

Indo-US Strategic Partnership and its Security Implications for Asia Pacific Region

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Abstract:

Due to unprecedented rise of China in the economic, political and social domains world is shifting its strategic focus from the European Politics to both continental and maritime domains of Asia resulting in a challenge for the US and its allies. US, China and India are tied into strategic ingredients of cooperation, competition and containment. US intends to assign India an appropriate, competitive and probable offshore balancing role against China – that is, a strategy of balancing without containment. Engaging into an active conflict is not envisaged due to close integration of these powers in terms of economic, political, social and cultural domains. Indo US close strategic coordination is win-win situation for both the countries. India may become an offshore balancing power for US to retain its influence in Asia Pacific region against China and its allies; On the other hand it brings treasure of opportunities for India to strengthen its military arsenal with open doors of US sophisticated technology with the co-production and co-development framework. This generous access to the state of the art military hardware would enhance India's power projection capabilities to the maximum, posing security implications for neighbors' and adversaries to India. Moreover growing Indo US nexus aiming balancing and containment of China has serious regional strategic security implications.

Key Words: India, US, Pakistan, Strategic, Partnership, Implications, security, Asia

Introduction

Due to gradual shift of power matrix from the European region to the Asian region stake holders in Asia like India, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore gain importance in the eyes of global contenders. Partnership and cooperation of global powers with these regional powers is centered on their strategic location and role they can play in the larger perspective. Competition in this realm has further separated the states to make themselves worth enough to be chosen by stronger global camp. Moreover Asian

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powers intended to grasp maximum out of emanating plethora of opportunities. Convergences on the economic, political, social, strategic, cultural and ideological domains force global contenders to develop regional powers economically and militarily to their advantage. After the demise of USSR and long lasting peace in European region US only finds China a sole potential contender to its global power status in general and its predominance in Asia Pacific region in particular. At the same time US intends to keep its influence in the Asia Pacific region with the help of regional powers engaging them economically and militarily, making them potential balancer against strategic and economic ascend of China. Introduction of Globalization pre and post-cold war have further intricate the relations among nations in the world. Complexities of these relations have increased enormously between the global power and regional powers. Implementation of Cold War policies/ strategies has become unthinkable for US and its allies. War due to its unaffordable consequences under nuclear overhang is beyond imagination. US desire to have such regional powers who can balance China without escalating the peace and stability in the region. Among available partners and allies India suitably fits in the costume designed by US. Due to lasting border disputes of China and India and convergence of interest of both powers, US finds India most suitable and willing offshore balancer against China both in the continental and maritime domains. Although India would not like to be involved in active conflict with China but it will prove to be a suitable contender and balancer of power on the behalf of US and its allies in the region. India's rise as regional powers indirectly serves the strategic interests of US allies in the region and they are ready to contribute in making India worthy of that role.

Collective efforts of US and its allies in making India a regional power will bring economic and military revolution in India. Military and economic might thus achieved may lead India into challenging the unprecedented rise of China and coercing Pakistan on long lasting contentious issues in the region. In such like environment India would remain arch rival of Pakistan and adversary to China simultaneously, favoring US in containment of sole challenger in the hegemonic role in Asia Pacific region. Growing Indo US strategic partnership would lead to serious strategic implications for Pakistan and China alike. Security scenario will force the contenders to chalk out and implement the counter Indo US strategies in the region. Tug of war between rivals may promote both *external* and *internal* balancing (Walt, 1987). Some may opt for band-wagoning (i.e. develop ties with the dominant power, wait for future and join the arms' race) while other could perform buck-passing (i.e. to enjoy a free ride in terms of increasing one's wealth, not power and most importantly remain neutral). While still others, even the powerful states, could opt for *appeasement policy* i.e. make concessions while building oneself up for the long run (Brawley, 2004; Walt 1987).

This paper carries in depth analysis of the ideological dimension of Indo US growing partnership to balance China avoiding containment and active conflict at a time. It also highlights the environment orchestrated by US in the region to foster strength to its potential regional offshore balancer India against China. It also shows dormant prospects of the conflict between the potential off shore balancer, India and China on escalating ladder of strategic calculus. Initially, it attempts to conceptualize the balancing strategy and the motive behind such an essential part of international politics. It, then, discusses the strategic logic behind the US-India partnership and its broader regional security implications.

Conceptual Contours: The Strategy of Balancing

This is one of the most read and debated concepts in international political arena. At present we do not have any concrete definition of this concept. The strategy may aim at varying objectives. Arduous questions to be answered in this domain are to Balance whom, when and why (Hume 1965; Snyder 1961; Morgenthau 1967; Kissinger 1973; Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann 2004). Objectives for the varying situations may be different and the systems acting for the purpose may also be varied according to circumstances. Moreover type of balancing required may be different on different situations arising on international political scenario. Noteworthy types of balancing Strategies are enlisted below:-

- **Hard Balancing.** It involves intense interstate rivalry between the states involving intense level of military preparedness informed best by the traditional realist and neorealist conceptual understanding.
- **Soft Balancing.** Softening and relaxing the intense period of rivalry between the two or more than two conflicting states. It is based on limited arms' build-up with limited goal to achieve and quite often absent from making formal alliances. However, soft balancing may turn into hard balancing if and when strategic cooperation becomes hard and inter-state rivalry gets intense.
- **Asymmetric Balancing.** Forms the efforts by the states against the non-state actors or sub-national actors that challenge the military and conventional authority of the state by using ingredients of terrorism. Although the sub-national actors may not have the direct capacity to challenge the state military and conventional authority, it sometimes becomes hard and complex to contain (Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann 2004).

The concept is still under evolution and has not been transformed into a single theory. However, balancing strategy is a source of maintenance of balance of power among rivals who are not ready to accept the hegemonic role of other states. This concept has contributed to the maintenance of order, peace and stability with proven chance for survival for strong and weak in the system alike

(Levy 2004). Absence of balancing strategy undermines the sovereignty of the weak at the hands of powerful. Weaker ones are ordained to fulfill the wills and wishes of strong. In the eyes of Kenneth Waltz “*balancing is a sensible behavior when the victory of one coalition over another leaves weaker members of the winning coalition at the mercy of the stronger one. On the weaker side, they are both more appreciated and safer, provided of course, the coalition they join achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking*” (Waltz 1979). Balancing strategy is still in vogue in the 21st Century for achievement of political, strategic and economic goals set in by the states. Balancing strategy did not lose its importance in post USSR era. At present states worldwide are determined to avert rise of sole super hegemon who can challenge the world peace, prosperity and sovereignty of nations. Practice of balancing strategy in the present day globalized world even between arch rivals is not feasible or may be questionable once they are interconnect in intricate political, economic and social web. Moreover due to escalating cost of war compels rivals at the brink of escalation to avoid it and search for an alternative to the attained of the desired goals. Only feasible alternative to active war like conflict is balancing without containment (Tellis, 2014; Tellis & Mohan 2015). The Indo US strategic partnership falls under the ambit of balancing without containment where both the US and India are not ready to escalate the situation to war with China owing to political and economic implications at the regional and global level.

Indo-US Strategy: Balancing without Containment

Complete Great Game being played in the Asia Pacific Region revolves around “3 Cs” that is Cooperation, Competition and Containment. All states in the region are intricately involved in the three Cs avoiding the fourth “C”, that is, conflict. Chances of conflict in the Asia Pacific region are quite remote but the escalating nature of containment and completion may lead to the worst case scenario. China is acting as “Regional Power”, India as “Rising Power” and US as “Extra Regional Power.” Complete triad is revolving around these three powers in Asia Pacific region. Due to magnanimous economic stature these states can transform strategic force with immense speed. US is quite apprehensive of the enormous economic and military growth of China, it certainly intends minimize the pace with the help of its partners and allies in the region. India the regional power is most appropriate choice within the strategic imperatives of the extra-regional power. Despite the economic complexity orchestrated by unprecedented Globalization, the strategic imperatives are still burning concern. National interests of the states are still dearest to them. Trust level recedes to minimal on contentious issues. Real intentions of the state remain hibernated. Regardless of the close economic ties between India, China and the US, the strategic rivalry and competition may not be undermined. Upsurge in Indo US strategic

Partnership is amid at regional power China, a common challenger to the converging interests of both India and US in Asia Pacific region. It is apparent from to close coordination and cooperation that adoption of alternative strategy by US would be the balance without containment against China whilst strategically supporting India as an offshore balancer to meet its security interest. Underline interest in this type of balancing strategy are following:-

- **Retention of Predominance by US in Asia Pacific.** It would help retain the US predominance in the Asia Pacific region ensuring the freedom of movements on the major Sea-Lines of Communications (SLOCs) for both itself and its allies and partners.
- **Indian Aspiration of Modernization of Military Arsenal.** India aspires to modernize its strategic and conventional forces by playing the US sponsored offshore balancing role in the region. Major developments sought out of this nexus are as following:-
 - Firstly, India would aspire to access modern technology that would modernize India's conventional and strategic forces, which India had failed to achieve through its staunch strategic partners in the past Israel and Russia (Kanwal 2015). India would love to milk US to the fullest in this regard.
 - Secondly, Close association and coordination with US will turn India into a regional hegemon who will be more assertive and aggressive, putting the safety, security and sovereignty of weaker states in the region at stake.

India under US umbrella would try to coerce its neighbours to its nefarious designs with and without the consent of US. Weaker states in the region will have very limited options available to them which may include following:-

- First, they could balance against the aggressive rise of India. If India behaves in mature way and regards its regional and strategic responsibilities as regional power then it will pose no major threat to peace and security of the region. However, more forceful and violent India could exacerbate Pakistan and other states with active border conflicts with India. The best then these states could do to develop their own balancing act against the assertive hegemon, which in turn could promote stability despite the risk of conflict.
- Second, the neighbouring states largely supported by the regional power could get closer to India in terms of integrating India in their economic and diplomatic cycles so that India's hegemonic designs are contained without necessarily waging a war. They could convince India that they are not a threat to India as long as India does not show assertion and offensive strategies against her weak and peaceful neighbours. This complex alternative strategy in the Indian neighbourhood could offset India's hegemonic designs threatening the weaker parties.

Corner Stone of Indo US Strategic Partnership

The building block of the Indo US Strategic Partnership is framework agreement signed in 2005, excelled by the premiers meeting held in successive years in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Framework agreement aims at building India in economic and military domains. Prime interest of India is matured defence cooperation. Most significant agreement is Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), which, if implemented successfully, would mean a lot for the Indians to boost up its economic and defence imperatives. The DTTI was formulated by US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter, to strategically engage India beyond the economic and political obstacles. Underline aim of DTTI is:-

- Firstly, transforming the bilateral defence relationship into one that is limited only by independent strategic decisions, rather than bureaucratic obstacles or inefficient procedures.
- Secondly, strengthening India's defence industrial base by moving away from the traditional "buyer-seller" dynamic toward a more collaborative approach.
- Thirdly, exploring new areas of technological collaboration from science and technology cooperation through co-development and co-production.
- Fourthly, expanding US-Indian business ties (OUSDATL, 2015).

The DTTI is framed out under the senior US leadership. This was fully endorsed by the US-India leadership meeting in 2015. The most important ingredient with regard to this initiative would be the going beyond buying-selling approach when it comes to the growing strategic US India strategic partnership. It would involve deeper research, co-production, co-development and ultimately the transfer of the technology. However, India has some political and structural issues that could become one of the major obstacles on the successful implementation of the DTTI (Tellis, 2015-b). The DTTI, would revolutionize Indian naval and other military capabilities. US aspirations for molding India as an offshore balancer against rising China, in the realm of economic boom, technological enhancement and harmonizing cheap labour is reality. It is quite evident from, The US Defence Secretary Robert Gates statement, "*We look to India to be partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond*" (Gates, 2009). Inclusion of India in Afghanistan affairs and assigning it major responsibilities are a step toward greater continental role. On maritime domain US is orchestrating India a balancer in the region who can neither be engaged militarily nor can be ignored by the rising China. The US expects from its growing strategic partnership with India to balance rather to contain the rise of regional power in order to neutralize what many think the assertiveness of China (Johnston, 2013; Fravel & Twomey, 2014). The US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that, "*the US-Japan relationship, the US-South Korean relationship, the US-Indian relationship, all are important in creating an*

environment in which China is more likely to play a positive than a negative role. These alliances are not against China; they are alliances that are devoted to...stable security and political and economic (conditions)” (Tellis & Mohan, 2015).

This reflects the underlying principle of the US rising partnership with its associates to chalk out strategy that would not threaten, but to balance the strategic rise of China, which in turn would make sure strategic stability in the region. However, the US growing strategic partnership with its closer allies aims to empower them to play an assertive balancing strategy, which may not be tolerable to China. As the US perceives, China may also consider US to be assertive in the Asia Pacific region that would threaten the Chinese legitimate strategic and economic interest. The US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter has recently proposed to take more assertive military measures in the South China Sea that could lead the US to penetrate the China’s 12 NM lines. China may not be a silent spectator in this case (Qi, 2015). Therefore, the US and its allies and partners need to carefully strategize and closely study the Chinese gradual strategic force modernization. If China’s force modernization and doctrinal posture, as broader part of its perceived Anti Access and Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy, is limited with no immediate design for expansionism. In other words, if China stays assertive but not offensive and its strategic forces stay limited and defensive, the US needs not to counter the Chinese defensive imperatives unnecessarily which in turn could provoke conflict and damage the US reputation as a powerful and responsible stakeholder in the Asia Pacific maritime affairs (Glaser, 2015).

The US has retained such predominance for several decades and it desires to keep this powerful dominance in the Asia Pacific region. The point is that the US as a responsible key player in the region needs to play out a balanced approach in the Asia Pacific region that would neither harm the security interest of its allies and partners nor offensively act to counter China’s strategic and economic rise. Also, China may play out a cautious strategy not to push out the US from the Asia Pacific maritime affairs (which the US retained its predominance for too long) and resolve the issues peacefully with its rivals. More assertive strategic posture of the US towards China in terms of its strategic opening to India may also encourage India to challenge the rise of China and declare to be a regional power. With strategic balancing approach in Asia, the US could successfully retain its self-proclaimed predominance in the Asian affairs. However, it also makes India to strategically and economically rise in the South Asian region. India with its growing strategic partnership with the US could also show power projection, which in term could threaten the weaker states in its neighbourhood. It is observed that the US largely assisted China’s rise and raised its international stature after the US provided strategic support amid the critical Cold War juncture when on the one hand, China had developed stark ideological

differences leading to a conflict with the USSR in 1969, but on the other hand, the US exploited the Cold War strategic opportunity in terms of extending its strategic support to China that was to balance China *vis-à-vis* the USSR so that the US could retain its strategic predominance over its adversary (Pillsbury, 2015).

Today, the US considers the economic and strategic rise of China as a threat to the US and its allies and partners. The US thinks that it was a strategic mistake when the US President Richard Nixon, under whose leadership China was recognized as the US strategic partner, sadly stated just before his death in 1994, “*We may have created a Frankenstein*” (Tellis & Mohan, 2015). In a similar context, the US opening of its strategic partnership with India *vis-à-vis* the strategic rise of China may turn to be a Frankenstein for the US in the long run because the strategic dynamics in the international politics remain uncertain. As the international politics maxim goes: *there is no permanent friend and permanent enemy in the international politics, it is the national interest that remains permanent*. In addition, the US-India growing strategic partnership could also have certain regional security implications.

Regional Security Implications

As the growing US-India strategic partnership suffices the Indian economic and strategic needs that could best be materialised to balance the strategic rise of China, which in turn would benefit the US to retain its predominance in the Asian affairs, this growing strategic partnership would also have implications on regional security. Important implications are as following:

- **Enhancement of Indian Military Might.** Rising partnership would enhance India’s strategic and conventional capabilities as India is seriously striving for a strategic force modernisation. India is emerging one of the key players in the Indo- Pacific region and conceptualizes Indian Ocean as India’s ocean. It is considered that after the US and China, India with its emerging economic and strategic force posture would expand its political, diplomatic, economic and strategic influences in the Indo-Pacific region with an eye on China. India has taken drastic measures in transforming its strategic force posture in recent years. After nuclear weapons acquisitions and inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests, India acquires the first nuclear submarine (Rehman 2018). Although these developments, as part of India’s power projection in the maritime affairs, are in the initial stages, they show India’s aspiration and preparedness for the future conflict in the region. India plans to build more *Arihant* class boats capable of carrying submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2009). It has, already, acquired *Kiev* class aircraft carrier from Russia entered into service in 2013. India plans to acquire two-*Vikrant*-class aircrafts likely entering

into service in 2018 and 2025 respectively. In addition, India could also get a next generation aircraft carrier from the US as part of its broader context of its strategic partnership. India would be lobbying very hard for this to secure the cutting edge technology with regard to aircraft building components as part of the DTTI framework (i.e. co-development and coproduction strategies) (Tellis, 2015-a). In practical manifestation two issues may confront India and the US:

- **One**, whether or not the US would be willing to provide India the latest and cutting edge technology when it comes to next-generation aircraft carrier.
 - **Two**, India would be willing to follow the US aircraft designs departing from its own indigenous aircraft framework.
- **India's Power Projection in Asia Pacific Region.** The growing strategic partnership would increase India's security and the enormous increase in the strategic and conventional capabilities would provide India extra confidence to show power projection in the region, which in turn could make others feel threatened. Just to follow the Cold War classic maxim – that is, *the consistent increase of one's security would decrease the security of the other state*. It could have broader implications on South Asian region where the inter-state rivalry between Pakistan and India is still alive when many outstanding issues including the core issue of Kashmir are yet to be, politically, resolved between the two states. Due to these issues, the two countries fought in the past and confronted many border skirmishes. Given this rivalry and given the increase of India's conventional capabilities, India could put Pakistan into an enormous strategic pressure and put Pakistan in a classic security dilemma. This would cause an unending arms' race in the region endangering peace and stability of the region.
- **Implementation of Cold Start Doctrine.** The growing US-India strategic partnership could reinforce India's warlike designs in the form of its long-cherished Cold Start Doctrine embraced with the cutting-edge technology. This could make India more assertive putting strategic pressure on Islamabad what New Delhi wills. Although there is recently less talk on India's Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), most part of the CSD remains classified for obvious reasons. Since the Kargil episode 1999 and Pakistan- India border confrontation 2001-2002, India desires to avert further frustration and would like to make his armed forces with sophisticated weaponry system from its centre close to border of Pakistan so that it enables India to wage a limited war rapidly and achieve its political and military objectives. But the fact remains alive that CSD, if and when formulated and executed, would be in the presence of both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons on the other side of the border.

Both the CSD and the presence and perhaps the quicker readiness of nuclear weapons during the crisis time make India to reluctantly withdraw from a limited war fighting CSD. Also, if India still officially remains strict to the principles of No First Use (NFU), then NFU option would help constrain India to launch the CSD. The offensive launch of CSD as it makes India appear more hegemonic and offensive would make India to depart from NFU. Would CSD affect India's doctrinal posture of NFU? This is the question that remains uncertain when it comes to the would-be limited conflict between Pakistan and India in the presence of nuclear weapons. Indian strategic statements are still consistent, albeit uncertain, using expressions such as "unacceptable damage" and "massive retaliation", seemingly intended to convince Pakistan of the possibility of India's eventual departure from NFU as it prepares for CSD to wage a limited war (Singh, 2011). Critics point to nuanced changes in Indian nuclear doctrine that makes it more likely that India could use nuclear weapons in a future conflict (Sagan 2009). Others maintain that the formulation of CSD lowers the nuclear threshold, thereby threaten strategic stability in South Asia (Kapur 2008; Ladwig 2007; Khan 2012). In doing so, this indicates a gradual shift in India's nuclear policy. With regard to its deterrent force development, India is making dynamic changes, which in turn make New Delhi to move from a minimalist to maximalist policy posture.

- **Challenge to Policy of Minimum Deterrence.** India's growing strategic partnership and its force modernisation plan put a challenge to the India's policy of minimum deterrence that it had earlier conceptualized. Therefore, the question is: Does India's gradual modernisation of its conventional forces and increasing the number of both strategic and nonstrategic weapons' capability undermine the significance of minimum deterrence it initially conceived? Although India claims to follow Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD) despite achieving the capability to produce more, the minimum does not remain quite a minimum (Khan 2015). It is not clear what India means by CMD when it needs to calculate its deterrent capability towards both China and Pakistan, who is the immediate threat, how many forces India would require, say, against China and what would the level of these deterrent forces be towards Pakistan. Anything that is credible and/or goes beyond the significance of minimum towards China may not be termed minimum towards Pakistan. Therefore, "*what is credible towards China will likely not be the minimum towards Pakistan; and what is the minimum towards Pakistan cannot be credible towards China*" (Narang 2013). India unintentionally and/or deliberately creates a strategic scenario in which one finds more ambiguity, vagueness, and confusion; therefore, it puts a

lot of pressure on Indian nuclear leadership to resolve this ugly strategic dilemma without necessarily pulling one or the other adversary into vicious cycle of arms' race.

- **Creation of Competitive Triangle between India, China and US.** The strategic partnership creates a competitive strategic triangle between the US, China and India as each one desires to show power projection and compete the other adversary. Although there is a less possibility of conflict between these powers, the risk does not vanish away (Rosecrance & Miller, 2015). The increasing US-India strategic alliance, as part of a broader strategic balancing, provides India a chance to threaten the Chinese legitimate security and economic interest in the Indian Ocean region as China's seventy percent of products passes through the Strait of Malacca where India, with its strategic forces, sits at the mouth. With the advanced and cutting edge technology, India could take assertive measures and could possibility blockade the Malacca Strait with the stronger back up of the US when and if the crisis between these powers erupts. The US has strong and powerful allies and partners in the region. South Korea, Japan, India, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia are strong allies of the US when it comes to maritime affairs of the Asia Pacific region. At the possible conflict, the US and its allies can successfully blockade China at the Strait of Malacca, which could in turn damage China's economic progress (Montgomery 2013; Yoshihara 2012); Joshi 2011). To avoid the strategic dilemma of Malacca, China would attempt to find an alternative by building alliances and playing out its own strategic counterbalancing – that is, String of Pearls (Khurana, 2008). China also tries to economically integrate countries that are in alliance with the US, to avoid the possibility of conflict and prevent the rise of an Asian challenger against the strategic and economic rise of China. Currently, most of the US strong allies and partners are well integrated with the China's economic rise and this increasing volume of trade and economic interdependence with these countries encourage peace and stability and avoid the possibility of conflict in the region.

Conclusion

Although both the US and India have retained strategic partnership during the Cold War era, the strategic partnership is not reduced after the end of the Cold War. This strategic partnership is growing up deeper in the 21st Century world politics where the major powers shift their strategic focus on the Asian affairs. The US and its allies and partners consider the economic and strategic rise of China as a growing threat. Particularly, the US largely sees China a threat to its long-standing predominance in the Asia Pacific region that it has retained for

decades. In doing this, the US extends its strategic partnership to its allies and partners providing both economic and military assistance and ensuring SLOCs in their respective maritime regions. The US-India growing strategic partnership aims at balancing to contain China in both continental and maritime domains in order to meet its economic and strategic interest, but this, in turn, also benefits India to increase and modernize its conventional and strategic forces that India can deploy in the Asia Pacific region challenging the legitimate economic and strategic interest of China on the one hand and putting strategic pressure on Pakistan agreeing to India's terms on the other. The implications for the regional security are large. This will enhance India's conventional and strategic forces ranging from naval and military arsenals embraced with the cutting-edge technology as the partnership between the US and India implements the co-development and co-production framework (the DTTI). China may not accept the US rebalancing and/or offshore balancing strategy. Pakistan and other countries closer to China may get worried about their survival and get into counter-balancing strategy to contain their perceived rising and assertive hegemon. Will there be a conflict between the US and China or between China and India in the Asia Pacific region where the strategic competition between these three powers are getting stronger? Although there are no signs of war preparation by each of these powers and none of the powers would like to wage a war against the other, the possibility and risk of conflict may not be avoided. It can be argued that war may no longer be an option for these states given the growing sense of globalization and economic integration when even the rival states may not afford to wage a war. That said, war becomes expensive and unaffordable in the contemporary world politics. The strategy of cooperation, competition and containment can be observed in the Asia Pacific region. Also, there is a possibility that each power might play a balancing strategy to prevent the rise of regional hegemon. This will be a balancing strategy to contain in order to build peace and stability, but this may also aim at containing one power at the expense of other that desires to retain its predominance. Both the US and China may reduce the chances of creation of traditional balance of power strategy in the Asian continental and maritime domains if these two powers carefully and closely analyze what the other side is strategizing. If China's efforts for its SLOCs are legitimate and does not want to expand, therefore, stay limited in both South and East China Seas, then the US and its allies and partners, say, India or Japan may not necessarily feel threatened to play out the offshore balancing strategy to threaten the legitimacy of China. On the other hand, China may increase its economic integration with the US allies and partners to avoid the possibility of conflict in the region. Also, China may not directly challenge the US long-standing predominance in the Asia Pacific region in terms of crafting an assertive strategy to push the US out of the region, which may not be acceptable to the US in simple terms. The US still largely remains the sole economic and

military power and it might take decades for China to replace such power dominance. The US also has stronger allies compare to China in and across the Asia Pacific region. In the meantime, India with this growing strategic partnership needs not challenge China and/or strategically pressurize Pakistan to bring them to India's terms. In other words, it needs to remain economically and diplomatically integrated with China to benefit the South Asian region playing a much more responsible role as a rising regional power by resolving all the outstanding issues peacefully with many states in its neighbourhood.

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