

Paper For Presentation for ISSS/ISAC (International Studies Association/ International Security Studies Conference ( November 14-16, 2014 University of Texas at Austin) Panel “Great Power Relationship in Asia”

## **US Security Strategy of Asian Rebalance: Implications for India**

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The present paper proposes to analyze the implications of US re-involvement in Asia-Pacific, India's role in the changing politico-security scenario and limits of Indo-US cooperation? India's security is threatened by the presence of two nuclear powers: Pakistan and China at its borders. With Pakistan India has fought four wars and with China a single war in 1962 with disastrous consequences. Although since then India's relations with China have improved and China has become the largest trading partner of India but the border issue between these two still remains a contentious issue. To balance and meet the Chinese threat India has developed a look east policy. India's Defence Agreement with Vietnam, development of strategic partnership with Japan, Nuclear agreement with Australia, participation in oil exploration in the South China Sea, guarding the Strait of Malacca and developing a close relationship with other countries of the Asia-Pacific region speaks for India's policy of rebalancing towards Asia-Pacific. India being fearful of China's rise has also expanded security and strategic cooperation with the US. Though, India and the US share the concerns about China's rise but India is not too much willing to bow down to US strategy of Asian rebalance because of the dislike to playing a role of the junior partner, compromising her strategic autonomy; and being unnecessarily drawn into a conflict between the United States and China. Though, in view of the Chinese challenge, the US has been favouring India's aspirations and greater role in Asia-Pacific but despite the security challenges from China and Pakistan, the past experiences of the US opportunism and inconsistency of its policies has allowed India to act cautiously towards the US strategy. On the other hand, China's policy of equating India and Pakistan and supporting Pakistan in thick and thin has also forced India to be careful in its dealing with China. In view of this it becomes pertinent to discuss the intricacies of the prevailing scenario, implication of the US policy of rebalance and challenges for India in this emerging scenario.

### **The Scenario of Asia-Pacific and Implication of US re-involvement in Asia-Pacific**

The US foreign policy of Asian rebalance, or “pivot,” to Asia is being largely seen in the political circles in China as a policy meant to contain China's rise because China's growing assertiveness over the uninhabited archipelagos in South and East China Sea, which have led to immense tensions and conflict situation with its neighbours particularly Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam has forced the US to take a fresh look at this region and realign the forces to check China's brazenness. In the South China Sea, China asserts its maritime claims on almost all the coasts of Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines to which it names as nine dash line. Though in

the United States' view this line has no legal authority therefore no relevance but this is an indicator of the growing aggressiveness of China and its desire to keep all the area under its effective control. <sup>1</sup> Actually China, Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei all have territorial claims on a group of uninhabited rocks, reefs and small islands which are important from the point of view of fisheries and trade therefore; no country wants to give up its claim on these islands. <sup>2</sup> In South Asia region also China has serious boundary dispute with India and claims a huge portions in the western sector in Aksai Chin area, in the northeastern section of Ladakh District in Jammu and Kashmir and in the eastern sector in Arunachal Pradesh. Approximately 38,000 sq. kms of Indian Territory in Jammu and Kashmir is under Chinese occupation. In Pakistan Occupied Kashmir it controls 5,180 sq. kms. of Indian territory which was ceded to it by Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963. China claims approximately 90,000 sq. kms. of Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh and about 2000 sq. kms. in the Middle Sector of the India-China boundary and as China and Pakistan share a very close relationship therefore to secure its energy and transport routes in this region China has also been constructing ports etc in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. As India and Pakistan also share a relationship of mistrust and enmity therefore, the Chinese and Pakistani proximity and close relations also pose a threat to India's security. The Chinese games of denying visa to the people of Arunachal Pradesh, issuing stapled visa to the people of Arunachal and Jammu and Kashmir, questioning the visits of the Indian officials to Arunachal Pradesh has increased India's apprehensions about China's intentions. Besides this the growing incursions, skirmishes and aggressiveness of the People's Liberation army of China in the Indo-China border has also increased India's security worries. The violation and intrusion of LAC by the People's Liberation Army, 334 times from January to August in 2014 indicates the Chinese preference and perceptions. The activities of Chinese People's Liberation army in Chumar and Demchok in Ladakh border during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in September 2014 has allowed India to believe that China has not abandoned the policies of arm twisting it. Agreements like Maintaining Peace and Tranquility Along the Line of Actual Control 1993, Confidence Building Measures, in the Military Field Along the LAC 1996, Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, 2012 and the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) 2013 to maintain peace on the border have failed to achieve the desired results. The presence of the mechanism for regular consultations and flag meetings, and several meetings of Special Representatives also could not make a difference. India on the one hand considers recurring Sino-Indian border clashes a potential threat to its safety but on the other China's spree of building up infrastructure in the border areas and linking Xizang and Xinjiang autonomous regions in Aksai Chin to Tibet is also a cause of worry for India. The all weather 1,300 km long Karakoram Highway road that connects China and Pakistan at an altitude of 4,693 metres, through the Khunjerab Pass also links the areas of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir like Gilgit-Baltistan with the rest of Pakistan. Karakoram Highway is very important to China, as it cuts through the zone between Asia and the Indian subcontinent, where the boundaries of China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan

meet and it also provides an access to China to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> While the territorial disputes in South China Sea, East China Sea and the Sino-Indian border between these countries are centuries old but the recent aggressiveness shown by China towards these disputes is new and have given birth to fresh anxieties and apprehensions about the Chinese intentions among the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The Chinese president Xi Jinping's recent call to the PLA to be prepared for a regional war has also increased the worries of these countries. The Chinese assertiveness and its aggressive postures towards its neighbours has put aside the assumption of China's peaceful rise and made these countries uncomfortable, nervous and anxious about China's objectives and their own security. This situation has forced them to adopt a strategy of entering into new friendships and partnerships to gain confidence to face the Chinese challenge. Therefore while, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Australia are looking for alternatives, possibilities and new alliances, Indonesia and Vietnam, are upgrading their naval power.<sup>4</sup>

### **China's Rise: an Uncertain and Insecure Future for Asia**

Actually China's rise has not only made the whole area insecure but also increased the uncertainties about the future of Asia. In Mohan Malik's opinion the key reason for China's assertive postures in the Asia Pacific region and change in its strategic behaviour in the post cold war era is the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 because with the collapse of the Soviet Union China no longer faces any threat on its northern frontiers and this geopolitical development explains China's expansionist moves on its eastern seaboard and southwestern frontiers.<sup>5</sup> It is also being believed that China's rise and its growing assertiveness is also linked to the simultaneous rise of Japan and India as both Japan and India's economic rise and adoption of suitable policies for their development is posing a challenge to China's supremacy. Therefore while on the one hand Japan is strengthening its military defence, becoming more nationalistic and showing great willingness to challenge China in the South China Sea. India, on the other hand under its "Look East" policy is cultivating relations with the countries of Asia Pacific to counter balance China's aggressive postures. Indian diplomatic moves towards Japan and Australia are also being seen by China as counter measures and aimed to challenging Chinese interests and supremacy. The competition and conflict to maintain its supremacy in this region as well as desire to maintain a balance of power in its favour has forced China to pursue aggressive policies towards the countries of this region. To maintain its hold in this region China on the one hand wants to create an atmosphere of fear but on the other is also trying to assure the countries about its good will. India's case in this regard can be taken as an example as though China has adopted a policy of developing economic relations with India but it is also keeping intact its policy of putting pressures on India through the unresolved boundary dispute. China's policy of carrot and stick has not only forced the countries of this region to use diplomacy but also to acquire confrontationist postures to safeguard their interests. A scenario of mistrust between the US and China is also unfolding as the US attempts to provide reassurance through

alliances and treaties and developing close ties with Vietnam, Japan and the Philippines has allowed China to believe that the US is indirectly provoking these countries to emphatically lay their territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific region and contain and confront China. The US actions in this area has deepened the view of the Chinese people that the ultimate goal of the United States in world affairs is to maintain its hegemony and dominance and, therefore it aims to prevent the emerging powers, particularly China, from achieving its goals and enhancing its status.<sup>6</sup>

The US activities of strengthening security and treaty ties with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, expanding relations with Indonesia and Vietnam; increasing engagement with ASEAN, clarifying its national interests in the South China Sea; supporting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement; reengaging Burma; and deploying a rotational presence of U.S. Marines to Darwin, Australia have allowed the Chinese people to believe that these actions are meant to contain China and constrain its rise. On the other hand the US feels that China aims, through displaying aggression vis-a-vis its neighbours and by using military threats like announcing an air defense identification zone over the East China Sea, and islands managed by Japan, to drive out the US from this region and maintain its supremacy in Asia. In the US calculations China has become a force that can challenge its authority and adversely affect its global interests therefore; the US aspires to contain China. It is also being argued in some quarters in the US that the open display of threats by China in this region is also aimed towards projecting Xi Jinping's image of a strong and tough leader who is willing to carry tough reforms in domestic sector as well. Xi Jinping's views which have been pronounced by the Chinese media about the possible US role in the Asia-Pacific make it clear that China dislikes the alliances made by the Asian countries with the US and feels that the US being a non Asian power should not meddle in the Asian affairs. This broadly means that Asia should be for the Asian countries and the US should stop interfering or promoting Asian countries to take on China. The Chinese moves are indicative of its desire of not only playing a central role in the world politics but also to be treated as an exceptional country like the US. It wants to be a new rule maker as well as rule breaker in accordance to its national interest.<sup>7</sup>

Actually in view of the tensions prevailing in Asia-Pacific the US is finding itself in a peculiar situation as on the one hand it has to fulfill its conventional and treaty commitments with its allies and on the other to engage China in such a manner that a productive relationship is maintained with it. The US believes that a prosperous America is good for China and a flourishing China is good for America and both have much more to gain from cooperation than from conflict. However as Chinese behaviour and activities present the toughest challenge to the US therefore; it has been forced to adopt a careful and realistic approach towards China. In view of this contradiction to ensure a more comprehensive US strategy and engagement as well as shaping a rule based regional and global order in the region the US is building new partnerships

with India, Indonesia, Singapore, New Zealand, Malaysia, Mongolia, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Pacific Island countries. These countries are also being invited to join the US treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand.<sup>8</sup>

Although to check China's aggressiveness the US has been developing close ties with the countries who have territorial disputes with China and branding Chinese policies as expansionist but the approach of maintaining a balance and not directly challenging China has also been evident during President Obama's visit to Japan, South Korea and Philippines in April 2014.<sup>9</sup> Obama's visit to these countries was though meant to reassure Japan about the commitments of the US-Japan defense treaty in the context of the Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands managed by it and to Philippines with a 10 year defense agreement but to maintain its relations and cooperation with China in various other global issues and to control the acceleration of tensions in this region, the US has also advised all the countries to observe caution in their dealings with China. The US has also expressed its willingness to welcome the rise of a peaceful, prosperous and stable China that plays a responsible role in Asia and the world and supports rules and norms on economic and security issues.<sup>10</sup> The US feels that open markets in Asia not only provide the United States opportunities for investment, trade but also to tap the growing consumer base of Asia. In view of this maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific, ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, countering the proliferation efforts of North Korea and maintaining transparency in the military activities of the countries of this region has become one of the important goals of the US foreign policy under the present circumstances. As this area is home to nuclear powers like India, Pakistan, China and North Korea which share hostile relationship with each other particularly India-Pakistan and India-China therefore, the US also aspires to stop any eventuality of a nuclear war in this region. The US also believes that by exhibiting a deep respect for international law and adopting a more open political system China would be more stable and register impressive economic growth therefore it should avoid display of unnecessary aggression in the regional affairs. As a matter of fact the US is assured that if China can be motivated to adopt a policy of accommodation and respect for international law it would assure the other countries of this region about its intentions and encourage a peaceful atmosphere for every one's growth but China's unrelenting approach is not allowing the US or the other countries to trust the Chinese designs in this region of immense economic potential.

However despite the US willingness to welcome China's peaceful rise, it is also true that the Obama administration is facing a very difficult situation as it has not only to assure China that its re-balancing is not directed towards its containment, and Asian allies of its support, but also to the US Congressmen that China is a major threat which needs to be dealt with equal strength.<sup>11</sup> China on its part understands it well that to maintain its economic growth it requires US economic cooperation therefore, tries not to antagonize the US. But the US policies of curtailing its role and influence have forced China to move in the direction of military modernization. The Chinese military budget which is increasing at an alarming rate also indicates that China is not

going to tolerate the new alignments quietly. Its military modernisation is not only aimed at enhancing Chinese influence but also obstructing the US aims of containing China in the Asia Pacific. There are chances that the difference in the perceptions and objectives may lead to a new cold war between China and the US and thus endanger the Asian security. As under the new regime China has also adopted an attitude of rigidity and boldness and therefore, reacting with equal intensity to the US accusations and threats of taking actions in the wake of any violation to the fundamental principles of the international law. The Chinese moves of using force, coercion and intimidation to further its interest in this area has forced the U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to issue a warning that “the United States will not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged.”<sup>12</sup> The US Secretary of State John Kerry also opined that though the United States takes no position on questions of sovereignty in the South and East China Seas, but it cares about the behavior and the means by which these questions are resolved and firmly opposes the use of intimidation, coercion, or force to assert a territorial or maritime claim by anyone.<sup>13</sup> In view of the prevailing scenario Mohan Malik has opined that China’s growing power and purpose is challenging the long established international order which was dominated by the US alliances, uncontested American maritime dominance and a balance of power favouring the US. He believes that China wants to dismantle the relics of the cold War to restore the natural power balance in the region.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese behavior and the US response towards it signals that in the present context the US Asian Rebalance is aimed to stop the emergence of a China centric strategic balance as it would challenge the role of the only super power in the world. Since the US wants to remain the sole super power and dictate and control the flow of the global events therefore, the rise of an aggressive China is being seen against the US aspirations and interests. The US policies in the Asia-Pacific and its desire to revive the alliance as well as forge new alliance can be understood in this context.

Interestingly the apparent inconsistency of the US foreign policy in tackling the major issues like Syria, Iraq, Ukraine or Gaza has also allowed China to believe that the US is not only a declining power but also helpless and weak to take any firm decisions. The US indecisiveness in a range of issues has actually made China courageous enough to even challenge the US interest in Asia – Pacific. In this scenario of suspicion and doubt, the mutual need of the US and China of developing close relations of the 1970 which encouraged Henry Kissinger's China opening and commencement of an era of equidistance seems to have taken a back seat because both the US and China are now looking for new friends and searching for innovative strategies to confront the challenges in this region. While the US is banking largely on its traditional allies and also luring India to become a part of this alliance to contain China by a defense alliance, China is not only searching for new friends but also reviving friendship with the old enemies. The signing of an energy treaty for exporting \$400 billion of Siberian natural gas to China over 30 years by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping not only indicates this but also makes it clear that politics and diplomacy are a game of possible. This deal is beneficial to both as both are reactionary powers and challenging the international order dominated by the US

and its allies. The energy deal also brings the two adversaries closer in the realm of their territorial disputes as they affirm the presence of ancient Maps to support the Russian claims in Ukraine and Chinese claims in East and South China seas. Besides developing unity in tackling the territorial disputes, this deal has also helped to end the Russian isolation in the wake of the Ukraine crisis by the Western world. It has also facilitated Russian goals of regaining the lost position in the world politics by using its large energy reserves as well as in exposing the hollowness of the western threat to cut European imports of Russian gas.<sup>15</sup>

The growing proximity of China and Russia not only challenges the US aim of keeping Russia in a reduced position and China in a contained one but also indicates their desire to dare the US dominated post cold war world order. This also shows that how the Western pressures and sanctions are allowing Russia for a re- approachment with China and how China is aspiring to take advantage of the Russian economic weakness and make it economically dependent on China. The Chinese and Russian moves have also exposed the weakness of the US strategy of rebalance and the US power. The declining military budget of the US and the increasing Chinese and Russian military budget signals the US disadvantages in this area.<sup>16</sup> The US move of excluding China from the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) has also not achieved the desired results as it has failed to emerge as a powerful group. In fact the lack of clarity in the US rebalance to Asia policy has made it a confused policy.

### **India's role in the changing politico-security scenario**

India's role in this scenario has become so much important that all the powers are aspiring to develop good relationship with India. This has been amply reflected in Obama's decision to send his Secretary of State John Kerry, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel and Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker to India in the first 100 days of the Modi Government. Ironically Modi who was in the list of the most unwanted people of the US and was denied the US travel visa has now become a much sought after leader because of his being the mass leader and also India's relevance in the emerging scenario. The US has become so keen to have a good working relationship with India that it is finding a natural convergence between India's look East Policy and the US policy of Asia Pacific Rebalance. In the US view an India that is playing its rightful role, is a very positive thing and can only do well in terms of providing stability, security, peace and prosperity in Asia Pacific. It is being said that the strategic relationship, defence ties and commerce are likely to be the key pillars of the next phase of the relationship between India and the US.<sup>17</sup>

In his maiden visit to India in the first week of May 2012, US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta called defence cooperation with India "a linchpin" in US strategy. President Obama during his visit to India in 2010 described the relationship between India and America as the defining partnerships of the 21st century because of the sharing of common values and interests. He opined that though there are problems but India's greater role on the world stage will enhance

peace and security, opening India's markets to the world will pave the way to greater regional and global prosperity and India's vibrant, pluralistic democracy would inspire others to follow a similar path of openness and tolerance. The US has also been supporting India's Look East efforts, a new trilateral dialogue with India and Japan; and a new more economically integrated and politically stable South and Central Asia, with India as a linchpin.<sup>18</sup> The US is keen to show that there is geo-strategic and even territorial convergence between the US and India in the region. Although India has expressed its unwillingness to play any such role but the emerging scenario indicates towards a new and growing synergy as India is also a staunch believer of the freedom of navigation in Western Pacific, a global artery for trade and energy transportation. The challenge the United States faces with regard to India is finding real ways to expand cooperation in economics, development and security. As a sign of the progress that has been made, the two countries have launched creative diplomatic efforts to build understanding and enhance coordination across the Indo-Pacific, like the trilateral dialogue between India, Japan and the US.<sup>19</sup>

Though, presently China and India share friendly economic relations but the aggressive Chinese policies and the unsettled boundary dispute make India apprehensive towards the Chinese friendship. India is also fearful of the solidifying friendship and partnership between Pakistan and China and China's strategy of developing the string of pearls around India's neck. India's look east policy and growing friendly relations with the countries of South East Asia, Japan, Vietnam etc. not only explain India's anxiety but also a desire to develop a platform to match China in its game. India's Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan in August 2014 and agreement on maritime security, freedom of navigation and peaceful settlement of disputes under international law indicate the desire of both India and Japan to work together to confront the Chinese challenges. Since India is also worried about China's increasing maritime assertiveness and military buildup as well as China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean therefore, this situation also speaks for a desire to step up Japan-India security cooperation. In fact a kind of convergence is being seen in India-Japan relations as Japan's relations with China also remain deeply strained over the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands as well as other issues related to wartime history and India still suffers the Chinese aggression in the Indo-China border. India and Japan have therefore upgraded their partnership to the level of 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' with the signing of a defence pact for regional stability and Tokyo's decision to double FDI in India by pledging \$35 billion over the next five years for boosting India's infrastructure, including bullet trains.<sup>20</sup> Though the civil nuclear deal could not be signed between India and Japan but Modi's visit to Japan has certainly given a boost to their relationship and their understanding about the issues of common interest. In fact India and Japan have developed a strong economic relationship, which can be gauged by Japan's growing share in India's infrastructural development. However, besides the economic partnership the new regional security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific particularly the rise of China is also working to bring them closer. The annual summits, the Malabar joint naval and military exercises along with the US, Modi's reference to expansionist powers during his Japan visit, growing partnership and



periodic dialogue between the foreign and defence ministries indicate the mounting synergy between these two.<sup>21</sup> Since Modi had a very successful Japan trip in August 2014 therefore, it was being opined that the growing closeness between Japan and India would force Chinese President during his maiden visit to India in September 2014 to chart a new course of friendship with India and make considerable economic investment in India. Although for the bright future of the mankind and benefit of both the countries, Modi has expressed his desire to inch towards miles to develop a strong partnership with China but the incidence at border and intrusion by the People's Liberation army in Chumar and Demchok in Ladakh border during Xi Jinping's visit has somewhat shaken the faith of Indian leadership. Though, a desire to turn the Indo-China economic partnership into a strong partnership of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was also expressed by Xi Jinping and an investment of \$ 20 billion to strengthen India-China cooperation and collaboration was also announced during his visit but the border dispute over shadowed the outcome of his visit. This situation has strengthened India's belief that China though, wants to strengthen economic relations with India but in the politico-security issues it prefers to move according to its interests and designs.

Though many scholars believe that the major power competition in the global issues is still between China and the United States, but in the maritime issues it involves all the three countries China, Japan and India and therefore the conflict for supremacy and strategic advantages between these three is imminent. The rise of strong nationalist leaders in Japan, the Philippines and India and their willingness to dare China also indicates that the time is changing and Asian powers are being united for good. Though India has a capability to challenge Chinese attempts to establish its supremacy in Asia but India due to its internal problems and lack of will power has so far not been able to do so. Therefore under a new and strong leadership in India the priorities have also changed and to understand and appreciate the changing dynamics in their bilateral ties a strengthened India-Japan relationship needs to be seen in this context. On the other hand the Modi Government's attempts to build good and friendly relations with the countries of South Asia particularly Bhutan and Nepal can also be seen in this light. As in Nepal China commands considerable influence therefore, Modi's visit to Nepal as a prime Minister that took after 17 years becomes important from the strategic point of view. It indicates India's desire to safeguard its own house from the enemies before venturing into outward policy initiatives. Following the old Kautilyan principles of enemy's enemy is a friend as well as to counter the string of pearls strategy of China, India has been developing security relationships with China's neighbours who have disturbed relationship with China. India's State Corporation's participation with Vietnam in oil exploration in the disputed South China sea and India's Defence Agreement with Vietnam, which includes sale of advance helicopters and spares for Mig fighters and Vietnam's offer of training to Indian troops in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency operations, and coast guard cooperation in combating piracy- amply describes the desire of both India and Vietnam to beat China in its own game. Indian Navy's Look-East Policy, and role in guarding the Strait of Malacca, can also cause severe problems to China's oil supply lines. India is also moving in the direction of developing a close military relationship with Singapore. The countries of India and

South East Asia neither have history of adverse relationship nor India has developed any military alliance with any country of this region but the uncertainty of the US support has allowed these countries to welcome India's involvement in the regional affairs. The increasing economic integration of South and East Asia has strengthened the strategic significance of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as 90 percent of trade takes place through this route. As India's trade with these countries is growing therefore, India's interest in the security of the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea is also increasing. Though agreement with Vietnam for oil exploration in the South China Sea is being advocated as an economic activity but India's defence agreement with Vietnam coupled with Indian intervention in South China Sea presents a different picture as it not only brings India into a direct confrontation with China but also points towards India's desire for putting pressure on China for a peaceful resolution of the boundary dispute. India's developing relations with Vietnam and Japan and other countries could be seen in this light. On the other hand China is also playing its game by entering into negotiations with all the neighbouring countries for instance to assure India about its good intention it has kept the line of dialogue open and high level visits of military officials but at the same it is also maintaining its adventurists policies at the Indo-China border. To checkmate the US, China is also eager to get India's cooperation in the projects like Maritime Silk Route, Silk Route and the BCIM economic corridor as well as to invite India as a member in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation but at the same time China not only wants to keep intact the pressures on India by its aggressive activities in the Indo-China border but also to deny any big role in this region. India's overtures and closeness towards Vietnam, Japan and Australia are in a way disturbing China because it feels that India aims to gang up with these countries to obstruct its rise.

### **Limits of Indo-US cooperation**

Although the US government has signaled that its Asian rebalance policy is not directed against China and not seen as a 'China containment' policy but the US moves of reviving its alliances has allowed China to believe that it is directed against China. What role India would play in this scenario is still a subject of debate in India however, India's growing regional aspirations, economic performance and capabilities indicate towards an active role of India in this strategy. India and the United States also share equal interest in the freedom of navigation and seas and realize the importance of maritime security and unrestricted trade. The US rebalancing strategy has placed India in a central and significant position and due to this the US expects India to take up its role and responsibility seriously. Many scholars in India believe that since a China centric Asia would be against India's national interests therefore, a strengthening of the U.S. presence would be a welcome move to support India's interests and aspirations. Although the US considers India a linchpin in this strategy and US and India are moving in a right direction, they have signed a nuclear deal and developed a strategic partnership but the past opportunism and experience with dealing with the US prohibits India to trust the US assurances. It also makes India a reluctant partner. The memories of the US tilt in Pakistan's favour during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war are still fresh in the minds of the Indian people. India has also not forgotten as how

despite being the world's largest democracy the US has always favoured Pakistan over India and developed close relations with the Communist China. India also dislikes the prospects of becoming a counterweight against China. As a matter of fact India has always followed a policy of not entering into alliances therefore; any such possibility makes India apprehensive. More so India has also followed a policy of independence in the foreign affairs therefore, the chances of playing a second fiddle and drawing into an unwarranted conflict with any country also puts a question mark on the possibility of India becoming party in the US strategy of re balance. Though the US would want to have India in its orbit, but India would prefer to pursue its own course, even if challenged by China or Pakistan. But some strategic thinkers like C. Raja Mohan, believe that the rebalance could compel China "to be more reasonable toward India as China begins to focus on the U.S. military challenge from the east. India cannot merely rely on internal balancing to cope with China's rise; rather, the U.S. and its Asian allies must be central to any Indian strategy of external balancing." <sup>22</sup> For him the U.S. pivot to Asia is an extraordinary strategic opportunity for India. As India also aspires to balance the Chinese power therefore, the unfolding Sino-U.S. rivalry is likely to end India's prolonged isolation from Asian geopolitics and offer it a chance to insert itself as an indispensable element of the new regional balance of power. In his view India should become an active partner in the US strategy as it has to gain much and less to loose but treading with caution would be the best policy for India.

## **Conclusion**

If the United States and India, the world's oldest and largest democracies, could create a genuine partnership, it would be good for Asian stability, for global prosperity, and, most especially, for the cause of democracy and human rights around the world. <sup>23</sup>The challenge therefore, is to make this relationship possible and workable. On the other hand there is also a need to manage the India- China relationship despite inherent complexities and challenges, and solve the problems through dialogue and diplomacy because both need each other for economic growth and prosperity. The US has also expressed a keen desire to working with the Modi Government and it is wooing India to open up. However, India's tough stand in the recently held World Trade organization meeting regarding the trade facilitation agreement in support of the food security issue has also increased the US worries about the strategic partnership and cooperation with India in dealing with China in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand China also despite showing aggression in the boundary dispute would not like to see the boundary dispute to obstruct economic relations with India. As India provides a big market for China therefore to fulfill its economic objectives it is also keen to have a good working relationship with India. The unfolding scenario has placed India in an advantageous position and it is now up to India to take maximum advantage of it by dealing with all the powers by adopting appropriate policies. Though it is also true that in view of the problems and policies of the US and Russia, India can neither depend on Russia nor on the US for support and assurance therefore in the present international order of confusion and instability India needs to tread very carefully. To take

maximum advantage of the situation India also needs to devise its own policy moves to deal with a harried America, troubled Russia and aggressive China.

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