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India's Security Cooperation with Myanmar: Prospect and Retrospect

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Introduction

In the first-ever visit to Myanmar² by an Indian defence minister, A K Antony travelled to Nay Pyi Taw for two days from 21 January 2013. Antony's trip to Myanmar followed the visit by Manmohan Singh to that country in May 2012, the first by an Indian prime minister in nearly 25 years. Although no major agreements were signed during his visit, Antony's brief sojourn in Myanmar underlined Delhi's political commitment to deepen security cooperation between the two countries. India and Myanmar have had defence contacts going back to the early-1990s, when India began a constructive engagement with the military rulers of Myanmar. The scope of the defence engagement was, however, significantly constrained by the international isolation of Myanmar and India's own ambivalence about Myanmar's internal political situation. The political reforms in Myanmar since 2011 and the growing international engagement with this important eastern neighbour have freed Delhi from some of the earlier constraints. The paper locates India's defence diplomacy with Myanmar in a historical perspective, reviews the expansion of bilateral security cooperation in the last two decades and examines the near-term prospects.

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² Both terms, Myanmar and Burma, are used in this paper.

The Colonial Era

The series of conflicts known as the Anglo-Burmese Wars from early- to late-19th century resulted in the Raj seizing different territories of the Kingdom of Burma and eventually annexing the whole nation as part of British India.³ The years that followed saw the integration of Burma and its economy with undivided India and its economy; and the burden of defending Burma naturally fell on the Raj. The separation of Burma from the Raj in 1937 did not in any way reduce the responsibilities of the Raj in defending what was its large eastern flank. With British India establishing comfortable relations with Siam that borders Burma, there was little concern in Calcutta (and later Delhi) of a threat to the Raj from the East. The weakening of the Chinese empire limited any potential threats from the north. The Second World War, however, shattered the quiescence on the eastern front.

The fall of Singapore and the rapid advances of Japanese armed forces almost to the doorstep of India in the Second World War underlined the huge strategic significance of Burma. Located between India and China, and between the subcontinent and the East, Burma became critical to the new theatre that was widely described as CBI (China-Burma-India). The Southeast Asia Command was set up by the Allies to push the Japanese out of Myanmar; and undivided India contributed nearly 750,000 troops. Burma also provided the backdoor to China that let the Allies supply the Chongqing government in the fight against Japanese occupation. The American General Joseph Stilwell built the famous Ledo Road from India to Yunnan through northern Burma.⁴

Writing during the Second World War and looking ahead to the security of the region after the decolonisation of the Subcontinent which was then on the cards, the Indian historian and diplomat K M Panikkar highlighted the indivisibility of Indian and Burmese security: “the defence of Burma is in fact the defence of India, and it is India’s primary concern no less than Burma’s to see that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma”.⁵ Panikkar was convinced that Burma was not in a position to defend itself and the country’s domination by another power would be disastrous for India. Panikkar also understood that post-colonial nationalisms would make substantial defence cooperation between Delhi and Rangoon difficult. Yet, he was confident that the logic of a defence union will suit Delhi and Rangoon. What emerged, however, was a more complex story of India-Burma defence cooperation after the Second World War.

³ For a comprehensive historical account, see Htin Aung, *The Stricken Peacock: Anglo-Burmese Relations, 1752-1948* (Lieden: M. Nijhoff, 1965).

⁴ See Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), pp. 351-404; for a history of the road to Burma, see Leslie Anders, *The Ledo Road: General Joseph W. Stilwell’s Highway to China* (Oklahoma; University of Nebraska Press, 1965)

⁵ K.M. Panikkar, *The Future of South East Asia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943), p. 45.

Nehru-Nu Friendship Treaty

The decolonisation of India and Burma in the late-1940s set the stage for redefining the framework of their bilateral relations, including defence ties. The Indian national movement strongly supported the aspirations of Burmese people for separation from the Raj and independence from Britain. The Indian National Congress, in its very first session in 1885, opposed the annexation of Upper Burma, and its leaders including Mahatma Gandhi strongly backed the Burmese nationalist demand for separation from the Raj.⁶ The strong bonds of friendship between Jawaharlal Nehru and Burma's first premier U Nu provided the basis for managing the transition to nationalist rule. While Burma sought to reclaim its national economy from foreigners, the large Indian population present in the country was badly affected. Nehru did not let the issue derail the bilateral ties. India and Burma also shared the commitment to empower the newly liberated states, articulate their independent viewpoints on world affairs and create an area of peace in Asia amidst the then-unfolding Cold War.

Panikkar had argued that a "long-term alliance between India and Burma" would be advantageous for both countries. He considered and rejected two potential arguments against a strategic union between the two countries. He argued that the massive difference in the sizes of the two populations and the emerging Burmese nationalism could raise questions about India's dominance over Burma and might undermine the potential defence partnership between the two. He argued that the resources and location of Burma would make it so important for India that it could not afford to sour the relationship and that it was in India's interest to make a success of voluntary security association between the two.⁷ On his part, Nehru seemed fully conscious of Burma's geopolitical significance and the need for great patience and understanding in building a long-term partnership with Burma.

The severe internal security threats faced by Burma in the immediate aftermath of independence provided the context for substantive Indian military assistance to Rangoon. Immediately after independence Rangoon confronted major insurrections by the Burmese Communist Party, ethnic Karen and other militias in 1949. Rangoon was under direct threat from the rebel forces. Nu sought military assistance from the India and other Commonwealth nations as well as the United States. Nehru helped convene a meeting of the Commonwealth representatives in Delhi in late-February 1949. While being empathetic to Nu's request, the meeting suggested that Burma reconcile its differences with the Karens and offered the good offices of the Commonwealth for talks on reconciliation. Rejecting the proposition as an unwanted interference in Burmese affairs, Nu reached out again to Nehru. Facilitating eventual Commonwealth assistance, and working with Pakistan and Ceylon to strengthen the hand of Rangoon, India also provided direct bilateral

⁶ Bimla Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1960), pp. 36-38.

⁷ Panikkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-50

military and financial assistance to Burma that was acknowledged with much grace by Nu once the situation was brought under control.⁸ The Indian assistance prevented the fall of Rangoon to rebels and included the supply of six Dakota transport aircraft to Burma.⁹ Speaking in the Indian Parliament in March 1950, Nehru declared that India's support to Burma was not about interfering in the internal affairs of its neighbour. "It is not our purpose and is not right for us to interfere in any way with other countries, but whenever possible, we give such help as we can to our friends, without any element of interference".¹⁰

Beyond immediate crisis management, Nehru and Nu sought to put the bilateral relationship on a firmer footing. Nu apparently wanted an explicit agreement for military cooperation but Nehru sought to keep the defence ties informal and flexible. The idea of defence and security cooperation, however, is hinted at in the peace and friendship treaty that Nehru and Nu signed in July 1951. Article IV says: "The two States agree that their representatives shall meet from time to time and as often as occasion requires to exchange views on matters of common interest and to consider ways and means for mutual cooperation in such matters."¹¹ Article II outlines a broader sentiment declaring that "there shall be everlasting peace and unalterable friendship between the two states who shall ever strive to strengthen and develop further [the] cordial relations [already] existing between the peoples of the two countries".

Seen from the perspective of Delhi, the treaty would seem akin to the kind of security treaties that Nehru had signed with Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim during 1949-50. The language of Article II in the treaty with Burma is entirely similar to the one found in the other three treaties. More fundamentally, it could be argued that much as Britain had developed a treaty system to secure the subcontinent from external threats, Nehru too had to structure a similar system. At the same time Nehru understood that Myanmar was very much unlike those three Himalayan kingdoms and had to be approached very differently. Unlike those Himalayan kingdoms towards which Nehru adopted the British protectorate framework, the Burmese Republic became India's partner in articulating Asia's voice on the international stage. Therefore, the security clauses were subtler and the Indo-Burmese defence cooperation was part of a larger effort to create an area of peace in Asia. It is important to note that the India-Burma friendship treaty was signed at around the same time as both countries concluded similar agreements with Indonesia. The three countries became the most vocal proponents of Asian identity in the early-1950s.¹² While all three were votaries of non-alignment and opposition to the emerging military blocs in the East

⁸ See Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 186.

⁹ Soe Myint, *Burma File: A Question of Democracy* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish), p.89.

¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1974), pp.292-293.

¹¹ Available at < <http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1951/12.html>>

¹² The India-Burma agreement was signed on 7 July 1951; India-Indonesia accord on 3 March 1951; and Indonesia and Burma signed their agreement on 31 March 1951.

and the West, they also understood the importance of greater military cooperation among themselves. However, with the passage of time and the growing focus in Delhi and Rangoon on questions arising from the impact of the Cold War on Asia, the salience of the special security ties at the bilateral level steadily diminished.¹³

The China Factor

India's current defence diplomacy towards Myanmar and their broader political engagement are widely viewed through the prism of its rivalry with China. India's Defence Minister Antony's visit to Nay Pyi Taw has been projected in the media as part of this rivalry.¹⁴ Yet when they became independent in the late-1940s, it was India that loomed large over Myanmar. But Indian strategists were conscious of the historic links between China and Myanmar and the re-emergence of China as a power of consequence after the Second World War. Panikkar also foresaw that the rise of China would complicate India's strategic calculus in Myanmar and Southeast Asia. China's "mere existence as a great military power on the borders of Burma", Panikkar argued, "and the increasing importance she will attach to the Burma Road and access to Rangoon, and the dynamics of Chinese population problems in relation to Burma and Malaya will create grave complications in India's foreign policy".¹⁵ The triumph of the Communist Party of China in the civil war and its establishment of a people's republic in Beijing became an important factor in the evolution of political relations between India and Burma.

The emergence of China as a communist state generated deep anxieties all across Asia; Delhi and Rangoon were no exceptions. With communist insurgencies raging in both India and Burma, there was incentive for Delhi and Rangoon to consult each other. The initial logic of bilateral defence cooperation was driven by the same consideration. At the same time, Nehru and Nu had to come to terms with the fact that they should actively seek a working relationship with communist China, a neighbour of both India and Burma. The two also concurred on the proposition that they had no interest in supporting Western efforts to isolate China. Nehru had agreed to Burma's request to be the first to recognise the People's Republic of China and India soon followed.¹⁶ A series of developments relating to China since then have had an effect on political and security cooperation between India and Burma.

¹³ Uma Shankar Singh, *Burma and India, 1948-1962* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1979), p 63.

¹⁴ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India, Myanmar seek closer ties with an eye on China", *Defense News*, 22 January 2013; see also Press Trust of India, "Myanmar's ties with India, Japan and Western countries concern China", *Times of India*, 6 January 2013.

¹⁵ Panikkar, *op. cit.*, pp.35-36.

¹⁶ K.M. Panikkar, *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), p. 66.

One issue was the fallout of the Chinese civil war in Burma. Rangoon was deeply concerned at the presence of Kuomintang troops—the stragglers from the civil war who drifted into Burma—on its territory. Rangoon objected to the transgression of its frontier by the PLA in pursuit of its defeated rivals. When Rangoon went to the United Nations in 1953 for international support, India strongly backed the resolution, demanding disarmament, internment and evacuation of foreign troops. Speaking in the debate, India’s Permanent Representative Krishna Menon said, “What hurts Burma hurts us equally. We have no military alliance but Burma is closely linked to us and it is naturally of great concern to us that she should suffer”.¹⁷ As Rangoon and Delhi pushed the Western powers to get the Formosa (now Taiwan) government to evacuate the Chinese nationalists who were in Burma, China had every reason to be pleased.

The improvement in Sino-Burmese relations during the mid-1950s was tested in 1956 amidst reports of the PLA’s incursions into Burma in pursuit of the nationalist troops. Nu sought Indian assistance, and Nehru asked the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to discuss the problems on the frontier with Nu; Zhou accepted the advice.¹⁸ By the turn of the 1960s though, India’s ties with China were headed south and Sino-Burmese ties on the upswing. As tensions on the border with India rose, China signed a boundary settlement with Burma in 1960 that generated much unhappiness in Delhi. Rangoon sought to placate Nehru, but what irritated him was the suggestion that India should emulate Burma in resolving the boundary dispute with China. Of special concern to Nehru was the map attached to the agreement that conformed to Chinese territorial claims against India at the tri-junction with Burma.¹⁹ Burma’s neutrality during the Sino-Indian border clashes of 1962 also shocked the political classes in Delhi that had gone out of the way to support Burma in the preceding years.

During this period, China offered its first aid package to Burma and began to purchase rice at higher than market prices. Burma also discussed the possibilities of facilitating the transit of goods produced in Yunnan. The idea would not make much progress in the 1950s, but it acquired great traction by the turn of the 21st century. The Sino-Burmese warmth, however, was disturbed once again during the years of the Cultural Revolution that rocked China for nearly a decade from the mid-1960s. Meanwhile India and Burma signed an agreement in 1967 to delimit and demarcate their 1643 km land boundary. The China factor came to the fore again in the late-1980s, when Burma’s military rulers drew close to Beijing in the aftermath of their crackdown on the pro-democracy movement and the resulting international condemnation. India’s strong support to the pro-democracy movement increased the political distance between Delhi and Rangoon. But as Burma found itself isolated and China’s influence began to grow rapidly, Delhi reviewed its policy and moved towards ‘constructive engagement’ with the military regime.

¹⁷ Cited in Uma Shankar Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-65.

¹⁸ Butwell, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁹ Uma Shankar Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-79.

Security cooperation was at the heart of India's new engagement with Burma since the early-1990s.

Security Cooperation: Incremental Advance

Scholars have identified many drivers of India's intensive outreach to Burma in the last two decades. These include the competition with China for influence, access to natural resources, connectivity to India's Northeast, and building a land bridge to Southeast Asia. These factors are indeed important, but none of them more consequential for India than the imperatives of border management. While the China factor certainly shapes the overall strategic environment in which India will have to pursue its relations with Myanmar, Delhi's approach in many sectors has an autonomous logic of its own. Having inherited a complex frontier with restive minorities that were not fully integrated with their respective new nation-states, both India and Myanmar confronted quite early on the problems of securing their borders and recognised the importance of bilateral cooperation.

After India outlined a policy of constructive engagement with the military in Myanmar in the early-1990s, cooperation between the security forces on both sides of the border has steadily deepened. To be sure, there were many initial glitches. When the two armies were conducting an important joint operation—code-named Operation Golden Bird—in 1995, the President of India announced that Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, was chosen for the 1993 Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding. The Burmese army suspended the operations. India then moved to a more consistent position of engagement with the Burmese armed forces.²⁰ While India stepped up its efforts to improve connectivity with Myanmar, develop road links through Myanmar to Thailand and beyond, and encouraged its companies to take up projects in Myanmar, security cooperation remained the most sustained feature of the bilateral relationship.

The joint and coordinated campaigns against the insurgents on both sides of the border since the mid-1990s have been rooted in the shared political understanding and confidence that neither side would give shelter to elements hostile to the other. On other borders of India, with Pakistan and Bangladesh, Delhi's strategy had focused on fencing, in the absence of requisite cooperation from its neighbours. In the case of Myanmar, Delhi would focus on prevailing through cooperation with Nay Pyi Taw's security forces.²¹ The general assessment is that the security cooperation between India and Myanmar has been a major success. "The drastic reduction in

²⁰ Soe Myint, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

²¹ Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Myanmar and India's Northeast: Border Cooperation, Better Connectivity and Economic Integration", IPCS Article no. 3788 (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, January 10, 2013.)

insurgency-related violence in Manipur and Nagaland—states sharing borders with Myanmar—has allowed New Delhi and Nay Pyi Taw to explore policy options to seal the gains”.²² These include stronger institutional exchanges between local governments and military units across the border, arms supply and capacity building. The initial focus on security cooperation on the land frontier has steadily been complemented by maritime cooperation.

The institutional exchanges have intensified over the last decade to include all the major stakeholders on both sides—including the paramilitary forces, the armies, and the defence and interior ministries. Frequent high-level exchanges at the national level have been complemented by local liaison among the officials at the border. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Myanmar in 2012, the two sides chose to expand their security cooperation to a more comprehensive partnership for development cooperation in the border regions. Manmohan Singh and Thein Sein signed a Memorandum of Understanding on India-Myanmar Border Area Development that would help promote prosperity along their shared frontiers. In the joint statement issued at the end of Manmohan Singh’s visit, the two sides identified “the need for special focus on the development and prosperity of the people in bordering areas”, agreed on cooperation “to bring about overall socio-economic development in the border areas by undertaking both infrastructure development and micro-economic projects, including upgradation of roads and construction of schools, health centres, bridges, agriculture and related training activities”.²³ The framework detailed in the MoU on border area development is a new approach, and it remains to be seen how the two sides will implement this.

While recognising the importance of non-traditional security, India has also slowly expanded its focus on hard security cooperation. There has been greater frequency of exchanges by senior military officials. The three service chiefs were in Myanmar within a span of 18 months during 2011-13. “These visits and other exchanges”, according to a statement in Delhi following Antony’s visit to Myanmar, “had provided each side a better understanding of mutual concerns, needs and strengths”.²⁴ Although there were no specific agreements, the two sides reportedly discussed the possibilities of greater Indian support for building up the capacities of Myanmar’s armed forces. Media reports quoting defence ministry officials have said Delhi is willing to respond to requests from Myanmar for across-the-board expansion of training opportunities in India.²⁵ Upgrading of Myanmar’s military equipment has been another item on the bilateral agenda. During a visit to Myanmar in 2006, the chief of Indian Air Force reportedly offered to

²² Ibid.

²³ See the joint statement issued at the end of the visit; available at , <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=84517>

²⁴ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, “India and Myanmar should work together to address common concerns: Antony”, New Delhi, 22 January 2013.

²⁵ Rajat Pandit, “Now, Antony headed for Myanmar to bolster defence ties”, Times of India, 5 January 2013.

modernise the avionics in Myanmar's fighter inventory. India also had plans to establish a naval aviation training centre in Myanmar.²⁶

Of special importance to India has been the expansion of naval engagement with Myanmar. While the initial and enduring Indian focus has been on cooperation between the armies and security forces along their long border, the maritime significance of Myanmar was not lost on the Indian defence decision-makers. Reports of a Chinese base in the Cocos Islands owned by Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal generated much public awareness of maritime issues in the Bay of Bengal.²⁷ Myanmar was quick to dispel India's concerns. It offered Delhi access to the Cocos Islands and let its officials see for themselves the inaccuracy of those reports. This episode and the Chinese plans to develop a commercial port at Sittwe on the Arakan coast triggered strong interest in the Indian Navy for sustained engagement with Myanmar. This has covered frequent port calls by India's naval ships, the negotiation of turn-around arrangements for Indian ships while transiting to the Malacca Straits, the inclusion of Myanmar Navy in the biennial 'Milan' exercises in the Andaman Sea, coordinated naval patrols to secure the long maritime frontier between the two countries in the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Navy's participation in the humanitarian relief operations after Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar in 2008.²⁸

Transfer of Indian arms to Myanmar is a more interesting but controversial issue. India's supplies of military hardware "ranged from Islander maritime patrol aircraft, naval gun-boats to 105mm light artillery guns, mortars, grenade launchers and rifles" as well as non-lethal equipment including radars.²⁹ More recently India has reportedly offered the sale of military helicopters to Myanmar and has agreed to train Myanmar pilots.³⁰ The supply of Indian hardware has unsurprisingly invited political controversy. At a time when Myanmar's military regime was isolated and was the target of many international sanctions, the Indian supply of arms was criticised by the international community as well as by Myanmar's political activists. Delhi responded by arguing that much of the equipment it had supplied was non-lethal and defensive in nature. At the end of 2012, India was accused of transferring weapons, bought from Sweden, to Myanmar's armed forces in violation of European sanctions. These weapons have been reportedly used by the Myanmar forces against Kachin rebels in the north of the country.³¹ While

²⁶ Vijay Sakhuja, "India and Myanmar: Choices for Military Cooperation", ICWA Issue Brief (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, January 2013).

²⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of the issue, see Andrew Selth, "Burma, China and the Myth of Military Bases", *Asian Security*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2007, pp. 279-307.

²⁸ Sakhuja, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Pandit, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "Amid warming ties, India may give Helos to Myanmar", *Defense News*, 26 November 2012.

³¹ David Stout, "Indian officials accused of providing Burma with embargoed weapons", *Democratic Voice of Burma*, 25 January 2013, available at <http://www.dvb.no/news/indian-officials-accused-of-providing-burma-with-embargoed-weapons/25199>

India promised to investigate the issue, some Indian analysts are cautioning against entering into a substantive arms supply relationship with Myanmar at a time when its armed forces are continuing operations against a number of rebel groups. They suggest, instead, that India “work towards facilitating a rapprochement among the Burmans and other ethnic groups”.³²

Towards Finding a Niche

Since the mid-1990s, India’s security cooperation with Myanmar has expanded, in a steady and incremental manner in scope as well as substance. As we noted, security cooperation between India and Myanmar is not new and is rooted in the reality of geography and shared history. The nature of the current security engagement is very different from the defence engagement in the late 1940s and 1950s that was one-sided and based on Indian paternalism rooted in the Raj legacy. By the turn of the 1960s, Myanmar became non-aligned in its approach to India and China. Today, India’s security cooperation with Myanmar is rooted in shared interests and mutual benefit.

At a general level, India’s contemporary engagement with its eastern neighbour has been marked by a big gap between potential and performance.³³ In the defence field, in particular, structural constraints in Delhi have limited India’s record on the ground. These include the absence of an effective institutional framework for security diplomacy, the inadequate defence industrial base, and the inability of the Indian government and the private sector to undertake and operate critical dual-use infrastructure like ports. As Myanmar seeks to modernise its military, India’s emphasis for quite some time to come is likely to be on training and capacity building rather than arms supply.

In terms of objectives, India’s main goal will continue to be the stabilisation of its land frontiers with Myanmar. What started in the early-1990s as simple cooperation in the area of counter-insurgency across the frontiers has been transformed into a more comprehensive engagement on ‘border management’. This transformation is now being reinforced with the ambitious plan for bringing development into the restive areas. As India’s stakes in the maritime space rise, Myanmar’s importance in India’s naval calculus is likely to steadily rise. As the major powers begin to see the eastern Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific as a single maritime theatre, the Indo-Pacific, the Andaman Sea is gaining strategic salience. Along with the South China Sea, it forms the critical link between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

³² Gautam Sen, “Cooperation Between Indian and Myanmar Armed Forces: Need to Move Away from a Weapons & Equipment Supply-Based Relationship”, IDSA Comment (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 15 January 2013.)

³³ For a critique of Indian engagement, see Renaud Egretau, “India’s Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration than Success?”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 48, No. 6, November/December 2008, pp. 936-957.

As China seeks to protect its vital sea lines of communication through the Malacca Straits amidst fears of American efforts to disrupt them, and develops alternative routes to the Indian Ocean, Myanmar's waters in the Bay of Bengal are likely to become contested zones in the coming years.³⁴ Myanmar provides the natural outlet to the sea for the provinces in Southwest China as well as a route to import oil and natural gas into China by skirting the Malacca Straits. The emerging Chinese interest in the Bay of Bengal has aroused concerns in India. If China is focused on North-South connectivity through Myanmar, India is looking at developing East-West connectivity through the land and waters of Myanmar. Realists in Delhi have begun to recognise that India's objectives cannot be about preventing deeper cooperation between China and Myanmar but expanding India's own engagement with the eastern neighbour.

It is not a surprise that India's recent security diplomacy with Myanmar has too often been framed in terms of a rivalry with China.³⁵ While a rising China does shape the regional environment, Indian security cooperation with Myanmar, as we have noted, has its own logic and limitations. While there is an undeniable element of rivalry between India and China, their competition in Myanmar has never been symmetric.³⁶ As its international isolation comes to an end, Myanmar is diversifying its great power relations, and it no longer has to rely on the goodwill of China and India or seek to play one against the other. The United States' outreach to Myanmar and the prospect of resuming defence contacts between the two set a very different context to the geopolitics of Myanmar.³⁷ Myanmar's incipient defence contacts with the West, its participation in the construction of an ASEAN defence community, and its expanding engagement with Japan and Russia tend to liberate India's own security diplomacy with Nay Pyi Taw. For, Delhi no longer needs to bear the presumed burden of balancing China in Myanmar. The threat to India, as Panikkar argued 70 years ago, is from the potential dominance of Myanmar by another power. The emergence of a vibrant and independent Myanmar embedded in a strong regional institution like the ASEAN, therefore, is in India's strategic interest. The reality is that, since partition and independence, India has not been in a position to guarantee this outcome on its own in Myanmar. An outward-looking and self-assured Myanmar will have enough common ground with India to facilitate deeper security cooperation, the foundation for which has already been laid. The real challenge for India lies in improving its own defence

³⁴ Vijay Sakhujia, "Bay of Bengal Littorals in Chinese Strategic Calculus", *China Brief*, Vol. 10, No. 14, 9 July 2010.

³⁵ See, for example, J. Mohan Malik, "Sino-Indian Rivalry in Myanmar: Implications for Regional Security", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 16, No. 2, September 1994, pp. 137-56. For a more recent analysis in the same framework, see Harsh V Pant, "China Shakes up the Maritime Balance in the Indian Ocean", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No.3, May-June 2012, pp. 364-68.

³⁶ For a reflection on the Burmese disappointments with India's engagement, see Thant Myint U, *Where China Meets India: Burma and the new Crossroads of Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

³⁷ Gwen Robinson, "US courts military contact with Myanmar", *Financial Times*, 20 September 2012; Sam Holmes, "U.S. Military visits Myanmar, Stepping Toward New Role", *Wall Street Journal*, 21 October 2012.

capacities to respond to some of Myanmar's security needs and demands and emerge as a reliable partner for Nay Pyi Taw in a few specific areas.

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