

# CHINA, REGIONAL BALANCE AND INDIA: A PURVIEW OF LARGER SECURITY INTERESTS OF THE REGION

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## **SUMMARY**

*This Paper traces existing geo-strategic atmosphere and the power-balance of Asia on the backdrop of China's rise as a major power. The pinpoint of argument here is how China's strength has brought about many-fold challenges for India as well as the entire region and New Delhi's policy responses so far and probable way outs.*

**Keywords:** *Emergence of new China, India-China bilateral issues, China's strategic game against India, Regional Imbalance, Pakistani connection, Myanmar between India and China, China and SAARC, Chinese maritime strategy, Options for India,*

## **1. Introduction:**

World War II brought about unprecedented changes in the global power equation. With the eclipse of colonial rule, new entities of international politics emerged as the important stakeholders of global affairs. On the one hand, it was the rise of United States of America and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics both appearing with opposite ideologies, forming Blocks and confronting approaches. But in the context of Asia, it was China that emerged with flying colours. China becoming the permanent member of United Nations' Security Council may be seen as ratification of China's role that helped Beijing in evolving as the most important stakeholder of the issues related to this continent. In fact, China attaining this exalted status is the most surprising outcome of World War II considering the state of China during century's long colonial rule and World War II. The process of China's evolution enhanced with Fall of USSR. China overpowering Japan; the once the Asian colonial power and existing economic powerhouse of the continent are undoubtedly surprising factors. But power equation is a dynamic matter. Hence, China's evolution is certainly a part of the tide of the time that keeps global affairs and political chemistry ever changing. Of course, there may be other arguments that preparation in China started long back. One may refer to the famous Long March of China and establishing communist regime in that country and others. All these are important points behind China's growth.

## **2. The Present Context: Some Interrogatives:**

But here, the context is different. However, I feel this prelude is also important to explain the points. Here the pinpoint of argument is: how has China's policy affected the region particularly peace, security and solidarity of the large part of East Asia, substantial parts of South East Asia and beyond? Has China contributed to global peace and security as an important stakeholder of the UN Security Council? What are the shape of India's relations with present China and the issue of vulnerability that permanently exists in India and her periphery because of China? What is the way out and future roadmap to restrict China and steward the wind flowing in different direction for a secured Asia and others? All these interrogatives demand to expose the real agenda of China.

### **3. China-Pakistan Nexus against India:**

This is true that after 1962 Chinese aggression, no full-scale military conflict has happened between India and China. Of course, there are occasional ceasefire violations across India-China border particularly in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim; the Indian Provinces located at the Northeastern part of India. Ceasefire violation at the international border by China is a regular affair. China's illegal occupation of a substantial part of Kashmir donated by Pakistan to its Chinese big-boss from the area that is called Pakistan Occupied Kashmir is also a bone of contention between India and China. Issue of constructing big-dam by China in the river Brahmaputra and Sino-Indian complication on river water sharing are some other contentious bilateral disputes between the two nations. But the most concerning factor for India is enhanced China-Pakistan co-operation at and around the disputed territory POK. China's all-weather friendship with Pakistan is always a matter of serious concern for India as this friendship is not based on development Pakistan and the beleaguered Pakistani citizens but targeting India's security points. Presence of Chinese troops and terrorists in large part of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir means that China ratifies the Pakistani approach, which has made terrorism as the State-policy of Islamabad. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and increasing Chinese activities in Gilgit Baltistan region adjacent to LOC have increased vulnerability and security concerns of India. This is true *"India's threat perception has really increased on the backdrop of enhanced Chinese effort and investment for infrastructure building in this region. The road connectivity will not only make China reaching Central Asia but this will provide Beijing to bypass India-domi-*

nated maritime route. But strategic ramification of this is certainly increased Chinese military infrastructure in the POK, integrated Pak-China military activities, terror outfits getting more weapons and better training facilities and other illegal activities at the throwing distance of India's border.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, “China has never changed its tactic of challenging India's security interests across the border. The two-fold Chinese strategy; challenging India on the strategic fronts and co-operating with India on the economic fronts, only served the Chinese interests so far. With the passing time as India felt the need of economic investment, China availed this opportunity. During this time, no doubt international political scenario changed a lot. Fall of USSR and setbacks in America's strategic interests in South East Asia and Central Asia substantially changed the dynamics of global politics. This is true that the changed scenario has increased America's dependence on India.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. China-SAARC Nations and India:**

Along with the North and Northwestern frontiers, Chinese challenge against India at the Northeastern frontier of the country is also immense. In fact, “Chinese shadow in India's Northeast is concerned, it is the gift of China to its ideological followers in India. In the form of Chinese aggression New Delhi's policy of keeping Northeast India outside the purview of the national policy backfired. Important question today is definitely not ruminating over India's defeat against China in 1962. Important point is: China has been ever persistent to sabotage India's strategic interests in Northeastern Frontier and add fuel to the prevailing discontentment among the Northeastern people against the policies of New Delhi. Apart from military defeat, the Chinese aggression sent some significant messages to New Delhi. The message was loud and clear for India's strategic think tank that Northeast India requires greater strategic vision not only for safeguarding the border areas from possible Chinese aggression but for peace, tranquility and solidarity in the entire Northeast which are related to larger national interests. The region with peculiar identity crisis, ethnic enigma, sub-regionalism and sub-nationalism has always been a sensitive area. China and other nations can

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<sup>1</sup> Shibdas Bhattacharjee, Chapter-4, *India's Policy Paralysis in Restricting China in Northwestern Frontier*, Page No-121, *India's Fragile Foreign Policy towards Neighbouring Nations*, 2017, ISBN-978-93-83803-18-7. Overseas Press, New Delhi

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Page No- 163-164

*manipulate these against India's national interests. This is not prediction but a proven reality. China has always aggravated the situation in the conflict-torn Northeast. Apart from active support to anti-national elements operational in Northeast since India's Independence, China has instigated other nations bordering Northeast to create disturbance. This is why China and China's nexus with the Neighbouring nations bordering India's Northeast and India's Chicken Neck (Silliguri Corridor) always bear great strategic significance for New Delhi. But India has always ignored this aspect if seen in terms of proper policy initiations and deliberations. As a result, country's Northeastern frontier has evolved as too complicated area to handle for New Delhi. One cannot afford to ignore analyzing security and strategic issues of Northeast keeping aside 1962 Chinese aggression. The issue really deserves prominence and is bound to appear again and again.”<sup>3</sup>*

### **5. China, Myanmar and India :**

Thus, as far as existing situation is concerned, there are some bilateral issues of dispute between two neighbouring nations. But more concerning issue is China's strategic mission of making nexus with various countries around India and more importantly against New Delhi. China has tactically extended its influence in all the nations of South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), the ASEAN and militarily more significant nation bordering India's Northeast; Myanmar.”*Beijing's policy towards Myanmar may be divided into three parts: politics and security; energy resources, and economic considerations. Since the introduction of China's reforms in 1979, Beijing's Myanmar policy has conformed to its general policy of ensuring a stable external environment with neighbouring states so that its domestic modernization and development can proceed unhindered. Hence Beijing's support to Yangon's military regime is essentially stable approach so far. China values its relationship with Myanmar, especially in its western development strategy, its active involvement in GMS (Greater Mekong Sub region) programme and as a means to enhance its military presence in Southeast Asia. So also, the strong and “all weather” friendship between China and Pakistan is well known. A third dimension to this relationship is being discerned with the active participation of Myanmar, which had strong ties independently with China ever since the Army in Myanmar took over the government. The triangular relationship*

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Page No-219

*of these three countries, China-Pakistan-Myanmar, brought new challenge for India on the strategic front. China considers Pakistan as a long time ally and continues to assist Pakistan in its missile and nuclear technology programs. On the other hand, Myanmar's relations with the West have always been complex and contradictory. Since 1988, the West's application of sanctions and attempts to isolate Myanmar to force a transfer of power to the democratically-elected government has increased Yangon's suspicions about Washington's designs. But West could virtually do nothing directly to remove Myanmar's junta. Therefore sanctions proved to be ineffective".<sup>4</sup>*

### **6. China Closer to Indian Periphery:**

So also, China has already made strategic bases in the other nations bordering India like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. China is investing in port building to make the island nations like Sri Lanka and Maldives, which has converted substantial part of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea focal point of conflict. Similarly, China's relationship with North Korea and aggressive poster in South China Sea are potential threats for regional security as India's friendly nation Japan seems under pressure by the autocratic regimes of both China and North Korea. Nepal has ideological connection with China. This is the basis of Nepal heading towards communist nation and Kathmandu seems often standing against New Delhi and with Beijing. Ideological penetration of China through Nepal is a major cause behind the upsurge of Maoist extremism in different parts of India. China is keeping no stone unturned to make Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh strategic bases to enhance its dominance and challenge India.

### **7. PM Modi's China Venture:**

Two basic questions arise from the above discussions. One is: is India's military power competent enough to challenge China on the war-fronts? Another one: what is the way out for India? This is not age of open military confrontation. Beleaguered state of United States in case of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are best examples of this. But one cannot ignore the strategic inroads. India has substantial opportunities here. For the region within its periphery, India enjoys leverage to put her relationship with Bangladesh into use. Enhanced co-operation between India and Myanmar is strategic need of this era. Similarly, India needs to extend its tie-ups with ASEAN and other nations

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Page No- 257-258

of Far East. India's relationship with Japan, Iran and other democratic regimes may be fruitful in this context. So also, countries like Nepal and Bhutan despite taking asylum in the lap of China, heaves on Indian oxygen at least for geographical reasons. This is true, *“land-locked Bhutan and Nepal and the unalterable dependence of these nations on India have always been great opportunities for India. This is true in case of Prime Minister Modi as well. In fact, Prime Modi initiated his foreign trip with Bhutan visit followed by Nepal. If Prime Minister Modi kept close watch on the evolving strategic dynamics in other side comprising Bhutan, Nepal and China, this could have been a great opportunity. Similarly, India got a unique opportunity to balance her relationship with Myanmar and Bangladesh during the Rohingya crisis. But that opportunity was not tried to harness by Prime Minister Modi and his team. Indian Ocean region and India's naval capability have always been great opportunities. Prime Minister Modi no doubt unfolded his maritime diplomacy through improving India's relationships with the Island nations of the Indian Ocean region. But problem is: this did not evolve as maritime strategic partnership which is important for the maritime security of India.”*<sup>5</sup>

## **8. Conclusion**

But apart all other things, India's potentiality is its huge market and the huge workforce. Under no circumstance, China can afford to lose Indian market. This compulsion of China needs to be put into use. India's effort should be to evolve strategically stronger against China and greater bargaining with China regarding accessibility of Indian market for all Made in China products. This has both potentiality and probabilities to subdue China at certain point. But India's mission can never be complete without the support of all those nations of the region having distinctive stand against Chinese hegemony. For this India needs to be more pro-active. India's relations with Japan, South Korea and to some extent Iran bear special significance. On the backdrop of Covid 19 pandemic, India has emerged as suitable place for Japanese and South Korean investments. This should be converted into strategic relationships to counter China. It will be interesting to watch how Prime Minister Modi-led government in its second consecutive term delivers to restrict China and create a conflict-free region for larger interests.

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<sup>5</sup> *Shibdas Bhattacharjee, Chapter-9, India's Security Challenges and Modi's Policy Responses: A Reality Check, Page No-465 Modi's Rule and India's Unbound Opportunities: Narrative of the Substantives and Beyond, 2019, ISBN-(13): 978-81-939968-4-3, Overseas Press, New Delhi*

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2. Ibid. Page No- 163-164
3. Ibid. Page No-219
4. Ibid. Page No- 257-258
5. Shibdas Bhattacharjee, Chapter-9, India's Security Challenges and Modi's Policy Responses: A Reality Check, Page No-465 Modi's Rule and India's Unbound Opportunities: Narrative of the Substantives and Beyond, 2019, ISBN-(13): 978-81-939968-4-3, Overseas Press, New Delhi