

EMERGING SECURITY ALLIANCES IN EURASIAN REGION

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Abstract

The end of the Cold war period marked the beginning of a 'new era', which has seen major shifts in power transition from unipolarity to bipolarity and now towards multi-polarity. The emergence of new great powers like resurgent Russia and the rising China, have put solemn challenges to US led hegemonic world order. Resultantly, new world order is in making where emerging security alignments, realignments and challenges from state and non-state actors has once again shifted international relations for global geopolitics and geo-economics. The purpose of this paper is to explore the emerging geopolitical and geo-economics trends in the realm of emerging security alliances specifically in the Eurasian region through the lenses of Balance of Power (BOP) and Regional Security Complex (RSC). Moreover, on the onset of these major changes over the geopolitical landscape; it also explains the global, regional and national implications for Pakistan. The prospective outcome of the research highlights the complex dimension of overall security architecture of Eurasian Region along with its causal relationship with exacerbating US-China and US-Russia geo-strategic rivalry.

Keywords: Security Alliance, Balance of Power, Eurasia Region.

Introduction

After the disintegration of the USSR, at the end of cold war, the world transitioned from the bipolar system to a unipolar one. However post 9/11, the rise of China and resurgence of Russia has seriously challenged US dominance over global geo-politics, remodeling it towards a multipolar system which is termed by Barry Buzan as “Decentered Globalism”; this would see the world order as having more great powers instead of only one superpower.¹ It would also result in having multiple power centers instead of only one, which is more sustainable because hegemony of single power leads to global frustration. Such an international order would offer wider and brighter opportunities to the states in terms of global recognition and participation; however, it may also pose serious challenges to some smaller states as well. The US response to 9/11 and her endeavors to maintain hegemony on a global scale has been redefining the security paradigms around the world. This policy of the United States is clearly manifested in its

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aggressive preemptive doctrine in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The belligerent security policy pursued by Pentagon endeavours to control or terminate threats before they become significant and that also satisfies U.S. quest for hegemony around the world.

The world has switched once again from geo-economics to geopolitics that indicate emerging security alignments, realignments, and challenges from state and non-state actors. Inconclusive war in Afghanistan, Iraq and violence in Libya, Yemen and Syria have once again put Eurasian region on the pathway to violence and contested interests of great power's politics. Brexit reflects internal schism in European Union, Trump's threats of taking no responsibility of allies, Turkey's involvement in Syrian war, Saudi-Qatar diplomatic rift, India-Pakistan nuclear flashpoint over Kashmir, Ladakh conflict between China and India and above all China-US trade war are some of the incidents that are simmering and may erupt as potential regional conflicts having global implications. The implications generated by these conflicts can become foundation block of new alliances where enemies can become friends and friends can become enemies.

The inter-twined spiral of strategies and counter strategies of major powers may, in turn, lead to the 'Security-Insecurity Paradox' at the grand-strategic scale with significant implications for regions adjacent to epic conflict zones. Therefore, the mantra of the "Thucydides Trap"² echoes in the context of US and China's competing power projection capabilities on land, sea, air, intelligence, nuclear, upper space and cyber space, besides being apprehensive about each other's strategic intent.³ Though it is difficult to establish the precise timelines and the benchmarks of real change in the global power order, the process seems to have been set into motion. The most vivid manifestation of this power contestation and power transition is the outlook of the shifting power blocs in Asia, wherein, it is certain that this process of change will not be restricted to the physical boundaries of the two great powers vying for influence, instead it is likely to span across the entire of Asia; particularly, Eurasia, South East Asia and South Asia.

Central Asia is a land bridge between East and West, apart from its location; it is rich in hydro carbon as well as minerals and is an emerging market for the global economic giants. Pakistan has great opportunities to capitalize on its geo strategic location and gain ingress in the capitals of Central Asia and the whole Eurasian Region and benefit from the great potential of the region in terms of oil, gas, trade and other economic ventures. Moreover, CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) affords us an excellent opportunity to become a trade and economic hub of the region. However, Pakistan is confronted with numerous security and economic challenges that inhibit it to

fully capitalize on its potential and the wonderful opportunity that its geo-strategic location provides it under the circumstances.

This article would, therefore, make an attempt to determine the causal linkages between US-China and Russia's geo-strategic rivalry and the security architecture of Eurasia, primarily in the spheres of threat perception and national strategies, spanned over last two decades, essentially covering post 9/11 era. It would also endeavour to establish the role that Pakistan can play in the emerging security alignment in Eurasian Region and the opportunities and challenges that await it in accomplishment of this dream.

Emerging Security Alignment in Eurasia

The article, "*From "Bandwagoning" Against Eurasia to "Circling the Wagons" in the Center of it*", written by Andrew Korybko on 31 March, 2018, asserts that the International Relations theories about the Balance of Power and Regional Security Complexes don't sufficiently explain the simultaneous emergence of three distinct but interconnected power blocs in Eurasia, which is why the new concept of "Circling the Wagons" has emerged recently. It also explains that the end of the Cold War radically changed International Relations because the bipolar system suddenly became unipolar under the US' then-uncontested global hegemony, which saw a multitude of states all across Eurasia "bandwagoning" behind it in support. This theoretical concept simply asserts that weaker states sometimes submit to the more powerful ones in their regions or the world and end up following their lead. That certainly happened in the 1990s when the US expanded its Cold War-era network of partners to include the post-Soviet Republics and the countries of Southeast Asia (now part of ASEAN) in an effort to tighten the geopolitical "containment" noose around Russia and China. Everything became more complicated after 9/11, though, as the US' War on Iraq and subsequent occupation sapped its strength and gave its Eurasian rivals in Moscow and Beijing exactly the opportunity that they were looking for to rise up and challenge the unipolar status quo.⁴

There is a very significant policy shift being witnessed between the great powers for their vested interests in the *Eurasian Region especially Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan*⁵. On one hand, the US is contesting to retain her status of being the 'overall security provider' of the region and on the other, economically rising China and resurgent Russia are introducing new security paradigms to safeguard common interests. In the foreseeable future, Eurasian region is likely to become the hub of world trade and economic activity; consequently it would also be at the center stage of the great power struggle between the Global Powers to control world resources. This conflict of interest

is already resulting in formulation of various alliances based on geo-political and geo-economic interests between the regional and global players.

This new security alignment in Eurasian Region is also known as the “Golden Ring of Security”; a term first coined by a Russian scholar; Andrew Korybko.⁶ Major powers which are involved in this enclosing are Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkey, and Russia also known as PICTR states. In the Eurasian region, many developments related to the regional security are acting as the driving force to initiate a strategic power play between the West and these PICTR States to fulfill their vested interests in the region⁷. In this context the U.S. is acting as a sole security provider of the region while on the other hand Russia and China are striving to initiate new security paradigms to protect their own interests in the region. Theoretically speaking power shift from West to East is gradually taking place and rising challengers are undermining established hegemony of the United States.⁸

The looming ‘Afghan Peace Deal’ is hinting towards the possibility of diminishing significance of role of War on Terror in the global politics; hence the shifting of focus by US from War on terror towards the strategic competition. Trump Administration’s pulling out troops from Afghanistan without stabilizing it is contradictory to previous US policies by Obama and George W. Bush administrations. Hence Afghanistan is relatively becoming a less important policy option for U.S. while its focus on containment of China and checking Russian influence in Eurasia is gaining greater significance. As a consequence, Pakistan is falling out of US favours and India is becoming a blue eyed strategic partner. This strategic rivalry has also resulted in an open war of words between US and China in the current COVID-19 environment, with both countries accusing each other of being responsible for spreading the disease and trying to hack research work in finding a solution to the problem. Situation on the Russian front is also not different as it has also launched both diplomatic and verbal attacks on the US and is accusing her of trying to create internal instability within Russia, terming it as quagmire “into deep internal crisis”.⁹

In international politics, states do not forget history and always prepare to take revenge. The fact whether the U.S. is on the decline or other states are rising, can be assessed from the legitimacy of their international policies. Russia and China are going to pose serious challenge to the U.S. in Eurasian region. Both of these states are chasing the policy of trying to revert US influence from the region. China is in an open trade war with the US; in a recent standoff, Iran fired 80 missiles on U.S. military basis in Iraq; despite best efforts US could not remove Bashar Al-Assad from power in Syria and Turkey sides with Russia on the issue, Pakistan became a hub of Belt and Road Initiative under CPEC despite all opposition from US, Taliban have come back to claim power in

Afghanistan and China has implemented new security law in Hong Kong eclipsing issue of Taiwan for the US. Where all these incidents are a hard pill to swallow for the US to keep its security arrangements in Middle East, South Asia and Eurasia in general, they also reflect a growing alignment of interest within the PICTR states against policies of US; thus bringing them closer to each other against one common enemy 'US and the West'. As per President Trump, "Many countries are not paying what they should," he said. "And, frankly, many countries owe us a tremendous amount of money for many years; they're delinquent, as far as I'm concerned, because the United States has had to pay for them"¹⁰

This kind of demoralization or ineffective approach of United States can cause serious halt and obstruction in its goal of attaining what it wants from the resourceful region of the Eurasia. Within the region, US relations with many countries do not have a very pleasant history: Russia, China and Iran are open rivals, whereas Turkey and Pakistan have also fallen out of favours due to Turkey's alignment with Russia in Syria and growing ties of US with India and unending blame game against Pakistan for failures in Afghanistan. US looming gap of feeble security alliance with regional countries can very promptly be filled by Moscow and Beijing who are eyeing at the position of being ultimate stakeholders in the region without 'policeman type' interference of USA.

This negative sentiment against US may result in formulation of long-term power blocs with various stake holders of the region to halt the influence of the U.S. in the premises of Eurasia. China and Russia are surely looking in the same direction with equal yearning towards Eurasia. Both states consider the Western presence on opposite sides of the Eurasian lands, in the form of the U.S. alliances in East Asia and NATO as a persistent threat to the stability of the region¹¹. The response of China towards US and her Allies has also been very tough, especially in the case of South China Sea, Hong Kong and North Korea: this has led to the declaration that "China is the greatest threat to the U.S." by FBI director Christopher Wray.¹² In the context of this region, there is certain natural inclination of some states towards the eastern bloc.

Hence the PICTR states due to their commonality of interests and anti US sentiments appear to be forging a natural security alliance in the form of a golden ring around the Eurasian Region with the ultimate goal of restricting further intrusion of USA in the region. There have been many instances where it has been noticed that the range of this new security alignment is quite different i.e. from being bilateral to tri lateral to being multilateral. Over the past few years, the occurrence of distinct and interconnected power coalitions has proven the emergence of the new security alignment. These security arrangements have led to something quite unique i.e. the incorporation of the world's most troubled and violent spot, Afghanistan with the energy

rich Central Asian states and growing relationship of some Eurasian countries with a few states of the Middle East.

The range of the area which comes under the umbrella of these alliances makes them quite distinct in their nature. The evolving bilateral strategic partnership between Russia and China is the result of the new changing dynamics of the region where the new alliances are being formed to safeguard the mutual interests of the states. The failure of the U.S in Afghanistan in countering the Taliban and various mutual meetings during the Afghan Peace Process in the previous years have formulated a tripolar strategic relationship between Russia, China and Pakistan which in essence is actually the response of the constant U.S. policy failure in Afghanistan. A Policy failure, as all the stated objectives of the US could not be achieved despite spending trillions of dollars in the landlocked poor country. Along with that there is another interesting multilateral strategic partnership or détente between the major powers of Middle East, that are Turkey, Iran, and Russia.¹³

However, apart from these emerging alignments there are also two very significant regional organizations Shanghai Corporation Organization (SCO) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) that can play a very pivotal role in the emerging new alliance in the region. Amidst all these arrangements, the role of Pakistan can also not be neglected which can act as the bridge between the Eurasian region through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan is a member of SCO and SAARC and playing a pivotal role in Afghan Peace process. Pakistan's role has already been acknowledged by the US in bringing peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan. In the coming months, the emerging strategic alignment in the region may present a very significant opportunity to Pakistan to further its foreign policy endeavors in terms of promoting a peaceful solution in Afghan peace process and promoting the Kashmir cause against India since the revocation of Article 370 on 5th August 2019.

Geo-Strategic Competition between US, China, and Russia and its Effect on the Region

The state of apparent competition between the three major powers is the defining feature of security paradigm in the region. China and Russia through their Sino-Russian convergence of interests have been trying to counter the U.S. quest to attain the absolute hegemony. They have common interest to move forward while casting double vetoes in the UNSC against the US invasion in Middle East, resisting US cyber governance and missile defence system. On the other hand China has deliberately kept silent over the Russian intervention in Ukraine while Moscow extended its support to

China in the maritime disputes which resulted in strengthening of the strategic partnership between both these states.

However, this evolving dynamic of Sino-Russian strategic convergence of interests against a common threat i.e. U.S can have its fair share of consequences. This strategic power play is giving rise to the emergence of 'new cold war' order and it can have consequences far beyond the region because the actors involved in this conflict are not limited to the region of Eurasia but beyond it because of declared and undeclared alliances. Through various policies of the U.S, it is quite evident that the hostility between these three countries can cause long term strategic conflicts in the region. The US is quite vocal about Taiwan issue which China claims to be its own internal matter. The issue of Hong Kong has given rise to fresh tensions between the U.S. and China. The U.S. diplomatic onslaught on BRI reflects that China's economic engagement with more than 70 countries makes US uneasy over the expansion of China's socio-economic interests and cultural expansionism on the other side. In its National Security Strategy US has proposed both China and Russia as the 'Strategic Competitors' instead of strategic partners and since then it has been institutionalized that U.S. does consider these two states as its rivals, particularly in the Eurasian region.¹⁴

In the recent years, under the administration of Donald Trump, Washington had a very dramatic approach towards China which has been characterized with a certain degree of hardening tone. Owing to the series of areas where United States feels itself challenged, such as trade, information technology, influence in the Indo Pacific rim land and South China Sea, there has been a significant shift in the US policy towards Beijing from a complex economic and strategic partner to apparent strategic competitor in the region. The perception of considering China a hurdle in its way of strategic power endeavours is the driving force behind this pivotal strategic shift in the USA's foreign policy towards China.¹⁵

On the other hand, the persistent history of hostility between Russia and USA along with the former's pursuit to create a 'post-west' world where USA is just one of the many strong powers rather than a dominant hegemon has diminished the chance of any cordial relations between the proponents of the former bipolar world order. The advancement of USA in Eurasia with a certain aim of exerting influence has pushed Russia towards the camp of Beijing. This rapidly increasing affiliation between China and Russia poses a serious threat to USA keeping in view the fact that the state of animosity between Moscow and Washington is all time high since 1985.¹⁶

USA's ability to form and nourish alliances can be considered as one of its most significant ability in its strategic positioning against China in the region. The fact that

China is also stepping up its efforts to build its relationship with a large number of states against USA, reinforces the significance of the issue for Washington where the current administration has to take very prompt and effective decisions to put a stop to the emergence of the worst scenario in the region for USA, that is a powerful Sino-Russian partnership which will ultimately validate the role of China as the 'Kingmaker' of the region, and this is not what Washington would want.

Increasingly divergent interests of the great powers and quest to attain their own national interests can cause turmoil and instability in the region. On the contrary, many analysts are of the view that the partnership between China and Russia is quite shallow and term it as a marriage of convenience; however the recent hostility between Iran and US has pushed these two states together to counter the US anti-Iran move in the region to attain hegemony: have also opposed US economic sanctions against Tehran. The strategic partnerships are refining manifolds among Pakistan-China, Pakistan-Russia, with Central Asian States and Turkey to counterbalance the growing impact of Indo-US-Israel nexus in the region. Moreover, the Sino-Russian embrace will continue to deepen in the economic security sphere in the foreseeable future. The emerging situation also going to have its fair share of consequences for the region as the self-serving interests of the major powers can destabilize the equilibrium in the region as each state would try to gain more in order to exert its influence. The nature of the conflict between the major powers in the region is intertwined and complex and will eventually cause the emergence of the conflicting circumstances for many states and may also lead towards sense of deprivation among the smaller states of the region.¹⁷

New Global Dynamics

The new National Security Strategy (NSS) that the White House issued on December 18, 2017, demanded that the US should divert its attention towards the competition with China and Russia in order to cater for the potential military threat looming over the United States. This call to extend the horizon beyond the current US emphasis on counterterrorism was structured well, but its implementation has not been very convincing in the military sphere. Fighting against one great power might be comparatively easy for the US but if Russia and China join hands against the US regional and global influence, that partnership may carry the potential to dent US power and influence and deter US allies from interfering.

China has been quiet over Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the US also remained helpless in reverting it. Though, Russia-China partnership goes much beyond this as China is the largest buyer of Russian crude oil; it has also surpassed Germany as the largest trading partner of Russia. What is more disturbing for the US is that Chinese

and Russian military forces are conducting joint military exercises, drills and defense dialogues and enhancing regional security cooperation. On the other hand, if Russia being a former superpower of cold war times aides China with sophisticated technology will significantly aggrandize China's military might.¹⁸

There is no doubt that the US is also preparing for the scenario where it might take on both adversaries together; however the possible ramifications might be catastrophic for the US as well as the international system. It overlooks the notion that China and Russia compete on a diplomatic and economic level as well as a military one, and that this competition is fairly crucial. In the military domain the US fails to identify the fact that much of this competition will be focused on asserting influence on other states, their conflicts, and attaining strategic leverage i.e. competition which involves far less risk of escalation and one where China and Russia can pick their targets on a global and regional basis, limit their aggressive and expanded intervention and reach gains at minimum cost and risks. Russia's traditional strategic interests play a critical role in the geopolitical and socio-cultural situation in the region. The anthology goes beyond the obvious military strategic nexus and seeks to identify new spaces for consideration by planners and policymakers alike¹⁹.

It needs to be understood that major wars between China or Russia and the United States, particularly wars that escalate to the use of nuclear weapons, would inflict so much damage to both blocs that it would result in nothing else but "mutual assured destruction" (MAD). China and Russia are well aware that the sole winner in an all-out nuclear conflict would be the power that could actually find a way to circumvent a major nuclear exchange or a massive level of conventional theater warfare. These diverse and yet scary scenarios suggest that China and Russia's dual focus on military and civil competition had a notable consequence long before Corona virus created today's massive uncertainties in global economics. Understanding grey area and hybrid operations is far more critical now than was ever before.

China and Russia have not only gained a lot from the fact that the U.S. has not paid much attention to such forms of competition, they have also benefited from their state-driven systems that ease to shape their economies to serve their strategic objectives along with their military forces. While there are several areas where China and Russia do not directly encounter the United States, yet there are a number of other cases where their novel strategy for such competition can now be applied to ongoing civil and military competition on a global level. If the United States is to effectively tackle such competition, then it must realign its focus towards its military strategy and identify the grey area within its strategy of hybrid conflicts and keep them at higher priority as it does to higher levels of warfare noting the evolving nature of this emerging threat and

the consequences thereof. Above all, the United States needs to refocus its national security strategy to address key global developments at a national and regional level, and it needs to incorporate its military strategy and operations with its political and economic goals simultaneously so that the overall strategy plays out effectively²⁰.

Additional factors which also pose major uncertainties on the scenario as to how the U.S. will tackle China and Russia are still in the loop. It is still far from clear how much the Covid-19 crisis will impact the relative competitiveness of the United States against China and Russia. All three countries have suffered a major blow during the pandemic. The U.S. has reached unemployment levels equal to the days of the notorious Great Depression, and it has already spent a good amount, more than \$ 3 trillion dollars, in an effort to ease the economic strain on its people and help people recover the damage already done. It will certainly have to deal with problems in both maintaining its decided levels of national security spending and meeting its new economic requirement.

Furthermore, China has also suffered a major blow in terms of employment, trade, and economic growth whereas the situation is no different for Russia. Both China and Russia have the potential leverage to use their state-driven systems and enable their leaders to directly allocate resources and order to continue funding competition in ways that may demand more compromises from their people rather than offsetting their economies priorities. Both are almost certain to keep challenging the hegemony of the United States and will carry on seeking and exploiting any new opportunities in other states that are facing political and economic issues in the light of the pandemic.

Likewise, conflicts between lesser powers, civil wars, and extremism open new windows of opportunity throughout the world with sustained areas of local and regional competition that have an impact on the working of the major powers. North and South Korea, Iran and the Arab Gulf, India and Pakistan are just a few notable examples. Syria, Turkey, and Libya are more recent cases that illustrate that exploiting new and unpredictable opportunities shaped by outside events can have a profound and unpredictable impact on US, Chinese, and Russian civil and military actions that can or cannot be fit for prior models and any formal definition of new and evolving kinds of warfare. This makes it even more pertinent that the US has to realign its efforts to compete with other potential hegemonies and resort to the combined use of economic resources, political tools, and military forces, to sustain deterrence, shape its strategic authority, and limit war fighting. On ground, this also means that the U.S. will deal with strategic partners, other countries, and non-state actors by treating them to be just as important as dealing with China and Russia.

China and Russia have already acknowledged these requirements and are now on their way to competing with the United States at the civil level with “gray area” tactics or indirect uses of military power, in low intensity military operations which includes utilizing third countries and non-state actors, and in deterring and fighting at multiple levels of conflict involving hybrid warfare. When deemed necessary, China and Russia employ their military power in what can be called “wars of influence” and that does not include actual fighting on the battlefield. When force is not employed, it generally takes the form of limited or exhibited uses of their own forces; clandestine operations; or the support of the forces of other states, non-state actors, or entities.

Different events over the years display the complexity of the Chinese and Russian operations over the last twenty years. They exhibit that both their civil-military character and their endeavors to limit the use of their own national forces and exploit those of other countries and non-state actors. They also give a range of partial cases that warn that the global impact of the Coronavirus and the subsequent economic and political crisis in country after country will offer many new opportunities for China and Russia to challenge the US and exploit the civil dimension of third country conflicts²¹.

According to Thucydides Trap, whenever any force is in action to displace the existing global power, instability can make its way to the global politics in which the existing power tends to stop the transition of power. Consequently, even though Russia and China might not be pursuing for absolute hegemony, yet they are making conditions apt for a multipolar world, which can compel USA to take counter measures.

Challenges Posed to Forming Strategic Security Alliance between the PICTR States

Alliances are never easy to form and tend to fall apart shortly after some of the divested interests are filled or if regional or global scenarios are evolving. Furthermore, even if alliances are formally formed there is no guarantee that some of the members may retract or even form new alliances rendering the previous ones obsolete. In international relations, realist principles dictate the patterns and interests of alliances and are the driving source behind the formulation of these principles. Now coming to PICTR states, the alliance may sound very pleasant to certain entities yet massive challenges stand in the way of such a broad alliance. Following are some of the challenges posed to this alliance:

- The biggest challenge to the alliance is the US and its interests in the region. Under no circumstances US would step out of the equation of Eurasian region leaving behind its unfinished agenda in Afghanistan, its pursuits in relation to energy interests in CARs, its contention with Iran over her nuclear assets or his

efforts to limit China's growing influence in the region through her aggressive one belt one road initiative. Not to forget the constant rubbing of shoulders with the resurgent Russia and her defiant leader Vladimir Putin.

- Iran and Pakistan have a chequered history of strained relationship which over the period of years has been marred because of a host of reasons including Pak-Saudi relations (strong leaning of most of the governments towards KSA) and strained US-Iran relations (influence of US over Pakistan). Pakistan is also cautious with respect to growing Indo-Iran relationship; India's heavy investment in Iran and support of Chahbahar Port. Recent capture of Indian spies making their way into Pakistan through Iran is also a source of great concern for Pakistan. Too much involvement of Iran can open ways for India to meddle in the regional affairs via-a-vis Iran
- Secondly, China and Russia aim to work together but their relationship is often limited by their similar hegemonic aims as both want to assert themselves as major powers in a multipolar world. Russia has lost its economic might and territorial integrity after the fall of Soviet Union. None the less, it still wants to assert itself as a major political power and that is where problems with China start precipitating.
- Furthermore, Russia has historic ties with India; this acts as a conflicting point with China who has adversarial relations with India. Recently it had a massive standoff with the Indian armed forces in Ladakh in June 2020, where 20 Indian soldiers were killed and the tensions remain high even to this day. Hence, the Indian factor would remain a major hurdle in Sino-Russian relationship. Indo-US relationship and their common interests in the region would also make India one of the key challenges for the PICTR states to overcome in order to materialize this alliance.
- The fragile South Asian environment is also a major challenge in formulation of any alliance in Eurasian region. The environment is very complex with regular conflicts emerging between Pakistan, India and China. The security environment is not very stable and that is why different entities in all these countries consider that the existence of an alliance is not the answer to the changing global scenario as the conflicts of the region will not let it prosper. Apart from that there is always interference of spoilers such as USA who do not want to see this alliance materializing as it would be adversarial to their interests in the region. Hence, multiple issues pose hinderance in this alliance²².
- Stability in Afghanistan and the volatile situation there, is also a big challenge; multiple stake holders are trying to assert their will and influence in the country with an effort to achieve the desired end state best suited to their interest. US, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran are all stake holders in Afghanistan; each

having their own agenda and interest and most not comfortable with the policy being followed by the other. Over the years US, Pakistan and Afghanistan were considered to be the major stake holders in Afghanistan; however the recent alignment of interests of global powers and resulting emergence of alliances is lately visible in Afghanistan also. US-India and Afghanistan are clearly on one side of the equation and China, Russia and Pakistan appear to be standing on the opposite side. Till the time peaceful solution of Afghanistan issue is not found it would continue to haunt all stake holders in the region and act as a thorn in any emerging partnership in Eurasian region.

Implications for the US and its Interests in the Region

The 21st century is witnessing the rise of multipolarity with a declining American hegemony and China's ascending supremacy attributable to its economic, industrial, and technological expansion at unprecedented levels. This has already brought with it a drastic shift in the global and regional balance of power. The United States National Security Strategy has described China as a challenger to its power, interests and influence in the region and that it is going to attempt to undermine its prosperity as well as security. A summary of the US National Defense Strategy also labels China as a strategic competitor that through its military modernization is attempting to achieve hegemony in the Asian region with an aim to displace the US.

China is thought to be progressing towards improving its position in the international system catalyzed by the American policies and is heavily involved in various regions and on various issues. It was in the book "China Dreams" published in the year 2009 that Senior Colonel Liu Mingfu asserted that the realization of Chinese dream for achieving a greater influence will require China to actively take a leading role wherever it can in the International affairs, to race neck-and-neck with America and to guide the world by exercising leadership.²³ The Chinese dream has actively been taken up by Xi Jinping since his ascent to power in 2013. Xi Jinping has often pronounced that China must gain the revival of the Chinese nation while warning that achieving the goal would require great struggle. And it is under Xi Jinping that China has been increasing its influence throughout Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, Latin America, and Europe. In 2017, China also formulated a grand strategy for its next phase, the crux of which is to glue together the North and the South.²⁴

Hence, the emerging strategic alignment among Pakistan, Iran, China, Turkey, and Russia will further lead to a decline in the US hegemony in the Asian region while allowing China to increase its sphere of influence. Given the fact that the current strategic competition between the major powers is focused around the entire Rim of the

Eurasian heartland, according to Nicolas Spyman the one controlling the Eurasian rim would control the heartland and the world, this strategic alliance will make America lose the comparative advantage that it has in the past enjoyed in these regions over its competitor, China. Moreover, hegemony in a region is first and foremost conditioned upon being the single dominant power within the region. Similarly, maintenance of a strong alliance system is another major pre-requisite for the achievement of either regional or global hegemony through persuasion. This implies that the PICTR strategic alignment will enable China to emerge as a regional hegemon, one that can successfully overtake the US. Hence, the alignment may lead to an eventual decline in the US dominance.

It is, however, noteworthy to highlight that President Trump's illiberal policies have themselves exacerbated the US decline which are ultimately leaving the US allies distrustful and opening up new opportunities for China's rise both regionally as well as globally. From Europe and Africa to the South and North East Asia, countries are now questioning the credibility of the US as a reliable support and an ally. The policies are illiberal in that they are divergent to the liberal values and are a reflection of the fact that President Donald Trump views everything as a zero-sum game where he has been prioritizing the relative gains over the absolute ones and has also demonstrated his disdain for the multilateral institutions and agreements. Since the beginning of his term, President Donald Trump has resorted to various policies motivated by the America first doctrine so as to reverse America's relative decline ultimately triggering a spiral of reaction. The list of these policies is the most relevant in the context of China's empowerment or a possible empowerment after the American withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership deal and Paris Climate agreement, the imposition of high punitive tariffs on imports from its key traditional allies and adversaries, the constant tariff threats, questioning the relevance of NATO and imposing sanctions on NATO allies, anti-Iran sanctions, threatening to terminate NAFTA and quitting the World Trade Organization, attempting to impose a ban on Muslim refugees, adoption of a hardline stance in favor of Israel and the suspension of US-South Korea drills.

In this context of the Asia-Pacific region, President Trump's withdrawal from the Transpacific Partnership deal is worth mentioning. The US withdrawal would still enable China to assert a greater influence in the Asian region through Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (a proposed agreement among sixteen nations that excludes the US) and the One Belt One Road Initiative. The talks on the RCEP also re-began amid the US withdrawal from the TPP. And, China's establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Bank has already signaled China's intent to dominate trade in Asia, defend its interests in Asia against any possible US intrusion, and to seek a leadership role in International trade²⁵.

Regional Benefits

The strategic alignment among these states is visionary and holds the potential to significantly improve bilateral and multilateral political and economic cooperation among the states which can potentially deepen in the future. Moreover, the agreement can cause a significant geostrategic shift in the regional dynamics of Asia which will be marked by an increased Chinese presence. Further, the strategic alliance holds greater prospects for peace and help solve common regional issues particularly the terrorist threat emanating from the Islamic State and the Khorasan Province. It is to note that the interests of these states already converge on a number of issues. The alliance countries already suspect that the US may be using ISIS as proxy to further its interests particularly to counter China and a resurgent Russia. A regional cooperation can allow them to avert this common threat. Further, a meaningful regional cooperation can also help the alliance states achieve the 2030 sustainable development goals relevant to energy, food, environmental and water security related SDGS through a cross-country collaboration in these areas. Last but not the least; it can help achieve financial and economic stability and most importantly regional peace by building enough economic stakes in the region. However, the precise long-term implications are yet to be seen.

Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan can play a significant role in making the PICTR states formulate a “Golden Ring of Security” around the Eurasian region. This strategic security alignment is based on common interests and threats; Pakistan holds the key to few of the major challenges that the alliance is presented with today. Some of these are:-

- Peace and stability in Afghanistan is the most crucial thing for the stability and prosperity of the region. Pakistan’s role in bringing peace to Afghanistan is going to be critical in defining the future of regional stability. Though competing interests of India and US in the region are not letting Pakistan play its actual role in Afghan peace process; instead of finding a solution that is acceptable to the people of Afghanistan, all stake holders want to enforce their own agenda driven peace on them, which in any case can never be in the interest of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hence role of Pakistan as a balancing player between Indo-US camp and Sino-Russian Camp becomes important as none of the opposing stake holders can reach a peace solution in Afghanistan without Pakistan.
- US interests in the region during cold war era and in the global war on terrorism have been promoted by Pakistan, being their front line ally. However lately the equation in global and regional politics has resulted in close Indo-US alliance against China; reflection of which is clearly visible in Afghanistan as well.

Similarly historical synchronicity of Pakistan with China have manifested itself in the form of CPEC, which is the pilot project of Chinese OBOR initiative. This Pakistani equation with China has obviously not gone well with US and resultantly Pakistan has fallen out of US favours. However, Pakistan is blessed with such a strategic geopolitical location that without its support neither China nor US can achieve its regional and global interests. Chinese influence towards the Arabian peninsula cannot be checked by US without Pakistan's support, nor can Afghan solution be achieved without Pakistan's close help and support. Pakistan also acts as a land bridge between China and CARs and China and energy rich Gulf countries through which China is very keen to meet its energy requirements. Hence Pakistan support is crucial for both US and China to further their interests in the region.

- Pakistan's support and relationship with Iran is also very crucial in formulation of this strategic alliance. Pakistan and Iran have a lot of common ground to build their relationship on. presence of Shia population on both sides provides religious affinity, whereas sharing borders facilitates trade and economic activities. Pakistan has also been of great help to Iran during its long era of economic sanctions whereas Iran can help meet Pakistan's energy requirements. However, relations between both countries have mostly been strained due to over influence of KSA over Pakistan's decision making elite and pressure by US over Pakistan due to her long animosity with Iran. Lately Indo-Iran collaboration on Chahbahar port and in certain economic ventures inside Afghanistan has also become a source of concern.
- However, Pakistan can greatly benefit from formulation of this great alliance between PICTR states as this would not only be economically very beneficial but also very viable; all states being in close proximity to each other. On the security side, PICTR states can join hands to become a formidable political and security alliance; three states out of 5 being nuclear powers and 2 being global economic powers. The alliance would also help in keeping the region stable and eradicate all kinds of insurgent groups and non-state actors from within the region and eliminate outside influence. Besides, it would also become a very strong voice at the international forums like UN etc. However, the alliance will have to face strong opposition from US and the West and will be seen as a challenger to US and NATO hegemony in the world affairs.

Conclusion

Amidst pervasive strategic uncertainty around the Eurasian Region in particular and the globe in general, evolving scenarios point to re-alignments in regional and global power blocks. This article will generate an improved understanding of the Eurasian geo-

strategic security perspective by the academia and security and policy experts. This study is also likely to sensitize civil society and masses to assert their role to work in the larger interest of peaceful and dignified co-existence of all states in the region; no matter how big or small. The article will thus help policy and strategy makers to grasp the complex dimension of overall security architecture of Eurasian Region along with its causal relationship with exacerbating US-China and US-Russia geo-strategic rivalry.

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