

IPCS SPECIAL REPORT

No. 59, October 2008

Lotus & the Dragon

BJP's China Policy

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BJP'S CHINA POLICY

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There is remarkable continuity in the BJP's foreign policy, especially with regard to China. China as a factor looms large in India's strategic calculations. India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War can be termed a watershed as it shocked the Jana Sangh out of its Pakistani obsession and forced it to appreciate the threat posed by China. In fact, greater attention was paid to China in the post-1962 discourse.

The 1998 nuclear tests were undoubtedly an exercise in jingoist chest-thumping and in pacifying bourgeois India's status aspirations. But, the rationale of overt nuclear weaponization lay in what Prime Minister Vajpayee termed as "the deteriorating security environment" caused by China helping Pakistan to become a "covert nuclear weapons state." Vajpayee further labelled the "unresolved border problem"

Today, unlike in 2003, the BJP takes a hard line on Tibet and asserts that "India's security is inextricably entwined with what happens in Tibet" and that the "Government of India must come out clearly on the side of the people of Tibet in this hour of their oppression and trial."

A maiden spell in power has introduced nuance and maturity in the BJP's China policy, influenced as it was by the Jana Sangh's militant nationalism. By taking the BJP's policy discourse on China into account, it is clear that the party appreciates the multifaceted opportunities and challenges that will present themselves in the conduct of India-China relations.

An Overview

Since its inception, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has projected itself as a nationalist party that promises the 'vigorous' pursuit of India's national interests and one that seeks a more assertive role for India in the international system as befits 'its great and ancient civilisation'. Nationalist overtones characterise all aspects of the party's discourse. While populist slogans such as "Shaktishali Bharat ke liye Shaktishali BJP"¹ (A strong BJP for a powerful India) may not serve as accurate indicators of policy positions, they do point to an explicit consensus from the party's brain trust to its grassroots *karyakartas*² on the ideology of nationalism as the guiding principle of the party.

It is this consensus that forms the backbone of much of the BJP's foreign policy thinking. Nationalism, in the context of foreign policy, essentially equates to an explicit emphasis on national security issues and territorial integrity. Thus, it can be argued that there is remarkable continuity in the BJP's foreign policy, especially with regard to China. China as a factor looms large in India's strategic calculations. The psychological ramifications of India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War and the unresolved border dispute continue to challenge the Indian policymaker in crafting a credible China policy. It is relatively easy to judge the strategic stance of a nationalist government against a weak state like Pakistan. However, this article aims to analyse how the nationalists of the BJP have acted and intend to act

¹ "BJP Vision Document 2004", http://www.bjp.org/Press/mar_3104a.htm

² Party Workers

towards a state with significant superiority in war-fighting capabilities, coercive diplomatic resources and organizational capacity.

I The Jana Sangh: The BJP's Forbearer

To fully comprehend the BJP's China policy, attention must be focused on the foreign policy worldview of the party's political predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh whose members created the BJP in 1980. The Jana Sangh, established in 1951, formed part of the conservative opposition to the Nehru-dominated Indian National Congress in newly Independent India. The corollary of this right-wing ideology, specifically in foreign policy terms, was the viewing of all external relations through the prism of militant nationalism. The fact that nationalism is at the crux of the BJP's foreign policy can be attributed to the jingoism of its predecessor. Moreover, unlike other right wing opposition like the Swatantra Party, the Jana Sangh's basic foreign policy instinct was decidedly chauvinist and hawkish. Statements such as "borders are meant to be defended, not debated"³ typify the Jana Sangh's chauvinism and illustrate the cachet that the party reserved for force as an instrument of foreign policy. Although Jana Sangh's foreign policy ideologues did recognise the menace posed by China, they reserved much of their jingoist ire for Pakistan. This point is illustrated by the fact that while the Jana Sangh called for the termination of all diplomatic ties with China and for the recognition of the Tibetan government in exile, they went as far as making the "annulment of Partition"⁴ and thereby the dissolution of the Pakistani state as their ultimate foreign policy objective⁵. It is necessary to include a caveat here: the Jana Sangh's remoteness from power could have led them to the adoption of this "extreme" stance in order to distinguish

itself from the incumbent Congress. Nonetheless, this does not detract from the central point of the limited, Pak-centric strategic outlook of the Jana Sangh, one that failed to identify the strategic challenge posed by a much larger and better equipped neighbour.

However, India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War can be termed a watershed as it shocked the Jana Sangh out of its Pakistani obsession and forced it to appreciate the threat posed by China. In fact, greater attention was paid to China in the post-1962 discourse with the Jana Sangh condemning the Indian Government for a China policy that "has been right from the beginning unrealistic and based on appeasement".⁶ As is expected of a jingoist polity, the Jana Sangh had always been vociferous about a "broad programme of military preparedness."⁷ But in the aftermath of 1962, the Jana Sangh called for the development of an indigenous nuclear weapons arsenal. In fact, the party mouthpiece, *Organiser* condemned the "eunuch government...in its ahimsic idiocy"⁸ for the "criminal folly"⁹ of not pursuing nuclear weapons. What is most significant about this entire line of thought is that the Jana Sangh identified China as the rationale for a hypothetical nuclear weapons programme arguing that "India would be able to give them a fighting reply and blast their aggressive designs."¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, the Jana Sangh was altogether exultant when India conducted its "peaceful nuclear explosion experiment"¹¹ (PNE) in Rajasthan on 18th May 1974. *Motherland*, a newspaper

⁶ *Organiser*, 1st February, 1965

⁷ Erdman L, Howard, "The Foreign Policy Views of the Indian Right," *Pacific Affairs*, 1966

⁸ *Organiser*, 26th October, 1964

⁹ *Organiser*, 26th October, 1964

¹⁰ *Organiser*, 1st February, 1965

¹¹ Quoted in George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 179

³ *Organiser*, 11 May, 1964

⁴ *Organiser*, 9th March, 1964

⁵ *Organiser*, 9th March, 1964

allied to the pro-bomb Jana Sangh, carried the following jubilant proclamation: "India Goes Nuclear at Last"¹². LK Advani, President of the Jana Sangh, stated that "It's one of the most heartening bits of news in recent years"¹³. The party's Central Working Committee went as far as issuing a resolution declaring 18th May to be a "red letter day in Indian history"¹⁴. Moreover, the party saluted the scientists who had "placed India on the nuclear map of the world"¹⁵

It seemed however, that power and its attendant responsibilities tamed the earlier bluster of the Jana Sangh when it came to office in the avatar of the grand Janata coalition government in 1977. The party struck a decidedly gradualist tone on the visit of Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then Minister of External Affairs to Beijing in 1979, arguing that it was "too much to expect a breakthrough on the border issue."¹⁶ Furthermore, it noted that "the two sides have taken significant steps [on resolving the unsettled border]".¹⁷ This sort of diplomatese stands completely distinct from the Jana Sangh's earlier tirades on China. The party even sought to marginalise the hawks within the Janata fold by attacking those "Janata gentlemen who just don't want Shri Vajpayee to go to China".¹⁸ Moreover, it ridiculed them for their fantastical demands of wanting the Chinese to give up all of Tibet and not simply "being content with Aksai Chin."¹⁹

This coming from a party that advocated strict reciprocity in international relations is quite remarkable. More than anything, it establishes beyond doubt that the dominant sentiment in the party was of engaging China rather than demonizing it. However, the Chinese seemed to have paid scant attention to the Jana Sangh's new found bonhomie as they chose Vajpayee's visit as the time to invade Vietnam and 'teach it a lesson', thereby delivering a stark reminder of 1962 to the Indians. Nevertheless, with its chronic 'remoteness from power' syndrome at an end and stark geopolitical compulsions to address, the Jana Sangh finally emerged as a pragmatic foreign policy actor.

Following the collapse of the Janata government, the Jana Sangh dissolved itself and its members formed the BJP. This inheritor of the conservative Indian tradition slammed the visit to China by the Congress (I) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 as a shallow exercise to "boost his sagging political image at home"²⁰ Furthermore, the BJP accused him of handing Aksai Chin to the Chinese on a platter by mouthing platitudes about "national sentiments"²¹ on both sides. It is clear that the BJP performed the role expected of the opposition by asserting that the Prime Minister was destined to "draw a blank"²² on the substantive issue of the unsettled border and that he was likely to achieve nothing more than a "a couple of agreements on...social and cultural exchanges"²³ as a "lollypop to show the electorate."²⁴ In fact, the BJP presented a statement relating to "anti-China activities of Tibetan elements in

¹² Quoted in George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 179

¹³ Quoted in George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 179

¹⁴ Quoted in George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 179

¹⁵ Quoted in George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (University of California Press, 2002), p. 179

¹⁶ *Organiser*, December 8, 1979

¹⁷ *Organiser*, December 8, 1979

¹⁸ *Organiser*, December 8, 1979

¹⁹ *Organiser*, December 8, 1979

²⁰ "Rajiv Writes Off Aksai Chin," *Organiser*, 18 December 1988

²¹ "Rajiv Writes Off Aksai Chin," *Organiser*, 18 December 1988

²² "Rajiv Writes Off Aksai Chin," *Organiser*, 18 December 1988

²³ "Rajiv Writes Off Aksai Chin," *Organiser*, 18 December 1988

²⁴ "Surrender in Peking," *Organiser*, 1 January, 1989

India”²⁵ in a joint communiqué as an unnecessary concession and as typical of Rajiv Gandhi’s diplomatic naiveté, thereby giving China the upper hand in the bilateral relationship.

II

The BJP in Power: The NDA Era

It is with this strategic heritage, albeit a milder, more pragmatic version, with which the BJP sought to frame its China policy. Hence, a clear link can be drawn between the Jana Sangh’s strategic thought on China and the BJP’s China-specific policy in the six-year period that it governed India, leading the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). This point is illustrated by the multiple nuclear tests conducted by the BJP in 1998. In the BJP’s 1998 election manifesto, the party had expressed its concern at the People’s Republic indulging in the transfer of “advanced weapons and technologies”²⁶ to Pakistan. While the manifesto refrains from openly using the term “nuclear,” the implication is clear.

The BJP’s foreign policy intent vis-à-vis China becomes all the more transparent when attention is focused on a televised interview of the NDA’s Defence Minister, George Fernandes of the Samata Party. In polemical fashion, Fernandes termed China as India’s “potential threat number 1.”²⁷ However, he imbued this statement with a certain strategic logic. He cited an upswing in Chinese military activity in the Indian Ocean as the harbinger of a containment strategy directed against India. This signalled a shift in India’s threat perceptions and hence a concurrent shift in India’s wider geostrategy, especially her stance on nuclear weapons: “Earlier nuclear

weapons were not ruled out; today they have been ruled in.”²⁸

This shift was made patent quite dramatically by the 1998 nuclear tests when India declared itself to be a nuclear weapons state. The tests were undoubtedly an exercise in jingoist chest-thumping and in pacifying bourgeois India’s status aspirations. But, the rationale of overt nuclear weaponization lay in what Prime Minister Vajpayee termed as “the deteriorating security environment”²⁹ caused by China helping Pakistan to become a “covert nuclear weapons state.”³⁰ Vajpayee further labelled the “unresolved border problem”³¹ as contributing to the “atmosphere of distress”³² that was symptomatic of India’s relations with China. Thus, this retrospective justification alludes not only to the BJP’s recognition of China as a threat to national security, but to an undeniable ideological consistency in the formulation and implementation of China-focused policy as well.

Another major foreign policy initiative taken by the Vajpayee government was the visit of the Prime Minister to China in 2003. Displaying remarkable diplomatic naiveté, Vajpayee made a clear

²⁵ “Surrender in Peking,” *Organiser*, 1 January, 1989

²⁶ The BJP’s 1998 Manifesto, Chapter 7, (<http://www.bjp.org/manifes/chap7.htm>)

²⁷ “China is enemy No. 1: George” Express News Service, 4th May 1998, (<http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/ie/daily/19980504/12450024.html>)

²⁸ “China is enemy No. 1: George” Express News Service, 4th May 1998, (<http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/ie/daily/19980504/12450024.html>)

²⁹ Prime Minister Vajpayee’s Letter to President Clinton (<http://www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/pmletter.htm>)

³⁰ Prime Minister Vajpayee’s Letter to President Clinton (<http://www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/pmletter.htm>)

³¹ Prime Minister Vajpayee’s Letter to President Clinton (<http://www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/pmletter.htm>)

³² Prime Minister Vajpayee’s Letter to President Clinton (<http://www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/pmletter.htm>)

departure from traditional Indian ambiguity by recognizing "Tibet Autonomous Region as an inalienable part of China"³³ in exchange for China's apparent recognition of Sikkim as an Indian state. There are two reasons why this proved to be an unsatisfactory *quid pro quo*. First, Vajpayee bartered away India's prime diplomatic trump card on China and a useful 'pressure point' to push Beijing into granting territorial concessions. As the home of the Tibetan government-in-exile, India had tremendous political and moral grounds to take a line contrary to Chinese perceptions of Tibet. Second, despite this generous diplomatic gift to the Chinese, Beijing skilfully sidestepped expectations of recognizing Sikkim as 'an inalienable part of India' in turn. Rather, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to assert that Sikkim is "an enduring issue left over from history"³⁴. In other words, this was a "diplomatic fiasco"³⁵ as was pointed out by the editor of *Organiser*, a publication allied to the BJP.

III

The BJP in Opposition: The UPA Tenure

Hence, what emerges from the above deposition is that a conventional foreign policy actor, no matter how nationalist, will find itself acting in a limited geopolitical space. Nonetheless, there are signs that the BJP has learnt from historical experience and is evolving a coherent China policy in the post-2004 milieu as it finds itself sitting in the opposition against the Congress (I)-led United Progressive

Alliance (UPA). Perhaps the most detailed and contemporary exposition of the BJP's strategic thought on China can be found in a document on foreign policy and national security, released by the party's National Executive in June 2008³⁶. Unlike in 2003, the BJP takes a hard line on Tibet and asserts that "India's security is inextricably entwined with what happens in Tibet"³⁷ and that the "Government of India must come out clearly on the side of the people of Tibet in this hour of their oppression and trial."³⁸ What "come out clearly" actually entails, is left to the imagination, but it seems clear that the BJP intends to use the "Tibet card" on China one way or the other.

In fact, the BJP has been particularly vociferous in attacking the incumbent stance as "blatant appeasement towards China"³⁹. This ratcheting up of rhetoric took place in the context of a popular uprising in Tibet of March 2008 that was quelled in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The BJP even led a walk-out of the *Lok Sabha* to protest against the "hesitation [of the Government of India] to condemn the violence in Lhasa"⁴⁰. While the BJP's criticism of the ruling UPA in this circumstance is valid, a certain hypocrisy

³³ "Vajpayee visit — Foreign policy lessons from China" - G. Parthasarathy (<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2003/07/18/stories/2003071800030800.htm>)

³⁴ "Vajpayee visit — Foreign policy lessons from China" - G. Parthasarathy (<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2003/07/18/stories/2003071800030800.htm>)

³⁵ Interview with R. Balashankar, editor of the *Organiser*, *Organiser* Head Office, New Delhi, 8 September 2008.

³⁶ "BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance" (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm)

³⁷ "BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance" (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm)

³⁸ "BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance" (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm)

³⁹ "BJP slams govt's appeasement of China" 27th March 2008, (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2902634.cms>)

⁴⁰ "Foreign minister says no change in China policy, BJP walks out" 17 March 2008, (<http://www.nerve.in/news:253500135615>)

robs this critique of its full impact. As is aforementioned, it was Vajpayee who bartered away India's prime diplomatic trump card by recognising Tibet as "an inalienable part of China"⁴¹ in exchange for paltry concessions on Sikkim on his 2003 visit to Beijing. Vajpayee's 'one China policy' ended decades of useful ambiguity on the issue. In any case, Tibet remains a central issue in Sino-Indian relations and necessitates a nuanced approach from New Delhi. Arun Shourie, Disinvestment Minister in the BJP-led NDA Government is emblematic of the increasing maturity in the BJP's policy discourse on China. He has encouraged his fellow politicians to "wake up to China's ambitions and to Tibet as a potential trouble spot."⁴²

To return to the foreign policy document, the party links the "long, unsettled border" to the warning that the "PRC will transform its newly acquired economic progress into military might."⁴³ The BJP illustrates this using the examples of various high-technology military assets being consolidated by the Chinese such as the upgrading of a missile base in Qinghai province "just 1900 km North East of New Delhi,"⁴⁴ the development of solid-fuel missiles and the creation of a new nuclear submarine base on Hainan Island. While the party is correct in drawing attention to these clear military threats to India's

⁴¹ "India, China ink two agreements" *Rediff India Abroad*, (<http://ia.rediff.com/news/2003/jun/23china3.htm>), 24 June 2003

⁴² "India, China ink two agreements" *Rediff India Abroad*, (<http://ia.rediff.com/news/2003/jun/23china3.htm>), 24 June 2003

⁴³ "BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance" (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm)

⁴⁴ "BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance" (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm)

security, what is worth mentioning here is that seemingly innocent, "infrastructural" developments can have equally lethal security implications. The train that traverses heights of 16,000 feet to connect Lhasa to China proper can carry tourists, no doubt, but men and materiel for the PLA as well. The BJP document failed to address this aspect.

Yet, the central point retains focus. By placing the border dispute in the "context" of China's military modernization, the BJP quite clearly envisages a situation in which China's unceasing investment in force projection may result in an outcome detrimental to India's territorial interests. Hence, while working towards a meaningful final settlement, the centre should speed up the construction of defence infrastructure "that our forces need to repulse foreign troops in the Northeast."⁴⁵ However, it would be in the interest of the BJP to adopt a more holistic vision for the Northeast's future rather than one that is purely motivated by defence concerns. A more sustainable approach to the Northeast dilemma necessitates a long-term investment in transport links that connect India's periphery to India proper and development projects that create stakes for Northeast Indians in India's economic progress. This will serve to end the extreme geopolitical isolation of the Northeast from the Indian state that began with the partition of the Subcontinent and continues to haunt Indian strategists 60 years on.

In fact, this is the precise thesis propounded by Kiren Rijiju, the BJP MP for Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese claim Arunachal Pradesh in its entirety. Rijiju provides a simple and effective panacea to the Northeast dilemma: "Don't fear China, just do your job. Help the people of border areas with roads, schools, hospitals,

⁴⁵ "BJP National Executive - Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA's Disastrous Governance," (http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm).

telecom facilities. This is the solution.”⁴⁶ Moreover, Rijiju’s assertions that “Chinese intrusions are happening in a slow, creeping manner. Inch by inch...”⁴⁷ are a direct challenge to the Army Chief of Staff, General Deepak Kapoor’s position of rationalising the incursions by chalking them up to “different perceptions of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)”⁴⁸. Jaswant Singh, the leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha termed Gen. Kapoor’s statements “irresponsible” and “unacceptable”⁴⁹. Indeed, the BJP alleges that this disconnect is part of the UPA’s overall pusillanimity on China. It cites a catalogue of diplomatic blunders such as the failure to adequately react to “such extreme diplomatic snubs as summoning our Ambassador at 2 am”⁵⁰ and the “craven” response to China’s audacious claims over Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, the BJP advances the argument that the lack of an appropriate response to China’s military and diplomatic aggression “endangers India - for it tempts China.”⁵¹

Crucially though, Rijiju makes an important point about the prevailing foreign policy orientation of India’s security establishment. He argues that “all the brains of the Ministry of External Affairs and the think-tanks in India are obsessed with...Pakistan.”⁵² The Kashmir dispute with Pakistan takes up “the energies of our politicians and our resources.”⁵³ Thus, it would seem that the Indian establishment is suffering from the same limited, Pak-centric strategic outlook that characterised the Jana Sangh’s foreign policy discourse in the 1960s. Rijiju asserts the following, “Don’t forget that Kashmir is claimed by a small country which does not economically or militarily match India, while Arunachal is claimed by a nation far superior to India.”⁵⁴ Thus, “unless we know what China is, India is not safe”⁵⁵

IV

Policy Environment and Options

It is this strategic logic that is an understanding of China’s strategic impulses and its conception of national interest, which needs to be at the base of any BJP policy formulation on China. This is a case of mere pragmatism, not ideology. The international “reality” is such that China cannot be classified as simply an irritant neighbour, but one whose geopolitical interests are in direct conflict with that of India’s. China’s strategy is to limit India to a purely South Asian role while establishing itself as the sole pan-Asian power. It is this awareness of tying down India in South Asia that should in turn imbue a revitalised China policy rather than vision statements

⁴⁶ “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions,” *Rediff.com*, 4 March 2008 <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm>.

⁴⁷ “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions,” *Rediff.com*, 4 March 2008 <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm>.

⁴⁸ “Chinese incursions due to different perception,” *The Indian Express*, 23 February 2008, <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Chinese-incursions-due-to-different-perception-India/276320/>.

⁴⁹ “Army chief made irresponsible statements,” <http://www.business-standard.com/india/storypage.php?autono=316165> , 9th March 2008

⁵⁰ “BJP National Executive - Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA’s Disastrous Governance,” http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm.

⁵¹ “BJP National Executive- Foreign Policy- National Security and UPA’s Disastrous Governance” http://www.bjp.org/Press/june_2008/june_0208_p.htm

⁵² “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm> , 4th March 2008

⁵³ “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm> , 4th March 2008

⁵⁴ “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm> , 4th March 2008

⁵⁵ “It is time to wake up to Chinese incursions” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/04inter1.htm> , 4th March 2008

of everlasting friendship. Indian strategists need not rejoice at Beijing's recognition of India's "pre-eminence" in South Asia, as it continues to encroach on India's sphere of influence by cosying up to Kathmandu's Maoist leadership and making its presence felt in the Indian Ocean. As George Fernandes had warned, China's "string of pearls" in the Indian Ocean - a bevy of port, surveillance and reconnaissance facilities - is all part of a wider strategy of encircling India.

To reiterate what was mentioned at the beginning of this essay, China is a state with significant superiority in war-fighting capabilities, coercive diplomatic resources and organizational capacity relative to India. Thus, the only way for India to break out of the Chinese *chakryavyuha* (encirclement) is to adopt a "hedging" strategy towards China. Whilst actively cooperating with China on issues of common interest such as international trade and climate change, India needs to vigorously pursue strategic depth on China's periphery and cultivate strategic cooperation with Southeast Asian states, wary of China's military clout. Moreover, India needs to enter into close strategic cooperation with the United States, especially maritime cooperation. There is remarkable potential for India and the United States to position themselves as the chief security providers in the Indian Ocean and Malacca Straits and ensure the safety of these transport routes from terrorism and piracy. This will form the basis of a new security architecture in Asia. It is in the interest of both India and the United States to prevent Asia from being dominated by any single power whose aggressive pursuit of national interest is likely to crowd out other major players in Asian security. Whilst BJP foreign policy ideologues have spoken vociferously about the desirability of a multipolar international system⁵⁶, they must realise that the consolidation of the United States as a player in Asian security is in the Indian national interest as well.

⁵⁶ "BJP Vision Document 2004", http://www.bjp.org/Press/mar_3104a.htm

India needs to shed its historical aversion to multilateral security arrangements and fully embrace the opportunity of leading a strategic alliance of democracies in Asia. An Indo-US strategic arrangement can only aid in the comprehensive accretion of Indian National Power. Thus, the BJP needs to make the forging of closer strategic ties with the United States its top priority.

Finally, India needs to demonstrate its policy maturity on China by dealing confidently with the question of Tibet. The BJP must translate its encouraging words into action by preparing India for the post-Dalai Lama setting. It is necessary that the BJP realizes the potential of India's moral position as the home of the Tibetan government-in-exile and fosters the next generation of charismatic Tibetan leadership. Taking into account Beijing's immense insecurity on Tibet, the BJP must exploit this "pressure point" to improve India's position in the Sino-Indian relationship.

V Conclusion

This article has sought to advance the argument that nationalism is at the crux of the BJP's foreign policy as a whole and its China policy specifically. A nationalist ideology has allowed the BJP to make itself electorally synonymous with "robust nationalism and an unyielding commitment to national security".⁵⁷ This was made patent by India's dramatic nuclear weaponization in 1998 and its hawkish stance whilst in opposition. But in its search for the international reality and a viable definition of India's enlightened national interest, the BJP is faced with myriad challenges, domestic and international. As Vajpayee's diplomatic fiasco in 2003 made patent, a conventional foreign policy actor, no matter how nationalist, will find itself operating in a limited geopolitical space. But it is evident that a maiden spell

⁵⁷ "Now, Get On With It", 10 September 2008 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Editorial/Now_Get_On_With_It/articleshow/3464511.cms

in power has introduced nuance and maturity in the BJP's China policy, influenced as it was by the Jana Sangh's militant nationalism. By taking the BJP's policy discourse on China into account, it is clear that the party appreciates the multifaceted opportunities and challenges that will present themselves in the conduct of India-China relations. Perhaps Yashwant Sinha, External Affairs Minister in the NDA government put it best: "We are all for good relations with China but I would humbly suggest that good relations do not mean that we surrender."⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ "Foreign minister says no change in China policy, BJP walks out" 17 March 2008, (<http://www.nerve.in/news:253500135615>)



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