

General

A briefing to officers attending the 41st Higher Command Course, Army War College, Mhow, was conducted on 14 Aug 2012 at the Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi. Ambassador Rajiv Sikri spoke on Chinese Influence in ASEAN: Implications for India and Col (Retd) RSN Singh spoke on Significance of Nepal's Connectivity to India & China (with an emphasis on Tibet). Commandant, Army War College accompanied the Course along with faculty from the HC Course.

Opening Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Additional Director, CLAWS

After welcoming the Commandant and all officers from HC Course, the Additional Director appraised the course of the Defence think tanks in Delhi and thereafter gave a short brief on the work being done at CLAWS.

Ambassador Rajiv Sikri: Chinese Influence in ASEAN - Implications for India

ASEAN has enormous importance for China and India. Four ASEAN countries namely Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam are China's neighbours, and share cultural and ethnic links dating back thousands of years. China's relations with some of the ASEAN members are governed by historical conflicts and suspicion; during the Cold War years, communist movements were a source of worry for some of these ASEAN community members.

Interestingly, ASEAN countries control China's lifeline i.e. Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and have alliances with the US both formal and informal, which China wants to undo. What adds a layer of complexity to the situation is the presence of maritime conflicts between China and ASEAN members. Most of China's trade passes through the Malacca Strait which is controlled by the ASEAN countries. Also, large numbers of people in ASEAN countries are of Chinese-origin, who are widely seen as China's agents and possess a disproportionate control of the business of these countries.

China realises the significance of ASEAN for oil, gas and timber which are destined to fuel China's growth in the coming years. Apart from acting as resource suppliers, these countries are also rice surplus countries. Chinese tactics are intended to ensure that ASEAN does not become hostile to PRC. The important consideration for China is the economic potential of ASEAN countries in terms of market size, profitability potential and natural resource provider capacity. Most of the ASEAN members are high growth countries with vast opportunities of trade and business in the short to medium term and can fuel further China's economic rise which is convertible to Comprehensive National Power, the main agenda of the Communist Party of China.

China has been trying to exert more influence among ASEAN by consolidating its control over the new entrants such as Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos which have authoritarian and communist governments. By signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003, China hoped and to a large extent succeeded in overcoming the history of suspicion and mistrust with ASEAN. China has also used its considerable economic clout to divide ASEAN and thus, has strengthened its hold over this region.

India till 1991 treated this region with neglect. The announcement of the economic liberalisation plan of India turned the focus of our policy makers towards ASEAN. This is evident from the formulation of Look East Policy. The economic and strategic importance of ASEAN cannot be overlooked as this region is geographically closer to India than the West and is experiencing a high growth economic phase. India's Prime Minister has rightly said that there is not any competition between China and India, and that both countries have enough space for growth and cooperation in this region.

ASEAN members which can be banked upon for assistance by India include the important members namely Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. ASEAN too is looking at India to play a greater role as it is the only country in the region which can stand up to China and can represent the will and aspirations of the smaller nations.

RSN Singh: Significance of Nepal's Connectivity to India & China (with an emphasis on Tibet)

The focus of the talk was on Nepal and Tibet in relation to India and China. The geography of these two nations has an overbearing impact on their geopolitics. The centrality of their location demands attention from the Indian strategic community, and their relations to China.

Nepal historically has a close orientation towards India through cultural ties, religious affinity and trade links. Nepal was a Hindu nation before the Maoists came to power in Nepal. Although there was no mass support for the idea, still the Maoists did away with the Hindu status of Nepal after coming to power. The present situation in Nepal is very complex and intriguing. Nepal is a land locked country and is heavily dependent on India for maritime access and trade. Therefore, neither of the two countries can ignore each other's national interests and concerns. Nepal is an insular and inward looking country because of its land locked geography. Historically, access to sea not only provided trade linkages, but was also a source of ideas and migration. Nepal can be divided into three major geographical regions:

- North – Himalayan region (occupies 35 per cent of area)
- Middle – Hill region (occupies 42 per cent of area)

- Terai – Plains/Agricultural land (occupies 23 per cent of area)

Only 18 per cent of Nepal's area is under cultivation, of which Terai region is the major contributor. Nearly 50 per cent of Nepal's population resides in Terai region. The population size and density of Terai as compared to other regions is very high and therefore, the demand for equal political representation in line with other regions. Majority of population of Terai region are people of Indian origin who migrated to Nepal from 1860 onwards under the encouragement of King of Nepal. The region seems to be bursting at its seams as is evident from the political turmoil in the area.

Most of the rivers of Nepal flow from north to south. Therefore, communication and travel across the breadth of Nepal is very limited. Out of the 75 districts of Nepal, nearly 22 have very limited or no communication with the other parts. The size of Nepal is approximately 147,185 Kms. Although the area size is small, various climatic zones can be found with temperatures ranging from minus 25 to plus 45 degree celsius. Nepal possesses some of the highest mountain ranges in the world, sources of important rivers and a plain region within a very limited geography. The potential for hydroelectric energy is immense in case of Nepal. Nearly 83 per cent of roads exist in the Terai region. Most Maoists of Nepal are born out of this region. India does not feel the heat of Maoist aggression like Nepal as India is a large country and can trade space for time.

The infrastructure development in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is unprecedented. According to China's leader Deng Xiaoping's philosophy, the coastal areas were to get rich first and then came the chance for the other regions of China. Thus, it was only in 1965 that development policy of TAR region was formulated by China. Nearly 58,000 km of road has been built in Tibet and the world's highest airfield is also being constructed in TAR. The Government of China is supporting the influx of Han population into the TAR region which has led to alienation of the local populace. China has helped in construction of Kathmandu highway and Qinghai-Tibet highway which are major sources of communication and transportation between China and Nepal.

The ability to deal with the situation in Nepal and the developments in TAR region will determine India's ability and foreign relations with neighbouring countries in our immediate region.

Lt Gen PG Kamath, AVSM, YSM, SM, Commandant, Army War College

The region of South East Asia will form the economic lifeline of China as 70 per cent of oil needed by China flows through this region. Therefore, China is more dependent on ASEAN than vice versa. The integration of Chinese diaspora into neighbouring ASEAN countries has not been a smooth exercise. India is recognized as a benign power in this region whereas China is seen as an intimidating power. There has been a rebalancing of military resources by USA with respect to Asia under the Obama administration. The

Indian presence in South China Sea and China's resistance to it are nothing but a part of the political game that is being played out in the region. China has been forceful on the issue of Indian presence in South China Sea but has been comparatively soft in case of the border dispute with India.

India needs to perceive the migration of people from Bangladesh and Nepal in the context of economic opportunities presented by a booming Indian economy. The connectivity between India and Nepal is more crucial to Nepal than its new found connectivity with China.

Discussion

A strong ASEAN is good for India as well as for the region. The regions of Nepal and Tibet act as a credible buffer between India and China. Any power vacuum in the ASEAN region will lead to enhanced rivalry and conflict as was seen in the case of Myanmar, with increased involvement of big powers in the affairs of these countries.

India's approach to strategic issues is based on national interests though at times it may be couched in moral/idealistic terms. Some examples Re India's voting pattern at UN with respect to Iran and Sri Lanka. India and US could use the Tibet card against China in the future by invoking the issue of autonomy. The Indian and American position on Tibet are different because of TAR's proximity to India and the resulting security implications. Although India has accepted China's suzerainty over Tibet, but it lays equal emphasis on Tibet's autonomy in its dealing with China. Thus, the Chinese would want to resolve the border dispute with India only after they have settled the issue of Tibet.

Concluding Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch

India needs to develop a long term strategy in its dealings with the countries of the region. While development of infrastructure to and within Tibet gives China the capacity to induct about twelve divisions per month into Tibet, what is of relevance is the quantum of force which can be applied at any one point. India has adequate capacity as of now to counter any Chinese threat in the area. Our efforts at modernisation of the force must ensure that we continue to retain this capability in future also.