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INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA



DRIFTING APART?





MISSION

We endeavour to sound **ALERTS** and create **AWARENESS** about the myriad dimensions and manifestations of **DEFENCE** and **SECURITY** in India and around the world.



The power of a King lies in his mighty arms...

Security of the citizens at peace time is very important because State is the only saviour of the men and women who get affected only because of the negligence of the State.

- Chanakya



DSA IS AS MUCH YOURS, AS IT IS OURS!



India has aspirations of being a world player. It has belief in its ability to play an influential role in global politics. And it believes it is only a matter of time before it becomes a major factor on the world stage. That belief stems from its obvious potential as a nation, armed with human resources of first rate quality, an economy that could well be the biggest in the world given some corrective measures, and a geographical position that would be the envy of most in the world. That potential has not been harnessed to its optimum levels precisely because of that geography.

It is a well-known fact that names, faiths, friends, etc. can be changed at the drop of a hat, but geography cannot be tampered with for the love of God. Geography is what a country is born with, made by tectonic energies over millions of years. It is as permanent as is the earth. So for India to grow to its fullest potential, it first needs to take a deep look at its geography, its location on

the map, the vast ocean that surrounds it, and the high Himalayas that have sustained it over millions of years.

An analysis of geography shows that adjoining India are the countries which together comprise South Asia, a veritable sub-continent. And it is with these countries that India has to first reconcile its geographical and political interests. Going by age old Indian wisdom, there is a saying that it is important to have good relations with neighbouring villages. No village is a stand alone entity, and it cannot be in conflict with those on its boundary. This holds true for international politics too. And even more when it comes to India and its South Asian neighbours.

In an election year, it is expected that foreign policy issues will take a back seat. Pakistan has already begun its process, in the backdrop of controversial judicial interventions. India is getting into election mode with parliamentary polls less than a year away. So to expect any breakthroughs would be

a wishful thinking. In any case, breakthroughs are not desirable in the first instance. What is required is a modicum of exchange that is decent, humane, and diplomatic.

The sole purpose of governance anywhere in the world is to make society affluent and more secure. Both aspirations are conjoined, and one cannot be achieved without the other. Geographical awareness suggests taking advantage of India's place on the map. The busiest oceanic trade routes could be aped on land too, thus benefitting more than a billion people. But for that, India and Pakistan would first have to arrive at a reconciliation that is based on a reality check, what is and what is not achievable from an adversarial. This reconciliation will pave the way for the greater good of the region, especially Pakistan which risks falling into a permanent bind with its flirtation with extremism. Geography can help all, but only those who are willing and have the vision to take advantage from it.

Manvendra Singh



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DRAGON'S SHADOW OVER SOUTH ASIA



South Asia is in a state of flux. Since the end of colonialism in the region, India has held the pre-eminent position even though it was flanked by pro-US military pact countries – the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) – in which Pakistan played a central role ostensibly to contain Soviet communism but it carried out a sideshow of hostility against India based on the obvious illegality of the Two-Nation Theory.

Yet India enjoyed the goodwill of other nations which had newly gained independence from colonial masters or, as were the Indo-China States of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, still locked in a war of liberation against American occupation (after freeing themselves from French rule). Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar shared land borders on India's periphery and its peninsular position created natural cohesion with the newly emerging nations of Africa in the west and Southeast Asia in the east. Island nations like Sri Lanka, Maldives and Seychelles found it convenient to do business with India. But it cannot be denied that its large size and its strategic location did attract the opprobrium of "Big Brother".

Over the past decade, geopolitics in the region has changed dramatically with Chinese expansionism undercutting the Indian sphere of influence. Slowly, but surely, the Chinese policy of creating military bases on island territories in the Indian Ocean Region has created a steel trap around India's throat while Sri Lanka, Maldives and Seychelles have revised their India policies accordingly. The blatant Chinese attempt to wrest Bhutan from Indian influence through the Dhoklam incursion boomeranged and China is now using other tactics to undercut Indian influence in the region. It has used Pakistan to block Indian direct access to Afghanistan through Pakistan and has created a network of rail, road and pipelines that run diagonally across Indian territory in Jammu and Kashmir occupied illegally by both Pakistan and China. The Belt-cum-Road project or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is turning out to be an exclusivist enterprise intended to keep India confined.

India's role in Afghanistan where it has been lauded for bringing a semblance of human dignity for the Afghans is being sought to be suborned; Nepal has shown signs of breaking old bonds; Myanmar engulfed in its internal contradictions is unable to become the bridge to Southeast Asia; and Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina has time and again shown its gratitude for India's help in its liberation but it is being wooed by China with submarines! This looks blatantly like a Chinese scenario for a post-Hasina situation.

By and large, the situation in the entire South Asia region is changing and most of the countries are drifting away from India as China has been luring them with dubious economic deals (as in the Hambantota port project in Sri Lanka) and military hardware.

This edition has focussed on the current situation and our experts on the South Asia region have tried to figure out the options for India vis-a-vis with all the stakeholders.

I am sure you will like this edition too as always.

Happy reading!

Pawan Agrawal



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