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Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia

David Scott*

India's links to the Pacific have gradually emerged in the last decade. Initially this was seen in the Look East policy enunciated in the early 1990s. This policy was rather limited in scope in terms of its emphasis mostly on economic relations with the ASEAN countries. However, the last decade has seen India move beyond such ASEAN, Southeast Asia economic horizons. Its Look East policy has entered 'phase-2'. Consequently, India has become further involved in military-security power projection, particularly through naval deployments and maritime diplomacy. India has also moved into wider East Asia (Pacific Asia) and Pacific Basin (southern Pacific) settings. In doing so rivalry with China is evident, as is balancing with other Pacific actors like Japan and the US. Whilst India's drive in the Indian Ocean remains more noticeable and manifest, this has spilled further eastwards. India has thus become a Pacific player and a factor within the Pacific Asia balance of power.

Back in 1993 India's strategic thinking reflected a continental mindset limited to its immediate neighbours, and Indian analysts were lamenting that 'our leverage in the global political power play is limited, and our options are limited ... we are not in a position to deploy resources for enhancing influence and serving our national interest abroad' (Dubey 1993: 129). A decade later in 2002, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz was asked why India was not being invited to the first of the prestigious and annual security Shangri-La Dialogue meetings in Singapore, sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, which brought together high ranking defence experts and politicians from around the East Asian region. His response was quite puzzling, 'I think it's always been a little bit strange, and it gets stranger each year, to talk about East Asian security without bringing in India ... India's such a big part of the East Asian equation ... India's presence would be important' (Wolfowitz 2002). India's absence in the meeting became all the more curious in the context of then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in the preceding month: 'India's belonging to the Asia-Pacific community

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is a geographical fact and a political reality. It does not require formal membership of any regional organization for its recognition or sustenance' (2003: 9).

Yet formal recognition of India's Pacific links, in Pacific Asia (East Asia) and the Pacific Basin has been growing in the past few years. India's leverage and influence have become noticeable. In 2003, for instance, India was invited to and represented at the Shangri-La Dialogue by its then Defence Minister, George Fernandes. India's participation continued through 2004, 2005 and 2006. The US Pacific Command formally recognized in 2005 that 'India's emergence as a rising power is important to the region' (Fallon 2005: 21). Then Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's address to the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2006 was based on the theme of a rising India, one whose bounds were stretching beyond its traditional South Asian and Indian Ocean settings, and one which was getting more and more involved in the dynamics of Pacific Asia, where 'India's trade, security and energy ties with East Asia and the Pacific region is [sic] set to grow rapidly in the coming years' (2006; see also *Asian Age* 2006).

India's 'Look East' Strategy and its Ramifications for Southeast Asia

The underlying framework for this growing Indian presence has been its Look East policy initiated in the early 1990s. It was no coincidence that China quickly understood the implications of India's "policy of going east", striving to push forward toward the Pacific Ocean and toward the goal of making itself a "colorful big power" (*People's Daily* 2003b). Indian analysts acknowledge that 'the growing Chinese economic and military influence in Asia clearly appears to be a decisive strategy in moulding India's Look East strategy.' It is quite apparent that strategic competition with China is a tacit element of this strategy 'through which it attempts to balance China in [Pacific] Asia' (Batabyal 2006: 180, 183, 194). With the new Congress-led UPA government continuing with the basic thrust of such a policy, India's 'Look East' policy became 'institutionalized' (Limaye 2005: 157).

Southeast Asia has been the first port of call for India's growing involvement in Pacific Asia. In the opinion of Admiral Joseph Prueher, then Commander in Chief US Pacific Command, 'India is a rising regional player...its long-term security anxiety is clearly China. India is also seeking greater economic cooperation with Southeast Asian nations. India is definitely looking East' (1997). As the Secretary-General of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognized 'with its dynamic economic growth and superiority in computer software, engineering and sciences, India will play an important role in maintaining the peace, stability and prosperity of the region ... and security of Southeast Asia' (Ong 2004). This echoes the call by then India's Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh, in Singapore in June 2000, that 'the engagement of a militarily stronger, economically prosperous, democratic, and secular India imparts greater stability to the region' (cited in Bahroo 2000). India's then Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, talked

happily about 'the restoration of our historical connectivity with Southeast Asia' (2006). All in all, Indian analysts have frequently commented on this growing Indian presence, hitting 'paydirt' (Uniyal 2000), with India acting as 'a much needed anchor' (Sundararaman 2004: 385) in the region, as 'India has carved out a significant space for itself in the Southeast Asian region' (Batabyal 2006: 194).

Relations with ASEAN were pursued with vigour (Grare and Mattoo 2001). India became a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1995. On attaining the latter status, the then External Affairs Minister Inder Gujral affirmed that 'we see the full dialogue partnership with ASEAN as the manifestation of our Look-East destiny. This is because we are geographically inseparable, culturally conjoined now more than ever before, economically and strategically interdependent and complementary' (cited in Jaffrelot 2003: 47). As the relationship was further strengthened when India became an ASEAN summit level partner in 2002, 'there has been no looking back since then' (Jayanth 2004). An ASEAN-India Framework Agreement was signed in 2003, with the aim of creating a free trade area by 2012. Indian analysts saw wider significance in this by arguing that 'India's "Look East" policy pays off' (Shahin 2003), that appeared 'poised for a major take off' (Naidu 2004: 331); and that it 'must be viewed as the blueprint for India's incorporation into the Asia-Pacific Economic Community [APEC]' (Sundararaman 2004: 385).

However, India's ASEAN links have not just been economic, they have strategic underpinnings as well. A China factor has been evident on all sides, 'as India's economic and military position is now stronger [in 2004], ASEAN would certainly like to use it as a counterweight in its relations with China' (Sundararaman 2004: 377). Typical of India's emerging maritime power projection was the dispatch of an Indian carrier group, consisting of the Indian naval aircraft carrier *INS Viraat*, accompanied by four other Indian naval ships namely *INS Rajput* and *Ranjit* (guided missile destroyers), *INS Shakti* (replenishment tanker) and *INS Khukri* (indigenously built missile corvette) to Singapore, Port Kelang (Malaysia) and Jakarta (Indonesia) during July and August 2005.

Maritime Activities in the South China Sea Area

During the 1980s and 1990s, Indian civilian and military establishment defined India's zone of strategic interest as being the South Asian landmass and the Indian Ocean, from the Persian Gulf to the straits of Malacca. However, the twenty-first century has seen its strategic horizons enlarged beyond the Straits of Malacca. While launching India's warship, the *INS Brahmaputra*, on 14 April 2000, the then Defence Minister George Fernandes asserted that India's 'area of interest ... extends from the north of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea' (cited in *Asia Times* 2000). The new Congress-led government under Manmohan Singh reiterated

the same thrust while maintaining that 'our strategic footprint covers ... South-East Asia and beyond ... Awareness of this reality should inform and animate our strategic thinking and defence planning' (Singh 2004). Arun Prakash, then Chief of Naval Staff, reckoned 'it is imperative for India, therefore, to retain a strong maritime capability in order to maintain a balance of maritime power in the Indian Ocean, as well as the larger Asia-Pacific region' (2005b). In his analysis, trends made the twenty-first century 'truly the Asia-Pacific century ... for India, the Asia-Pacific region holds immense promise for political, economic and military cooperation, and the key role that maritime forces can play, makes the Indian Navy a key component of any national strategy towards this region' (Prakash 2005a).

India's naval infrastructure has been beefed up in order to allow further deployment out from the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean into the South China Sea. The year 2005 saw the setting up of the Far Eastern Naval Command (FENC) at Port Blair on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Meanwhile there is the current drive towards setting up a further maritime centre 50 kilometres south of Visakhapatnam, where the Indian Navy's Eastern Command is currently headquartered, being readied to berth two aircraft carriers, support ships and submarines, and specifically set 'to facilitate ongoing Indian naval exercises in the South China Sea with the navies of China-wary countries' (Ramachandran 2006). At a general level, 'the political-strategic intent of the new base is to build sinews for India's "Look-East" policy not only in trade terms but also in the context of the evolving maritime balance of power in the Asia-Pacific' (ibid.).

This strategic involvement was demonstrated in 2000 through India's bilateral and unilateral naval exercises in the South China Sea—an area next to China and also claimed by it, but a claim disputed by Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. Consequently, 'by extending its area of operation firmly into the South China Sea, India presents a direct challenge to China' and 'promises ... a redefinition of the naval balance of power in the region' (*Asia Times* 2000). An Indian commentator (Bedi cited in Davis 2000) considered that 'going into the South China Sea is a bold step. India is going out of her own sphere, experimenting with something new'. In Taiwan, commentators were quick to see the implications of this 'rapid expansion of the Indian navy's area of operation into the SCS [South China Sea]'; with its 'major impact on the balance of power in the SCS, on naval strategic deployment both within and outside the region, and on the development of both bilateral and multilateral relationships in the region' (Song 2003: 230). Unnamed senior sources in the US administration acknowledged that 'what [the naval exercises] will do is underscore that India is beginning to arrive as a serious player' (Barber 2000) in Pacific Asia. Indian strategists like Srinivasan (2000) felt that 'this is surely reason to be pleased, for it is the first flexing of India's muscles as a blue-water naval power; and more importantly, a direct challenge to China'. Bilateral exercises were first held with South Korea and Vietnam in October and November 2000. Indian naval exercises with the Philippines were seen by the

PRC as India's 'stepping up navy building or enhancing its ability to control the ocean ... in an effort to hinder China' (PRC sources cited in Koshy 2001: 2). Following these bilateral exercises, four or five Indian vessels remained in the South China Sea to be joined by a Kilo-class submarine and reconnaissance aircraft for unilateral naval exercises, 'in a quiet show of strategic reach' (Mehta 2000) by India.

This message was reinforced in November 2003 as INS *Ranjit*, a Russian guided missile destroyer, INS *Kulish*, a guided missile corvette and INS *Jyoti*, a replenishment tanker, sailed through the South China Sea, before finally making a courtesy call in Shanghai. The official PRC response was positive, that the coming joint exercises represented a 'stepping stone in enhancing inter-operability between the two navies' (*People's Daily* 2003a). Similarly positive was the nature of the influential comment that 'this would be the first time that the armed forces of the countries, hitherto locked in eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation for over four decades, would be undertaking an exercise of this magnitude' (ibid.). Nevertheless, the magnitude in terms of India's long-term projection was clear, as was the existing legacy of hostility which was not to be brushed aside through one visit. Chinese comments that 'the exercises assume significance as navigation in the South China Sea ... has been plagued by sea piracy' (ibid.) were true enough, but omitted India's very sensitive presence in areas claimed by China as its own and regarded by India as international waterways. Shortly afterwards, other Chinese sources commented on the implications of this Indian arrival by maintaining that 'world powers such as ... India have increased their military infiltration in the South China Sea regions, pushing the issue towards a more complicated and internationalized level. The situation allows no room for optimism' for PRC over China's undisturbed hegemony in these waters (*Outlook East Weekly* 2004).

A year later in October–November 2004, again, the Indian Navy deployed five of its frontline warships—two Kashin class destroyers, INS *Ranjit* and *Ranvijay*, the frigate *Godavari*, the missile corvette *Kirch*, the offshore patrol vessel *Sukanya* and the fleet tanker *Jyoti*—into the South China Sea 'to further project its blue water capability' (Thapar 2004). This was 'in line with the larger objective of carving out a greater role for itself in the strategically important South China Sea ... to enhance India's maritime security requirements ... an exercise in power projection' (*Indian Express* 2004). It was clear that 'Indian naval diplomacy has now gone beyond the western shores of ASEAN' (Maitra 2005). Naval exercises were carried out with South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, with port calls to Pusan, Tokyo, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

At the state level, a two-way convergence is apparent around the South China Sea, as 'many countries in the region view India as a possible counterweight to future Chinese expansionism in Southeast Asia' (Batabyal 2006: 191), and 'defence cooperation between India and the Southeast Asian countries are [sic] motivated by an inclination on the part of the Indian elite to play a new balancing game against

China in the region' (Batabyal 2006: 193). One key player in Southeast Asia has been Singapore, facing north-westwards towards India, but also north-eastwards towards China. Despite its own Chinese ethnic background, Singapore has pursued close military-security cooperation with India, and also with the US. Consequently, during February–March 2005 the Indian-Singapore SIMBEX naval exercises did not take place in their usual Bay of Bengal and Malacca Straits setting but rather eastwards in the South China Sea; with the frigate *Gomati*, the Kashin Class destroyers *Rajput* and *Ranvijay*, fleet tankers *INS Jyoti* and Indian built corvettes *INS Kora* and *Karmuk* making up a strong Indian flotilla.

Indian links with Vietnam have further extended its presence and increased Chinese concerns, in which there is what Kapila called 'the China factor' as an underpinning 'strategic calculus of India and Vietnam' (2001). Both Vietnam and India have unresolved territorial disputes with China, both have China as a looming northern land neighbour, and both have faced war with China—India in 1962 and Vietnam in 1979. An initial India–Vietnam defence agreement in 1994 was strengthened by a further joint protocol on defence cooperation in March 2000 which included an institutionalized framework for regular discussions between the Indian and Vietnamese defence ministers, sharing of strategic threat perceptions and intelligence. India's then Defence Minister Fernandes hailed Vietnam as India's 'most trusted friend and ally' and noted that Hanoi 'stood by us' after the nuclear tests because 'they understand that if [India] went nuclear there were good security reasons [i.e., China] for it' (cited in Limaye 2000). Naval exercises between the Indian Navy and the Vietnamese Navy in 2000, not surprisingly, drew protests from China. In August 2005 India dispatched *INS Magar*, an amphibious ship, with 900 boxes weighing 150 tonnes of Petya and missile boat spares for Vietnam's navy. Meanwhile discussions have taken place on naval berthing rights for Indian ships, possibly at the Cam Ranh deep water bay. It needs to be mentioned that earlier this was used as a Soviet base in the 1980s evoking Chinese fears of encirclement. Its use by the Indian Navy rekindles such fears. In 2005, Indian analysts were seeing 'a grand, but doable, role' for India as a balancer outside South Asia. Its 'sphere of responsibility' may need to be defined to bring 'east of Malacca Straits, including Vietnam' within the scope of 'strategic and theatre level reach and punch' (Karnad 2005: 63).

Second Phase of 'Look East' Strategy and Forays into East Asia

India's drive has also been seen operating outside the geographical sphere of ASEAN, where 'India is actively trying to intensify its engagement with the [wider] East Asia region' (Singh and Kim 2005: 129), i.e., Pacific Asia. Initially it had been the economic allure of Japan and the Asian Tigers that had attracted India eastwards. In 1996 the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had stated: 'our imagination is now riveted on the Asia-Pacific Century that is knocking at the door of human

kind' (cited in Jaffrelot 2003: 35). Two years earlier, he had felt that 'the Asia-Pacific could be the springboard for our leap into the global market place' with 'a new relationship between India and the Asia-Pacific'. He further believed that such a vision would be realized and that 'the next century will be a century of partnership for us' (ibid.: 46). His then Finance Minister, and future Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh agreed in 1995, that 'the economic policies of India' should take cognizance of 'the dynamism of this region [Asia-Pacific], which shall soon be the tiger-economy of the world.' India, he underlined, would like to be a part of 'this process' (ibid.: 45). The then External Affairs Minister, Inder Gujral, was already commenting at the first ASEAN-India Dialogue meeting that 'India's partnership with ASEAN will have an impact on India's economic, political and security related involvement in these larger, concentric coalitions around ASEAN ... in East Asia, in the Asia-Pacific' (Gujral 1996).

India's membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), in 1996 was significant for its wider Asia-Pacific nuances, as 'a welcome and logical extension of its look-East policy'¹ and the ARF could 'be used as a springboard to the [wider] Asia Pacific region' (Kuppuswamy 2000). Consequently, Indian officials stressed in 1998 that 'our Look East policy will be integrated into a larger regionalization strategy which encompasses...the Asia Pacific' (Singh 1998). In the wake of these moves, Indian analysts (Naidu 2001) were discerning 'a rapid growth in Indian interests—economic, political, and strategic ... [with the] growing realisation that developments in the Asia-Pacific do impinge on Indian interests. Hence, one can expect India to pay greater attention to this region in the coming years'. It is for this reason that currently Ahamed, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, argues that 'the Look East policy is not merely an external economic policy, but a "strategic shift in India's vision"' (2006).

Consequently, India's economic and diplomatic drive eastwards has been complemented by some military power projection of the country as 'a credible naval power in the neighbourhood with expanding stakes towards the East' (Khurana 2005: 296). Indeed, it now features in the wider quadrilateral Asia-Pacific maritime balance of power, alongside the US, China and Japan (Bateman et al. 2006). This power projection became a favoured theme for many Indian analysts. Bajpai, for instance, argued that 'India ... is an emerging power with capabilities that extend to the Asia-Pacific region' (2001: 83). Naidu (2001) believed that it 'is the only [local] country in the region that can match China in terms of size and military power ... Because of these reasons, India is uniquely placed to play a significant role in the Asia-Pacific balance of power'. Korean and Indian analysts agreed in

¹ The ARF comprised Australia, China, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Russia, South Korea, the United States and the ten ASEAN countries.

2002 that an economically growing India that is 'more closely associated with an increasingly prosperous Asia-Pacific region, can play a bigger role in enhancing regional security' (Singh and Kim 2002: 196).

India has deliberately widened the scope of its Look East policy. In 2003, India's then External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, called this 'phase two' of India's Look East policy; whereas 'the first phase ... was ASEAN-centred and focussed primarily on trade and investment linkages,' the 'new phase of this policy is characterized by an expanded definition of "East," extending from Australia to East Asia ... The new phase also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues' (Sinha 2003; also Mohan 2003). East Asia was specifically considered as part of India's 'extended neighbourhood,' towards which India had stakes in issues ranging 'from the stand-off in North Korea to the violence in Philippines'. These issues of concern would have to be dealt with 'effectively and quickly so that violence subsides and peace reigns. I have no doubt that ... India will play an ever-increasing role' (Sinha 2003).

Indian analysts have emphasized this bigger Pacific thrust. Naidu argues that 'India has become a vital part of the larger Asia-Pacific strategic landscape ... [and] India seems well poised to acquire a key place in Asia-Pacific affairs.' He credits this to the Look East policy which has played a vital role in enabling India to become one of the major powers of the Asia Pacific. 'The Look East policy is responsible in making India an inalienable part of the Asia-Pacific's strategic discourse' (Naidu 2004: 331, 344). He further argues that 'India's rise and its emergence as a major power in the Asia-Pacific' meant that 'the emergent Asia-Pacific balance of power to a great extent would depend on the role India will play' (2005a: 228) in this region. In 2006 this Pacific Asia thrust was given a new impetus within India's policy as Indian diplomats stationed in the ASEAN countries, China, Japan, Korea, Australia were summoned to a strategy meeting in Delhi (Bagchi 2006).

India's geo-political forays in East Asia, i.e., the Pacific Asia, firmament were cemented in 2005 with its participation in the East Asia Summit (EAS). This development was a fundamental 'geostrategic transformation', reflecting India's 'strategic muscle' (Panda 2006: 29). The 'invitation to India to the EAS is a recognition of its fast growing economic and political clout' in Pacific Asia, in which 'it is time for New Delhi to look beyond ASEAN' (Naidu 2005b: 715). Chinese commentators took note of the significance of India's participation in view of China's initial reluctance about allowing India's participation. One of them states that 'India's participation in the first East Asia Summit shows a more aggressive [i.e., assertive] gesture of India in the Pacific region since the look East policy was initiated' (Zhao 2006). Indian commentators agreed that 'with the participation of India in the recently concluded East Asian Summit ... it is seen that the Look-East policy is being pursued aggressively and has started yielding results' (Kuppuswamy 2006). On the other hand, 'India must be aware that it has not been

invited to EAS because of its rising economic potential alone but more as a balancing force to offset the China factor' (Kuppuswamy 2006). In Lee Kuan Yew's word's 'India would be a useful balance to China's heft' in the EAS (Lee 2005). The *People's Daily* (2005) commented that Japan sought to bring 'India into the community to serve as a counterbalance to China'. China remained 'leery of India's great power pretensions and attempts to extend its influence in China's backyard', while regarding New Delhi's Look East policy as part of a wider 'conge China' strategy (Malik 2006: 3). Accordingly the Chinese would aim to confine India to the periphery of a future East Asian community and 'foil India's efforts to break out of the South Asian straitjacket' (ibid.: 4).

India's security presence in Pacific Asia has become a matter of concern. Its influence in the Indian Ocean is starting to spill over into the adjoining Pacific, where Indian army representatives have attended the Pacific Armies Management Seminar (PAMS) meetings for some years. India hosted PAMS in 2004 while it was Fiji's turn to hold it in September 2006. Similarly India has been participating in the Asia-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Conference ever since 1998. The China factor and India's response to it in Pacific Asia has become a noticeable undercurrent in general Asia-Pacific strategic discussions, with some arguing that 'in case China's rise is violent and leads to instability, India will need to cooperate closely with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan and the ASEAN countries to forge a force for peace and stability' in that area (Singh 2006). Such has been the Indian projection into the region, that it might need to work on future scenarios about Taiwan. 'China must also take into account the growing naval power of its nearest significant military rival, India' (Daly 2004). Indeed Chinese analysts recognize that their bilateral relationship is significant not just for South Asian and Indian Ocean dynamics, but also for Pacific Asia and Pacific Ocean dynamics. Thus, for Guihong Zhang 'on the one hand China would welcome India to play a more important and constructive role in Asia-Pacific ... and thereby facilitating a multipolar Asia-Pacific in which China is one of the major powers,' but, on the other hand, 'an emerging India does mean a strong competitor for China from ... Southeast and Central Asia to ... Pacific Ocean where their interests and influences will clash' (Zhang 2005: 289). Either way, India's Pacific linkages in Asia-Pacific may lead to the emergence of 'a rising China-US-India triangle' having 'far-reaching implications at many levels' (ibid.: 288).

In turn, a growing partnership is discernable between India and Japan, following their 'global partnership' proclaimed in 2000, and 'strategic partnership' announced in 2005. By 2005 Japan's maritime exercises with the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean occurred in parallel to India's maritime exercises with Japanese units in East Asia. Strategic and defence relations were strengthened in 2005-06 leading to the beginning of an 'Asia-Pacific alliance between India and Japan' (Srinivasan 2005). For Naidu, 'it is on the security front that one can visualise a remarkable convergence of interests' between India and Japan in containing China, and where

‘without doubt, India–Japan relations have decisively entered a new phase, which have considerable impact, especially on the Asia-Pacific’ (2005c: 327). The year 2006 saw a series of defence consultations between the two countries. Japanese Admiral Takashi Saito’s visit to India in February was followed in March by that of General Tsutomu Mori, head of Japan’s Ground Self-Defence Force, and in April by the Chief of Japan’s Air Self-Defence Force, General Tadashi Yoshida. The Indian defence minister’s visit to Japan in May represented ‘the flowering of India’s defence diplomacy’ (Kondapalli 2006; also Suryanarayana 2006; Vasan 2006).

Within such a Pacific Asia framework, Indian naval units have also been working with South Korea. A four-ship flotilla from the Indian Navy participated in the International Fleet Review in South Korea in October 1998, ‘as part of its policy to raise its profile in the Asia Pacific’ (Naidu 2004: 346 fn. 21). Bilateral naval exercises were carried out in 2000 and again in 2004. A high profile state visit to India by South Korea’s leader occurred in 2004 resulting in the Long-Term Cooperation Partnership for Peace and Prosperity and the Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue joint agreement. In March 2006 it was announced that India had agreed for its air force and navy to exercise jointly with South Korean forces at a Pacific base in July 2006 with a view to enhancing ‘future power projection in the Asia-Pacific region’ (*NewsInsight* 2006). Korea’s economic presence in South Asia is also complemented by India’s security presence in East Asia. Both were drawn together by the concerns over China’s shadow of ‘geo-economics’ which seemed to walk on the ‘two legs of geo-political and geo-strategic considerations,’ thereby making a Korea–India strategic partnership inevitable (Singh and Kim 2002: 190).

Emerging Trends in Southern and Western Pacific

India has also been projecting itself out into the Pacific maritime reaches, further extending its Look East policy in which ‘the potential with Australia and the South Pacific remains to be tapped’ (Mohan 2003). Indian links with Australia have relevance not only for the Indian Ocean but also the Pacific. The first strategic dialogue meeting between the two countries, held in August 2001, underscored their ‘shared perspectives and common interests on a number of important issues, including in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.’ Further, both agreed that they would contribute to stability in both these regions (Australia-India 2001). Australia’s Defence White Paper, *Defence 2000*, had already identified India as a strategic player by arguing that ‘the most critical issue for the security of the Asia-Pacific region is the nature of the relationships between the region’s major powers—China, Japan, India, Russia and the United States’ (Australia 2000: 17). Australia’s prime minister underlined ‘India’s growing role in the wider Asia Pacific strategic system’ (Howard 2004). As a part of the new thrust the navies of

both countries concluded a 'milestone' pact on joint naval exercises in December 2005 with a fuller Memorandum of Understanding agreed in March 2006 that had 'a significant focus on maritime security cooperation' (India Defence 2006a).

Such Australasian directions bring India further into the South Pacific. Annual Reports of India's Ministry for External Affairs for the years 1999–2003 stressed the ASEAN focus of India's Look East policy. However, the Annual Report for 2003–04 highlighted that 'India continued to pursue closer relations with South East Asia in keeping with its Look East Policy.' But it also articulated a new Look East Policy extending 'beyond South East Asia to the Pacific region' (India 2004: 38). The 2004–05 Annual Report continued to keep up with the new approach with India's dialogue meeting with the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) took place on the sidelines of the 2003 India-ASEAN summit (India 2005: 23).

Amongst the island statelets India has an 'obvious strategic interest' in the Fiji Islands as the 'most developed of the Pacific island states' which is not only home to more than 300,000 people of Indian origin (PIO) but also a consistent and 'vocal supporter of India's candidature in the United Nations Security Council' (Singh 2005: 57). However, Fiji's domestic politics, and native Fijian backlash against the Indian community in 1987 and 2000 led to Indian economic boycott in 1987. Some have even invoked an 'imperial vision' (Dasgupta 2000) on the part of India to intervene more forcibly. However, India has been very careful to avoid a totally antagonistic relationship with Fiji and instead has focussed on systematically cultivating a wider audience in the South Pacific (Vohra 2004). Ever since it became a PIF dialogue partner in 2003, India was hoping that 'greater involvement with the Pacific Islands Forum would also increase India's influence and leverage in the region' (Singh 2003). Since then India has provided financial assistance to many small island states, at times even competing with China's similar programmes (Shie 2006).

India has also projected a military presence into the Pacific reaches. Indian commentators argue that the 'Indian Navy plans to stretch out to Indian ocean, Pacific ocean ... to make its presence felt in every corner' (Reddy 2006). The Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), set up in 1998, had India as an observer from the beginning; with India more actively participating in their 2001 minesweeping operations, alongside other Pacific actors like Australia, New Zealand, Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Canada, Chile and France (Baruah 2001). INS *Kanwar* gave a robust Indian naval presence in the WPNS for 2004, while INS *Mysore* and INS *Tarasa* did the same for 2005. The tenth WPNS was held in Hawaii in October–November 2005 with a suitable presence of India. The joint naval operations with INS *Tabar* took place in August 2006 with Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. This naval diplomacy which sought to 'showcase' India's maritime capability (Raman 2006) was a timely response to Wen Jiabao's earlier visit to

the South Pacific. The stopover in Fiji was seen as particularly significant for re-establishing India–Fiji links (Kumaraswami 2006). INS *Tabar*'s captain was told by India's High Commissioner in New Zealand that 'as India emerges steadfastly as a major global economy, it is important that the country establishes itself as a maritime nation,' in which 'the oceans of the world, their wealth and the maritime lines of communication are all central not only to trade and commerce but also the security and integrity of India' (cited in Raman 2006).

India has also been drawn further into US-led operations in the Pacific, still being considered something of an American backwaters. Operation 'Cooperative Thunder' saw Indian Air Force units flying across the Pacific in February 2004 to take part in joint exercises with American units in Alaska. In September 2006, India had another long range mission as IAF IL-76 transport aircraft flew in 140 officers and soldiers to Hawaii for Operation *Yudh Abhyas* ('Preparing for War'). This was India's largest joint exercise on foreign soil (*Indo-Asian News Service* 2006). The Indian Navy was invited to send observers for America's Valiant Shield exercises off Guam scheduled for 2006. India was also invited to send a liaison officer to the Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu, joining others from Japan, South Korea and Australia (Dikshit 2005; *Nerve of India* 2006). Again, it is of some significance that whereas India was invited as observer to the US naval exercises off Hawaii in 2004 and 2006, China was not. Given these indications, India's ties are likely to deepen in the near future. The US Pacific Command recently spoke of India's role in the region, thus, 'our relationship with the Indian Integrated Defense Staff and the Indian Armed Services continues to grow ... U.S. and Indian security interests continue to converge as our military cooperation leads to a stronger strategic partnership' (Fallon 2005: 21–22) in the Indian Ocean and in the Western Pacific.

Chinese analysts have recognized the growing presence of India in the Pacific. It has been observed that in its 'desire to go beyond the Indian Ocean, to go beyond the sub-continent' and to get more India's forays into the Pacific have raised a major question in China: 'Are we all ready to accept India as a Pacific power?' (Zhao 2006: 38). China has its reservations, at a time when it is itself pushing out into the Pacific. As noted, other major players, the US, Japan and Australia have been positive about India's growing role. This all adds to China's discomfort, but that is part of the 'Great Power Great Game' (Scott forthcoming) between China and India being played out across Asia, around the Indian Ocean and in the Pacific.

Membership in APEC?

A final aspect in this question concerns the Indian aspirations for membership in the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC), set up in 1989. India has long sought membership, indeed as early as 1991. India's then Finance Minister P. Chidambaram argued in 1996 that 'we believe we have a rightful place in APEC

.... It is not practicable to dream of APEC without including India, as it would amount to enacting Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark' (cited in *AsiaWeek* 1996). However, India's application in 1997 was rejected, with a ten-year moratorium on new membership announced for 1998–2007. However, there is a distinct possibility of India's membership in APEC. Vietnam expressed support in 2000 for India's membership (Baruah 2000). Consequently, by 2003 Australia too joined in by stating that 'India is too important to ignore and APEC should not ignore it' (*Business Asia* 2003). Japan and the United States have moved towards supporting India for strategic as well as economic reasons. However, China's position still remains ambivalent.

Some Indian commentators linked India's presence in the 2005 East Asia Summit with wider APEC aspirations. According to Kuppuswamy (2005), India had seized the opportunity so that its 'entry into this [APEC] forum may be possible in the near future'. Australian analysts wonder whether 'India, which is already a participant in the East Asia Summit process, might also not be an appropriate member' (*Asian Economic News* 2006) for APEC. The issue was wider than just economics because as an emerging great power, India will be 'at or near the centre of all the key issues in the 21st century' (Sheridan 2006). Woo notes that as the second membership moratorium draws to a close, APEC members will have to again take up the issue of whether to expand the organization and, especially, if it can afford to not have India in the fold, for 'this issue is of at least as much importance to APEC's continued relevance as a trans-Pacific institution as it is to India' (2005: 10). The November 2006 Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) *State of the Region 2006–2007* (2006: 22) showed that recent trends in support for India's membership in APEC stood at: 62 per cent overall, with South-east Asia at 64 per cent, Northeast Asia at 62 per cent, North America at 66 per cent and South America at 67 per cent, though Austria/New Zealand surprisingly showed a lesser degree of support at 40 per cent. The PECC concluded: 'the question of Indian membership [of APEC] deserves serious attention' (ibid.). It seems more than likely that India will gain APEC membership once the moratorium ends in 2007.

Conclusion

In sum, the situation in 2007 is clear enough. Having firmly established 'foot prints' of its 'strategic vision' in and around the Indian Ocean (Scott 2006, 2007), India is moving further eastwards to Pacific Asia and the Pacific Basin via South-east Asia. A decade ago, India turned its eyes for the first time on the East and its sight was fixed on the Asia-Pacific region, 'the planet's new growth area' (Gupta 1997: 227). It is time that 'India should break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia ... [and] go East in search of an Asia-Pacific identity ...' (ibid.: 309, 314). The United States Pacific Command was quick to recognize that India

was emerging as a 'regional power with great potential in the coming century' based on the successful liberalization of its economy. This assessment was also guided by the US strategic perceptions about China as a principal security concern for the future, therefore the need for the US Pacific Command to maintain 'modest levels of contact with the Indian military' (Prueher 1998). Nine years on, and India's economic surge, its links with Pacific Asia and with US Pacific Command, and continuing concerns about China have all become stronger. Indeed as per the latest reports forthcoming, Indian exercises around the Pacific are scheduled for mid-2007 (India Defence 2006b). This should see a flotilla set sail for the Pacific Ocean in a three-month deployment to participate in a joint exercise with US Pacific forces, and then join the Russian Navy at Vladivostok in a similar mission. Exercises with ships from the Singapore Navy and port visits to the Philippines, South Korea and Japan would also take place. India has indeed become a Pacific player.

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