



# CENJOWS

## PARADIGMS OF RESETTING THE INDIAN STRATEGIC SPACE

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The change is the only constant as they say, seem to be coming somewhat true in the case of Indian political thought which otherwise is known more for its status quo preferences. It is the hydraulics of external geo-political canvass which has potential to impact on Indian security as well as economic matrix that has prompted her to venture out towards a path lesser travelled so far. **The aftermath of recent US outreach through two plus two dialogue has witnessed an affirmative move by India to showcase her pragmatic and realist outlook by joining hands with the visitors in taking their relationship to the next level.** While doing that, India continues to seek avenues of conducive strategic equations with other big players and the peer groups to take care of her national interests in sync with much cherished political doctrine of non alignment.

The US surely has a lot of promise to enhance Indian cause in the politico-military arena and there is an apparent increase in interaction between the two countries. In that, a new strategic paradigm seems to be in offing for India who in recent times has been under coercive shadows of collusive threat by two of her nuclear armed neighbours. The concept of non alignment has been an enabling as well as a binding mechanism for Indian polity with distinct advantage of political flexibility to reach out to all cutting across the mosaic of group dynamics as it prevails in the contemporary world. But the cognitive inimical designs against India have been on the rise and it surely requires appropriate realignment of strategic spaces while continue to be non-aligned.

The non alignment movement (NAM), when it was coined expected the countries not to join a political confederation and steer clear of their political influences. It was summarized by one of the Indian politician most aptly that **‘we neither lean towards left or right, we simply stand straight’**. However, the economic globalization alongside digital revolution has blurred the notion of political boundaries bringing about new strategic structures in the emerging multi polar geo-political turf impacting all the nations without exception. The US and China, the two biggest economies have been central to the changing politico-economic paradigms across the global turf.

It has pushed the political emotional content of yesteryears into pragmatic outlook to shape the destinies of the nations including India. The edifice of the concept of NAM in the present day context stays intact, however it needs to be applied with a pragmatic perspective. In that, India has found a window to continue to be non-aligned by **“aligning with everybody”**. And it is **this new approach which has created new avenues of strategic spaces much needed by the India to neutralize the negative synergies**. It requires the expertise of an acrobat to retain balance at all times while crossing the rope high in the air, lest he falls head on. India seem to be doing that and with reasonable success, albeit with friction areas which are in any case expected in a relationship wherein clear lines are seldom defined and nations look to maximize the dividends.

India, off late, has reached out to all the reckonable powers and peer groups based on mutuality of interests in order to steer her political aims and objectives in a commendable manner. The political differentials are being addressed with maturity and accommodation with underlying philosophy of seeking cooperation thereby reducing reasons of confrontation. **The history and culture of tolerance, politico-social inclusivity, democratic moorings and above all burgeoning large markets add to the soft power of India creating spaces for strategic outreach even with the countries known to have inimical designs against India**. After all it is the economy which is the ultimate driver prompting nations to look for economic good of their subjects and **that’s where the space exists for mutuality and political inclusivity**.

Let us look at the engaging enormity and all pervasive influence of the US world over which obviously has an intrinsic value for India and import of its politico-military afflictions on nations on our periphery with inimical designs. Neutralization of Taliban in Afghanistan and containing Chinese rise in Indo-Pacific appear to be the two immediate concerns of the US in her political lexicon wherein India is seen as the bridge head as both countries have mutuality of interests here.

Denuclearization of Iran & South Korea and regime change in Syria are other burning concerns wherein the US has accorded priority in her strategic

matrix. **The US objective of perpetuating her stature as the only super power, or alternately have decisive dominance in a multi polar world, if it so happens, would continue to be an important denominator as a backdrop to their narrative.** There is a political flux in the global geo-political turf with China emerging as a challenge to the US which is going to impact the entire world in some form or other.

In that, US interests lie in dampen the chances of success to Chinese BRI scheme involving approximately one trillion dollars worth loans and investments in almost 68 countries across the globe. China on their part is quite aggressive in her pursuits wherein military is inclusive in their political mechanism for their economic power projection. The purported extension of territorial claim line over South China Sea (SCS) in the face of outright defiance of the international court at Hague with jurisprudence on laws of the seas is reflective of Chinese penchant for using military to attain their national objectives.

It has implications on the concept of free flow of trade in the international waters which is main issue of geo-political turf which seem to have been encroached by the China from the US perspective. Besides this, the China has created redundancy in her approach to her sources of energy as well as markets through Pakistani geographical space through CPEC scheme. It sanitizes transit of Chinese trade from possible US intervention over high seas, thereby reducing Chinese insecurities to some extent.

India, with her border with Pakistan and dominating location in the Indian Ocean, is a suitable perspective ally to do the US bidding in checking the Chinese inroads both overland as well as on high seas. Since US geo-political interests lie both in the Indian as well as Pacific Oceans in reference to China, they have coined the new term of Indo-Pacific with its import of inclusivity of these Oceans. Not to forget that there were two different nomenclatures so far, describing the same geographical spread as IOR and Asia Pacific.

On other side, the dubious and deceitful Pakistani narrative has to be stopped in order to bring about peace in the Af-Pak region which happens to be the essential factor for stabilizing Afghanistan by the US. **Therefore, it would be in the US interests to use their politico-economic leverages to pressurize the new political dispensation in Pakistan to stop the support to terrorism in Afghanistan as well as India.** There are unlikely to be any dramatic changes in Pakistani (army) narrative as **anti India rhetoric is a compulsion beyond compromise for them.** However, Pakistan with her crippled economy and urgent need of a financial bailout may be willing to lower the ante and mend their ways, as of now. India, therefore, has an opportunity and strategic space to further isolate Pakistan politically based on

her complicity in terrorism and use the international sentiments to nudge Pakistan to lower her intransigence against India.

The signing of Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 and communication compatibility and security agreement (COMCASA) on 06 Sep 2018 with the US is reflective of the new and pragmatic Indian political outlook. **It is about creating new strategic space to deter the politico-military lead coercive ways of China to unsettle India as a competitor in their march towards politico-economic expansion and anti India rhetoric by Pakistan on daily basis with terrorist strains.** The matter has serious connotations when hyphenated with the collusive dimension of the Pakistani and Chinese anti Indian agenda.

**While engaging with the US, one has to keep in mind that Indian interest lies in good harmonious relations with our neighbours through creating an environment for cooperation instead of confrontation in the region.** India accordingly, has to give political space to China as there are number of areas of mutual interests between two regional powers despite inimical agenda of China against India for their political reasons. China seems to have chosen economic route to achieve her objective to attain stature of a world power. In that, one of the largest markets lies in India and that too incurring least logistics costs. It is therefore for China to decide on her future equation with India given the economic opportunities India may offer. Going by the trends, the China seem to be changing for good in the face of ground realities in the contemporary environment.

In that, the China with her main land 4000 nautical miles away cannot possibly match the domination of IOR by India despite her military presence in form of “pearls in the Ocean. Moreover, China cannot do 1962 over the land borders as Indian Army and IAF are strong enough to take care of any military adventure as on date. The CPEC scheme seems to be running into trouble due to security situation in the Af-Pak region and internal political dissent in Pakistan. In addition the increasing bonhomie of India with US is also playing up in increasing Indian political leverages which cannot be ignored by the China.

Beside this, the US has initiated a trade war by invoking tariff duties on \$ 200 billion worth trade which is almost half of their Chinese imports as against US exports of \$ 60 billion to China. If there is further escalation in the trade war, it would have long term impact on Chinese aspirations of economic expansion. Not to forget that the Chinese businesses are dependent on out sourced manufacturing of western world companies which if denied to them would bring doom to their economy.

In the emerging economic scenario, India happens to be a large market to expand the current Sino-Indian trade worth \$12 billion to higher quantities. In consequence, China in the given circumstances cannot go beyond a point when it comes to India which she could probably do earlier with impunity. **So, there is a scope of a strategic space which needs to be utilized by both China as well as India for their common good instead of perpetuating historical legacies which has little relevance in present day context.**

Related to Chinese influence in the South East Asian nations, the Indian concept of “Look East” which started as primarily as an economic outreach to ASEAN countries has now manifested into “Act East”. In that, the turf of Indian interests extends beyond South Eastern region towards Australia, New Zealand and archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean. Besides the economics, the new political initiative has security dimensions post intrusion by China in the South China Sea.

The Japanese initiative of QUAD has been revived as a joint mechanism with military connotation to contain Chinese expansion in the region. While India is a member country but has restricted her participation at a lower level and unlikely to indulge in overt military participation for obvious reasons of avoiding getting into murky geo-political slugfest of US and her allies. India is likely to continue with her economic agenda and exploit the new strategic space in ASEAN region in security domain restricted to inimical activities impacting on her own security.

Russia is another big player who has been on Indian politico- military scene with known positive synergies. They have reasonable high influence in the West as well as Central Asian region which has a large scope of meeting Indian energy requirements, besides lucrative markets for Indian trade. The major part of Indian mechanized forces, aircrafts, naval ships and strategic weapon platforms have Russian signatures. The Russia has distinction of providing defence technology unlike the western world who seems to be reluctant in parting with their cutting edge technologies barring few exceptions. India has substantial defence production infrastructure based on Russian assistance and needs to be further modernized and sustained. India needs Russia for her security infrastructure and also an anchor for geo-political support.

From geo-political point of view, Russia seem to be keen to fill up the strategic space on Eastern flank of the West Asia consequent to possible draw down of US from the Afghanistan in future. Russia has already secured a status of political reference point in the West Asian region after her September 2015 intervention in the Syria. Russia is also active in resolving the Afghanistan crisis as apparently they have inroads with a section of the rebels there. Accordingly, it is in Indian interests to continue the positive political

synergies with the Russia. Overall the dependency quotient of Russia is comparatively high in the Indian experience and there is already a strategic space exists which needs to be further nurtured.

India is also looking at her peer group in her immediate neighbourhood to seek and find political spaces for harmonious relations. Pakistan is indulging in festering insurgency in J&K and terrorist activities against India with impunity in the backdrop of her nuclear capability as military deterrence plus support by China and Islamic countries. Pakistan, in their anti India obsession, have gone to the extent of permitting China to intrude in their geographical space so as to enhance their politico-military deterrence.

It is in the interest of both US as well as China to make Pakistan see reason to refrain from their complicity in spread of terrorism. The Islamic countries also need to be sensitized to stop financial support to Pakistan which can be done through US who has reasonable influence over these countries. India needs to exploit her high strategic pull as discussed above in the international domain to pressurize Pakistan from all the possible ways to bring about a change in her attitude.

The other countries on Indian periphery are also under reasonable Chinese influence due to lucrative economic inducements as part of BRI scheme of China. While these countries have fallen into Chinese folds but the experience of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia and even Pakistan have exposed the negative side of the Chinese game plan. India needs to woo back Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives by political accommodative approach and joint human development schemes. The politico-economic stability of these small countries is in Indian interests, hence needs to be given priority in Indian diplomatic efforts. The SAARC mechanism is the appropriate forum to bring about regional synergies back on track.

India is dependent on the oil producing countries of West and Central Asia for her energy requirements which, obviously is a prime area of diplomatic outreach. India has reasonably good relations with most of the OPEC countries. However, the geo-politics of oil and gas has its own grand games which have impact on economic activities of countries like India. Therefore, there is a need of creating redundancies to ensure the optimal energy supplies. The economic sanctions by US on Iran and strictures to all countries not to buy Iranian oil is one such contingency which need to be factored in the strategic space for unhindered supply of the oil and gas. Similarly, Africa and EU are important to Indian economy which needs to be given appropriate attention in our national pursuits.

India is looking at the support of US in her strategic outreach to neutralize Chinese as well Pakistani negative synergies, besides enhancing

her military capabilities with cutting edge technologies and weapon and equipment. Militarily, India with the support of the US seem to be looking at moving beyond existing defensive doctrine and acquire capability of power projection beyond confines of her territories for optimal regional dominance.

While India is taking measures to counter Chinese penchant for coercive military ways through military diplomacy, the economic cooperation is being looked at as a mechanism to reduce the military ante by relegating the historical legacies on back burner. The China under current strategic pressures, as discussed, is also seem to be open to this approach as this is the sensible way forward to mend the fences. India is also hopeful that the China in their own interests of economic expansion may motivate Pakistan to decrease her intransigence and rein in their inimical activities against India. Russia continues to be the dependable stabilizing factor despite the reduction in politico-military equation under influence of US in the recent times.

India with her political neutrality, accommodative culture, emerging economic power with optimal military capabilities has a unique equation and a sovereign respect in the international community. India has worked her way as a leading non aligned country who can be approached without any restrictive compulsions of political confederations and groups. India stands equally comfortable with the US, China, EU, Russia or that matter any other country to forge mutually beneficial equations even if there are intransigent issues amongst few of these countries.

India on her part is exploring strategic spaces to further strengthen her geo-political presence by building up her economy, technological prowess and upgrade the military power so as to neutralize the inimical influences impeding her progress and well being of her citizen. That be the aim, India has to prime up her diplomatic outreach to create, sustain and reset the strategic spaces in resilience to the dynamics of global geo-politics in the contemporary times. Working on positive synergies so created is the way to make India a reckonable leading nation in the world. India with her intrinsic political strength is sure to achieve her aims and objectives by resetting the strategic spaces appropriately in a pragmatic manner in sync with our national interests.

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