

# Military Diplomacy

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*This paper provides conceptual and practical aspects of military diplomacy. It examines India's recent efforts in enhancing its military diplomacy vis-à-vis Chinese military diplomacy conundrum in Asia, especially in South and Southeast Asia. It points out that India's inability to evince trust and goodwill with its neighbours has led to most of them preferring to employ military diplomacy with China as an India-specific countervailing factor. It argues that India's military diplomacy is yet to catch up with its rising power status. With the security situation in South Asia as well as the larger neighbourhood constantly fluctuating, India should focus on re-inventing the basket of military diplomacy. It concludes by stating that nations that evolve and adopt a sound approach to military diplomacy can expect to enjoy a benign, if not completely safe, security environment.*

## Backdrop

In a lighter vein, military diplomacy like military intelligence may be construed to be an oxymoron. This would appear reasonable as militaries are traditionally associated with conflict and use of force whereas diplomacy is defined as the art of conducting relationships for gain without conflict.

Diplomacy can be defined as the conduct of international relations by negotiation and engendering goodwill and mutual trust rather than by force, propaganda, or recourse to law.

The *Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* states that the goal of diplomacy is to further the state's interests as dictated by geography, history, and economics. Safeguarding the state's independence, security, and integrity is of prime importance; preserving the widest possible freedom of action for the state is nearly as important. Beyond that, diplomacy seeks maximum national advantage without using force and preferably without causing resentment. Thus, if the use of (peaceful) diplomacy is the first resort in developing international relations, the use of (violent) military means could be considered the last resort. Diplomacy can be defined as the

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conduct of international relations by negotiation and engendering goodwill and mutual trust rather than by force, propaganda, or recourse to law.

Militaries, historically, are associated with achieving national aims and objectives in international relations through the use of force. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the coercive use of militaries (and navies) by colonial powers led to coining of the term '*gunboat diplomacy*' which refers to

the pursuit of foreign policy objectives with the aid of conspicuous displays of military power, implying or constituting a direct threat of warfare. It meant that the military had to have the capability and wherewithal to act; and the decision makers the will to call the enemy's bluff, if required.

As a corollary, there have been numerous instances of peaceful use of military to further a nation's international relations. This peaceful use of the military as a tool of national diplomacy led to the use of the term 'military diplomacy'. Thus 'military diplomacy' could be defined as use of (peaceful) military in diplomacy, as a tool of national foreign policy. It is axiomatic that military diplomacy has to be dovetailed and integrated with the national diplomatic efforts. UK's defence diplomacy is defined by Anton du Plessis, in a narrow sense, as the "use of military personnel, including service attaches, in support of conflict prevention and resolution. Among a great variety of activities, it includes providing assistance in the development of democratically accountable armed forces". Du Plessis goes on to give a broader definition of military diplomacy as "the use of armed forces in operations other than war, building on their trained expertise and discipline to achieve national and foreign objectives abroad". He also gives Cottey and Foster's inclusive definition of defence diplomacy (alternatively international defence diplomacy) as "the peacetime use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defence ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy" and more specifically the use of military cooperation and assistance".<sup>1</sup>

The words 'military' and 'defence' are used loosely and can be freely interchanged. While the term 'military' could be used to identify activities undertaken by the uniformed components of the nation's defence establishment, the term 'defence' could be used to imply the entire defence establishment to include the non-uniformed components such as ministry, R&D establishments, national training institutions such as National Defence College and national defence universities.

The Indian ministry of defence defines defence diplomacy as exchange of high-level defence related visits, dialogue on security challenges and port calls; and defence cooperation as those activities covered by training exchanges, combined exercises; sourcing, development, production and marketing of defence equipment

and other forms of cooperation<sup>2</sup>. Going by the most obvious meaning of the terms, diplomacy efforts/initiatives could be unilateral or by mutual consent between two or more countries. Unilateral initiatives could include policing of the high seas by navies. Cooperation, on the other hand, cannot be unilateral as it implies cooperative or consensual actions between two or more nations. While the aims and objectives of nations participating in military diplomacy or cooperation could differ the crux is that they work together to develop an environment of peace and trust.

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### Objectives of Military Diplomacy

Defence diplomacy serves specific national foreign and security policy objectives. In the context of global and regional strategic engagement, it creates sustainable co-operative relationships, thereby building trust and facilitating conflict prevention,

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introducing transparency into defence relations; building and reinforcing perceptions of common interests; changing the mind-set of partners; and inducing cooperation in other areas. Defence diplomacy can further country specific foreign policy objectives by managing defence foreign relations and supporting the other diplomatic initiatives of government. The author, in his book *'Enabling Military-to-Military Cooperation as a Foreign Policy Tool'*, details the various activities that can be undertaken as part of defence and military cooperation and which could also contribute towards military diplomacy<sup>3</sup>.

A positive security environment implies that no adversarial or inimical activities are planned, initiated or undertaken or abetted against a country. This assumes greater significance in view of the global network of terror with or without state support. The following actions could be undertaken to achieve this:

- > **Political, security and strategic defence dialogues:** Multi-tiered dialogues would serve to enable an understanding of the participants' concerns and establish

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areas of common and mutual interest. These dialogues could be at the political level of national leadership level – head of state/government/ ministry and the civil and military professional/specialist level within the government and the armed forces.

- > **Defence agreements/MoUs/treaties:** These agreements could range from mutual assistance to cooperation. They ensure that respective positions etc, as the case may be, are identified and recorded to enhance trust and to prevent misunderstanding at some later stage.
- > **Transparency in intent with regard to national military policy:** Ensuring some degree of transparency in national defence and military policy such as response trigger lines and capabilities through various media - both government/confidential and open sources as websites, magazines, journals etc, would assist in realistic assessments and appropriate responses. Of course, while intentions, however, peaceful, could change, capabilities do not change. However, this transparency could facilitate better strategic and defence perceptions resulting in diffusing of tensions and right sized militaries and related budgets and expenditure. A comparison of bilateral relations between India and Bhutan; and India and Bangladesh highlights this point. India and Bhutan - which is host to an Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) - enjoy a special military diplomatic relationship and a larger bilateral relationship. In comparison, India and Bangladesh, despite the special role that the former played in securing the independent status of the latter, have a less than happy bilateral military relationship.
- > **Assistance in maintenance of lawful government:** Assistance in the maintenance of lawful government through military means; such as India's assistance to the Maldives during an attempted coup in 1988; and through military training, advice and equipment.
- > **Professional personnel contacts:** Contact at all levels would serve to create a better understanding of respective positions. It would also reduce animosity and enable a more conducive approach towards problem solving and inter-operability. This is achieved through

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permitting contacts between military personnel in formal, informal and social settings. Alumni of military training establishments, particularly long courses as at the National Defence College of Command and staff colleges, where spouses are encouraged to participate can be a major means of achieving this.

- > **Exchange of perceptions:** In order to establish commonalities, mutual benefit and areas of discord, both formal and informal (Track II) initiatives can be used to exchange views. Participation in exchanges, visits, seminars, conferences, symposia etc, and presentation of papers at these events educate the participants and provide decision makers with necessary inputs for astute decision making.
- > **Participation in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (UN PKO) or coalitions and humanitarian assistance and relief:** A formal commitment to the UN and other regional cooperative organisations or coalitions for provision of forces and equipment for UN PKO, humanitarian assistance and relief and joint operations is a corner stone of military diplomacy as it is indicative, amongst other things, of a country's willingness to stand and be counted in international relations. The setting up of the Indian ministry of external affairs funded Centre for UN Peacekeeping (training) (CUNPK) at the United Services Institution of India, in New Delhi is a small step in this direction. The US has an elaborate training programme and funding for training other nations in peace keeping operations under the former president's Global Peace Operation Initiative (GPOI) . GPOI has subsidiary programmes such as Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA)<sup>5</sup> and Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities (EPIC)<sup>6</sup>. The US funds UN training and simulation facilities in target countries such as Bangladesh and India. This ensures that countries willing to contribute troops for UN missions have the requisite trained forces readily available thereby enabling the US to ensure adequate UN forces without having to commit its own. Similarly, France supports the Zambakro Peacekeeping School in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast).

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- **Strengthen defence relationships to promote own influence and access:** A vibrant and healthy defence and military relationship could provide the desired influence and access to the country and decision makers. This could be achieved through equipment transfers through sale, aid or gifts; defence and military infrastructural development such as operational, training and administrative facilities; and human resource development with the help of in-country advisory / assistance / training teams etc. Creation of equipment and intellectual dependency through exports and personnel exchanges could also serve to promote its own influence and access. This could result in access to the defence and military establishments and the desired influence in the target country's decision making instruments particularly defence. This could also ensure that its own sensitivities and concerns are considered and kept in mind during the target country's decision making.
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- **Enhance Own Defence Capability in Areas of Defence Equipment:**
    - > **Sourcing and developing of defence equipment:** In order to pose a viable deterrent and thereby ensure national security, the nation's military has to be adequately equipped. Military diplomacy could enable cooperative efforts for drawing up of equipment specifications, research and development, technology transfers, acquisitions and production. Some examples of such joint ventures in this field are the Indo-Russian BrahMos cruise missile and four nation (UK, France, Germany and Italy) armaments agency OCCAR (Organisation Conjoint de Cooperation en matiere d'Armement) to provide improved management of collaborative defence equipment programmes involving European partners, particularly the Eurofighter jet fighter.
    - > **Making own defence industry and R&D effective and financially viable:** Countries with relatively large militaries with the consequent large volumes of defence equipment may find home production, especially of spares more economically viable. It also gives the added advantage of not being dependent on imports during conflict situations and reduces the vulnerability to sanctions or exorbitantly high prices or economically detrimental contracts. This could be done by promoting own defence exports, technology transfers, joint R&D and joint production.
    - > **Leverage big ticket defence purchases:** Big ticket sales made from a position of strength could be leveraged both in terms of strategic relations and financial payoffs such as offsets. However, purchases made from

positions of urgent or desperate need could be detrimental to the buyer, as in the case of the Indian purchase of the Russian aircraft carrier *Groshkov* and its huge, frequent and arbitrary price hikes/cost overruns and delay in delivery.

- **Assist friendly foreign countries to develop their defence capability (without impinging on own security):** The efforts to develop the defence capability of friendly foreign countries are always fraught with the need to guard against compromising one's own security. Exposure to own systems and assistance in defence development in areas of equipment, concepts, material resource, defence human resource etc could assist other countries in developing their own capability. These efforts could be linked to safeguards for own security through treaties/agreements, compliance with other development/economic assistance/aid etc.
- **Undertake international military engagement to enhance own military capability:** The art of warfare and science of defence management have evolved with technological advances. There are continuous developments in these fields. One has to keep pace with these developments, in order to assess future threats and develop own capabilities. This can be done, overtly, through personnel contacts in the form of professional military exchanges, defence and military human resource development in basic and advanced military skills, war fighting skills at tactical and strategic levels, and in conceptual and doctrinal abilities; and defence management specialisations in resources, techniques and training. Own systems, approaches and procedures could be raised to optimal levels by carrying out comparative assessments and thereafter incorporating best practices, with appropriate refinements.
- **Promote defence and military interoperability:** One of the likely outcomes of defence and military cooperation could be combined operations; either in bilateral and

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multilateral arrangements such as NATO, the US led coalition in Iraq etc and under the aegis of the UN. NATO has evolved extensive common standards ranging from English language to military terminology to military equipment to operating procedures to ensure complete and effective interoperability. This would have come in useful during the NATO deployment in Kosovo and other areas.

- **Appointment of defence attaches to foreign countries:** Appointing defence attaches to foreign countries has been an old practice. USA and China have amongst the highest number of defence attaches abroad and virtually cover all the nations in the world. India, on the other hand seems to be taking a very conservative approach by not having increased the number of its defence attaches abroad for many decades thereby losing many opportunities to extend and gain from pro-active military diplomacy.
- **Specific defence diplomacy actions:** These vary considerably and range from post-conflict reconstruction actions to participation in international parades and tattoos. Most of these actions can be linked to and may even form part of the previous categories.

### **Military Diplomacy Across the World**

USA, UK, France and the NATO nations could be considered the world's leaders in military diplomacy. China has been aggressively enlarging its military diplomatic efforts and could also be considered amongst the leaders.

India, with a long tradition of use of military diplomacy, is also ramping up its efforts, albeit, in its own slow and confusing style under the overly centralised and bureaucratic control of its ministries of external affairs and defence.

Australia and India have well established military diplomatic efforts. USA, UK, France, the NATO nations and Australia have very focused and relatively transparent policies and programmes. One of their military diplomatic objectives has been to ensure and encourage militaries that support democracy and civilian control of the defence forces. India, with a long tradition of use of military diplomacy, is also ramping up its efforts, albeit, in its own slow and confusing style under the overly centralised and bureaucratic control of its ministries of external affairs and defence. While the USA engages countries across the globe through its theatre commands, India and China focus on the developing world on the continents of Africa and Asia. India also engages with many Western militaries in its quest for equipment, knowledge

and international standing and Australia focuses on its immediate neighbourhood of the Asia-Pacific region.



## Military Diplomacy – Under Optimised

Military diplomacy, more often than not, does not receive the attention that it merits. Where employed, it suffers from not being fully integrated with the nation's overall foreign policy and diplomatic efforts. Anton du Plessis puts it very succinctly when he states:

...defence diplomacy approximates a military adjunct to diplomacy rather than a distinct type of diplomacy. At one level, its importance in a changing environment and use for foreign and security policy purposes are recognised in principle, whereas, at another level, defence diplomacy has become an overarching term for defence foreign relations. As a result, defence diplomacy does not receive the recognition it deserves. Conceptually, this is due less to the precarious relationship between various foreign policy instruments, and more to an underestimation of the nature, scope and utility of defence diplomacy. Practically, and due in part to conceptual ambiguity, this underestimation is reinforced by a lack of integration with foreign and defence policy and corresponding military policy and strategy, as well as by defence diplomacy being restricted to its military-defence policy context rather than enhanced by its diplomatic-foreign policy context<sup>7</sup>.

### India's Efforts at Military Diplomacy

India maintains defence and military relations with many countries including Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Japan, Philippines, Republic of (South) Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and ARF, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Israel, Oman, Iran, UAE, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, Namibia, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Djibouti, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, USA, Brazil, UK, France, Russia, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Belarus, Germany, Greece, Italy and Australia.

Over the last decade India's military diplomacy contacts and activities have increased exponentially. Rajat Pandit chronicles the list of war games being undertaken by the Indian defence forces in 2010-11. The army has planned 14 to 18 exercises with countries ranging from the US, UK and Russia to Bangladesh, Mongolia, Thailand, Tajikistan, Seychelles and Singapore; both at home and abroad. After the 'Malabar' naval war games on the western coast, the 'Habu Nag' amphibious exercise at Okinawa (Japan) Indian warships will hold combat manoeuvres with French warships, including the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*. Indra-Dhanush, air combat war games between IAF and British Royal Air Force are slated to be held at Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal. While the RAF has deployed its spanking new Eurofighter Typhoon fighters, E-3D AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) and VC-10 mid-air refuellers, IAF is participating with Sukhoi-30MKIs, Mirage-2000s, MiG-27s and the Phalcon AWACS<sup>8</sup>.

The example of Indo-Singapore military cooperation and the consequent more mutually supportive relations is a case in point. Singapore was looking for training areas and skies closer home and found them both in an India that was willing to explore new ways of defence cooperation. India has endeavoured to combine military diplomacy or cooperation to support its larger strategic interests as in Sudan for its oil, Yemen, Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia in Africa, China's neighbours – Laos and Vietnam, Pakistan's neighbour, Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republic of Tajikistan.

### **India's South Asian & Chinese Conundrum**

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India's inability to create trust and goodwill with its neighbours has led to most of them preferring to employ military diplomacy with China as an India-specific countervailing factor. India has to review its conduct of bilateral and multilateral international relations in South Asia and the developing world. It must shift the focus to mutual gain and 'interdependence' (as in the Indo-Bhutan equation) and away from a race with China. Of concern to India should be the Chinese efforts of jostling for space in the military diplomatic arena especially in the South Asian and Indian Ocean regions.

As C. Raja Mohan states:

China is consciously promoting it (military diplomacy) ... Beijing (China) uses its armed forces as an instrument of diplomacy to enhance China's national power. .... Chinese ministry of defence promised to intensify its military diplomacy by maintaining military attaches in 109 countries: annually sending more than 100 military delegations abroad and receiving more than 200 visiting military delegations. Beijing also plans to conduct high-level strategic consultations and professional and technical exchanges; and organizing study abroad exchanges for mid-grade and junior officers<sup>9</sup>.

The bilateral environment came under pressure after the 1950s *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai* and Nehru's Panchsheel doctrine of international relations because India gave refuge to the Dalai Lama, in 1959. This was followed by what Neville Maxwell called "India's China War"<sup>10</sup> of 1962. India's military responses were seen in the Nathu la (1967) and Sumdorong Chu or Wangdung (1987) standoffs. The tension continued on the borders till an agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas was signed on September

7, 1993. The state of amicable military (diplomatic) relations developed and grew with exchanges, visits and joint exercises. All this while, Indian Chinese watchers kept warning against the consequences of not taking cognizance of Chinese infrastructural development in the Tibetan plateau and its "string of pearls" around India in its engagement of Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Its extra friendly relations with Pakistan are an obvious tactic to counter India and hinder free development of India. It consistently makes overtures to Bhutan, which have so far ignored by it, both because of its own interest and India's interests. China has since abandoned the Deng era doctrine - 'hide your capabilities, bide your time' - for its current openly assertive and aggressive actions<sup>11</sup>. On September 7, 2010, a Chinese ship confronted a Japanese coast guard vessel off the disputed islands of Senkaku (the Japanese name)/ Diaoyu (Chinese name). Then there is the case of China's refusal of a visa to India's northern army commander for an official visit to China on the grounds of his being the senior commander in Jammu & Kashmir. India responded by cancelling course vacancies for Chinese officers and some visits and put on hold other military exchanges and contacts.<sup>12</sup>

### **Engaging South Asia**

The present writer has argued for a dynamic and methodical approach to military diplomacy (with specific reference to South Asia) in his article 'Dynamics of Military Engagement in India's Neighbourhood'<sup>13</sup>. He has suggested setting up a South Asian Military Interaction Programme (SAMIP), essentially based in India, and, if insisted upon by the neighbours, in their countries also. The aim of SAMIP would be to facilitate and institutionalise military diplomacy in South Asia. SAMIP activities could include the following:-

- > Military conferences – this could also include exchanges and meetings at the levels of defence ministers and senior civilians of defence ministries.
- > Joint border interactions/meetings – bilateral and tri-lateral.
- > Joint maritime patrol and surveillance to monitor the sea lanes of communication and EEZs.
- > Joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as was highlighted by India's speedy response during the tsunami of December 2004. This could be in the form of communications, joint relief operations, mutual assistance etc.
- > Joint combined exercises – bilateral and multi-lateral comprising forces from one or more military service.
- > UN peace support and keeping related activities.
- > Seminars/conferences/symposia on military related subjects.

- > Training institution(s) exchanges/conclaves for trainees and faculty.
- > Military sports events – at the local and central levels.
- > Military adventure activities – at the local and central levels.
- > Indian military training institutions alumni get-togethers.
- > India could also set up a unilateral military assistance programme covering areas ranging from training to materiel assistance.
- > Institutions and security think tanks, such as IDSA, USI etc could offer, fully funded, research fellowships to members of the defence establishment and militaries of the region. These research fellows would get an insight into Indian defence thought while providing insights into the defence thinking of their own nations. America's Pacific command funded Asia-Pacific Centre for Strategic Studies in Hawaii to reach out to the defence and military establishments in the region.

### **An analysis of India's Military Diplomacy**

**The Strengths:** India has actively conducted military diplomacy since independence. The initial efforts were a combination of its colonial inheritance (Nepal), the non aligned movement (NAM), support for anti-imperialistic and anti-colonial movements (Nigeria, Iran, Iraq, Namibia, South Africa's anti apartheid efforts, etc). India's vast experience in mountain warfare, counter-insurgency/

India's vast experience in mountain warfare, counter-insurgency/terrorist operations and its redoubtable military training machinery has been exploited to develop vibrant bilateral relations through the medium of training and joint exercises.

terrorist operations and its redoubtable military training machinery has been exploited to develop vibrant bilateral relations through the medium of training and joint exercises. Bilateral relations with countries where Indian Military Training Teams are deployed are extra special as evinced in Bhutan, Lesotho, Zambia, Laos, and Tajikistan etc. The presence of training teams assist in building links with the host country's military thereby supplementing the efforts of the diplomatic corps and at times even off setting not so cordial relations at the diplomatic level. Bhartendu Kumar Singh in his analysis of India's military diplomacy<sup>14</sup> credits Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for the increased military diplomatic activity being undertaken by India in keeping with its rising economic and political profile, that has also been backed by the strategic consensus, for tackling common security

threats through cooperative security in the region. Bhartendu Kumar Singh feels that gains are readily visible in the reduced tensions with China (sic) which has allowed the two countries to explore the possibilities of a partnership in the emerging Asian security architecture. It has enabled India to ensure enhanced policing of waters in the Indian Ocean region, through sharing of intelligence with other countries. India's capability to curb piracy and other subversive activities in the region has definitely increased as witnessed in the recent sinking of pirate ships in the Gulf of Aden by the Indian navy. This has allowed India to maintain a peaceful periphery and project its power in a discreet and subtle manner that resonates with the maritime needs and aspirations of small littoral countries in the region.

**The Weaknesses:** Bhartendu Kumar Singh also highlights the shortcomings in India's military diplomacy. He states that scope of military diplomacy is still limited to a few countries, and is also limited in variety and depth. India is not able to harness military diplomacy due to the demand-supply disequilibrium in military modernisation. India still does not have a diplomatic presence in many of the continental countries in Africa as well as in the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean region and its trade linkages with these countries are too shallow to create 'stakes' for these countries. Many of the military diplomatic activities therefore, are a consequence of agreements reached with individual countries, rather than the part of a grand strategy. There are significant players competing with India with more resources and more lucrative terms of engagement. He argues that India's military diplomacy is yet to catch up with its rising power status. With the security situation in South Asia as well as the larger neighbourhood constantly fluctuating, India should focus on re-inventing the basket of military diplomacy.<sup>15</sup>


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Given the nature of the Indian bureaucratic decision making process India's strengths have not been optimised due to a number of infirmities in the Indian approach to military diplomacy. Some of the infirmities are listed below:

- The over centralised approach of India's bureaucracy aka ministry of external affairs (MEA) and a convoluted and cumbersome decision making process.
- Lack of a definite and structured policy and road map for engaging other countries.

- Lack of a vision to develop a strategic grouping such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the ASEAN Security Community (ASC).
- A general approach within the decision making polity and bureaucracy where a major portion of military diplomacy is considered to consist of leveraging the economic aspects of defence industry rather than relationships built on institutional and personal interactions at all levels.
- Lack of dedicated funding for military diplomacy which prevents the development of a long term approach. It also does not inspire much confidence in bilateral relationships due to the resultant uncertainty.

## Conclusion

The 21<sup>st</sup> century's 'flatter world' is creating new international dynamics. Any nation that does not deploy all its instruments and resources towards optimising its security environment would be forced to exist and develop sub-optimally. China and India are the best examples of two contrary approaches - with China currently occupying the winner's podium. The only saving grace for the Indian model is the democracy factor which counter-balances China's totalitarian regime. Nations that evolve and adopt a sound approach to military diplomacy can expect to enjoy a benign, if not completely safe, security environment. 

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### Notes:

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