

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY:

china's new posture: a cause of serious concern

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Abstract: India and China have a long history of cultural exchanges and historical ties, but their contemporary relationship has been marked by rivalry and hostility. The recent border clashes in Doklam and Galwan valley have escalated the strategic competition between the two Asian giants. This paper analyses the emerging issues that could affect India's security and economic interests in the context of Sino-Indian rivalry. It focuses on four key areas: China's activism in South Asia, China's power status in the Asian continent, China's role in the Indo-Pacific region, and China's relations with other regional powers. It also suggests some policy recommendations for India to deal with these challenges effectively.

Keywords: - Sino-Indian rivalry, Border disputes, South Asia, Asian continent and Indo-Pacific region

1.0 Introduction

India and China as two ancient civilizations had close historical ties and cultural exchanges. But contemporary relationship has been more adversarial than friendly since their inceptions. These trends could be seen in their policy orientation in the twenty first century also. Several issues came to limelight that keep them engaged in a direct confrontation in bilateral relations. Doklam conflict and recent clashes in the Galwan valley in East Ladakh has created a new untoward position for India. This strategic reality brought the Sino-Indian rivalry into forefront and renewed a new trajectory of relationship between them.

As far as India is concerned, this changed scenario has created a serious complexity in its immediate and hostile neighborhood. India found itself in a tricky position while dealing with china due to its unpredictable behaves. China's aggressive policy under the umbrella of 'BRI', its nexus with Pakistan and negative policy orientation at UN level has made India to rethink. Hence, emerging scenario and China's anti India attitude demands a well articulated policy orientation from the policy makers'. This paper is going to analyze some emerging issues that could have direct bearings on India's strategic and economic position. This will also highlight some important issues that could be handled properly by Indian stakeholders.

2.0 Issues of Concerns

The conventional issues like border dispute and Dalai Lama and Tibet has always come to forefront while discussing Sino-Indian relationship. But in recent times, new issues like stapled visa in Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir, Doklam conflict and recent clashes in Laddakh, river water and flood dispute in northeast, Indian membership to Nuclear Suppliers Group, Masood Azhar issue, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), South China Sea and Indian Ocean have emerged the key irritants between India and China. Furthermore China's activities under 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)' have created more challenges and panic in front of India's policy makers' rather than close cooperation. These changes demand a holistic close look from Indian side. All these new trends could be examined under following issues.

3.0 China's activism in South Asia

China's activism in the India's immediate neighborhood based on this grand design is also a matter of grave concern. The 'encirclement' by China around India that includes Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan can alter the dynamics of this region. China had started to develop its ambitious plan to get access with these countries to gain economic and strategic stronghold. Chinese authorities already are in a great touch with Nepal to extend 'Belt Road Initiative' to their boundaries. The rail line from Lahasa to Shigatse has already been extended and connectivity from Shigatse to Kerung near to Nepal and Yadong on the India-Bhutan border in the pipeline. This project serves in two ways for the China. It consolidates latter position in the interior part of Tibet

and automatically spreads its arms towards its fragile south border close to India. This creates the strategic gain for China with regard to its relation with India to be known the only competitor in this region.

State owned enterprises of China have been therefore investing, exploring and operating in South Asian Region to gain some foothold.ii China has also a close watch to buying the ownership of ports from Pacific Ocean to Indian Ocean to gain strategic advantage at the cost of India's influence. It has signed the deal with Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Maldives and Pakistan. China is also trying hard for naval bases in Bangladesh, Cambodia and some extent to African Continent. These designs raised the serious questions about China's intention in strategic thinking across the India.

4.0 Lone Superpower Power Status In Asian Continent

China wants to play greater role globally in the 21st century. Chinese leadership had has always the motive to established itself as the undisputed power of the Asian continent and a great nation at world stage.iii That's why, they have been trying to transform China's image from a closed hidden nation in iron curtain to open one. This project provides a shot in arm to achieve this goal. China is trying to use this project as the symbol of fraternity and tool of confidence building measure among the needy states. As Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed at Nazarbayev University, Astana (Kazakistan) on 07 September 2013, 'All round development and people to people contacts' will be the key objectives of this project.iv Now their policy makers' are giving emphasize on the vision based on a new model 'mutual respect and mutual trust' with the hope to gain closer cultural and political ties with the countries of this region. By doing so, China is looking to create a narrative of inter-linkages in which it would acquire a central role to play.

On the other hand, other nations such as Japan, Korea, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and India have also the aspirations to seek important role in International affairs. This emerging scenario creates competition and challenges for all states as every state is busy to define its place and position in the region. Hence there is a great need of mutual respect, positive engagement and peaceful solution of divergence rather than confrontation and pursuit of hegemony.v But as the history shows that China never hesitated to change its stance according to its strategic interests, there is no room for other state to take comfort in this emerging scenario. China's ability to adjust the participating countries within its ambit and its expansionist ambition always leaves the room for relentless for neighboring countries.

Many thinkers see the emergence of a strong China as a threat to the entire region due to its policy of 'acronyms of disagreements' and indomitable instinct of dominance shown throughout the cold war period. As history indicates, China might not be loosening its grip in its core issues. Its handling of regional issues has always exacerbated the tension in the region. All this is likely to bring in high-stake power politics in this region. The region can obtain a dynamic and sustainable development only if stability and geopolitical balance are preserved.

India is also not exception in this story; it has the bitter experience of relationship with China since its independence. The Sino-Indian war of 1962, border disputes, its Pakistan's policy, its role in NSG meetings and duel response on the issue of terrorism at UN and recently held 'Doklam Dispute' are the clear cut indications of Chinese approach towards India. How can India take it granted that with the rise of an aggressive and assertive China, flexing its muscles across its land and maritime frontiers is not going to provide hostility in the near future? Hence, India is not in favor of any changes occurring in this region, which may have implications for its security. The litmus test for the Indian policy makers lies in the ability to remain intact with its security interests without allowing any change in the strategic quo status in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond.

5.0 Energy Security and Economic Aspirations

Energy security is the real issue that impels China to take this grand initiative. The Central Asia and West Asia will remained the major oil and gas producer in the future also, but how to reach their will be more Important. 'BRI' will provide a cheap and viable path to fulfill energy demand. The exploration of oil field and transportation are other issues that closely interlinked with this project. China is investing a huge amount of money in the Central Asia, West Asia and Caspian oil field to fulfill its energy demand. The laying of gas pipelines is also related to this project. China wants to establish a pipeline corridor along this Road. It will not only provide a solution of security problem but also makes maintenance of pipeline very easy. Hence, these economic interests are the main reason behind China's activism.vi

India's economy is also growing rapidly at an average annual rate of 7 to 8 percent that seeks markets and guarantee energy supplies to sustain its growth. Energy demand is increasing at the rate of 10 percent annually and projected to reach a high level of 270 million tons by 2020. Thus, India is also making effort to gain access to reliable long-term

sources of energy. This scenario brought India directly in a competing position with China in energy efficient Central Asia.vii Both India and China as the emerging economies need energy security as vital concern. It creates problem and suspicion in the mind of policy makers' of both countries.

The project of 'BRI' has provided China direct access to Central Asia and West Asia. It minimizes the chances of other stake holders. On the other hand if India will join this project, it will only place latter on a ladder behind only on the mercy of the main stake holder. India could not take chance to remain secondary position in this competitive-influence-building process in these regions. The second thought of India' direct effort to enhance possibilities in this region has also its own problems. It requires huge money, technology and planning. Furthermore, this will push India in some kind of face off with China. In both the conditions, India find not easy to tackle this tricky game plan. Although, India has done well to get access in this region for energy security with the help of other like minded regional countries, yet success of these efforts still to come.

In other economic activities related to this project, India has the objections about its sustainability and transparency.viii This project has financial implication and burden for small states for accepting high-interest Chinese loans. This automatically brought all these small economies in dept trap. As Lt Gen Bhopinder Singh (RETD) observedix, "There is growing disquiet of sinister 'debt-trap diplomacy' at work, wherever and whenever Beijing decides to invest its multi-billions, earned from the trade-surpluses accumulated for the last 25 years." And the results of this dubious plan have already going to happen in various countries. A good illustration is the deal of 'Hambantota Port', signed by Sri Lanka with China recently. The former has to make sign a deal with latter for control and development of this deep-sea port for a 99-years lease contract due to repayment of Chinese loans. The cancellation of the deal to build 'Budhi Gandaki hydropower project in Nepal and Diamer-Bhasha Dam in Pakistan are the clear cut examples of this Chinese emerging threats and raise serious questions in strategic thinking across this region.

China had emerged an economic power in late nineties with the 7 percent growth rate and hence sees the trade and surplus money as keys to expand its influence. Besides, it is a tough task to maintain so high growth rate for a long time. Their domestic market is overburdened by surplus commodities and money. It demands the new areas of supply. The most important objective that impels China to initiate this ambitious project is its desire to place its position at centre stage of global supply and manufacturing networks. It will not only serve China to consolidate its economy but also provide a platform to challenge the other major powers' monopoly in economic affairs.

India also has the same economic aspirations being the largest consumer market and growing economy with the growth of 07 percent annually. Indian government is not only aspiring to develop local industry under 'Make in India Program' but also want to extend export of commodities in its immediate neighborhood under 'Act East and West' policy. But this expansion of China under this 'BRI' has contained Indian chances. At domestic level Indian consumer market already flooded by cheap Chinese consumer goods. Indian industries found it very hard to compete this challenge and feeling the heat. On the issue of direct investment and access to consumer markets of these regions, India could not match up to China due to lack of surplus capital, cheap commodities and policy making hindrance.x All these concerns made the situation more complicated in respect of Indian response over this project.

6.0 Belt and Road Initiative

The dynamics of international relations are witnessing sudden changes in this period. China has realized these facts very soon and reorients its policies and perspectives in a sudden pace. It has designed multi-pronged strategies.xi Much talked 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) or earlier known as "One Belt One Road" is an unmatched, unparalleled infrastructural initiative taken by Chinese authorities to take driver seat in international relations in this changed scenario. It has created a position of suspicion in the mind of policy makers' of neighboring countries especially of Japan, India and Southeast Asian countries. India could never ready to take risk by joining this type of project without proper understanding nor easily ignore it as it has propagated the philosophy of people to people connectivity.

This 'Belt and Road Initiative' has given birth to some serious questions about its neutrality, utility and philosophy in Indian foreign policy making. As the emerging consumer market and regional power in South Asia India has the special place and stakes in this project, as it will also be connected by a sub branch of 'BRI'.xii India's policy maker's find this project as articulated and well designed far more for strategic gain in this region. It has the direct bearing on India's strategic milieu in this region. Without proper handling of these strategic issues India has no option but to stay away from this project. Hence, for a better understanding of this issue, it is pertinent to give a close realistic look on China's activities under this project.

7.0 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The establishment of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under this project in disputed Pak Occupied Kashmir (PoK) is the bone of contention in point of India's response. This project runs through the area of Gilgit-Balistan in PoK, an integral part of India. India sees it not only as a pressure tactics of China to turn around the table in favor of it but also think it as an effort to undermine the former stake on this disputed land. This also opens the door for China as 'third Party' in this bilateral dispute. As Harish K. Thakur^{xiii} observed that the chief objective of China behind the CPEC is 'to strategically undermine the position of India by having access to the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir'. The CPEC is a \$ 46 bn multi-phase project that passes through the disputed Pak occupied Kashmir (PoK). It will not only provide the all weather facility for the transportation but also upgraded the existing railways, power projects along side this project. This corridor will reach at Gawadar port situated at Arabian Sea. Hence India thinks it a deliberate attempt to change the quo-status regarding its claim towards this territory.

8.0 Maritime Silk Route

China sees this grand initiative as a shot in arm to establish upper hand over the issue of South China Sea. Maritime Silk route through South China Sea has brought the direct bearings close to its arch rivals particularly India. All the neighboring countries sees it a China's great strategy to consolidate its claim on the entire South China Sea. China not only wants to secure energy security but also wants to strengthen its claim over this regional naval passageway.^{xiv} It has established Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in South China Sea despite the concerns of other stakeholders.

This China's activism poses the challenges to India's presence in the strategically important Indian Ocean Region (IOR) also. India is at the centre of the ocean and has the some type of influence in this region.^{xv} India's foreign trade is heavily dependent on IOR. It has already articulates an understanding with the other stakeholders like USA, Australia, Indonesia and Japan for cooperative use of sources in this area. Chinese presence here through economic engagement and construction of ports under this initiative has increased the security concerns for India. This Maritime route will certainly be testing India's strength in IOR especially.

China's dubious approach towards provisions of the United Nations Convention on the laws of the sea, 1982, to which it is a signatory, is a clear cut attempt to promote its maritime strategic interests.^{xvi} Much talked 'String of Pearls' policy combined with this grand project has emerged as the cause of concern for the countries of this region in general and for country like India in particular.^{xvii}

9.0 Policy of 'String of Pearls'

China has also a close watch to buying the ownership of ports from Pacific Ocean to Indian Ocean to gain strategic advantage at the cost of US and India's influence. It has signed a deal with Sri Lanka for control and development of the deep-sea port of Hambantota purely on 99- year leases bases. With Myanmar, Chinese authorities have already started to develop another deep-water port in Sittwe. The development of Gwadar port in Pakistan is not only provides sea access to China but also inland route for transportation from its border.^{xviii} China is also trying hard for naval bases in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar and some extent to African Continent. Military base in Djibouti and in the island state of Vanuatu, another heavily debited country are also turning to be safe platform for Chinese nefarious activities^{xix}. These designs raised the serious questions about China's intention in strategic thinking.

The 'BRI' initiatives pulled together all these pre-existing projects and development plans less than one umbrella, mainly to provide a strategic roof.^{xx} India sees this policy of 'String of Pearls' as 'encirclement' by China around its territory and hence always watching it closely with a dissent of opinion.

To sum up, Asian resurgence has changed the parameters of emerging world order in this new 21st century. China and India has emerged as major players in international relations in this era. Policy makers' of both countries are busy in transforming policy and image. China has been working on a new design of its foreign policy. Having transformed its own economy, China wants to recast its region of influence in its own image. This project of 'OBOR or renamed 'BRI' is a combination of foreign policy and economic development strategy that has been initiated to shape China's engagement and investment with the outside world for many year to come. Chinese' authority wants to utilize surplus capital and surplus capacity to productive use not only to develop its poor bordering areas but also put forward a tough competition for other stakeholders in its region and beyond. It seeks to establish itself at the centre of world's affair by taking economic, strategic and political initiatives. The 'BRI' has just proven an instrument in achieving this goal. Indian response over this Chinese project 'BRI' could be seen in this strategic mistrust. Hence, a strategic dimension is going to emerge between India and China over this issue.

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