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Editor

Atmaja Gohain Baruah

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The year, 2018 ended with certain significant developments in East Asia, leaving a major bearing on the peace and security of the region. A few advancements were taken forward by the governments of China, Japan and the two Koreas, showing their military prowess and strengthening their defence capacity. The Japanese government has declared to substantially ramp up its defence spending over the next five years, as part of its 2019-2023 defence budget. New stealth fighters, aircraft carriers and other military equipment are estimated to cost around 27.47 trillion (\$242 billion) in the years to come. Such a massive increase in Japan's defence expenditure is most notably a response to any potential North Korea missile attack and to counter China's increasing air and sea advances. Never to stand idly by, China is also fiercely ramping up its air and naval capabilities, while carrying out maritime combat exercises with live ammunition and joint military exercises with countries like India and Pakistan. It is only expected to intensify in 2019, as the year will mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

In the midst of this, the Korean peninsula is standing at a difficult political and foreign-policy junction. There is a narrow window of opportunity for North Korea to gain concessions from the United States and China, as Kim Jong-un sees the possession of nuclear weapons to be a useful deterrent against a U.S. military strike. Complete denuclearisation is therefore challenging to attain, and South Korea is left to align its national interests with global strategic trends. Japan too, while appreciates the improvement of relations between North and South Korea with the US, is wary about Pyongyang's real commitment in initiating a full denuclearization. That is why Abe is strongly encouraging the need to put maximum pressure on North Korea, while enhancing its own defence posture too.

Last but not the least, 2018 was definitely a year of several firsts for India-Japan relations. In an effort to deepen ties, both countries held their regular joint maritime exercise in October along with their first land-based military exercise in November. Now that India has joined the ranks of United States, France, Australia, Russia, and Indonesia by engaging with Japan in a "2+2" defense and strategic dialogue at the ministerial level, there are greater signs of manifestation of the deepening India-Japan cooperation in foreign, defense, and security areas. In that positive spirit, this issue features an interview with Dr. Ryohei Kasai, an eminent scholar from Japan, to share his views about it with us. An important aspect of Japan-India collaboration is their partnership in the Chabahar port and to elucidate its implications better, we have featured an interview with Dr. Kenta Aoki from Japan. Regarding the issue of Korean denuclearisation, we have Dr. Lami Kim from Hong Kong, giving in-depth analysis of the recent developments taking place in the Peninsula. Besides, significant military developments in Japan, China, and the Korean Peninsula are captured by way of brief news items in the issue.

We look forward to comments and suggestions from our readers.

Atmaja Gohain Baruah

EXPERT COMMENTARY

'CHINA-JAPAN-ROK' TRILATERAL FRAMEWORK SUMMIT 2018: ELUSIVE QUEST FOR STRATEGIC EQUILIBRIUM



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A flurry of politico-diplomatic activity gravitated the Northeast Asian sub-region, into the crosshairs of global attention, this year, most notably bookended, by the unprecedented Trump-Kim summitry schmooze in Singapore, the incrementing sequence of seminal goodwill-bonding overtures between President Moon and Chairman Kim, and the much-vaunted and recently accomplished ice-breaker 'Xi-Abe' summit, respectively. Amidst the frisson, a no less marquee event, stands obscured, in the form of the jumpstarted resuscitation, of the apparently stalled trilateral dialogue framework, convening China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, to a rekindled coordinating dialogue Summit-process, in Tokyo, in May 2018, on the back of a three-year hiatus, of sorts. First mooted, in the context of the ASEAN-Plus-Three process towards the end of the 20th century, and primed to militate concurrently, the initially off-ASEAN meetings on the margins, morphed, into a stand-alone, annually ordained dialogue mechanism, forged, in the wake of the rupturing global economic and financial crisis of 2008, that first amplified the indomitable imperatives to fostering regional and sub-regional interdependence. Yet, this annualized event, constitutively steeped in a focus on macro-issues aimed at engendering an overarching conducive environ for the practice of strong bilateralism, founded in pervading generic principles of good neighbourly cooperation and amiable conduct, and tethered, to consolidating economic potential through institutionalised arrangements and arriving at common strategic understandings aimed at filing rough-edges on the security landscape, has however, played out only twice, since its first five scrupulously convened annual editions, up until 2012.¹ Anchored in mandated political participation of the occupants of the Korean 'Blue House' and the Japanese 'Kantei', but representation from only the Number Two at China's 'Zhongnanhai', the level of attendance, is a clairvoyant sneak-peak, into the extent of policy expectation and process prioritization, in officious and impact terms, construed, by each of the sovereign constituents. China, has continually perceived the utility of the trinity entity, identified, along a narrow straitjacket, as an ostensibly principal 'economic affairs' platform, circumscribed away and insulated, from addressing the bare-knuckled security and hard-nosed strategic dossier, hence, relegated, within its neat domestic division of authority, to the remit of its Premier and the State Council, even as Japan through its Premiership and South Korea vide its Presidency, accord this assemblage, top-billing.

And why not, since a read-out of the track-record since inception, of the trilateral collective, that convenes the second and third largest global economies, which, alongside the Republic of Korea, composites a third of Asia's output and aggregates a fifth of global GDP in nominal terms, points to booming economic cooperation and intense commercial interchange, underpinned, by the rationale of greater economic interdependence.² Such

¹ Kan Kimura, "Northeast Asian Trilateral Cooperation in the Globalizing World: How to Re-establish the Mutual Importance", *Journal of International Cooperation Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 02 & 03, 2014.

² Trilateral trade stood at a whopping sum of \$670 billion, during 2017.

bustling economic interaction, is set against the backdrop of the regional subset theatre, rendered invariably incandescent, for its vulnerability to nuclear-coalesced degenerative security on the Korean Peninsula, and embroilment, in cross-cutting strategic strains, engendered, by the multitude of fiercely contested, coterminous and overlapping, maritime delimitation rights and claims, inter-se the triumvirate of protagonists, lending itself to putative characterizations of the dyadic security complex, as an 'Asian Paradox.'³

The 2018 instalment of the three-way Summit, transpired, in an intriguingly enveloping dichotomous concourse of circumstances, undergirded, by an externally induced impulse for urgent sovereign re-engagement, blended along, an equally compelling internalised logic, for strategic coordination and convergence. On the extant, undulating rhetoric and capricious stances on inflexion-issues, has contributed to patently contradictory signalling from the incumbent dispensation in Washington, embodied, in an ostensible vexatious Presidential resolve to cease open-ended 'free-riding', by Tokyo, and to a lesser extent by Seoul. This stands exacerbated, by a concomitant willingness of the US, to give Beijing a seeming pass on critical regional hegemonic and security matters, by embracing a transactional interchange with it, one that, sets aside inveterately held complex and sobering strategic assessment of the comprehensive threat posed by China, to an inveterately underwritten and regionally-comforting security architecture, geostrategic landscape and geo-economic template and the imperative for counteracting strategic posture, by the United States, a disposition, that has traditional cornerstone allies Japan and South Korea, spooked. Yet, despite the conventional wisdom stereotyping a consequent upending, it has galvanised Tokyo and Seoul, to soundly invest back into consciously foraging for and assiduously pursuing, a productively working *modus-vivendi* with Beijing, thereby feeding into positive momentum, for renewed and recast, sovereign-trilateration.⁴

This said, locally, each of the principals remains beset, by bedevilling variables, ushering them, back, into mutually-witting cohabitation. China, the dominant resident major-power in the fold, encumbered, by the dysfunction of its trade equations with the United States; constrained, by being at the punitive end of technology-migration limiting measures by the latter; and eager to harness it's virtual fetish, with catapulting its manufacturing and logistical systems, up the production value chain, through incorporating and innovating pervasive technological application, is anxiously keen, to source and find greater economic entrenchment in alternative markets, as also, foster diversified trading arrangements and deepening technological driven relationships, amidst an observed and realised tapering domestic growth dynamic. Japan, for its part, in structural reform mode domestically, under the philosophical policy moorings of 'Abenomics', after years of wallowing along an queer trajectory of developed country economic stasis, equally solicits a break-out for its rebooting economic fortunes, and salivates at the prospect, of tapping into beholding gargantuan market opportunities, for its core-competent sectors of industrial, technological and innovation excellence, assimilating and synergising within a tectonically transforming Chinese economic ecosystem and harmonizing within a pristinely less-tapped but robust South Korean economic milieu, that has often been a trenchant peer competitor, along reminiscent commoditized, and product-lines. However, an equally significant consideration for Tokyo, in lending its shoulder to the wheel of endeavour in reviving the trilateral grouping, is to remain telegenic and germane, to the elusive tension-defusing and pried-open precious diplomatic gambit on the Korean Peninsula, amidst feelings, of it being hung-out to dry, in terms of its redline security and humanitarian expectations, being placed, on the margins of any potential grand-bargain compact, at resolution of the Inter-Korean conflict, and any thawing of the Washington-Pyongyang nuclear imbroglio.⁵

³ Si Hong Kim, "APCI and Trilateral Cooperation: Prospects for South Korea-EU Relations", Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), February 2017.

⁴ Andre Yeo, "China, Japan, South Korea Trilateral Cooperation: Implications for Northeast Asian Politics and Order", East Asia Institute (EAI), Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, June 2013.

⁵ Michael Kovrig, "Trilateral North East Asia Summit Signals a Return to Cooperation", Commentary/Asia, *International Crisis Group (ICG)*, May 23, 2018.

South Korea, under current national helm-ship, seems zealously pertinacious, in fording through with peace initiatives and conciliatory overtures, towards irreversibly consolidating incremental gains accruing from a staged scale-up in cross-border exchanges with its hidebound North, potentially morphing into purported full-normalisation of Inter-Korean ties. Yet, in similar vein, it conceives of intimated relations with Beijing and Tokyo, as critically innate, to its longing desire, to vault its economic standing and burnish its present profile, defined, in terms of being a middle-level economic power, with proven specific techno-industrial competencies at home, yet shorn of recognition and acclaim, beyond its periphery, which explains its fork-up of the nascent 'Go-South' initiative.

Both Tokyo and Seoul veritably view the necessity of materially improved equations with Beijing, which is the DPRKs almost singular politico-diplomatic and financial patron, as the strongest possible leverage to wield influence towards strategically modifying the reclusive State and nudging its totalitarian leader's high-stakes brinkmanship ways. Notwithstanding the imperative for strong enlightened bilateralism inter-se, the dint of ameliorated relations with an accosting overwhelming China is impractical, unless, it's ably complemented and effectively supplemented, by trilaterally commissioned rudimentary confidence-building steps, crystallising enough, so as to progressively metamorphose, into budding and concretized strategic trust, across actions and intentions. Little can there be a substitute, to periodic incidence of high-level communication, and regularised candid, transparent dialogue, delivering path-breaking guidance.

There is no gainsaying, that for cooperative and mutually beneficent economic interchange to thrive and flourish, an overarching and overriding need, for a halcyon, pacified and constructive strategic-setting, is sine-qua-non, in more ways than one. Yet, the larger East Asian geopolitical and geo-economic terrain, with the North-East Asian geographical subset, hemmed-in, exudes and reflects multi-layered processes, intersecting in a labyrinth of interaction, over existential issues and undiminishing interests. The conventionally incontrovertible security guarantor that the US has been, to its hub-n-spoke allies in the region, as also the progressive emergence of ASEAN and its resplendent evolution into a vibrant economic community, taming riven conflicts inter-se, have been the emblematic arch-pillars, of an East Asian narrative, on an ideally chiming and coexisting economic and security construct, founded on well-established and universally legitimised norms, of conventions and actions.⁶ The indomitable and irrepressible rise of Chinese, across economic, military and technologically transformative dimensions, and its countenancing of deploying muscular instruments to advance strategic objectives masquerading as historical claims, (*evidently leveraged, by its intransigent truculence, at the apogee of the crisis over sovereign-rights and maritime claims pertaining to the Senkaku/Diaoyu, raising the spectre of real-time maritime military conflagration with Tokyo, rupturing the bilateral track and potentially imperilling processes at multilateral reconciling engagement*), constitutes a formidable challenge to the existing regional order and sub-regional frame alike, amidst a lacerating fragmentation of global and regional discourse, around normative processes, governance imperatives, and scope for manoeuvre in respect of national interests driven, statist-dispositions.

In the context of the 'China-Japan-RoK' triad, where emotively roiled cumbersome historical baggage, as it is, inevitably winnows opportunities and dividends of mutual cooperation, the intrinsically lopsided locus of power asymmetry favouring Beijing, is further accentuated, by Washington's seemingly inadequate bulwarking response, whether, through the ambivalence accompanying its 'Pivot-to-Asia' strategy of 2012, through, to its currently adopted mode of recantation, in querulous sulk. Yet, what's unmistakable, is that, whilst the trilateral coordinating framework, was not impaired in its Summit pageantry, through the thick and thin of the raging epoch of the

⁶ Gudrun Wacker, "Security Cooperation in East Asia: Structures, Trends and Limitations", *SWP German Institute for Security and International Affairs (GIGA)*, May 2015.

Sino-Japanese maritime dispute during 2010-2012, and even the high-stakes nuclear calisthenics resorted-to, by Pyongyang, through its irascible and pixelated leader, the grandiosely announced return of Washington, through its 'Pivot-to-Asia' strategy, aimed at reinserting itself back into the countervailing mix, and reassuring cornerstone allies of having its back, actually ruptured, the flow of trilateral process, during 2012-2015. It was dissembling argued, by Beijing, as constituting an unacceptably extraneous insidious influence, causing an affront to home-grown and indigenously-bred regionalised process of finding via-media, but was counteracted and rationalised by Japan and South Korea, as being in consonance with the quadrant principles embellishing the vent of the new *Asian Security Concept, viz., Common, Comprehensive, Cooperative and Sustainable Security*.⁷

Political will marks an epochal elemental consideration, in shaping strategic calculus, vis-à-vis peer sovereigns. A unique disjuncture, marks the 'China-Japan-ROK' dynamic, in that, despite being strong trading partners, and marred by vexatious imperial times historical and present-day territorial disputes that rustle-up visceral nationalist mutual disaffection in a jiffy, nevertheless, neither, has enjoyed an overwhelming, predominating presence in each other's foreign policy doctrine, national development compact and national security stratagem, as would have been perfunctorily and plausibly expected, despite the fact, that a 'Rising Japan' once consternated Chinese strategic thinking during the back end of the twentieth century, even as a 'Buccaneering China', enjoys that place of pride in recent years, and prospectively, in the foreseeable future.⁸ However, the trilateral process has propitious opportunities to succeed, given that, imparting normalisation and injecting productivity in engagements across each other, has become an avowedly key pillar, not just within the strategized rubric-dimensions of peaceful national development and shared cooperation, that permeates Chinese external engagement and outreach, under the now delimited tenure of President Xi, but also, reciprocally felt, in a Japan, which is revisiting its pacifist constitution and conceptualising 'Proactive Pacifism', predicated on principle of international cooperation, under a soon-to-be longest serving post war Premier Abe, now in his fourth stint, and the positive vibes of which exude within South Korea, under a pragmatic President Moon, who cannily but stoutly reversed the concurred deployment of the controversial US-mounted Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system, which had counter-productively fraught 'China-ROK' relations, under predecessor President, Park Geun-hye.⁹

Furthermore, what adds to the manifesting positivity in nurturing the trilateral framework, is the ability of the sovereign-principals, to hammer-out working mechanisms and arrangements, albeit coalesced around the so-called 'softer' issues, pertaining to transnational and human security and disaster management and mitigation threats, upon which, consensus tends to be relatively facile, but, to also find strategic convergence, around the more thornier issues, of maintaining benignity and restraint at sea, through setting-up of the three dimensioned maritime and aerial communication mechanism, which, though geographically amorphous, yet, is definitively imbued with tension-defusing instruments, not to mention, the unequivocal strategic guidance, commended, to their negotiators and technical working groups, to expeditiously formalise the contours of a long-dilating trilateral Free Trade Agreement, which could build on the 2012 in-principle agreement to enshrine a Trade and Investment Cooperation pact, which remains only to timely, in the current context, of the need to make trading relations between the trio, more holistic and investment oriented, through assimilation of complementing technologies, integration of production and logistics chains, and identification and harnessing of industrial and business synergies. Timing often optimizes traction; here, it's ripe-n-rife.

⁷ Christian Wirth, "Power' and 'Stability' in the China-Japan-South Korea Regional Security Complex: The Simultaneity of Conflict and Cooperation in North-East Asia," *Pacific Review*, Vol. 28(04), February 2015.

⁸ Sarah Teo, "China-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit: What Does it Mean for East Asia", *RSIS Commentary* # 234, Singapore, November 4, 2015.

⁹ K.V. Kesavan, "East Asian Trilateralism at a Crossroads?" *ORF*, December 29, 2017 at (www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/east-asian-trilateralism-crossroads/)

THE AFTEREFFECTS OF DOKLAM: CHINA SPEEDS UP PLAAF AIRFIELD DEVELOPMENT IN TIBET



GP CAPT RAVINDER SINGH CHHATWAL (RETD)

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A few months ago, there were press reports of China building “underground bomb proof shelters” to park fighter aircraft at Lhasa’s Gonggar/ Kongka Dzong airfield.¹ While this small news item did not receive the attention it deserved in the Indian media, it is a signal to India that China is preparing for a conflict. There are also reports that China is building new airfields in Tibet. Since the 1990s China has been rapidly modernising its military with advanced weaponry. China’s military rise and developments in Tibet pose a serious security challenge to India. This commentary focusses on the Chinese Air Force’s (also known as PLAAF- People’s Liberation Army Air Force) airfield build up in Tibet and its implications for India.

Lhasa airfield came up in 1968 and for almost 50 years the Chinese never thought of making blast-pens for their fighter aircraft. Perhaps they realised their short-coming after the Doklam showdown, in 2017, and have now speeded up development of PLAAF airfields in Tibet. The Doklam crisis seems to have rattled the Chinese as they, probably, did not expect such a firm reaction from India. In Doklam, Chinese and Indian troops were engaged in a tense 72 day stand-off in the tri junction area of India, Bhutan and Tibet. The Chinese desperately tried to influence Indian leadership to withdraw their troops. But, India stood its ground and did not waver despite China’s bellicose attempts at psychological warfare with provocative statements in state media which fell on deaf ears. The situation was finally resolved diplomatically with both sides deciding to disengage troops from the area.

In any conflict against India, China will have to deploy its air force in Tibet to be within range of targets in India. But, Tibet has very few air fields and till recently these few airfields did not have bomb proof shelters for safe parking of fighter aircraft. Perhaps this was due to China’s threat perception being more focussed towards Taiwan, Japan, North Korea and now South China Sea. With an undercurrent of hostility between China and India, the Chinese now seem to have realised that they need to ramp up their military capabilities in Tibet with better airfield infra-structure for future use against India.

Tibet is a high-altitude plateau with the airfields mostly at heights of more than 3000 m. At these high altitudes aircraft operations suffer from load penalties due to the reduced density of air. This will be a serious limitation for PLAAF considering that their tanker fleet is also limited to just 10 aircraft of H-6 class and three IL-78s. China has built a new heavy lift transport aircraft, Y-20. This aircraft can be modified for tanker role. Once that is done and it is produced in sufficient numbers, PLAAFs aerial refuelling capability will greatly improve.

¹ Sudhi Ranjan Sen, “Chinese bunkers at Lhasa airport, just 1350 km from Delhi, worry India”, in *Hindustan Times*, October 3, 2018, URL: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/chinese-bunkers-at-lhasa-airport-worry-india/story-B85jNuqEH72jiPk7sPKbcM.html>.

In Tibet the main airfields are Gonggar/ Kongka Dzong (South of Lhasa at an elevation of 3570 m, main runway length is 4000 m and second runway length is 3600 m), and Hoping which is close to Shigatse city and is about 160 km west of Kongka Dzong (elevation 3809 m, runway length 5000 m). There is one dual use civil and military airfield in Ngari Prefecture of Tibet, Gar Gunsa (elevation 4274 m, runway length 4500 m) which serves the city of Shiquane. The airfields opposite the North Eastern part of India are Bangda/Pangta (elevation 4334 m, runway length 5500 m, it is the world's longest paved runway) which is about 170 km from the Indian border and Linzhi in Nyingchi prefecture. Linzhi is a civil airfield at an elevation of 2949 m, runway length 3000 m, which was opened in 2006, it is just 30 km from the Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to these there are two airfields in Xinjiang- Kashgar and Hotan. Kashgar is a civil airfield and is about 570 km from Leh. From this distance PLAAF can launch counter air strikes but for sustained air support to the PLA land campaign the large distance will be a limitation. Hotan and Gar Gunsa airfields are closer with the distance to Leh being about 330 km to 350 km.

Airfields for fighter aircraft operations have to be located at reasonable distances (approximately 200 km to 300 km), from each other so that they are mutually supporting to cater for any diversions due to weather or other emergencies. The three airfields in the northern sector- Hotan, Kashgar and Korla - are not mutually supporting. The distance between Hotan and its nearest airfield, Kashgar, is 450 km; between Hotan and Korla is 750 km; Hotan to Gargunsa is 550 km.

In western Tibet there is only one airfield, Gargunsa, which has no supporting airfield. If this one airfield is unavailable, there will be a gap of almost 1500 km between Hoping and Hotan, thus severely denting PLAAF operations in western Tibet.

In the eastern sector, opposite Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, China has made major investments in developing infrastructure for airfield construction. A majority of the airfields are within 300 km from the LAC (Line of Actual Control). Hoping/ Shigatse and Kongka Dzong/Gonggar/ Lhasa are two well developed military air bases with Linzhi and Pangta also operational as dual use airfields. Hoping and Kongka Dzong are mutually supporting each other with the distance between them being just 160 km. From this we can infer that eastern Tibet seems to be the most strategic sector from China's viewpoint.

China is going to build three new airfields in Tibet for which work is going to start in 2019 and is planned to be completed by 2022². These new airfields are at Shannan (also called Lhoka), Xigaze (Shigatse), and at Ali (Burang). All these airfields are at an elevation of more than 3900 m and although these airfields are being made for civil purposes they can also be used for military purposes. Shannan is opposite upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh and Burang is near the trijunction of Nepal, Uttarakhand and Tibet and both are just about 60 km from the LAC. Shigatse already has an existing dual use civil and military airfield. It seems the new facility will be developed as a helicopter base.

Burang is at a distance of about 220 km from Gargunsa and from a military point of view it will provide mutual support to Gargunsa. Therefore, IAF will have to target both these airfields to create a gap of 1500 km between Hoping and Hotan. These three new airfields will be available to PLAAF for logistics purposes but their use for offensive air operations will only be possible if PLAAF builds the necessary infrastructure for sustained fighter air operations.

² 'Tibet to build three more airports', *Xinhua*, June 9, 2018, URL: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/09/c_137240626.htm.

While China has built tunnels for fighter aircraft in Gonggar and is planning to construct new airfields, PLAAF will still have limitations for carrying out a sustained air campaign against India. Firstly, with very few airfields PLAAF can deploy only a limited number of combat aircraft in Tibet. Secondly, as mentioned earlier airfields in Hotan, Kashgar, Korla and Gargunsa are not mutually supporting due to vast distances. Thirdly, the limitations of flying from high altitude will impose restrictions on carrying full bomb load. Fourthly, PLAAF has to build blast pens at all their airfields opposite India to protect their combat fleet from counter air strikes.

Other than Gonggar airfield none of the other airfields have blast pens for safe parking of fighter aircraft. Gonggar can park about 36 aircraft in tunnels dug in nearby mountains. PLAAF had such facilities along its airfields on the Russian border and now these are in Tibet. India will have to keep a close watch on these airfields and monitor any developments taking place there.

The airfield build-up underway in Tibet provides a window of opportunity for India to develop its own capabilities and procure the requirements for advanced weapons in a finite time frame. A case in point is the MMRCA (Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft) requirement which took 15 years to finally decide on purchase of 36 aircraft against the original IAF requirement of 126 aircraft. Even now the political slugfest on pros and cons of the Rafale deal are continuing ad infinitum. These issues need to be resolved so that IAF promptly gets the required number of fighters to cover up its depleting strength.

China's military build-up at our doorstep, in Tibet, is a serious security challenge for India. This challenge must be accepted.

MAPPING EAST ASIA

CHINA

China-Pakistan Joint-Military Exercise, 2018

Following an attack at the Chinese Consulate in Karachi on 24 November, 2018 by a separatist group, the Balochistan Liberation Army, the trust level between China and Pakistan received a jolt.¹ It created suspicion between the two states, though it did not jeopardise the 'all-weather friendship' between them. Instead one can see the relationship between China and Pakistan remaining intact from the joint military exercise conducted between them.

In the first week of December 2018, the two states conducted Pak-China International Air Exercise, known as Shaheen-VII at an operational air base of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in Karachi. For the joint air exercise, the contingent of People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) was comprised of Air Defence controllers and technical ground crew along with fighter jets, bombers and early warning AWACS planes.² This exercise is held alternately, every year, the last one, the sixth 'Shaheen -VI', being held in China.

Meanwhile, a three-week long joint military drill, called 'Warrior-VI' between China's People Liberation Army and the Pakistani army kicked-off in the second week of December, 2018.³ It has been reported that such intensive joint military exercises between two countries has become routine following the build-up of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Unmanned aircraft system (UAS)

In recent period, China's focus on unmanned aircraft system (UAS) has attracted international attention. In fact, Aviation Industry Corporation of China released a white paper on the UAS. This white paper has informed that "the scale of investment in the UAS industry has increased by 30 times compared with 20 years ago, generating about 15 billion U.S. dollars of output value every year globally." It also predicted an average annual growth rate of the global UAS industry over 20 percent, with more than USD 400 billion production in 10 years. It underlined while militaries are still the primary user of the UAS, their civil use has also got immense industrial production. It identified aerial photography, forestry protection, security, geological surveys, electric power inspections and logistics transportation as the main civil usage of the UAS.⁴

In September, the Chinese PLA suspended its "major military dialogue for the near future with the United States" in response to the US sanctions Chinese military companies "for procuring Russian military hardware." Prior to this, the US State Department had announced sanctions on China's Equipment Development Department (EDD) "for engaging in "significant transactions," with a Russian company Rosoboronexport, a major Russian arms exporter. The EDD was facilitating "China's purchase of Russia's SU-35 combat aircraft and the S-400

¹ "Karachi attack: China consulate attack leaves four dead", *BBC News*, November 23, 2018 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46313136> (Accessed 9 December, 2018).

² "Pak, China to hold joint air exercise 'Shaheen -VII in Karachi", *The News*, December 2, 2018 at <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/400944-pak-china-to-hold-joint-air-exercise-shaheen-vii-in-karachi> (Assessed 9 December, 2018).

³ "PLA to participate in Pak-China joint military exercise 'Warrior-VI 2018", *The Nation*, December 8, 2018 at <https://nation.com.pk/08-Dec-2018/pla-to-participate-in-pak-china-joint-military-exercise-warrior-vi-2018> (Assessed 9 December, 2018).

⁴ "Output of Global Unmanned Aircraft System to Exceed 400 bln USD: White Paper," *People's Daily*, November 8, 2018, at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/1108/c90000-9516162.html>

surface-to-air missile system." Under the sanctions, US travel visas to the EDD staff and use of the US financial system were to be denied. The sanctions were also to seize the EDD's property "within US control."⁵ The two countries, nevertheless, conducted a joint disaster management exchange (DME), with more than 200 personals, in Nanjing, East China's Jiangsu Province in November 2018.⁶

Taiwan's Search for Defence Modernisation and Self-reliance

President Tsai Ing-wen commissioned the two warships it recently purchased from the US. These warship, "built in the 1980s and named USS Taylor and USS Gary" are "Perry-class guided missile frigates." They have been renamed as "the Ming Chuan and Feng Chia." Tsai commissioned them "at Zuoying Naval Base in Kaohsiung." The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the *de facto* US embassy in Taiwan, issued a statement on this occasion, that this sale was "consistent with United States commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide military articles that support Taiwan's self-defense...the two frigates will improve Taiwan's capability in current and future defensive efforts, and furthers Taiwan's continuing work to modernize its armed forces." It clarified that this sale was "consistent with United States commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide military articles that support Taiwan's self-defense."⁷ In view of the difficulty faced in procuring arms from the international market, Taiwan strives for indigenous arms research and development. Recently, the media reported that four Prototypes of an eight-wheeled armoured vehicle "Clouded Leopard" "passed the required tests." The reports informed that the vehicle, which is classified as Taiwan Infantry Fighting Vehicle (TIFV), "passed all 62 categories in the primary pre-mass production tests while failing only two categories in the secondary pre-mass production tests." Thus, the vehicle is ready for mass manufacturing. The vehicle, "a variant of the CM-32 Clouded Leopard" will be "equipped with a 30mm chain gun." The media reported that Taiwan had a plan to manufacture "a total of 284 vehicles in the coming years."⁸ Incidentally, Deputy Minister of National Defense Chang Guan-chung recently remarked that Taiwan was following "a dual-development system that focuses on both indigenous system development and foreign arms sales." At the US-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference in Maryland, he claimed, "We are standing at a time when Taiwan is marching towards self-reliant defense." His remarks expressed Taiwan's aspiration, though defence modernisation of Taiwan is fraught with extra-ordinary difficulties due to its difficult predicament.⁹

China Airshow Zhuhai 2018

The 12th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition (also referred as Airshow China 2018) was held at International Aviation and Aerospace Centre, Zhuhai. This is a spectacular event organised biennially which provides China with a tremendous platform to showcase and promote its defence industrial prowess by displaying its military technology, PLA aircrafts and systems placed on static display, attract potential clients and present

⁵ Zhang Zhihao, "PLA Halts US Talks in Protest over Sanctions," *People's Daily*, September 24, 2018, at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0924/c90000-9502952.html>

⁶ Liu Xuanzun, "PLA, US Army Conduct Military Exchange in China," *People's Daily*, November 19, 2018, at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/1119/c90000-9519773.html>

⁷ "U.S. Sale of Warships to Taiwan Helps Regional Stability: AIT," *Taipei Times*, November 18, 2018, at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201811080014.aspx>

⁸ Staff Writer, "Armored Vehicles Pass Tests, to Start Mass Production," *Taipei Times*, October 25, 2018, at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/10/25/2003703000>

⁹ Staff Writer, "Taiwan Marching toward Self-Reliant Defense: US Forum," *Taipei Times*, October 31, 2018, at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/10/31/2003703369>

after-sale services, an opportunity for Chinese military watchers to observe some of the latest aerospace and military technology intended for export to gauge domestic People's Liberation Army (PLA) systems. "The Zhuhai air show is also a battleground of psychological warfare for the PLA to show its hardware build-up to outside world." This was most impressive event in recent memory wherein, featured an impressive performance by J-20 stealth fighters, the first ever demonstration of a Chinese thrust vector control (TVC) equipped fighter, as well as a large number of new flying wing drones, new radar systems, and more. While the J-10B is hardly the first aircraft to perform such displays at a public airshow, it is arguably the first ever TVC equipped, non-Russian and non-U.S. aircraft (either in service or demonstrator) to perform publicly in that manner. The PLA's willingness to display TVC technology in such a confident and public manner, aboard an indigenous engine, is likely indicative not only of greater openness on behalf of the PLA itself, but also a reflection of the stage domestic TVC development has reached and the PLA's faith in the maturity of the technology. Indeed, a number of placards and videos showcasing relevant past and ongoing TVC research and development were also identified elsewhere. Chinese fifth generation fighters such as the J-20 will likely benefit from TVC technology.

In addition to J-10B, China also unveiled two of its latest and sophisticated tactical weapon systems, which as per military experts was aimed at deterring rivalries in the East and South China Sea. The exported version of the 609 intelligence radar and CM-401 anti-ship missile, is already in service with border and coast defence units, were also on display for the first time. The 609 intelligence radar is able to detect long-range early warning of stealth aircraft such as the US F-35, tactical ballistic missiles, and targets close to space, according to its developer, the 14th Institute of the China Electronic Technology Group Corporation (CETC), "China's radar technology has surpassed Russia and is catching up with the US". This radar is an important part of China's comprehensive anti-stealth and anti-ballistic missile systems, which could be integrated into the PLA's air and sea combat systems to form a powerful air-to-air and air-to-sea defence network. Whilst, CM-401 system is an anti-ship ballistic missile which is capable of destroying fixed targets on land or moving targets on sea, including medium-to-large warships." The Chinese aerospace industry is not new to flying stealth unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and combat drones (UCAVs). The first proper sized stealth UCAV demonstrator Lijian (or Sharp Sword) was flown in late 2013, which was comparable in overall configuration to many other equivalent projects around the world such as the French-European Neuron, the British Taranis, Russia's Skat and Okhotnik B, and the X-47B, X-45 and Phantom Ray demonstrators from the United States. The most high profile of these would be the stealthy flying wing CH-7 UCAV from China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), makers of the successful CH-3, CH-4, and CH-5 family of drones. China's military and aerospace industry is making progress in leaps and bounds; with its quest to be a global leader in development niche technologies, it is investing dedicatedly towards research and development. Airshows of such magnitude provide China latitude to showcase and display its military prowess.

China-India military Exercise kicks off in South West China

Joint military drill between China and India Codenamed "Hand-in-Hand 2018", kicked off on 11 December 2018 in Chengdu, the capital city of southwest China's Sichuan Province. The exercise aims to strengthen the counter-terrorism capabilities of the two armies. During the 14-day event, troops from both sides interacted at multiple forums to include basic training schedules, setup a unified anti-terrorism command and conduct live-firing as part of the field exercise on anti-terrorism operations. Wang Weijun, head of the Chinese side, said through this joint exercise, the two armies can learn from the best practises conducive towards improving their capabilities in response to the menace of terrorism. "On the other hand, it will promote mutual trust and bring our exchange and cooperation to a higher level." The Indian side, Colonel PPS Tomar, also expressed that "both armies are both very professional armies and both have a lot to learn from each other. By these exchanges and exercises, we can achieve greater synergy, understanding of each other's procedures and develop and hone anti-terror capability. This will also contribute towards building friendship between our two armies". This is the

seventh joint training in the series between the two sides since 2007. It lasted until 23 December 2018.

Chinese Military monitors, warns US warships

In the recent past, China has expressed anxiety and anguish over move US naval vessels, especially aircraft carriers *USS Trenton*, *USS Lincoln* and *USS Theodore*, through China's territorial water in the East and South China Sea. While as per US, these moves are part of its routine practise between its military bases in Singapore, South Korea, Japan and Guam, and has been reinforcing its stand on freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) and non-militarisation of artificial islands in South China Sea. PLA has five theatre commands, and the Southern Theatre Command oversees six southern provincial regions; Guangdong, Hunan, Hainan, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. It also operates the PLA South Sea Fleet, which is responsible for maintaining peace and security in the South China Sea. The Theatre Command keeps a close vigil Chinese waters and air to prevent any incident that may harm China's national security and to safeguard national sovereignty, senior Colonel Li Huamin, spokesman of the command, said in a statement. On 10 December 2018, *USS Chancellorsville* entered the territorial waters off the Xisha Islands in the South China Sea without China's permission. The command, according to relevant laws and regulations, deployed air and navy forces to monitor and verify the ship, and warned it to leave. China has been assertive in its sovereignty claim over the islands in the East and South China Sea and has been working dogged aspiration towards the development, as per military experts it has added 3200 square kilometre of territory artificially. Development A2AD is premised to check and control move of vessels both at sea and air, which does not violates China's territorial water and air space.

China India reach important consensus on boundary issues

The 21st round of talks between Chinese and Indian special representatives on boundary issues was co-chaired by Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval in Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province. Senior officials of China and India had reached some important consensus on boundary issues during a meeting, held on 28 November 2018, and said a press release from the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Both sides agreed to continuously promote the process of special representative's talks in line with the important consensus reached by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on properly resolving border issues and developing China-India relations, to reach a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solutions as soon as possible. The two sides will jointly safeguard peace and tranquillity in the border areas before a final settlement of the boundary issues. Both sides agreed to implement the consensus of the two countries' leaders to all levels of personnel, including front-line troops, and further improve building of trust in border areas, while strengthening communication and coordination of the two countries' departments involved in border issues. Both sides shared the view that border trade and people-to-people exchange should be expanded step by step, to consolidate the public opinion foundation of border areas' friendly cooperation and create a good atmosphere for border negotiations and the development of bilateral relations. The press release also said that China-India relations have made positive progress and have stepped into a new development stage, especially after the informal meeting of Xi and Modi in Wuhan in April. The two sides will continuously strengthen strategic communication, enhance political mutual trust and expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields, to usher China-India Developmental Partnership a new level.

PLA Navy to have at least five carriers

The number of aircraft carriers, Chinese navy may have in its inventory, has been a subject of constant debate in strategic circles, and experts have been hypothesising for some time on the subject. Implementation of military reforms announced by president Xi Jinping in September 2015; evidently highlighted the strategic shift in Chinese

outlook, herein, the focus has shifted from “offshore waters defence” to “offshore waters defence” with “open seas protection,” and in the years to come will enhance its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattacks, maritime manoeuvres, joint operations at sea, comprehensive defence and support. This is largely attributable to its necessity to ensure energy security through protection of SLOCs, protect its archipelagic territories ECS and SCS, and protect Chinese personnel deployed overseas in construction of various infrastructure under BRI. As per Wang Yunfei, a naval expert and retired PLA Navy officer, China needs six aircraft carriers to ensure adequate carriers are on active duty while the others are undergoing maintenance. Albeit, China’s Ministry of National Defence has not yet revealed a plan for future carriers. The Liaoning and the Type 001A, which uses ski jump ramp to launch aircraft, could largely remain in offshore waters near China. Third and the fourth carrier with conventional power engines are likely use an electromagnetic catapult, may go further into open seas, while the two nuclear-powered carriers to protect China’s global interests. Wang echoed, that China’s first nuclear-powered carrier is likely to be launched in 2026. The goal of having five to six aircraft carriers could perhaps be achieved by 2030-35, which also coincides with PLA centenary goal 2035, to complete its modernisation by 2035.

JAPAN

Japanese Diet passed the NDPG and MTDP

Following the Japanese Ministry of Defence’s wide-ranging studies on an exclusively defence-oriented policy, Japanese Diet passed the National Defence Programme Guidelines (NDPG) and the Mid-Term Defence Programme (MTDP) on December 18. The NDPG is driven by three objectives: making of a desirable security environment, deterrence of threats, and finally response to threats. The defence architecture is organised around ‘multi-dimensional integrated defence capability’ allowing a cross-capability approach with a specific emphasis on obtaining and firming up capabilities in space, cyber, and electromagnetic pulse (EMP). Japan will advance its air defence capabilities with emphasis on the Pacific Coast, remodel Izumo destroyers to facilitate the use of STOVL aircraft in emergency situation, and also perform monitoring or surveillance, training, and disaster response. In order to develop new military technologies, Ministry of Defence will focus on reinforcing the human foundation, technological foundation, and manufacturing foundation. The MTDP estimates a procurement cost of 27.47 trillion yen (\$244.36 billion) over five years.¹⁰ To pursue, Prime Minister Abe’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision, Tokyo intends to strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance and leverage defensive capability to advance its multi-directional and multi-layered security cooperation in a rapidly altering security environment.

The latest NDPG is a revision of the 2013 NDPG which was formulated for a period of 10 years. However, responding to the complex security environment which has transformed at a much faster pace than anticipated given the threats from North Korean ballistic missiles and Chinese activities in the East and South China Sea, Japan felt the need to revise the NDPG. China has expressed strong on the NDPG and stressed that ‘due to what happened in history, Japan’s moves in the field of military security have been closely followed by its neighbouring countries.....we urge Japan to keep its commitment to the strategy of ‘purely defensive defence’, adhere to the path of peaceful development and act cautiously in the area of military security’.¹¹

¹⁰ “New defense policy shows alarming rush to militarization”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 19, 2018 at <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201812190033.html>

¹¹ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on December 18, 2018, FMPRC https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1623094.shtml

Japan's Cabinet approved the 2019 defence budget

The 2019 defence budget of JPY5.26 trillion (USD47.2 billion) was approved by the Cabinet on 21 December.¹² It indicates a 1.3 per cent increase year-on-year and the seventh successive upturn under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe given the intensification of threat perception from North Korea and China. If the Special Action Committee on Okinawa and US Forces realignment connected expenses are excluded then the defence budget will increase by 1.4 per cent to JPY5.01 trillion, signifying the biggest hike in funding since 2014. Japan's plan of introducing the Aegis Ashore land-based missile interceptor system and six F-35A stealth jets are factored in the 2019 allocation as well as the plan to remodel its first aircraft carriers since the Second World War.¹³

India-Japan Joint Air Force Exercise held

Japanese Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) visited India for the first bilateral air exercise Shinyuu Maitri-18 with their Indian counterpart from 3-7 December 2018 at A F Station Agra. The focus of the exercise is joint Mobility/Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) on Transport aircraft.¹⁴ Successively, Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, Chief of the Air Staff paid a visit to Japan from 10-14 December to further strengthen the prevailing defence cooperation between the air forces of the two countries. During his visit, Chief of the Air Staff met with Japanese Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya and Chief of Staff, Koku- Jieitai (Japan Air Self Defence Force) General Yoshinari Marumo, and Chief of Staff, Joint Staff Admiral Katsutoshi Kawano.

Japan condemns China-based cyberattacks

Japan has registered protest against "prolonged and wide-ranging" cyberattacks by an alleged China-based hacking group named APT10, targeting its government, corporations and educational institutions and insisted that Beijing should take responsible action. Earlier, the US Justice Department accused Chinese nationals over state-sponsored hacking directed at government agencies and businesses in the US, Japan, and UK. Furthermore, it is reportedly stated that cybersecurity community APT 10 acted in collusion with the Chinese Ministry of State Security's Tianjin State Security Bureau. Japanese foreign ministry underscored that every G 20 member, counting China, "have affirmed their commitment to the prohibition of (information and communication technology) enabled theft of intellectual property, and are required to take responsible actions as a member of the international community."¹⁵ Japan aims to coordinate with the international community and "make efforts in order to ensure a free, fair and secure cyberspace."

¹² Kosuke Takahashi, "Japan Self-Defense Forces receive significant boost in 2019 budget", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, "Japan self-defence forces receive significant boost in 2019 budget," *Jane's 360*, December 21, 2018 at <https://www.janes.com/article/85398/japan-self-defence-forces-receive-significant-boost-in-2019-budget>

¹³ "Japan unveils record US\$47 billion defence budget aimed at countering China's military rise", *South China Morning Post*, December 21, 2018 at <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2179041/japan-unveils-record-us47-billion-defence-budget-aimed>

¹⁴ "EX SHINYUU Maitri-2018 With JASDF Commences", *Press Information Bureau*, December 3, 2018 at <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1554556>

¹⁵ "Japan slams alleged China-based hackers after cyberattacks on government, firms and colleges", *KYODO*, December 21, 2018 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/12/21/national/japan-slams-alleged-china-based-hackers-cyberattacks-government-firms-colleges/#.XBzsXFwzblU>

Developments in Japan-Russia Relations

Ahead of Prime Minister Abe's visit to Moscow for the 25th summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the hope of making progress towards a peace treaty, Russian President has stressed that importance of addressing critical security concerns first with regard to possible US military deployment in the contested islands in case Russia agrees to hand over control to Japan.¹⁶ Following the two leaders meeting in Singapore, Japan decided to accelerate discussions based on a 1956 joint statement in which Russia decided to transfer the two smaller islands to Japan when a peace treaty was settled. Experts say that a possible deal is the two-plus-alpha,¹⁷ one in which Russia returns the two smaller islands and keeps the two larger ones, but permits Japan some access. There are discussions that the peace treaty may be signed in June when President Putin is expected to visit Japan for the G20 meeting. Meanwhile, Russia confirmed in mid-December that new barracks for troops are built to shift troops into four housing complexes on two of the four contested islands, known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan.

Japan-India-US trilateral Meeting

Prime Minister Modi met with President Trump and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe in a trilateral meeting on the side-lines of the G20 Summit in Argentina. Drawing from the convergence of shared values and a common vision for the Indo-Pacific, Prime Minister Modi coined the trilateral cooperation as JAI, drawing from the acronym of the three countries, which carries the message of success.¹⁸ Earlier in April, New Delhi hosted the 9th Japan-India-US trilateral meeting at Joint Secretary/Director General/Assistant Secretary level with the aim of discussing regional and global issues of mutual interest. The objective of this trilateral is to explore concrete steps to advance cooperation in connectivity, infrastructure, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, maritime security, maritime domain awareness and HADR. There is a Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group which focus on supporting improved connectivity in the Indo-Pacific. All three leaders decided to remain engaged and reinforce cooperation in backing for a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

KOREAN PENINSULA

North Korea reportedly tests new 'high-tech weapon'

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the state news agency of North Korea on November 16 reported that "Kim Jong-un inspected the testing of a newly developed high-tech tactical weapon at the Academy of National Defence Science". No details was provided but this development followed just after a report based on satellite imagery identified the extent of North Korea's complex network of missile bases in the country. North Korean media reported that Chairman Kim Jong-un articulated satisfaction over the "state-of-the-art" weapon

¹⁶ "Putin seen wary of possible US military deployment", *NHK*, December 20, 2018 at https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20181221_03/

¹⁷ "Abe's search for Russia peace pact: Best chance, last chance?", *REUTERS*, December 19, 2018 at <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201812190060.html>

¹⁸ Remarks by President Trump, Prime Minister Abe, and Prime Minister Modi Before Trilateral Meeting, U.S. Mission India, 3 December, 2018 <https://in.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-of-japan-and-prime-minister-modi-of-india-before-trilateral-meeting/>

that “builds impregnable defences of our country and strengthens the fighting power of our people’s army.”¹⁹ South Korea confirmed this was Chairman Kim’s first public inspection of a testing site since the Hwasong-15 intercontinental missile in November 2017. South Korea indicated that this might be a test of a traditional weapon since the term “strategic weapon” was not used by the North Korean media.

Developments in the US-South Korea relations

The US and South Korea held the second working group meeting on North Korea on December 21. South Korean nuclear envoy, Lee Do-hoon and his US counterpart, Stephen Biegun co-chaired a meeting on denuclearisation. Both sides instituted the working group in November in order to coordinate on efforts to achieve the shared goal of the final, fully verified denuclearisation, lasting peace on the peninsula, inter-Korean relations, and the implementation of UNSC resolutions. In addition, both sides exchanged views on several developments related to the inter-Korean relations and sanctions. Since some gaps surfaced indicating the potential incongruity of progress in denuclearisation dialogues and inter-Korean cooperation, the White House, South Korea’s presidential office and the unification ministry are coordinating an approach toward Pyongyang. Meanwhile, Biegun reportedly suggested that the US will recommence extensive humanitarian assistance for Pyongyang in order to revive the denuclearisation dialogues.²⁰ In addition, there are discussions related to the second meeting between President Donald Trump and the Chairman Kim early next year. In addition, on December 20, South Korea stressed that it wants to downsize larger exercises and hold smaller joint military drills with the US in 2019. In 2018, US and South Korea suspended a few combined military exercises in order to ease tensions in the Peninsula since North Korea perceives these exercises as a rehearsal for war.²¹

Developments in Inter-Korea Relations

In an effort to reduce tensions with North Korea and enforce the September 19 inter-Korean military accord, South Korean Ministry of National Defence stated that it will systematically and actively push for the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) from the US. With regard to the OPCON transfer, the US and South Korea have an interim plan to corroborate the latter’s ‘initial operational capability’ (IOC) which is essential to drive wartime operations. Subsequently, the allies will ascertain South Korea’s full operational and mission capabilities.²² While South Korea was scheduled to recover wartime OPCON in 2015, it was deferred, as Pyongyang unveiled a series of nuclear and missile tests. South Korea is pursuing practical steps in reducing border tensions, averting accidental clashes and instead investing in confidence building measures. To achieve these objectives, it aims to steer discussions with Pyongyang over removing all guard posts (GPs) in the DMZ, which has been agreed during the April summit between President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un when both agreed to turn the DMZ into a “peace zone in a genuine sense”. South Korea intends to institute an inter-Korean joint military committee in the first half of 2019, which will be led by a vice-ministerial representative from each side to launch direct communication channels between their respective top defence officials.

¹⁹ “North Korea ‘tests new high-tech weapon’”, *BBC*, November 16, 2018 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46231372>

²⁰ “S. Korea, U.S. hold second ‘working group’ meeting on N. Korea”, *Yonhap News Agency*, December 21, 2018 at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181221003900315?section=nk/nk>

²¹ Hyonhee Shin, “South Korea seeks smaller military drills with U.S. amid North Korea talks”, *Reuters*, December 20, 2018 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-usa-drills/south-korea-seeks-smaller-military-drills-with-us-amid-north-korea-talks-idUSKCN1OJ0C2>

²² “Military to accelerate border tension reduction, seek early OPCON transfer”, *Yonhap News Agency*, December 20, 2018 at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20181220003151315>

Meanwhile, in November, South Korea managed to get sanctions exemptions from the UNSC for a joint survey²³ of inter-Korean railways in order to reconnect rail and road links between the two Koreas. Both Koreas are scheduled to hold a ground breaking ceremony at Panmun Station for the joint project to renovate and link cross-border railway.

India-Korea Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha visited India for the ninth India-Korea Joint Commission Meeting held on December 19. Within the scope of India-South Korea Special Strategic Partnership, both leaders discussed the shared vision underpinned by three P's: People, Peace and Prosperity. Given the convergence of India's Act East Policy and South Korea's New Southern Policy, both sides agreed on the importance of a free, open, peaceful and rules-based order. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj reiterated that "India sees ROK as an indispensable partner in its 'Act East' policy and in its vision of the Indo-Pacific."²⁴ Both leaders reviewed tangible progress achieved in several areas including defence, economic engagement, consular matters and other areas of our functional cooperation. Furthermore, issues related to the developments in the inter-Korean relations, denuclearisation through dialogue and negotiation, and addressing proliferation linkages have been prioritised.

Developments in Japan-South Korea relations

On December 24, Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs, Lee Do-hoon held consultations with Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kenji Kanasugi. This meeting was held in the backdrop of escalated tensions in Japan-South Korea relations following the fire-control radar irradiation incident. Defence Ministry of Japan confirmed that a South Korean Gwanggaeto-daewang class destroyer directed a fire-control radar on December 20 at a fixed-wing patrol aircraft (P-1) belonging to the Fleet Air Wing 4 of the Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) (Atsugi) off the coast of the Noto Peninsula. Following this incident, Japan registered strong protest against South Korea arguing that "it is extremely regrettable that this incident occurred, and we will firmly request the ROK side to prevent the recurrence of such incidents".²⁵ Japan claimed that fire-control radar, which is intended to be used to measure the precise orientation of and distance to an attack target, was employed for the said radar irradiation by South Korea. The defence ministry further claimed that "fire-control radar irradiation is a hazardous act that may cause unintended consequences, which in relation to the ships and aircraft deployed in the surrounding area is a profoundly dangerous act, even if such an action was taken to search for a missing ship".

²³ "South Korea secures U.N. sanctions exemption for inter-Korean railway survey", *Reuters*, November 24, 2018 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-southkorea-railways/south-korea-secures-u-n-sanctions-exemption-for-inter-korean-railway-survey-idUSKCN1NT01P>

²⁴ Press Statement by External Affairs Minister after 9th India-Korea Joint Commission Meeting, MEA, December 19, 2018 <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/30774/Press+Statement+by+External+Affairs+Minister+after+9th+IndiaKorea+Joint+Commission+Meeting>

²⁵ Regarding the incident of an ROK naval vessel directing its fire-control radar at an MSDF patrol aircraft, Ministry of Defence, December 22, 2018 at <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/press/release/2018/12/23a.html>

OUTLOOK FROM THE REGION



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The latest Modi-Abe summit demonstrated India and Japan's continuing urge to secure security and strategic cooperation. What are the new dimensions that can be seen in this relationship?

There are several less conspicuous but strategically important developments in the summit, which are expected to pave the way for making the bilateral security and strategic cooperation work on the ground. The commencement of negotiations on the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), agreed by Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi, is one such example. It is understood that ACSA envisages mutual access to goods and services for defense purposes. Also, the signing of the implementing arrangement for deeper cooperation between Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and Indian Navy is another step forward to expand cooperation in maritime domain awareness (MDA). Furthermore, the establishment of the Annual Space Dialogue between Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is another ambitious effort to enlarge the sphere of bilateral cooperation to outer space.

What would be the impact of India and Japan now elevating their "2+2" defense and strategic dialogue to the ministerial level in the Indo-Pacific?

Japan holds 2+2 ministerial dialogue with the United States, France, Australia, Russia, and Indonesia. Another such arrangement with India, an elevation from the secretary-level, is the manifestation of the deepening bilateral cooperation in foreign, defense, and security areas. It gives impetus for further advancing the Special Strategic and Global Partnership by adding yet an important platform for Tokyo and New Delhi to discuss issues of strategic significance at the higher level.

With Japan seeking to cooperate with China on infrastructure projects, what impact would it have on the infrastructure projects Japan plans with India?

Some infrastructure development projects have been identified for Japan and China to work together in third countries. However, it is not easy when it comes to implementation. For example, Japanese companies did not join the Chinese syndicate to make a bid for the proposed high speed railway project to connect the three airports around Bangkok, Thailand, which had been earlier identified as a possible ideal cooperation by the two countries. While Japan maintains interest in seeking possibility for participating in the Belt & Road Initiative, its approach would be modest, cautious and limited, paying full attention for the China-led initiative to be free, fair and transparent. As far as Japan's cooperation with India in the same area is concerned, there might not be any negative effect by these developments. It is Tokyo's firm commitment to work with New Delhi to develop infrastructure and improve connectivity and there are strong willingness to discuss and pursue more joint projects in the free and open Indo-Pacific.

Is the revitalization of Japan–China cooperation truly going to instil some measure of stability and certainty in Asia?

We can expect several positive prospects from the improved ties between Tokyo and Beijing. It should be noted in particular that there were some significant agreements in maritime security in 2018. These include the establishment of the Maritime and Aerial Communication Mechanism between the defense authorities, the signing of the bilateral Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR).

Agreement, and high level exchanges between the defense authorities including ministerial reciprocal visits. While there are unresolved issues such as the repeated intrusions by Chinese government and fishing vessels into the Japanese territorial waters surrounding the Senkaku islands and the development of undersea natural resources, both in the East China Sea, the recent developments are expected to contribute to not only confidence building between the two countries but also peace and stability in Asia.

The denuclearization process is at a crossroads amid pushback from China, Russia and South Korea on the question of sanctions. How is Japan going to navigate its approach towards the Korean peninsula?

Japan faces tough challenges from both the Koreas. Bilateral relations between Japan and North Korea have been stalled over the abductions issue, in which as many as 17 Japanese nationals were got away in 1970s and 80s allegedly by the direction of Pyongyang's authority. Relations with Seoul have also been difficult for the last few years. The recent incident of fire-control (FC) radar direction to Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's P-1 patrol aircraft by a South Korean naval warship in late December further deteriorated the bilateral relations already strained by several historical issues. While breakthrough in the respective relations is unlikely, if not impossible, in the near future, Japan welcomes the positive efforts by North Korea and fully supports its denuclearization. It is also ready to extend cooperation in the multilateral talks for such process.



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India, Afghanistan and Iran recently held their first trilateral meeting on Chabahar port. What strategic manifestations does it have?

It shows three countries' firm commitment towards full operationalization of Chabahar port. In May 2016, India, Afghanistan and Iran signed the Trilateral Chabahar Agreement, and in December 2017 the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated the first phase of the development plan of Chabahar port. The first trilateral meeting supports the resolve of three countries to develop the Port. Besides, it is worth to mention that, during Rouhani's visit to India in February 2018, a MoU to award the operation rights of Shaheed Beheshti port of Chabahar port to India Global Ports Limited (IGPL) for 18 months was signed between India and Iran. Taking all of these into consideration, the message by India is clear that it will continue its involvement and assistance to Chabahar port at least for a certain period.

It might be China that carefully monitors these developments the most. China leads the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and attempts to construct the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), positioning Gwadar port as a gateway. China's vision in the Middle East is not clear, but its influences been increasing in that part of Indo-Pacific. As the relation between Chabahar and Gwadar can be seen competitive in terms of transport and economic activities, the development of Chabahar port can be seen as a counter to China-Pakistan axis.

What can be behind the US government's decision to waive sanctions on Indian investments in Chabahar?

I reckon that the US government decided to waive sanctions on Indian investments in Chabahar for the sake of the reconstruction and humanitarian relief in Afghanistan and the deepening partnership with India. In fact, the US exempted not only the development of Chabahar port from sanctions but also an associated railway and the shipment of non-sanctionable goods for Afghanistan's use. It indicates the US took its relation with Afghanistan and India into consideration. Actually, it was quite clear that the US's anti-Iran policy collided with its Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia. On 21st August 2017, the US announced the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia. Some of the key characteristics of the strategy are that the US committed: (1) its continued support for the reconstruction in Afghanistan; (2) putting pressure on Pakistan, deeming it as a source of instability in the region; and (3) further developing its strategic partnership with India. The Port serves Afghanistan's economic development, while it benefits Iran as well. I assume that, after seeing both sides of the argument, the US carefully waive sanctions on Chabahar.

Can Chabahar provide a balancing act to the Chinese backed Belt and Road Initiative and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor?

The answer is yes or no. It is true that China has increased its influence through BRI and CPEC. In addition, it promotes infrastructure cooperation in Asia, such as Colombo port, Hambantota port (Sri Lanka), Chittagong

port (Bangladesh), and Kyaukpyu port (Myanmar). Furthermore, China opened the Chinese People's Liberation Army Support Base in Djibouti in 2017. Based on these initiatives, Chabahar definitely can provide a balancing act. However, there is another scenario, that is, Chabahar and Gwadar foster the connectivity between them and move for the direction of co-existence so that the Mokran shore attains development and prosperity. The Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif actually invited China and Pakistan to join the development of Chabahar port in March 2018. Actually, this development plan encompasses not only the transport sector but also heavy industries, such as petrochemical and steel complexes, tourism, residential area, and so on. Iran seems to be planning to develop Sistan and Baluchestan Province to enhance its national integration and for risk mitigation. Under economic sanctions, it is also true that China is an important partner for Iran. It will be necessary to have several policy options in mind.

How is trade via the Chabahar port influencing trade relations between India and the Central Asian countries?

It has a great potential. If we consider the geographical feature of the Indian Sub-Continent, India should go through Iran and Afghanistan to reach the Central Asian countries. On the Northeastern front, there are Himalaya Mountains which hinder coming and going of goods and people. On the Northwestern front, there is Pakistan between India and the Central Asia. Historically speaking, the Hindu Kush was an obstacle for Indians to get access to the West too. Due to this simple fact, India inevitably has to look at Iran for the betterment of trade relations with the Central Asia. When I visited Chabahar in February 2018, five temporary gantry cranes were already installed out of ten berths. The shipment of wheat from Gujarat to Afghanistan through Chabahar was already tested from October to November in 2017. The port is already operational. One of challenges is a railway connection. A railway from Chabahar to Zahedan is still under construction. If it is completed, mass transportation will be possible and we can say Chabahar port is "full operational" at that time. I think, from the Indian perspective, it is important to pay attention to the development of Chabahar port as well as to the associated transport infrastructure surrounding it. In the long run, it will surely contribute to India's revenue and energy security.

Can Chabahar be called the fault-line in India-Japan infrastructure cooperation?

Definitely, Chabahar is strategically important for both India and Japan, so it is a possible area of India-Japan infrastructure cooperation. However, although Japan showed its positive attitude towards the development and connectivity of Chabahar port in Japan-India Joint Statement in November 2016, it currently seems reluctant to get heavily engaged with Chabahar. Indeed, the Japanese Government provides one grant assistance project to Chabahar, which is a provision of customs equipment worth 800,000,000 Japanese Yen (equivalent to approximately 7 million US Dollars). Nonetheless, nothing else has been implemented so far. It would be fair to say that the level of commitment of Japan is comparatively lower than India's. For Japan, Chabahar is important to curve China's increasing influence in Indo-Pacific, to share universal values, and to stabilize Afghanistan. It is understandable that Japan should look into it from various perspectives, but Chabahar can potentially be the fault-line in India-Japan infrastructure cooperation.

Who will benefit the most by cooperating in Chabahar? Is it detrimental to China's interests?

Both India, Afghanistan and Iran will be benefitted by developing Chabahar, but it will perhaps be Iran who will be benefitted the most. Iran is currently going through a very hard time under the economic sanctions and political pressure from the Trump Administration. Under this context, Chabahar is deemed as a focal point which connects Iran with the outside world. Iran attempts to develop the Mokran shore including Chabahar and Bandar-e-Abbas because population density in big cities is too high in Iran and it is essential to deconcentrate

population and economic activities. Also, there are Sunni separatist groups in Sistan and Baluchestan Province and that region is relatively underdeveloped, so developing Chabahar and surrounding areas is important for national security too. The underlying cause might be a lack of water resources in Iran. Lack of drinking water and water contamination is on the top agenda for Iran and they desperately need a solution. Above all, Iran needs to accomplish full operationalization of Chabahar and hence development of the region, so that it can play a role as a major power in the region. Needless to say, it is also important for India and Afghanistan. India is trying to drive a wedge between Chinese interests in Indo-Pacific. Afghanistan can export its rich natural resources, such as iron, copper, gas, and so on, to foreign countries through Chabahar. As a user of the Port, I think Afghanistan comes first.



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How do you see the prospects of US-North Korea high level talks? Will it bear any concrete outcome?

The US-DPRK denuclearization negotiations have stalled since June, and pessimism is gaining ground. I am still cautiously optimistic that North Korea's denuclearization will eventually happen, although it will be a long process. Such optimism is derived from the country's harsh economic situations, which without sanctions relief, may collapse. It seems obvious that Kim Jong-un is committed to economic development, for which denuclearization is required. John Bolton's recent mention of possible sanctions relief is a good sign. Seeking tangible achievements, Washington may make some concessions. My guess is that during the first half of 2019, the two countries will agree to trade limited sanctions relief with the DPRK's steps toward denuclearization, such as the destruction of Yongbyun nuclear facilities. Of course, the tumultuous domestic political situation in the US will also affect the progress of the US-DPRK negotiations, and thus it is quite hard to predict what will really happen at this point.

How does the issue of denuclearization influence peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula?

I view that North Korea's denuclearization a necessary step toward peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. The inter-Korean relations have improved dramatically during 2018, but in order to maintain the peaceful mood and build mutual trust, the two countries should resume economic partnership. Without denuclearization, the US would not lift economic sanctions and would deter South Korea from cooperating with North Korea. Establishing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula involves not only the two Koreas but also the US. From economic cooperation to ending the Korean War and establishing a peace treaty, the US needs to be involved. In order for the US to get onboard, progress toward denuclearization must be made.

Though the Chinese and the South Korean President recently agreed that their relationship has been reset now, how far are the restrictions imposed on South Korea by China really been lifted? How did it affect their trade relations?

Chinese economic sanctions over THAAD (the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system) caused severe damage to the South Korean automobile, smartphone, tourism, and cosmetics industries, reducing South Korea's gross domestic product growth by 0.4 percentage point in 2017, accordingly to the Bank of Korea. Their bilateral relationship was supposed to be reset when President Moon visited Beijing in December 2017, but sanctions have been lifted only gradually and have not been completely removed. Also, as the THAAD issue has not been completely resolved, there is a danger that harsh sanctions may come back in the future. China's behaviour raises the concern that it is recreating the East Asian tributary system of past centuries, for which recognition of China's pre-eminence in the world's political hierarchy was a prerequisite for trade with the "Middle Kingdom." Having recognized the danger of being too dependent on China, South Korea has been trying to diversify its trade partners and is now turning more toward Southeast Asia. However, China still is and will likely

remain the largest trading partner for South Korea for years to come, and China's influence over South Korea's strategic decisions will continue.

How can South Korea balance its strategic priorities, calibrating its involvement on the Korean Peninsula so that the US and China still remain its partners?

South Korea is caught between a rising superpower that is also its largest trading partner, and a defending hegemon that is also its security guarantor. Different South Korean leaders had different strategic priorities; President Roh Moo-hyun took a more equidistant approach to the US and China, while Lee Myung-bak maintained a strong alliance with the US. Amid the heightening competition between the US and China, however, South Korea's options were narrowing, as it was increasingly pressed to choose one side over the other. The deployment of THAAD was the first real test of South Korea's commitments. For China, South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD indicates Seoul's commitment to the US-led world order that aims to check a rising China, although its official position is that the missile defense system's sophisticated radar enhances the US' surveillance capabilities into Chinese territory.

However, South Korea is an important partner for the US and China respectively, as well. For the US, alliance with South Korea helps its efforts to check the rise of China. For China, South Korea is the fourth largest trading partner. South Korea should think about how to enhance its leverage. Reducing military tension between the two Koreas is one way to enhance its leverage vis-à-vis the US' leverage vis-à-vis the US. Diversifying its trading partners will help it reduce China's influence over South Korea. Ultimately, a unified Korea will increase its independence.

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