

Changing Geopolitics of Eurasia: Imperatives for India

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Abstract

Eurasian landmass has been witnessing major geopolitical shifts in the wake of American aspirations to prevail once again on the globe. The supercontinent has been gaining increased significance in global politics for several reasons. US aspires to prevail in manner that it can maintain its technological and military superiority over the globe. Most important being the geopolitical earthquake that is the Russian special military operations against Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022. The conflict is still going on with hardly any sign of abatement and subsequent mitigation. The escalation of the on-going conflict has led to several interpretations, claims and counterclaims among the leaderships as well as journalists and analysts of events on the globe. It has implications on almost every walk of nation-state's life both within the region adjacent to it as well as the entire world. Subsequent developments and growing complexities have given rise to different assessments of the geopolitics of Eurasia. Another significant issue in contemporary geopolitics is the silent rise of China as a global power. China's rapid economic growth and military modernization have transformed the country's global and regional personality as a major player in international politics.¹ This certainly has considerable impact on geopolitics of Eurasia and the world. Author thus endeavours to explore the changing patterns of alliances and its consequent impact on the shifting strands of geopolitics in Eurasia in this paper.

Introduction

Europe and the globe both has witnessed transformation of the existing alliances and the way convergence between and among nation-states of the world has been happening. The world is also witness to the imperatives behind such alliances and shifts in alliances. These changes certainly create ample influence on the geopolitics of several regions including the global geopolitics.

First and the most important has been the strengthening bond between Russia and China since the days that preceded the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Russian President Vladimir Putin travelled to Beijing in February 2022 prior to the commencement of conflict with Ukraine; and entered into an agreement declaring the alliance to be “without limits” and with no “forbidden areas”.² This has certainly tremendous influence on geopolitical dynamics of Europe in particular; and Eurasia in general. China has made tremendous economic advancement by transforming itself into a manufacturing hub and enhancing its dominant presence in the global supply chain. Geopolitics is basically the study of the way nations use their power to influence other nations and to achieve their goals. Thus, in a world which has largely been defined by economic imperatives of the nation-states in the post 1990 global order, the convergence between China and Russia is of tremendous significance. More so, when China had made significantly successful efforts at cultivating Europe since the 1990s for its economic engagement, avoided taking sides in Europe’s conflicts with Russia. Accordingly, on the eve of Ukraine war, Chinese President Xi Jinping chose to tilt towards Russia and accused NATO of the ensuing crisis in Ukraine. Thus, the convergence between China and Russia is of tremendous significance towards influencing and altering the geopolitics of Eurasia, as this convergence has certainly embittered west and Europe.

Growing convergence between Russia’s Putin and China’s Jinping may be interpreted to mean many things for Eurasian geopolitics.

- * One important aspect of their coming together is that Xi Jinping probably has been supporting Putin in his endeavour to prevail over Europe so that Russia by defeating or destroying Ukraine would prevail over NATO or belittle NATO on its own turf. This shall be a befitting setback to Europe and the West including US.
- * Another important aspect could be that China may also be interested to let Russia limit the Western influence on European landmass, by limiting NATO’s eastward expansions. This would create a leverage for China to repeat the same in Asia as China too has been advancing ‘One China policy’ under which it has been claiming Taiwan as a part of its own territory. China has been pressurising Taiwan to accept Chinese sovereignty over its territory and has also been expressing willingness to bring Taiwan under its suzerainty by force if need arises in future.

Thus, Russian special military operation in Ukraine would help China justify in future its own military operations against Taiwan, against

which USA has been warning China time and again. US has gone to the extent of saying that any attack or aggression against Taiwan shall be resisted militarily by USA. Nevertheless, the growing convergence between China and Russia smacks of China's aspirations to further consolidate its dominance over Asia. Reason being that after the conflict is over both Russia and Europe would have suffered tremendous economic loss by then. This may lead to growing dependence of Russia and Europe on China. Otherwise also, Asian continent is often said to be unipolar as China is the sole superpower on the continent. Yet, China's aspirations to continue to prevail in Asia would have serious implications for geopolitics of the continent.

Secondly, amidst the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict; Russia has been looking for partners as allies across both Asia and Europe. Russia has entered into agreement with China. Russia has been making all efforts to strengthen its ties with other Asian countries like India, South Korea, Pakistan, and Iran. Russia is trying to build an extensive partnership with all such countries. Earlier in 2016, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the idea of a Greater Eurasia.³ The term has come to be described as an integration project ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific.⁴ This would involve cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with SCO, ASEAN, and the EU.⁵ Sino-Russian alliance will cause it to link the EAEU with the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative. This sounds like economic ventures between the two partners, but it has political and strategic visions as well ingrained into it. All these multilateral organizations have their own complicated internal dynamics and diverging objectives which will certainly make the management of their ties a tortious trek. The gradual process in which it will proceed will carry with itself the potentials to shake and alter the erstwhile geopolitical dynamics of Eurasia.

Thirdly, the growing security linkages between Europe and Indo-Pacific too has great bearing on the geopolitics of both the Eurasian landmass as well on the maritime zone adjacent to it. This was reiterated by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida when he expressed that the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific is indivisible.⁶ Hence, this makes it obvious that Japan has now started looking differently at the relationship between Asia and Europe. It is in this context that Japan is endeavouring to build strong military partnership with Europe. South Korea too is following the suit and is trying to build its military relationships with Europe, even though Japan and South Korea has quite often been found at loggerheads. South Korea has started selling

major weapons platforms in Poland.⁷ Therefore, the churning waters of the Indo-Pacific has led to increased concerns among countries such as USA, Japan, South Korea, and Australia and the convergence among these countries has a bearing on the geopolitics of Eurasia.

Fourthly, Japan has been trying to redefine its security policy and needs in the wake of nuclearization of North Korea and aggressive posture of China in the South China Sea. North Korea shares its security and strategic concerns with both Russia and China. North Korea's nuclear programme has support of both Russia and China, as they have hardly ever tried to restrain. Nuclearization of North Korea and its aggressive postures has certainly caused considerable shifts in the geopolitics of Eurasia.

Fifthly, Japan has been increasingly getting wary of China-Taiwan conflict. Russia's endeavour in Ukraine has been termed as Russian endeavours at reuniting the Russian world, which is evident in Russia's role in Crimea in 2014, and the special military operation in Ukraine. Russia is pursuing the same despite tremendous costs involved towards its aspirations on the European continents. Thus, China has a lesson to learn in the on-going Russian adventures. China wants to use it as a leverage in Asia and unite Taiwan with itself and further consolidate on the islands in South China Sea. Since, Japan has been wary of its maritime territorial disputes with China, Japan understands the changing dynamics of security systems of Indo-Pacific and Asia in the wake of on-going conflict in Ukraine and China's support to Russia. Hence, Japan has been preparing itself against any misadventures of China in its proximity, especially in the maritime zone that it shares with China. Japan has accordingly started reviving its domestic defence industries and build credible military capabilities vis a vis China. This has prompted USA to maintain a credible system of alliance of convenience with Japan.

Sixthly, there has been strong relationship development of Australia with US and UK through AUKUS arrangement. It becomes obvious that Australia too is eager to play its role and register its presence in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, Japan, South Korea and Australia are trying to act as a bridge between Asia and Europe, at least some such developments over the recent past reveals like that. These developments have given rise to a new geopolitical theatre. This process is being further accelerated by Russia-Ukraine conflict and the growing nexus between Russia and China in the aftermath of the escalation of conflict. Such emerging dynamics of the region has brought new challenges for Eurasia.

Seventhly, USA is also aware of Chinese gameplan. Consequently, US has been prompting Japan to adopt a robust defence posture and redefine its security needs. US seems to be interested towards Japan assuming greater responsibilities for regional security architecture in Asian theatre as well as in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, US has also been roping in, India and Australia alongside Japan through QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) to create a credible deterrence against China in the maritime region. US has also been taking up joint military exercises with India in the Indian Ocean for the same reason. US has also been the prime mover of the AUKUS as stated above. All these moves of USA would certainly have serious implications for geopolitics of the maritime region raising strategic concerns for China, by creating enough of deterrence impacts. China has already started calling it as 'ganging-up of major powers against China' and has been asking the partner countries to refrain from aligning with US.

Eighthly, NATO summit that took place in June 2022 at Madrid, for the first time many Asian countries were invited in its deliberations. Prime Ministers of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and President of South Korea participated in the summit. This is an indication of NATO's growing aspirations to engage in Indo-Pacific and East Asia. This seems to be in line with American President Biden's foreign policy choice that allies and partners in Europe and Asia should collaborate with each other. This may be US feelings that it cannot consider itself as the net security provider of either Europe or Asia. Thus, NATO has endeavoured to change the Eurasian geopolitics by inviting Japan and South Korea in its deliberations. NATO may have been endeavouring to alter the regional balance of power to contain China's rise.

Ninthly, on-going Sino-US rivalry also has greater strategic implications for Eurasia. This has potentials to disrupt global stability too. On March 30, 2023, Saudi Arabia has given its approval to the Gulf nations to join Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This decision would now facilitate Saudi Arabia to join the SCO as a dialogue partner which is significant for geopolitics of Eurasia for many reasons. One reason is that Saudi Arabia is seeking to strengthen its ties with China as its relations with US has deteriorated over the last few years especially during the reign of Joe Biden. Second reason could be the changing perception within middle east, that off late US has been paying less attention to the security situation of the middle east. US less importance to middle east may have oil at its core.⁸ US has been asking Saudi Arabia-led OPEC to increase oil production in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine conflict, which Saudi Arabia has refused to do. Consequently,

Saudi Arabia has started converging with China which will certainly have serious implications for the geopolitics of Asia. On the other hand, China has been making inroads, diplomatically as well as economically, in the middle east region and this speaks volume about China's growing stature within Asia. This will certainly have potentials to influence considerably the geopolitics of Eurasia.

Last and equally important, the twelve break-away republics of erstwhile Soviet Union which are parts of Eurasia (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the three South Caucasus, and the five Central Asian States) have undergone several up and downs in their political, economic, and cultural transformations in the aftermath of cold war and dismemberment of Soviet Union. The formal institutions and mechanisms of democratic politics and free market economies that are created are yet to gain substantial scale of maturity and consolidation.⁹They are still struggling to entrench their polity with democratic ethos in real sense of the term and hence their economies too are in dilapidated conditions. It seems they are yet to go a long way before achieving stability in their political and economic regimes. Hence, these countries have remained vulnerable to outside interventions and hotbed of international and regional politics. Therefore, the region's geopolitics has continued to be vulnerable on account of it being rich source of oil and natural gas, scramble for which may ensue anytime among the major powers of the world. The time in which it will happen will have serious geopolitical implications for the Eurasian region.

Geopolitics thus is largely the concept of security, that involves the way nations ensure their security in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. This involves, alignment and re-alignment of forces and powers; use of military prowess to deter one against the other; deftly crafted and conducted diplomacy and negotiations etc. Power is the most important aspect of geopolitics. In this sense, it involves the study and understanding of the way nation-states on the globe use their power to influence other nation-states to maximise upon their national interests and achieve their goals. Such endeavours on parts of the nation-states involves, military power, economic power, political or diplomatic clout, and cultural power. Technology has come to play another significant role towards causing shifts in geopolitics of any region. This has further added to the growing complexities in the study and understanding of geopolitics. Cyber-technology has certainly impacted the way nation-states of the world communicate and interact with each other. Eurasia is not an exception to any of these factors that has a bearing upon the geopolitics. Major powers of the region such as

China, India, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and many others are aligning and re-aligning to enhance their security and power, with potentials to alter the erstwhile geopolitics of Eurasia.

Imperatives for India

India must deftly analyse the quagmire that many of the recent moves of major powers have created both at the maritime turf as well as on the continents of Asia and Europe. India must build its security in the Indo-Pacific as well as a viable alliance or coalition of forces on the Eurasian continents for all future purposes. India must find its way amidst alliances that have been emerging among USA, Europe, Japan, and South Korea on the one hand, and Russia, China, and Iran on the other.

India has been facing security challenges from China on its border. China has also been claiming the whole of Arunachal Pradesh as its own, which India has rightly been refusing and refuting. On the other hand, its economic engagement with China has gone seriously deeper. India is an emerging economic power and a power to be reckoned with in Asia, as well as in other parts of the world. India and China are rival and competing powers in Asia. India has maritime and strategic aspirations in the Indian Ocean, as well as in Indo-Pacific. India wants to have a continental strategy too that would help it to prevail in the Indian sub-continent, and Asia in general. However, there are number of emerging possibilities for India under the emerging circumstances and security alliances both on the continent as well as on the waters, which India must take note of to articulate its responses.

Firstly, India-Japan relations has been on a positive track and strengthening day by day. This momentum requires to be maintained both on sea and on the land. The convergence of interests towards maintaining a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific must be taken in letter and spirit. Thus, by maintaining the global character of the India-Japan bilateral ties, a Eurasian framework could be pursued parallel to the ongoing one in Indo-Pacific. Bilateral global partnership must be geared-up in a Eurasian framework. Such an endeavour will have potentials to alter the strategic balance in Central Asia amidst growing Chinese influence in that region.

Secondly, US-Indian strategic cooperation must be taken further in manner and might to maintain a balance with Sino-Indian relations. Since, Sino-US conflict is the fact of international politics; India needs to be diplomatic enough to use its relations with USA cautiously that it

must not be read otherwise by the Chinese dispensation. India's endeavour should be that its convergence with US must not be detrimental to Sino-India relations. The existence of Sino-Indian crisis must not make India vulnerable to western manipulations and pressures. Fact remains that India also has substantial economic engagement with China and given Chinese economic and military stature, it must not be irritated beyond considerable point. Hence, India must rely more on diplomatic resources to tackle China than military resources.

Thirdly, India's stand on Russia-Ukraine conflict at any given point of time must be well calculated. Its stand must not be influenced either by provocation from western allies or from manipulation by Asian countries. India must weigh the pros and cons of its moves on long term basis, given Russia's stature of a time-tested friend of India. India has rightly welcomed cooperation and support from any country on the globe to resolve the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine to make its G20 Presidency viable and meaningful.

Fourthly, India must be equally cautious in middle east and Afghanistan. India has been pursuing deft diplomatic relations with the region and countries of the region and the same must be maintained. India's Act East Policy has also been delivering the enunciated objectives the momentum of which requires to be maintained. India also has the policy of 'Look West' and "Connect Central Asia' which may be articulated to suit its national interest in given circumstances.

Last but the most important, India needs to be extremely cautious in maritime zones. The waters on its maritime borders have started churning with potentials for escalation. Thus, it is there that India needs to extra cautious not to fall prey of great powers rivalry or containment games.

Conclusion

The geopolitics of Eurasia is certainly tossing amidst alignment and realignment. Silent rise of China and its growing economic and military strength is the major cause behind it. China's convergence with Russia; China's support to North Korea; Russia's support to Iran; China's convergence with Saudi Arabia; China's advancement in Central Asia through the instrumentalities of SCO; China's prevalence in ASEAN; Japan's wariness of China; South Korea's concerns about North Korea's belligerent attitude and China's role in it; China's aggressive posture against Taiwan; US support to Taiwan against China; US endeavours at containment of China in South China Sea; US convergence with

Australia against China; formation of QUAD to contain China; US foreign policy of pivot to Asia are to name a few of the major developments in international politics which have caused shifts in the geopolitics of Eurasia. Of Course, Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to the geopolitical earthquake in the region. Undoubtedly, history must be witness to many changes at any given point of time in different geographical regions of the world. Yet, the changes taking place in the present are required to be understood in right perspective to formulate India's foreign policy responses. It is in this context that India must be aware of the shifts in geopolitics of Eurasia.

References

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- [4] Greater Eurasia till today remains a work in progress in the evolving world order. Therefore, it is susceptible to reconstruction and will continue to be defined and redefined by scholars on international relations.
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