

Asian Geo-Political Order: Emerging Trends

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ABSTRACT

The nature of world system has made much headway moving from a unipolar and then from bipolar to multi-polar world. The end of World War II led to the creation of a bipolar world system that was influenced by two super powers with distinct ideologies- USA and USSR. The disintegration of the USSR in 1991, one witnessed again unipolar system for a short while that was led by USA. Soon, the world system transformed into a multi-polar world with the emergence of India, Brazil, China and Japan etc. The 21st century is seen as the future of the Asian politics that will determine the nature of the world politics. Thus, in this scenario, India had to play a meaningful role in order to cope with these profound changes. The expansionist policy of China and growth of insurgency in North East states of India, India has to be careful in dealing with its neighbours. Thus, at best India's Act East policy is best option to take care of its interest in South and Southeast Asia.


Keywords: World System, East Asia, Alliances, Foreign Policies, strategic relations

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1. Introduction

The study of geopolitics focusses on the impact of geography to determine international politics. It is a way to study and understand foreign policy so that one can predict international politics through various geographical variables. One cannot study international relations without a good knowledge of geography. The geopolitics has been summed up in the following words: "Increase and decrease in population, natural resources lead to political systems that frequently change. It also led to the states and empire fall. but throughout recorded history one saw that the location of continents, islands, seas, and oceans has remained the same. The state is seen as a living organism; therefore, borders are conceived as often open and porous. They affect the functions of the state. In other words, the rise of state is equated with its political, economic and military strengths. The development of the political organism is characterized by the prevailing environment."ⁱ

The Westphalia treaty laid the foundation of the modern notion of nation-states and hence world society began to regard each other as a unit of nation states. This treaty came into force in 1648. The timing was important because the European expedition began in search for new land for trade and commerce and established colonies in other parts of Asia and Africa. One also witnessed that the trade routes via Medeterrian Sea was completely controlled by Italy and there was very little scope for other European to begin trade with other part of the continents. The major trade routes in Asian continent were in the hands of Arabs and Asia Minor. In the seventeenth century a major shift in the geopolitical and geo-economics of the Asian history occurred that profoundly influenced European players to gain eminence through battle and war for expanding their empires. "For the half part of twentieth century most of the Asian countries were colonies of European countries and the fate of the region was subservient to the colonial interest of these countries".ⁱⁱ

2. Geopolitical Order of Asia during the Cold War

After Second World War, not only in the sphere of geo-politics and geo-strategy, there were fierce competition between so called superpowers- USA and USSR along with their allies. Even the International economic relations were largely governed by the tensions and policies within this bipolar competitive world order. Soon, the result was seen in the formation of NATO, CENTO, and SEATO by Western countries. The purpose was to contain Soviet influence on the rim land of Europe and Asia. Similarly, the American policy initially tried to contain Communist China. During the Cold war period the American policy was based essentially on the three geo-political factors. : (1) America's security policy was grossly affected by the Soviet Union. (2) the Soviet Union that had complete control of the heartland of Eurasia became a big challenge to Eurasian powers and (3) the USSR, on the other hand, applied the revolutionary principles of war.

Since World War II one saw the growth of various new nation-states in Asia. Somehow, decolonization was a major cause of the eruption of the geo-politics of the Cold War. The purpose of newly emerged Asian countries was to end colonialism. One cannot ignore the efforts made by China, Vietnam, India, Iran and others in the creation of nation-states when the second world war ended foreign rule. The efforts made by the rising states in Asia enabled them to work for self-rule and boost industrialization. To a certain extent it fulfilled the aspirations of the newly independent states that was quite different from the western world. The beginning of the cold war was a constant struggle of the Asian states. It was historically structured by decolonialization.

The gradual development and uneven universalization of the Asian nation-states system became central part that focused on global historical rise of capitalism and hence colonialism gave rise to the emergence of cold war geo-politics. Indeed, the global cold war geo-politics had a great impact on the future course of action in the making of Asian states. So far cold war geo-politics also influenced the notion of nationalism and Asian national pride. As a consequence, it became an important factor in laying down the quest for developmental nationalism. It was seen that development nationalism that emerged and fell between the 1940s and the 1970s in third world countries. The decline of the Cold War dramatically changed the developmental nationalism and which was later on transformed into an area of cultural nationalisms.

Can we say that the global character of the Cold War was an outcome of western supremacy or a cause of decolonization? Bruce Vaguan has rightly pointed out that "The geopolitics of the Cold War was readily domesticated to a wide range of local conditions and circumstances that attended decolonization. In many cases this was a process that had begun in the late colonial period following the emergence of locally anchored communist parties in the various colonies in Asia. This reflected the important, even central role that Marxism played in the rise of nationalism and the anti-colonial struggles by the 1930s if not before. The rise of nationalism, decolonization and Cold War geopolitics also coincided with the growing significance and consolidation of the modern idea of development. In the context of decolonization and the Cold War the nation-state was naturalized as the key unit of (capitalist and socialist) development."ⁱⁱⁱ

Asia is the biggest and most populous continent of world with almost 4.3 billion people, it shares up 60 per cent of the world's current human population. There has been phenomenal rise in Asia's growth rate that has quadrupled during the last 100 years and today it has become the largest purchasing power in economic term. According to Francis Sempa, "there is some doubt that Asia-stretching from the Eurasian landmass to the maritime reaches of Australia and the South Pacific-is experiencing a major shift in the global balance of power. Expressions like the 'Indo-Pacific' and 'Asia-Pacific' capture Asia's expanse and dynamism. The growth rates in Asia have been averaging well above the rest of the world."^{iv}

3. Rise of China

What is the power structure in Asia? One can recall that the power change in Asia focuses on such powers like the USA, Australia and Japan, and reformist states like China and India. The growth of China as a major has challenged the major powers and regional powers of the role in Indian Ocean. India is no exception. This transformation in Chinese politics is mainly due to its development of military power and economic growth. Chinese has never believed in peaceful way of solving issues and will test the American presence in the Western Pacific. The government of China felt that US involvements with India and Japan by the theory of "containment of China". Japan has quite doubtful about US commitment in developing a strategic partnership with China. The cause for this was to build new model of major power relations."^v

The growth of China as a major power along with Russia, India and the ASEAN have largely increased their economies that have largely shaped the politics of Asia and have made Asia the center of world geo-politics. Still, Asia suffers from various crisis, though these countries together have developed various regional organizations and security structures. Today, there has been major shift of power from the West to the Asian continent. But the question is how this world redistribution of political, economic and military powers will lead to gradual change in global and regional geo-political structure. International relations experts believe that power transitions of this magnitude will lead to destabilization. They argue that the world has been closely interdependent to each other. Hence, the chances are less that new global order would not be a conflictual one. What we have to see these challenges as transformation measures that profoundly influence and pay the way to bring peace and stability in various regions. Interestingly, one notices that it has affected the mindset of the people that are forcing the nations for upright political reforms and accountability.^{vi}

Asian stability will largely depend on China and it is difficult to predict how it can influence the present global and regional balance of power. Today, the rise of China will likely to challenge the USA supremacy in Asia. But the problem lies with the emergence of new world order. On the one hand, one can clearly dispute between USA and China to play more dynamic role. The Chinese hegemonistic design help other Asian states to make pacts with US. On the other hand, if the US stays in Asia, then it has to play a more dominated role to contain China in the Indo-Pacific.

4. Maritime Security

The new geopolitics of Asia has boosted the significance of the naval security of Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region. It has moved to two dialectical trends: (1) Economic interdependence and growing strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region. There have been phenomenal growth of India and Chinese capabilities curves that have helped in self-perception of power. One major cause of strategic rivalry amongst the Asian countries is the rise of China as a military power. As a result, we saw a tight rope partnership between Japan and South Korea, Japan and India. With this objective, arms trade and arms race have become important in Asia. Mahendra Lama is correct when he says that “a new age of maritime economic dependence and maritime strategic competition has emerged in Asia in which instead of choke points and ports, three peninsulas and three bays will assume significance; namely, the Indo-Pacific, West Pacific, the South Asian peninsulas, and the Arabian, Bay of Bengal and South China Sea bays.”^{vii}

5. Conclusion

The nature of world structure has taken a different path ie, it has moved from a unipolar to bipolar and from bipolar to multipolar. Bipolar world system was the product of cold war that was dominated by two major powers with different ideologies led by USA and USSR. The sharp decline of USSR as superpower in 1991 led for brief period a unipolar system led by USA. Soon the world system was transformed into a multipolar world with the rise of developing countries like India, Brazil, China and Japan etc. The 21st century is seen as the century of Asia which will amply influence the course of world politics. The changing geo-political and geo-economic situations will also transform the previous global order. Thus, in this transforming period, India had to cope up with new policies so that it can suit with these changing dynamics. The focus of India will not only be the major powers but also has to work for a changing dynamic of regional order. The hegemonistic policy of China and increasing insurgency in North East states of India has complicated India's position. Therefore, it is very important for India that neighbors like Myanmar Nepal and Bangladesh should co-operate India on issues like border-infiltration, money laundering, human and drug trafficking and fake currency through open land borders shared with them. India's Look East policy is a good effort to indulge in economic and strategic relations with ASEAN so that India can play a dominating role in South and Southeast Asia and in this way it will be able to counter China. In this duration, QUAD is a big step to face the challenges posed by India's adversaries.

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