

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA ON THE GROWING CHINESE INFLUENCE IN MYANMAR

6.1 **General.** The security threats to India in view of Chinese activities in Myanmar can be analyzed in terms of a direct threat through Myanmar via the old Stillwell road from Yunan or threat through the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal making use of deep sea ports of Myanmar or Bangladesh, control of sea lanes of communications in the Indian Ocean and passage over the Malacca Strait. In addition threat of support and backing to insurgencies of Indian North Eastern states, threat of gun running, drugs and AIDS along with insurgencies is also a reality. Lastly the threat to Indian economy due to large scale flooding of Indian market with cheap Chinese goods pushed in through the porous Indo- Myanmar border also needs to be looked into.

6.2 **Naval Threat.** Of all the facets of China-Myanmar relation, the aspect that deserves closest scrutiny is the naval cooperation between the two countries. China seems to have adopted a systems approach in building up a strong base. In pursuance of this strategy, five new ports are being or have been constructed along Myanmar's coast from Victoria Point in the South to Sittwe in the Northern Arakan State⁶⁸. The Za Det Kyi (St Mathews Island) base in the South on the Tenasserim Coast is being currently upgraded with a new airport, hangars and a naval dockyard with Chinese assistance. Long range surveillance is possible from here. Similar facilities are likely to be set up at Munaing Island and Katang Island⁶⁹. This base enables surveillance of the two major shipping lanes; the first between Sumatra and the Great Nicobar Island and the second along the Ten Degree Channel, South of the Little Andaman. The Za Det Kyi base is part of the series of Islands in the Mergui archipelago. A Chinese presence near the Andaman Sea in this area

⁶⁸ Badgely, John. (1994). 'Myanmar in 1993: A Watershed Year', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No.2. (February), p.158.

⁶⁹ Bedi, Rahul. (2003). China-Pak-Myanmar: The Triangular Relationship Needs Careful Watch'. *Frontline*, Vol 20, Issue 13, June 21- July 04.

could pose a serious threat to our island territories and also to the South East Asian region as a whole. The Hangyii base in the Bassein Creek was completed by the Chinese in 1993. This base also provides China a good opening into the Bay of Bengal and is also situated in the proximity of Yangon. Currently, a huge communication network is being set up under Chinese supervision at Hangyii. It is reported to have berthing facilities to berth Chinese ships of the 2500 ton class presently and may be enlarged subsequently. The most important of all the naval facilities being opened for the Chinese is the one at the Cocos Islands. The islands have two naval bases and excellent infrastructure. It was way back in 1992 that a western spy satellite first detected a new 150 feet antenna on the islands that can be used for gathering signal intelligence⁷⁰. The Cocos Islands are located just 40 Km off the northern coast of Andaman Islands and are capable of monitoring the Indian missile tests off the Orissa coast as also all radio communications in the Bay of Bengal.

In July 2000, joint Sino- Myanmar's exercises were conducted off the Merguis Archipelago. In international relations theory and that of balance of powers, super power must have control over two oceans.⁷¹ The Chinese navy experts may prepare China to be influential in Indian Ocean, where it has no territorial attachments, beyond Myanmar. Beijing is seeking to equip itself with a credible blue water navy, capable of proceeding with a 'sea denial strategy' in South China Sea and off its coast and later in the Indian Ocean and Pacific. The systems approach adopted by the Chinese indicates a comprehensive plan to build up Chinese presence in the Bay of Bengal. It includes a close over watch facility in the Malacca Straits in the South and similar facilities in the Northern Bay of Bengal. The Kawthaung facilities at Victoria Point are also located close to the Northern entrance to the straits of Malacca. This location also houses the operational HQ of the Tanintharya Division, a strategic area that borders Thailand to the East, Andaman Sea to the West and Malacca

⁷⁰ Singh, Swaran. (1995). 'Sino-Myanmar Ties: Implications for India's Security'. *Journal of the United Services of India*, Vol.CXXV, No.521, Jul-Sep, p.353.

⁷¹ Mahan, Alfred. T. (1900). '*The problems of Asia and its Effect upon International Policies*'. Kennikat Press.

Straits to the Southeast. To the North, the Danawaddy Naval HQ situated at Sittwe has been shifted to Kyauk Phu, starting in June 2002. High level communication facilities are being set up at this base with Chinese assistance. They have also proposed to keep a Chinese officer permanently at the base. This request has not been agreed to so far. In an overall sense, there are all signs that the Bay of Bengal is being gradually converted into the 'Bay of Beijing'. The Chinese strategists see Myanmar occupying the same place in China's calculus of deterring India in South East Asia as does Pakistan in South West. This critical area deserves close attention. An Indian initiative to undertake development of port infrastructure in Myanmar is an urgent necessity.

In order to offset the serious disadvantages in this field, the recent overtures made by the Myanmar Government to India must be fully exploited. Such activity must form part of a more holistic policy that embraces economic and political parameters. This will enable India to put into place suitable counter measures against Chinese expansionism that appears evident in the context of its current and foreseeable actions. An access to Myanmar's ports will also provide outlets for trade from the Northeast region and contribute to its economic rejuvenation.

6.3 **Land and Air Threat.** China's physical presence in Myanmar brings it in close proximity to India from yet another direction. North Myanmar can be utilized as an alternate launch pad for offensive operations against India. Physical infrastructure that links up the trans-Chindwin Irrawaddy complex to Myanmar's North Western borders in particular, will facilitate such designs. India needs to watch out for such developments keenly. The old Stilwell road that runs through North Myanmar into Arunachal Pradesh and Assam provides the Chinese with such an approach. China has also renovated Yangon and Mandalay airports therefore directly connecting Beijing and Myanmar. Longest landing strip in South East Asia, capable of being used by Concorde for power projection purpose has been built by Chinese at

Yangon.⁷² It is a challenge to which India must remain alive. On a more optimistic note, if China realizes the futility of such manoeuvres in the context of a long term relationship with India, then the same factor can be fully exploited for economic purposes by all the three countries. This important issue must also be factored in by Indian strategists.

6.4 **Insurgency in North East India.** China is capable of influencing insurgency in Northeast (NE) India, mainly through the North Myanmar corridor. Apparently, China has reduced or abandoned its support to the Northeast Indian insurgent groups since the 1980s. However, this card is liable to be played in consonance with the state of India-China relations at any point of time. Due to Myanmar's contiguity with our Northeastern states and the ethnic affinity all along the Indo-Myanmar border it plays an important role in the context of a coordinated and cohesive drive against insurgency along the border. Therefore, it is imperative for India to elicit continued cooperation from Myanmar in curbing insurgency on a reciprocal basis. The NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), UNLF, the ATTF and the PLA maintain camps in Myanmar and indulge in smuggling of arms and drugs. The main areas which harbour Indian insurgent groups are; NSCN (K) and the ULFA in the Myanmar Naga hills and the NSCN (IM), UNLF and the PLA in Tamu and Chika-Phaisat opposite Manipur. Since Nov 2001 the Myanmar's Army has been cooperating with the Indian Army in anti-insurgent operations. It will be necessary to increase the degree of cooperation in a more meaningful manner in order to guard national interests in the long run. This will enable India to control insurgency in the Northeast in a real sense without it being host to the manipulations of the Chinese strategists.

6.5 **Narcotics, Smuggling and AIDS.** Myanmar was long considered the primary opium producer. India is caught within the two main fangs of international drug trade. The Golden Crescent is on its West and the Golden Triangle is to its East. However, the Golden Triangle is now showing

⁷² Khosla, I.P. (1998). 'Myanmar : Cohesion and Liberalism'. *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 21, No 1, February 1998.

tendencies of becoming pentagonal with the inclusion of Yunnan (in China) and Nagaland-Manipur complex in India. This threat can cause enormous destabilization in the Northeast India in particular and for rest of India at large. China is coming down heavily on its drug consumers. Myanmar itself is also not a big consumer of drugs though it is a major producer. Consequently, the danger of increased re-routing of the drug trade through India appears strong. China is likely to encourage this trend with the assistance of Myanmar. Once again it becomes amply clear that such a menace can be countered successfully only through a cooperative relationship with Myanmar in general and with the Tatmadaw in particular. In addition, India needs to initiate more steps to formalize the border trade in the Northeast region. The 160m Km route from Moreh to Kalemo via Tamu has already been commissioned into use. A similar connectivity has been established between Champai (in Mizoram) and Hri (in Myanmar). Additional five check-points have also been opened to restore the ancient links between the two neighbouring countries. Such actions will increase prosperity in the region and reduce the necessity of resorting to illegal trade. The drug trade is invariably linked with the AIDS epidemic since one of the major ways in which the disease is spread is through the use of infected needles utilized for administering drugs to the consumers.