

# Defense concerns are growing in India

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The recent improvements in U.S.-China military ties, as reflected in the visit of a Chinese military delegation to Washington led by Lt. Gen. Ziong Guankai, assistant to the chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), have drawn the attention of Indian defense analysts. They admit that India should indeed recognize the improvement as an attempt by the Clinton administration to have a civil relationship with China. However, they add, with the Indian defense budget slipping to the lowest level as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product since the debacle of 1962, when the Indian Army was outgunned by the Chinese, New Delhi has thereby put itself in a quandary.

Sino-American military interaction began with the visit of the missile cruiser *USS Bunker Hill* to the eastern seaport of Qingdao, the home of the PLA's nuclear submarines, in 1986. Indian analysts note that at a mid-February appraisal of U.S. policy, Adm. Richard Macke, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, spoke about modernization of the Chinese military—specifically the PLA Navy and its acquisition of Kilo-class diesel submarines from Russia. He made it clear that China poses no threat to the United States.

Macke could not say the same about Southeast Asia, where Chinese military strength is a concern. And, there are some in the West who are fueling the fears of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

According to an Indian scribe based in Hongkong, Mike Lombardo, a military analyst also based in Hongkong, has said that China is resolving decades-old minor border disputes, in order to pressure ASEAN nations to accept China's developing regional military ambitions. Lombardo says that, while Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen was saying how pleased he was over the border situation with Russia, Moscow was complaining of increased "poaching" by Chinese fishing vessels in disputed waters off the Kuril islands on the Bering Sea. He also says that it is this Janus-faced strategy which allows China "to pacify the eastern border [with Vietnam] so it can encroach in the South China Sea," where clashes have taken place over the Spratly Islands. At the same time, China is developing its military ties with Burma and Cambodia, in order to use their ports in case of a future conflict in the South China Sea, Lombardo claims.

Lombardo's theory aside, Beijing's alleged installation of a radar station in the Cocos Islands in the Andaman Sea, which would enable it to watch the Indian Navy movements

in the Indian Ocean and to monitor the Indian missile program, makes New Delhi uneasy. New Delhi has also expressed concern at the report that China is angling to set up naval facilities on the Ramree Islands, not far from the Bangladesh border.

## Shift in nuclear doctrine

At the time, Indian military analysts have noted that China has made a shift in its stated policy vis-à-vis use of its nuclear weapons. At least one analyst has considered it an implicit nuclear threat against India.

China, till now, had provided an unqualified assurance to all non-nuclear weapons states that it would not use nuclear weapons against them. This position has often been cited, particularly during the non-governmental talks known as the Shanghai initiative and a followup meeting at Goa, as superior to that held by the western nuclear weapons states, who promise to retaliate with nuclear weapons against any nation which violates their territory, including by use of conventional forces.

However, in the April 5 statement released by Beijing and placed in the record of the 38-nation Conference on Disarmament in Geneva the next day, China redefined this policy. It declared that its policy not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons "naturally applies to non-nuclear weapons states parties to the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] or non-nuclear weapons states that have undertaken any comparable internationally binding commitments not to manufacture or acquire nuclear explosive devices."

Although this policy implies that the Chinese nuclear weapons policy toward threshold states such as India, Israel, and Pakistan has changed, some Indians claim that this is primarily aimed at India, because Israel and Pakistan are considered friendly to China. However, it begs explanation how India can be construed as a threat to China.

In reality, the Indian analysts are trying to address the prejudicial policy of Washington, which stems from the dictates of the Cold War days. The cold warriors with special ties to Britain's geopoliticians had brainwashed a good part of the U.S. establishment that any help extended to India is akin to supporting the Soviet Union. Hence, Washington spent decades scheming how to subvert India's military and keep its technological base weak. Even today, the policy is pursued relentlessly, through the Missile Technology Control regime and the NPT. The pressure on the defense budget, through International Monetary Fund and World Bank advisers and their "believers" in the Indian Finance Ministry, has steadily compromised India's defense as well as its capability to play a significant role in the region. Under the circumstances, many in India will look upon U.S.-China military cooperation with a jaundiced eye. A judicious policy is thus needed in Washington toward the region, so that Delhi does not misconstrue any shift in China's military doctrine as being anti-India.