

*Mohd Aminul Karim*

## **CHINA AND THE WEST: EMERGENCE OF NEW SECURITY RELATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

Since the end of the Cold War, through a gradual transition from bipolarity, the world power structure has been undergoing changes. The present structure is experiencing uni-multipolarity. U.S.A still remains the unquestionable super power. However, China is emerging as a new economic superpower which is buttressing its military wherewithal as well. Though, China stands far behind U.S.A. in terms of military modernization and technological sophistication and its area of interest remains confined to the Asia-Pacific and Central Asia, yet it has drawn the attention of the West and the world at large both in terms of economy and military. Linked to it, the close collaboration between China and Russia and interests of other actors like Japan, India, Pakistan and ASEAN countries have brought about a new game scenario in present day world power politics which intermingles geo-politics and geo-economics.

### **Introduction**

After the demise of the Cold War, bipolarity has been overtaken by a 'lonely' super power, as Huntington called it. Prevailing system is a hybrid one with a single superpower at the top that is followed by a number of major powers. As seen thus, the prevailing system can be called a uni-multipolar system, though multi polarity *per se* does not exist. At the same time, prevailing situation also generated a crucial question: is there a power vacuum which fails to balance the system in

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the contemporary international relations? The answer is an emphatic yes. Now, such a vacuum has probably given rise to unbridled use of power to settle scores, rightly or wrongly, by one power i.e., the United States of America. Brzezinski foresees the United States would continue to be the lone super power of the world in the days to come. His forecast, in all probability, would turn out to be true. American geopolitics, as prescribed by its strategist Spykman, is to keep the Eastern hemisphere divided, so that America can dictate terms in this part of the world. America has greatly succeeded in fulfilling such a prescription especially after the Second World War; it continues almost unchecked till date.

Russia checked it to a great extent during the Cold War. Russia was contained by the application of the containment theory propounded by Kennan immediately after the Second World War. Kennan, an American diplomat working in Moscow, had even called the Soviet Union an 'impotent power'. Keeping the house divided or contained or encircled, applying those either singly or together, are some of the geopolitical imperatives of the United States even today. Added to it, America's unquestioned supremacy in power relations makes the scenario more complex and compounded. It has given rise to America's unilateral declaration of National Security Strategy Paper (NSSP), which authorizes it to take military action against any power preemptively or proactively if it is considered a threat, even without consulting the allies.

This self acquired right violates the Article 5 of the UN Charter which provides the right to act in self defense in case there is an actual armed attack and not to act proactively. But who cares? It has the wherewithal to dictate terms whenever it fits its national interests –both political and economic. However, there is something called 'imperial overstretch', Paul Kennedy has called so, which may imperil the American power in the long run. Some of the powers in the Eastern hemisphere are reasserting themselves probably to challenge the unquestionable power of the United States. Notable among those is China, modernizing its military to take care of some of the flashpoints in the Asia Pacific region. Russia follows suit, mainly because of the oil money flowing into its economy. Thus, a grouping called Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was formed, *inter alia* to challenge the military presence of the United States in the Central Asia. A kind of Cold War is probably in the offing. However, its intensity and dimension would not be reminiscent of the Cold War the world witnessed during the

later part of the twentieth century. A glance at the objectives of the actors in the power play would give us a somewhat realistic picture of as to what is happening in the new shape of power blocks that are emerging.

The paper attempts to delineate the power blocks that are emerging in the Asia-Pacific around China and, thereby, probe into the emerging scenario in the region. The paper's purview would be confined to the Asia-Pacific and Central Asia and would attempt to depict a scenario that is likely to emerge in the first quarter or, at most, the first half of the twenty first century. This scenario building exercise is, so to speak, a guesstimate and there is nothing sacrosanct about it. Balancing game is always in a state of uncertainty and flux. It creates a precarious stability and always in need of being restored.

### **Strategic Objectives**

Presently, unipolarity is the name of the game, which is generally resented by the Chinese followed by the Russians. Henry Kissinger called the Chinese the cold blooded practitioners of power politics. The Chinese are still haunted by the memories of the Century of Humiliation that began with the Opium War imposed on them by the British in 1840. The Chinese are now trying to resurrect. They would like to get back the central place in the world politics reminiscent of their grandeur during the Middle Kingdom. In practice as well, the process of development in China is, perhaps, the most dynamic in the contemporary world. "In the last 30 years, China has changed faster than any nation in history. Economic growth has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and remade the cultural and political environment of the country. China is perhaps the most dynamic part of the international order at the moment, and that, to many people, makes it the most frightening."<sup>1</sup> Russians are also trying to reassert themselves especially after the spurt of hard currency flowing from the sale of energy.

China sees its security as the summation of the variables like military strength, domestic political stability, national unification, prosperous economy and world peace. China feels world peace depends on a strong China. China, at the moment, is looking for a peaceful surrounding and trying to mend fences, wherever they are, which would allow it to have a stronger economy, better technological strides, and a well groomed

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<sup>1</sup> *Newsweek*, (September 25, 2006), pp. 30 and 33.

technologically advanced military, which can somewhat match the western militaries. China, as its pragmatic leader Deng Tsio Peng prescribed, should strive for all round national development, which would ensure better national and international security. Chinese military should fit into the overall national objectives of China. Two of the strategic objectives of China are to reunite the mainland China with the renegade province of Taiwan and to gain control over the Spratly and Parcel islands in the South China Sea. China's energy needs are on the rise and as such it has to keep its energy transportation lanes, from Persian Gulf through Malacca Strait to South-China Sea<sup>2</sup>, secured; it has to, however, at the moment, depend on American security umbrella. Chinese blue water naval capability is still far from maturing or from developing into a full fledged self contained military machine capable of calling shots in the Asia-Pacific region. However, its efforts are on and it is in the process of acquiring the state-of-the-art equipments for its navy from different sources.

The moot point that comes to the fore: can China, at this point in time, afford to antagonize the Americans in this part of the world in order not-to-destabilize the region? This is also inextricably linked with China's relations with Japan. If America withdraws from the Asia Pacific, then Japanese militarism would revive and it would further inflame the China-Japan animosity. China-Japan animosity is an age old phenomenon deeply rooted in their history. Although Japanese security needs are primarily looked after by American Pacific Command, Japan is spending huge sum of money, US dollar 42 billion, sixth largest in the world, to beef up its military. Japanese Defense Agency has now been upgraded to a full-fledged ministry. Japan suspects that China could disrupt its Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) only with a small blue water capability and through its assertions of territorial claims in the South China Sea. An American source mentions that Japan, for the first time, in its White Paper has identified China as a threat. The provision that concerned China most is: Taiwan being considered falling within Japanese security range.<sup>3</sup> Japan has plans for military deployment in Okinawa Prefecture in the event of a Taiwan conflict to prevent the possibility of China attacking the islands to disrupt US-Japan military

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<sup>2</sup> 80% of the Chinese oil passes through the Malacca Straits.

<sup>3</sup> "China and the Future of the World", The University of Chicago, 2006; URL: <http://chicagosociety.uchicago.edu/china> accessed June 20, 2007

cooperation.<sup>4</sup> The present Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI), going on between America and Japan, is aimed to “assess the security environment in the region and bilaterally determine the required roles, missions, capabilities and force structure”. This will go a long way to “strengthen the alliance, ensure the defense of Japan and maintain immediately deployable forces...”.<sup>5</sup> A question may be asked: is there a possibility that Japan may do away with its pacifist article in its constitution?

However, American sword and Japanese shield would keep the Japanese posture under lid. Given any scenario, Japanese military preparation and sophistication would go unabated. Recently, Japan has got embroiled, in the defense of Taiwan with America, which is definitely worrisome for China. This can also be called a hangover of Sato-Nixon joint communiqué of November 1969 where it was mentioned that South Korea and Taiwan were respectively ‘essential’ and ‘important’ factors for Japanese security. China cannot take it lightly since Taiwan is of vital national interest for China and Japan has, as already highlighted, age old bitterness in its relations with the China. Taiwan is an issue on which China would never compromise. There are enough reasons to contemplate America and Japan would get militarily involved in case there is a showdown by Chinese military to forcibly unite Taiwan. The scenario that is likely to unfold is quite disturbing and as such the strategic objectives of the players directly involved are loud and clear.

Russia, as a regional power, would continue to checkmate American ingress in Eurasia especially in Central Asia, a region of significant strategic importance and having huge reserves of gas and oil.<sup>6</sup> The area is

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, “Japan’s Re-emergence as a ‘Normal’ Military Power”, *Adelphi Papes*, No.368-9.

<sup>5</sup> Issak Zulkernaen, “US Pacific Forces Posture”, *Asian Defense Journal*, (November 2005), p.7.

<sup>6</sup> As per western estimates, the hydrocarbon resource potential in Central Asia is almost equal to those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait taken together. The oil reserves in the Caspian shelf are estimated at 17 to 21 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 7 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. The total Central Asia is estimated to contain about 46% of the world’s gas reserves. (Source: “US and Geostategy of Central Asia” by Imtiyaz Shah of Centre of Central Asian Studies)

called the strategic backyard of Russia; this is also true in respect of China greatly because of secessionist and fundamentalist tendencies.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is intended to bolster Russian-Chinese geopolitics to contain American geopolitics in the region. The Organization has greatly succeeded in its objectives of keeping the Americans at bay in Central Asia. It has already succeeded in uprooting the American bases in Uzbekistan.<sup>7</sup> Coupled with it, Russia would continue to provide sophisticated military technology to China;<sup>8</sup> China needs it badly since it is constrained in not being able to acquire state of the art technology from the western sources specially after the embargo imposed on China following the Tiananmen square episode of 1989. Russia would continue to provide such support since it fits into its strategic objective of building a multipolar world and containing American hegemony, as one tends to call it, in Eurasia. It appears, McInder's theory of 'he who controls Eurasia would control the world' is being replicated by the actors in the great game of power politics.

Of the other regional powers, India is playing a very matured and balanced game of geopolitics. It is apparently trying to mend fences with China and Pakistan. However, complete normalization of relations with these two countries is far from reality. It also goes against the grain of power politics. India, called a swing state along with Pakistan, is still having defense collaboration with Russia. Added to it is India's recent hobnobbing with America's military in terms of acquiring state of the art equipments, joint forces exercises and collaboration in civil nuclearization. Such posture does not bode well in the geopolitical game in the Asia Pacific. American strategic objectives would be to court India to contain or encircle China. However, the fallout of triangular relationship among Russia, China and India remains an enigma.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Russia has an operational air base in Kant in Kyrgyzstan. It reportedly houses Su series aircrafts along with rapid-deployment force drawn from Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. With Kazakhstan, Russia has a much deeper military relationship. Kazakhstan has extended the lease of the Baikonur space centre and ballistic test range to Russia for another fifty years. For details, see, *Strategic Analysis*, (January-March 2004), p.62.

<sup>8</sup> However, Russia is unlikely to provide the most sensitive equipments to China.

<sup>9</sup> An analysis of the triangular relationship among Russia, China and India is done in, A. K. M. Abdus Sabur, "Sino-South Asian Relations: Evolving Trends", *BISS Journal*, (Volume 26, No. 3, July 2005), pp.339-84.

role of ASEAN countries and Australia would also influence the geopolitics of the region.

### **Evolving Security Relationships**

Some of the key questions could be: would China change the security architecture of the Asia-Pacific or the world at large? Would China turn into a hegemon? Would China challenge the power of America? Would America exit from the Asia-Pacific? In case America exists from the Asia-Pacific, would China fill the void thus created? Would Japan be able to take over the responsibilities of America? How much of the stability in the *status quo* of the Asia-Pacific be disturbed in case America withdraws? In answering these or similar questions, an Australian security expert Michael Wesley visualizes three scenarios which may be worth mentioning here:

Vision 1: An Accelerating *Status Quo* where it sees the predominance of American power persists for the majority of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other powers like China, Japan and ASEAN countries will continue to grow in wealth and power, but, in the long run, there would not be any change in the status quo of the hierarchy of power.

Vision 2: It visualizes an emerging Asia-Pacific community where there would be better interdependent links through trade liberalization, greater liberalization, regional stability and greater understanding. In the process, the institutions like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference etc. would be further strengthened.

Vision 3: It visualizes a Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific where it foresees China to be the second biggest power.<sup>10</sup> Sino-Russian Communiqué of December 1999 urging all nations to join a “balanced, multipolar world order” speaks for the expediency in balancing American power.

Brzezinski feels China is unlikely to challenge the U.S. militarily and would remain focused on economic development only. China would, however, look for an opportunity to be recognized as a great power. This

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Wesley, “The Challenges of China: Australian Perceptions and Reactions”, in *Asian Perspectives on the Challenges of China*, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C. 2001.

conclusion is contradicted by John Mearshiemer of Chicago University who believes an increasingly powerful China will push America out of Asia as U.S.A. put out the European great power from the Western hemisphere as part of Monroe Doctrine in the nineteenth century. The Professor makes an unambiguous statement to substantiate his argument, "If China continues to grow economically and therefore militarily, there will be an intense security competition between the United States and China, with a serious possibility of war".<sup>11</sup>

This reminds us of Spykman's theory that the old world i.e., the Eastern hemisphere should continually be kept divided in order to keep the American predominance intact in this part of the world. Here two factors are going to shape our perception about the co-relation of forces in the Asia-Pacific: first is the policies adopted by America resulting in what Paul Kennedy has called "imperial overstretch"; and, second, the Chinese power, both military and economic, that is likely to remain continually on the rise. The application of Nixon Doctrine is also relevant here; the doctrine had called for a post-Vietnam retrenchment of American power from regional centers of power. It emphasized on outsourcing. America, in fact, is trying so in Iraq and Afganistan where indigenous military forces are being groomed to take over more responsibilities. Can we, therefore, relate that American hegemon will be driven out by Chinese hegemon, if one tends to call it so, in this part of the world? Scenario, at this point in time, is definitely not that critical.

The Chinese, in their different pronouncements, have made it abundantly clear that they would not go for any imperialistic or hegemonistic approach in international relations. However, they would not mind using military might to reunite Taiwan or to get their hold on the areas claimed by the Chinese in the South China Sea. Now, this is the question of perception as to how you brand a nation given a particular scenario. When it comes to South China Sea, ASEAN countries may term it as imperialistic or when it comes to Taiwan, America or Japan may take it as a military intervention which will, in all probability, be repelled by military means. Again when it comes to the question of border demarcation with India or over ownership of *Arunachal Prodesh*, India may feel threatened, as it did in 1962 and it might lead to eyeball to eyeball contact of two militaries. Indians might then view it as

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<sup>11</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, The University of Chicago, 2006; URL: <http://chicagocity.uchicago.edu/china> accessed June 20, 2007



hegemonistic or imperialistic tendencies by the Chinese. When it comes to the resources or geostrategic significance of Central Asia, China and Russia together try to repel the presence of American military. China is the second largest consumer of oil after the United States, depending on imports for two-thirds of its total consumption.<sup>12</sup> It is growing more and more energy hungry,<sup>13</sup> due to its phenomenal development. Therefore, it is natural for China to try to have control over the resources of Central Asia as western powers and Russia are also reasserting their influence over the Central Asian resources like gas, oil, water, etc.

America is going ahead with National Missile Defense (NMD) in the mainland and Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) in Japan or Taiwan. This scenario may be called core deterrence being extended to include extended deterrence. This is likely to create pressure on China for more sophistication of its offensive missile capability. China is already going for some MIRVs in its ICBMs. It is also going for cruise missiles against which, in fact, no defense mechanism exists. China's recent successful anti-satellite missile test has not only destroyed a satellite but also a myth that a new space arms race is not looming. There is, therefore, a possibility that bravado will be matched by bravado where the US is likely to pour resources into a space arms race. America's missile defense program also fueled argument in China and elsewhere that US is set to weaponize space.<sup>14</sup> Recently concluded Indo-US nuclear deal (for civil nuclear energy), runs contrary to American policy of non-proliferation. The Indo-US deal may further fuel horizontal proliferation. The larger US geostrategic consideration of containing China had driven the current US administration to depart from its long-standing policy of promoting non-proliferation. One has to also keep in mind that the weapon grade plutonium used in Pokhran 1 (in 1974) came out from the 40 mw CIRUS reactor supplied by Canada for 'peaceful purpose'. Moreso, Indian fast breeder reactors, as reported, have been kept out of the deal. Such action-reaction cycle gives rise to more militarization in

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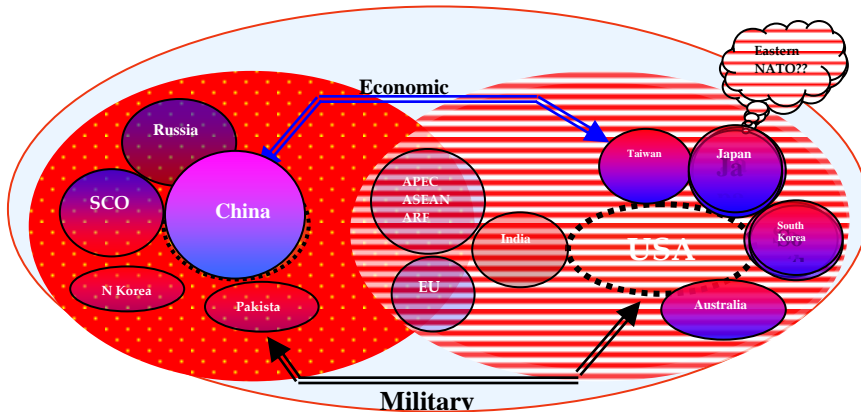
<sup>12</sup> Jing-dong Yuan, "Promises and Problems", *Asia Times*, (April 9, 2005); URL: [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/GD09Df05.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GD09Df05.html) accessed May 16, 2005

<sup>13</sup> China is the world's second largest importer of oil and it alone accounted for 31 percent of global growth in oil demand in 2004. See, "China's Global Hunt for Energy", *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October 2005), p.25.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Johnston, "America's China Worries", *The Daily Star*, (February 20, 2007).

the region. Military alliances or alignments are palpable along with more sophistication in the military technology.

Taking into view the prevailing politico-strategic and military strategic trends, the following model synthesizes the likely scenario developing in the Asia Pacific region.



Model: Emerging Security Relations

Here, the case of Pakistan and Taiwan is rather peculiar. Militarily, Pakistan has a tilt towards both China and U.S.A. However, Pakistan's swing state syndrome is responsible for this scenario. While militarily, Taiwan has a tilt towards the U.S., economically, it is tilted towards China. Taiwan has a huge investment, to the tune of US\$100-150 billion, in China. China is applying a 'carrot and stick' policy when it comes to the issue of the reunification of its renegade province Taiwan with the mainland. India, although having good military ties with Russia, is likely to court America when it comes to tackling China. The model shows the speculative idea of forming an eastern NATO since there is fluidity in the alignments that may emerge.

### Concluding Remarks

Power politics is agog in the region. It does not, however, necessarily mean that power politics should always overtake the soft power i.e., diplomacy, dialogue, international and regional institutions, ethics, values, etc. As anywhere in the contemporary world, market forces as well as pluralist concepts are at play in the Asia-Pacific region.

Economic interests of a nation, often, overtake the geopolitical compulsions of a nation. There is an interdependent economic linkage which can put a damper on the strategic compulsions of a nation, at least, for the time being. Soft power needs to be encouraged to play its due role to tame the chauvinistic aspirations of all the actors in the region. There should be more communication and dialogue among the actors. Institutions like the UN, ASEAN, ARF, WTO, APEC and North East Asian Security cooperation (if formed) should be given their free hands to tone down the divergent approaches of the regional actors and bring them to the negotiation table to sort out the outstanding issues in the region. It is expected that the soft power along with interdependence in economic linkages will ensure peace and stability in the region.