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29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
#08-06, Block B,
National University of Singapore,
Singapore 119620
Tel: 6516 6179 / 6516 4239
Fax: 6776 7505 / 6314 5447
Email: isassecc@nus.edu.sg
Website: www.isas.nus.edu.sg



Sino-Indian *Panchsheel* and Japan's Overture to India

P S Suryanarayana¹

Abstract

*With 2014 designated as the “Year of Friendly Exchanges between India and China”, the two mega-state Asian neighbours will commemorate later this year the 60th anniversary of the enunciation of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (**Panchsheel**). Interestingly, however, New Delhi’s diplomatic calendar in the early part of January 2014 has been dominated by Japan’s overtures to India in the defence domain and by the crisis over the treatment of an Indian diplomat in the United States. Moreover, China, despite speaking of the upcoming **Panchsheel** anniversary, has emphasised the primacy of Sino-Russian and Sino-American relations (with India not seen in this hall of primacy). So, a relevant question is whether China’s bid to fashion a “new model of major-country relations” with the US will overshadow the **mantra** of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the Chinese discourse. Regardless of whether this happens, India and China can seek a mutually beneficial ‘new normal’ in their relationship.*

¹ Mr P S Suryanarayana is Editor (Current Affairs) at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be contacted at isaspss@nus.edu.sg. Opinions expressed in this paper, based on research by the author, do not necessarily reflect the views of ISAS.

Introduction: Genesis of ‘Five Principles’

China, India, and Myanmar “will [in 2014] commemorate together the 60th anniversary of the release of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”.² An announcement on these lines was made by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin in his New-Year-eve comment on “Playing the Main Melody of Asian Cooperation”.³ His comment presents, in essence, a glimpse of Beijing’s latest views on the “Asian Situation and Neighborhood Diplomacy”. It can be tempting indeed to dismiss the flowery language here as meaningless diplomatic niceties. However, one will run the risk of missing some operational nuances that define China’s diplomacy behind the public facade. Experience shows that weighty nuances can often be gleaned from the official Chinese discourse at symbolic moments.

It is, therefore, possible that Beijing and New Delhi will in the current year pay attention to the relevance and future of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These norms are collectively known in India as *Panchsheel*. The five principles of inter-state relations, first enunciated in 1954, are: (1) mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) mutual non-aggression; (3) mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; (4) equal and mutual benefit; and (5) peaceful coexistence.

Also privy to the Sino-Indian enunciation of these principles, which actually flowed from a Chinese diplomatic initiative, was indeed Burma (as Myanmar was known in 1954). Despite such a trilateral genesis, India and China have come to be associated with this piece of creative diplomacy more intimately than Myanmar. This should cause no surprise. Myanmar until recently remained largely isolated on the international stage except for Nay Pyi Taw’s parallel relations with China and India.

The Five Principles were first propounded in 1954 by the then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in the context of his country’s talks with India over Tibet. New Delhi responded positively, saying that the same principles had governed the foreign policy of India since its independence in 1947. In such a positive ambience, these Principles were incorporated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. The accord was signed on 29 April 1954. Subsequently, the China-India Joint Statement of 28

² People’s Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1114403.shtml; accessed on 6 January 2014

³ Ibid

June 1954 elucidated *Panchsheel* as the basic framework for their relationship and for their respective ties with other states.

In a follow-up, India was among the countries which, in December 1957, successfully propagated these Five Principles at the United Nations.⁴ The objective was to promote *Panchsheel* as the framework for a harmonious world (to use a Chinese phrase of early-21st Century). The diplomatic logic of these efforts was that the Five Principles, traced to the civilisation-matrix of China and India, could potentially ensure stable international relations.

It is sheer commonsense that these Principles, if properly adopted by states with differing governance models, will enable each of these countries to grow, undisturbed by external forces. It is a different debate whether *Panchsheel* can be harmonised with the early-21st Century concept of a universal “right [of each state] to protect” the ‘vulnerable’ sections in other state[s].

Matrix of China, India, Japan, US

Of greater significance to the purpose of this paper is the relevance of *Panchsheel* to the future course of the Sino-Indian relationship in a new and evolving context. Being formative still, this new context consists of three key aspects. One, India is being increasingly wooed by Japan, whose troubled ties with China continue to be acute. Two, noticeable at a strategic point in the burgeoning spectrum of the newly-evolving Sino-Indian context is the India-US relationship. As this is written, the Indo-American equation is in a state of damaged equilibrium. Three, a paramount ingredient of this new and currently-formative Sino-Indian context is the China-US equation. Right now, the Chinese and American leaders are trying to fashion “a new model of major-country relations”⁵ between these two powers.

As for the Japan factor in Sino-Indian relations, Tokyo has recently briefed New Delhi on the new Japanese “concept of proactive pacifism”.⁶ Surely, “proactive pacifism” is uniquely relevant to Tokyo. Japan still has a ‘no-war Constitution’ that might eventually be amended to create a ‘normal military’ with both offensive and defensive mandates. Japan’s immediate

⁴ Some aspects of the genesis of *Panchsheel*, outlined here, are drawn from two different addresses: (1) by India’s former President K R Narayanan at a seminar in Beijing in June 2004, and (2) by Natwar Singh, in his capacity as India’s External Affairs Minister, in New Delhi in November 2004.

⁵ PRC Foreign Ministry, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1113568.shtml; accessed on 2 January 2014

⁶ Japan’s Ministry of Defense, www.mod.go.jp/e/pressconf/2014/01/140106.html; accessed on 9 January 2014

neighbours, including China, are wary of this concept of “proactive pacifism”. In their view, this might signify a key step towards the ‘remilitarisation’ of Japan *a la* the old imperial Japan prior to the Second World War.

Chronologically, Tokyo announced its “proactive contribution to international efforts for peace and stability”⁷ after Beijing had carved out an “Air Defense Identification Zone” (ADIZ) in the skies above the East China Sea. Both Tokyo and Washington, long-time military allies, continue to oppose Beijing’s ADIZ over the East China Sea that borders Japan.

India has now been briefed by Japan about its “proactive pacifism” and response to China’s act of declaring an ADIZ. Moreover, Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera has emphasised that “it is of particular importance for the Japanese side to further strengthen the relationship with India”.⁸ Mr Onodera, who visited India from 5 to 8 January 2014, further disclosed that the first meeting of the Joint Working Group on the US-2 amphibious aircraft was now held.

During India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Japan in May 2013, a significant scaling-up of defence-related cooperation between the two countries was announced. A top Indian official annotated that accord as follows: “India and Japan have agreed to institutionalise bilateral naval exercises, to conduct them regularly and with increased frequency. The Japanese Government has offered to sell the US-2 amphibious aircraft to India. ... This is one of the few occasions where Japan has offered to sell such dual use equipment with both military and civilian applications to a foreign country. ...this is an aircraft with extraordinary capabilities of landing even in fairly high seas where waves are quite high, and [it] has a very, very, long range”.⁹

⁷ Japan’s Prime Minister’s Office, National Security Strategy December 17, 2013, p. 28; www.kantei.go.jp; accessed on 9 January 2014

⁸ As in Note 6 above

⁹ Ranjan Mathai, India’s Foreign Secretary in May 2013, as cited by P S Suryanarayana in *Decoding India-Japan and Sino-Pak Talks*, ISAS Brief No. 284, 6 June 2013, www.isas.nus.edu.sg

Japan Sees India in Practical Terms

Mr Onodera has now down-played the civil-military dual-use potential of the US-2 aircraft, without of course disputing the Indian view on this issue. He was responding to a question on a reported Chinese view on the possibility of a Japan-India military deal over the US-2 aircraft. Mr Onodera told journalists, after his talks with his Indian counterpart A K Antony in New Delhi on 6 January 2014, as follows: “I feel there is an incongruity that China, which sells lots of weapons globally, is concerned about Japan’s attempt to export the US-2, which is not even a weapon but just a seaplane. I speculate that the international community has the same view as ours”.¹⁰ He treated the possible Japan-India co-production of the US-2 aircraft as a matter to be decided by the relevant Tokyo-New Delhi Joint Working Group. Mr Onodera, however, is ready to “welcome the Indian side to inspect, ride and check the performance of a real US-2 aircraft”.¹¹

Beyond such specifics is the fundamental question why Japan, whose Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is to visit New Delhi later in January 2014, woos India in practical terms. The answer can be found in Japan’s latest National Security Strategy that was unveiled on 17 December 2013. India is cited in this document as one of Japan’s “partners for peace and stability in the international community”. In this context, India is cited behind the US, South Korea, Australia, and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In a matter-of-fact tone, instead of an effusive strategic embrace, Japan has portrayed India as follows: “India is becoming increasingly influential, due to what is projected to become the world’s largest population (**sic**) and [due] to high economic growth and potential. India is also geopolitically important for Japan, as it is positioned in the center of sea lanes of communication. Japan will strengthen bilateral relations in a broad range of areas, including maritime security, based on the [existing] bilateral Strategic and Global Partnership¹² [between Tokyo and New Delhi]”.

The strategic dimension of this rubric will be determined by how India and Japan engage over rare-earths and civil-nuclear issues to meet Tokyo’s practical and philosophical goals. Tokyo’s goals are practical access to a technological raw material (rare earths) and political

¹⁰ As in Note 6 above

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Japan’s Prime Minister’s Office, National Security Strategy, December 17, 2013, p. 24; www.kantei.go.jp; accessed on 9 January 2014

progress towards global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In this regard, India and Japan have been exploring their bilateral strategic domain. But they have a long way to go in cooperating to address some key issues in the global commons. These relate to maritime security, climate change, outer space, and cyberspace. This author's assertions on these lines flow from his reading of the recent Japan-India declarations and agreements.

‘A Changing Balance of Power’

Japan has amplified its recent focus on India in a global context. A relevant read-out from Tokyo's latest National Security Strategy and National Defense Program Guidelines is as follows: “The primary drivers of change in the [global] balance of power are the emerging countries, including China and India.¹³ As a result of change in the balance of power due to the development of countries such as China and India¹⁴ and the change of relative influence of the United States, multi polarization of the international community has been progressing. At the same time, however, the United States is expected to continue to play a role in maintaining world peace and stability”.¹⁵

Reasonably tenable is the Japanese forecast that the US will continue to play a global role in the foreseeable future. As a result and as this is written, the currently-damaged Indo-American equation is relevant to the now-evolving context of Sino-Indian relationship. Also impinging on this aspect, as sheer commonsense, is the dynamic of Sino-American effort to create for themselves a “new model of major-country relations”. The relevant cross-currents can be summed up as follows.

The recently-booming Indo-US relationship has suddenly ruptured. The singular cause is America's indefensible violation of the human rights of an Indian diplomat after she was arrested in December 2013 on private allegations against her. As this is written, it's anybody's guess as to whether and how India and the US will repair the badly-damaged ambience of their relationship. In a sense, as of mid-January 2014, India and the US face a testing moment of truth in their relationship.

¹³ Ibid, p. 6 of the document; www.kantei.go.jp, accessed on 9 January 2014

¹⁴ Japan's Prime Minister's Office, National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and beyond (Summary); www.kantei.go.jp; accessed on 9 January 2014

¹⁵ Ibid

By contrast, the parallel moment of truth in the Sino-American relationship is a delicious diplomatic nicety which is best narrated in the words of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. In a New-Year-eve comment, Mr Wang said: “China-US relations have today reached a new historical starting point. During their meeting at the Annenberg Retreat last June [2013], [Chinese] President Xi Jinping and [US] President Obama reached important agreement on building a new model of major-country relations, thus charting the course for growing the bilateral relationship. President Xi Jinping incisively characterizes this new model of major-country relations as being one of no conflict and confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation”.¹⁶ Mr Wang noted, in the same breath, that “specific policies and measures” would be required for real progress towards a new model of major-country relations between China and the US. Significant, however, is his parallel assertion that “President Obama readily agreed to the idea”¹⁷ of a new model of major-country relations as first “proposed” by President Xi. Mr Wang has also quoted President Xi as emphasising that “the vast Pacific Ocean has ample space for China and the United States to both develop”.¹⁸

Conclusion: ‘Space’ for Parallel ‘Rise’

There is more to this metaphor than meets the eye. China and the US have not yet optimised their respective score in their bilateral domains of economic and military competition and cooperation. Similar is the story of frequent assertions by leaders of India and China that the world has room for both countries to grow without confrontation or a fight between them. It is also widely believed that full-scale Sino-American and Sino-Indian wars are almost unthinkable as the only paths to supremacy. The relevant argument is that nuclear deterrence is variously but deeply embedded in each of these two equations. Moreover, mutual gains are possible for these three countries through suitable linkages in economic and other spheres. China-US-India coordination in such frontier areas as outer space and cyberspace may even be needed for global stability, going forward.

In such a China-US-India matrix, it is simple but profound insight that the Sino-Indian *Panchsheel* can be a key to the avoidance of war and to the path of mutual benefit. Yet, India and China have not begun the 60th anniversary of the release of *Panchsheel* on a proactive

¹⁶ As in Note 5 above

¹⁷ PRC Foreign Ministry, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1116501.shtml; accessed on 10 January 2014

¹⁸ Ibid

note of translating these Principles into *the drivers* of a border settlement. This is of course easier said than done. And surely, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin, as noted above, has dedicated 2014 as the 60th anniversary of promulgation of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. However, neither do these Principles nor does India find a place in the Chinese Foreign Ministry's sum-up of the country's score-card for 2013 and prime agenda for 2014. China's Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership of Coordination with Russia tops the list of Beijing's priorities for 2014. Following closely is the Sino-American bid at building a bilateral model of major-country relations.¹⁹

A question, going forward, is whether Beijing's initiatives for a new model of China-US ties and stronger Russo-Chinese relations will overshadow the unsettled Sino-Indian equation. Such a question is indeed a delicate one as India and China begin to mark 60 years of *Panchsheel*. An answer will depend on how India and China seek to manage their chequered and complex relationship and move forward. It will be in tune with the spirit of this anniversary if they can agree to seek mutually beneficial 'new normal' in their bilateral relationship.

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¹⁹ These observations are based on this author's reading of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent interview to *People's Daily*. His comments have been summarised by a spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry; www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t1113606.shtml; accessed on 2 January 2014