

Analysis

U.S. and India should join to balance China's rise



Reuters -- Since the Second World War, the United States spurred global economic growth and made substantial investments in Asia. Deng Xiaoping's opening up of China's economy in 1978 began China's full integration into the global economy and normalized its diplomatic relations with other countries. The resulting transformation of China's economy allowed it to ultimately challenge the supremacy of the United States. China seeks to be the preeminent power in the Western Pacific and consolidate Asia into an exclusive bloc that is deferential to Chinese national and security interests. Although China's military capabilities are not formally equal to those of the United States, it still is capable of inflicting sufficient damage to increase the cost of a conflict to the United States to an unacceptable level. China's territorial disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and its actions in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with Japan illustrated to U.S. policymakers the dangers of China's approach to its neighbors and the risks of a major conflict in the region.

In 2012, the Obama administration announced that it was going to be intensifying its focus to the Asia-Pacific in a policy popularly known as the "rebalance to Asia." The objective was to address the fact that the balance of powers in the Asia-Pacific region shifted in China's favor following the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. war on terror. The policy signaled that the US would be refocusing its interests and resources toward the Asia-Pacific region by investing and developing new capabilities, strengthening existing alliances and investing in key partnerships. This "concert of democracies" strategy involved courting democracies in the region to manage the uncertainties caused by a rising China.

Currently, it is unclear whether there will be any formal version of a policy such as the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD) that was unveiled in 2007 by the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe. But what is clear is the bi-

lateral relations between Asia's maritime democracies — India, the United States, Australia and Japan — are stronger than ever. These four countries interact regularly at a military-to-military level as well share intelligence regularly.

The United States' "rebalance to Asia" was always going to be complicated because of the special nature of the U.S. relationship with China. While the United States and China compete on geopolitical and military terms, they are also deeply dependent on each other economically. To add to the complexity, China has slowly but steadily replaced the United States as the largest trading partner for almost all the Asian states, and many of these states consider China as an important vehicle for their future growth. Thus, the United States and its allies in Asia find themselves in a difficult situation: they want the United States to protect them from any Chinese aggression but at the same time also want the United States to be sensitive to Chinese interests.

There is no denial that the U.S. presence in Asia provides stability and certainty to India. There is also increasingly less doubt that India finds comfort in a U.S.-centric world order based on shared values and mutual perceptions of stability. The U.S. presence in Asia ensures peaceful resolution of disputes as well as economic progress. It is unclear if India has the capacity or the resources to address challenges posed by a rising China on its own or with the cooperation of its other allies. For this reason, it is important that India and the United States deepen their engagement on military, economic and security levels to make the U.S. rebalance a success. When Obama celebrates India's democratic achievements as a state and society along with Modi, they ought to discuss the role that India can effectively play in making the U.S. rebalance successful, which is vital to both American and Indian interests. More importantly, the U.S. and India should work together on exploring ways to reassure China and include it for regional problem solving to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and stable Asia.

Cyberspace

China's online population nears 650 million

AFP - The number of Internet users in China has risen to nearly 650 million, authorities said over the weekend, as the world's largest online population continues to rise.

There were 648 million Internet users in China at the end of 2014, according to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The figure represents an increase of 30 million over 2013.

China defines its online population as those who have used the Internet at least once in the

last six months.

China already had more web users than any other country in the world.

It is home to a huge e-commerce market and the web has been used by citizens to spotlight government abuses, creating a concern for the ruling Communist Party.

Beijing maintains tight controls over the Internet, blocking websites it deems politically sensitive in a system dubbed the "Great Firewall of China" and encouraging social media companies to censor user-generated content.

Technology

UNMANNED DRONES COULD PLAY KEY ROLES IN FOOD SUPPLY

ap - herding cattle. counting fish. taking an animal's temperature. applying pesticides.

when it comes to drones, "your imagination can go pretty wild in terms of what would be possible," says roger johnson, president of the national farmers union.

this month, the federal aviation administration issued the first permit for agricultural use of unmanned aerial vehicles. steven edgar, president and ceo of adavso, says his idaho-based business will use a lightweight, fixed-wing drone to survey fields of crops.

drone technology, already used in other countries, can make farmers more efficient by helping them locate problem spots in vast fields or ranchlands. increased efficiency could mean lower costs for consumers and less impact on the environment if farmers used fewer chemicals because drones showed them exactly where to spray.

the association for unmanned vehicle systems international, a trade group, says agriculture could account for 80 percent of all commercial drone use, once government regulations allow it. that could be a while. the federal aviation administration has been working for years on rules that would balance the desire for commercial flights of small drones with the need to prevent collisions involving manned aircraft.

five ways drones could affect the food supply:

Scouting farms

the first agriculture drones are looking at massive fields of crops to scout out where crops are



too wet, too dry, too diseased or too infested with pests. they can help farmers count plants or measure their height. farmers can now use satellite technology, but it's slower and less detailed than images from low-flying drone.

"this is about getting the most productivity from every square inch of a farm," says adavso's edgar.

alabama farmer don glenn said he would buy a drone or use a service that provides drone surveillance on his farm of corn, wheat, soybeans and canola. it's hard to survey corn fields when they are 8 feet to 10 feet tall, he says.

drones can carry different tools, including high-resolution cameras, infrared sensors and thermal sensors. ground-penetrating radar could even measure soil conditions.

Applying chemicals

once the land is surveyed, farmers could use that data to narrow the areas that need treatment. if a plot of farmland is infested with weeds, for example, a farmer could spray a small amount of herbicide just in that area, instead of an entire field, to kill them. farmers hope that they even-

tually could use drones to do the spraying.

kevin price of the iowa-based drone company roboflight systems says that kind of precision would put farmers at a huge advantage, helping them reduce the costs of chemicals and their application.

Playing cowboy

the national farmers union's johnson says his father used to fly a plane over his ranch and his neighbors' to spot escaped cattle when he was growing up in north dakota. that's something a drone could do with far less money and effort.

lia reich of the uav manufacturer precision-hawk says the company's drones can use thermal sensors to take the temperature of cattle. the data comes back as bands of color, and "if all of the cattle look green and one looks dark purple then that one has a higher temperature," she said.

drones could help ranchers count cattle, disturb pests that are aggravating livestock or even apply insecticide to an animal.

Finding fish

a university of maryland project is developing drone technology to monitor fish in the chesapeake bay. matt scassero, the project director, says the idea is that a laser-based sensor mounted on a drone would allow scientists to see through the water and measure the size of a school of fish. researchers could ascertain the conditions of the water, too.

some drones can land on water, making it possible to measure water quality, as well.

Revealing secrets

there are downsides for farmers. documentary filmmaker mark devries has used an unmanned vehicle to fly over large commercial hog operations and film them. he wants consumers to see the buildings full of animals and huge manure pits.

the drones "allow for close-ups and vantage points that satellites and airplanes cannot easily obtain," devries says.

r.j. karney of the american farm bureau federation says there is a "major concern" about those kinds of films and his group intends to work with the obama administration and congress to address it. he says such films are not only a privacy violation, but can put farmers at a competitive disadvantage.

still, the agriculture industry sees the advantages of drones as far outweighing the disadvantages.

"we're concerned about falling behind other countries" as the faa delays, karney says. "farmers are anxious to see where this can go."

Poverty

L.A. HOMELESS CAMPS EXPAND BEYOND SKID ROW

UPI - Homelessness has been on the rise across the United States for several years now, and the trend is manifesting itself in the proliferation of homeless encampments in some America's major cities.

The phenomenon is especially pronounced in Los Angeles, where homeless camps are now popping and spreading in new parts of the city -- leaving behind their traditional confinement to downtown's Skid Row.

A new report by the Los Angeles Times claims complaint calls to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, a city-county agency, rose 60 percent from 2013 to 2014. The agency reportedly fielded 767 calls last year -- proof, some say, that the city's homeless problem is being exported to neighboring communities like Echo Park and South Los Angeles.

Social workers say that while some homeless people have been pushed out of downtown, the driving force in the founding and populating of new home-



less camps is poverty. High rent and staggering wages in places like Highland Park and Boyle Heights has pushed renters onto the streets. Poverty and homelessness are in many ways localized, they say.

"Homeless people, especially the mentally ill, they don't like new," Gina Chovan, a senior officer with the Los Angeles Police Department's Northeast Division, told the L.A. Times. "They want to stay where they know all the nooks and crannies."

But efforts to sanitize stretches of downtown Los Angeles -- where real estate

development continues to move into and remake new parts of the city -- certainly plays a role.

"Now that we're fixing up our communities, we're actually seeing a problem that's been there in plain sight for decades," Chovan added. "Gentrification just brought it to light."

The problem isn't just L.A.'s. Cities all across the United States are seeing an uptick in homelessness and homeless shelters. Homeless camps are propagating in places like San Jose and Honolulu. Even in smaller cities like Boise, homeless camps grow every

spring and summer as the weather warms.

In Seattle, the Mayor Ed Murray has proposed a unique temporary solution: he wants his city to fund and regulate three new homeless tent cities. His administration recently asked the city council for authorization to carry out what he sees as a stopgap measure.

"Permitted encampments are not, in my view, a long-term strategy to end homelessness," Murray told reporters at a recent news conference. "But organized encampments have less impact on our neighborhoods and provide a safer environment than what we see on our streets today."

With city and state funding for homeless services in short supply, a makeshift tent under a bridge is routinely the best and only option for men and women who find themselves on the streets.

Of course, not every city is as friendly as Seattle. Many municipalities are moving in the opposite direction of Murray, passing legislation that bans homeless encampments.