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Flashpoints and Crises in Asia: Shaping a Way Ahead

By Robbin Laird

During my visit to and meetings at the Australian National University, I was given a copy of an interesting book by Dr. Brendan Taylor, entitled *The Four Flash Points: How Asia Goes to War*.

The book is well worth reading as the author provides a sobering analysis of key flash points and how those flash points might generate broader conflict.

The flash points are the following: the Korean Peninsula, the East China Sea, the South China Sea and Taiwan.

What is clear is that these flashpoints will be tests for crisis management among the key players in the region.

But the book itself does not really focus on this aspect, but upon the author's assessment of how best to build out a different kind of order within which the flashpoints will be subsumed.

And his prescription really emerges at the end of his book.

"China will be unable to dominate Asia in its entirety.

""America will continue to meet its longest-standing objective – the prevention of regional dominance by a great power rival.

'But it will be able to do so credibly and with considerably lower risk than through an ill-advised attempt at preserving the incumbent order.

'Pulling back from Taiwan and the South China Sea does not represent a radical departure in strategic focus for America.

"It will not break any treaty commitments to US Asia-Pacific allies: Australia, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea.

"At the same time, China should be reasonably content because it will have the strategic space it craves to assuage its deep insecurities. (page 189).

He adds shortly after this statement the following further elucidation of his position.

"This need for a careful calculation and clarification of vital interests also calls into question the idea that the United States should extend its defensive line in Asia during periods of strategic challenge.

"In truth, that line has moved back and forth throughout US history with varying results.

At times it has been drawn back as far as Hawaii and with an avowedly 'American first' president in the White House, a return to that approach is not beyond the realm of possibility. (191)."

The book provides a good look at the flashpoints; it argues for the nature of an underlying global change in the region, and the importance of the United States accepting global change while constraining Japan.

Interestingly, Australia does not appear prominently in his analysis.

One could pose a different set of questions generated by his look at flashpoints.

One would start with how the military transformation underway by the liberal democracies might affect their options in dealing with a crisis generated by China?

How might military forces be configured to best be able to prevail in a crisis from the standpoint of the US and its allies?

How might civilian policy makers prepare themselves for handling the kinds of crises likely to be generated by the various flash points?

Also, it is important to consider is the nature of the regimes.

The assumption throughout out the book seems to be that there is a stable ascendant China working to expand its perimeter of defense to assuage its historical "insecurities."

But China is hardly that; and the question of how interests get defined is really the key part of the conflict calculus which the author highlights as well.

No matter what the United States ends up doing, the big change in the region is really Australia and Japan.

Both are expanding their perimeters of defense and are very likely to converge on some common approaches and defensive postures.

The current Chinese leader I am sure will consider this to be aggressive and would lead to insecurities in Beijing, but it is highly unlikely that a convergence of capabilities and interests by Japan and Australia would directly menace the Chinese mainland.

It would threaten the ability of the Chinese to push out into the Pacific and write a new rule book, arguably a major objective for the current regime.

I would argue that the intersection of Japanese and Australian policies will be a key aspect in constraining China and providing a way to ensure that a liberal democratic approach be protected against the authoritarian agenda shaped by Beijing.

Another key player could well be India in reaching into the region and working with the Aussies and the Japanese as well as the Americans.

And for the Americans adjusting their approach, something underscored by the author, makes a great deal of sense, but I am not sure that sacrificing Taiwan is a price worth paying.

New approaches to military modernization conjoined with innovations in how to conduct crisis management are clearly needed if the flashpoints discussed by the author are to be managed and dealt with.

The core questions need to be asked:

How do we shape effect crisis management approaches to the flashpoints likely to bubble up in the next decade?

How do we build effective military tools to deal with these crises?

How do we reshape our societies to prepare for conflict and to reduce our social vulnerabilities?

How might the enhanced cooperation of Japan and Australia enhance credible deterrence and how might the US more creditably work with such a dynamic?

Brendan Taylor, *The Four Flash Points: How Asia Goes to War*. (La Trobe University Press, Australia, 2018).

The Return of Geography in the Defense of Australia

By Robbin Laird

As Australia thinks through its options for enhanced capabilities to defend the nation in the changing strategic context of the Indo-Pacific region, Australian geography may well be returning in a way not seen since the days of World War II.

During World War II, Japan directly attacked Australia in order to try to ensure that it would not function as a launch point against Japanese extended territorial defense. Japan had significantly expanded its territory and control over the Pacific and its islands; it was threatened by the United States and its ability to operate in the Pacific from various island bases and certainly the notion that Australia could become the unsinkable aircraft carrier for the allies was a key concern for Japan.

Although dramatically attacking Darwin with the same naval task force which had earlier attacked Pearl Harbor, the Japanese ultimately failed in its efforts to negate Australia and its role as the key ally of the United States in defeating the Empire of Japan.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was clearly a key turning point in this phase of the War.

With the Chinese pushing out from the mainland and shaping a phased island strategy, their ability to project power out into the Pacific raises again the question of the role of Australian territory, notably Western Australia and the Northern territories in the defense of Australia.

An enhanced role for these territories in extended deterrence is a distinct possibility for the Australian Defence going forward.

Some in Australia would see this as a Fortress Australia policy, but it really something quite different.

It about the ADF can operate from Western Australia and the Northern Territories much more flexibly and do so as if the territory operated a chessboard across which forces could be moved in a crisis.

There first of all is the question of Australian forces and the ability to do so.

The RAAF will certainly look at agile basing and enhanced capabilities to operate from a variety of airstrips and mobile bases.

The Navy already operates their submarine force from Western Australia and as the new build submarines are added to the force, might next flexibility be considered in how to operate the force, somewhat similar to how Australia operated in World War II.

This leaves the key question of the role of the Army.

There is a beginning of change within the Australian Army as new strike capabilities in support of the maritime force and new active defense capabilities are being built.

But might not the Army have an even more significant role as the Aussies look to leverage F-35 2.0 and provide longer range strike and active defense capabilities for a power projection force designed to go much deeper into the Indo-Pacific region to defend Australian interests?

In addition, there is the consideration of key allies, notably Japan and the United States.

For the United States, a major challenge is to generate a much more mobile and flexible force able to operate with an alternative to large fixed bases.

Cooperation with Australia could provide flexible basing in a crisis but only if the United States can really learn how to show up for relatively short periods of time but operated a sustainable force.

And to do this without permanent basing of a sort not relevant to the 21st century and the crisis management challenges on the horizon.

For the Japanese, as they add new military capabilities, such as new ships, new submarines, new aircraft and new strike systems, they clearly will be looking to move capabilities on a short-term basis outside of the limited perimeter of their island chain.

A good starting point for change could well be for Japan and the United States to learn how to operate their F-35s from the sustainment facilities the Aussies are building for their own F-35s.

This would mean that if desired by the Australians in a crisis, the United States, Japanese or other F-35 partners could fly to bases in Australia, bases with significant active defenses or ability to operate from mobile bases, and be maintained by Australian sovereign capability.

The F-35 inherently can do this; but it would require a revolution in sustainment thinking on the US and allied side to achieve what is inherent in the aircraft itself as a combat system.

It is a case study of a broader set of changes which could interweave with the changing role which territory will play in 21st century extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region.

And such a return of geography, raises some fundamental questions as well for the ADF, notably for the Army which has thought of itself largely in out of Australia expeditionary terms. Now it might play a much more significant role in terms of the defense of Australia in terms of its national territory, notably in Western Australia and the Northern Territories.

For the United States to be an effective partner in such a change would require significant alterations in how the US power projection forces operate as well. It would require building on those areas where common platforms are yielding potential for common sustainment and weaponization solutions, but generated from the Aussie side.

It is not about turning Australia into a Fed Ex set of terminals for the American forces; it is about an agile, flexible engagement force which could show up for 90 days in a crisis and support common policies and interests.

And the weaving in of the Japanese will be a challenge as well both on the Australian and Japanese as well for the Americans who have to shed their superpower mindset and think in terms of regional crisis management and their contributions and role in a tailored set of crisis solutions.

To reset how to think about geography in relationship to the new platforms and technologies is a major challenge not only in a rethink of Australian defense but for Australia's closest allies as well.

This means as well that infrastructure and its defense becomes a core strategic challenge for both Australia and its closest allies.

It is high time to recognize that Chinese efforts to buy commercial ports and infrastructure really is about ensuring that the obvious trajectory of change for Australia and its closest allies is something which the Chinese wish to obviate without firing a shote.

It takes a strategic vision to constrain the Chinese; and we need to generate such an approach.

Defending Australia's Maritime Interests in the 2030s and Beyond

By Ben Stevens

The Hunter Frigate will better suit Australia's maritime interests than the Future Submarine Project's Shortfin Barracuda design.

As the Future Submarine Project comes under scrutiny, it is worth comparing its Shortfin Barracuda submarines with the acquisition of the Hunter Frigate announced in June.

Both are controversial decisions, but the Shortfin's current issues and lack of strategic weaponry and nuclear propulsion has considerably reduced its benefits to Australia.

The Hunter Frigate – despite expected construction, interim capability and cost issues – will better support Australia's future maritime capabilities than the glorified tactical patrol submarines that are now being built.

Controversy Surrounding the Future Submarine Project

The design chosen by the Future Submarine Project, the Shortfin Barracuda, is a derivative of an unproven design, with the first French Barracuda not expected to be commissioned until 2019 at the earliest.

Nonetheless, Australia decided to buy 12 altered designs of the French nuclear-powered submarines in April 2016 at a controversial AUD 50 billion, with the potential of adapting to nuclear propulsion during construction being a key reason for its choice.

In terms of potential capabilities and operational reasons, the French design suited Australian operational conditions more than the Japanese Soryu patrol submarines and the shorter-ranged altered German Type-216 design.

The controversy and ongoing issues with the Future Submarine Project include that the original Barracuda model hasn't even finished the construction phase in France. Furthermore, adapting a nuclear-powered European design to a conventionally-powered submarine was always going to experience issues, which weren't fully accounted for.

The final question is why Australia is investing AUD 50 billion, its largest-ever defence project investment, on large tactical patrol submarines, which would most likely just patrol the Indian Ocean and Australian waters.

Being an adapted variation of an unproven design, the Shortfin Barracuda is suffering from extended costs, performance concerns in regards to the pump-jet propulsion system, battery problems and capability gaps due to delays in delivery times.

The issues with the Barracuda submarine mirror many of the historical problems associated with Australian shipbuilding adapting foreign designs for Australian purposes, a pattern not fully accounted for during the acquisition phase.

The adaption from nuclear propulsion to pump propulsion is causing many of the design issues currently associated with the Shortfin and it isn't expected to enter Royal Australian Navy service until 2032 at the earliest.

Coupled with Australia's opposition to long-range strategic strike weaponry or cruise missiles and the fact that conventional submarines are increasingly vulnerable to China's growing area-denial capabilities, there are some hard questions now being asked in Canberra.

Comparing the Hunter Frigate

The Hunter Frigate are also a controversial decision, but not as troublesome as the Shortfin Barracuda. In June, it was announced that Australia's surface fleet would be expanded by the addition of British BAE Systems Type 26 Global Combat anti-submarine frigates worth AUD 35 billion.

This decision to return to British-designed combat ships, the first since the River Class Frigates built in the 1960s, marked a clear variation from Canberra's traditional military equipment providers in the USA. Despite this, however, the new anti-submarine frigates will still utilise the US Aegis combat system, which would aid any joint fleet actions with the US Navy in the South China Sea should the need arise.

The concerns about the Hunter Frigate is that it is a derivative of an unproven British design. There were more proven foreign designs during the acquisition stage, albeit at the cost of less capabilities. Furthermore, the 2020 construction date and slow rate of ship construction – nine ships over 18 years – leaves Australia with a large capability gap in the interim.

Despite the capability gap and expected construction issues, the Hunter Frigate would require less adaption than the Shortfin.

Although there will be some adaption issues including the integration of the Aegis and Saab systems, the system commonality and construction lessons from integrating the Aegis system in the Air Warfare Destroyer will considerably reduce system integration problems.

The Hunter Frigate would also be more actively involved in Australia's defence and would be more likely found in naval task groups, as the Hunter is expected to operate as a dedicated anti-submarine warfare screen and can be integrated into surface fleets with greater ease.

Furthermore, it is more capable of supporting regional humanitarian efforts than the Shortfin, a task that will only increase in the Asia-Pacific century due to the effects of climate change.

At present, it seems that the Hunter Frigate will prove to be a less controversial decision.

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Prime Minister Abe and Deterrence in Depth

Prime Minister Abe is looking to bring the Japanese constitution in line with the strategic realities facing Japan with the rise of China.

The first change would be to draft language that would formally recognize the country's Self-Defense Forces in the constitution, as Mr. Abe has proposed.

Currently, Article 9 states that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained."

Amending the constitution requires two-thirds support in both houses of Parliament, which would require a second change then as well, namely, a national referendum in which a bare majority would suffice.

According to an article by Byron Tau published August 12, 2018 in The Wall Street Journal, the plan faces significant challenges.

"There is still a very strong sentiment among the Japanese population who are against any form of military expansion," said Hiroyuki Hosoda, who leads the ruling party's amendment effort.

Nonetheless, he says, "the world has changed. Japan is an advanced nation. There is no merit whatsoever in starting a war."

Japan has had a de facto military since the 1950s known as the Self-Defense Forces, and the constitutional changes sought by Mr. Abe would explicitly authorize those forces.

Backers say the change would send a message about Japan's readiness to defend itself when the U.S. is re-evaluating its defense commitments and China is flexing its muscles with outposts in the South China Sea and a new aircraft carrier.

Recent statements by Prime Minister Abe after winning his Liberal Democratic Party's leadership election last month, highlighted other key aspects of shaping a way ahead.

With regard to the Korean peninsula, he is looking for the United States to remain engaged with South Korea even if a peace agreement is reached.

Japan opposes any withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula in exchange for North Korea's denuclearization, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in an interview with the Financial Times published Monday.

"It is my understanding that there is no such idea in the minds of the U.S. side nor in the mind of President (Donald) Trump," the British newspaper quoted Abe as saying.

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/08/world/shinzo-abe-says-japan-welcome-britain-tpp-open-arms/?utm_source=Daily+News+Updates&utm_campaign=36650ec1d3-Tuesday_email_updates09_10_2018&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c5a6080d40-36650ec1d3-332756961#.W7t8oy-B1sY

And in a visit by the Vietnamese leader to Japan, Prime Minister Abe indicated his strong support for Vietnam in its South China Sea policy

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, agreed Monday (October 8, 20188) to work together to maintain peace and security in the South China Sea, where Hanoi is engaged in a territorial dispute with Beijing.

During their meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo, the two leaders also confirmed their readiness to promote free and fair trade through regional trade agreements, including the 11-member Trans-Pacific Partnership, despite the spreading protectionism trend.

"Going hand-in-hand with Prime Minister Phuc, I am determined to realize the free and open Indo-Pacific region," which covers the South China Sea, Abe said in a press conference.

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/08/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-vietnam-agree-cooperation-secure-peace-south-china-sea/?utm_source=Daily+News+Updates&utm_campaign=36650ec1d3-Tuesday_email_updates09_10_2018&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c5a6080d40-36650ec1d3-332756961#.W7t9Vy-B1sY

In short, Prime Minister Abe is seeking to expand Japan's role in the defense of the region but doing so by intertwining the evolution of Japanese policy with those of key allies.

It is about Japan playing an expanded role in a deterrence in depth strategy.

Australia and the New Build Submarine: Options for the Next Government

By Robbin Laird and Harald Malmgren

Current talks between France and Australia to build a new submarine are facing significant challenges.

If these challenges are not met prior to a new Australian government being elected next year, the next Australian government might well look for new solutions to getting the submarine they need and want in a timely manner.

In 2016, the Australian government announced that it would build a new submarine with the French. The new build submarine would replace the aging six Collins Class submarines with 12 longer range, and more effective "regionally superior submarines," to use the language of the Australian government.

This new submarine has never been built before, but would leverage French technology but built in Australia by new innovative production technologies and a 21st century Australian workforce. Australian and French engineers would work closely together and the new submarine would be operational within the next decade.

The problem is that the agreements to do all of this are not in place and the challenge of putting a complex co-development project in place are proving challenging. In part this is a question of trust and confidence of the two sides in each other; and neither the French nor the Australians have put together defense projects on this scale of co-develop together.

Recent reports have highlighted that the agreement is providing difficult to finalize. Since the Australia-French sub project began in the design stage, a new government was elected in France, with a new Defense Minister and new officials within the French procurement agency, the DGA. The core agreement with Australia remained in limbo within which the core issues of intellectual property rights and other key issues involving the build of the new submarine remained unresolved.

For the Australians, the key issue revolves around the build and the IP involved as well as the ability to continuously build and support the new class of submarines.

They are looking at a co-development project of fundamentally new types of submarines with their partner, through which there would be two-way technology transfer and a long-term commitment to working through the evolution of submarine technology in a very dynamic threat environment.

In addition to a new government coming to power in Paris and now responsible for putting the agreement into place, soon Australia will have a new government. Parliamentary elections have to be held no later than next Spring. The current Defense Minister, Christopher Pyne, has been involved with the project from the outset. As a Parliamentarian from South Australia where the submarine will be built and as the former defense industrial minister, he would clearly like to see an agreement in place prior to a change of government.

But what if it is not?

Are their alternatives to the French solution which the next government might pursue?

From several inputs in both France and Australia, there is a French assumption in play that Australia has no options other than France, and all that France has to do is wait out the process and the current or next Australian government will come around to the inevitable, namely, a submarine negotiated on more classic technology transfer lines, while the Aussies are seeking a wide-ranging co-development process of a next generation submarine.

Australia is looking for a build and support approach which provides a sovereign submarine capability but with a very close-knit operational capability with the U.S. and Japanese navies. This makes sense of course because the nature of the Chinese challenge is central to the Australia-Japanese-US ASW triangle in the Pacific.

The clearest option for Australia should the French option fail, something which the Australian government clearly is not eager to see, would be to work with Japan and plus up their American options as well.

The Japanese industry has come a long way since the failure to prevail in the earlier competition.

In their failure, they have learned and what they have learned is that they need to commit completely to co-development and a new build in Australia as well.

With the growing focus of Japan on extended perimeter defense and the need to rebuild their defense industrial capability, Australia is the perfect partner. Both seek ways to have enhanced sovereignty while still working closely with the United States. Both wish to have hedging options given the political dynamics in the United States. And both seek to expand their defense industrial capabilities. Both technological aspirations and political timing of Australia's growing ties with the U.S. are converging into opportunity for a bold new industrial thrust in Australia.

By working together on submarines, the Japanese and Australians might find other ways to work together on defense systems.

The Australian submarine will have an American combat system. That is already decided with Lockheed Martin as the key systems integrator.

The Japanese option provides flexibility as well. The Australians are modernizing the Collins class and have worked out an effective sustainment approach to buy them time, A new build submarine, larger and very upgradeable, could be built in Australia with Japan agreeing to buy some of the new build submarines from Australia as well.

This is something which the Japanese themselves need when they come to replace their current class of submarines, one designed to optimize the defense of the islands of Japan, not to reach out into the expanded defense perimeter of Japan.

In other words, Australia and Japan have very similar strategic requirements for their next submarine force.

The United States Navy would be extensively involved in such a new endeavor.

With the Japanese looking very hard at expanding their regional defense capabilities, Australia remains the most significant partner in such a strategic calculus.

If the French government wants to complete their clear opportunity working with Australia, it would be wise for Paris to take a hard look at the changing dynamics in the Asian Pacific and the emerging ambitions of Australia to be a major player militarily and industrially.

The Abe government in Japan is currently rethinking not only its security role in partnership with the US, but its underlying industrial support capabilities which could be applied more effectively in joint projects with Australia and the US.

Japanese economic relations with Australia, long based on trade and direct investment, are now in a new stage where co-development of new military hardware and software would be in the mutual interests of both nations.

That would also put Australia on the forefront of the global industrial development map, rather simply fork-lifting platforms built elsewhere into Australia.

The Future of Indian Airpower: The Impact of an F-16 Acquisition

By Robbin Laird

Combat airpower is a combination of the effects which can be delivered by a combat fleet, not simply individual assets. India has a mixed fleet and working fleet integration is a key issue which affects its combat power going forward.

When considering modernization of the fleet, a clear focus needs to be upon how the new acquisition can work with India and its partners in shaping more effective combat power to serve Indian national interests.

At the same time, the Indian government is clearly concerned with the ability of Indian industry to grow in the aerospace sector and to enhance its capabilities to support the broad evolution of Indian capabilities.

The two considerations – combat power and industrial capacity – clearly come together with considerations of supportability and sustainment. How effectively can the Indian Air Force resupply and maintain its air combat elements? And how might Indian industry evolve in ways to do a better job providing integrated support to the Indian Air Force?

India is looking at a number of options for its next round of aircraft acquisition and one of those candidates is the F-16. Although critics argue that the F-16 is an older plane, in fact given the software being integrated onto the F-16 it is evolving along with the overall fleet being flown by the USAF, not exactly yesterday's airpower force.

The F-16 is flown by a great number of Air Forces and key parts are built worldwide. This means that India is not tied to the United States and its operational or manufacturing experience.

Rather, the F-16 built in India could leverage a global enterprise as well as expand its global working relationships.

For example, the UAE Air Force flies both the most advanced F-16 to date, the Block 60, as well as French combat aircraft. The Indians flying Rafales and F-16s might well find a working relationship with the UAE in shaping interactive concepts of operations or the development of mutually beneficial technology to enable their air combat forces.

The "Made in India" part of the F-16 engagement would clearly be about opening the Indian air combat aperture to a variety of F-16 global partners.

And that brings up the impact of USAF modernization as well. The USAF is structurally modernizing a significant part of its F-16 fleet with the so-called SLEP program that adds 50% additional service life up to and beyond 12,000 flight hours.

At the same time, they are introducing an advanced Northrop Grumman radar, the APG-83.

The radar on the F-16 Block 70 and the spillover effects from the F-35 program as well are important considerations when buying a Block 70. The software on the Block 70 radar has more than 95% in common with the APG-81, the AESA radar that's on the F-35. And the hardware is 75-80% in common. Collectively, there is about 85-90% in common between the Northrop radar on the F-35 and the F-16 Block 70.

And this obviously has a significant impact upon both the path and cost of modernization. The U.S. and the F-35 partners will invest significantly in the evolution of the F-35 radar, which will have an impact as well on the Block 70 radar modernization as well.

This radar, the latest of four fighter aircraft based electronically scanned array fire control radars from Northrop Grumman, shares much in common with the F-35 radars as well, which means that when it comes to the evolution of the sensor-EW-command functions provided by advanced AESA radars.

The Indians would be benefiting from USAF combat learning with the new systems and as well as those global partners engaged in a similar modernization effort. Beyond the USAF, this may well have been part of the decision-making process with air forces in Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and currently being contemplated by Greece that have led to several hundred F-16 upgrades with this radar.

And it is clear that the impact the F-35 will be significant upon the evolution of air combat, something I have labeled, the renorming of airpower. An Indian Block 70 clearly would be a beneficiary of this evolving air combat learning process as new radars and sensors enter the air combat force, with the new Northrop Grumman radars as an open-ended evolving combat capability.

Put in blunt terms, the IAF could choose a platform qua platform in terms of its organic capabilities at the time of acquisition or it could buy a enterprise enabled platform which is part of a global enterprise, with several key air combat forces worldwide, and flying with key elements of the ongoing air combat revolution driven by the F-35.

Made in India could be part of engaging in the global enterprise or it could be narrowed down to assembling a combat aircraft in India itself as the focus of effort.

Being part of a global F-16 force has many other advantages. There are many F-16 pilots worldwide; there are a variety of training centers; and if the IAF needed more aircraft in a crisis they could go to an F-16 partner and find ways to lease aircraft as needed as well. With a global inventory, there is always a possible of a rapid plus up as well in case of crisis.

In short, the F-16 considered as a force multiplier for the Indian Air Force has many advantages. It is not just about the platform but the systems onboard the aircraft and the core work which the USAF and F-35/F-16 partners are doing worldwide to get integration between the new fifth generation aircraft and 4th generation aircraft.

As there are many partners involved, India would have the opportunity as an F-16 user to interact with a wide variety of partners in the learning curve of evolving fifth generated enabled capabilities.

It is about the learning curve with regard to integrated with advanced air forces which will be a key part of the upward push on Indian airpower modernization.

Being an F-16 partner would be a good enabler of such an effort.

This article was first published by India Strategic.

Rafale for the Indian Air Force

By Gulshan Luthra

New Delhi.

Ever since allegations over the Bofors howitzer deal with Sweden erupted in the 1980s, thanks to a report first in the Dagens Nyheter newspaper of Stockholm, Indian politicians multiplied and magnified them, with VP Singh also adding a lie that the gun was of poor quality, fired backwards, and killed own troops.

VP Singh, who succeeded Rajiv Gandhi after a vicious campaign to grab power by playing up Bofors, in fact alleged bungling in nearly everything done by his predecessor and blocked progression of various proposals for the armed forces and intelligence agencies. The media, as usual in frenzy, played to that, and – I am not sure – perhaps no one reported the successful trial of the gun at the artillery range in Pokhran where it exceeded the maximum defined range of 30 km to 30.8 km.

Two committees of Parliament, Defence and Bofors Probe, witnessed the trial firing, but as some MPs still expressed doubts over the gun's capability, the Geological Survey of India (GSI) was mandated by Parliament to check and it verified what the Army authorities had stated. That the distinguished Members of Parliament were not willing to believe the trial report as submitted by the Army, shows how loud the campaign of allegations was.

Ever since, any time either the Army, Navy or Indian Air Force (IAF) have set their focus on a major acquisition, allegations erupt out of the blue. This was in the case of Thermal Imagers for instance for the Army also some years ago, and a frustrated officer of the Lt General rank told me some of our politicians should be held accountable for the casualties the Army suffers.

The simple, flat, truth is that the armed forces are mostly devoid of contemporary weapons. The Army does not have proper modern rifles, and a young Major told me that when in operation, he prefers to equip his platoon with older AK 47s rather than the indigenous and newer INSAS.

I have mentioned this as the Perspective the country's armed forces operate in.

Air Power

Combat aircraft are the only asset that can hit an enemy in his territory, with speed and desired level of destruction subject to the aircraft's capability and defined objective.

IAF acquired Soviet MiG-21, MiG-23 and MiG-27 for combat role in the 1960s and 1970s, Anglo-French Jaguar for Deep Penetration Strike Aircraft (DPSA) requirement in 1978, French Mirage 2000 in 1985 and Soviet MiG-29 in 1987, the latter two as a reaction to Pakistan's acquisition of F-16 and three other hi tech systems including the Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I) computers from the US in 1982.

Then in the 1990s, when the Soviet Union was breaking, Moscow asked New Delhi to purchase some weapons and aircraft, as hard currency was required by it. At Government's suggestion, IAF acquired the Su-30 MKIs, of which there is an order of 272 with 25 deliveries pending yet. The aircraft is made in India from raw materials by HAL, and there is a proposal to buy another 40 based on readymade kits from Russia.

IAF had not asked for the Su-30, but the acquisition of this aircraft has turned out to be a boon, and at the moment, this is the most capable combat aircraft in the IAF inventory. The formidable supersonic BrahMos missile was also acquired in the same spirit, of helping the Soviet Union then, with a 50.5:49.5 partnership.

Obviously, most of the IAF inventory is old, and the series of aircraft, except the MiG-29, have limited range and capability. They need to go.

Modern aircraft which can hit an enemy in his territory are required.

The Current Scenario

IAF has a sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons, or roughly 850 aircraft inclusive of trainers and a few for routine MRSOW, Maintenance Reserve and Strike-off Wastage.

The actual strength of the combat squadrons is 31. And what we mostly have are the vintage MiGs, old but being upgraded Jaguars, Mirage 2000s and MiG-29s with some life, and of course the leading edge Su-30 MKIs.

The country's effort for an indigenous replacement for MiG-21s, in the form of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, is yet to bear fruit both in numbers and technology, although HAL is now near its desired goals, thanks to the company's efforts particularly in the last couple of years.

The Su30 is too big, expensive to fly, and requires periodic maintenance. Its availability used to be about 50 percent, although now it is enhanced to an assured 60 percent. Nonetheless, it has its own role.

In any case, IAF needs a modern Medium Multirole Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) and the choice of Rafale, as an emergency measure, is appropriate. I use the word 'appropriate' as this is the selection of the user, who is responsible to defend the country.

Indian Air Force stand

If the IAF leadership says it is an excellent machine, I would trust the Chief of Air Staff and other distinguished officers. I do not want to repeat any justifications here as they are in public domain. But as a citizen, as a writer on defence, I would share the worries of IAF commanders, who would not know what to do if they have no new aircraft in case of trouble.

Time to keep off politics for some time, be it over Bofors or Rafale, and let the IAF get the aircraft it wants.

In any case, the order for 36 Rafales is a standalone deal, and the process for 114 more combat aircraft in the form of MMRCA-2 competition is already in place.

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Putin visits New Delhi: An Indian Perspective

10/03/2018

By Vinay Shukla

Moscow. Even as the spectre of US CAATSA sanctions looms over significant arms contracts with Moscow, India expects the signing of "important" defence deals during President Vladimir Putin's New Delhi visit on October 4-5 for the 19th Annual Bilateral Summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In an interview with India Strategic on the eve of President Putin's visit due October 4-5, Indian ambassador to Russia D.B Venkatesh Varma observed:

"We expect important agreements in the defence sphere to be concluded during President Putin's visit. Our military technical cooperation is almost six decades old. We envisage continued cooperation with Russia well into the future including more active participation of Russian defence industry in the Make-In-India programme which would add a new dimension to our cooperation, not just at the governmental level but also between the private sectors of both countries."

The emphasis on the private sector is significant, keeping in view that India needs to expand its defence industrial base, for which the state-run sector has not been enough.

Responding to the question about the effect of US CAATSA – Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act on the long-pending bilateral deals worth around USD 10 billion, including S-400 air defence missile system, 4 Grigorovich class stealth frigates (advanced Talwar class) two of which will be built in India from scratch, lease of second Akula class nuclear attack submarine, operationalisation of JV for the production of Kamov K-226T multi-utility helicopters for the armed forces, Ambassador Varma underscored:

"Defence cooperation between India and Russia is based on mutual interest and is not subject to decisions of other countries. As a matter of principle, India has consistently maintained that while it accepts UN sanctions, we are not in a position to do so with respect to unilateral sanctions."

Ambassador Venkatesh Varma, considered one the finest Indian diplomats and an old Russia hand, took over the charge of the Embassy in Moscow only on September 10.

He expressed confidence that President Putin's visit to India for the 19th Annual Bilateral Summit will lay the framework for further deepening of our bilateral relations in the traditional areas of cooperation but also add new dimensions to our strategic partnership which is increasingly of global significance.

Excerpts:

India Strategic: You have been appointed as India's Ambassador to the Russian Federation at a time when the post-WWII global order is under stress and rules of the game are being changed arbitrarily.

Under these circumstances, how you view the relations between India and Russia in perspective?

Ambassador Varma: It is an honour to be India's Ambassador to the Russian Federation at an important phase in our bilateral relations against the backdrop of a fast changing international situation. Our historic relations with Russia have both elements of continuity and change. The Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between our countries is unique both in its scope, rationale and future potential. It rests on the fundamental pillars of our cooperation on political and strategic issues, military and security cooperation and in the field of economics, energy, transportation, industry, science and technology, cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

"In terms of rationale, both countries have a stake in the wellbeing and growth of the other. Trust and confidence at the leadership level is quite unique. President President Putin's visit to India for the 19th Annual Bilateral Summit will lay the framework for further deepening of our bilateral relations in the traditional areas of cooperation but also add new dimensions to our strategic partnership which is increasingly of global significance."

India Strategic: There is an impression in both New Delhi and Moscow that in the rapidly unfolding scenario their transforming relations with US, China and Pakistan are becoming a sort of irritant and eroding mutual trust.

To what extent the upcoming summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin will assuage these concerns?

Ambassador Varma: India enjoys strong and expanding relations with all the major powers. At the same time, our relations with Russia have grown from strength to strength given the inherent quality of trust, confidence and mutual interest.

"We do not expect nor accept exclusivity in our relations nor do we accept the dominance of any other power.

India Strategic: Defence and security cooperation between India and Russia has always been the main pillar of their bilateral ties in past decades and not only survived the Soviet collapse, but also further developed into a strategic partnership, which transformed India into 'net security provider' in IOR.

However, lately it is being challenged by the US CAATSA law, so how do you view the future of this partnership as CAATSA is here to stay?

Ambassador Varma: Defence cooperation between India and Russia is based on mutual interest and is not subject to decisions of other countries. As a matter of principle, India has consistently maintained that while it accepts UN sanctions, we are not in a position to do so with respect to unilateral sanctions.

India Strategic: Is India ready to go ahead with the signing of major defence deals with Russia, including the S-400 Triumf air-defence system, which are pending for quite some time though IGAs for them were concluded much before adoption of CAATSA?

Ambassador Varma: We expect important agreements in the defence sphere to be concluded during President Putin's visit. Our military technical cooperation is almost six decades old.

"We envisage continued cooperation with Russia well into the future including more active participation of Russian defence industry in the Make-In-India programme which would add a new dimension to our cooperation, not just at the governmental level but also between the private sectors of both countries.

India Strategic: Although, Indo-Russian cooperation in energy, including civilian nuclear field, is expanding at somehow satisfactory pace, the overall trade and economic cooperation still remains much below the potential.

This was also noted during the latest session of Joint Commission in Moscow co-chaired by Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

What measures are being taken or planned to be taken to improve the situation, can we expect the signing of some concrete agreements during Mr Putin's India visit to address this problem?

Ambassador Varma: As agreed by leaders of both countries, one of our main objectives is to diversify our bilateral relations. Our External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj co-chaired last week the 23rd Session in Moscow of the bilateral Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation along with Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov.

"This meeting paved the way for forward movement in important sectors. These include: cooperation between Indian and Russian space agencies with respect to the India'a Gaganyaan programme; taking forward our cooperation in civil nuclear energy; strengthening inter-regional cooperation; transport linkages including North-South Corridors; establishing the Green Corridor; and removing various impediments to increased India-Russia trade.

"A new Strategic Economic Dialogue will be announced. Overall, the bilateral investment target of US $ 30 billion has already been reached. Bilateral trade now has crossed the US $ 10 billion mark.

"An India-Business Summit with participation of over 100 companies from each side, will be held during the forthcoming visit of President Putin and will give a new impetus to trade and investment between the two countries. In a new innovation in our relations, talented Russian and Indian Children will represent the results of their interaction to Prime Minister Modi and President Putin during the Summit.

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Japanese-Indian Bilateral Maritime Exercise, 2018

Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) Ships Kaga, an Izumo Class Helicopter Destroyer and Inazuma – a Guided Missile Destroyer arrived at Visakhapatnam on 07 October 2018.

The JMSDF Ships under the command of Rear Admiral Tatsuya Fukada, Commander, Escort Flotilla-4 (CCF-4), would be participating in the third edition of Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX) with the ships of Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy (IN) from 07 to 15 October 18. JIMEX-18 is aimed to enhance interoperability, improve understanding and imbibe the best practices of each other.

The IN will be represented by three indigenously designed and built warships and a Fleet Tanker. The ships participating are INS Satpura, multipurpose stealth frigate, INS Kadmatt, Anti-Submarine Warfare Corvette, Missile Corvette and INS Shakti, the Fleet Tanker.

In addition, one submarine, P8I Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft and a number of integral helicopters would also be participating in the exercise. The Indian ships participating would be under the command of Rear Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Flag Officer Commanding, Eastern Fleet.

JIMEX 18, spread over eight days, will comprise a Harbour Phase and a Sea Phase of four days each.

The Harbour Phase of the exercise scheduled from 07 to 10 October 18 will include professional and social interactions between ship's crews, sports fixtures and operational planning for the Sea Phase.

The Sea Phase would include Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercises, VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure) Drills, Gun Firings, Cross Deck Helo Operations and coordinated operations in Anti-Submarine/ Anti-Air threat scenarios.

The last edition of JIMEX was conducted in Dec 2013 off Chennai. The conduct of JIMEX-18 after five years is indicative of an upswing in the Indo-Japanese defence relations and the continued efforts of both Governments to work closely to enhance safety and security of the global commons in keeping with 'rule based order'.

It is pertinent to highlight that JMSDF is a regular participant in the Malabar series of exercises between Indian and US Navies.

In addition, the ships of the two navies have been working in close coordination in Anti-Piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden (GoA) for the past few years.

JMSDF Ships also participated in the recently concluded MALABAR 18 off Guam (along with Indian and US Navy units) in the Pacific Ocean in Jun and biennial multilateral exercise RIMPAC-18 off Hawaii, USA.

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India to Acquire Russian S-400 Air Defense System

10/05/2018

By P Venkata Rao

New Delhi. India and Russia are friends for a long time and the trajectory that a few years ago appeared to be flat took an upward shift October 5 with the successful visit of President Vladimir Putin to India.

On the face of it, the visit was part of the annual Summit meeting both countries were having for over a decade and yet this year the talks Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with President Putin was special for more than one reason.

One, it came in the backdrop of the unusual informal Summit Prime Minister Modi had with President Putin at Sochi in May this year and second, but more importantly, both the United States of America as well as the rest of the world were

watching whether New Delhi goes ahead and signs the $5.5 Billion Triumf S-400 air defence system agreement amid impending threat of sanctions from Washington for buying major equipment from Russia.

New Delhi told Washington that the Indo-US ties were important and strategically significant, but it would not be possible to renege on agreements at least already reached with Russia, the threat of sanctions for doing trade with Russia notwithstanding. India went ahead to give its assent to the deal that defence planners of the country emphasise will make a huge difference in altering the country's air defence capability to prevent any incoming attacks from hostile neighbours or powers that may turn hostile.

The deal in a way conveyed to the world what New Delhi's strategic decision makers in the South Block, which houses the offices of the Prime Minister, External Affairs and Defence ministries, continue to maintain the policy of strategic autonomy in India's engagement with major powers of the world.

Just last month New Delhi told Washington its intention to go ahead with the defence hardware deal with Moscow, both in terms of its requirements and the fact that its defence purchases go back to seven decades. Then, India lives in the shadow of a terrible terror-infested neighbourhood.

The Indian stance had figured at the 2+2 format talks between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of both the countries recently in New Delhi.

Prime Minister's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had also visited Washington to say that the US should not put sanctions against India under its 'Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act' (CAATSA) for dealing with Russia and Iran.

Doval interacted with top officials in the Trump administration, impressing upon them the strategic and security importance of both the weapons system and oil from Iran. As it is, the oil market is turbulent and bad for heavy oil consumers like India, and if New Delhi was to stop buying oil from Teheran, India's economy would suffer further.

Interestingly, the US frowned upon a decision by Turkey, its NATO ally, when it attempted to purchase the S-400 air defence missiles from Russia, cautioning that it would attract the sanctions.

Of course, India is in a different category what with the US Congress passing a legislation allowing country-specific waivers for India along with Vietnam after the President notifies the Congress that these countries were scaling down defence procurements from Russia.

Pronouncements from US officials till the deal was signed offered no solution or a way out and it is precisely for this reason alone that the Indian decision underscored it will chart its own independent course irrespective of the threat of sanctions.

In fact, it was not just the S-400 that India decided to buy from Russia. Delegation level talks covered four Krivak-class frigates worth $2 billion and 200 light utility Kamov Ka-226T helicopters pegged at $1 billion, to be indigenously made through HAL. India and Russia have already concluded an Inter-Governmental Agreement for the helicopters, 60 of which would be built in Russia and the rest in the southern Indian state of Karnataka at a new HAL facility.

Although during the last decade, the US has emerged as a leading military hardware supplier to India with deals over $10 Billion, the Russians continue to enjoy advantage for Russia has been the oldest weapons and weapons- systems supplier. The latest deal should restore some of the imbalance with Russia in this sector alone as both countries are moving towards achieving an ambitious trade target do $50 Billion by 2025.

On this trip, President Putin, also addressed the India-Russia Business Summit attended by leading business leaders and top honchos.

There were discussions for a possible second Russian-built nuclear power plant in India. Moscow is currently expanding India's biggest nuclear power plant in Kudankulam.

With PM Modi announcing India's intention to send its first crewed space mission by 2022, marking the country's 75th year of Independence, Russia is one of the top favorites to assist New Delhi and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in this very ambitious programme.

India-Russia space collaboration goes back to four decades with the country's first satellite Aryabhatta put in space by the then Soviet Union and later in carrying India's only cosmonaut, Squadron Leader Rakesh Sharma in 1984.

Sharma's response "Saare Jahan se Achha" from Soyuz spacecraft to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to how does India appear from space still rings in the ears of all those who heard it then.

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Building the US–Australia Alliance

10/05/2018

By Stephan Frühling

The presidency of Donald Trump makes this a difficult time for any ally to contemplate closer institutional links to the United States.

Nevertheless, strengthening the US–Australia alliance has strong bipartisan support in Australia.

Polls indicate that recognition of the importance of the US alliance, and support for closer cooperation, has actually increased in Australia since Trump was elected, and Australia's defence and foreign-affairs ministers have maintained good relations with their US counterparts.

Moreover, the US emphasis on the 'Indo-Pacific' in the 2017 'National Security Strategy', and on working with allies in the 2018 'National Defense Strategy', reflect a US perspective on regional security that is in tune with Australian thinking.

Building alliance institutions fit for the challenges facing Australia and the United States, however, will require changes on both sides that would be difficult and challenging under any US administration.

For Australia, this will mean confronting, for the first time in 50 years, the question of what it is willing to do to support its treaty commitments and how it might have to rely on the alliance in the defence of its continent against a nuclear-armed great power.

Once the possibility of US long-range operations staged from Australia is woven into Australian and US policy, questions about how logistical integration and Australian support for such forces should take shape may well transform not only Australia's defence infrastructure in its northern region, but also its approach to defence procurement and even decision-making on the ADF's force structure.

For the United States, strengthening the alliance will require devoting more time and effort to an ally that Washington has customarily valued precisely because it did not require the same level of attention as US alliances in Europe and Northeast Asia.

Given the strength of Australia's case for operational leadership in its own defence, and the need for ANZUS to operate more visibly as an alliance, new command arrangements will probably require US commanders in INDOPACOM to become comfortable with dual-hatting – including the placement of some US forces under the political control of the alliance.

Insofar as Washington and Tokyo look to reinforce Australia's indirect treaty obligations to the defence of Japan, they will need to pay greater attention to the way Australia too should be reflected in institutional arrangements.

An expectation of Australian commitment to the defence of Japan warrants involving Australia in US–Japan bilateral discussions on this issue.

Some 67 years after Australia and the United States signed the ANZUS Treaty, their defence cooperation remains close in the realms of intelligence- sharing and out-of-area military operations, especially in the Middle East.

The rise of China as a great power in Asia, however, now presses the long- dormant strategic question of what the treaty should mean in the Asia-Pacific region itself.

Negotiating a strategic policy framework to guide peacetime influence and crisis management; developing joint command arrangements for alliance forces; and examining the political and military aspects of the defence of Australia and US long-range operations from the continent will enable the United States and Australia to work together to reduce the likelihood of an attack, and react effectively to one should it occur.

By linking practical cooperation to detailed understandings of their treaty commitments, the two allies would not just transform their defence relationship; they would now, finally, complete the construction of their alliance.

This was the conclusion of Frühling's recently published article entitled "Is ANZUS really an Alliance? Aligning the US and Australia, published in Survival and is republished with permission of the author.

The full article can be found here:

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