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## Entente Tri-parti: Triangular Alliances Involving India

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**Guest Column-By Rajesh Tembarai Krishnamachari**

Advancing from the age of *entente cordiale* (1904), *Anglo-Russian entente* (1907) and the *Little Entente* (1933), we appear to be entering an age of '*entente tri-parti*' as distorted versions of love triangles transcend the spectre of the 70mm screen appear on the horizon of the international political arena. In this paper, we analyze the various triangular axis-formations India is actually or perceived to be entering into, their motivations and their goals.

Alliances represent symbiotic and synergic arrangements of nations brought together by a multitude of diverse factors such as:

### 1. Ideological motivations

Certain religions with concepts of a monolithic entity called '*ummah*' like Islam, presumed doctrines of *weltanschauung*, like Communism, cultural affinity like the Europeans, linguistic affinity like former French colonies tend to draw nations close to each other.

### 2. Geographical factors

Nations sharing common boundaries are often concerned about proliferation of tendencies from one state to another. Territorial disputes, water sharing problems and other developments invariably bring contiguous states to the drawing table.

### 3. Economic reasons

These are of two types namely the volitional and the coercive kinds. In the volitional arrangement, nations are drawn together by the discretionary and non-obligatory economic incentive of performing better by working conjointly to increase their economic prowess. Groups like the European Union illustrate this. The coercive kind of diplomacy arises when a weaker state importunes a stronger state for an arrangement to prevent an economic disaster for the former.

### 4. Common Adversary

The concept of enemy's enemy being one's friend is as old as Adam himself. Driven to the wall by a common foe seeking to destruct their civilizational ethos, nations build bridges with other states to both obtain strategic depth and gain secure second-strike capability.

## **A. India-Israel-United States**

This is undoubtedly the most high profile and the most controversial of alliances India has sought to establish. Brajesh Mishra, the Indian National Security Advisor (NSA), first proposed the idea. In a speech at the annual dinner of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in Washington, he proposed an informal association of democratic countries with a limited aim of combating terrorism. (1) The motivation for the trio to come together was the common terrorist scourge that they were facing. The need to develop a multilateral mechanism to counter the rising Islamic terror was felt; a mechanism which would not get bogged down in Musharraf-style definitional and causal arguments about terrorism. Blocking financial supplies, disrupting networks, sharing intelligence, simplifying extradition procedures are some measures that can only be effective through international cooperation based on trust and shared values.

The defense relationship between India and Israel (illustrated by the fact that Israel is India's second largest arms supplier after Russia) and the burgeoning trade relationship between the two gave a major fillip to the alliance. The presence of an influential Indian and Jewish population (1.8 million and 5.2 million) in the US made it take note of this alliance. (2) Experts have also advanced the concept of natural allies to explain the growing interaction between the trio. Dr Subhash Kapila predicates the creation of a potent stability force in the region through an Indo-Israel alliance endorsed by the US. He further claims that to counter the rising Chinese threat, US would find it prudent to support India actively. (3)

The alliance has been widely misunderstood and criticized; a development not helped by the wanton misinterpretations projected by the pseudo-secularists (who in Yashwant Sinha's words are '*more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves*') and the communists (who fear that India might gain and rise up in world status). Rediff reported that Gulf News in its editorial had condemned the alliance as the coming together of '*three right-winged administrations that have much in common.*'(4) Students of literature can comprehend the meaning of the phrase '*throwing an apoplectic fit*' by referring to '*Axis of the Apocalyptic*' by Satya Sagar where the author has linked even the Samuel Huntington theory of '*clash of civilizations*' to this topic.(5)

## **B. India-Iran-Russia**

This group came together first to prevent the spread of the obscurantist Taliban(6). They had opposed bin Laden and Al Qaeda even before Sep 11 by supporting Ahmed Shah Masood of the Northern Alliance.(7) Later after the US led invasion of Afghanistan, they pooled in their aid efforts to accelerate the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan.(8)

While the fraternal bonds between Russia and India are well known and documented to need a relook, what is interesting is the rise in Indo-Iranian and Russo-Iranian relations. International agencies suspect that the Zelzal (Earthquake) technology of Iran is a reverse-engineered version of the Russian SS-4 IRBM with a range of some 2000 km. (9) Russia is also suspected to have transferred some nuclear technology to the Iranian establishment. Adding to this relationship with the Russians is the burgeoning economic ties between India and Iran in the areas of energy, transit and transport, industry, agriculture and the service sectors. (10) India has also agreed in principle to buy five million metric tones of liquid natural gas annually for 25 years during which Iran will offer discovered and semi-discovered gas fields for Indian investment. (11)

India, Iran and Russia have also agree to build a new Asia transport bridge.(12). The cargoes will travel in sealed containers by sea to or from Mumbai through Bandar Abbas in Iran, and then by train via Russian Black Sea or Baltic Sea ports. Experts estimate the route could be doing \$10-billion in annual business within a few years.(13). The map is available at (14).

Cassandra predicting tensions with US over ties with Iran would be surprised to hear the chairman of Business Executives for National Security, Stanley Weiss say "*India's new ties with Iran make it more, not less, valuable to Washington*". (15) However the continuing ambivalence of Iran regarding its position on Kashmir does raise a doubt as to whether the current phase of effusive fraternal feelings is more a ploy seeking short-term gains than a reflection of long-term interests. (16)

Of course our old friends, the archetypal proponents of the '*suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*' theory, dismiss this alliance as a mere '*pipe dream*' (17)

### **C. India-China-Russia**

Ex-foreign minister of Russia Yevgeny Primakov coined the formula of “*Russia-India-China strategic triangle*” in 1998. (18) Earlier this year, the Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov was quoted by ‘*The Hindu*’ as saying “*Trilateral interaction is important for global stability... Dialogue between Beijing, Delhi and Moscow will be carried forward*”. (19)

The three countries, dubbed the future ‘locomotives of world growth’ (20), were brought together by a common desire to challenge unfettered American hegemony. They also faced a common adversary in Central Asia terror that fuelled secessionist movements in Kashmir (India), Chechnya (Russia) and Xinjiang (China). The three foreign ministers have already met twice and now plan to summit together at Russia in a move sure to give a boost to trilateral cooperation. (21) Economic factors like the need to evolve a strategy to counter globalization also forces marginalized economies to join hands. (22)

While Sino-Russian boundary disputes have been nearly settled, the Sino-Indian question continues to arouse emotions on either side of the Mc Mahon line. Lingering cold war suspicions and the perennial China-Pakistan nexus act as impediments to this inchoate alliance. However the Chinese premier Zhu Rongji’s successful tour of India followed by Ivanov’s trip are believed to fast forwarded interest in the idea of trilateral grouping to the point where ‘*working towards informal alliance*’ was now possible. (23)

A statement of the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson stating that the three countries have near identical stands and concerns has fuelled optimism about this alliance.(24) Recently the three countries, in a significant development, had decided to adopt a common approach to the Iraq imbroglio. (25)

Our friends in the Marxist-Macaulayan bureau have been mute in regard to opinion on this alliance.

### **D. Other Alignments**

Some analysts have written about a plausible India-Israel-Turkey alliance. ‘*The three nations are regional superpowers and their highly regarded armed forces operate in dangerous neighborhoods.*’ (26) Also they have large Islamic populations and are concerned at the escalation of Islamic fundamentalism. All the three intrinsically secular societies have embraced modernization. The Turkish and the Israeli military have trained together for quite some time. The summit also enjoys the implicit benediction of the United States. K Gajendra Singh has explored this issue of the tripartite axis in detail in a brilliant paper at this site itself. (27)

In the past also, India has attempted to make triangular alliances like India-Yugoslavia-Egypt at the start of the Non-Aligned Movement. With the commencement of the south-to-north river diversion project by China (28), posterity might witness an alliance that looks so highly improbable today—

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. History does move in cyclical patterns, it seems.

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