

# Regional Security Outlook: Indian and Malaysian Perspectives

**S**ession Two discussed what each country perceived as the ideal regional architecture to underpin security and stability in their immediate regions as well as the Asia Pacific. The lead Speakers were **Mr Mahendra Ved**, Journalist, Commonwealth Journalists Association of India, India and **Mr Rajayah Devudu**, Deputy Undersecretary (Policy), Ministry of Defence, Malaysia. The session was moderated by **Tan Sri Hasmy Agam**, Executive Chairman, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) Malaysia. ISIS Researcher **Woo Hon Weng** reports.



(From left) Mahendra Ved, Hasmy Agam and Rajayah Devudu

## Regional Security Outlook from Indian Perspectives

What are the long-term sources of stability in Southeast Asia/South Asia and the Asia Pacific? Conversely, what are the major threats to stability in these regions? How is Malaysia/India responding to such threats?

**Mr Mahendra Ved** gave a brief review of India's interactions with its immediate and extended neighbourhood and the security implications of these interactions. In geographical and geopolitical terms, India is in a unique position, being surrounded by seven neighbours, varying in sizes from tiny Bhutan to Pakistan and China. These countries have a common border with India

but none among themselves, making India, with its size, population and resources, the centre of the South Asian region.

This also however, carries with it a myriad of issues, problems, and disputes, big and small, and some long pending and defied solutions; India therefore has a difficult neighbourhood. As its former External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh said, 'friends can be chosen but not neighbours.'

Despite many constraints, in the last decade India sought to reach out to its neighbours big and small, friendly or otherwise in a constructive and cooperative manner. This was despite developments that have had a serious impact on security, such as the December 2001

attack on the Indian Parliament, and the November 2008 attacks on several establishments in Mumbai, where over two dozen foreigners were killed, including a Malaysian woman.

After the attack on the Indian Parliament, India moved a large number of troops to the India-Pakistan border but no bullets were fired. While there have been no tangible direct gains or losses, what followed was an absence of cross-border movements of terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir for five years.

### India-Pakistan Relations

Relations are tense due to the perception that Pakistan is exporting terrorism to India said Ved. In the second half of 2009, cross-border movements of militants had resumed in the Jammu-Kashmir front. Pakistan is facing numerous internal upheavals such as political instability and the military campaign against the tribal areas are spilling over to the rest of the country, with innocent civilians becoming victims of organised violence daily (the last count was 3,000 people). The reopening of the border to cross-border movements in Jammu-Kashmir is seen as a way of diverting public opinion from domestic issues.

India acted with great restraint after the Mumbai attacks. Even the positioning of troops at the border that was done in 2001 was not resorted to this time; it concentrated its efforts on the diplomatic front, receiving worldwide support. The sole surviving attacker admitted to being a Pakistani national, but Pakistan took several months to accept his identity.

Since then Pakistan has shifted its

position from one of total denial to claiming that the attack was carried out by non-state actors. Dossiers submitted by the Pakistani investigators to India made it clear that they have been unable to establish the identity of the men who controlled the assault team using satellite phones, Voice Over Internet Protocols (VoIP), and other communications. Key suspects including Lashkar-e-Taiba commanders are still at large.

It was felt that dialogue between India and Pakistan should not be held hostage to the fate of the Mumbai investigations. However, unless India is duly persuaded that Pakistan is serious about acting against terror groups targeting it from Pakistani soil, any dialogue will be scarred by suspicion as the prospect of future terror attacks hangs over the whole process.

India believes the Lashkar-e-Taiba camps are operational again in Pakistan, and suspects such jihadi groups, as non-state actors, enjoy the support of not just the rogue elements in the state, but also the institution of Pakistan's armed forces, particularly the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI).

India must do all it can to initiate meaningful dialogue, to strengthen democratic forces in Pakistan. However, any peace process will be fragile unless Pakistan, that has acted so far under US and international pressure, finds the will and resolve to prevent enemies of peace from repeating another operation against India from their soil.

While confidence-building measures are unproductive at the government level, they are making progress at the level of the media and in people-to-people relations. Currently, there are media campaigns promoting peace through

popular culture such as sufi music and dance, familiar to the people of both sides due to common cultural linkages, and performed by artistes from both countries, in major cities such as New Delhi.

These performances are under the auspices of the two largest media groups in India and Pakistan: the Times of India and the Jang Group of Pakistan respectively. People-to-people relations must be promoted as the ordinary people, particularly divided families on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, suffer the most whenever there are tensions and hostility.

Religious extremists of all types on both sides will also feel emboldened when relations are strained, which is detrimental to both societies.

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### India-China Relations

Relations have been good despite unresolved border disputes. The last decade has seen summit level talks and acknowledgement of each other's positions without necessarily agreeing on them. Both nations talk of cooperation, while there is

also a strong element of competition in the race for energy, oil and gas or influence in South Asia.

The race persists in other areas as well but in these China has been far ahead.

Many Indian analysts believe the 'String of Pearls' theory — that of China surrounding India by building bases and developing influence in South Asia. Whether or not it is true, the fact remains that China has strong economic and military ties with all the South Asian neighbours of India. Pakistan's military and strategic ties with China are well known while others such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh find it prudent to deal with China if only to pacify the anti-India factions in their respective domestic spheres.

As leading nations of the Asian century, with fast rising economies and purchasing power, both India and China are cautious of the risks from competition. The last five years have witnessed a growing debate comparing the two Asian giants, within and outside India. India invariably emerges second on many scores. However, its leadership has not shied away from comparisons.

In his address to the Eighth Annual Indian Diaspora Conclave in January 2010, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pointed out that India, like a slow moving juggernaut, was progressing in its own way, through a democratic approach, and while the process is slow the nation believes the democratic road is worth taking.

However, India views with concern China's growing stridency, that surfaces in the form of frequent border face-offs and behind-the-scenes diplomatic moves. There is a belief amongst some in India that China played a significant role in the election of the present UN

## The Second India-Malaysia Strategic Dialogue

Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. However, China did not succeed in blocking the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) waiver for nuclear fuel and equipment for India, in the face of a concerted campaign by the US Bush administration and a high measure of sympathy among the Europeans.

### Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak)

AfPak refers to the US Obama administration policy of military surges to combat the cross-border insurgency movement in both countries. US Secretary of State, Robert Gates warned of a terror syndicate operating at the AfPak border with the intention of provoking conflict between India and Pakistan and destabilising the region. In the event another attack like the Mumbai terror attack is repeated, India may not display the restraint and statesmanship it did earlier.

Gates said the terror syndicate is composed of Al-Qaeda, which primarily operates at the safe haven of the AfPak border, the Taliban which is active in Afghanistan, Tehrik-e-Taliban which targets Pakistan, and Lashkar e-Taiba which focuses on both India and Pakistan. Gates' warning which indirectly hinted at Pakistan's complicity in the Mumbai terror attacks angered the Pakistani government, leading it to announce that it would not launch any more attacks on the tribal areas for a period of from six months to a year.

This halt in attacks by Pakistan would seriously impact the US and Nato plan in the region. History has shown that safe havens on either sides of the border in the long run have led to more lethal and brazen attacks on both sides. Pakistan's announcement came as a disappointment to the US which was pushing Pakistan to expand its military operations against

militants staging cross-border attacks. The US believes such action is critical to success in Afghanistan as it prepares to send an additional 30,000 troops to the country. However, the Obama administration, together with China, which is Pakistan's key ally in the region, are likely to call on Pakistan to stop its intransigence.

India, while wanting political reconciliation in Afghanistan, does not look at the Taliban as either good or bad. It wants foreign forces to continue their presence in Afghanistan to help that nation stabilise and achieve self-governance. Whether the US military surge would prompt other Nato countries to emulate it is still a matter of doubt. Britain is working actively on plans to bring about some kind of a Nato victory in the next few years and then leave Afghanistan to the care of the region to which it belongs, which really translates to Pakistan.

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### Regional Security Outlook from the Malaysian Perspective

**Rajayah Devudu** said that there are both forces of stability and instability in regional security that together represent a complex environment. The region is home to some of the world's largest standing armies, and three key flashpoints. It contains key arteries of maritime trade, chokepoints, and harbours deep-seated distrust due to historical animosities. The global financial-

economic downturn further complicated the situation; the longer the downturn, the more strategic the consequences will be he said.

### ***Traditional Security threats***

There are three flashpoints in the region: Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, and the overlapping claims over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. These issues are unlikely to be resolved in the near or distant future, and will continue to pose key security concerns in the region.

#### *Taiwan*

As long as the US backs Taiwan, Chinese attempts reunification will not be possible. The US is happy to keep it that way. From the US point of view, the issue of Taiwanese independence will keep Chinese resources preoccupied, thus diluting their capability to compete with US strategic predominance. The US is reviewing a plan to sell missile defence systems worth US\$2 billion to Taiwan, a plan which has caused China to protest strongly.

#### *Korean Peninsula*

While the Six-Party Talks are promising, they tend to fizzle out intermittently. The problem is that the parties involved have diverse interests. China is not prepared to impose sanctions on North Korea while the US is not prepared to withdraw its forces. It is unlikely that there will be peace and denuclearisation in the Korean Peninsula in the near future. Nevertheless, the Six-Party Talks provide an avenue for engaging North Korea in dialogue and this is very important.

### ***South China Sea: Unresolved Maritime Territorial Disputes***

At least two maritime disputes have been settled through the International Court of Justice (ICJ): one involving Malaysia and Indonesia over the Sipadan-Ligitan islands and the other between Malaysia-Singapore over Pulau Batu Putih. However, one of the most complex overlapping claims is the dispute over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. There are six claimants, including Malaysia; China is the biggest claimant. In 2002, the Asean-China Declaration on the Code of Conduct was signed but there has not been any concrete progress in the eight years after the treaty other than the parties involved being deterred from entering into open conflict.

Over the years, China has fortified its position by putting up a military structure on the islands, breaching the code of conduct, but Asean has only reacted by putting up a diplomatic protest.

### ***Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Threats***

The term may not be appropriate because some of these threats have existed for a long time. Perhaps it is a convenient label to denote that these threats affect human life and challenge the authorities, although they do not undermine the existence of the state.

#### *Terrorism*

In today's context the focus is more on the Afpak border where the US has gone on pre-emptive strikes. In Southeast Asia, although there has been a concerted regional effort against counter-terrorism, and a total decimation of the Jemaah Islamiyah, especially after the killing of Noordin Mat Top and the arrest of Mas Selamat Kastari,

capable groups remain still at large. They continue to draw inspiration from the global jihadi ideology and seek to exploit local conflicts. There is also the rising phenomenon of urban terrorism.

Whatever the developments taking place in Afghanistan and the AfPak border, should the Taliban succeed, it will inspire groups in this region. In Malaysia, the government is taking pre-emptive measures such as the preventive detention of people suspected of involvement in terrorism. Furthermore, Malaysia has had long experience in fighting terrorism. The threat at that time however, was different; the communist terrorist insurgents waging war to undermine the authority of the government was a known entity. In today's context, it is difficult to identify the terrorist.

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### *Maritime Security*

This is an area where there has been an increased focus due to the fear of pirates colluding with terrorists and endangering shipping routes. However, so far, there has been no clear nexus between piracy and terrorism. There has been an enhanced level of security in regional waters following endeavours such as coordinated patrols and innovative concepts such as the 'Eye in the Sky' maritime security programme by littoral states.

Affected countries such as the US and India have offered to patrol, to a certain extent, the Strait of Malacca and even the Singapore Strait. But littoral states such as Malaysia have taken the position that while other countries can come for capacity-building, they cannot usurp the authority that comes with enforcement duties. Some countries have even engaged private security personnel, which Malaysia objects to, because it is difficult to distinguish between security personnel and terrorists or pirates.

The focus of piracy today has shifted to other areas such as the Gulf of Aden, while in Southeast Asia, new piracy activities have emerged in the South China Sea and also the Sulu Sea. The problems in those areas basically originated on land but subsequently spilled over to affect the sea lanes. Therefore the solution used for the Strait of Malacca cannot necessarily be applied to these areas. Altogether different solutions have to be sought.

### *Internal Instability*

Countries in the region are still grappling with nation-building issues. Although some have achieved independence a few decades ago, others have never been colonised. As with India, Malaysia shares land and maritime borders with almost all countries in the region, with the exception of land-locked Laos. Therefore, problems that occur in its neighbourhood affect it too.

Malaysia therefore practices good neighbourliness with its neighbours, offering assistance such as peace-building support for Southern Thailand. Malaysia has followed a strictly non-interventionist policy in its neighbourhood despite the fact that it has occasionally been accused of harbouring people

fleeing from there who later strike back and create havoc.

Malaysia sent a peacekeeping force to Mindanao, Southern Philippines from 2004-2008 under the ambit of the International Monitoring Team (IMT). Though real progress was beginning to be made, the team was forced to leave after the Philippines Supreme Court's decision that the agreement reached by the warring parties was unlawful.

Recently, upon the request of the Philippine government, the Malaysian government has been considering re-sending the IMT. It is in Malaysia's interest to ensure Mindanao is peaceful as events occurring there also affect Malaysia's maritime border in the eastern state of Sabah.

### *Natural Disasters*

While it is not uncommon for the region to experience natural disasters, the magnitude and frequency of the events of late has been worrying, especially the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, and the 2009 Padang, Sumatra earthquake. Malaysia and India could work closely within the ARF framework to come up with an ARF Guideline on Disaster Relief.

### **Climate Change**

This is another potential area for collaboration but due to the complexity of the scientific and technical aspects involved, it would be difficult to measure progress or success. However, it is something for the two nations to consider.

### **Energy Security**

The supply of oil as well as new sources of oil have become very critical today due to the global energy crisis. Therefore, keeping open the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) for freedom of navigation is very important, especially in preventing major power conflict over the right of passage.

### **The Role of Major Powers**

The US and Japan are the traditional players in this region with new players such as the regional economic powerhouses of China and India joining in. For some time before the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on US soil, the US had almost lost interest in the region but it has now come back with renewed interest. Malaysia welcomes this, especially the new Obama administration's call not to handle matters unilaterally, and its pledge to work closely through diplomatic channels.

The US will now engage with Myanmar instead of confronting it. It has signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), and has agreed to send a permanent Ambassador to the Asean Secretariat. The US will also now leave it to Asean to handle the Myanmar issue, which is a positive development. All these are indications of closer US-Asean engagement with a different focus.

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Japan has over the years been increasingly assuming an independent role and the new government of Prime Minister Hatoyama is expected to take a more independent stand. The interests of Japan are more focused on maritime issues such as Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and also energy security. Meanwhile, India has had good relations as well as strong bilateral ties with countries in the region such as Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand.

India needs to be engaged as a stakeholder because it has more to contribute to the region, and over the years, it has shown how it can work closely with the other countries. India has been a dialogue partner of Asean for some time and is also a strong supporter of the ARF.

China is another key player and all this while, there has been talk of a triangular relationship between China, Japan and the US. Now with India coming in, it should be reconfigured as a quadrangular relationship between US-Japan-China-India.

However, the region cannot forget Russia which is coming back with a renewed focus. Russia possesses large reserves of energy resources, which is important at a time of energy crisis.

It also plays an important role in the strategic equation where its influence cannot be ignored.

### Regional Security Architecture

How have institutions such as Asean/SAARC and the Asean Regional Forum contributed to regional security? What can be done to improve the effectiveness of these institutions?

Devedu said that there is an increasing trend towards multilateral security dialogue in the Asia Pacific, where multi-layered and composite security cooperation mechanisms are already in place. Apec, which traditionally focuses on economics is now also focusing on security matters.

The IISS Shangrila-Dialogue is another mechanism for defence ministers and senior defence officials to congregate annually and give prepared statements on confidence-building measures. Asean+3, East Asian Summit and Asean+6 are basically leaders' strategic forums that give guidance on cooperation among East Asian countries.

### Asean

Since its inception in 1967, Asean has grown by leaps and bounds. There has been no major conflict in the region with the brief exception of the Vietnamese military intervention in Cambodia, in 1978, for humanitarian reasons — an earlier version of the current concept of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP).

Asean itself played a key role in bringing an end to the Cambodian conflict. Growing instances of intra and extra Asean activities have strengthened Asean solidarity considerably in a number of areas. One of them is Asean integration, which is a process and not a product; it is moving very well incrementally and is expected to achieve its target fully by 2015.

The Asean Charter which came into force in 2008 is an important step towards the creation of a rules-based organisation and a strengthened community. It reinforced Asean's central role as the driving force of the ARF.



However, it is acknowledged that the Charter has some flaws, including the absence of non-consensus and decision-making mechanisms, as well as being vague on stipulated sanctions for non-compliance. The Charter is also accused of being state-centric and not people-friendly, which Devudu said is more of a perception than a reality. Notwithstanding all these, the Charter still provided some basis for Asean to move ahead, and it can be reviewed in due course.

Asean's leadership could be seen during the height of Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The Myanmar military junta refused to accept the help of outsiders but Asean was able to persuade them to let other countries participate in disaster relief operations.

The inclusion of the Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) shows the maturity of Asean on defence issues since in the past, discussion used to be taboo. The ADMM is now working on getting dialogue partners from countries outside Asean involved. The expanded forum will be known as ADMM Plus; India is among the potential dialogue partners to be invited.

### ***Asean Challenges***

The non-intervention principle is increasingly being questioned. There are some members who do not want this principle to deviate from its conservatism. Meanwhile, the Asean Charter promises to protect the citizens' human rights. But given the fact that Asean countries have had no proper track record on human rights preservation, this could be a key challenge.

### ***Asean Regional Forum (ARF)***

The Asean-driven ARF is another successful institution that has locked major powers which have an interest in the region in constant dialogue and cooperation. The ARF has moved into many areas of security cooperation such as disaster relief, peacekeeping, terrorism and so on. It has undertaken more than 90 Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) which vary according to different security contexts. These measures have contributed to confidence-building and transparency, and also provide some semblance of community-building.

### ***ARF Challenges***

The ARF could play a much more effective role provided its members refrain from taking sides on some major issues, and making strong comments, as well as avoid strengthening military alliances. There is also the criticism that Asean/ARF have not delved into the resolution of interstate conflicts such as the often-cited case of the Korean Peninsula. However this will not be an easy matter as Asean will be sidelined in that context.

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Despite this, there could be many other opportunities for Asean. The ARF should review its three-stage evolution (confidence-building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict-resolution) which is too state-centric. The core security issues





affecting the region in today's context are non-traditional security issues which require different and more innovative approaches.

The ARF should look into the real implementation of its work plan and plan of action, in which there has been some progress, but more can be done. It should continue to remain relevant in areas where it can add value to regional security and stability, such as enhancing and deepening confidence-building, non-traditional security and transnational security.

For Asean to remain in the driver's seat of the ARF, it should come up with new ideas and new thinking so as to lead institution-building. India could assist Asean in this case because India works very well with Malaysia in promoting some of these Asean-related activities. Asean should not let bilateral issues such as the recent dispute between Thailand and Cambodia over the Preah Vihear temple site, and that between Malaysia and Indonesia over the Ambalat issue, affect its solidarity.

A strong and united Asean will play a better role as the fulcrum of regional security architecture, which will help enhance peace and stability in Southeast Asia.

### **How do Malaysia and India Assess the Political Situation in Myanmar?**

#### ***India's Assessment***

Myanmar is India's land gateway to Southeast Asia and as geopolitical compassion dictates it, India maintains good ties with the present government, thus earning the opprobrium of the West. India is convinced that sanctions have not

worked in Myanmar and that they have only further isolated the country.

Sanctions also have not prevented Western MNCs from doing business in Myanmar. Therefore, India has engaged the Yangon government to help it in the development of Myanmar's roads, ports and infrastructure. It also sought and received Myanmar's cooperation in dealing with militancy on both sides of the border. Human rights issues are also pursued persistently with Myanmar.

#### ***Malaysia's Assessment***

It is important for Asean to ensure the stability of Myanmar during the latter's transitional phase as there are many issues that require careful management. Countries such as China and India do not take a critical stance on Myanmar in their own interests. However, China and India could seek ways to gently nudge Myanmar to move forward.

Asean, despite its principle of non-intervention, made a strong statement in Singapore in 2008, when Singapore was the Chair of Asean, that Myanmar must change, otherwise it would be seen as rejecting cooperation with the region.