

Geopolitical Significant of South and South East Asia in World Theater

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Abstract

South and South-East Asia cover global attraction in the time period. With emerging global economic, resident of around one-third of the total population, global power competition is focused in the region. Chinese influence in the region is rising on the other side, US engagements in the region to deter China is growing. This review paper will concentrate addressing the question: How does the region becomes pivotal point for geo-political competitions? With growing influence of China in the region, the US engagement is also increasing. This paper focuses on the power struggle of US and China in the region behind these engagements. The rising US military and economic assistance to countries like Nepal shows the geopolitical involvement in the region for global power politics.

Introduction

Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world, and its existence has always been significant on global stage in geopolitical competitions. Over the past decades, the south and south east Asian role in the geopolitics has remarkably attracted to many game players. With growing of the Chinese influence in the region, the US engagements has been grown up. With changing dynamics of the Indo-Pak conflicts, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is on the way towards death line. Meanwhile, connecting the South Asia to East Asia, excluding Pakistan, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is functioning smoothly.

On the other hand, the completion between two Asian emerging power China and India has encountered with the border conflicts and given new perspectives for the regional security and geopolitical competitions (Ball et al., 2019). Chinese influence has always seemed to be constrained by US involvement in the region. One of the US's actions to support India in its efforts to stop China in the region is the US-India Civil Nuclear Initiative. The US's Indo-Pacific Strategy's goal is to limit Chinese influence in the region. India is viewed by the US as a potential ally (Rice, 2000) in the effort to balance the power struggle in the political playfield with China.

There were two power struggles in the region in the early 1970s leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union: China joined the US with Pakistan and India joined the Soviet Union. Two decades later, the Soviet Union's fall caused this structure to fall apart, allowing for new alliances (Garver, 2002). Asia with the 60% of the world populations is leading the global south. Global world order is polarizing with multi-polar world. South and South-Asia with one-third of the world population, has significantly important in the world geopolitics. This review paper will try to address the question: How the region is pivotal points for geo-political competitions? With growing influence

of China in the region, the US engagement in the region is also increasing. This paper tries to highlight the power struggle calls between US and China in the region behind these engagements.

The US Engagement in the Region

US President Richard Nixon noted that Asia was only a minor interest for the United States in an article titled "Asia after Viet Nam." He had also said that the greatest threat to conflict that could result in a third world war would come from Asia (Nixon, 1976). Nixon had expressed his idea of rebalancing US foreign policy toward Asia to build a Pacific community, by which it tends to focus on east from west.

With the beginning of the year 2023, the US engagement in the South and South East Asia has increased. These engagements concluded as the counter steps of the US against the Chinese influence in the region. As the Trump's "America First" policy was focused on the containing the China in the global affairs. The Biden Administration with "America is Back" is continuing the policy and had worked more closely with its allies in the region (Roehrig, 2022). With policy continuity of the Trump Administration Biden Administrations adopt its policy of confrontations with China, leveling it as "Strategic Competition" (Roehrig, 2021).

Soon after Biden takes charge of Whitehouse, Sino-US relations continue to worsen and Trade War, Chip War, Taiwan Issues and other issues had frozen the relations between two super powers. The Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) with India, Japan and Australia was continued as project from Trump Administration and another security pact AUKUS is added in the policy including Australia and the UK containing the China.

On 2021 Vice President Kamala Harris went to Singapore and Vietnam. Soon after the visit to Vietnam, the Biden Administration withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in chaotic situations. The reality of the US intentions and engagement in the region was revealed from Vietnam to Afghanistan.

For the US policies and ideas of allies in Asia, the ideas of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and a "rules-based international order" are fundamental goals. Though it is rarely emphasized on it and the main motivator is worry over the rise of China's economic and military dominance. Thus, despite the fact that these US allies are frequently presented as efforts by governments with shared values and interests to cooperate, it is virtually impossible to hide the anxiety regarding China in these programs.

After its period of seclusion, the US became active in this region and over the years, it has had a range of interests in the area. Given the recent geo-economic shift in the world, the US has significant economic potential in South and Southeast Asia, as well as security and military interests against China. The region of South and Southeast Asia has always been important to the US. Containing the USSR throughout the cold war and, more recently, China.

For the US, India seems to be the potential ally in the region to contain China. India’s recalibration of its line to the Indo-Pacific with greater convergence of Indo–US interests(Pant & Saha, 2020). The US is focused to support India's continued rise and regional leadership. The US Indo-Pacific Strategic Report-2022, state that US will continue to build strategic partnership in which the US and India work together through regional grouping. The US has spot India as a like-minded companion and leader in South Asia and Indian Ocean, active in and connected to Southeast Asia (White House, 2022). For this US interest, BIMSTEC can be such grouping in which India having huge influence. India's strategic objectives and security concerns, particularly the need to increase pressure on Pakistan, fend off Chinese incursions into its strategic backyard, and safeguard the security of the North Eastern area, have resurrected India's interest in the resurrection of BIMSTEC (Kumar, 2020).

The raising engagements of US in the region can be explore on the data. The US foreign assistance database, shows the increasement of the assistance in the region.

Years	Military Assistance	Economic Assistance	Total (in Million Dolor
2022	27%	73%	180
2021	10%	90%	181
2020	1%	99%	124
2019	1%	99%	174
2018	2%	98%	140

Table 1 US assistance to Nepal between 2018-2022 (Source: Foreignassistance.gov)

Nepal had received \$42.8 million through the US Department of Defense. The foreign military financing program was the main program prioritized by the US aid in Nepal during the period.

Nepal received a 16.93 million FMF program in 2021, third in the top activities. With 17.86 million, DOD was third in assistance partner and Conflict, Peace, and Security was third sector of priority with USD 17.82 million. In 2020, U.S. cooperation in the military sector was low. In that year, Nepal received 124 million dollars in aid, of which only 1 percent of military assistance was available. In 2019, an obligation of assistance was \$174.2 million. Only 0.5 percent was military assistance. At that time, \$1 million was spent on military education and training.

The US was Nepal’s biggest donor until 1965. During the height of the Cold War, Nepal received more US funding. Data from the Five-Year Development Plans show that from 1962 to 1965, US aid accounted for 46% of all aid. As the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union collapsed, it was at a rate of 7%. As US assistance in the region including Nepal was high during the cold war period to deter “communist” influence. Yet, now as Chinese influence in the region is increasing again to deter China, the US has increased its assistance (Dhakal, 2023).

This diplomatic engagement is also raising in the region. On the end of the year 2023, over 150 US diplomats gather in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal to discuss about the region. On November and December, 7 US high ranking officials paid official visit to Kathmandu. John Bass, Under

Secretary of State for Management, Alaina B. Teplitz, Assistant Secretary of State for Bureau of Administrations, Marianne Craven, acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs, Eleen Laubacher Special Assistant to the president and national security council senior director, Elizabeth Horst Principal deputy assistant secretary and deputy assistant secretary for Pakistan, Rebecca E. Gonzales, director of department of stats's office of foreign mission, and Marcia S. Bernicat Director general of the foreign service and director of global talent have visited to Nepal in the end of the year. The US engagements and official visit to the region in year 2023 shows the rising assignments of the US in the region.

Conclusion

The US's involvement in South and Southeast Asian nations is consistent with its plan to encircle China. With its IPS defense policy, the US has a strong interest in the region. It appears that the developing nations of South and Southeast Asia will be under the strategic control of the major powers in this situation. India is in direct competition with China as an IPS member. The Power Center and the three-tiered economy are in opposition to South and Southeast Asia. The US's predominance in world affairs has been put in jeopardy by China's ascent. By 2050, China wants to surpass the US as the dominant country.

The US worries that Beijing might usurp it as the world's dominant power. The United States has also directed its IPS toward Southeast Asia in an effort to prevent China from realizing its 2050 aspirations.

Asia is now taking center stage in the global affair. Additionally, the nations in South Asia region will suffer directly when the world is split into two poles. The US is isolating China, which has the world's largest population, by referring to regional peace and stability. China is making progress in its efforts to increase its sway over Asia. India, a growing economy in and of itself, has aided the US in its efforts to stop China.

India seeks to block China in order to maintain its dominance in South and Southeast Asia. Developing Southeast Asian nations can benefit from the competition between the two polar power centers and the three-tiered economy in terms of economic and infrastructure development. Alongside each of the three are potential balance losses and the possibility of becoming a flashpoint in the Sino-US conflict.

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