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MY PROFILE OFFERS SITEMAP

February 15, 2007

Giants meet to counter US power

Jeremy Page in Delhi

India, China and Russia account for 40 per cent of the world's population, a fifth of its economy and more than half of its nuclear warheads. Now they appear to be forming a partnership to challenge the US-dominated world order that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War.

Foreign ministers from the three emerging giants met in Delhi yesterday to discuss ways to build a more democratic "multipolar world".

It was the second such meeting in the past two years and came after an unprecedented meeting between their respective leaders, Manmohan Singh, Hu Jintao and Vladimir Putin, during the G8 summit in St Petersburg in July.

It also came only four days after Mr Putin stunned Western officials by railing against American foreign policy at a security conference in Munich.

BACKGROUND

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The foreign ministers, Pranab Mukherjee, Li Zhao Xing and Sergei Lavrov, emphasised that theirs was not an alliance against the United States. It was, "on the contrary, intended to promote international harmony and understanding", a joint communiqué stated.

Their formal agenda covered issues ranging from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Korea to energy security, nuclear non-proliferation and trade. The subtext, however, was clear: how to use their growing economic and political muscle to prevent Washington from tackling such issues alone.

"In the long term, they feel that the whole structure of international relations has to shift in their direction," said Vinod C. Khanna, of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi. "What has happened is that quite independently they've reacted very similarly to recent international events."

Mr Mukherjee said: "We agreed that cooperation rather than confrontation should govern approaches to regional and global affairs. We also agreed on the importance of the UN."

Diplomats say that it is premature to talk of a strategic axis between the world's largest and two most populous nations because they still have more in common with the West than with each other.

Delhi was close to Moscow in Soviet times, but has forged a new friendship with Washington. Chinese relations were soured by its border wars with India in 1962 and the Soviet Union in 1969, and by its arms sales to Pakistan. Russia appears keener than China or India to challenge American hegemony. But there has been a convergence of interests as each struggles to make the transition from a command economy to free markets. Since 2003 they have found further common ground in opposing the

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BRONWEN MADDUX



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northwestern Chinese region of Xinjiang.

Another is energy. India and China are desperate for Russian oil and gas, and Moscow is worried about its dependence on Western markets. But their most significant common ground is opposition to US military intervention in Iran. The joint statement did not mention Iran, but the three countries have taken a common stance in calling for a negotiated solution through the International Atomic Energy Agency. None of them wants a nuclear-armed Iran, but Russia sells Tehran nuclear technology and India and China need Iranian gas.

 HAVE YOUR SAY

I agree with Benjamin Franklin who once said "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both." I think that a better UN system needs to be in place to reflect the new realities of this time vs 1945 realities.

Chris, Miami, USA

Mr. Randleman's view that "the world hates the US because by GOD's grace we have saved every country



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