

Top Indian official declares relationship with China “adversarial”

By K. Ratnayake
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Speaking at a conference in New Delhi, Indian National Security Board chairman and former foreign secretary Shyam Saran criticised China’s declaration of an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea as a “unilateral action.” Saran said India was seeking to manage the situation in cooperation with other countries. His remarks pointed to a growing discussion in Indian ruling circles about establishing closer defence ties with Japan and the US, in order to counter China.

The US and Japan strongly opposed China’s announcement of an ADIZ last month that included the disputed islands known as Diaoyu in China and Senkaku in Japan. The Obama administration immediately challenged China’s authority by flying B-52 bombers into the zone without providing flight information. US allies Japan and South Korea did the same, creating a highly volatile situation in which an error or miscalculation could lead to a clash.

Although India has issued no official statement on China’s ADIZ, Saran’s remarks to a Leadership Summit organised by the *Hindustan Times* on December 6 indicated rising tensions with China. “If you ask me what is the essential nature of the relationship between India and China, I cannot deny that it’s essentially an adversarial relationship,” he said.

Nicholas Burns, former US deputy secretary of state under the Bush administration, echoed Saran, saying China acted unilaterally without consulting US, Japan, India or any other country. “Democracies like India and the US need to take a strong stand together. The US doesn’t recognise what China is doing regarding Arunachal Pradesh and does not support it.”

China has long claimed the northern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of Tibet, fuelling border

tensions that erupted in a 1962 war between the two countries. Media commentators in India are raising concerns that Beijing will announce an air defence zone over the disputed border areas with India, something that China has denied. The US and India should “send a strong message [to China],” Burns declared, adding that new “energy” was needed to advance the relationship between the two countries.

In response, Saran declared that “perhaps India has not quite comprehended” China’s rise as an economic and military power. He said the US and India had to find ways “to manage its rise,” adding: “This understanding is an integral part of the Indo-US strategic relationship.” The US is using its strategic partnership with India as part of its broader “pivot to Asia,” which is aimed at diplomatically undermining and militarily encircling China. Saran also highlighted India’s Look East Policy of developing economic and military ties in South East Asia.

Saran is an enthusiastic supporter of India developing closer relations with Japan. Writing in the *Business Standard* in June, he said Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s announcement of a nuclear deal with the US in 2005 “proved to be a game-changer in India’s foreign policy [and] his visit to Tokyo in May 2013 may assume similar significance.”

Referring to a joint statement by Singh and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in May, Saran wrote: “India has clearly signed up to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s conception of the ‘confluence of the two oceans’ [the Pacific and Indian Oceans] bringing India and Japan together in a strategic embrace.” He rejected China’s concern about Japan, saying: “China cannot have a veto over which countries India wishes to develop co-operation.”

Since Beijing declared its East China Sea ADIZ, the

Indian commentary has focussed on the need for India to deepen ties with Japan in order to counter China. Analysts have routinely noted that Japan and India are “natural allies,” that is, without conflicting strategic interests and sharing common goals.

Arvind Gupta, an analyst for Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, wrote that the developments in Asia, including the rise of China, the US “pivot to Asia” and recent developments in the South China and East China Seas, posed “challenges to Indian and Japanese diplomacy and security.”

Urging Japan not to miss “a great opportunity to enhance its presence in India,” Gupta added: “China’s footprint is increasing in South Asia. This causes worry in many quarters. However, Japan faces no such hurdle. Japan has a positive image in India and South Asia... It should shed its inhibitions and deepen engagement with India and other countries of the region.”

Writing in the *Diplomat*, Anikta Panda commented: “India may have been the proverbial elephant in the room as China-Japan relations grew strained beginning in 2009. Today, with Shinzo Abe back on top in Tokyo, ties between the two Asian democracies stand to reach new heights... I’d wager that should India decide to step beyond a strategic partnership and into an alliance with any single country, it would be Japan, as their interests are ‘congruence’.”

Panda added that “one can cast the strategic convergence between India and Japan as a form of mutually-beneficial external balancing against the rise of an aggressive China. Both India and Japan share intractable border disputes with China.”

Japan is increasing its clout in India. The *Japan Times* noted that while developing strategic relations with India, “Japan should not miss the economic potential of India, with a population of some 1.26 billion ... In recent years, more than 100 Japanese companies have been entering the Indian market every year. The total is now about 1,000.”

Japan’s foreign direct investment in India had risen to \$US14.55 billion by the end of 2012. Toyota, Hitachi and other giant corporations are developing their production in India for international markets.

Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force and the Indian Navy have begun joint exercises. India has discussed with Japan buying 15 sophisticated ShinMaywa US-2 amphibious aircraft. The Indian media has placed great

expectations on Prime Minister Abe’s visit to India in January, as chief guest at the Republican Day celebrations, as a further boost to relations.

While India, Japan and the US brand China as “a threat,” the chief responsibility for rising tensions in Asia lies with the Obama administration’s “pivot.” The US is not only engaged in its own military build-up in the region, but is encouraging its main allies and strategic partners to do the same.

As it has done in the Middle East over the past decade, US imperialism is recklessly using its military might and setting the stage for conflict, in an attempt to maintain its continued dominance in Asia.

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