

India, China focus on regional security

by Ramtanu Maitra

More than one year following the five underground nuclear tests which India carried out in its Rajasthan desert, the two Asian giants, China and India, have decided to raise the level of their bilateral talks. This could lead to both nations discussing a broad range of bilateral and international issues. Observers believe that the Sino-Indian bilateral relations, which had become mired in inane generalities since the thawing of relations in the early 1990s, now have the potential to blossom into a full-fledged strategic dialogue, taking into account economic, political, and security matters that concern the vast populations—more than 2 billion people—of these two nations.

This process, which may lead to a significant upgrading of bilateral relations, and identification of specific common objectives, became evident during the June 14-15 visit to China by Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. During their meeting, which was slated for one hour but lasted for more than two hours, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxun and Singh emphasized the importance to now begin formal talks on demarcation of the Line of Control between India and China.

The dispute over this Line of Control had led to the Sino-Indian border clash in 1962, and subsequently, had frozen bilateral relations for almost three decades. However, under the tutelage of the late Deng Xiaoping, and a number of Indian leaders, China and India signed an agreement to maintain “peace and tranquility” along the non-demarcated border in 1993. To a large extent, this agreement, and later agreements which led to the reduction of troops along the borders, removed the potential of any sudden flare-up between these two nations because of misunderstanding and confusion. Yet, the lack of a clear demarcation of an international border in the extremely hilly and difficult terrain in the Himalayas—by far the world’s highest and steepest mountains—still provides opportunities for any number of mischief-makers, such as the intelligence-linked international media, to attempt to create instant animosity. Such situations have been exploited earlier by various lobbies, who do their bit to subvert consolidation of the Sino-Indian relationship.

New initiatives

Another development that emerged from the Tang-Singh discussions, is that both foreign ministers agreed to give a

“new impetus” to the Joint Working Group, which has been, over the last 10 years, engaged in resolving the border dispute between China and India.

While “substance” dominated the talks between the two ministers, some token gestures were also included. For example, both sides agreed to participate in the 50th-anniversary celebration of the establishment of Sino-Indian diplomatic relations, which falls on April 1, 2000.

A few days later, the Chinese Communist Party’s International Department announced resumption of contact with the Bharatiya Janata Party, the dominant partner of the interim coalition government in New Delhi. Contact between the two political parties was rudely disrupted last year, following India’s nuclear tests and subsequent identification of China as India’s “main threat.”

Agreements that emerged out of the Tang-Singh talks can best be described as part of a slow, natural process. However, a number of international events in recent months have decidedly played a positive role in nudging the bilateral relations forward. This has been helped along from the Indian side, of course, by New Delhi abandoning the irresponsible rhetoric about the alleged “Chinese threat.” This was a definite step forward in helping to cool Beijing’s ire.

Second, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s famous bus-diplomacy trips to Lahore, Pakistan, in February, and to Dhaka, Bangladesh, in June, to initiate friendly and cooperative relations with India’s smaller neighbors, and thus to create a more peaceful environment in the subcontinent and region south of China, must have been noted with a great deal of satisfaction in Beijing. It is another matter, however, that the promises made in, and hopes raised by, the Lahore Agreement, were soon torn asunder by a confused and demoralized Pakistani leadership. Nonetheless, Beijing recognized New Delhi’s sincerity in the latter’s attempt to bring stability to the subcontinent.

The Kashmir conflict

From Delhi’s viewpoint, Beijing’s dogged neutrality over the ongoing border problems with Pakistan, indicates that China has no intention to mediate, and thus internationalize, the Kashmir issue. Over the last 50 years, Islamabad had been cajoling foreign powers to get involved in the Kashmir dispute, while India has resolutely opposed this, and asserted that the Kashmir issue can only be resolved bilaterally between India and Pakistan. From time to time, particularly when the chips were down, Islamabad had reluctantly gone along with the Indian proposal, but, in reality, has refused to accept it. On this particular issue, there has been an amazing unanimity within all Pakistan’s political parties, and their tormenters, the Pakistani Army, since 1947.

China’s opposition to internationalizing of the Kashmir issue is widely recognized as Beijing’s tacit support to the Indians. Equally important were statements issued by the Chi-

nese leadership and the Foreign Ministry in Beijing in the latter weeks of June, which called for maintaining peace and tranquility along the Indian-Pakistani Line of Control (LOC), the result of three wars between the two nations since their independence from British colonialism in 1947. These statements from Beijing have been read in New Delhi as China's recognition of this Line as a firm, demarcated line, in contrast to Islamabad's repeated references to the LOC as non-demarcated, and therefore, open to violation.

A learning process

In addition, in these last few months, Beijing has taken a fresh look at various external forces and their activities. Beijing had strongly opposed NATO's unilateral declaration of war against Yugoslavia. Beijing's protests about the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia were much stronger than its opposition to the 1991 Gulf War—an Anglo-American onslaught against Iraq carried out under the pretext of eliminating the alleged “madman,” Saddam Hussein, and “destroying” Saddam's plans to annex Kuwait as well as to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Beijing's sustained protests against the current NATO operations, which include the bombing of Iraq, the bombing of Sudan, and the onslaught against Yugoslavia, must not be read simply as opposition to the unilateral invasion of a sovereign nation-state, financed and funded by the West. Chinese policy has followed the same reasoning as Moscow has used in its opposition to the NATO attacks. China has also read the attack against Yugoslavia by NATO, as a clear message that NATO will henceforth be used as the military arm of the West, to enforce the expansion of Western economic and strategic interests. Beijing realizes that NATO's expansion will soon reach its doorsteps—east and west—if measures are not taken immediately.

Beijing's apprehensions were confirmed when its Embassy in Belgrade was hit by several missiles from separate directions on May 7. While the American and British governments have insisted that the attack was an “accident,” Lyndon LaRouche immediately saw the perfidy of this attack, and proved that it was no accident (see *EIR*, July 2, p. 64). The Chinese youth, who had all along been a strong motivating force behind the high-growth-based economic developments undertaken by the Chinese leadership since the early 1980s, erupted spontaneously all over China and condemned the attack on the Embassy as one planned by the West. If Beijing had had any difficulty in understanding the problems associated with being a part of a unipolar world, that came to an end on that day. The expansion of NATO eastward toward China and the punitive measures meted out by NATO to “teach China a lesson,” have been thoroughly noted in Beijing. China's recently strengthened support for the creation of a “multipolar world”—its policy since the end of the Cold War—and its renewed emphasis on opposing “global

hegemony,” indicate that a new debate has begun in Beijing on how China should cope with the extraordinary power of the West in international affairs.

China has also been made uneasy by the situation in Afghanistan (see p. 60). The infiltration by the battle-hardened mujahideen, many of whom were trained in Britain and others in the prolonged 1979-89 Afghan War, waving the flag of *jihad*, into the India-held part of Kashmir, which was exposed in late May by the Indian leadership, is also very disturbing for Beijing. Already, China has expressed its worries at the advancement of Afghan Taliban—who also use *jihad* as their battle cry—into Tajikistan, and elsewhere. Unconfirmed reports indicate that both India and China are involved in materially supporting the Afghan leader of Tajik descent, Ahmed Shah Masood, to contain the Taliban. Mujahideen, trained in Afghanistan and elsewhere, have already shown up in the India-held part of Kashmir in the thousands, and, in much lesser number, in the Chinese western region of Xinjiang. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi would like to see the Taliban, or NATO, moving further eastward.

What next?

These are the international issues which concern the leaders in both Beijing and New Delhi. However, little concrete has been done so far in New Delhi or in Beijing—or in Moscow—to formulate a constructive policy which could actually *prevent* catastrophes such as befell Yugoslavia and Iraq. There has been talk of developing a multipolar world, not as an opposition to counter the powers-that-be, but as an instrument to maintain peace and stability in the vast area stretching from eastern Europe to South, Southeast, and East Asia. It is recognized by both Beijing and New Delhi that peace and stability is the prime requirement for executing unimpeded long-term economic development for the benefit of the vast multitude who reside in this area. It is an idea which needs to be given life.

In order to make this peaceful, developing multipolar world a reality, Beijing and New Delhi will have to take stock of what is required to be done to ensure that Eurasia does not remain vulnerable to those Anglo-American external forces who promote unipolarity, as others still worship colonialism. The two great nations must understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, and similar virtues of smaller nations in the region, and mobilize their forces for a genuine, just new world order.

In this context, both Beijing and New Delhi, in conjunction with Moscow, must formulate active policies which will help to stabilize Central Asia—an area of great potential and immense vulnerability. It is important that the Sino-Indian security and strategic dialogue touch upon these issues. In the coming months, both will have to focus on economic, political, and security matters of the region and assert themselves in international affairs.