

THE EMERGING STRATEGIC SECURITY ALIGNMENT: A CASE OF GOLDEN RING OF SECURITY IN EURASIAN REGION

*Muhammad Samrez Salik and Ms. Khurshid Fatima**

Abstract

The international political system is gradually drifting from unipolar to bipolar world. This transformation is posing a severe challenge to small and medium size states. Apart from challenges the likely future global order will create more opportunities as compare to the cold war era and unipolarity. In this context the writer in its article has made appraisal for the Eurasian Region countries. China has invested its huge capital in the development of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asian states and in Pakistan. Further, the countries of Eurasian Region are in search of new security structure already in place after the demise of Soviet Union has been abolished. It is worth analyzing its role for BRI, China Pakistan Economic Corridor and overall regional security. The article analyzes the emerging security arrangements to address the security and stability of the region through the prism of theory of Regional Security Complex (RSC).

Keywords: Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkey and Russia (PICTR), BRI, Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICS).

Introduction

Following the cataclysmic events of 9/11, the world has been propelled in to radical changes in the global security agenda ranging from Westernization to liberalization and regionalism. The US response to 9/11 and ever since then her endeavors to maintain her hegemony on a global scale have been redefining the security paradigms. The declining reference to time and geographical distance and motivation for hyper-terrorism are facilitating the political identities and activities of non-state actors, creating an environment for the global reach of counter terrorism movements, proliferation of security actors and the varied ability of sovereign states to respond to the challenge of trans-sovereign security problems and transnational threats.¹

The Southwest Asia has remained plagued with conflict and violence for a prolonged period of four decades. Afghanistan has remained the epicenter of this prolonged conflict. In the midst of the transiting world, the order of power is shifting from West to East as well as unipolarity is shifting to multipolarity. In this prism, Belt

*Muhammad Samrez Salik is a PhD scholar at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad and Ms. Khurshid Fatima is Research Associate at Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad.

and Road Initiative (BRI) forms a counterstrategy to the US strategy of Pivot to Asia.² Indian Ocean Region is also seen as center stage of rivalry and its manifestations are already visible. In the given geopolitical environment, it may be required to analyze future security demands and possible security paradigms to move the conflict prone region to much needed growth and development. In this regard, Barry Buzan's Theory of Regional Security Complex gave logical insights which need to be reviewed in the context of changing global order.

Figure-1: 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

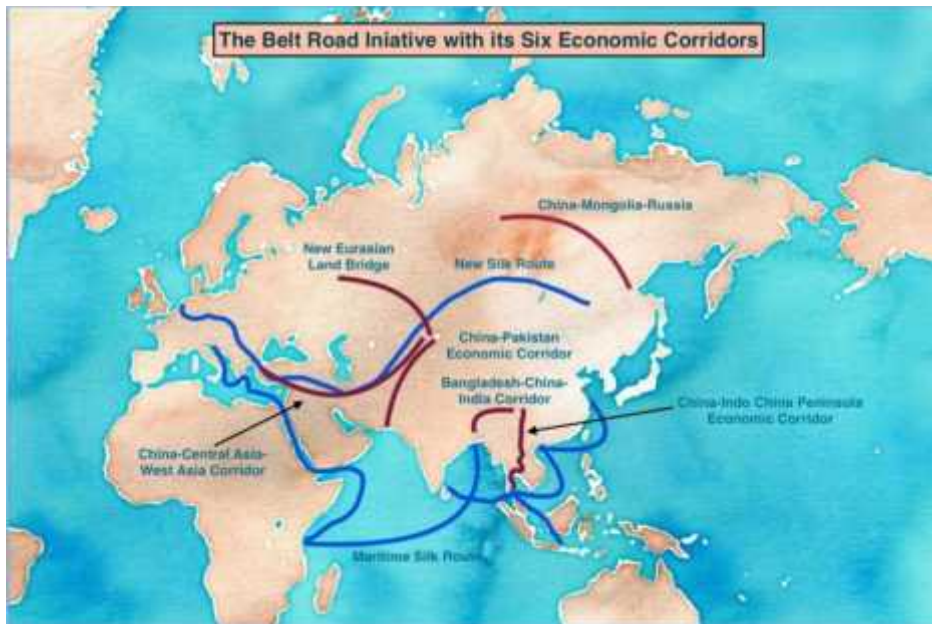


Owing to these regional security developments, the great powers are also on the verge of strategic power play for their invested interests in the **Eurasian Region**. In that realm, the US is contesting to retain her hegemony and is the only country as 'overall security provider'³ of the region whereas economically rising China and resurgent Russia are also introducing new security paradigms to safeguard common interests. The geopolitics of new world order have emerged as a complex in the post 9/11 scenario such as the US, China, Russia and other countries of the Eurasian region are greatly involved into global politics.

The concept of '*Golden Ring of Security*' was first introduced by a Russian Scholar; Andrew Koryobkov in his article: 'From Bandwagoning against Eurasia to Circling the Wagons in the Centre of it'. There are visible signs that the War on Terror is soon bound to slow down and play a considerably less conspicuous role in world politics. The US has already transited the efforts from War on Terror to strategic competitors. However, the New Cold War is looming that is entirely about convergence of strategic interests and resources as well as the zero-sum mindset with its most prominent rivals such as United States, Russia and China.⁴ The US supremacy is being challenged by new emerging inter-connected power blocs against it in the Eurasian region. The logic stipulated behind that the 'weaker states tend to align against stronger adversary as the

later by instinct can take control of anything by force while capturing the essence of bandwagoning'. Thus, the bandwagoning considered as act of preventing an aggressor state from disrupting that balance of power. In this regard, the China and Russia have commenced the balance of the power conception with further growing alliances in the region. Moreover, in the contest of West and East, the natural gravitation of certain countries towards Eastern bloc is interesting in Iran, Turkey and Pakistan forming a super-complex of 'Golden Ring of Security' to oppose much stronger threat i.e. the US in the Eurasian Region.⁵

Figure-2: Belt Road Initiative with Six Economic Corridors



Enclosing New Security Alignment: A 'Golden Ring of Security'

The Golden Ring of Security enclosed the newly emerging security arrangements encircling the distinct and interconnected power alliances (Koryobkov, 2018). In true essence, the new security arrangement is making a growing bilateral strategic partnership between China and Moscow as 'waxing powers' against the US as a 'waning power'. The multi-polar trilateral relations between Beijing, Russia and Pakistan have started as a response effort (2016) towards US failure in countering terrorism in Afghanistan. A multilateral cooperation of the Mid-East major powers between Iran, Turkey and Russia emerged in the late 2016 that also formalized into manifolds bilateral alliances later in 2018. Moreover, these alliances have incorporated the world most troubled spot i.e. Afghanistan and energy rich areas of Central Asian states as well as the heartland of Eurasia and to some extent Middle East. Moreover, these two transnational institutions that occupy the most important place in security alliances are Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Pakistan, however, can function as the bridge in connecting them together as the 'Zipper

of Eurasia⁶ notion via the Chinese-built infrastructure of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This coinage refers to the New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) coupled with expansions of the CPEC.

Conceptualizing ‘Common Threat’ and Formation of ‘New Security Alignment’

At the first stance, the growing Sino-Russian Alliance seems as cardinal feature to be a logical counter to their common adversary (US) in the emerging global order.⁷ China and Russia have persistently aligned their stances on critical issues against the US and including, North Korea, casting double vetoes in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the US interventions in Middle East⁸, pursuing greater power in international financial institutions, resisting US perspective on cyber governance and missile defense. China had also refrained from criticizing Russian intervention in Ukraine⁹ while Moscow demonstrated implicit support for China in its maritime disputes that further strengthened strategic alliance against west.¹⁰ Moreover, both have drawn increasingly closer together because of a confluence of geostrategic, political, and economic interests. This conflict has a common theme of diminishing, subverting, or dislodging American influence. On other hand, US power is also receding in its military and diplomatic power in its political leverage, in its economic might, and, perhaps most perilously, in the power and appeal of its leadership and ideas¹¹.

On the strategic level, this leads towards a ‘*New Cold War*’¹² confrontation that is already underway¹³ for long term strategic conflicts. It had become institutionalized since the US proposed its National Security Strategy (NSS, 2017) and termed both Russia and China as her ‘Strategic Competitors’.¹⁴ Besides, the American hostility towards Beijing and Moscow can be viewed in the US strategies such as upgrading the space wars as a branch of defense, possibility of missile crisis in Europe and allegation on Russia for interference in American elections for influencing outcome and followed by the structural conflictual tendencies.¹⁵ In the economic domain, the US has also imposed heavy sanctions on Russia in terms of economic and technological constraints. US has gone more hostile in containment of China and has started trade war against China.¹⁶

However, Moscow and Beijing have seen their influence increasing in the region. The growing strategic rapprochement between both is viewed as ‘a shallow partnership of connivance’ due to convergence of national interests such as military cooperation and leveling of allegations against them to form a new security alignment against the West.¹⁷ Recently, both attended the ECO meetings which can be viewed in this context. In addition, the US’ growing tensions with Iran pushed Moscow and China closer in opposing economic sanctions against Tehran. Russia and Beijing coalition with EU to isolate US also seems to be on the cards. The strategic partnerships are improving manifolds between Pakistan- China, Pakistan- Russia, with Central Asian States and Turkey to offset the growing effect of Indo-US-Israel nexus in the region. Moreover, the Sino-Russian embrace will continue to deepen in the economic security sphere in the foreseeable future.

The research paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the theoretical underpinnings applied on the concept of Golden Ring of Security through the framework of Regional Security Complex (RSC) and Comprehensive Security Framework by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde. The second section highlights the major implications at global, regional, inter-state and domestic levels. The third section comprises of the major findings of the paper as well as conclusions and recommendations.

Theoretical Underpinnings

'Security' in its traditional conception remained synonyms with the neo-realist's assumption of state as 'derivative of power'¹⁸ such as states constantly struggling for power during World Wars. The Barry Buzan, for the first time, in his book; "*People, State and Fear*" argued that the concept of security was too narrowly founded and evolved as more complex and multifaceted in Post-Cold War Era.¹⁹ So, he focused was to offer a broader security framework encompassing all dimensions of security.²⁰ Buzan's approach is an interesting exercise to analyze security from all angles, from micro to macro levels and to address the social aspects of security and to how find people or societies construct or 'securitize' threats. According to Buzan, in the international relations 'regions' are usually considered as subsystem or part of international system that have a particular geographical boundaries and common patterns of interactions such as religion, language, political integration, cooperation among states and history etc. The regional security complex 'is a group of states whose primary security concerns are so intrinsically interlinked and interdependent with one another and their national security interests cannot be realistically apart'²¹. Security is a relational phenomenon because one cannot understand the national security of any given state without understanding the international pattern of security interdependence in which it is embedded.²² In his analysis of regional security and how it affects the concept of security as a whole, Buzan offers several interesting and important concepts. First comes 'amity and enmity among states', in other words relationships between states that can represent a spectrum of being a friend and foe or alliances to those marked by fear. According to Buzan, the concepts of amity and enmity cannot be attributed solely to the balance of power. The issues that can affect these feelings range from things such as ideology, territory, ethnic lines, and historical precedent.²³ This is important to understand as the concept of amity/enmity leads to the idea of what Buzan refers to as 'Regional security complex' whose processes of securitization and desecuritization cannot be resolved apart from one another.²⁴ Buzan veers towards a broader understanding of security-based levels and sectors. The three levels that are referenced and addressed in detail in his work are individuals, states and international systems. The sectors, which he also addressed in the article '*New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century*', are Political, Military, Economic, Societal, and Environmental, together forming the concept of 'Comprehensive Security'.²⁵ These concepts cannot adequately address the issue of security separately, each one is intricately and complexly linked with the next, forming a web of information that consequently affect each other. This micro/macro methodology is something, of the utmost importance in order to be able to get a better idea how to deal with what Buzan calls the 'National Security Problem'.²⁶

Barry Buzan discussed briefly in his book with co-authors Old Waever and Jaap de Wilde; 'Security: A New Framework for Analysis', the dimensions and levels of security problem in term of ordering priorities that are interwoven together as complex web;²⁷ Barry Buzan's major findings are:

- **Military Security** is the most important threat and most pressing concern, which affects all components of the state. It can put into question the very basic duty of a state to be able to protect its citizens as well as have an adverse effect on the layers of social and individual interests.²⁸
- **Political Security** represents a constant concern for a state. It can be more ambiguous and difficult to identify in relation to military threats. As the state, itself is a political entity, a political threat with the purpose of weakening that entity can be considered to be on par with a military threat. They can take the form of competition amongst ideologies, or an attack to the nation itself. However it is important to distinguish between intentional political threats and those that arise structurally from the impact of foreign alternatives on the legitimacy of states.²⁹
- **Economic Security** is difficult to determine due to the nature of economics itself. The economic sector is also a clear example of how the different sectors interact with one another. Buzan addresses the important linkage between economic security and military security. It is easy to see that military security is dependent on economic security due to budget constraints and limits. Furthermore, economic security can be considered a key indicator as to the general security of a state. If developed and developing countries are compared, it is clear that with economic security other levels of security become easier to establish.
- **Societal Security** threats are about identity and the balance that can be found within any given state. Weak states are often ill-equipped to deal with differences in identity and culture that have spill-over effect over other neighbouring states which share same ethnicities and identities. However, it is also important to stress that the notion of societal security is difficult to apply since it deals with identities and cultures, essentially subjective and contextual constructions, it can easily lead to politics of discrimination and exclusion.
- **Environmental Security** is not easier to define and is considered the most controversial of the five sectors. When thinking of possible ecological threats, one often thinks about the "struggle humans have with nature" such as earthquakes and hurricanes. It is impossible to control these natural disasters. Possible initiatives to address these issues dependent on economic security and political security, as these issues are considered not only a threat to an individual state, but also global threats that will have a widespread after effects.

After analyzing the framework of "Regional Security Complex and the Concept of Comprehensive Security" with its derivatives, which is directly relevant to the subject matter under discussion. It is necessary to apply and evaluate theory, while keeping in view the "emerging geopolitics" in Eurasia and its implication for the region. The strategic relations among the US, Russia and China can be understood by taking into

consideration the basic assumptions of Neo-Realism theory. Eastern Bloc's ambitions to become revisionist powers in Eurasia against the US are truly the depiction of the traditional conception of security to pursue power for influence and resources in the region. Since America's national interest are driven in her policies of becoming 'sole security provider' of the region. The resurgent Russia and economically rising Beijing feel insecure as natural instinct of 'fear' between states to be controlled by hegemony as already discussed by Barry Buzan (2009). States foster alliances in the pattern of 'amity and enmity' to securitize threats from foreign interference whereby intrinsically stressing the national security issues altogether. In that context; the emerging security alignments between PICTR countries forming a 'Golden Ring of Security' can be viewed as new 'security complex' with reference to the interdependence and interlinkages between these countries on the following parameters or the levels such as; the golden ring of security emerges as countering way to the US growing Quad alliance and the emerging Indo-US-Israel nexus in the Eurasian region thereby addressing the military threats in context. The PICTR countries also have leverage to bring security and stability in the most volatile region i.e. Afghanistan, because the US is constantly failing the purpose by putting military muscles rather than huge investments in development and growth. This development will lead towards bloc politics in the realm of new cold confrontation between eastern and western bloc on ideological basis. The eastern bloc led by PICTR countries supporting communism and socialist's political ideologies as compared to US led capitalist's ideology. The area is also containing immense natural resources that may become source of concern for great powers. Moreover, the regional memberships and transnational cooperation at regional institutions such as SCO and ECO are underpinning the economic security of these states in foreseeable future. Additionally, the instability in Kabul is bound to affect the development of these projects due to its ill effects radiating to neighboring countries compounding security aspects. Since the US withdrawal from Paris Agreement; the PICTR countries are likely to bring in more cooperation in environmental security. In the holistic view, the newly formed security arrangements in the shape of Golden Ring of Security have altogether prospects of forming regional security complex that will foster effective security mechanism thereby constructing enhanced cooperative security framework in foreseeable future.

Critique

Although, the concept of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSC) is applicable well on the emerging geopolitics of Eurasian region. Under the consideration of all the derivatives of the theory, the newly multi-pronged alliances between PICTR countries at regional level may be suited best to form a Regional Security Complex. All sectors are considered while analyzing national and international security both separately and together. But, the idea of Regional Security Complexes that was offered by Barry Buzan in his book: "Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security" through which multiple regions such as Middle East, South Asia and East Asian complexes, have not been adequately addressed in the security domain due to overburdening of relational interdependence between states in the regions. Moreover, within the context of emerging security alliances between PICTR, the RSC theory should be reviewed again in term of newly dynamics forming regional complexes owing to global geopolitical and

geo economic developments. Therefore, the concept of “Comprehensive Security” is also applied to incorporate security in all domains and analyzed briefly.

Implications

- **Impact on Overall Security:** The emerging security arrangements i.e. the Golden Ring of Security between PICTR countries will impact Eurasian Region positively³⁰. Although, the US is becoming waning power and her hedging policies such as from ‘Pivot to Asia’ to ‘Rebalancing’ and Quad alliances in Indo-Pacific are not much favored in the interests of the regional countries³¹ in Eurasia. Due to the regional history of turmoil, there are likely chances of crackdown between countries out of game played for divergent interest by the great powers.³² Moreover, in case of China, Russia and India there is also the possibility of regional integration (trade), but the conflicts will remain intact with regards to security imperatives³³. India will also prefer to be part of a regional alliance while being domineer of the US hedging policy while acknowledging her ambitious regional power status³⁴. Besides, Australia is security partner of the US and economic partner of China. However, the states seem to favor more the option which lies at optimal interest according to the need-based interdependence. Moreover, the intertwined nature of interests between great powers will create conflicting situations that lead towards sense of deprivation among states. There is a need to define regional cooperation for overall security such as led by PICTR countries. It is established fact that anarchy and sense of deprivation can only bring dissatisfaction. That’s why, all the powers have co-opted the policies of ‘vested interests’ in the region, therefore, the geo-economic convergences between great powers may reduce tensions by avoiding any conflicts in the Eurasian Region³⁵.
- **Regional Impact:** In the regional context, the Golden Ring of Security is going to be an enhanced security mechanism in terms of institutional commitments, it is also considered a more optimal and preferred security mechanism. The Golden Ring of Security as ‘security complex’ can be viewed in terms of ‘collective security’ in Eurasia through the lens of SCO, ECO and BRI. Although, it might have some negative implications, such as states might have natural competition for power and influence between them. However, the Golden Ring of Security will encompass more insider powers in the security complex than outside powers in the region. The security impact in Afghanistan, India, Central Asian Republics, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan is as under:
 - **Impact on Afghanistan:** Afghanistan holds a central position vis-à-vis BRI and CPEC. Instability in Afghanistan can adversely affect main prong of BRI passing through Kazakhstan in the north and CPEC in the south. One of the main threats to CPEC lie in instability if Afghanistan. Keeping in view criticality of CPEC for overall success of BRI, stability in Afghanistan becomes a *sine qua non*. It may even be in the interest of the US to keep Afghanistan unstable. Afghanistan lies at the heart of Eurasia and therefore instability in Afghanistan radiates ill effects to all the countries in Eurasian region. Afghanistan, as a most troubled spot,

is facing issues, one of them is, US' interests of using Afghanistan as battleground to manipulate and serve her interests in the region. Afghanistan provides an opportunity to the US to keep an eye on Pakistan, China, Iran and Russia. It also enhances liberty of action of the US vis-à-vis China's rise and BRI. Since US is visibly failing to bring stability, but China and Russia are involved in peace process for stability out of their own strategic interests. Chinese ambitions to secure access through CPEC and CAREC initiatives can be secured through stability if Afghanistan for which India has already made serious objections³⁶. Moreover, through Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline will make Afghanistan an energy transit hub which might also facilitate Russian ambitions to secure easy access to the warm waters. Afghanistan is also facing issues of terrorism, militancy, drug trafficking and human smuggling at border areas with Turkey and Iran. Pakistan and Afghanistan can also play role as connector hub to the region. However, there are likely chances that the collective security arrangements such as The Golden Ring of Security can play more effective role in bringing stability in the region. There is a need for collective response mechanism against common security threat in the conception of emerging security complex.

- **Impact on India:** India is serving as '*net security provider*' of the region on behest of the US. In this context, India will be on more disadvantages while being the puppet of US in the region³⁷. As a major implication, India might get sidelined in the region and thereby face isolationist tendencies by the PICTR countries in foreseeable future. Indian upgrading of her defense and naval posture will form a great source of concern in the region specially for Pakistan³⁸. India ambitions to become dominant regional power are being challenged by both the revisionist powers such as China and Russia in the region.³⁹ Indian isolation in the region will contribute positively to Pakistan. CPEC as geostrategic alternative will make redundant great powers' dependency over *Strait of Malacca* and provide more room for their strategic interests in Indian Ocean region as well.
- **Impact on Central Asian Republics:** Energy rich areas are likely to come under effective control for more economic development through cooperation between PICTR countries. CARs will remain at advantage for having their own leverages in terms of capacity and resources.
- **Impact on Turkey and Iran:** Iran and Turkey are aspiring their own roles in the region⁴⁰. Both Iran and Turkey are against US influence and want to become regional dominant powers in Eurasia. Golden Ring of Security will provide them alternate options.
- **Impact on Pakistan:** Pakistan has remained bulwark first for USSR and secondly for US in the region. The presence of the US in Afghanistan has enhanced liberty of action of India which directly impinges upon security of Pakistan. India has negatively contributed

towards creating instability in the region. The leverages provided to India by the US in Afghanistan cause serious implications for Pakistan and India continues to label Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism⁴¹. US cutting of financial aid to Pakistan and internationally maligning of Pakistan is favoring India. However, US recent tilt towards Pakistan in terms of playing more role in Afghanistan can be viewed in consideration of its geostrategic importance in the region. India has declared two front war against China and Pakistan which is another concern for security of Pakistan⁴². In this scenario, the possible options for Pakistan lie in playing integral role in the newly emerging security alignment such as Golden Ring of Security. Pakistan has leverages to play primary role in security terms as well as potential economic connector through CPEC in the Eurasian region. In this regard, Pakistan National Internal Security Policy (2018-2030) should be reviewed to strengthen the capacity building at both regional and national levels for optimal results in foreseeable future.

Findings/Analysis

- First, US influence seems to be reducing due her leadership failure in the region and secondly, it is being challenged by revisionist powers like China and Russia as “Axis of Resistance”.
- New Cold War confrontation will bring sense of deprivation among states as it is based on ideologies of the great powers led by making eastern and western blocs.
- Effective Security mechanisms such as emerging Golden Ring of Security through PICTR countries will bring more stability in terms of institutional commitments for collective security and development as a ‘Security Complex’.
- Regional Security Complex theory by Barry Buzan needs to be reviewed in terms of new geopolitical developments and emerging regional alliances.
- However, smaller states are affected when bigger states play games; therefore, there is a lot of apprehension among the countries in the region. The need of the hour is to focus on capacity building of those states in every possible aspect.
- ‘Accommodating and Cooperative Strategic Framework/ Policy’ such as the Golden Ring of Security Framework is needed at regional level to ensure stability and prosperity in the region.
- Stability in Afghanistan will be better ensured.
- Energy security of energy rich regions will be ensured.
- Greater role of regional powers will be ensured as against self-serving interests of the extra regional powers.

Conclusion

“The world is witnessing titanic transitions. The old rivalries are transforming into future friendships and age-old strategic partnerships are now being transformed into suspicious relationships”. China and Russia were considered to be enemies but now

they are best friends. India and Russia, thought to be inseparable because of India's dependence on Russia are now weaning away due to Indian tilt towards the US. Consequently, Russia has begun to have doubts about how their relationship would be in the future. The global powers are at the verge of receiving 'change of choices' and patterns of 'trust and mistrust' hauling the world towards anarchy and sense of deprivation. In the gigantic view, 'regions' are needed to be identified in focusing submerged developments through regional alliances. The need of new leadership is important for combating ideological differences among emerging blocs whereby contributing greatly in new world order for continuous harmony and peace in the world.

Recommendations

- Resurgence of the US Global Leadership can only combat the emerging threat of China-Russia Axis impacting the peace and security of the world.
- The growing China-Russian alliance should be considered more accurately and translucently in terms of their revisionist aspirations to become as dominant global powers.
- There is a need to reintegrate Iran and Turkey in terms of their regional power status in making security arrangements of Golden Ring of Security.
- Indian and Russian alliance should also be reconsidered.
- There is an opportunity to isolate India because of her outside approach e.g. India's defense up-gradation with the support of the US and India's role as net security provider of the whole region on behest of the US.
- There is a need to differentiate the global leader and the new leaders i.e. already existing revival of the US and Western ideologies and new leader in terms of new principals led by Eastern bloc.
- The 'demilitarized-region' would be in common interest of all; regional as well as extra- regional stakeholders. In this regard, diplomacy should be focused as an optimal principle between great powers.
- All efforts should be put in to bring stability in Afghanistan which is a *sia-quanon* for success of future initiatives as well as growth and development is the region.

NOTES

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