

Indo-Pacific Region: The Evolving Security Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Most of the scholars have presented a mixed regional response to the emerging security trends in the Indo-Pacific region. Actually, this region is an emerging geostrategic and geo-economic concept that has been gaining an importance in regional security issues in Indo-Pacific relation. The most vital force in Indo-Pacific region is the framework of maritime powers such as Australia, China, Japan, India and the US, which determines the pivot of this region all these powers seek to determine and dominate their national interests. However, this region is very rich a natural resource that is why; the emerging global powers are competing over these resource consequently, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a significant geo-strategic space and theatre of the competition and rivalry. Therefore, the rise of non-traditional threats such as terrorism, piracy drug trafficking and climate change have thrown new scrutiny challenges for the nation-states in the region. The nature of these security challenges in the region has considerable transnational implications which require international cooperative measures to be adopted by the maritime powers. The US rebalance strategy towards the Indo-Pacific region is an important policy regarding the national interest of the US and in the same manner, the strategy of China in the region are very crucially responsible to create tensions and security challenges in South China Sea which is a part and parcel of Indo-Pacific region. The rivalry between the China and the US has caused some security problems and challenges to keep peace and harmony in Indo-Pacific region. Thus, the present research paper highlights some security concerns and challenges in Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific Region, Maritime, Security Concerns, Natural Resources, Rivalry, National Interest.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, most of the scholar and policy makers have paid much attention to the emergence of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ to describe the changing regional security system in Asia. But there is still some confusion about what the term means. Nevertheless, at its simplest, the contemporary Indo-Pacific means recognizing that the accelerating economic and security connections between the two oceans. This region recognizes the arc of trade routes, energy flows, diplomatic bonds and strategic conditions between the two oceans. This linkage in turn emerges especially from the rise of China and India as outward looking economic and military powers, the expansion of their economic interests and their strategic and diplomatic imperatives into what maritime powers emerge as rivalry forces in the region. Recent development in world affairs has made the Indo-Pacific the world’s economic and strategic centre of gravity of many levels in global relations. Moreover, Indo-Pacific is region with Asia at its core and Australia’s 2016 **Defence White Papers** have emphasized on maritime South-East Asia within a wider Indo-Pacific theatre. Consequently, the Indo-Pacific is not a concept framed primarily by the rise of India. Rather the evolution of strategic system has made the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ by its nature multipurpose region and one of it is the South China Sea. Now more than merely a term, the Indo-Pacific is emerging as a useful conceptual framework for understanding and developing policy in capital from Canberra a Washington, Beijing, Jarkarta and New Delhi.

Now, it is assumed fact that the Indo-Pacific region is an emerging geo-strategic and geo-economic concept that has been gaining significance in the field of defense and security studies. Today it is the geographical connotation of the area which covers the Eastern Cost of Africa through Indian Ocean and Western Pacific Ocean. It has recently gained a wide acceptance in geo-politics scenario. Now the concept can also be seen as a natural collar to that of India’s “**Look East Policy**” into an “**Act East Policy**”, which not only seeks to increase the people-to-people contact and greater connectivity in the region and also seeks to play a vital role in the region. Indeed, most of the scholars assert that Indo-pacific forms a composite entity of sea regions and littorals marked by a multiplicity of culture, ethnicities, religious, economic models and political structure. But sea is a common linkage that binds the diversity subsystems within the Indo-Pacific region. In essence, the Indo-Pacific region envisages a new framework where competitive and

convergence security interests of the maritime powers are the evident in the light of global power shift to the region. To conclude, the maritime powers, such as Australia, China, Japan, India and the US, determine the pivot of this region and these powers seek to dominate and influence each other to achieve their national interests.

The Geostrategic Significance of Indo-Pacific Region: In fact, this region represents the centre of gravity of the world's economic, political and strategic implication for the maritime powers. Actually, this region is very rich in natural resources especially hydrocarbons which fuel the industrial engines of the work economies. Recently, a shift in global economic scenario has swiftly emerged as a centre of international trade and investments. It indeed embodies and includes a large market which is defined by nearly half of the world's population. Moreover, regional peace and stability, freedom of navigation and this region consists of the world's vital choke points for global trade and commerce including the straits of Malacca. The boom in port construction has also highlighted the strategic significance of the region and in long turn it is likely to be a greater commercial traffic and possibility for greater strategic competition among the rivalry maritime forces. Moreover, the increasing flow a raw materials, oil and gas into the region has led to the rise of Asia as a place of strategic importance. To conclude, this region constitutes the engine of economic growth and development. Former chief of Indian Navy, Suresh Mehta has rightly pointed out that the geo strategic importance of the region as the global strategic growth and expansion of maritime powers recognizes this region of the crucial significance in global relations.

China is the only East Asian power with substantial interest in the Indo-Pacific and its vital sea lanes through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Japan along with South Korea has an even more acute dependence on the Indian Ocean Sea lanes for energy security than does China. Moreover, the powerhouse economic of East Asia depend acute on oil imports across the Indian Ocean from the Middle East and Africa, and this is set to deepen further. Now it is assumed the 80 percent of China's oil imports, 90 percent of South Korea's and also up to 90 percent of Japan's are shipped from the Middle East or Africa through the Indian Ocean Japan's active strategic diplomacy in recent years, including an enhanced security and economic partnership with India and establishment of a small military base in Djibouti, can be seen as Indo-Pacific strategic issue. Indeed, Japan has frankly declared that the security issues in the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, South China Sea and East China Sea cannot be treated separately. Moreover, Japan see in India and Australia strategic partners of considerable potential including in the context of Japan's far-flung maritime vulnerability and concerns about security competition with China. This is why; the China factor and its across the vast region should be seen in the context of China's national interests in the Indo-Pacific region particularly in the region of south China Sea.

Security Challenges in Indo-Pacific Region: The fact is that Indo-Pacific region has recently emerged as a centre of maritime powers completion and rivalry. The traditional rivalries over maritime territory, sovereignty and natural resources have intensified among the regional maritime powers, the rise of non-traditional threats such as terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking and climate change have thrown new challenges for the nation-states of Indo-Pacific region the strategic significance in recent years. The strategic significance of this region lies in its natural resources, energy and international trade, which as remarked by Pradeep Kaushiva and Abhijit Singh, readers the region stability, critical, the looming threat of maritime crime and environmental crisis in the region. In addition to this, the region of Indo-pacific has also emerged as highly volatile, with the proliferation of nuclear and missile weapons. The US has also failed to control the role of China and North Korea in their efforts of Nuclearisation of Asia. It has led many serious security implications for the region. Moreover, recent development have also created a new security environment amidst rising assemblage of economic and political powers such as China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, Philippines etc. However, the US continues to emphasize its commitment to pursue its rebalance strategy, but all regional allies and emerging partners of the US including Japan, Australia, South Korea, Thailand and the, Philippines still doubt its ability to provide support in decisive and critical situation. Therefore, the rise of non-traditional security challenges has made the situation more critical in Indo-Pacific region. Most of the scholars assume and assert that there are some security concerns and challenges in Indo-Pacific region as under:

The US Rebalance Strategy: The US has it's a comprehensive strategy which aims to protect and promote the US national interest in the region by accelerating its economics and diplomatic engagements with its traditional and emerging partner namely, India and Indonesia. It has also military, strategic and ideological dimensions which are essentially driven by the geo-strategic imperatives of the economically fast growing Indo-Pacific and its implications for the US interest and dominance in the region particularly in South China Sea region. Consequently, China has created geo-strategic flux in the Indo-Pacific region, which poses serious military, economic and political challenges to the US interest in the region of South China sea. The US has also rectified its border foreign policy of peace stability and freedom of navigation. But China's aggressive posture in the region and territorial claims create security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region.

The China Factor: Indeed, China is a key factor in the Indo-Pacific as well as in the US rebalancing strategy, which both have intensified the controversial issues in Indo-Pacific region including the region of South China sea. Meanwhile, China's rise as an regional power projection, particularly in the East and South China Sea, have caused some major security concerns for the region. China's nationalistic leadership and aggressiveness pursuit of national

interest that has created a regional flux and its doubts the US growing engagements with its regional allies. China's maritime boundary claims, increasing military activities in the East and South China Sea region. Actually, China's aggressiveness approach has certainly generated many severe uncertainties and dangerous security concerns in the region. Nevertheless, China Strongly resents the rebalance strategy and continues to leverage its power in future dynamic of Indo- Pacific Region.

New Development Arrangements: However, the US marine expeditionary units in Iraq and Afghanistan are to return to their home station in the Pacific theater. But the US efforts to plan a more disturbed presence with a focus on the Southern Pacific. Its salient aspects of developing pivot strategy are as follow:

Emphasis on flexible troop development in the pursuit of specific operational missions especially in Syria and ISIS influenced areas.

The overall security thrust efforts in the Southern and North Western Pacific region.

Rotational Deployments of military units to different parts of the region and more effective military presence in Middle East countries

Consequently, as a part of its deployment policy. The US has positioned 250 marines in Darwin with plans to increase the complements to 2500 by the end of 2016. The US Army is also mobilizing its other treaty ally, South Korea with plans for deployment the US army attack helicopter reconnaissance squadron. However, the US needs greater operations supports from its allies in the Asia Pacific. But in the recent years, the US has made many dimensions with the South-East countries to expand naval bases and join trainings exercising program in the asia may be viewed as strategic moves aimed directly at constraining China's orbit of influence and as the principle cause of regional instability and insecurity in the Indo-Pacific region or its parts s a whole.

Regional Environmental Changes: In the South China a, large scaled land reclamation and militarization activities have been taking place in the region Japan and Australia have expressed their strong opposition to any coercive or unilateral Acts that could alter the status quo in the East and South China Sea. The concerns have also been reflected in the joint statement of the US- Asian leaders' special submit held in February 2016, which also reiterated the need for relevant regional and global issues. Most of the Scholars argue that both the US and China should not promote any effort for militarization and land reclamation. They should keep in mind that their efforts could create tension and security concerns in Indo-Pacific region which would disturb peace and stability of the region. Moreover, the US and Japan demand for the free navigation in the South China Sea. But China Claims that it is its territorial right as self-defense and any outsider disturbances could affect the process of peace and stability in the region.

Piracy in Indo-Pacific region: Some of the scholars assume the fact that piracy is an important and crucial issue in the context of security concerns for any country. For example, this problem has affected the stability of the Indian Ocean and likewise some other parts of the Indo-Pacific region. Piracy, that until recently had been dismissed as romantic folklore has returned with a vengeance and has emerged as bane of the modern seafarer. This traditional crime has made the considerable impact on the commercial Shipping, especially on those vessel passes through some of the hot-spots in the pacific regions like the '**Horn of Africa**'. However, earlier piracy was the rife in Malacca Straits and Indonesian waters but modern piracy is emerging from Somalia and its complex problem deeply associated with security problems of a particular region. The main objective of Somali pirates is to get ransom money from shipping companies by holding their crew and cargo hostage. Consequently Piracy has emerged as a security challenge in Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, many countries have developed warships for carrying out Anti-Piracy Operations and Patrols independently. This primary objective has always been to ensure safety pf the merchant ships.

Maritime Trafficking: The global terrorism has taken a new perspective in the post 9/11 era, while its maritime dimension and emerging format has been highlighted during the Mumbai terrorist attack of 26/11. However, the Us efforts as well as of the Russian efforts to combat global terrorism have not been more successful till now. The efforts made by these global powers have created the problem of asylums in the Arab Countries like Syria. Rather the various groups like ISIS in the coming years as maritime terrorism are likely to manifest and evolve in many unique ways. Hence to combat the terrorism, a unique Anti-terrorism mechanism requires an urgent need at the global level to ensure a full proof coastal security system in the Indo-Pacific region.

Drug Trafficking: It shares a close linkage to maritime terrorism since it is often used to finance terrorism insurgencies and piracy activities directly or indirectly. Terrorists groups share a deeply symbiotic relationship with drugs cartel and organized crimes syndicates. Now it is a proven fact that the nexus of pirates and narco-terrorism is a great threat to security concerns at the global level. Therefore, a defensive mechanism needs to be operated to combat it. But unfortunately South Asian Navies and coastguards are still unprepared to counter the arrival of submersibles, and their arrival would prove to be serious setback to Anti-Narcotic measures in the region.

CONCLUSION

To conclude we can say that there are some traditional and non- traditional security challenges in Indo-Pacific region. Today it is an evidence that the potential link between piracy and terrorism, drug trafficking, human smuggling and related crime has affected the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region as non- traditional factor but on the whole, militarization of the South China Sea, demand for free navigation, the US access to this region are the other key factors that have affected the peace process of this region and created many security concerns and challenges in the Indo-Pacific relations. Therefore, it is an urgent need to tackle all problems related to security concerns in the region. Most of the scholars argue that some regional forms like ASEAN can play a crucial role to combat security concerns and can create peace and stability in the region. Moreover China and the US should avoid their efforts to militarize South China Sea and ensure **Confidence Building Measures** (CBMs) to combat global terrorism, drug trafficking and some others regional as well as Global Security Challenges in Indo-Pacific region.

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