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Strategic Triangle in the Indo-Pacific Region through Competition, Cooperation and Containment: Future of Maritime Power Posturing

Dr. Muhammad Sharreh Qazi

Assistant Professor,

Department of Political Science,

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Correspondence: shareh.polsc@pu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Within bounds of the Regional Security Complex, this article assesses key developments in the Indian Ocean and fallout of strategic interests from the Pacific Ocean in maritime convergence. The article argues that maritime interests in the Indian and Pacific Ocean are witnessing convergence as states form coalitions and strategic partnerships to create a balance between USA and China. Strategic choices between principal and peripheral actors is structured in a mix of containment, competition and cooperation. China and its strategic partners understand the momentum of impact if American interests in the Pacific Ocean are merged with its interests in the Indian Ocean. The article argues that China would be opting to go for cooperation strategy as a means to broaden its reach and entangle oncoming contenders. America, on the other hand, is opting to amalgamate both competition and containment in a worst case scenario situation to prevent China from creating an overwatch against global maritime activity. The paper finds that an escalatory environment with spiraling tendencies is forming in and around the Indo-Pacific and its fallout will likely be seen in assessment of magnitude of contending parties. It finds that despite understanding maritime worth of the Indo-Pacific connect, principal and peripheral partners to these strategies might be willing to transform maritime politics to strategic entanglement.

Keywords: *Maritime Politics, Indo-Pacific Region, Regional Security Complex, Strategic Entanglement, Strategic Equilibrium.*

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific maritime region has become a quandary for international confidence building mechanisms and peace processes. The nature of this region is both complex and unique because it houses economic and military dimensions in the same breath. Globalization has merged military and economic cooperation to such an extent that they remain mostly inseparable. China and the US share distinct lines of action and though this region serves as a domain for economic cooperation and consolidation of trade for both these states, the military dimensions pertaining

to this area are different. China lays territorial claims to the region and asserts that it has its proximity priority which makes it inherent claimant, a claim that directly prejudices the interests of Japan which is a strategic ally to the United States. The economic paradigm shift towards this region means that global preferences are going to eventually change, indicating in anxiety for Atlantic powers and their economic fabric. Another dimension indicates the post-Cold War military shift, whereby the US and UK had condensed their naval presence and India and China, in an attempt to fill the naval vacuum have upset maritime order (Hornat, 2015). With nuclear weapons playing an important role as active system challenging mechanisms, the US has leaned in to join India in an effort to contain China through containment (Mishra, 2014).

China has taken a hostile reactionary response to such containment measures and even though it cannot match the naval prowess of that of the US and India combined, it can however, press an economic consequence in case of brinkmanship (Hornat, 2015). The inability to cope up with such bifurcating response contrivances allows the region to initiate a trust deficit which is harmful for both balance and deterrence. Middle East has largely remained a region of perpetual conflict and the diversity of contemporary conflicts means that global economic order will seek to prioritize states with exponential growth rates and unconventional economic progression; India and China. The more recent Indian maritime designs displaying a response mechanism synonymous to what the US had in its maritime designs, Chinese anxiety has initiated an overdrive of investments in constructing a naval force capable of averting any prospective threat and also to provide adequate cushion in order to move for expansion. Considering that the major volume of trade in the world is conducted through sea and the major constellation of states with exponential economic growth and requirement is housed in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region (Mansfield, 2014), the importance of securitizing these lines of communication become imperative, demanding cooperation between states under traditional rivalry.

The US remains the most active and dominant naval power in the world and its power projection is exponential. This implies that naval capabilities of the US would remain profoundly impressive over the security of this region. The nature of this security would bear two effects; the first being that the US would have responsibility to over watch the trading volume flow in the region and second would be that the US would be a dominant formidable adversary to compete against because of its superior technology and knowledge of important strategic chokepoints (Mansfield, 2014). The global political equation in this instance becomes intensely disturbed and China, even India would have doubts regarding their national interests, considering the trust deficit that remains operational at status quo.

The paradigm shift in economics invokes a sense of instability because states now weigh their political motives in accordance to their financial outreach. This principle dictates that the more economically vibrant a state would desire to be; the more it would be impinged to enhance its military preponderance beyond territorial jurisdiction (Lake, 2014). China is state that has displayed an immense economic capability and has diversified global economic order beyond comprehension. Even though it initially had to compensate for its cultural isolationism, it had covered the gap in a much faster paced manner than what was predicted. International economic order was initially impenetrable by closed economies and mercantilist national policy frameworks but ever since the economic policy shifts in China, international

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organizations monitoring international trade have come to terms and have been unable to contain Chinese economic expansionism. This means that regionally, China would be surpassing Indian economic progress reducing opportunities for India and globally (Lake, 2014), it would be considered as a system challenging state to global economic order. This attitude implies that the US would feel prejudiced of Chinese economic dimensions and would be reluctant to allow this transition on Chinese terms and conditions. The economic dimensions activate military responses and considering the volume of distrust concerning power play in the Indo-Pacific region, the military reaction would be aptly severe and predominantly escalating in nature. Moreover, the nuclearization of the region as a consequence to strategic rivalry between three nuclear capable nations would have a negative trickledown effect on other regions and might upset the balance of power through status quo deterrence (Schöttli, 2013).

Growing Importance of Indo-Pacific Region: Confronting Dominion

The Indian Ocean is a significant and relevant body of water. It is the global trade route encompassing oil and energy trade, which is the driving force of the world's industry. It has political, economic, security, and energy implications for the whole world which makes it important for all regional and global players. Due to its geo-strategic and geo-economic importance it is the theatre of a new game for global powers. There are various rivals in competition for influence. The international system has gone through significant geo-political transformation over the past years. Rise of China, United States pivot to Asia and Indo-US strategic partnership have changed the dynamics of international politics. Compelled by the Chinese rise United States is trying to maintain its influence over the region and preserve status quo as dominant power. Whereas China's policies are shifting from regional to global and it wants United States to stay away from Asian affairs (Pant, 2007). Initially China's focus was on maximization of strategic influence through economic development and soft power but now it is more assertive in its behavior challenging contemporary global order. United States and China are balancing each other in typical realist style in form of building alliances and security cooperation with other regional states and military power maximization (Schöttli, 2013).

The Indo-Pacific region is stalemate at contemporary domains and this might not remain a case in perpetuity (Kireeva, 2014). Economic insecurity would automatically trigger a military response which would choke not only global trade but would also disturb global political equilibrium. This makes the Indo-Pacific power play a flashpoint where positive transformation of conflict remains either undesirable or unachievable in worst case scenario. What remains interesting to note is that state rationality might operate as an automatic response mechanism in deescalating conflict and this de-escalation might also maneuver contending states towards cooperation instead of confrontation. Indo-Pacific sector is a predominant lifeline for states maintaining economic development and states like Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and South Korea depend on oil and other natural resources being traded through naval routes within this maritime domain. An upset of security and institution of hostility would produce similar fissures to global trade and economics as would the closure of the Strait of Hormuz or an interruption to the trading equilibrium on the Strait of Malacca. States in this maritime zone have yet to recover from the East Asian debt crisis and have yet to

substantiate their status quo economic balance (Li & Whalley, 2014). Any dispute within this region, in naval proportions, would surely dent maritime transportation and would involuntarily cease naval trade which might initiate another economic depression. The trickledown effect of such recessive patterns would automatically introduce a domino effect in other hostile regions and can lead to multiple conflicting situations, mitigating which would be impossible (Kireeva, 2014).

Rise of China: A Cooperating Contender

Inducted in 2001 to the WTO, China had to bear down an extensive regime of tariff relaxations and waivers to allow foreign investors to exploit Chinese market. Chinese mercantilist economic fabric had to offer maximized economic relief in order to come out of isolation. However, China still maintains a large segment of its industrial sector under state control. The State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were entities that restricted foreign affiliates from consolidation and creation of blocs within Chinese economic domain (Koopmann & Wittig, 2014). In this confusion, China was seen partly resisting trade liberalization (C. Li & Whalley, 2014) and was seen as a contravention to WTO guidelines. Consequently, the US and other states maintaining liberalized trading order were skeptical of Chinese economic designs and reacted with caution. This would definitely impress a negative sentiment in both international economic order and domestic perception of US in China. The trust deficit inherently becomes activated as an inclusive factor whilst dissecting Sino-US relations and towards the overall intentions of China for future (Koopmann & Wittig, 2014).

Economic dimension of China poses a profound negative sentiment but militarily, the inability of China to compete or at least come at par with the US military, particularly the American naval manifestation retains China to a relatively docile status, making sure that any confrontation may either be avoided or quickly diffused thoroughly (Pant, 2007). Chinese compliance to WTO standards and a progressive role in the Doha Rounds to liberalize and reform WTO guidelines is indicative of appeasement as a substitute to circumvent prospective hostility. Calculating China in economic connotations in order to understand its designs towards any hostility in Indo-Pacific region is imperative because China only predominantly asserts economic prejudice. India is also supportive of containing China through cooperative naval strategy because it sees China as a major hurdle in impressing the status of a regional economic hegemon and sees China as a barrier to its economic growth (Li & Whalley, 2014).

With Chinese economic rise comes the phase where China prepares to secure its own investments and strategic economic vulnerability with the development of a formidable military presence. Chinese military prioritized its focus on maintaining land forces capable of securing strategic vantage in geographical proximity if ever it needed be. Conventional military paradigms dictated China to amass a large stockpile of land forces and equipment primarily designed to support and supply them (Schöttli, 2013). As paradigm shift of economy drifted towards maritime consolidation, the concerns for Chinese armed forces required amendments if not revolutionary measures. The major concern was the fact that the US had already maintained its apex lines of defense in naval connotations and this gave the US tactical superiority and strategic leverage in contemporary times. Magnitude of American naval prowess influenced almost all strategic trading routes which

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implied that either China would have to develop its own navy following designs to counterbalance American presence or it would have to succumb to American pressure and comply economically in order for asset security (Montgomery, 2013).

China being surrounded by complex neighborhood (borders four nuclear states and had past skirmishes with India and Soviet) worries about the strategic volatile environment. To overcome its security concerns China is strategically expanding. China's security policies are shifting from regional to global. China is developing and producing military assets worldwide (Bateman, 2012). It is modernizing its naval capabilities to secure its sea lines of communications and important maritime choke points. China is taking keen interest in Indo-Pacific region. It is expanding its naval capabilities in the region through construction of naval bases in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Beside expanding its influence in Indian Ocean (Medcalf, 2013) China demands Taiwan's return to the control of mainland China and claims sovereignty over islands and reefs in South China Sea. Compelled by Chinese shift in policy US and other regional states fear that Chinese rise could disturb regional stability and could lead towards military confrontation over Taiwan and other regional disputes (Montgomery, 2013).

Moreover, the island dispute between China and Japan is one of the most volatile flashpoint of the East Asian region. Patrols by Chinese coastal guards have further contributed to the friction and have increased the risk of collision and other accidents that could escalate into military confrontation. In November 2013 China announced the establishment of Air Defense Zone over the East China Sea including disputed islands which resulted in aggressive reaction from Japan, US and other regional stake holders. Keeping in view Chinese expansion in Asian region US and Japan are helping other regional states (Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei and India) that face Chinese threat to counter China (Pant, 2007).

Chinese took a diverse tactic; an approach which focused on more proactive international economic policies to consolidate financial reserves and to simultaneously develop a naval fleet able enough to manage any disturbance from the US. However, India played the role of a facilitator to the US in increasing maritime competition over China through a prompt increase in its military expenditure, predominantly focused at raising a fleet capable of amalgamating regional security against Chinese dominance and assisting the US as a maritime ally. The concept was that China would be denied access to key ports and trading stopovers in exchange for a more robust system of naval security, consequently granting India ample regional flexibility and autonomy (Ladwig, 2009).

Indo-US Strategic Partnership: Understanding Containment Mechanism

India had long desired to aspire for regional autonomy in the Indian Ocean in order to assert its posture as a regional hegemon. National sustenance necessitates that India be able to maintain leverage in Indian Ocean which remains the predominant source in Indian global economics (Mohan, 2013). Denial of access to states with growing economic margins like China remains a key strategy for India in order to dissuade any intervention that interferes with its economic and military strategic designs. Indian concerns take a structural review because of strategic cooperation between China and India tilts the balance of power out of Indian dominance and ultimately, provides China enough margins to strategically dominate Indian Ocean

trading scheme. Regional autonomy means that India would be able to dictate strategic dimensions with its neighbors and would be able to bypass brinkmanship by maintaining dominance. The Chinese investments in upgrading Pakistan's navy and bilateral trade agreements in purely defense subtexts incites anxiety in India and thus, naval presence in the Indian Ocean becomes a central policy in Indian regime system (Pant, 2007).

Containment necessitates that the containing state must have an adequate amount of military and economic instruments in order to dissuade the contained state from underestimating the containment and following a subsequent violation leading to escalation (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008). This implies that India must have either an equal number of military hardware as that of China or a higher number in order to allow margin and relative dominance during intensification of conflict once the containment initiative is prejudiced. India does not have a proficient capability to controvert any aggression by China because of geographical proximity and conventional inferiority but in maritime domain, both India and China have a less developed infrastructure. Even though they may both have adequate presence in order to utilize navy as another dimension to a conflicting situation, India alone cannot initiate containment of China or assert its maritime influence to dissuade prejudice to Indian Ocean dominance.

Containment further asserts that if it is to be conducted in maritime domains, the containment procedure must be flexible enough not to trespass into the tangible national interest thresholds of the contained state so as to invoke an involuntary retaliatory response that would again lead to escalation. Indian naval expansion would be translated as an offensive strategy rather than as a defensive domain because Chinese economic progression would be prejudiced (Hughe, 2007). This principle compels India to allow a smoother diplomatic channel with China in an attempt to signal defensive development and not offensive enlargement. The rapid nature of diplomatic visits by Indian statesmen to China or the frequency of economic amalgamation between China and India are indicative that India does not want to economically confront China by inadvertently accelerating its naval preconception against Chinese maritime stratagem (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008).

Containment may also dictate that where one state remains unable to initiate containment, it may seek alliance from others states with homogenous strategic policies in order to garner ample technological and diplomatic influence to initiate containment of adversary state (Keohane, 2005). Alliance structure demands that it may not be based upon segmented interests but it should have a comprehensive architecture and its complexity would discourage any adventurism due to unforeseen retaliatory response mechanism. Indo-Pacific maritime containment policy is intricate because it would impinge economic tradeoffs beyond comprehension as it would tend to disturb both trading routes and disturbed domestic economic fabric of both the containing coalition and the contained state. This implies that if such containment is practically initiated, meaning thereby that show of force has transgressed into use of force and escalation is now the only prospective outcome because of uneven response mechanisms, the financial construct of the containment initiating coalition must allow performance enhancement instead of strategic fissures (Pant, 2007).

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India had recognized its inability both financially and militarily remains inadequate to contain China even if it meant its own national segment of the Indo-Pacific geography and strategic alliances remained vital for the sustenance of such a motive. Coincidentally, the US remained skeptical of Chinese mercantilist economic patterns and its military influence on the South China Sea region and had thus decided to initiate containment through show of force. However, American affiliates operating in and through China would then receive a blowback and may even orchestrate another economic depression, the consequent effect being fractures in containment strategy ultimately leading to exploitation by China for strategic leverage. In the event that such an anomaly may occur and China may command strategic influence, the possibility that China may well be commanding an advantageous position would be exceptionally devastating to US strategic interests, which would pose irreparable damage to tangible national interests (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008).

With the US and India accumulating support from Japan anticipate discouraging China from economic or maritime brinkmanship as in the case of islands in South China Sea, this containment alliance might see internal rivalry as all three participants have their own segmented agendas to be facilitated by such containment. Japan reserves a strategic alliance and extended deterrence contrivance with the US and remains skeptical of the Chinese military expansionism towards its geographical proximity. The South China Sea dispute further exacerbates this claim and containment would diffuse maritime compression steadily built by China towards Japan. On the other hand, India is primarily concerned with its naval equipoise with China, would be unable to unilaterally initiate containment and motivating the US would mean India would have sufficient autonomy to design a naval dominance in the Indian Ocean exclusively (Montgomery, 2013).

The US remains the sole member of the coalition instigating naval containment of China with adequate diplomatic domination and naval ascendancy to deter China from challenging any such defensive strategy. However, US itself is economically reliant on China through foreign affiliates. American financial equities through international economic organizations and monetary institutions do not allow the US liberty to unilaterally or multilaterally interrupt global economic order. Brinkmanship would only aggravate the situation even more and might even serve as a catalyst for nuclear devastation. This implies that naval containment may serve as a viable tool for states that do not have nuclear capabilities as it did in the Cuban Missile Crisis but what separates Cuban Missile Crisis from Containment of China is the level of interaction of contending parties. In the formerly mentioned instance, there was containment of an ally with whom, strategic sentiment may not be as that of national territory and in the latter, prejudice through containment is being directed unswervingly towards tangible national interests of a state with nuclear capability.

Future of the Indo-Pacific Triangle

The US, India and China and even Japan, if considered as a player in Indo-Pacific strategic dimensions, are all conscious and cautious of the consequences of any aggressive posture in the Indo-Pacific region (Manicom & O'Neil, 2006). The magnitude of economic influence does not allow intransigence in political or strategic behavior and military inadequacy to unilaterally counter any single state does not consent to adventurism. Furthermore, fragmented interests and self-

consolidation do not allow containment mechanisms to flourish or display itself at optimum efficiency. Moreover, any irrationality not endorsed by containment initiating associates or system challenging behavior by contained state may entail overwhelming damage to regional and global political and economic equilibrium, an instance that may aggravate numerous other flashpoints commencing a trickledown effect.

With China swiftly increasing its naval volume and expanding its air defense capabilities, diplomatic and strategic coalition between states cognizant of Chinese expansionism are rapidly merging their maritime forces in an attempt to form a joint response in a more generalized tone. This strategic behavior could not only compartmentalize dynamics of security but may also regionalize economic order which would impair global liberal economic order and regional economic fabric. Handicapping China through a joint naval initiative remains a key strategic dimension for the US and India but this strategy remains conventional. Contemporary circumstances do not allow containment to remain non-confrontational and economic fulcrum that China has principally dents all military initiatives. China is not like the Cold War Soviet Union or Cuba that maintains a diverse system of economy not in tune with global economic order and this does not allow containment to efficiently manifest desired results. China has exceptionally high trading volume with the US and India and this means that coercion through containment can also rebound its desired results in an economic dimension on the states maintaining containment. The Indo-Pacific region houses some of the most important economic contributors and the number of rapidly developing economies is also increasing. Furthermore, population density in this region is also exponential which implies that any military initiative following of temporary or perpetual maritime hostility would severely damage global economic order and may initiate a domino-effect economic recession, recovery from such a recessive economic collapse would be hard to overcome because of market collapse (Keohane, 2005).

Strategic dimension to the Indo-Pacific entails a different set of circumstances. India may be able to assist the US in maintaining the containment of China but its own domestic economy would be unable to bear the cost of such containment for longer periods of time. Even if India does acquire status of regional blockade, its bilateral agreements with China serve as an insurance policy for China to coerce India into economic compression through which, utilization of Pakistan and its own ground force influence may disturb domestic security of India. Such a marginalization would automatically weaken Indian participation in the containment policy and with an inadequate naval structure; Indian capabilities would be severely tested both regionally and domestically. The US may assist India by providing technological support and may even temporarily finance Indian navy with sufficient economic and technological relief but Indian naval power projection would remain dominantly centric to Indian Ocean and Pacific region would remain a secondary priority. This would allow China more room to manipulate India through ground forces by impressing Indian territorial integrity through strategic mobilization and may deter India from adopting a more proactive naval posture (Hughe, 2007).

Dissuading Indian priorities from naval to ground military forces would create a technical gap that can be efficiently exploited by China because even though Japan and India may have signed memorandums of cooperation, their strategic priorities are different and their regional dynamics are so diverse that cooperation, if

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achieved, might remain short-lived and more towards a commercial interaction with partly strategic dimensions that may exhaust over time. The US would have to remain a lynchpin operator to maintain any form of containment and maritime balance would gradually shift in favor of China as it has adopted a steadier approach towards gradual up gradation of its naval segment of the armed forces. Nuclear weapons are a factor in this power play but their utilization is only for political and strategic force multiplication because any nuclear deployment in the region due to brinkmanship would create a domino effect of nuclear exchange because the nature of relationship between the US and China, India and China, India and Pakistan is delicately balanced on maintaining strategic status quo.

China and the US will avoid any nuclear confrontation of even any direct aggression for fear of escalation but Indian military expansionism would disturb the balance of deterrence in South Asia and Chinese alliance with Pakistan would initiate an arms race in the region causing India to activate aggression in anxiety of prejudice. Recent paradigm shifts in Indian force posture is also indicative of the fact that an enhanced naval edifice would obstruct deterrence and might lead to low intensity conflicts with potential to escalate. Such a disorder to strategic stability means confrontation and negative conflict transformation due to infringed tangible national interest and a conflicting situation whereby the US would hesitate to intervene due to its ties with Pakistan, causing mistrust in Indian perceptions, ultimately damaging the containment coalition (Medcalf, 2013).

Strategic Stability in South Asia and East Asia: Constructive Role Played by China

People's Republic of China has long been misinterpreted as a state with context to its approach on international political scenario. Perception is mostly based around China's covert nature and lack of disclosure of information from which intentions can be assessed. Moreover, China is largely assumed under its Communist political design and economic expansionism under state owned authorities to be similar to Cold War USSR. Predominant literature places China as a competing, on some occasions winning, candidate for global supremacy, replacing the US. Regional sphere of influence is also often viewed either solely in context to specific instances or through political kaleidoscope of American interests which is rather partial in its connotations. China, like all other nations, naturally exerts a sphere of influence which is to be understood from a Chinese standpoint and in purely internal-external computation instead of only assuming it from perspective of another state. Strategic stability, in this context, would then be a calculus of China's natural regional influence as per its geographical placement and then its most immediate preferences for sustenance¹. Duplication of precedent strategies or replication of another state's preferences would be detrimental for any intellectual assessment. South Asia and East Asia, geographically and politically, fall directly under Chinese influence both

¹ A. Rose, Frank. "Strategic Stability in East Asia." U.S. Department of State. December 8, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2014/235384.htm>.

as alliance regions and economic routes for which assumptions regard less of a practical credible assessment of China's role as a stabilizer².

Regional stability in South Asia is embedded in understanding behavioral patterns of India and Pakistan. Strategic stability automatically aligns itself to underlined circumstances. India and Pakistan require counterbalancing in order to maintain a pacific status quo and though it is presumed to be in military connotations, same is true for other aspects of this relationship. The Indo-US nuclear deal³, had purely civilian dimensions as per agreement but prospective NSG waivers and conventional military agreements meant that this agreement postulated more than a civilian approach. Pakistan-China nuclear cooperation, under IAEA safeguards similar to agreements made between US and India, signaled more of a balance instead of an aggressive encouragement to militarize. Chinese commitments to discourage nuclear proliferation and its personal willingness to restrict augmentation of national strategic offensive assets are credible notions that China would not encourage nuclear malfeasance. China, already assuring its commitments to the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty⁴ subject to compliance by major state participants, is not required or bound to compromise its own strategic interests.

Similar to South Asia, China is often regarded as an ally to North Korea pertaining to its ideological similarities and bilateral cooperative agreements. Perception is that China, in order to pursue its designs for Taiwan and South China Sea dispute with Japan, may likely utilize North Korea as potential proxy and would thus encourage its nuclear designs. This further hypothesizes that since China would feel threatened of American presence in the Pacific region, it would indirectly counterbalance by utilizing North Korea and consequently further its own paradigms. Chinese relationships with North Korea have predominantly been exclusive of North Korean nuclear posture and where China condemns nuclear proliferation⁵, it is also the only country that can possess enough leverage on North Korea and can be a lynchpin in deterring DPRK from augmenting its nuclear presence⁶.

Strategic stability in regional context is not perceptive analysis of personal dimensions of one particular state or its alliances but a conglomerate of assessing regional implications of any vulnerabilities. China has been either mostly overestimated in negative connotations or underestimated in comparative analyses and both situations misrepresent actual circumstances. Chinese compliance to

² Khan, Zafar. "Strategic Imperatives for Deterrence Stability in South Asia." *South Asian Voices*. May 21, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://southasianvoices.org/strategic-imperatives-for-deterrence-stability-in-south-asia/>.

³ Bano, Saira. "Pakistan: Lessons from the India-US Nuclear Deal." *The Diplomat*. June 22, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/pakistan-lessons-from-the-india-us-nuclear-deal/>.

⁴ Reif, Kingston, and Madeleine Foley. "Fact Sheet on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT)." *The Center for Arms Control and Non Proliferation*. February 11, 2013. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-on-the-fissile-material-cutoff-treaty-fmct/>.

⁵ "US: US, China Oppose North Korea Nuclear Test." *Times Union*. October 4, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.timesunion.com/news/article/US-US-China-oppose-North-Korea-nuclear-test-4226224.php>.

⁶ A. Rose, Frank. "Strategic Stability in East Asia." *U.S. Department of State*. December 8, 2014. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2014/235384.htm>.

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international regulations and Chinese influence on ally nations during conflicting situations is not to be misinterpreted as its strategy to employ proxy control but as a notion that even though China has the ability to translate its leverage on its allies for strategic advantage it chooses not to⁷. The economic corridor may be inferred to have a militaristic dimension but same can be assumed for any state and its initiatives. Furthermore, persuasion by Chinese government over North Korea to refrain from nuclear adventurism is a potent indication that China does not desire to upset balance of power in Pacific region⁸. China has predominantly been regarded as a newcomer to international political arena and thus has largely been ignored to secure any vital position in global political decisions. Unexpectedly, China has been regarded as a competitor for US and thus has been regarded in the same dimension.

Inability of US and other states in containing conflicting situation in Asia in general and South Asia and East Asia in specific had been largely because of absence of a member from the same region to conduct dispute resolution. China, being a direct geographical resident of this region, would be better able to steer conflict resolution provided that assistance and reliance is maintained. Chinese economic compliance to WTO standards is also evidence that it does not have a separate economic design for hegemonic seizure of global economics. In order to communicate amicability in both regions, China needs to be regarded as a major source of leverage as it commands economic, diplomatic and geographic prevalence as compared to US and other states⁹. Regional strategic stability is different in its construct as it encompasses more than bilateral interests. China as a regional occupant would have a comparatively greater influence in maintaining pacification and where it personally does not have a considerable nuclear presence, it would consequently remain focused on developing defensive capabilities instead of aggressively increasing its offensive threshold.

Strategic stability on a bilateral level is far different from establishing same on regional proportions. China, maintaining cordial ties with North Korea and Pakistan could have manipulated these states as proxies against its disputes with India, Japan and the US but it refrains from such hostile posture and instead selects economic integration which would ultimately discourage invasive policies of such nations due to cessation of economic incentives. This in itself is stabilizing and can be further employed to extend international agenda of pacification of enduring hostilities¹⁰.

⁷ Neuman, Scott. "China Calls On North Korea To Halt Planned Space Launch, Nuclear Test." NPR. September 19, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/09/19/441727640/china-calls-on-north-korea-to-halt-planned-space-launch-nuclear-test>.

⁸ Blanchard, Ben. "China's Xi Urges Resumption of North Korea Nuclear Talks." Yahoo! News. September 2, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://news.yahoo.com/south-koreas-park-thanks-china-help-easing-tension-070616383.html>.

⁹ Bodeen, Christopher. "China to Respond Firmly to Any North Korea Nuclear Test." Army Times. September 18, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/2015/09/18/china-respond-firmly-any-north-korea-nuclear-test/72400626/>.

¹⁰ Blanchard, Ben. "China's Xi Urges Resumption of North Korea Nuclear Talks." Yahoo! News. September 2, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://news.yahoo.com/south-koreas-park-thanks-china-help-easing-tension-070616383.html>.

Conclusion

Indo-Pacific region, beyond territorial disputes and maritime dominance strains is a region that has a pivotal position in global economics and this dimension dissuades any strategic adventurism in order to assert control over regional maritime contours. China maintains a strong economic presence with a marginalized naval status whereas the US enjoys a more dominant naval capability in the region but requires economic consolidation to maintain force posture. India on the other hand maintains a more regionalized naval preference and whereby its prospective approach is global; the ostracized naval presence does not allow India flexibility to exercise maritime outreach beyond the Indian Ocean and would have to remain dependent on assistance from regional players and the US. Chinese policy of internationalization of economics and bilateralism has so intricately merged interests of states in the Indo-Pacific nexus that any military venture would have severe economic repercussions, a tradeoff that no state is willing to make ("Asia Pacific," 2012; Keohane, 2005).

Indo-Pacific triangle is a diverse case study because it encompasses the employment of smart power projection and it is achieved through coalescing economic penalties in exchange for military brinkmanship and vice versa. Containment may remain a strategic impulse to contain China but it is restricted to theoretical domains for the fact that China can infringe massive economic damage without direct confrontation, something that would be entirely counterproductive to the containment policy. However, declaration of a containment policy undertones the threat of force which keeps China from aggressively suppressing Japan and dissuades China from maritime manipulation. The US would be able to maintain a dominant naval presence and all other states would have to recognize this reality where China is appreciative of this dimension, it does not want to confront the US in strategic deployment within the Indo-Pacific naval dimensions and resorts to a more docile approach instead of reactive response mechanisms (Bateman, 2012; Mansfield, 2014; Mohan, 2013).

The Indo-Pacific power triangle itself is so convolutedly enmeshed with economic and strategic subtexts that confrontation would hardly be the desired strategic preference of key players. Furthermore, the inclusive nature of all challenges and concerns makes deployment of any containment stratagem entirely deleterious because of merged national interests. This ultimately leads the three key players to agree to a settlement mechanism whereby status quo would remain respected and denial of aggression would remain operable.

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