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The Growing Geopolitical Competition in the Indo-Pacific Region and India's perspective

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Abstract:

World politics have been facing a dynamic shift after the demolition of the erstwhile USSR and the US become guardian as well as the focal point of world power but 1978 economic reform of PRC gives a tremendous opportunity to become a rigorous economic power and ultimately it changed Chinese capabilities. Chinese centralised undemocratic polity steadily rising economy and military power threaten the prevailing order. Chinese aggressiveness palpable in the South China Sea, conflict with its neighbourhood countries on territorial disputes, debt trap, the string of Pearls; encircling India through ports building in its neighbourhood countries. Present papers try a humble attempt to cast light upon new endeavours of existing power like the US, Japan, Australia, India, etc containing china and the present development in the Indo-Pacific region and its implication on India.

Key Phrases: Indo-Pacific, Containment, Power

❖ **Introduction:** The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ has been, first time, used by Gurpreet Khurana, an Indian naval officer, and scholar and popularized by Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe in his 2007 “confluence of the Two Seas” speech to Indian Parliament(Rej & Tuneer Mukherjee, 2018). Then it recurrent uses in various government documents like the US National Security Strategic (2017), the US National Defence Strategy (2018), “Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy” (2016) in Japan’s Official Strategy Paper, Indian Maritime Security Strategy paper in 2015, etc goes on. Basically ‘Indo-Pacific’ is a geostrategic construct that has been used keeping in mind the transition of Asian security. Often cited, that the 21st century will be the Asian century that is quite proved right in terms of trade or commercial transaction, a most populated region that will be attracted by the open market economy in this shrinking and compressed world. In this highly sophisticated technological age, H.J. Mackinder’s “heartland theory” has been rejected and was cited that “Who rules Eastern Europe command the Heartland Who rules the Heartland command the world Island Who rules the World-Island command the world”.

“Unlike Mackinder, the U.S. strategist Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan held that the control of the maritime domain would be the key to empire-building in the new age. Other scholars went further Spikeman’s Rimland theory, which accepted

the centrality of Eurasia but claimed that its mastery depended on the control of its oceanic rim on the Atlantic and the Pacific. His dictum-"Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; he who controls Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." (Distinguished Lectures, by Shyam Saran).

Because land and water body is not considered as a constraint, no one can stop or hinder to connect anyone. China has emerged since the 1980s in terms of economy, military, etc, cast a challenge to the US' supremacy as well as India and break world order. China has been dubbed as 'revisionist power' its aggressive and hegemonic nature has been shown in the South China Sea, debt trap, illegitimate territorial claim, etc. India too contemplated that china has created constraint to this world order through its 'string of pearls' tried to encircle India in the Indian Ocean, and threatened tinny as well as small countries of South China Sea and through its deputed BRI projected try to cut off India. India is always in favour of free and open use of the sea and abides by international law. As far as Indo-Pacific is concerned, India has made it clear that it is not against any country by PM Modi in Shangri-La Dialogue (2018). But china considered that the making of the Quadrilateral group and military and naval presence, the convergence of Japan, the US, India, and Australia are conspiracy or containment against it. Donal Trump Administration vehemently critical of china and launched and took many initiatives against china like Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the revival of Quad, 2+2 Dialogue, increasing bilateral relation, transfer of arms, etc. if literature has been assessed it will be crystal and clear that regarding 'Indo-Pacific' there is no congruence view among these state. Initially, Japan has excluded china in its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' and included china in its new policy that is 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision' (2018). ASEAN has taken the Indo-Pacific term but substantially no different from its previous policy. Although there are differences among these states some commonality also available like maintains rule base order, open and free navigation, improvement of connectivity and alternative to BRI, etc.

Power transition and role of India: The 21st century has been facing a new challenge that is the transition of power in general world politics and particularly in Asia. Power Transition, theorist argues, would lead to instability, conflict, confrontation, war, etc, between decline and rising hegemonic power. Prevailing hegemonic power overwhelmingly focuses on the concentration of power and maintains the status quo in the system. But rising power is not satisfied with this system and tries to tilt the scale of what is occurring with the USA and China one is declining power and the other is rising respectively. China has been exploiting the present The US leads an open economic system and becoming an economic giant that used to empower its military section. Chinese's aggressiveness is revealed in the South China Sea and territorial dispute with its neighbouring countries. Power transition is not seamlessly occurred between the US and China but also other middle powers are also rising what is call rising of the rest or swing states. Power transition created uncertainty whether the USA accommodates China or preclude it. What will do these swing states? There are hedging strategies available to these countries. Against this backdrop, The US adopted "the strategy of Pivot" toward Asia in late 2011. In early 2012 pivot rechristened as "Strategic of rebalancing"; America's desire to balance China with converging like-minded countries here lays the importance of India. India

is very contentious about Chinese aggressive behaviour, the nexus between its perennial enemy Pakistan and growing appearances in the Indian Ocean. India would use internal balancing and external balancing. First, the option is very limited scope because of its weak economy, poor infrastructure, demographic dividends so on and so far, so the second option is more vibrant and The US's The Pivot creates an opportunity to exploit it and make use of external balancing. India tries to manage this power transition and has taken three approaches; first, developing a strategic partnership with The US. Second, tries to stabilize relation with China. Third, employing localised balancing with the increasing partnership with other regional power i.e. Japan, Australia, etc. The US and India, duo complaining to each other for not acting to the mark. The US wants India must come with a commitment to contain China. India is also very contentious about Pentagon behaviours because of its G2 policy. The US tries to share power and accommodate China. If India acts according to The US demand it will lose its Strategic Autonomy(Pant & Joshi (auth.), 2016).

For Brewster the Indian Ocean is very close limited countries have the opportunity to access china is not one of them. Formidable geographical barriers have been constraining China to connect Europe, Africa, the Middle East, So china very much dependent on the Indian Ocean. India expressed control over the key entry and exit point to the Indian Ocean by its 2007 naval document. China must secure its Sea Line of Communication routes (SLOC). The closest naval base to the Indian Ocean is at Hainan Island in the South China Sea and its airbases are at long distance and the air force has limited mid-air refueling capabilities. For him, the Indian Ocean is India's Ocean. In 2014 India along with 16 other Indian ocean littoral nations had participated vis. South Asian, African, European, Southeast Asian, Middle East, and Australasian. A few days later of the Milan exercise china unilaterally demonstrated its exercise in international waters between the Indonesian Island of Java and Australia's Christmas Island. Some analyst implies that China tries to encircle India through building ports in its neighbour's countries, around the Indian Ocean viz at Gwadar (in Pakistan) and Hambantota (in Sri Lanka) and Kyaukpyu (in Myanmar) (Brewster, 2015). If one employs realism, particularly Structural realism then it is clear that current structural constraints compel India to eschew Non-Alignment policy and strategically engage with the USA, Japan, Australia.

The Changing contour of Indian foreign policy and its growing closeness with the USA:

The present geopolitics and the contour of global politics have been rapidly changing at this juncture of the 21st century. India and the U.S. are becoming very closed in waging the 3rd 2+2 dialogue on October 26-27. India and The U.S pen down a treaty i.e. BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement) with this India entitled to receive highly classified U.S. defense and intelligence information. It seems India has been shied away from its equal-distance policy of power block or NAM, recently argues for 2.0 of NAM. It is a clear indication of the U.S strengthening its containment policy against China. This will not cost strategic autonomy but will also apprehensible to lose Russia. (Narayanan, 2020) Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated that China and Germany are soon becoming superpowers and the influence of the U.S. wanes globally. Even having faced the 2008 economic crisis, the supremacy of the U.S. will not be, in terms of militarily as well as economic, compared, or

challenged. Although The U.S. has the experience of military failure abroad like Vietnam, Latin America, even in Afghanistan its supremacy is not on the verge. (Lachmann & Lieber, 2020). If one analysis the growing nexus or coalition between the US and India along with other regional actors in this Indo-Pacific region then it will be clear by applying Mearsheimer's 'Offensive realism'. For his world is too large to be the hegemonic power in a multipolar world. If any player tries to challenge the US hegemony it will prevent the peer competitor with regional other like-minded players and for this reason closeness among four countries of Quad is visible (Jackson, R., & Sørensen, G., 2013, pp 84-85).

“theory leads one to believe that China will eventually want to dominate East Asia. By the same theory, if that were to happen one would also expect the United States to react to try to prevent or undercut Chinese power in East Asia. Indeed, if China became a peer competitor America could be expected to go to great lengths to contain China’s influence and prevent China from intervening in other regions of the world where American national interests are at stake” (Jackson and Sorensen, 2013, pp-85).

View of noncompliance of the twenty-first century in the Indo-Pacific Region: According to Shamshad Ahmad, (Ambassador ret'd. of Pakistan), growing tension in the Asia Pacific region is the consequence of the global security paradigm. The aftermath of End of the bi-polar politics had been emerging as a ray of hope to revert to collective security and strengthen the United Nations but it has become an instrument of power politics. The remnant of the cold war security challenge is out there like NATO and various regional security arrangements have been organising. Erosion of the arms control and disarmament measurement and continuation of long-outstanding regional disputes, the emergence of new forms of conflicts obstruct the equal security for all (Aneel, 2017, pp. 17–18). In reply to the question of whether the Asia Pacific and South Asia Security: Is there or not Ambassador Ahmed find the cause of concern for South Asia or the Asia Pacific is after the cold war they do not embrace peace like western nations rather it become a global hotspot. Pentagonal relations among the US, Japan, China, Russia, and India are not benign for peace they involve constraint each other block. He blamed India- US nuclear deal of 2008 which is a short-sighted policy and broke the nuclear deterrence of Indo- Pak.

“South Asia needs stability through balance not asymmetry of power. Unless the U.S. revisits its iniquitous nuclear deal with India and matches it with a similar arrangement with Pakistan, the current Indo-U.S. nuclear nexus will continue to undermine the cause of peace and stability”.

Present International order, as well as security order, is dominated by the US but the gradually phenomenal economic, political, and military rise of the China stabilising the security order. China has its concerns about the US-led uni-polarity or its Asia Pivot policy constraint Chinese peaceful rise. China’s answer to American’s Asia Pivot is not in military terms but socioeconomic terms through its One Belt One Road. In this chapter, he dubbed OBOR as China’s version of American’s post World War-II Marshall Plan (Aneel, 2017, pp. 19–20).

ASEAN-U.S.-China Relations in the South China sea: Analysis of any problem requires a comprehensive and sophisticated approach, The South China Sea issue is no exception. Bunn Nagara has claimed that the South China Sea, South East Asia, and East Asia as a whole have had trade as their main focus, there is a little bit problem among these archipelagic littoral nations but never engage in full fledged war. For century China is a dominant power in this region and the China-centric tributary system prevents each other from claims like Burmese designs on Siam, and Siamese designs on the Malay states to the south. So the current disputed claims to maritime territory by several littorals or archipelagic states in the region very recent development. But Chin's claims it historical. There are also some relatively recent development take place like after second World war America has engaged in this region with security treaties and alliances and different regional organisations have been mushrooming like the Association of South East Asia(ASA), South East Asia Treaty Organisation (ASEAN); Malayan-Philippines-Indonesia (MAPHILINDO), the East Asian Economic Grouping(EAEG), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), etc. According to B. Nagara, it is conceived that China's rising is a threat to the prevailing world order, and China is intended to alter this order but it is not reality. Neo-realist thinker Mearsheimer argued that China's rise cannot be peaceful, and that conflict with the US is inevitable. The author has rejected neo-realist claims because if current military predominance is a guarantor of regional security, China is its biggest beneficiary. Despite the occasional assertiveness of China in the South China Sea is unable to challenge the United States militarily. Chinese force for millennia biased toward land-based army rather than naval forces and its forces remain relatively underdeveloped technologically. The abiding reality of the South China Sea is neither China nor America wants war even East Asian Nations do not want conflict. What is needed is having independence from colonial masters rapid development is necessitated and a co-operative and harmonious environment is required. China and The US or G2 countries have increasingly become interdependent, their economies are deeply intertwined (Nagara, pp 22-23)

In the concluding part, one could say that 'Indo-Pacific' is a new phase in international politics in general and in particular continuous of two ocean region viz. West pacific and Indian ocean where India's role has been emphasised. It will pave the way for India to be the vibrant actor to counter china's aggressiveness with the synergy of the US and other middle power to maintain the balance of power for peace and tranquillity and Rule Base Oder (RBO) in this region. Indian should not explicitly engage to counter china rather it should cautiously employ various other means because in International politics there is no one permanent friend and enemy. The Indian Ocean is a very important water body not only for economic terms. Often it becomes a flux point between the prevailing powers and the rising or emerging powers. Although the Chinese rise has created a misbalance of the existing world equation foreseeable future the US predomination will prevail in the Indian Ocean. In 1978, the Economic reform of China gives it rapid and quick development in the last half of the twentieth century now china becomes the number One energy-consuming country in the world. China imports energy in form of crude oil or natural gas from the Mild east, African countries, and Arabian countries through the Indian Ocean. China faces a profound strategic challenge in the Indian Ocean region, which cannot easily overcome.

“According to Chinese President Hu Jiantao, this chokepoint represents China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma’ (Storey, 2006). China also faces the so-called ‘Hormuz Dilemma’ in the Persian Gulf, where some 40% of China’s oil imports transit the Strait of Hormuz. China faces a dilemma across the entire Indian Ocean, where its SLOCs are highly vulnerable to threats from state and non-state actors” (Brewster, 2015, p. 2).

In the aftermath of the Second World War geopolitical, the geostrategic rivalry had been seen between the US and erstwhile The USSR. The Rivalry in the Indian Ocean is played by India and China, not by the US and either of those countries (Brewster, 2015, p. 2).

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