

## **UPA government's clandestine strategy to have a military alliance with the USA**

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There was a news report in the English daily "The Telegraph" on August 22, 2013 about a proposed US move to set up a rotational air base at Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. After a thorough search on the net, it was confirmed that there indeed was a sinister move by the US to set up a rotational air base in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, Changi in Singapore and two or three other places in Asia-Pacific region as part of its 'Asia Pivot' policy. This is a very serious matter which could have an adverse impact on our national security interests and foreign policy issues. The way the media and our 'netas' ignored it, is an unpardonable mistake. Even after our humiliating defeat by the Chinese army in 1962 border war, we have not allowed the US to set up a military base in India. We had not extended such a facility even to the USSR, a former close friend of India. Why should we then even think of giving any such facility, even if it is a temporary base, to a rogue nation like the US. During May-June, 2012, the US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and chairman of the Joint Chief of staff General Martin Dempsey had visited the Pacific Command headquarters in Hawaii to formally commence the proposed shift of American military concentration and assets to the area. They also attended the eleventh annual Shangri-La Dialogue defence forum where they met with their counterparts from 26 Asia-Pacific nations. While in Singapore, Panetta also announced that the US would increase the percentage of US naval forces in the Asia-Pacific from 50% to 60% as per its revised forces relocation plan and strengthen and expand its military alliances with nations throughout the region, especially those in the Southeast Asia which are embroiled in territorial disputes with China. From Singapore, Dempsey went on a visit to Philippines and Thailand, longstanding allies of the US, while Panetta left for Vietnam and India, considered by the US as its most significant new military partners in the post-cold war period.

Singapore had signed a strategic Framework Agreement with the US in 2005 to promote closer cooperation and partnership in defence and security and the two countries are now major security cooperation partners. The Singapore government later allowed the US to deploy for littoral combat ships at a base in Singapore as an obligation under this agreement. Earlier, through a MOU signed in 1998, Singapore had extended the use of Changi Naval Base to the US. India had also signed an Indo-US Military Framework Agreement with the US in 2006. The proposed move to set up a temporary air base in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala under the guise of rotational stationing of military aircraft could be an outcome of this agreement.

Reacting to the news item about the proposed air base in Trivandrum, a Defence Ministry spokesman had simply said that it had never discussed any such proposal. But the chief of the

Pacific air forces under the US military's Pacific Command, General Herbert Carlisle, who made this disclosure about the Trivandrum base had earlier led a US delegation at a crucial policy dialogue meeting of Indo-US air forces. He had also visited Trivandrum. Hence the news item cannot be dismissed as entirely baseless. General Carlisle had also stated that the US was not setting up any new bases in the Asia-Pacific and would only rotate its assets in a revival of 'Checkered Flag' policy of the cold war period. He further clarified that during the cold war period, the US rotated all its military units from the Continental US to Europe and that would now be done for the Asia Pacific.

It is clear from General Carlisle's statement that the US is expecting the revival of the cold war era, viewing China as its main rival. The US efforts to set up more military bases and form new military alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region should hence be seen as part of a wider strategy by the US and its allies to encircle and contain the growing menace posed by a belligerent China.

The US had been trying to woo India into a military alliance with the US since last few years. The US also had shown interest in the past in permanent hosting of American naval vessels in Goa or Kochi. However there was no positive response from India to such proposals, because of strong objection from a section of Indian security experts and analysts against such a level of military cooperation with the US. The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue is a trilateral security cooperation between the US, Japan and Australia, convened for the first time in 2002. It was actually an outcome of a US initiative to ensure the support of the regional allies for its campaign on 'war on terror and nuclear non-proliferation'. In 2007, as proposed by Japan, this trilateral grouping was converted into a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quadrilateral Initiative under which India also joined this group as a fourth member. Meanwhile the US has expanded the 'Malabar' series of joint naval exercises with India by including Australia, Japan and Singapore from 2007. A massive joint naval exercise was conducted by these countries in the Bay of Bengal in September, 2007. Enraged by this exercise of naval might, China had shown its strong protest by sending demarches to all the participating countries. Under the Sonia regime, India is slowly but steadily getting dragged into a military partnership with the US. The Trivandrum airbase base may not materialize immediately. However if the UPA gets a third term, the proposal is likely to get the green signal. Fortunately, the UPA is unlikely to get a third term.