

Geo-Political Checkmate in the Indian Ocean Region: 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Energy Security and Indo-US Nexus

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Abstract

The study intends to explore the connection between China's energy security, 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and its anticipated impacts on Indo-US strategic perception in the Indian Ocean region. China's economic prosperity and industrial boom is fomenting different variables to upset the U.S. led world order. In the back drop of energy security as core national interest, Chinese leadership has exceptionally focused the maritime domain. In addition to this, for uninterrupted industrial growth, China largely relies on energy imports that have turned its attention to the strategic value of the Sea lines of communication (SLOCs). However, China's newly emerged interests and subsequent investment in different sea ports along the oceanic supply chain of Indian Ocean is fuelling Indo-US strategic distrust in the region. The study concludes that China's carefully crafted Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is to challenge the status quo to protect its (China) core national interests in Indian Ocean. The divergence of strategic interests in Indian Ocean is heralding a new multipart strategic competition that will transform the Indian Ocean into breeding ground for naval arm race. To understand the shifting geo political realities, the researchers used the Power Transition theory.

Keywords: *Indian Ocean region, 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), Energy Security, Power Transition,*

Introduction

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, described that world power configuration has been taking change for the 5th time since 20th century. In the on-going power transition from Unipolar to the polycentric structure, the unfolding uncertainties, strategic value of SLOCs, sophisticated technologies, the desperate need of Blue Water navies for the projection of offshore power have profoundly complicated the sense of insecurity and security more than ever existed in the past. Pointing to the geo-political epicentre for competition, Robert D. Kaplan in his article entitled, the 21st century geo-strategist in "Centre Stage for the 21st Century" viewed that due to residence for preeminent energy and trade interstate seaway, Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is where global struggles will play out in the twenty-first century (Kaplan, 2009).

IOR is the third largest oceanic body enclosed by Asia, Australia and Africa continents. The region hosts nuclear powers both declared and undeclared, witnesses the competition of extra-territorial powers i.e. Sino-America, is the inhabitant of some of the largest oil, coal and natural gas producers while at the same time energy starving

states. In the emerging geopolitical theatre of India Ocean, India's geographic position at the center along other ingredients of national power catapulted it on advantageous locus. Apart from its favorable geo-strategic position, India has some hiccups as well. India's territorial conflicts with nuclear arch rivals Pakistan and China are one of the strategic impediments in the way of its "great power" ambition. In the extra-regional actors, America is the most powerful contender having French and British in reserve. According to the US Department of Defense Base Structure Report US has ensured its presence in 12 different locations in IOR- Diego Garcia, five in Persian Gulf, three in Africa and three on the eastern rim.

Next to the US, China's growing dependency for energy imports and trade exports on India Ocean prompted it to take urgent and fast track measures to secure its interests in Indian Ocean. China is the world's second-largest consumer of oil and surpassed the United States as the world's largest net importer of oil in 2014 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2015). China is struggling hard to establish its naval presence across the IOR. China established its first external naval outpost in Djibouti and installed

“a few thousand” troops and staff at its first ever overseas military base. Apart from Djibouti, China has been enormously investing in other maritime ports, which in large numbers are spotted around Indian Ocean (Beckhusen, 2018). The presence of the vital powers and their higher and uncompromising stakes has made India Ocean a significant 21st century water body with diverging strategic interests.

Indian Ocean holds multiple strategic, commercial and transportation significance. The region is a pivotal conduit for global energy and trade shipments those shoulders 40% of the world oil supply and 90,000 commercial fleets annually. Infested/swarm over by important choke points (U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2017), IO is the matter of dead and life in context of energy security for developing states of the new power structure. The presence of the global hegemon US, exclusive strategic claims of ambitious India and China’s inroad in the region have made Indian Ocean converging region of bedrock concerns. In the wake of China’s interests in the oceans, MSR is taken the vital instrument of China’s quest for maritime superiority accompanied by naval modernization to balance

the possible threat of the Indo-US nexus in IOR in case of blockade. The conflicts of interests, in IOR, are sharpening the strategic rift further and overwhelming the initiated joint mechanisms to evolve a liberal maritime paradigm between the diverging stakeholders India, America and China in IOR.

Theoretical Framework

Power Transition Theory (PTT)

The power transition theory is an attempt to highlight the possibility of conflict in international system by distinguishing between dominant power(s) and potential challengers. Power transition theory was first posited by A.F.K. Organski in ‘World Politics’ (Organski, 1958) in late 1950s and has further been focused in ‘Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century’ (Ammen, 2000). Power Transition Theory is anti-thesis of ‘Balance of Power’ that was called as basic principal of international relations.

Power Transition Theory (PTT) like realism does not see world system as anarchical rather hierarchically organized similar to domestic system. In system smaller states recognize the power potential of dominant nation(s) based on different power capabilities. It also recognises that international and

domestic systems are governed by similar rules. Like domestic system, political parties struggle for power, in international system states are in constant competition for scarce resources. Power transition conceives international competition as driven by the potential net gains, the overall improvement observed in some measure after all positive and negative influences have been fully accounted for, that could be accrued from conflict or cooperation (Jacek&Organski, 1989).

The most importance aspect of power transition theory is hierarchy in international system. Organski visualizes the international system as pyramid. As one moves down from the top, the number of states will be increasing down ward. At apex rung, the most powerful state(s) are designed and designated as "Dominant Nation". Dominant state(s), 'the one has total ingredients of national power in true sense' and in the end is placed the least powerful. Dominant state(s) sets the rules for international order. Such state(s) has military prowess that can be projected far from its shorelines, economic prosperity, seductive culture that entice the other states of lower rungs, and an attractive political model. Dominant state(s) confirms the requirement of

both 'Hard Power' and 'Soft Power'. It is the main runner of the show in international order.

On the second rung of the pyramid great powers reside, those states which have also massive resources but at a time one on one cannot match the dominant state(s). As their names convey these states are also powerful but weaker than the dominant power(s). Great powers also share the benefits of the international system but less than that of dominant power. Dominant power(s) needs their diplomatic, economic and military support for sustaining their status of global hegemon in international system. The most important thing about these states is their potential to be the future dominant state(s).

Down the great powers, middle powers stand in hierarchy. These powers are second rank powers Australia, Germany, Japan and India. Allthese state have economic and security assurances and certain benefits for their survival and prestige in prevailing international order. Further down to great powers, middle and small powers come. Although small powers align themselves with current international order however largely feel dissatisfied from it.

Furthermore, Organski's Pyramid bifurcates great and middle powers into satisfied and dissatisfied powers. Firstly, stands those great powers and middle powers which are satisfied from prevailing international order and allied with the dominant power(s). Some of the great and middle powers e.g. India, Great Britain, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia are satisfied and allied themselves with US (hegemon) to share the global leadership and extract maximum benefits from the system. Organski calls these states the most powerful and satisfied states.

On the other side of spectrum, some of the great and middle powers do not feel satisfaction from current international system. They do not think that the running system is fulfilling the desired level of their satisfaction. They see themselves on receiving position and think are being exploited by current international order. In current scenario this group consists of China, Russia, and Iran etc. great powers of this groups are called 'powerful and dissatisfied' while middle powers of the group is called 'weak and dissatisfied'.

The dissatisfied category gangs up and springs up as real challenger of hegemon. When nations are di-

ssatisfied and at the same time powerful enough to possess the means of doing something about their dissatisfaction, trouble can be expected (Organski, 1968, p. 328). In current international order China's economic growth, military modernization, creeping assertiveness, and being far away from the true political modernization on western lines have been patching it as true challenger to the US.

PTT contends the notion that the power of a nation cannot increase unless it wins a war or makes new alliance. One of major assumptions of its arguments is the impetus for the power originates within the states. It is industrialization that makes a nation more powerful and the most powerful nations of the world are industrialized nations. An industrial growth of the different states largely contributes in altering the global power structure. So the more rapid will be industrialization, the fast change will be observed in the global power structure.

In 21st century, alongside the changing sands of geo politics, shifting epicentres of powers, replacing of old alliances by new one, the century is also witnessing industrial revolution at its pinnacle. Industrialization brings great po-

wer to the nations undergoing it (Organski, 1968, p. 301). Chinese industrial growth has made it able to knock the door that opens to the status of the dominant state.

At global level, rising China has been threatening the US dominancy. Dissatisfied great and middle powers under China's auspicious started to gang up against dominant power (America). Some of the symptoms of resentment have already been taken at a snail pace movement. Sometimes diplomatic statements and other times overt and blatant denials of US moves have sowed the seeds of multi-polar world.

In Indian Ocean Region (IOR) China and American started to counter each other through regional states. US have declared India as linchpin for her rebalancing policy and multiple times America has expressed her firm commitments for making India a great power. While on the other side, China has been bolstering Pakistan's navy in IOR. The frequency of defence treaties, naval exercises and arm sales are scaling up with every passing day in the region. Massive population over stretched land, rich history and above all Indian's aspirations to be a greatpower; are few among many variables that make it a suitable strategic western paw to counter

China. Both, India and China have also flashpoints that intermittently ignited border skirmishes and both fought a war in 1962. Suffice to say US policy to contain China would be up to some extent incomplete or at least in greater troubles in the absence of India.

Wars occur when a great power in a secondary position challenges the top nation and its allies for control (Organski, 1968, p. 325). China's quest for separate economic institutions, military alliances and strategic agreements with different small, middle and other dissatisfied great powers are manifestations of her dissatisfaction from status quo and projection of a revisionist power along Russia. Besides, intermittently it has flexed her diplomatic muscles sundry times. Keeping in mind uncalculated price of the war, China adopted at-odd-but-not-at-war approach with America. In US-Iran nuclear deadlock China supported Iran and on sundry occasions in soft manners conveyed her message to Washington. In Syrian case, China has vetoed several US moved resolutions in UNSC. Similarly in the South China Sea, China denied ICJ verdict in Sino-Philippine maritime dispute. China's colossal strategic strides in IOR have long been serving as glue for US-India

relations region. On one side Indo-US joint anti-Chinese submarine surveillance mechanism in Indian Ocean reminds China its maritime vulnerabilities. To overcome its vulnerabilities in waters; Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is an important strategic-cum-economic instrument.

Power Transition's Assumptions

PTT claims that the possibility of war increases manifold when rising power dissatisfied from prevailing international order and determine to upset it. The situation becomes worse when dissatisfied rising power achieves approximate balance of power with the dominant power. In past, in WWI and WWII dissatisfied rising powers challenged the dominant before achieving credible balance of power, and that adventure ended in disaster. However, if challenger gets larger muscles that ensure her dominance, the dominant power remains hesitant to fight the challenger which mitigates the risk of conflict (Organski, 1968, p. 334). In such situations the signs appear before challenger claims or fight for dominance.

The power gap between rising China and America is still to cover a lot. Although, China emerged as economic challenger of US,

however, the other ingredients of national power still tilts into American favour.

Second assumption, PTT claims that rapid and sudden growth of a challenger in single generation does not let dominant power to take peaceful precautionary steps for sustaining peace in prevailing international order. The potential, location and size of China have been in discussion in US since long. Back in 1949, US embarked to get China isolated in its first 30 years. In early 50s, both had face off over Korean peninsula. However, in 60s Sino-Russo split paved the ground for the Sino-US joint venture against common adversary Soviet Union. In short, Sino-US relations have stretched over decades and both are well aware of each other's strategic cultures. The principle of rapid rise in single generation that enhances the possibility of war between rising and dominant nations is quite dimly applicable in Sino-American case. The Chinese growth has track record of almost six decades and US has been shaping and reshaping its China centric policies accordingly.

Sometimes Self exaggerated sense of rising power makes it blind and during inebriation of growth it may miscalculates the actual capabilities of dominant power.

Chinese mature and cautious approach has nullified this strategic mistake. China never flexed its muscles aggressively against great powers but in extreme exceptions. China is very cautiously projecting its image and never exaggerated to lead or outwit its geopolitical rivals. Its century's long struggles had already made it able to define itself being responsible nation in international community of nations.

The degree of friendship between the dominant and challenging nations also contributes in peaceful transformation of international order. The power transformation from British to US was peaceful because of their congruent political systems and civilizations. However, in Sino-US power transition, both have different political, administrative systems, and military objectives. Both are representative of different political systems and values

The stark difference between Sino-US culture, norms and over again US pressing for Chinese political modernization are major symptoms of their anticipated future conflict. Above of all, adjusting with alien political system need greater changes and for a larger nation like China or US it would be impossible

to submit voluntarily to their counter values.

Energy Security as a Strategic Concern

Energy security, broadly defined, means adequate, affordable and reliable supplies of energy (International Energy Agency, 2007). It matters because, today, to keep continue the smooth and ensured growth of economies, industries and transport sector from maritime to aerial and battlefield vehicles, energy security has become top priority concomitant to others in foreign policy making circles. Being mover of every kind of state's wheel, for various states energy became as influential strategic tool to secure their national interests either through blackmailing others (in Russia case and European Union case) or as core national interest in Chinese case. Energy security has acquired the status of an essential variable in on-going geopolitical contest and that pitched various states against other either to protect energy sources, markets or transit routes.

In this regard, the former US President Richard Nixon rightly pointed out that *Security and economic considerations are inevitably linked and energy cannot*

be separated from either (Bromley, 1991, p. vii). Historical evidence confirms his remarks in relation to the importance of energy. In the 18th century, European continent with mesmerized momentum had embarked on astronomical industrialization process. The catalyst for the stimulated industrialization was coal-powered technologies. Coal was at the centre of the Industrial Revolution and perhaps in recorded history first time human translated energy into desired outcome. The coal-generated industrialization process was culminated in to advanced weapons, capitalism, luxurious goods and cumulative result was industrial growth, seductive life style and the dominancy of west in every aspect. Coal was primary mean to run steam engines, heat buildings, to power transportation sector and became the vital engine of entire industrial revolution.

Meanwhile, energy being important element to keep moving war machinery the consideration for the diversification of energy sources had started to take roots. The first recorded example of diversification or shifting the source of energy from coal to oil can be traced to Winston Churchill's instruction to First Sea Lord Admiral Jackie Fisher: "You

have got to find the oil; to show how it can be stored cheaply: how it can be purchased regularly & cheaply in peace and with absolute certainty during war (Munson, 2015)"

For the first time, Churchill had shifted Royal Navy ships from coal to Persian oil as its source of propulsion (Yergin, 2005, p. 52). The sole purpose for this shift was to make more efforts to outwit and out-fight German naval fleets. So energy security became the source of strategic concerns since onset of the modern strategic competition even prior to WWI.

In context of energy security, maritime and continental routes of Indian Ocean have acquired remarkable strategic ascendancy for involved Troika (producers, consumers and transit states). In this equation some states- Saudi Arabia, Russia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Djibouti, Japan and China - have acquired more geo-strategic-cum-economic importance for providing one of the important tools e.g. reliable arrangements for pipelines, lands routs, sea ports (to circumvent possible terrorist and strategic threats or to reduce transit cost) or ensured supply or potential markets.

Geographical Diversity as Threat to SLOCs

The variable of the geographical dispersion of energy sources further compound the energy security dilemma for many developed and developing stakeholders. In many cases the unequal and tortuous dispersion of energy not only gives more leverage to transit states as compare to producers and consumers but also increases the possibilities of the military threats in context of blockade. The largest Shale oil and gas reserves are discovered on North American Continent (U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2013), the oil elephants are concentrated in the Middle East, however, Brazil, Venezuela, America, Russia, and Central Asia also hold sizeable fraction (WorldAtlas, 2019) and the largest natural gas reserves reside in Central Asia and Russia. All these far flung energy reserves demand secure routes and ensured supply for both consumers and producers. In the past on various occasions, the stable flow of energy has been disrupted or threatened to be disrupted by rival factions. South East Asian, Somali pirates (BBC, 2011) and Iranian government in case of US-Iran war multiple times

threatened to disrupt the sea borne supply lanes.

The process of massive industrialization and growing dependence on energy in the incumbent evolving polycentric structure is shifting focus from the land based security measures to the waters. Maritime routes as the cheapest source for transportation and potential target to cripple adversaries' economies has been fuelling the greater than ever sense of maritime insecurity in various states. The massive naval presences of American fleets in the target rich water channels, China and Indian unceasing struggles for greater naval muscles have been posing grave threats to the already disturbed waters of Indian Ocean. However, arm race to protect the energy lanes further complicate the Indian Ocean's power politics. That's further disturbance will further the already perceived threats to the SLOCs which back and forth energy from geographically distance locations.

China and the Seas: A Growing Dependence

According to Energy Information Administration (eia), nearly 59 million barrels per day (b/d) of global petroleum and other liquids production moved on maritime

routes in 2015, or almost 61% of the world total. Much of this volume transited Suez Canal and SUMED Pipeline, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz. A large volume of China's energy imports from remote regions are coming home through different maritime routs, maximum of which pass across greater Indian Ocean. China is the world's most populous country with a fast-growing economy that has led it to be the largest energy consumer and producer in the world.

China's economic boom made it as unusual economic challenger to the centuries-old economic giant, the US. Being manufacturing-based economy whose rapid growth is moderating energy consumption (Deng, 2018) and energy deficit state, China surpassed US as largest global energy consumer in 2010. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) reports that China surpassed the United States at the end of 2013 as the world's largest net importer of petroleum and other liquids, in part because of China's rising oil consumption. China surpassed South Korea to become the world's second-largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2017, according to data from IHS Markit and official Chinese government statistics (U.S. Energy

Information Administration (EIA), 2018). China surpassed the U.S. in annual gross crude oil imports in 2017 by importing 8.4 million barrels per day (b/d) compared with 7.9 million b/d of U.S. crude oil imports (The Maritime Executive, 2018).

According to Energy Information Administration (EIA), in 2015 China imported 23% of its oil requirement from Africa, second bigger source for Chinese oil import after Middle East with 52%. All these imports were transited to maritime routes. Pentagon's 2016 annual report to Congress noted: "Given China's growing energy demand, new pipelines will alleviate only slightly China's maritime dependency ... the sheer volume of oil and liquefied natural gas that is imported ... will make strategic SLOCs increasingly important to China (Office of Military Commissions Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2016)." Chinese energy imports from Africa and Middle East are to pass all the way through important navigational choke points. During any crisis, energy disruption to China can cause mammoth jolt in its economic might and if not possible in reality But sword will still be lingering on China.

A threat perception has developed in Chinese elites in relation to its heavy dependence of energy imports on various maritime routes, 80% (Davis, 2014) (in addition to much of its trade) of which comes in China through Malacca straits. President Hu Jintao, during a speech at a military academy in 2004, termed this heavy dependence for China on one single strait as “Malacca Dilemma” and has been considered a potential threat to the free flow of energy resources into China.

Sustainable economic growth is as an important component of China’s rise and social cohesion. China’s economic rise is the outcome of its unprecedented industrialization pace and continuous supply of the energy mix to keep move the industries. The Uninterrupted supply of the energy is vital element for this sustainable economic growth.

Many high profile office holders in China specifically pointed out China’s core interest in their formal writings, whitepapers and CPC’s plenary sessions. On December 6, 2010, Dai Bingguo (戴秉国) published an article entitled "We Must Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development" on the official website

of China's Foreign Ministry. He wrote:

In my view, no development path should be chosen at the expense of major national interests, core interests in particular. What are China's core interests? My personal understanding is: First, China's form of government and political system and stability, namely the CPC leadership, the socialist system and socialism with Chinese characteristics; second, China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity; third, the basic guarantee for sustainable economic and social development of China. No violation of these interests will be allowed (Bingguo, 2010).

On September 6, 2011, the State Council released a white paper entitled China's Peaceful Development, which once again defined and highlighted ensured ensuring sustainable economic as Chin’s core national interests along others(White Paper, 2011). Chinese policy making circle views energy security in both strategic and economic terms to keep industries moving for sustainable economic development.

In the backdrop of its strategic-vulnerability in terms of energy security, China has long since been investing in different sea ports

along the important SLOCs for commercial purposes. How many of these ports situated either India's perceived zone of influence like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or zone of competitions for many other powers like African ports and Mediterranean. Obviously, China's investment in these specific ports has been fueling a range of concerns in regional and global players and is being portrayed as China's "grand strategy" to secure sizeable influence in Indian Ocean in the sugar coated slogan of "community of shared future" in the first place.

However, for China, the last year's Xi's revitalized determination to broaden market access and expand imports in the face of greater opening-up (Baijie, 2018) has increasingly elevated the strategic standing of the (SLOCs). Being an export-oriented economy with ever growing demands of energy imports, China's survival and prosperity is closely tied to the free seaborne trade.

Haiyang Qiangguo: China as a Maritime Power

We should pay close attention to both development and security. The former is the foundation of the latter while the latter is a precondition for the former. A wealthy country may

build a strong army, and a strong army is able to safeguard a country (Jinping, 2014)

Piracy, natural disaster and due to power politics, China prompted to place extra-ordinary focus on development for strong naval muscles to cope with the threats. For this purpose, President Xi has continued the call to develop China into a maritime power (People.cn, 2013). During policy discussion session with members of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee in July 2013, Xi noted that in the 21st century, the ocean has an increased vital role to play in economic development and opening to the outside world. For playing a key role in the global governance through maritime power as an instrument of national power, China unveiled important blue prints of connectivity across the already disturbed waters under the banner of 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The plan was announced in October 2013 in Indonesian parliament by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his official visit. MSR has multi-pronged aspects that covers various areas from commercial facilitator to strategic launching- pad.

Why and What India Does Concern?

Two important sea ports, Gwadar in CPEC and Kyaukopyu in BCIMEC ensure the China's direct access to the Arabian Sea in the west of India and in the Bay of Bengal in its east. While Indian "strategically important" Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also exist in this sub region of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal. For India, these islands have massive strategic importance. But in power politics, the strength of one measures the weakness of the adversary. For China, Andaman and Nicobar card up to some extent is lingering sword over its energy import and trade export (short to Malacca dilemma) in case of any conflict. In strategic terms it can be safe to say that China's investment in Myanmar Port, the northernmost part of the Andaman and Nicobar is only 22 nautical miles away from Myanmar, might serve two fold purposes in future: a reliable base for naval presence (as staying or fuelling station) to counter Indian's Andaman card and second to evade partially the Malacca dilemma to get direct access to China via Myanmar.

In Southwest of India China's investments in the "strategically important" Gwadar port have also been perceived as an important

package for the so-called the String of Pearls. India largely downplays its economic aspects and projects it as Sino-Pak joint strategic move against India. The vital reason for India's triggered worrisome is Gwadar's geographical position.

In South West of India's Lakshadweep Islands, China is bolstering Pakistan's strategic strength that in return is supplementing China's strategic presence at and around Gwadar port. In this regard, China has provided maritime patrolling boats and inked agreement for selling of 8 AIP submarine to Pakistan (China to provide eight submarines to Pakistan, 2016) which raised Indian concerns.

This India perceived two-pronged investment in Gawadar and Myanmar's Ports on one side at the tip of Strait of Hormuz is breeding 'Hormuz syndrome' for India while on the other hand it is defying the India's "Ring of Steel". In the context of the energy security, for India Straits of Hormuz is standing on equal footing as Malacca Strait stands for China. While Andaman and Nicobar are a "very important aspect" of India's security, acting as extended arms of the country (Daily News and Analysis (DNA), 2015).

Indian booming industries are also heavily dependent on energy imports from various parts of the world. The Middle Eastern region contributes a large fraction of its oil imports. The share of Middle-East nations stood at 64 per cent in 2017-2018 as compare to 61 per cent in financial year 2013-2014(ET EnergyWorld, 2018). Much of Indian oil shipments from the Middle East have to sail through the Strait of Hormuz. In this regard, to counter balance the India's possible hostile ambitions in Nicobar and Andaman nothing but Gwadar is a pragmatic choice.

Chinese presence in Bay of Bengal through its investment in Myanmar and Bangladeshi ports has struck the alarming bells in New Delhi. The triggered worrisome of the encirclement put Indian naval modernization and proactive intelligence sharing with the US, Japan and France on more fast track. The misdiagnosed sensing from China has forced India towards more proactive diplomacy for assuming the lead under 'Act East Policy' in the South East Asian. However, India's geographical position in the Indian Ocean and its national power elements make it easy to galvanize the support of many resented littoral states of the Indian Ocean. To give

an alternative infrastructural avenue and to break the MSR's seduction, Modi's government came up with its own version of MSR, Project Mausam (Pillalamarri, 2014). The sundry developments in the waters of Indian Ocean region can interlock India and China in perpetual naval up gradation.

An Indian Ocean Trifecta

Two regional states, India and China, and one extra regional state America have emerged as key strategic and economic players in the third largest water body of the planet. In Indian Ocean Region (IOR) America and China have been struggling to reaffirm and foment alliance network. In this regard, for America, India is the most suitable counter-weight to China. US had already bestowed India the status of linchpin(Datt, 2012) in its rebalancing policy and firmly expressed its commitments for making India a great power. India's massive population, over stretched land, the oldest history and aspirations to be a great power are multiple variables that make it an appropriate strategic western paw for countering China. However, in this equation the sense of "strategic autonomy" in Indian policy circle is an important intervening variable.

On the other side, China is bolstering the capacities of India's possible balancer Pakistan. The frequency of defence treaties, naval exercises and arm sales between Sino-Pak are scaling up with every passing day in the region. The troika, Pakistan, India and China have also border flashpoints that have intermittently ignited either in full-fledged wars or border skirmishes. In nutshell, US policy to contain China would be up to some extent incomplete or at least in greater troubles in case India asserts the element of its strategic autonomy.

However, in realistic view, US and India see Chinese investments through traditional geo-political lens and totally overruled infrastructural aspects. In seas, Chinese investment is being perceived as practical implementation of Alfred T. Mahan's advice for controlling Nicholas J. Spykman's coined idea of the Rimland. Many of MSR's ports are located on Spykman's defined Rimland that encircle the Mackinder's Heart Land what all fluctuate US-Indo strategic perception in this part of the world. Further, in sundry places Chinese investment in different ports by default counter the already US or Indian established naval bases or other relevant installation.

The other striking fact of this competition is China's larger economic base unlike cold war contest. Unlike USSR, CPC's legitimacy has been confirmed by its economic progress, which is standing on western liberal system. However, back in 20th century USSR was totally (economic and political system) running under communist principles. However, China is partially following communist paradigm while underscore the liberal system for its economic boom. The 'half beast, half man' principle can be applied on China administrative and economic paradigms. China's liberal economic system as 'half man' is enhancing its economic clout where its authoritative regime is 'half beast' which is both internal and external stumbling block. China is being delivered by Deng Xiaoping's given liberal economic system but under Mao's communist political order. The former put China on position where it emerged as America's economic challenger while the later has been hampering its true national integrity and global outreach. The liberal element of China makes it more steadfast and competent competitor than USSR.

Strategic Aspects of Maritime Silk Road (MSR)

Alfred Thayer Mahan, a United States Navy flag officer, geo-strategist, and historian, said; that naval blockade can defeat strongest enemy. In both World Wars naval blockade played important roles in the victories of the "allied forces". Due to advancement of communications in the new geopolitical realities maritime routes, ports and trade hold greater importance. To control these maritime routes, China has employed its massive investments in different ports. More than 90 per cent of China's trade" is carried out through sea lanes. The trade shipment is fast but much expansive as compare to cheapest sea borne trade. Keeping in mind the importance of sea routs, there is higher possibilities that China will supply most of its goods in the future by sea. In order to replace a single modern container ship, up to 300 trains can be needed. Beijing knows and recognizes the massive importance and its larger concentration on developing, investing on different sea ports and modernizing its navy in order to keep check and provide security to its trade and energy shipments.

The rise of India, China and other stakeholders of the global

politics has speeded up the process of multi-polarity. China had already furthered its claim for vital position and role under catching phrase of 'China's role in global governance' (Zhongying, 2016). In the developing and developed states owing to the heavy dependence on trade, both for raw materials to fuel economies and to ship their exports abroad, the command of seas is an important instrument to ensure the stable flow of maritime shipments aside geo strategic bargaining. The need for maritime security has been pushing various states towards naval up gradations, naval exercises and naval alliance system. This reshaping hierarchy of choices in foreign policies has been shifting the focus from land-based alliances towards maritime security communities.

In realistic paradigm, power always comes at the cost of other. China's maritime security quest to overcome its security dilemma in IOR obviously is putting adverse effects on other players especially India and America. In 2012 according to The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) published annual Military Balance established that Asian spending on defence surpassed that of Europe. The size of defence budgets have been equally soaring with Sino-

India economic boom and in future the trend will be on increase. It is documented that Asian economic growth proportionally increased its defence spending as well. Dr LucieBéraud-Sudreau, responsible for the collection and assessment of data on defence budgets and defence industry for The Military Balance and Military Balance, asserts the direct relations between economic rise and defence expenditures (Béraud-Sudreau, 2017). After years of strong growth of more than 5% in real terms, Asia's total defence expanding plummeted to 1.4% between 2016 and 2017. The vital cause for this decline has been economic slowdown in both China and India.

Conclusion

MSR is initiated on economic lines and being projected as vital engine for economic growth and integration. No doubt, the standard model for economic integration has been European Union (EU). However, European economic integration became only possible when the existing territorial disputes had been overcome and extinguished all the ashes which could have engulfed Western Europe in war or just short of war. The success of MSR could only

be possible when stakeholders in South China Sea and East China Sea conflicts would be able to sort out their differences amicably .

Next to the territorial disputes are China's internal problems. China has been facing two fold territorial challenges both external to mainland and internal on mainland, China-Taiwan issue and territorial issues on mainland China. Xinjing and Tibet's true integration is necessary if China truly be seen real and responsible power. Otherwise, the existing bicker in Xinjing would be pressing vein of China for western propaganda machine human rights watch dogs once again (Watson & Westcott, 2019).

The most important aspect of Chinese investment is the generated perception of the "Debt-trap diplomacy". China must take appropriate steps to dispel the notion. The first thing for China is to read deeply and take care of the national interests of the various states. It should avoid being the part of the domestic politics of the different states. In many states going governments used China's investments as their election campaign manifestos. And in many states, from Sri Lanka to Malaysia, Maldives and Pakistan new governments felt irritation from

previously concluded agreements. The domestic fault-lines in these countries are mainly playing the role of time bombs for Chinese investments. China should take consider the small states, their domestic politics dynamics and national consensus trajectory. One China completes homework it ought to tailor- made its investment mode accordingly.

The need and hope for economic gain is one of the distinguished elements that are bringing together a number of states with diverse histories, political systems and territorial disputes towards Beijing. The designed distribution of economic dividends has initially mustered sizeable support and participation in China's initiated MSR. However, fragile strategic perception of US and India and divergent themes for global administration has put various question marks on unfolding initiative.

MSR has positive economic and infrastructural effects for smaller states connecting them with each other and with Beijing through maritime routs. However, both opposing blocs have historical nightmares that are totally changing the outlook of the economic based initiatives. For China,

MSR is important milestone for safeguarding SLOCs and to avoid the incidents like Yinhe (ChinaDaily, 1993) - where America stopped Chinese freighter that had been suspected by American intelligence of carrying poison gas ingredients to Iran.

Both India and China are largely under the burden of their bitter histories while America is to maintain the status quo in the Indian Ocean Region. China's investment under the banner of MSR, by default, has saboteur impacts for the US hegemony and status-que while for India scare to be overwhelmed. Additionally, power influx phenomena acts as catalyst for this strategic competition. In this power transition process and in the middle of the structural changes various stakeholders are locked in zero-sum-game competition for proper place in the re-configuration process of international world order.

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