

REBALANCING ASIA – PACIFIC: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In view of the economic importance, the regional as well as extra-regional powers seem eager in making ingress in Asia-Pacific. Due to the US absence from the region for quite some time, Chinese managed to fill the vacuum to improve its economic ties with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Nonetheless, despite being Chinese trade partners, ASEAN states have welcomed the US re-engagement that has multiple interests in this region including the prevention of nuclear proliferation and maintenance of safe and secure Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC). The US renewed strategy aims at achieving its strategic objectives through partnership instead protection of its allies and by selectively deploying its troops rather than occupying the region. The mistrust that prevails between China and the US could lead to tension if the regional disputes remain unresolved. Protections of trade routes are also the Chinese priority goal. Therefore, it would brush aside any pressures coming from the US and its allies, a scenario that must be avoided in the larger global interest. Lastly, while Pakistan does not figure out in the emerging great game in Asia Pacific, but because of its strategic location, it might be sandwiched between China and the US especially, in case the crises are expanded beyond Asia Pacific.

Introduction

Till late 2000, Europe and the US continued to play a nucleus role in economic activities having global impacts, but with the change of century, it is opined that the centre of economic activities is shifting from the West to East. Asia-Pacific region is emerging as a key driver of the world politics and economic activities. Chinese initiative to bail out Asian market from collapse during global financial crisis of 2008,

made the US realize the upcoming nature of threat to its interests in Asia-Pacific.¹

Professors Graham Allison and Joseph Nye have equated the challenge that two great powers are facing as ‘the Thucydides trap’ who explained the cause of the great Peloponnesian War of the 5th century BC. Thucydides pointed out that the rise of Athens caused fear of being elimination in Sparta. Since then, scholars continue to ponder how power shifts leads to competitive tensions, which sometimes may be managed and sometimes may lead to conflict.²

Economically, Asia Pacific which is home to some of the most important trade and energy corridors, maintains a persistent growth rate.³ From security perspective, the region is fast developing and modernizing its war fighting machines. China having second largest economy as well as second-largest recipient of foreign direct investment in the world, maintains an edge over other regional states both in term of economic development and military buildup.⁴

In view of its growing significance, the US is in the process of making necessary adjustments to its priorities in the Asia Pacific. In view of its importance, President Obama during his address to Australia’s Parliament in November, 2011, stated, “As President, I have therefore made a deliberate and strategic decision-as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future...”.⁵ In the same context, the US former foreign secretary Hillary Clinton expressed, “The most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decades will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment-diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise- in the Asia-Pacific region...”.⁶

It is understood that the foreign policies of China and the US carry great importance for the world peace and economic prosperity. The US new policy for the Asia Pacific clearly indicates its intent of adopting a new strategy of both ‘containment’ as well as ‘engagement’. It is believed that the

US presence and projected role in containing China in the South China Sea, Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf is a serious issue and a matter of concern for China.

As a part of the strategy, outlined by the Department of Defence (DoD) Strategic Review 2012, Defence Secretary Leon Panetta told at Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore that the US would assign 60 percent of its fleet to the Pacific Ocean by 2020. Additionally, four new US Littoral Combat Ships designed to fight close to shorelines would be placed in Singapore while Philippines is seeking to host more US troops on a rotational basis.⁷ Moreover, the US air force is also fully involved in its preparation.⁸ Pakistan being one of the key players in Asia alongside India, which has 90 percent trade through Persian Gulf cannot remain oblivion to the emerging security environment where Chinese and the US may have to stand in two opposite camps.⁹

In this backdrop, this piece of writing focuses on growing Chinese influence in Asia Pacific and the US approach to rebalance China and its impact on the power balance and regional security including its relevance to Pakistan. The paper will unfold in following sequence: First, strategic significance of Asia Pacific, second, the US perception of Chinese growing influence in the region, third, the US counter-balancing efforts and its possible fallout impacting on strategic security and stability of the region, fourth, Asia Pacific issue in theoretical framework. Fifth, great power games in Asia Pacific and its relevance to Pakistan and finally, the conclusions and recommendations.

Geo-Strategic Significance of Asia Pacific

Inagaki was the first to indicate that the next century would be the Pacific Age. As an oft-repeated maxim has put it, “the Mediterranean is the ocean of the past, the Atlantic is the ocean of the present and the Pacific is the ocean of the future”. The findings of Goldman Sachs report clearly indicate that the economic centre of gravity will be shifted decisively to the Asia

Pacific by 2050 wherein three of the world's four biggest economies will be China, Japan and India.¹⁰



Map of South East Asia¹¹

Asia Pacific provides an ideal international trade route; five of them pass through the chains of island including the Straits of Malacca which is considered as the key maritime chokepoint. It is only 1.5 nautical miles (2.8 km) wide at its narrowest point. The region also contains six largest ports of the world.



A report entitled 'Maritime Law and Policy for Energy Security in Asia' prepared by Jin Cheng and Kevin X. Li, expresses, "Nearly 50 percent of the world's crude oil, 66 percent of its natural gas and 40 percent of the world's trade is transported through this narrow waterway". From strategic security perspective, Southeast Asian waters provide suitable locations to establish military bases, the one who would control the Malacca Strait would have distinctive leverages over its rival.¹² Additionally, South China Sea that contains clusters of Iceland is seen from two angles; one, it provides freedom of action to the state that maintains control over this Sea and secondly, it contains natural resources like hydro-carbon.¹³



Source: UNCLOS and CIA¹⁴

The Core Interests of the US in Asia Pacific

Following World War II (WW-II), the US entered into series of bilateral treaties with Southeast Asian countries for protection of its interest in the region.¹⁵ In the emerging politico-strategic scenarios, the US interests and objective in Asia Pacific can be outlined as follows:

Firstly, the core objectives in the region is to protect its national interests by maintaining balance of power through power projection. Japan and South Korea are already hosting about 100,000 US troops. Chinese rising military pressure over the regional countries has compelled the Washington to come up with its re-balancing strategy that includes placing some troops at Darwin, Australia and it is also in process of adjusting its forces at Guam.¹⁶

Secondly, the US would ensure smooth flow of its trade across the globe by securing Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) which is also significant to maintain a bargaining position with China.¹⁷ While quoting Teo, Harnit Kang highlights, “Whoever controls the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean could threaten China’s oil supply route...”.¹⁸ As stressed earlier on, controlling this region is equally significant from military perspective.

Thirdly, since the end of the WW-II, Washington has been maintaining its strategic alliance with Japan. In order to promote their common interests, the US is likely to go all out to support Japan in case of a Chinese military aggression. Besides, India and Indonesia are also considered major drivers of the global economy, thus, Washington would wish to give India a strategic leadership role in the region.¹⁹

Fourthly, since 9/11, the US has identified two more objectives to include nuclear non-proliferation and war against terrorist organizations in the region. The US is persuading North Korea to give up its nuclear option while engaging it at a multilateral forum and it would not let lose the control to allow any other country to become nuclearized including Japan.²⁰

Fifthly, the complex interdependency has changed the dynamic of the world politics. It has opened markets in Asia to present the US with ample opportunities for trade and investment.²¹ The US would thus, like to explore all options peacefully and if need so, would also achieve its economic

objectives through power projection, coercion as well as threat of use of its military might.

Sixthly, a single track approach to deal with China is less likely to work. The US would therefore, like to maintain a new set of priorities towards China called 'Engaged-Containment Policy' by applying both 'soft and hard' power.²²

Chinese Growing Influence: The US Perspective

Washington perceives that China's rise as a major international actor is likely to stand out as a defining feature of the strategic landscape in the early 21st century. Its military which spends around \$ 100 billion annually, is now venturing into the global maritime domain. The increase in defence spending provides her with flexibility to acquire everything that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may like to include in its weapons' inventory.²³ While China may have no aggressive designs as it has been occasionally expressing but mere possession of military power is sufficient to make a country aggressor, if it so decides.²⁴

Both China and the US think differently with regards to the world politics. There is a serious 'identity gap', the US is looking forward for a 'liberal international order', while Chinese disapprove 'democratic peace theory', says Gilbert Rozman.²⁵ From the US perspective, China's military developments and lack of transparency in its defense budget creates doubt about the sincerity of the rhetoric of "peaceful rise" that underpins China's great power identity.²⁶ Condoleezza Rice, the US former Secretary of State opines, "The United States, along with many other countries, remains concerned about China's rapid development of high-tech weapons systems". She further explains that Washington's relations with Russia and China are complex and portrayed simultaneously by 'competition and cooperation'.²⁷

China would wish to maintain its hegemony over South China Sea and prefers a map which was drawn up before the UN was formed which gives it claim over nearly the entire

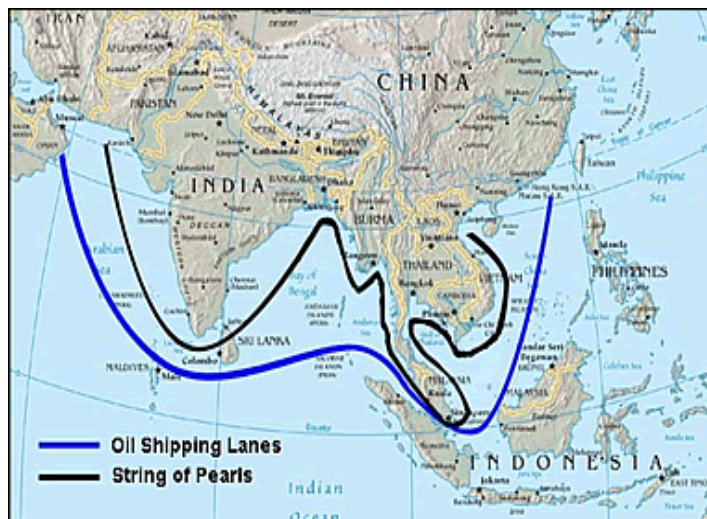
South China Sea. Huy Duong from the *Diplomat* wrote, “China started to draw a mysterious U-shaped line on their maps that are expanding to include the economic zones of other countries”. In view of the Chinese massive naval build up, the US analysts expect China to push further into the South China and beyond.²⁸

The majority of Chinese analysts are convinced that China should adopt a more proactive and assertive strategy. They are of the view that China should develop itself as a maritime power if it was to protect its economy by protecting its trade routes passing through the Strait of Malacca. Lexiong believes that “China would suffer a miserable defeat, as Germany did, if it were to be afraid of developing its sea power”.²⁹ It is opined that in response to nation’s aspiration, China has come up with first ever aircraft carrier the *Liaoning*. It has adopted ‘anti-access area denial’ strategy focusing on a triple D approach i.e. to deter, delay and defeat its opponents in a theatre of operations. It aims at restricting the meddling of any third party in a conflict involving Taiwan which remains one of China’s core interests.³⁰

China aims at limiting the US forces to the Western sphere of the Pacific by employing a multi layered and multi dimensional attack strategy which calls for an integrated response by using advanced systems such as ballistic and cruise missiles, anti-ship weapons, 4th generation fighters, manned and unmanned combat aircraft, as well as space and cyber warfare capabilities.³¹ It does not mean that China remains un-concerned about rising Japan as ‘normal’ state from ‘system supported’ culture, Bhubhinder Singh calls it a “shift in security identity from a peace-state to an international-state”, aspiring to undertake active role at the global level.³²

The Chinese perceived strategy of ‘String of Pearls’ is the sign of its growing geo-political power which stretches from the Chinese mainland and goes up to Port Sudan. The ‘String of Pearls’ refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its SLOC. Ever

since the term "String of Pearls" has been invented by Booz Allen in 2004, a team of experts at the US-based consultancy, journalists/academics have overplayed China's supposedly malicious involvement with countries along its SLOC in the Indian Ocean, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, there is no indication that China was ever involved in such an ambitious planning.³³



The map is taken from Booz Allen report³⁴

However, the perceived strategy will challenge US naval supremacy in the Pacific Ocean and control over SLOC. According to Kiracofe, "...the rise of China is the issue that these military deployments and debates on war fighting strategy seek to address".³⁵ Micheal Auslin opines that there is an enormous terrain between maritime bullying and full-scale war, but the steady decline of a sense of stability and security could lead to greater tension. Though, the Asia-Pacific is presently in the early stages of that spiral but it could still lead to full scale conflict as China has been encouraged over the past one decade.³⁶

Ever since China has developed its military capabilities, it seems more aggressive and maintains an assertive stance over contested territory, and might take an adventure to change

status-quo. As the tussle between China and its neighbours goes on, the chances of a slip-up could lead to clash rise. Washington views that protection of this region against Chinese exploitation is crucial not only for the US but also global peace at large.³⁷

On economic front, the US feels threatened too. Though, currently, ASEAN collectively remains the largest destination of the US investment in Asia, and represents its 4th largest overseas market, but its market shares continue to decline as China has become the region's economic behemoth.³⁸

Counter-Balancing China: The US Initiatives

During the initial years of 21st century, the US remained struck in Iraq and Afghanistan thus, could pay less attention towards this region. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2009 set the pace for cooperation which was followed by Obama's presence at the November 2011 East Asia Summit (EAS), for the first time. The US appointed a dedicated mission to Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), announced the Lower Mekong Initiative, forged strategic partnerships with Indonesia and Vietnam, strengthened its military cooperation with Philippines and Singapore, appointed an ambassador to Myanmar and engaged Brunei, Laos and Cambodia.³⁹

As indicated earlier, in January, 2012, a new defence strategic guidance titled, "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence", was announced by President Obama in which he chalked out the salient features of the US military strategy for Asia Pacific. The guidelines call for a shifting focus from fighting and winning wars to preparing for future challenges, particularly those within the Asia Pacific region and acknowledges the need to focus more on its naval fleet. Another important aspect of the review is the emphasis laid on the term 'partnership', which would require its partners to share the burden of responsibility. The strategic review calls for strengthening its relations with its

long time allies and also builds on new ones such as India, Indonesia, Vietnam and New Zealand.⁴⁰

To counter Chinese area denial strategy, the US has already prepared its plan by introducing ‘Air Sea Battle Concept (ASBC)’ as well as the ‘Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)’ published in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The strategy calls for a coordinated response from the US air and naval forces.⁴¹ According to Global Times report published by Clifford A. Kiracofe, “to begin with, the US military aircraft will be deployed in Thailand, India, Singapore and Australia”. General Herbert Carlisle, the Chief of US Air Force operations in the Pacific says that such deployments include fighters, tankers, and bombers applying Cold War model in Pacific theatre as it expands its presence in the region.⁴²

As pointed out earlier on, Pentagon is placing more troops in the region more than at any time since the WW-II. With immediate effect, Australia will host a deployment of over 200 US marines which would eventually go up to 2,500 which is called Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG). From another perspective, Washington also takes into account other regional players like India, a rising power, Japan’s growing assertiveness, Russia’s increasing activism in the Asian affairs, and Indonesia’s return in politics.⁴³



United States Military Bases in Asia Pacific⁴⁴

In response to Chinese ‘String of Pearls’ strategy, the US aspires to contain China through a ‘New Bamboo Curtain’ which extends from South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Australia, Vietnam, India and beyond; with a view to disrupt Chinese energy supplies in the Straits of Malacca if need so. Alternative routes become too expensive and time consuming as well. Currently, Chinese naval forces are handicapped both in terms of number as well as technology and they are incapable of confronting the US naval ships. Presence of a permanent group of the US warships in Singapore could thus pose serious security threats to Chinese commercial ships, in case there is tension between the two.⁴⁵ Chinese access to Gwadar Port as an alternative option, will pose a serious security risk for Pakistan.

There is yet another ring to contain China that is based on Guam and Hawaii.⁴⁶ To demonstrate their power potential, the US along with its allies held biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercise, the world's largest naval exercise, consisting of 25,000 personnel from 22 nations. China, Pakistan and North Korea were kept away.⁴⁷ The US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta during his last visit to China received strong criticism from Chinese side that strongly objected to the US rebalancing strategy and the resultant growing military presence in Asia and the Pacific.⁴⁸

The above arguments notwithstanding, Michael Auslin during his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee has observed that the US Pacific Command already consists of 325,000 strong military personnel remains a credible deterrent. He believes that the announced strategy of increasing its naval forces up to 60 percent is unlikely to make a material difference as there is nothing new in the proposed strategy. Half of America’s aircraft carriers and over 50 percent of the Navy’s cruisers, destroyers, and submarines are already in the Pacific. Similarly, the US air assets are also in position throughout the region, only few more are unlikely to make a marked change. He opines that in view of the Chinese, Russia and North Korea influence, “America’s

margin of error for maintaining a credible military posture in the vast Asia-Pacific region is steadily shrinking”.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the Auslin views, in addition to Japan, the US has also developed a network of bilateral alliances with South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand. The two emerging powers with which the US has recently engaged are India and Indonesia which will ensure the access to the world’s most vital energy and trade route.⁵⁰ Moreover, the US strategy is not limited to security parameters only. Military moves were supplemented by diplomatic and economic push as well. Washington formed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to take full advantage of rapidly growing Asian economic system. It is a major free trade initiative, and therefore, efforts were made to expand it by encouraging the addition of other members to participate. Currently, there are nine negotiating parties including Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.⁵¹

On a diplomatic front, the TPP would convey a commitment on part of the US for long term and sustained engagement. Another benefit of concluding such an agreement would be that all members of the TPP would have a common interest to safeguard and maintain the free flow of goods through strategically important sea lanes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Though, the TPP carries a number of benefits for the US, but it has not been fully appreciated by many of the negotiating parties which raised concerns about the issue of intellectual property rights, investor-state disputes and protecting domestic markets etc.

Though, China intends capturing Asian market, still the trade between Asia and the US is about \$1 trillion that is about 27 per cent of the total trade.⁵² The US enjoys free trade agreements (FTAs) with Singapore and Australia. It has membership of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which is a leading regional economic forum. It brings emerging economies to promote open trade and investment along with building capacity to enhance regulatory regimes. The US has also set off a new US mission to ASEAN in Jakarta

and signed the ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation’ with Southeast Asia.

ASEAN likely Response to the US Scheme

The ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of Bangkok Declaration by the founding members namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Currently, the organization consists of 10 members including Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia besides the founding members. Unlike the NATO, ASEAN remains an economic forum. The economic interdependence has paved the way for multilateral cooperation including political, economic and cultural. However, together they do not possess a unified policy on various issues because of inter-state conflicts. It has failed to bring a successful multilateral organization such as European Union (EU). Despite differences, it is a successful sub-regional organization of Asia Pacific which continues to cooperate on economic front and respect United Nations Charter.

Generally speaking, ASEAN responded positively to the US initiatives. But frequently, the states have come up with reservations on the basis that while the US presence in the region would provide them leverage vis-a-vis that of Chinese aggressive policies, but many fear that the region could become a high ground for strategic competition between the two great powers. While ASEAN would like to benefit from both, but they would not like to be placed in a scenario where they would be asked to make a choice between the two. Moreover, the individual ASEAN states exercise independent national policies therefore, the US cannot have uniformed policy towards them. The US would therefore, have to maintain state-to-state relationship.⁵³

In the regional context, Philippines continue to enjoy the strongest relationship with the US, which stems from the US colonial period (1898-1946).⁵⁴ Both sides continue to pursue joint military and economic cooperation especially in the backdrop of growing threat of terrorism. The ties between the

two have been further strengthened because of the maritime dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea and the US rebalancing strategy towards Asia Pacific. 'Manila Declaration' on November 16, 2011, reaffirmed the bilateral security relationship.

Singapore, despite being small in size, has transformed itself into a major player in the Southeast Asia and a supporter of a strong US presence in Asia. Today, the city-state is America's 13th largest trading partner. It hosts US naval ships in its waters. However, while the US traditionally enjoys strong relationship with Singapore, but still both have differences in certain areas. Singapore has an apprehension that the US strategy towards Southeast Asia may provoke a backlash from China if the relationships are not managed delicately.⁵⁵

While majority of the regional countries have been trying to tread the fine line, without annoying China, nonetheless, Vietnam has been more open and continues to oppose Chinese 'South China Sea' policy which she considers a breach of its sovereignty. Military ties between the two have increased especially after their first 'Defence Policy Dialogue' held during 2010.⁵⁶ Thailand has been one of the US oldest strategic partners since 1833 in the backdrop of the 'Treaty of Amity and Commerce'.⁵⁷

Except for Philippines and Vietnam which are vocal and favourably inclined towards the US re-balancing strategy, the remaining ASEAN countries including Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Brunei, Cambodia and Laos are looking for a balance approach while dealing with both China and the US. Their future relationships with them are seen from economic prism and their military relationship with the US seems symbolic. Despite their close relationship with the US, none of them is prepared to openly offend China.⁵⁸ Moreover, because of economic disparities and differing national policies, the US would be unable to engage all regional states in a comprehensive manner.⁵⁹

While the US would wish to retain its leadership role in Asia Pacific, but the responses that have come from the regional countries can best be described as ‘cautious engagement’ because many still feel that the US may not have the capacity to meet its rebalancing strategy. Secondly, in view of the Chinese deep rooted ingress in economic domain (China-ASEAN Free Trade Area), which is now the third largest in the world by trade volume, the US wish to take lead role in economic front too seems a distance dream.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, the US seems inclined to retain the initiative by relying on its all weather allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia. As a strategic partner, the US might also trust India which has its vested interest to contain China as well as Pakistan. The presence of US boots in the region and its support to littoral states engenders negative impact on security environment of Asia-Pacific. China views the US presence in its own backyard as a threat and truly, a matter of concern.⁶¹

Emerging China-US Tension and its Relevance to Pakistan

21st century is an age of globalization, and no country, despite its limitation, would be able to stay in isolation. Pakistan is one of the main players in South Asia which is likely to be affected directly or indirectly in case of an upheaval in Southeast Asia. Though, unlike India, while Pakistan does not figure out in the ongoing game between the great powers in Asia Pacific, but the emerging scenarios might drag Pakistan within its fold, despite its desire to stay away. Through its propaganda campaign, India is already trying to implicate Pakistan in great powers’ game by projecting an alliance between China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Iran and Pakistan as a balancing power to India, the US and even Russia.⁶²

In the changing politico-security landscape, development of the Gwadar Port largely funded and constructed with Chinese expertise, has come up as an independent naval

station. It is likely that Chinese Navy would be enjoying full access to dock service and may be allowed to station its future naval fleets at this base. With the courtesy of Pakistan, Chinese submarine presence in the Arabian Sea and its potent role of securing its maritime shipping which could at a later date, be augmented with a dedicated 'Indian Ocean Task Force, might synergize Chinese and Pakistani efforts to secure the Straits of Hormuz-Arabian Sea maritime domain. It would pose a challenge to the present dominant Indian naval presence.⁶³

It is viewed that though, the great powers' game which mainly focuses on Asia Pacific, providing China, an access to Gwadar Port would definitely have direct implications for Pakistan's security on two accounts; one, Chinese presence at Gwadar would influence Indian Ocean which would impact India's security. Secondly, in case of any future conflict in Asia Pacific between China and the US, allowing China's Navy to operate from Gwadar naval base means Pakistan has become a party. In the recent past, some newspapers have claimed that some soldiers of the PLA are present in northern part of Pakistan, though the news remains unconfirmed.⁶⁴ Presence of Chinese naval forces as well as foot soldiers in and around Gwadar in any future scenario, Pakistan is likely to receive more attention though in negative sense.

Critical Analysis: A Possible Upcoming Scenario

In the backdrop of the above debate, one might conclude that Asia Pacific has been securitized; a theory that was developed by Buzan and Waever which deals not with security per se, but the process of securitization whereby the security label is attached to certain phenomena.⁶⁵ Territorial disputes including the contested claims on exclusive economic zones between the regional players which are unlikely to be resolved in near future, these problems have become source of concern that can lead to open conflict between China and the US and her allies.

It is opined that despite the ongoing disputes, China seems more accommodative, and looks for ‘absolute gains’ in the region while the US maintains a hostile approach towards rival and wish to achieve ‘relative gains’. Alternatively, one may also conclude that the US, being the sole super power, considers China a threat to its hegemonic power therefore; it is striving to maximize its relative power vis-a-vis that of China by applying means like the threat of use of force, maintaining alliance and through blackmailing, the power maximizing tools as outlined by Mearshemier.

On the contrary, China is well aware of its limitations. It remains isolated and in fact, encircled by the US and its strong allies despite the fact that majority of ASEAN would not like to offend China. Therefore, it appears that because of its shortcomings, China aims at protecting its long term national interests in the region by ‘maximizing its security’. Chinese wish to control South China Sea is also seen as an attempt to maximize its security by pushing the US and its allies away from China’s mainland as well as secure free flow of its trade. Chinese investment in defence sector is taken negatively by the US and its allies and is considered as a threat to the security and sovereignty of the regional players. If the trends continue, both China and the US are destined to be an arena of relentless security competition, following the Cold War model, a situation that leads to ‘Security Dilemma.

Notwithstanding above concerns, despite the clash of interests in Asia Pacific, China remains the second-largest trading partner of the US, its third-largest export market, and the largest foreign holder of US government debt. Both countries are trapped in a ‘complex economic interdependency’ a theory promoted by Joseph Nye.⁶⁶ Therefore, it is believed that despite differences on a number of accounts, the two are likely to accommodate each other not by choice but because of economic compulsions, even at the cost of compromising on certain security issues relevant to regional players. Additionally, India too is intimately involved in bilateral trade with China which stands at over \$ 60 billion per year. Therefore, ‘complex economic interdependency’ is

further expanding across various regions that would discourage any adventure that may affect the trade and resultant economic prosperity.

Lastly, though the possibility of a physical confrontation between China and the US and its allies are less likely in short to medium term, but outrightly cannot be ruled out. Therefore, if such a situation emerges in near future, China would run short of options to protect its national interests unless, it gets an access to India Ocean and Persian Gulf through Gwadar Port. The perceived scenario would complicate the situation further which would encourage India to jump in as the US ally to contain both China as well as Pakistan. In this game of chess between the US led allies and China, Pakistan seems the biggest loser. It is likely to be caught in crossfire between the two great powers, a development that will have serious security implications at the regional as well as global levels. Balancing the relations between the two would become a daunting task for Pakistani policy makers.

Conclusions and Possible Way Forward

The window of economic opportunity that Asia Pacific offers must be availed by all without involving in 'zero-sum game'. A de-militarized and de-securitized region is in common interest of all regional and extra-regional players. Creating a win-win situation is important if all have to benefit from the economic opportunities of this region.

Kiracofe views who suggests that though Washington's policy of retaining, and even increasing, its allies within a tight military and economic framework are nothing new, but, in the evolving multi-polar world, the provocative projection of hard power should be avoided that only increases tension and may lead to war as pointed out by Kiracofe. Washington should therefore, must avoid zero-sum thinking and a costly and unnecessary policy of hard power provocation.⁶⁷

In 21st century security paradigm, the options with the two great powers are limited. Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Australia, suggested a need for reinforcing dialogues and cooperative efforts. Chinese President has also emphasized and suggested to the US president, “We should prove that the traditional belief that big powers are bound to enter into conflict is wrong, and [instead] seek new ways of developing relations between major countries in the era of economic globalization.” This vision can be translated into practical manifestation, provided both sides concede respective grounds.⁶⁸

Rice suggests, “It is incumbent on the United States to find areas of cooperation and strategic agreement with Russia and China, even when there are significant differences”. Fareed Zakaria’s opinion also goes in line with Rice thinking who suggests, “The US must adjust with the changing realities and concede some of its own power and priorities and be prepared to accept a world with diversity of voices and viewpoints”. China is rising power therefore, earlier it is realized by the US; the better it may be for stabilization of the emerging world order.⁶⁹

Interdependency, though an important factor that might push the two countries to extend more cooperation but probably, interdependency in isolation without taking into account security might not fully work. One needs to strike a balance between the two important factors, economics and security interconnectedness; both should prosper simultaneously without compromising one at the cost of other. Therefore, both China and the US should respect each other’s sensitivities and must not cross the ‘redlines’ which become detrimental to regional as well as global security.

There is no way that two great powers could continue playing ‘zero sum game’ in the region indefinitely. Maintaining long term peace and stability is in the common interest, both from the perspective of security as well as economic prosperity therefore, it makes sense for them to adopt a more collective approach, remove misperceptions by

having frequent interaction at the highest level so as to mitigate regional insecurity. China has already suggested to the US side for developing cordial relations on the basis of mutual respect, trust, equality and reciprocity.⁷⁰ In this context, the US being the global leader, may have to take a lead.

It is believed that things generally go wrong in vacuum. At no stage, the US allies or Chinese partner i.e. North Korea should feel threatened in the absence of full time backing from their senior partners. Scholarly world suggests that both the US and China should continue to extend full support to their respective allies to reassure them that they will not be left alone in case of an aggression from either side, a clear message/signalling would take away the incentive for adopting an aggressive posture by either side.⁷¹

Their cooperation on economic front notwithstanding, both sides also need greater cooperation on a number of other issues which have global repercussions including climate change, terrorism/piracy, drugs trafficking and nuclear non-proliferation. Moreover, a greater understanding is also needed to resolve the issue of Korean Peninsula as well as Taiwan, two of the most challenging issues that the 'new type of great-power relations' must accommodate.

With regards to the settlement of territorial disputes in Asia Pacific, the approach has to be a distinctly Asia-Pacific. Authors intend supporting Chinese thinking which lay emphasis that major power relations should be based on the principle of multilateralism. One Chinese analyst goes even further, arguing that any structure cannot go without balance of power or equilibrium, an important security mechanism dating back to ancient times, and has also been an important constituent part of the present-day international security mechanism.

While better relations between China and the US are important, but in order to achieve long term sustainable peace in the region, China and Japan would need to get closer and

face each other directly at the heart of the delayed transition in East Asia, a long awaited action that both should have carried out long time ago. Being the regional players, both China and Japan should bypass the US and negotiate a great power bargain directly.

With regards to Pakistan, it must desist from oscillating between one great power to another and strike a balance while dealing with regional and extra-regional countries. It cannot afford to put all eggs in one basket as it has done in the past. It cannot afford closed cooperation with one at the cost of other. It should remain open and cooperative with all regional as well as extra regional states.

Moreover, Pakistan should continue to create environment for better ties with Russia which can play very important role in creating good will between India and Pakistan and reduce the US influence in the region. A close alliance between China-Russia and Pakistan can change the perception that this region can still live peacefully without the US influence. Pakistan's commercial and strategic relationships with Malaysia and Indonesia, the two strong organs of ASEAN and Japan would also help Pakistan in dealing with the US in crisis environment.

And finally, China should invite both India and Pakistan to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which would provide an institutional framework to engender cooperation. It would also be helpful from the perspective of countering US military influence in South and Central Asia.

Conclusion

Following Vietnam War, the US stayed away from this region for quite some time and realized only after having observed Chinese ingress in the region. While Chinese presence and dominating role on economic front in the region has not been a problem for the ASEAN, but because of its rapid military modernization and flare-ups in the South China

Sea, ASEAN also feel, threatened and has welcomed US re-engagement with the region.

The current regional security environments seem heading towards the Cold War model of the US-Soviet rivalry. The international order which has long been monopolized by the West is being challenged by rising China which the West would not like it to happen. Resultantly, a new Cold War in the Asia-Pacific might emerge. To avoid such an emerging scenario in the larger global interest, the decision makers in China, Japan, and the US would require adopting a constructive approach in shaping the process of national identity construction.

To secure the regional security architecture, China is less likely to follow a path to war but that does not mean that she will surrender to US strategic containment. The US therefore, should simply strive to maintain the military status-quo and be content with Chinese protestation. Confrontation would bring nothing but devastation which is detrimental to the security and the economic interests of the regional countries and the international community at large.

Finally, in the emerging geostrategic environment, Pakistan should also reach out to Asia Pacific countries especially Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia, establish and expand its economic as well as military relations with them so that during the crisis situation, Pakistan still has some leverage against the US led aggression. It will help Pakistan diversifying its security related options in case it is brought under pressure by the US and possibly India.

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