

# STRATEGIC CONUNDRUM OF US – CHINA AND INDIA – PAKISTAN: A PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

The study observes that transforming geostrategic landscape of South, South East Asia, and IOR is remolding the existing contours of various alliances and partnerships' structures. This is increasing the strategic significance of India and Pakistan in US and Chinese calculus. The growing centrality of South Asian rivals in US and Chinese strategic equation is expected to prominently surface in geostrategic and geo-economic trajectories. In essence, it is a struggle for the retention of US primacy, which ipso facto is being contested by rising China. It analyzes the prospects of peaceful rise of China or otherwise vis-à-vis US. In contemporary world, nuclear is fundamentally a critical deterring factor, which in past did not exist to prevent rivals from wars.

**Keywords:** Nuclear, Geostrategic Contours, Trilateral Security Dialogue.

## Introduction

It is always a challenge to analyze the transforming geostrategic contours of the world, in which the global and regional players' threat perceptions and capabilities are moving on divergent trajectories. This is directly impacting the geopolitical landscape, not only of South Asia, but also of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and South-East Asia. The 'threats and vulnerabilities' can arise from multiple factors, which motivate states to securitize to a referent object so as to calibrate counter strategies.<sup>1</sup> History testifies that the rise and the fall of the 'Great Powers' were invariably as a result of long and violent struggle, writes Paul Kennedy. In his perspective, the outcomes are primarily determined by the 'state's productive economic resources in wartime' and 'relative to the other leading nations, the decades preceding the actual conflict.'<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the states ensures 'balancing of ends and means' both in war and peace, managing of national resources, effectiveness of diplomacy to improve its relative position, and to crafting of its 'grand strategy' and policy to 'bring together all...elements' of national power.<sup>3</sup>

From ancient time to the renaissance, the world was immensely influenced by the precepts of 'divine providence' that had revolved around the

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primacy of ‘revolutions of the throne,’ rules of various princes, families and dynasties to ‘accelerate or suspend’ the downfall of the empires. The driving forces behind the decline and the fall or transition from one empire to another, victories, defeats were invariably triggered by religions, dynasties and empires through the application of force.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Edward Gibbon attributes various factors behind ‘the decline and fall of the Roman empire,’ including the ‘temporal sovereignty of the popes,’ and the ‘disorders of military despotism,’ parochial tendencies of monarchies and Christianity, and the conquests of Muslims and Turks that in his perspective were ‘the most awful scene, in the history of mankind’ that led to its decline.<sup>5</sup> Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth argue that power transition from one to another is different from the analogies drawn about the old great powers. They view that the present-day technological revolution, relative military advantages vis-à-vis the adversary, and ‘converting economic capacity into military capacity makes the transition from a great power to a superpower much harder now than it was in the past.’<sup>6</sup> Moreover, history testifies that whenever there is a shift in the balance of power equation, writes ancient Greece scholar Thucydides, it leads to generation of fear about the rising power’s claim to pride and rightful place in the changing structural dynamics of the system that creates apprehensions and make ‘war inevitable’ between the states. Historically, Athens’ rise and ‘the fear which this caused’ in established power – Sparta, created a ‘trap’ dilemma.<sup>7</sup> Thucydides writes Athens civilization and naval capabilities were at its zenith. This surprised and caused fear in major land power (Sparta) about the potential competitor’s potentials to swing the pendulum of balance of power.

In contemporary world, China ostensibly is pursuing a policy to secure its ‘*rightful place under heaven*’ that has strategic philosophy and history stretching back to 2000 years.<sup>8</sup> Sun Tzu states that the principles of ‘invincibility lies in defense; the possibility of victory in the attack.’<sup>9</sup> To this strategic conceptualization, Mao Zedong observed that in the case of failure of deterrence, then the defensive war preparation capabilities be enhanced for a long war of resistance.<sup>10</sup> But, according to some Chinese scholars, United States’ (US) crafting of ‘pivot to Asia policy’ is perceived as an instrument of US well-calibrated strategy to reinforce its chain of regional strategic alliance system with objective to contain the rise of China.<sup>11</sup> Balancing takes place ‘against regional states,’ writes T. V. Paul, when the established power perceives the emerging power as a ‘revisionist.’<sup>12</sup> Chinese leadership’s quest to reassert its rightful position is in accord with its traditional strategic philosophy. China’s ‘peaceful rise is a

comprehensive long-term strategy,' writes Vincent Wei-Cheng Wang, 'leveraging globalization as a catalyst to accelerate its own economic development and elevate its power and stature.' He further states that 'language is peace and stability; the style is constructive diplomacy; and the substance is economics.'<sup>13</sup> This is clearly in accord with Dao's strategy: 'Only after victory is certain does one give battle; only after the scales have been weighed does one move.'<sup>14</sup> The long-term peaceful rise strategy of China versus the US China containment policy is premised on multi-pronged strategies that have potentials to further intensify their mutual mistrust, rivalries, and tensions resultantly escalating crises in South China Sea and East China Sea due to variety of factors, including opposing strategies of US and China from South-East Asia to IOR. In this scenario, it is argued that the South Asian rivals – India and Pakistan have enormous strategic leverage to influence the future contours of the regional geopolitics.

While the Western Pacific is witnessing transitory and destabilizing developments due to ongoing military and economic power capabilities of China against US. It is *prima facie* challenging and gradually reducing US influence in the region, especially at a juncture when both countries are vying to secure their respective spheres of preponderance. 'China cannot rise peacefully,' writes John Mearsheimer, and it is likely to escalate 'intense security competition' with US due to Beijing's 'considerable potential for war' that could alter the entire 'architecture of international system.' Hence China would dominate Asia.<sup>15</sup> This is creating a numerous security, economic, and diplomatic-related complexities that is persistently impacting the shifting contours of the regional geopolitical and geo-economic landscape *ipso facto* leading both countries toward understanding the imperatives of evolution of a shared, stable and balanced power readjustments with a view to create some space for China. Currently, as per the International Monetary Fund, Chinese economy accounts for 17.3 % of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP - based on purchasing-power parity criteria), and its annual growth rate in GDP term is 6.7 % that is equal to world's 1.2 percentage. This has evolved a close dependence of the regional and extra-regional economies, including that of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Russia, and Brazil, which in Stephen Roach's perspective, account for nearly '9 % of world GDP.' He further states that the developing Asian economies of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, including the more developed economies of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan as a whole make them 'China-dependent Asian economies' that amounts to '11% of world GDP.' In addition, China is United States' third

largest export market (of US \$ 659 billion in 2015), and similarly in the case of Germany, China is the third largest export market after US and the European Union.<sup>16</sup> The total volume of India-China trade was worth US \$ 80 billion in 2015 with rebounding upward trends.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan-China bilateral trade's volume in 2016 was US \$ 16 billions; however, political and economic factors are analyzed in the backdrop of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that is a symbol of their 'all-weather strategic partnership.' Incidentally, regional and other major economies' increasing dependence upon China could prove another *key* factor in determining the future realignment of their relations with the two power camps - US and China.

In the ongoing global transformation, Pakistan in spite of its multiple internal difficulties and external constraints, it is argued would continue to have a key role in the emerging geopolitical and geo-economic transformation. Furthermore, it is observed that ongoing power struggle between the US and China per se is to sustain former's hegemony and to contain latter's rising economic, industrial, scientific, and military profile that is swiftly increasing Beijing's claim to gain a rightful global position as a great power. The present transforming geostrategic environment accords China a powerful role in the power struggle, which is shaping up the new realignments, new treaties and partnerships between the two. On the other hand, India and Pakistan too are gaining pivotal roles to balance out the emerging geostrategic trajectories. In the case of Pakistan, it is viewed that it possesses a critical geopolitical centrality, and with the establishment of CPEC it will eventually provide China a critical two Oceans – Pacific and Indian - strategic connectivity stretching right from China, Central Asia, Iran, Middle East to Africa and Europe. The growing Sino-US adversarial trajectory is liable to influence the foreign and security policies of New Delhi and Islamabad. In addition, it would impact the emerging regional security alliances and strategic partnerships' structure; consequently negatively impacting the fragile security environment of South Asia, South East Asia, and the IOR. This is expected to intensify South Asian asymmetries both in the realm of geo-economics and military. Actually, US objective is to maintain its global unrivaled military superiority. The 'primacists' school of thought, Jeffrey Sachs writes believe in 'a new arms race' as a 'necessary price' to sustain the 'global balance of power and preserve US security.' While the other school of thought calls for a realistic balance of power arrangements rather than US primacy.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, India's growing geopolitical and economic alignment with US is perceived by its policymakers as an essential instrument to attain the status of a

great regional power, if not a global power by projecting itself as a counter-weight to China, and Pakistan. In this environment, Pakistan too has a crucial role to play with the launching of CPEC, which is Beijing's instrumental artery of 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) vision to influence the future geopolitical and geo-economic configurations.<sup>19</sup> The paper would analyze the contemporary environment: that how influential would be the role of China-Pakistan strategic equation, and the US-India partnership's impact on the global and regional structural dynamics? Whether the rise of China be peaceful or not, and the role of geo-economic and nuclear weapons' on the escalating rivalry between US and China?

### **The Emerging Geostrategic Contours**

Neorealist Kenneth Waltz observes that 'realist theory is better at saying what will happen than in saying when it will happen.'<sup>20</sup> The states functions under the environment of anarchy where states are compelled to cater for their own security. Incidentally, when states amass power, even for defensive objectives, it is perceived as a threat by the rival state. In fact, the anarchic system at occasion generates emasculations that have potentials to prove perilous, especially with excessive accumulation of power.<sup>21</sup> In this context, it is significant to delineate the distribution of power that is required so as to bring about structural changes, advocates Brooks and Wohlforth.<sup>22</sup> They further explain that: 'How far did the Soviet Union have to fall for the system to cease being bipolar?' They further observe that: 'How high does China need to climb before the system changes?'<sup>23</sup> The fundamental question of transformation from unipolarity under the US to bipolarity with the emerging peer competitor(s); China, or Japan, Russia or India, it is observed is likely to intensify the 'trap.'

It is significant to note that Asia and IOR are mix of different religions, civilizations, including Buddhism, Confucian, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, which thrive in various parts of Asia. This makes the 'region's complex tapestry,' writes Henry Kissinger. He further delineates that the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Singapore with high economic and industrial standards are rivaling their Western peers. There are three states – China, India, and Russia with rising economies and technological and industrial bases.<sup>24</sup> In the emerging multipolarity, China, Japan, and US are the key players, contends Joseph Nye, Jr.<sup>25</sup> In his point of view, the rise of China and India 'may create instability.' He further maintains that it is significant to manage the rise of competitor(s) -

otherwise their rise – like in the case of Germany that had led to World Wars, could now also result in ‘devastating world wars.’<sup>26</sup>

Power is a hybrid matrix of military and economic capabilities, which as a consequence influences and conditions states’ behavior.<sup>27</sup> It demonstrates that power is comprised of various capabilities, including economic, military, soft, political, technological; other elements of ‘fourth generation warfare’, and Information Age’s revolutionary access to mass-communication systems and other mediums of knowledge explosion.<sup>28</sup> Economic rise need to be complemented with the scientific, technological and industrial capabilities that directly impact the information age’s Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Such capabilities enable the states to demonstrate their power projection far beyond their geographical boundaries.<sup>29</sup> Presently, the ‘technological gap between China and the US is so massive, the process of closing it will be lengthy’ as per Brooks and Wohlforth.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the volume of US and Chinese wealth in 2010 was US \$ 144 trillion and US \$ 32 trillion respectively. Moreover, economic and technological indicators suggest that to bid for a superpower status Beijing requires proportionate latent material capability.<sup>31</sup> This gap between the two is persisting even in their defense expenditures, latest hi-tech weaponry and innovative technologies, GDP, scientific and industrial bases, and in other economic indicators prerequisite to qualify as a great power; and even in the fields of science Nobel prizes, for instance, since 1990s - China lags behind US.<sup>32</sup> Brooks and Wohlforth concludes their argument by stating that ‘China has very far to go to reach’ this benchmark, including in ‘latent technological and economic capacity’ to enhance its global power projection, which in essence is prerequisite to qualify as a superpower.<sup>33</sup>

According to Graham Allison, since World War II, US maintained its hegemony in the ‘*Pax Pacifica*.’ He explains that ‘when rising assertiveness becomes hubristic and fear turns to paranoia,’ and it creates ‘mutual exaggerations’ that ‘can feed misperceptions and miscalculations,’ and spurs ‘unintended consequences.’<sup>34</sup> Whilst David K. Richards, explaining the significance of Thucydides analogy of ancient Greece and the pre-1914 Europe, observes that it overlooks the factor of nuclear deterrence in present day world. He elaborates that the growth of China’s economic power, regardless of how the size of its economy vis-à-vis US, or how large former’s defense budget is (US-China spends \$ 600 & 145 billion, respectively), in his perspective, ‘will not change this equation.’<sup>35</sup> In the context of nuclear deterrence, Matthew Kroenig

observes that invariably our nuclear strategy stems from the Cold War bipolar geostrategic paradigm, which now has been transformed into a multipolar Asian nuclear order – with the nuclear weapon states status of China, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea.<sup>36</sup> This is drastically influencing the geopolitical dynamics from Middle East to East Asia. Thus it has posed a serious security dilemma for the US

policy-makers, as how to deal with the emergent challenges from the new categories of Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Induction of nuclear weapons has changed the traditional causes of conflicts; hence prevent countries from

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initiation of war with conventional weaponry.<sup>37</sup> The multipolar architecture is being ignored, which could mislead thereby resulting in 'incorrect and potentially disastrous policy choices.'<sup>38</sup> This amply reflects the tapestry of multipolar nuclear structure of the present-day world right from Middle East to South-East Asia. However, in addition to traditional utility of nuclear weapons for deterrent objectives - the strategic arsenals too carries huge prospects of 'misperceptions...overestimation or the underestimation,' which could in fact trigger miscalculations. Hence, it becomes difficult to sustain a semblance of rationality and control particularly when states are expected to 'blust...bluff' with intent to create ambiguity, to cloud their intentions, and to carve deceptive strategies. Such tendencies possess the seeds to spiral situation out of control. However, with the induction of nuclear weapons, it is expected to prevent states from initiation of all-out conflicts.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, China is in pursuit to regain its rightful place with perceived intent to claim its sovereignty over the entire South China Sea region. In December 2016, China deployed its only aircraft carrier in South China Sea. Chinese 'Area-Access' (A2) and 'Area-Denial' (AD) strategies for South China Sea and the Asia-Pacific, which is being countered by US through calibration of a 'Joint Operational Access Concept' of 2012 and the 'Asia Pacific strategy' to sustain its control over the Pacific Ocean and IOR. Additionally, in February 2017 aircraft carrier USS Carl Vincent along with flotilla of warship was deployed to patrol the South China Sea. To further expand US naval fleet, it is reportedly investing US \$ 13 billion on building of Ford-class aircraft carriers, and 355 ships

to sustain its naval dominance.<sup>40</sup> This sufficiently highlights Washington's national interests to project its power projection that includes plans under the 'Air Sea Battle'<sup>41</sup> strategy to regain 'access.' In spite of Chinese assertiveness, it poses little threat to the US primacy in region due to multiple factors coupled with latter's existing naval edge over the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which is still considered to be two/three generations behind US naval capabilities.<sup>42</sup> Obviously, US considers itself as an indispensable Asian player set to build an elaborate network of alliances, strategic partnerships along with cultivation of relationships with other regional states and bodies with intent to foster strong trade and commerce ties with them, which China considers it a threat.<sup>43</sup> To further crystallize United States' Asia-Pacific and IOR strategy, it considers India a linchpin country that can in parallel play a significant role in East Asia as well. This indicates that the growing Indian influence in league with the US and other regional allies would put India as a challenger to China's 2A/AD plan to assert its claim and influence in South China Sea and to prevent the littoral states from gravitating towards China. However, with coming into office of new President of US, Donald J. Trump, whose vision is to re-establish United States' 'greatness' is expected to increase unpredictability in Sino-US relations. Moreover, US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in January 2017 is anticipated to undermine its image in region, and consequently China would endeavor to capitalize from it by expediting its efforts to establish alternative Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership forum. But, the new Trump administration's Defense Secretary during visit to South Korea and Japan in February 2017 re-emphasized the significance of US alliance with the regional allies, and reaffirmed its insurance to provide 'protective blanket' to them.<sup>44</sup> The significance of U-Japan alliance was also termed by Trump administration as a cornerstone of its policy.

To further harness China containment strategy, US-India 'Trilateral Security Dialogue' was started in 2005 that later on culminated in the shape of Indo-US nuclear and strategic partnership thereby setting in motion the India-US Strategic Dialogue in 2009. This has given a distinct trajectory to the transforming geopolitical state of affairs, for which the word Asia-Pacific has now been substituted by 'Indo-Pacific.' This US policy under the rubric of 'pivot' has given it a critical significance.<sup>45</sup> This is resulting in cementing of a chain of alliance system stretching right from Japan, South Korea to Vietnam and India along with regular holding of naval exercises and strategic dialogues. Moreover, it is increasing the orbit of US-Indian partnership thereby escalating tension



between India-Pakistan, and generating a sense of insecurity in Pakistan due to already expanding military asymmetry in India's favour, and the dove-tailing of latter by US/allies.

The fluctuating geostrategic setting and other developments in Indo-Pacific is furthermore intensifying mutual fears between US and China. On the other hand, it is exacerbating the gulf of mistrust between India and Pakistan as well. In the absence of a credible mechanism of mutual restraint regime, dialogue process or conflict resolution mechanism and in the presence of disputes, including that of Kashmir, and water issue is complicating the strategic stability of South Asia. Moreover, India's evolution of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) or pro-active strategy in 2004 has prompted Pakistan to evolve a 'full spectrum' nuclear deterrence strategy to calibrate a proportionate response right from the conventional, battlefield nuclear to strategic nuclear weapons to contain the perceived Indian plan of launching Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) within short timeframe of 72-96 hours reportedly to achieve limited objectives - is creating a fertile ground to trigger a chain-reaction between the rivals.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, when each state thinks that peaceful resolution or arbitration chances are slim, then, tendency to strike first in spite of high cost associated with such behavior would increase. For instance, before the outbreak of World War II, Japan had decided 'to go to war against an enemy whose military power and potential were so vastly superior to its own.' It is a classic 'mutual failure of deterrence.' Consequently, Japanese government perceived that 'Empire has no alternative but to begin war.'<sup>47</sup> Both countries would try to deny adversary any military advantage by striking first with intent to disable the command and control structure, and counter-value and counter-force capabilities.<sup>48</sup>

In Indo-Pacific, the Sino-US strategic rivalry intends to retain and assert their geostrategic and geo-economic influence. Kurt M. Campbell writes that Middle East is the 'arc of instability,' which is 'stretching from Japan through China and Southeast Asia to India' as an 'arc of ascendance.' The future chronicle of the region would be determined here in which US is planning to invest heavily to establish itself as a 'pivot' to 'rebalance' the strategic contours of region.<sup>49</sup> The US pivot strategy in league with its allies - Japan, Indonesia, and India would be an essential instrument to regulate the future geopolitical setting to sustain their ascendancy.<sup>50</sup> To achieve its strategic objectives, US is pivoting in collaboration with its regional key players and defense treaty partners to boost its traditional alliance structure with Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and

Thailand to rebalance the rising China. On the other hand, Washington formalized a number of strategic partnership agreements with India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, and is reviving its relations with Burma.<sup>51</sup> However, in the case of Philippines, its new president Rodrigo Duterte during visit to China in October 2016 stated that his country was restructuring its foreign policy with intent to reduce the US influence, and to forge closer ties with Beijing.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, in November 2016, Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Razak, during visit to China too stated that despite its disputes with China over islets, reefs and Spratly archipelago, which according to satellite imagery China has placed military equipment on them despite its pledge not to militarize them. However, both countries still agreed to sign a defense deal and showed intent to further enhance bilateral cooperation. It signals a strategic shift of Philippines and Malaysia towards US and China.<sup>53</sup> Zhang Baohui commenting about this noticeable strategic shift writes that Southeast Asian countries desired good relations with Beijing that in his point of view would strengthen their national interests.<sup>54</sup> ***To transform the geostrategic environment in its favor, US is working on a multi-pronged strategy to confront the emerging challenges from the potential superpower – China.***<sup>55</sup> It reflects US substantive policy of realignment due to contemporary geo-economic and strategic imperatives. The US has demonstrated its ‘resolve to pivot to Asia without pivoting away from other obligations and opportunities,’ remarked Clinton in her memoir.<sup>56</sup> Henry Kissinger considers this policy as ‘inevitable.’<sup>57</sup>

## Chinese Strategy

China’s emerging profile in the realms of geopolitics, geo-economics, geostrategic and its launching of OBOR project is of immense strategic consequence. OBOR in essence is influenced by its historic Silk Road route, and President Xi Jinping’s vision of ‘China Dreams’ associated with its national heritage and systematic quest to regain its historic position,<sup>58</sup> which stretches over two thousand-year history; and secondly with objectives to face the contemporary challenges that are unraveling with ongoing geostrategic transformations. The flux situation seemingly prompts China to proportionately tailor the broader contours of its foreign and security architecture to safeguard its national interests with the initiation of ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and the ‘Maritime Silk Road of the Twenty-First Century,’ which are designed to foster linkages with the Central Asian, the European, Southeastern, and South and North Asian states to achieve its long-term strategic and economic goals.<sup>59</sup> These

initiatives were launched by President Xi Jinping in October 2013. In March 2015 it was accorded a wider and ambitious directions under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' concept of '***Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt***<sup>60</sup> with visible plan to ascend to a global arena through its economic, industrial and military prowess, and to build linkages with the regional and extra-regional countries as an off-shore balancing strategy vis-à-vis US that too is following a similar plan against Chinese rise.

Seemingly, OBOR's declared aim is to establish trade, commercial and security relationships with over sixty countries from Asia, Middle East, Europe and right through to Africa.<sup>61</sup> In spite of its elaborate economic and industrial base and rising clout in relation to US, Beijing still has considerable steps to climb before acquiring its rightful place under the heaven – in line with its traditional strategic philosophy. With rising economic and strategic profile and its extensive network of export-oriented industrial trade with various countries since 2008 had subsequently led to adoption of a systematic assertive foreign and security policy. It eventually sensitized the Chinese policymakers about the imperatives of establishment of multiple institutions, including Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN Plus China (10+1), China-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Expo, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation (GMS), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to augment its economic and strategic outreach, and to foster strategic integration with the regional and extra-regional states, which had traditionally depended upon US for their defense and strategic requirements. Taylor Fravel maintains that Xi's policy is not proactive rather it is reactive.<sup>62</sup> while Hong Yu argues that Chinese policymakers demonstrated resolve to 'reshape the world order' by simultaneously sustaining its cordial relations with the regional countries by facilitating these states in building their infrastructures (presently China has over US \$ 3.5 trillion in foreign exchange reserves) in line with its OBOR vision; to increase connectivity and to develop infrastructure projects in these countries in order to gain its strategic objectives in parallel with boosting of exports of its manufactured goods; to secure import of raw-materials for its industries; and to protect the sea lines to ensure smooth flow of trade and commerce, especially the imports of petroleum products.<sup>63</sup> In line with OBOR, Chinese leadership reportedly aims to expand its orbit right from Gwadar (Pakistan) to Colombo Port City (Sri Lanka), and Kyaukpyu Port (Myanmar), and to construct Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor by settling regional states'

territorial disputes. OBOR forms China's decisive foreign, security and commercial philosophy that is expected to determine its future influence and rise.<sup>64</sup> Beijing's US \$ 10.98 trillion GDP is double the size of Japan's US \$ 4.12 trillion that is equal to 60% of the US (US \$ 17.94 trillion) economy.<sup>65</sup> China's total investment in the AIIB is US \$ 429.78 billion that accords it 26% share and voting rights, and to change this clause requires 75% votes. On the contrary, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) does not possess similar financial capacity to meet the increasing investment demands. Therefore, AIIB's focus would be to build and invest in the Asian states<sup>66</sup> to further increase these states' dependence on China thereby increasing latter's influence over them.

All these measures are increasing Chinese influence at the global level, and to sustain its economic growth rate and to further explore foreign markets for its goods, which is vital for its future economic and industrial growth and military modernization and power projection capabilities and to enhance its strategic trajectory; and to realize the 'China Dreams' philosophy to emerge as a regional and global power. In this connection, CPEC is its 'flagship' scheme that would provide access through Pakistan to IOR, the Persian/Oman/Aden Gulfs, Red Sea, Straits of Malacca/Hormuz/Bab-e-Mandeb, Middle East and the Central Asian states. This would go long way in alleviating China's 'Malacca dilemma,' as presently, 85% of its oil imports passes through the Straits of Malacca.<sup>67</sup> Pakistan and China are partners since 1960s, and the establishment of CPEC is an exhibition of their budding partnership especially complementing Beijing's growing geopolitical and geo-economic ambitions. It is vital for Islamabad both economically and strategically to capitalize on it when the quantum of threat to latter's internal security and to its cohesion is intensifying due to alleged infiltration of non-state actors (NSAs) from Afghanistan into Pakistan. For instance, from 2005 to 2016, China undertook 44 construction projects with total investment of US \$ 35 billion and 11 investment ventures with US \$ 7 billion. In essence, CPEC plans to transform Pakistan both economically and strategically by pumping in US \$ 50 billion for these objectives. (With inclusion of four new schemes in Pakistan, its volume has gone up to US \$ 54 billion. It is also termed as Chinese Marshall Plan.) It is the most critical subsidiary of China's ambitious visionary OBOR venture. Additionally, China reportedly has already invested US \$ 1.3 trillion globally during 2005-2016 in various construction contracts. Actually, CPEC would construct a variety of energy and infrastructure development schemes in Pakistan, including roads and railway networks of 3,000 kilometers that will reduce Chinese shipping route

distance of over 10,000 kilometers and linking Gwadar with Kashghar, China. It is termed a pivotal venture, primarily due to its extensive linkage with OBOR. In the case of Pakistan, it is projected to attract/increase foreign investment by US\$48.5 percent from July to October 2017.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, US and India are too planning to increase their present trade volume from US \$ 100 billion to US\$500 billion per year in line with their strategic vision.<sup>69</sup> The expanding orbit of US-India trade is expected to lead to forging of a free-trade agreement (FTA) between them, which as per Tarun Das would make US\$500 billion bilateral trade target achievable.<sup>70</sup> Like CPEC, Washington and New Delhi are supposedly planning to launch India-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) in unison with India's 'Act East policy' that would complement US rebalancing policy<sup>71</sup> as a counterweight to Chinese OBOR and of course, to enhance their trade. It would consequently offset the broader contours of OBOR's plan to link it through Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, if it is realized. In the case of India's economic relations under IPEC, it would play a major role in further cementing India's power to protect US primacy and consequently to buttress its potentials to counter-balance China, and to sustain its ascendancy.<sup>72</sup>

### **South Asian Security Matrix**

The South Asian environment is being influenced by micro/macro-level changes that are directly disturbing its security matrix. This as a result is motivating India and Pakistan to realign with the existing hegemon – US, and the potential competitor – China, respectively. The factors influencing the behaviors of India-Pakistan include: the widening military, strategic, and geo-economic asymmetries in India's favor and, on the other hand, Pakistan is at a clear disadvantage. This has increased India's international clout thereby leading to its emergence as a key regional power. In spite of Pakistan's declared NWS status, its internal security situation is still in a predicament because of multiple internal/external factors, including rising wave of terrorism that has not only increased its internal instability but has also tainted its image abroad. This has created various governance-related issues, aggravated its economic woes, fueled sectarianism and enhanced political polarization that is further magnifying its difficulties. This fluid strategic context is constraining Pakistan to evolve different doctrinal concepts and constructs: one to increase the efficacy of its forces, and two to craft its overall strategy in more realistic and efficacious way.<sup>73</sup>

'Pakistan's strategic cultural matrix and the security structure of South Asian environment' is consistently keeping Pakistan's and India's relationships

on 'acrimonious and antagonistic trajectories,' write Zulfqar Khan and Ahmad Khan. They maintained that the 'conventional forces' ratio is favorably tilting to India's advantage.' On the contrary, 'Pakistan's robust strategic and conventional capabilities and posturing is all set to neutralize India's aggressive military doctrines.' As per these writers, in such a 'geostrategic environment, Pakistan's role in the turbulent Middle East and Indian Ocean regions too cannot be ignored, as the recent establishment of CPEC is supposed to regulate the geostrategic trajectories of the coming decades.'<sup>74</sup> That Pakistani geopolitical significance has enhanced in spite of its socioeconomic and law and order related difficulties. It is well poised to play a central role in the regional geopolitics, and through CPEC it could even provide Russia access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. In the transformed geopolitics, Russia-Pakistan relationship has 'particular and intrinsic value' for which the former is expected to have a separate track – both for India and Pakistan.<sup>75</sup> Prima facie, the transforming geostrategic landscape of South Asia and Pakistan's fundamental role in the transforming geostrategic trajectories - would prove to be of decisive consequence in determining the future geopolitical structure of the region, in which ostensibly Russia, China, and Pakistan seems to be in strategic concord. Moreover, Russia along with Iran could also be co-opted in CPEC following Trump administration's confrontational policy toward Tehran, which Russia would consider favorable to its national interests.

Historically, Pakistan's strategic culture and security moorings were primarily influenced by its experience immediately after its independence in 1947 from the British India.<sup>76</sup> This conditioned its 'political, cultural and cognitive characteristics' and its elites' perceptions about India.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, Indian elites were actually influenced by its size, ancient civilization factors that essentially molded their thinking to be a natural great power.<sup>78</sup> Such Indian strategic outlook had immensely shaped its perceptions vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. This consequently complicated India-Pakistan foreign and security relationship. Incidentally, since the development of nuclear weapons in 1998, it generated a perilous strategic impasse that further intensified their security dilemmas. Alexandra Wendt writes that 'fundamental principle of constructivist social theory is that people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them.' He further observes that: 'Anarchy and the distribution of power are insufficient to tell us which is which.'<sup>79</sup> Hence, such perceptions and approaches towards each magnified the security dilemma for both of them and created a state of stability-instability

conundrum. This situation later on further intensified their military asymmetries, which motivated them to evolve 'more offensive conventional and nuclear posturing.'<sup>80</sup>

In such a shifting security structure, Pakistan's affiliation with Chinese OBOR and CPEC initiatives were seemingly perceived by Pakistani elites as a rational and balanced strategy to hold the Indian conventional, strategic, and diplomatic advantage at bay. However, its strategy and power potentials can only be made vibrant with a viable economic base, which as per Bernard Brodie only comes with a 'dollar sign.'<sup>81</sup> This would be only possible if it could effectively capitalize from the inflowing benefits of the CPEC. In addition, Pakistan is also confronted with a 'two-frontal' security dilemma due to fast aggravating security situation in its Northwest/Tribal belt, India-sponsored terrorism in its tribal and urban areas, and the ongoing India's deliberate violations of the Line of Control (LoC), and Working Boundary.<sup>82</sup> Such an aggressive attitude, as one Pakistani writer puts it, is a ploy of the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, to shift focus away from the ongoing unrest and gross human right violations in Kashmir, which New Delhi is exploiting to its advantage due to 'indifference of major powers' about the volatile situation in the Indian occupied Kashmir.<sup>83</sup> Other factor behind the increasing escalating tension between the rivals is due to expanding Sino-Pakistan economic and strategic orbit that accord them critical significance and leverage in multiple avenues.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, India is too increasing its influence and role in Afghanistan, which is perceived by Pakistani strategic community as a part of Indian plan to push Pakistan into a two-frontal security dilemma.<sup>85</sup> In strategic realm, India has shifted its traditional doctrinal structure of 'minimum' to a 'credible' deterrence, and is augmenting it by commissioning the indigenously manufactured nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) *INS Arihant* that was commissioned in August 2016. It is equipped with nuclear-capable missile called K-4 that would give it an assured second-strike capability.<sup>86</sup> Besides, it is also developing anti-ballistic and intercontinental ballistic missiles, Multiple Independently-Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV), and is piling up hi-tech conventional weaponry. In response, in January 2017 Pakistan too successfully test-fired Babur-3 – submarine launched cruise missile (SLCM - with range of 450 kilometers), from an underwater mobile platform, which would reportedly accord it a fairly reliable (not necessarily an assured second-strike) capability.<sup>87</sup> To augment its deterrence, correct the regional ballistic missile defense imbalance and to counter Indian CSD, in January 2017 Pakistan tested MIRV - *Ababeel*. On the other hand, India in order to reinforce

its deterrence and influence - Indian Navy (IN) is furthermore building nuclear-powered second aircraft-carrier INS Vishal (it is not expected to come into service before 2030) with the collaboration of US under the Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation (JWGACTC) as a part of their reported bilateral Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) that are some of the major developments relating to the regional security reconfigurations.<sup>88</sup> All such plans were conceived under the 2005 ten years New Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship, which also included the Commercial Space Launch Agreement (CSLA) under their Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) program and the Technical Safeguards Agreement (TSA) of 2009.<sup>89</sup>

Later on, India was offered anti-ballistic missiles defense system. This ultimately enabled it to indigenously built supersonic interceptor missile (in May 2016) as an advance air defense system capable of intercepting incoming ballistic missiles in mid-air. The post-2000 period clearly demonstrates the growing imperative relevance of the space-based assets for an optimal employment and deployment of conventional and nuclear forces in any future conflict. In this connection, India is no exception, and prima facie it is developing civil-military satellites, including for military and command, control, communications, and computer objectives, especially in the aftermath of Chinese expanding space capabilities.<sup>90</sup> In addition, US and India in August 2016 signed a defense - Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) that will seemingly facilitate two allies to use each other's military facilities to check China's growing influence. Also the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) between US-India, is a part of United States' defining policy to contain China. Besides, Indian Defense Minister Parrikar and US Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter in April 2016 agreed to increase bilateral ties in order to widen the scope of 'military-to-military exchanges, to expanded collaboration on defense technology and innovation.'<sup>91</sup> Similarity, in December 2016 US termed India a 'major defense partner' actually to streamline and to facilitate bilateral defense, trade and technology sharing architecture. While with the commissioning of Arihant, India's supposed triad capability coupled with its expanding blue water naval potentials would extend its strategic outreach in IOR and accord its Strategic Naval Force Command a necessary flexibility in tailoring its future strategic requirements and doctrines without even deviating from its stated 'No First-Use' nuclear policy. However, some scholars maintain that *India is in process of restructuring its nuclear doctrine*.<sup>92</sup> These are perceived in



Pakistan as existential threats, which are expected to compel Pakistan to craft proportionate counter strategies to neutralize it.

All these developments appear to be India's plan to indirectly operationalize its CSD to pressurize Pakistan in line with Modi government's alleged anti-Pakistan policy in league with its existing doctrine in spite of Pakistani government's efforts to improve relations. This strategy was evolved by India to abridge the lack of 'inter-service cooperation' mechanism. As per George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, it is very significant 'because even if Indian leaders chose to respond with limited military force to a future terrorists attack attributed to Pakistan,' then it 'would still need to prepare for escalation of an ensuing conflict.' They further maintained that Pakistan would attempt to counter such an offensive intrusion into its territory through 'battlefield nuclear operations.' Obviously, then, Indian Air Force and Navy would too come into action.<sup>93</sup> This would consequently multiple the prospects of spiraling situation out of control thereby dragging both countries even to a nuclear precipice. In such eventuality, it would be *naïve* to expect Pakistan's inaction against Indian military posturing. It surely has inbuilt seeds to escalate a crisis with high probability of conflagrating it to a full-blown conflict. On the other hand, then Pakistan's 'full-spectrum' nuclear strategy in all probability would too come into full-swing, as its non-operationalization would make it dependent on the Indian goodwill, which otherwise is not bound by institutions.<sup>94</sup> Rationally speaking, keeping in view Pakistan's conventional military disadvantage against India, its policymakers would take all necessary measures to contain India's reported blitzkrieg under CSD and to minimize the risks to its security from military intrusion.<sup>95</sup>

As previously argued that Pakistan has been entangled in a 'two-frontal' security-dilemma, which in view of growing asymmetries with India, and the latter's entrenchment in Afghanistan is expected to further intensify Islamabad's two-frontal security conundrum that is clearly detrimental to its national interests. In the context of China too, such developments would prove inimical toward the realization of goals of the OBOR/CPEC, stabilization of its Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, sustaining of its strategic relations with Pakistan that is intrinsically linked with the stabilization of Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and the resolution of Kashmir dispute so as to materialize these mega projects and to protect its both short and long-term objectives. In fact, lately the Uyghur minority and the East Turkestan Islamic

Movement seemingly escalated their activities, which warrant synergy between

***Here the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of four countries seem to be in a conflictual state: China-Pakistan on one hand and US-India on the other.***

China and Pakistan to ensure the viability of CPEC.<sup>96</sup> Here the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of four countries seem to be in a conflictual state: China-

Pakistan on one hand and US-India on the other. Such diametrically divergent national interests in future could become a major source of friction between them. The OBOR/CPEC is not only China's largest foreign investment venture,<sup>97</sup> but it could also prove instrumental in stabilizing Pakistan's internal security situation

India appears to be striving to attain a regional power status with aims to gain a global role and the memberships of the United Nations Security Council and the other multilateral non-proliferation cartels, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) that gained impetus after the signing of path breaking Indo-US nuclear deal, in 2005. India subsequently managed to sign a number of similar nuclear agreements with other states right from North America to Far East and Australia. India's access to critical dual-use technologies and joint research and development (R&D) projects with the developed countries would exert a phenomenal impact over its future economic, industrial, military, strategic and diplomatic rise. To assess the power potentials of a country, a basic measuring yardstick remains the material capabilities, including socio-economic conditions, technology, education, scientific, industrial and military R&D, natural resources, trained manpower, and military strength to balance the power of adversaries with sufficient military forces in league with conceptualization of appropriate response strategies. Consequently, Pakistan would be under constant pressure to invest in these sectors with objective to correct the imbalance of power<sup>98</sup> by becoming a linchpin of the OBOR/CPEC.

Carl Von Clausewitz writes that the threat of use of force in essence is 'a continuation of politics by other means,' which does not necessarily mean the 'actual' employment of force; rather it hangs in-between a 'twilight zone between diplomacy and war.'<sup>99</sup> Hence, calibration of a multi-pronged strategy would enable Pakistan a sufficient flexibility to confront the emerging contemporary challenges. Fundamentally strategy has to be 'pragmatic' otherwise it's a futile exercise.<sup>100</sup>

## Analytical Conclusion

The study explains the salient contours of the United States' primacy and China's strategic outlook and latter's growing assertiveness to secure its rightful place under the 'heaven.' Moreover, there are multiple other interconnected factors, including geo-economic, geopolitical, technological, industrial, and military that are divergently propelling them toward crafting of policies to secure their conflicting national interests. Competing strategic and philosophical moorings of both countries are reconfiguring the geostrategic environment on divergent trajectories both at global and regional levels. It has increased their bilateral wedge thereby furthermore intensifying the complexities. History testifies that invariably the rise of a peer-competitor against the established predominant power had led to violence and war. It has created a typical modern-day complex Thucydides 'trap.' But, today's 'trap' is more intricate due to onset of Information Age's technologies, RMA, state of geo-economic interdependence between the states, and the existence of multilateral nuclear-order (in comparison to Cold War's bipolar nuclear order), which would continue to prevent the adversaries from triggering a catastrophic war. In this environment, Pakistan-India, and the IOR would remain the central theatres that would influence, if not determine, the future contours not only of the region, but, also of the world. India and Pakistan have key roles in the emerging geostrategic power-bloc politics – one under US primacy, and the other one under China. China has ventured on visionary OBOR/CPEC mega-projects and, on the other hand, US has fine-tuned its 'rebalancing' and 'pivot' policy to contain the rise of China. In South Asia, the micro/macro-level changes are also markedly influencing India's and Pakistan's strategic outlooks consequently motivating them to craft perilous conventional and nuclear doctrines and strategies that in the absence of dialogue process, frequent eruption of crises, and non-resolution of bilateral disputes, or any other resilient architecture of mediation had persistently aggravated the structure of strategic stability and intensified security complexity. It is deduced that it is expected to further enhance the momentum of their mistrust, miscalculations, estrangement, and thereby increasing the prospects of crafting of dangerous doctrines. This is expected to negatively influence the future evolution of multilateral and multi-pronged strategies between India and Pakistan flanked by US rebalancing/pivoting policy reinforced by India's 'Act East' policy, and China's A2/AD strategies in parallel with OBOR/CPEC to regain its rightful place under the 'heaven.'

The paper analyzed the emerging multi-dimensional dynamics of the global and regional geo-economic and geopolitical environment that is influencing and remolding the whole gamut of geostrategic transformation toward a more conflictual direction. Although, galaxy of scholars have denied the existence of 'trap' dilemma, as indicated by Thucydides. But, the Chinese ascendancy and assertive policies could too amplify the prospects of a low-key escalation despite existence of multilateral nuclear order in South East Asia and South China Sea. However, all the visible indicators points toward erosion of US primacy and the growing strategic influence of the emerging peer-competitor's (China) race to catch-up would complicate the 'trap' phenomena. In this connection, South Asian centrality and strategic significance would continue to be of immense consequence.

For China, CPEC would provide unfettered access to two oceans – Pacific and the Indian/IOR consequently overcoming its Malacca dilemma by boosting its connectivity from Central Asia to Middle East through to Africa and Europe. On the contrary, India's growing trade and strategic cooperation with US/allies along with expanding of naval capabilities would expand New Delhi's influence and strategic outreach. In this scenario, it is crucial to fathom the critical role of NWS in the emerging multipolar nuclear order both at the regional/geostrategic pedestals that would prevent rivals from resorting to direct conflict. In the case of India and Pakistan, the widening geo-economic and military imbalance is leading to conceptualization and crafting of CSD and full-spectrum nuclear deterrence type of divergent conventional and nuclear strategies, which would make the strategic stability of South Asia volatile and intensify nuclear conundrum. However, the prospects of low-key indirect sub-conventional conflicts between their allies or through employment of proxies' would prominently surface in the coming decades. Though, there is no-space for a limited war between India and Pakistan due to inclusion of nuclear weapons and crafting of proportionate conventional and nuclear strategies. In the case of US-China, the factors of economic inter-dependence and the existence of Asian nuclear order would continue to dissuade rivals to initiate a full-blown war despite presence of modern-day Thucydides 'trap.' However, the prospect of tensions, crises, and rivalry is expected to increase volatility in world politics. Consequently it would persistently intensify the regional/global complexities, increase instabilities, and impact the overall security structure of South, South East Asia and IOR.

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