

# Asian Security Conference: India must get its act together

Anil Bhat

focus

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itime dimension. The theme very effectively brought out the interplay with the geo-physical, the geo-economics and the geopolitical." The bare facts of Asia's geopolitics were set into motion in the very first session. Yan Xuetong, an influential figure in the Chinese foreign policy process, speaking on "Bipolarisation in East Asia," categorically stated that in the next ten years, China and the US will emerge as the major powers in international politics capable of competing with each other. As the only country capable of posing a challenge to the US, especially after Russia's decline since 1992, a change in China's foreign policy is visible with its New Model of Major Power Relations (NMMPR) which indicates that the relationship between China and the US will be competitive, if not cooperative, but it will not be confrontational. Xuetong cautioned that while national interest drives international politics among states, China is worried about the turn of events in East Asia, especially the ideology of Japan, if not

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its military capability. Ideology has been instrumental in causing wars, like the Cold War between the US and erstwhile USSR. Differing with Xuetong, Sujit Dutta, who presented "Asia's power transition: uncertain future of stability and peace," elaborated on three factors that impacts Asia's power transition. First, globalisation, which has resulted in China's integration into international institutions leading to huge capital flows, trade, and interdependence, even between China and Japan and China and South Korea. Globalisation has

created overlapping interests, norms and structures in Asia leading to huge growth patterns in the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, globalisation has changed the state system in Asia. Due to social media and satellite based communications, there have been calls for social change by popular movements. Even within China, popular movements have called for political, economic and land reforms, and fight against corruption, etc. Hence, the international relations of Asia will have to account for these domestic forces. Third, balance of power in Asia is superimposed due to the US-China factor.

During informal interactions, when I asked Xuetong why, despite peace and tranquillity agreements, Chinese PLA had upped the ante against India by aggressive cross border incursions during 2013, he asked how I claimed so. I replied that as a retired Army officer, I knew about them from reliable sources. While IDSA scholar Dr S. Kalyanaraman clarified that in India, the public had a right to know about such matters, I added that

Indian media was quite resourceful and that we accepted and appreciated that in China, the media is controlled by the Communist party.

Former director of Japan's defence intelligence, Vice Admiral Fumio Ota's paper titled "Chinese military expansion and other Asian states reaction" was the most informative one on China's long term aims and the exceptional pace of its military build up. Referring to Military Balance 2012/2013 issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force created 10 fourth generation fighter squadrons during 2011-2012. This is the same as the entire Japanese Air Self Defence (JASDF) fourth generation fighter squadrons. From 2001 to 2005, China built 16 new submarines which is the number of submarines in the current Japan Maritime Self Defence Force's (JMSDF) order of battle.

The subsequent five year period between 2006 and 2010 saw the Chinese increase their building rate, producing 22 sub-

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marines, which equals the total number that JMSDF is planning to build up to according to the latest National Defence Programme Guidelines. Chatting with me, Vice Admiral Ota acknowledged the importance of Japan's maritime cooperation with India. It is noteworthy that the strain in India-Japan relations following India's nuclear test of 1998 did not at all affect the ongoing cooperation between both nations' Coast Guards. An interview of India's then defence minister George Fernandes by a Japanese TV news agency, in which he elaborated on India's threat perceptions/reasons for the 1998 nuclear test, was in fact very well-received in Japan.

During the final panel discussion on "India's Response," chaired by IDSA's DG Dr Arvind Gupta, issues of Asia-Pacific as a zone of conflict or cooperation in future were discussed. While India was largely hailed for playing a stabilising role in Asia, the panellists, however, felt that the country needed significant domestic and economic reforms and governance. India was urged to identify priorities clearly, make a clear ideological map and take initiative in both near and extended neighbourhood. The panellists exhorted India to try to consolidate its position in the Bay of Bengal and to explore options with South East Asia, Iran and Afghanistan. Panellists also stressed that India should be more assertive, active in shaping regional order, take initiative in cyber and water where it has strength.