

Eurasian Triangle Leaders: Cooperation, Not Confrontation, Should Govern

by Mary Burdman

The Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India held their sixth trilateral meeting in New Delhi, Feb. 14, in a very different strategic situation from that in which any previous meetings among Eurasia's three leading nations had occurred. This meeting, planned since the unprecedented summit of the three nations at the G8 summit in St. Petersburg in July 2006, came on the heels of Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's speech to the Munich conference Feb. 10 (see articles in this section) and the Chinese space "experiment" to shoot down one of their own outdated satellites on Jan. 11.

In their Joint Communiqué issued Feb. 14, and in every other official statement the three nations made about the meeting, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing were emphatic that their nations' "trilateral cooperation was not directed against the interests of any other country," but was "intended to promote international harmony and understanding and find common ground amidst divergent interests." The Ministers called for a "world order that would be based on the equality of nations," and said that the "Ministers agreed that India, Russia and China, as countries with growing international influence, can make substantive positive contribution to global peace, security and stability."

In the past, international reactions, especially among the geopolitically minded, to cooperation among the "strategic triangle" of nations, first proposed by then-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov in December 1998, have tended towards exaggerated claims that either it was a geopolitical "axis" aimed against "the West," or that any effective cooperation among these three huge and diverse nations, was impossible. These assessments were wrong. At the time, Lyndon LaRouche called the Eurasian leaders, the "Survivors' Club" of nations, which were not willing to go under with the Anglo-Dutch system, and that is how Russia, China, and India are acting today.

One of the most notable points of the Joint Communiqué, is the emphasis put on the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), which was created as to en-

hance security cooperation among these nations in the wake of the profound political shifts in Eurasia in the 1990s. Now, cooperation is expanding to promote economic, energy, defense, and other relations. The Ministers agreed: "that cooperation rather than confrontation should govern approaches to regional and global affairs. While welcoming India's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an observer country, the Foreign Ministers of Russia and China stated that they would actively facilitate early realization of mutually beneficial contribution of India to the SCO."

The Ministers also stressed "the high potential of trilateral cooperation and synergy in the economic field," including in the areas of "energy, transport infrastructure, health, high technologies, including IT and biotechnology." India offered to host a proposed "trilateral business forum" already this year, as well as a trilateral seminar for officials and scholars on "emerging geo-strategic trends."

Strategic Cooperation

At the press conference after the meeting, Foreign Minister Lavrov said that the three ministers had discussed a wide range of world policy problems, in particular: a Middle East settlement, the situation in Afghanistan, the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues, and problems of Iraq. "Today's talks have confirmed that the interaction in a tripartite format is based on commonness of approaches of the three states to fundamental issues of the world community," he said.

Lavrov made the same point even more eloquently two days later, speaking in Abu Dhabi in response to U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates's claim that Putin's Munich statements criticizing U.S. policy recalled the "Cold War." What Putin said, Lavrov declared, "has nothing to do with cold war, but simply the expression of responsibility for the world's fate, which we want to decide together, collectively, as there can be no other decision if we want to establish a stable world in accord with everybody's interests."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu had supported President Putin's criticism of U.S. and NATO policy in his Munich speech, during her regular press conference Feb. 13. The official Chinese news agency Xinhua quoted

Putin saying that the United States' "almost uncontained" use of force has led to other countries developing weapons of mass destruction. "As the international situation is filled with opportunities and challenges, all countries should make efforts to create a harmonious world featuring lasting peace and common prosperity," Jiang responded. "All countries should step up cooperation, seize opportunities and cope with challenges." At the same press conference, Jiang said that China, Russia, and some other nations are "actively urging" the Geneva Disarmament Conference to sign a treaty preventing an arms race in space through negotiations. China will continue to make efforts against the deployment of weapons in space, together with the international community, she said. China and Russia are distributing a document at Geneva, saying that efforts by any nation to achieve global military dominance—the stated policy of the Bush-Cheney Administration—are "counterproductive and jeopardize the security of all humanity."

This did not please U.S. Ambassador Christina Rocca, who warned Feb. 13 in Geneva that alleged "emerging threats to our space assets" were cause for concern, and that China had created "large orbital debris" by its Jan. 11 test. When a "small number of countries [i.e., China] are doing things like jamming satellite links, blinding sensors, or launching anti-satellite weapons," then the U.S. would be compelled to defend its "national security" assets, Rocca threatened.

'New Chapter' for China and India

Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing called for writing a "new chapter in India-China relations" on Feb. 12, at the inauguration of the remembrance hall for the famous Chinese Seventh-Century traveller Xuan Zang (Huan-Tsang), who had walked all the way from western China to Nalanda, now in Bihar, to study the Buddhist scriptures. The hall is a joint Chinese-Indian project.

Before the trilateral meeting and Li's preceding visit, there was much effort made, including by some shriller elements of the Indian press, to claim that India was highly affronted by China's ASAT test, and that some saw the test as some kind of serious threat. Most certainly there are serious "problems left over from history" between China and India. However, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave a clear indication of India's strategic orientation to China, when he said in a Jan. 23 interview that India does want to join the SCO, an organization in which China plays a very influential role. Just before the visit of President Putin to India at the end of January, Singh told Interfax News service: "We would like to be associated with the Shanghai Cooperation. India obtained observer status at the SCO in July 2005. We have conveyed to the SCO member states and to the SCO Secretariat, India's interest in participating in SCO activities that promote economic, energy, educational and cultural cooperation as well as those directed

against terrorism and trafficking in drugs. We are awaiting SCO's response to our request. . . ."

India will be an observer at the upcoming SCO joint military exercise "Peaceful Mission—2007," to be held July 18-25 in the Russian Volga-Urals Military District. The heads of government of all six SCO nations will be in the Ural city of Chebarkul to observe the maneuvers on July 25. Asked about trilateral relations with Russia and China, Prime Minister Singh responded: "In effectively addressing challenges, we should avoid divisive policies and actions driven by the outmoded mindset of balance of power, and instead strive for a more meaningful and inclusive cooperative framework. As Russia, China, and India move ahead of their respective growth curves, a great challenge today is to find means to draw on the vast geo-economic potential that remains unexploited in our common neighborhood."

Energy would be a "critical sector" for cooperation. An article which appeared late last year in *International Strategic Studies*, the journal of a leading Chinese military think-tank in Beijing, indicated that the Chinese side understands that India is maintaining its distance from the overtures of the Bush-Cheney regime. "The United States has been itching to channel India into its global strategic track," authors Zhang Song and Wang Bo wrote. "The U.S. deems that South Asia is of extremely important geo-strategic value," and Washington considers India indispensable for regional security, counterterrorism, "driving a wedge in the traditional Russia-India relations, [and] putting a check to the rise of China."

India also wants U.S. support in increasing its role in the Asia/Pacific region. However, Bush Administration policy is that "support rendered to India by the U.S. is premised, limited and preconditioned," that India cannot challenge U.S. hegemony. This can certainly mean problems, because India pursues its own independent foreign policy, and has made it clear, "that it would not allow any agreement signed with the U.S. to undermine the national security of India," they concluded.

China also must take responsibility to ensure that its national re-emergence sticks to the policy of peaceful development, wrote Lau Nai-keung, a Hong Kong member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, in a much-noted commentary published in the *China Daily* on Feb. 2. The CPPCC, founded in 1949, is China's most prominent national political association outside the Communist Party. Lau wrote that China's peaceful relations with its neighbors is "of direct relevance of our national security." With growing world consensus about the importance of a peaceful China, "It is now up to us to prove them right." If the gentle giant got mad just once, Lau wrote, "This once might be a disaster too big for the world to afford."

Lau made special note of relations with India, and presented the Chinese view of the 1962 border clash. Although

he did not go through the real background, including the legacy of the British imperial “forward school” policy, and the effect of Bertrand Russell’s and Nikita Khrushchev’s “one-worldist” campaigns on Indian and Chinese policy at this time—the exact time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Lau did make clear that the “Chinese People’s Liberation Army, after defeating the Indian forces in the Himalayas, immediately announced its own unilateral ceasefire and unconditional withdrawal behind the disputed McMahon Line.” China has stuck with this policy, Lau wrote.

Transportation Corridors

One other potential which is re-emerging, after close to a decade “on the back burner,” are elements of the Eurasian Land-Bridge. Although none of the Eurasian nations has proposed the New Deal-style national financial policy which would be necessary to get this great project going, China and Russia, especially, are making progress. Even the free-market Russian Economic Development and Trade Minister German Gref said that it would “be great to have a railway corridor between Russia (the Pacific) and India (Indian Ocean) via China,” in an interview with the Indian *Financial Express*, published Feb. 12.

Gref said that the lack of an efficient shipment route between the two nations is “a very serious issue.” The proposed rail corridor had been “frozen” for mostly political reasons in the early 1960s, but “now that relations between India, China and Russia have improved and their economies are actively cooperating, we have all the prerequisites for reviving the transportation project.” Also, when Putin was in India, Vladimir Yakunin, CEO of the government-controlled Russian Railways, held discussions about modernizing India’s railways.

Yakunin was in Rome Feb. 10, where he announced that Russia is planning to build high-speed rail lines linking some important cities by 2012-14. The lines will be Moscow-St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg-Helsinki, Moscow-Kazan, Moscow-Samara, and Moscow-Adler, a port on the Black Sea. Italian state-owned rail companies will participate in the project.

China will be constructing a new railway to link Lanzhou, Gansu province, to Chongqing, the largest city in central China. Lanzhou is an important city on the second Euro-Asian Continental Bridge, the rail line from Lianyungang on China’s Pacific coast, to Rotterdam in Holland. Ultimately, this new rail line will be a direct connection between Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

Also, this Summer, China will begin construction of the extension of the Qinghai-Tibet railroad—the first railroad ever to the “Roof of the World”—from the capital Lhasa to Xigaze. Although many geographical challenges remain to be overcome in these highest mountains in the world, the new rail line will increase the potential for cross-border trade between India and China.