

India-China-Russia 'Axis'?

China has long been fanatically obsessed with its disputed border with India, suspicious of New Delhi's tactics to delay border settlement once and for all, and favourably inclined toward Pakistan. But China also needs at least a neutralised India to achieve its objectives in the post-Soviet era. Come what may China has been consistent in advocating the theory of multi-polar world ever since the demise of the Soviet Union in the '90s, albeit the reality is something else. Despite the decline of dollar empire there are major and not-so major powers that would like to see America as the sole superpower though China itself offers itself as a candidate for the superpower status through its ever growing global economic clout and military might. The American presence in international market and security mechanism is so omnipotent that so many regional groupings that have sprang up in the post-Soviet phase, look directionless at the moment. America is not their declared target and yet they cannot really advance without challenging America's violent politics. What is described so frequently in the mainstream media as the emerging India-China-Russia axis in view of their periodic deliberations over strategic cooperation in the region chronically plagued by non-traditional security threats emanating from religion based insurgency, is unlikely to develop, both horizontally and vertically, as a true axis power in the near future.

While issuing the joint communique the foreign ministers of India, China and Russia after their 9th meeting in Bangalore on October, 27, 2009 reiterated their resolve to improve trilateral cooperation, explored new avenues for deepening and strengthening this 'axis' interaction on various issues for the benefit of the people of the three countries and peace and stability in the region.

Though it was the 9th summit, they succeeded only in discussing ways in which the meeting of this forum could be more meaningful to the business communities in the time ahead so that new opportunities may be grasped to expand trade and investment. At a time when bilateral understanding between India and China over the border question is not that good, it is difficult to expect much from this trilateral exercise.

The hard fact is that India, China and Russia with 20 percent of the global landmass and 39 percent of the global population are yet to be recognised by the major players as crucial factors in international politics. What all they did at the Bangalore conclave was to take stock of international shift in power equation in recent years and welcome the decision made at the Pittsburgh meeting to designate G-20 as the premier forum for global economic cooperation. The new players—India, China and Russia—urged the G-20 club to speedily change in IMF quota share of at least 5 percent to emerging market and developing countries and a significant increase of at least 3 percent voting power in the World Bank for developing and transition countries, while avoiding erosion in voting shares of developing countries. In other words the so-called trilateral 'axis' is urging US, in effect, to make their presence felt in anything global. And Uncle Sam seems to be obliging.

One reason China is showing interest to evolving a kind of working arrangement with India and Russia despite periodic border irritations with India

is to strengthen Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which is seen by many as a countervailing weight to American economic and strategic offensive. Not for nothing both China and Russia welcomed in no uncertain terms India's constructive engagement in SCO activities. But the prospects of Shanghai house becoming a challenging force to American authority anytime soon seem bleak. India continues to downplay alleged intrusions by Chinese troops into disputed territories while pretending ignorance about construction of dams on the Brahmaputra river. On the Kashmir issue Pakistan gets China's tacit support and India virtually looks helpless to counter China-Pakistan land deal in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, in any form, diplomatic or otherwise.

Kashmir is one of those imperial legacies that still blight international relations. But what worries New Delhi, Beijing and Moscow most at the moment is America's escalation of war in Afghanistan and its spill-over effect in Pakistan. As things are both Afghanistan and Kashmir appear to the Pakistanis to be nearby domestic issues. And it has compounded the security problem in the region beyond Pakistan's border.

One area where all these three countries hope to advance their trilateral cooperation is fight against religion-based insurgency, more precisely islam-oriented insurgency. And India is most vulnerable to ethnic and religion-based insurgencies. With conflicting interests having different degrees, at play, the much publicised and yet less understood India-China-Russia 'axis' is unlikely to take any concrete shape anytime soon. □□□