

New Great Game and Limits of American Power

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Abstract

The 'New Great Game' is the global rivalry between the US-NATO bloc and its allies and their Counter-Alliance Camp. In the grand strategic calculus of Russia-China-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India entanglement, the US Camp seems to be losing its strategic foothold, particularly in Eurasia. The US' 'Pivot to Asia' may also suffer serious setbacks. The deals on Syria's chemical weapons and Iran's nuclear programme have brought the Middle East under a 'Strategic Pause' but have also exposed the limits of American power. Afghanistan is on the tipping-point of proving or disproving to be the 'graveyard of empires'. The danger of Saudi Arabia becoming the victim of a fresh 'Arab Spring' as well as destabilization of Pakistan has increased manifold. The US' latest offer for full-spectrum revival of strategic alliance could merely be a 'Strategic Deception' for Pakistan. The US-Iran nuclear deal may also manifest into additional space for US strategy and lines of operations for Afghanistan-Pakistan. Iran and Syria could be re-visited in the next cycle. Strategic wisdom is hoped to prevail amongst regional stake-holders. Any strategic failure of the US strategy could further expose the limits of American power. The dynamics could roll the ball for a new balance of power; thus shrinking the area of US imperialism and opening up spaces for the manifestation of 'Chi-Merica' (China-America) or a multi-polar world.

Keywords: Great Game, China, America, Russia, Asia.

Introduction

The term 'Great Game' was used to describe the military and diplomatic rivalry and secret war between the empires of Britain and Russia in the 19th century which was fought in Afghanistan, deserted passes and deserts of Central Asia¹. Victorian Britain wanted to prevent

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Tsarist Russia from making inroads into Afghanistan and posing any threat to its prize possession, 'The British Raj in India'.² However, the New Great Game of the 21st century is the global rivalry in several regions between the US-NATO and its allies in one Camp and its Counter-Alliance Camp on the other for control of energy and critical resources and/ or the conquest of areas of economic and strategic import, primarily of the 'triple entente of Eurasia: Russia, China and Iran'.³ Eurasia is a continental landmass that primarily reflects the socio-political notion of Europe.⁴ However, in geographical reference Eurasia is taken to be the contiguous landmasses as well as their proximate islands and regions. Generally, Arctic Ocean is taken to be Eurasia's extent to the north; Atlantic Ocean to the west; Pacific Ocean to the east; and in the south Eurasia's extent is taken to be the Mediterranean Sea, Suez Canal, Sinai Peninsula, Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.⁵

The Great Game rivalry is taking place in several theatres which can be categorized into main, secondary and tertiary theatres.

- The main theatres of the New Great Game are the regions or areas of geo-political, geo-strategic or geo-economic significance which are contiguous or are in the geographical proximity of the Eurasian powers; where the rivalry has a direct bearing on the core interests of the rival camps; and where there is a great likelihood of an 'armed conflict' between the rival camps or their proxies. These regions appear to be the Caucasus; Central Asia; Middle East (inclusive of Eastern Mediterranean); South Asia and Indian Ocean; and Asia-Pacific region, particularly South China Sea.

¹ Peter Hopkirk, *The New Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1&7. The term 'Great Game' was first coined by Captain Arthur Conolly who was in Russian Captivity in Bokhara but it was Kipling who was to immortalize the term in his novel 'Kim'. Modern Soviet Scholars do not have a term of their own; they call the Great Game as '*Bolshaya Igra*'.

² *Ibid.*, 5. In the beginning of 19th Century when the play first began, Britain and Russia were 2000 miles apart. By the end of it, some Russian outposts at Pamir were within 20 miles of India.

³ Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, "The US-NATO March to War and the 21st Century Great Game," *Global Research*, December 5, 2010, (accessed April 11, 2013), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22170>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Wikipedia, s.v., "Eurasia," (accessed April 11, 2013), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasia>

- The secondary theatres of the New Great Game are the regions/ areas of geo-strategic or geo-economic significance which may be in the geographical proximity of the Eurasian powers but where the rivalry tends to offer advantage to the rival camps to position their forces to support the New Great Game and helps them further their core national interests. These are the areas where the direct armed conflict or military confrontation is less likely to take place between the rival camps, such as the Balkans and East Africa.
- The tertiary theatres are the regions where there is minimal danger of an armed conflict or direct military confrontation between the rival camps, and where the rivalry or competition is primarily for reaching out to the untapped hydrocarbon and natural resources before the rival can do; and secure them for one's own future generations. The tertiary theatres of the Great-Game appear to be the Latin America, Caribbean and Arctic. The rivalry and race for hydrocarbon riches in such regions is poised to get into top notch amongst the US, China, Russia, India, UK and others.

These theatres may appear distinct but are interlinked in a template of 'Cause & Effect'. The time-frame, dimension and the intensity of the Great Game rivalry in a theatre primarily depend upon the geo-strategic and economic interests of the rival camps as well as the resource-richness of a particular region. The dynamics of rivalry are drawing the camps towards a security paradigm that is fraught with serious threat to global peace and security and is accentuating the danger of a wider conflict.

The article aims to highlight the broad strategic contours of rivalry in the main theatres of the New Great Game which have tremendous impact on the entanglement that has shaped up in the regions proximate to Russia, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India as well as to indicate the limits of American power in the said entanglement.

Rivalry in the Caucasus

The Caucasus is defined as the territory that is bestriding the Caucasus Mountains and is situated between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The North Caucasus generally includes the republics of Russian Federation; and the South Caucasus includes Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.⁶ The South Caucasus also includes Northern-Iran as well as the eastern areas of Turkey

⁶ Nazemroaya, "The US-NATO March to War...",

which were taken from Georgia and Armenia under the Treaty of Kars signed in 1921.⁷ The Caucasus has been a theatre of war where the proxy involvement of the US and NATO has been encouraging the ethnic conflicts to marginalize Russian influence in the region. According to Nazemroaya, these conflicts are amongst Georgia, Russia and the breakaway states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; and also amongst Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Additionally, the discords and hostilities between the Russian Federation and its separatist movements in Chechnya and Dagestan have added more complexity to the security landscape of the Caucasus region.

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 has been the most critical conflict in the Caucasus over the breakaway states of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It was a proxy war in which Georgia was furthering the US agenda in Eurasia. Notwithstanding the reality that Georgia was not a member of the NATO alliance and Russia was very sensitive about Georgia, NATO started to integrate the Georgian air defence system, and provide intelligence and reconnaissance support to Georgia regarding Russian war preparations.⁸ The US had also planned to use Georgian bases to strike Iran.⁹ The Russian position in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was essentially aimed at preventing Georgia from joining NATO alliance as this move could have caused serious implications for the security of the Russian Federation. The Russian military attacked the same military bases to give a strong message to Georgia.¹⁰ In August 2010, Russia concluded a military-agreement with Armenia in August 2010 which extended Russia the capability of using Armenia as a launching-pad for its military operations against Georgia and Azerbaijan; thus making the Caucasus front susceptible to many future crises.¹¹

Similarly Russia considered the creation of GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) as a 'Trojan Horse' within the Commonwealth of Independent States. The inclusion of Ukraine by the UN Security Council in a group of countries to help solve the Abkhazian

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Michael Evans, "Georgia Linked to NATO Early Warning System," *Times* (UK), September 5, 2008.

⁹ "US to Deploy Army Bases in Georgia to Rearm Nation's Army," *Pravda* (Moscow), September 24, 2009.

¹⁰ Arnaud de Borchgrave, September 9, 2008 "Commentary: Israel of the Caucasus," *United Press International*, (accessed April 13, 2013), http://www.upi.com/Emerging_Threats/2008/09/09/Commentary-Israel-of-the-Caucasus/UPI-91561220360400/

¹¹ Ibid.

conflict, and EU's attempt for a fast-track economic and political integration of Ukraine with EU accentuated Russia's security concern in the Caucasus. On the face value Russia may not appear to be too opposed to Ukraine's sovereign choice of closer relations with the EU but the former would detest and attempt to frustrate any design that could lead to Ukraine becoming a NATO member or a part of the 'Silk Route Strategy' or forging economic integration with the EU at the cost of Russian economy; particularly oil and gas sector.¹² That explains why the Ukraine government under President Viktor F. Yanukovich (now deposed) has ditched the plans to sign a number of far-reaching political and trade accords with EU, embarrassing the German Chancellor and others at the Summit held on November 28, 2013 at Vilnius, Lithuania.¹³ Such scuttling of accords resulted in civil riots in the Ukrainian Capital that spoke of pro-EU sentiments of the general public but it also unambiguously reflected the leverages that Russia still exercises over Ukraine's sovereign choices. Coincident to the Ukraine's scuttling of accords with EU, Russia's declaration of deployment of its nuclear short range ballistic missile on its western border with NATO has probably poised Russia as an 'Old New Adversary' in the calculus of European security.¹⁴

Rivalry in Central Asia

Central Asia is a core-region of Asia whose northern-extent is generally taken up to Russia; western-extent to the Caspian Sea; eastern-extent up to China; and Afghanistan in the South. There is not a single definition of Central Asia that is universally accepted. The modern definition includes: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and in still broader sense: Afghanistan, Northeast Iran, Northern Pakistan, Mongolia; and sometimes Xinjiang and Tibet in Western part of China, and Southern Siberia in Eastern Russia are also included in Central Asia.¹⁵

Central Asia also has huge reserves of oil, natural-gas and minerals which are comparable to those of the Middle East. Central Asia is situated

¹² "Ukraine Parliament Rejects Tymoshenko Laws, Putting EU Deal at Stake," *Voice of Russia UK*, November 29, 2013, (accessed December 18, 2013), http://voiceofrussia.com/uk/news/2013_11_21/Ukraine-parliament-rejects-Tymoshenko-laws-putting-EU-deal-at-stake-4714/

¹³ David M. Herszenhorn, Ukraine Faces EU's Dismay on Turnabout on Accords, *New York Times*, November 29, 2013.

¹⁴ Andrew Roth, "Deployment of Missiles Is Confirmed by Russia," *The New York Times Europe Ed*, December 16, 2013.

¹⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (2013) ed., s.v. "Central Asia."

at the heart and geo-strategic fulcrum of Eurasia which is next to China, Russia, Iran, the Caspian Sea and the South Asian Subcontinent. Central Asia is a strategic-region which could be adroitly used to create a wedge between the major Eurasian powers, and also to set up a launching platform for undertaking military operations in Eurasia.¹⁶ The control over Central Asia would have serious security implications for the US-EU contention with Russia over the security of energy routes, particularly for the security of the trans-Eurasian energy corridor that extends from the Caspian Sea Basin and Persian Gulf to China; and also for the project of 'New Silk Road' that promises to connect East Asia, Middle East and Eastern part of Europe.¹⁷

Although the US invaded Afghanistan on the pre-text of 9/11 terrorist attack but a number of strategic thinkers consider that the US was mainly interested to establish a military foothold and a base of operations in Central Asia which would have extended several strategic advantages to the US, such as: isolation of Iran, prevention of building of pipelines from Iran, controlling the flow of energy from Central Asia, creating a wedge amongst the Eurasians and also weakening their strategic dependence and linkage with Russia and, above all, the strategic containment of China.¹⁸ Any US military adventurism in the Middle East, such as strike against Iran or any Libya-style military intervention in Syria is fraught with danger of spreading the conflict to Central Asia.¹⁹

However, with the announced withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the danger of a wider conflict has lessened to an extent but the danger of an intra-state conflict has increased when viewed in the context of the 'Blackwill Plan' that advocated a 'nation-building approach' in Northern Afghanistan and 'counterterrorism-approach' in Southern/Eastern Afghanistan. Such dichotomy and discrimination in the two strategic-approaches meant 'partitioning of Afghanistan' and creating heart-burns amongst regional stake-holders, especially Pakistan.²⁰

¹⁶ Nazemroaya, "The US-NATO March to War...,"

¹⁷ MK Bhadrakumar, "Pakistan Gets a Cuddle and a Hug," *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 2, 2012.

¹⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, quoted in Bates Gill and Matthew Oresman, *China's New Journey to the West: China's Emergence in Central Asia and Implications for US Interests* (Washington: Centre for Strategic and International Studies Press, August 2003), v.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Alexei Pilko, August 4, 2011, "The Afghanistan Factor and the Debt Ceiling Crisis," Global Research Canada, (accessed April 13, 2013),

Additionally, the impact of 12-14 years of strong US-NATO military presence in Afghanistan and the creation of a pro-western elite — a powerful segment of Afghan society and Afghan National Army — would continue to accentuate north-south divide in Afghanistan to the strategic advantage of the US at least in the near future.

With the conclusion of the nuclear deal with Iran in the third week of November, 2013 and endorsement of US-Afghanistan Security Agreement by the Afghan *Loya Jirga* on November 25, 2013 (almost concurrent time-frame), the security implications for the region (particularly for Pakistan and Afghanistan) have increased substantially. There seems to be some tacit understanding or conclusion of a ‘secret-deal’ between Iran and the US for the accommodation/facilitation of US-NATO’s security interests in Afghanistan to the disadvantage of Pakistan, China and Russia. The timing of the two strategic developments suggests that Iran, in the bargain of the said nuclear deal, might have used its influence over the *Loya Jirga* delegates (those sympathetic to Iran) in favour of the US, and might also have agreed to provide an alternate safe exit route to US-NATO forces scheduled to be withdrawn in 2014 onwards. US-NATO were desperately looking for an alternative route, especially in the face of growing uncertainty about the availability of safe exit through Pakistan after the killing of Hakim-ullah Mahsood (head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan), differences with Pakistan over drone-strikes and closure of NATO supplies by the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, the danger of GWOT turning into a Drug War or US-NATO led anti-narcotics operation is still looming large over the region; an emerging security concern, particularly for the Russian Federation.

Rivalry in Wider Middle East

The Middle East, according to the most conservative definition, is a region that is generally considered to be bounded by Egypt in the West, Arab Peninsula in the South and Iran in the East.²¹ However, an extended view of the Middle East would include the region up to Mauritania in West-Africa as well as the North-African member countries of the Arab League and to

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-afghanistan-factor-and-the-debt-ceiling-crisis/25895>

²¹ “What is Middle East?” Teach Mideast, Middle East Policy Council (US), <http://www.teachmideast.org/essays/27-geography/51-what-is-the-middle-east> Middle East is a geographical point of reference coined by British Foreign Service at the end 19th century.

the East it could go as far as Pakistan.²² There are wide disagreements as to the geographical boundaries of the Middle East but there is general consensus that the Middle East includes the following states: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Egypt and Yemen.²³

It is the energy hub of world-economy and the most important region due to strategically vital choke points of the Straits of Hurmuz, Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandeb. According to Tristam, the Middle East is the birth-place of major religions; such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism; therefore, religion is at the very heart of turmoil in the region, particularly the long outstanding Palestine-Israeli conflict. The Middle East is also a fundamental pillar of US strategy in the world. Its control extends strategic leverages to the US and its allies to contain and manage China which is considered to be the main architect of the opposition and resistance to the US and NATO efforts.²⁴

The Middle East has been marred by continuous conflicts and wars involving extra-regional players for the last four decades, particularly after the Gulf War of 1990. The Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen have become the festering fault lines. After the failed Israeli adventure in Lebanon of 2006, the US and NATO started supplying massive arms and attempted to shape a 'Coalition of the Moderate' (a NATO-like military alliance) against Iran and Syria.²⁵ Support was also extended to the Palestinian groups that were under control of Mohammed Dahlan in the Gaza-Strip and Mahmood Abbas in West-Bank. Israel or its lobbyists did not object to the weapons-deals that the US concluded with Saudi Arabia against Iran and Syria.²⁶ That also explains as to why Iran, Syria and the Middle East have become the crucial elements of Russia and China's counter-strategy to frustrate US-NATO designs for the trans-continental encirclement of Russia and China.

²² Pierre Tristam, "What is Middle East," About.com Middle East Issues, (accessed April 22, 2012), <http://middleeast.about.com/od/middleeast101/f/me080208.htm>.

²³ Ibid. A number of experts also consider Turkey in the Middle East; along with Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia; and also Sudan mainly due to its significant Arabic-speaking and Muslim population.

²⁴ Nazemroaya, "The US-NATO March to War..."

²⁵ William M. Arkin, "A New Mideast Military Alliance," *Washington Post*, July 31, 2007. The Coalition of the Moderate meant: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Egypt and Jordan.

²⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Saudi Arms Sale: Reinforcing a Strategic Partnership in the Gulf* (Washington DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies Press, November 3, 2010), 3.

Israel used to consider its relations with Egypt as a ‘cornerstone’ in its calculus of national security. However, Egyptian geo-political posture and orientation had undergone substantial transformation under President Mohammed Morsi (Muslim Brotherhood Party) who was trying to carve a wider but more independent role for Egypt as evident from his refusal to the US to strike the Iranian warship carrying weapons through Suez and his visit to Iran to attend the NAM meeting on August 30, 2012.²⁷ He also surprised the world by condemning Syria’s oppressive measures and calling for effective intervention.²⁸ Egypt’s strategic leaning and changed foreign policy were likely to create serious challenges for the US, EU and particularly, Israel. Within a span of a year, Morsi Government (though democratically elected) became unacceptable to the US, EU and Israel, and therefore it was toppled in a coup by the Egyptian Army on July 03, 2013 supposedly with the tacit support and acceptance by the US, UK and Israel etc.²⁹

Yemen had been a new frontline in the New Great Game rivalry. It is geo-strategically situated at the Red Sea and the southern-most edge of the Arabian Peninsula, overseeing the most vital sea lines of communication for international shipping and trade. However, Qatar and Oman have been following flexible foreign policies. The two states have been acting as mediators between the Resistance-Bloc and Iran as well as between the Coalition-of-the-Moderate and the US.³⁰ According to Nazemroaya, Turkey has also made accords with Syria, Lebanon, Iran as well as Russia which appear to be an attempt on the part of Turkey to draw the region towards the formation of a common-market and political-community. Iran has been making determined efforts with its regional allies and sympathizer groups to shape a “Resistance Bloc” in the Middle East to oppose US-NATO-Israeli nexus, which has instituted a layer of insulation for China and Russia and slowed down US-NATO’s advance into Eurasia.³¹

The events of the last few years in Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, East African Community and Libya are also reflective of the New Great Game

²⁷ “Egypt Allows Iranian Warship through Suez Despite US Objection,” *World Tribune* (US), August 27, 2012.

²⁸ Brian Whitaker and Haroon Siddique, “Syria Crisis: Assad Regime Oppressive, Says Morsi,” *Guardian* (UK), August 30, 2012.

²⁹ Toby Helm and Martin Chulov, “Egyptian Army Had No Choice Over Move to Topple Morsi, Says Tony Blair,” *Guardian* (UK), July 6, 2013.

³⁰ Nazemroaya, “The US-NATO March to War...”

³¹ *Ibid.* Resistance Block is a loose grouping of Iran, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and like-minded resistance groups in Yemen, Gaza and Lebanon; particularly Hezbollah, Shiites and those resisting Israel, US & allies.

being played on the chessboard of the global energy rivalry, strategic choke points and waterways in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. Therefore, the geo-political and geo-strategic developments in East Africa have tremendous impact on the Middle Eastern situation. East Africa is usually referred to as a region comprising Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.³² However; in the broader geo-political view, the countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia (including Somaliland) and South Sudan are also included in East Africa.³³ The East African Community (EAC) is an organization comprising: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda.³⁴ South Sudan which seceded from Sudan in 2011 is keenly awaited by EAC to become its full member whereas the mother-Sudan is considered ineligible.³⁵

The East African region has been a theatre of competitions and colonization between the European nations and has also endured many civil wars, genocides and bloody conflicts during the period of 19th and 20th centuries.³⁶ It is once again witnessing a Great-game rivalry between the opposing camps. Over the period of the last decade, China has developed vital economic and energy security stakes in Sudan, Libya and elsewhere. The US-NATO strategy aims to set up a strategic choke point for the sea lines of communication passing through the Horn of Africa, exercise geo-strategic or military leverage over the region and thus prevent China from consolidating any meaningful access to the energy resources of East Africa. To justify the permanent presence of the US and NATO naval forces in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and off-East African coast, Western powers seem to have been fostering/overplaying the piracy issue in the region. Russia,

³² *Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (US: Merriam-Webster Inc., 2001), s. v. "East Africa," 339. EAC comprises: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Susan Sannyiel Pannchol, "East Africa: Parliament Urges Community to Reject Khartoum Application," *Citizen* (Juba), February 29, 2012.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Sudan's membership is opposed by Tanzania and Uganda on the grounds of human-rights record and its past hostility with South Sudan—a candidate country. In my view, such opposition is due to opposing geo-political orientation and difference in religious outlook between Sudan and South Sudan.

³⁶ "East Africa," Wikipedia, (accessed April 11, 2013), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Africa, The conflicts in East Africa include: Zanzibar Revolution (1964), Genocide of Hutus (1972), Uganda-Tanzania War (1978-1979), Ugandan Bush War (1981-1986), Rwandan Civil War (1990-1993), Genocide of Tutsis (1993), Burundi Civil War (1993-2005), and Lord's Resistance Army insurgency in Uganda, South Sudan and Congo and others.

China and Iran have also positioned their warships in the strategic waterways to counter or mitigate the strategic ill-effects of US-NATO's military presence, primarily on the pretext of anti-piracy and maritime security missions.³⁷

The Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006 was not only synchronized with that of the US but it took place at a time when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) was about to strike a lasting peace in the entire Somalia.³⁸ The peace talks were sabotaged by Ethiopia on the behest of the US.³⁹ The ICU Government was overthrown and a corrupt, unpopular and Western puppet government (STG) was installed instead. The ICU invasion was justified by the US and NATO as well as by Britain, Ethiopia and the STG on the grounds of war on terror and al Qaeda.⁴⁰ Now Somalia is a divided country governed by the gangs of militias, pirates and Islamist Mujahedeen group (Harkat Al-Shabaab etc) which could be compared to the pre-2001 Taliban in Afghanistan.⁴¹ Besides the US, EU and NATO's adventures, Israel had also been prodding and supporting the separatists groups in Darfur and Southern Sudan.⁴² Sudan has been enhancing its relations with the Middle East, particularly with Iran and Syria — the vital

³⁷ Atul Aneja, "Iran, China will Begin Counter-Piracy Patrols," *Hindu* (New Delhi), December 22, 2008; "Russia, China Conduct Anti-piracy Exercises in Gulf of Aden," September 18, 2009, RIANOVOSTI (accessed April 11, 2013), <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090918/156174185.html>

³⁸ Suzanne Goldenberg and Xan Rice, "How the US Forged an Alliance with Ethiopia over Invasion," *Guardian* (UK) January 13, 2007. The ICU Government was overthrown; and instead a corrupt-puppet Government (STG) was installed. The invasion was justified by US, Britain, NATO, Ethiopia, and STG on the grounds of GWOT and al Qaeda. Now Somalia is a divided country governed by the gangs of militias, pirates and Islamist group which could be compared to pre-2001 Taliban in Afghanistan.

³⁹ "Ethiopia Destroyed Somalia Peace Talks: Speaker," January 13, 2007, Garowe Online News, (accessed April 11, 2013), http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/Ethiopia_destroyed_Somalia_peace_talks_Speaker_7068_printer.shtml

⁴⁰ Goldenberg & Rice, "How the US forged an Alliance...."

⁴¹ Nazemroaya, "The US-NATO March to War...."

⁴² "Sudan's SPLM Reportedly Opens an Office in Israel: Statement," *Sudan Tribune*, March 5, 2008. Israel had allowed Sudan's opposition groups to open diplomatic offices in Tel Aviv. Israeli weapons had been entering South Sudan in addition to the ones from Kenyan territories. Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Southern Sudan had also been funnelling weapons to the militias in Darfur.

pillars of the “Resistance Bloc”.⁴³ Therefore, the events in East Africa have been driven by the global quest for the energy resources of East Africa and for the control of Eurasia.

Libya, strategically situated on the Mediterranean, oversees the strategic island of Malta and the proximities of Italy. The Libyan War of 2011 was one of the most shocking events of modern history, viewed in the backdrop of the ‘Arab Spring’ and events in East African Community, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen. The War has long-term implications for the entire African continent (54 states) as well as for the geo-strategic orientation for the part of the Great game being played in Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁴ Amongst other reasons, Gaddafi was intending to create an African Union; nationalize foreign oil companies; invite Russian, Chinese and Indian oil companies to make up for the loss in Libyan oil production; and above all carry out trade in oil, raw materials and gold which implied devastating consequences for the US and Western economies.⁴⁵ Gaddafi had been an outspoken critic and supporter of the Palestinian cause.

The holy triumvirate: the US, NATO and EU found in the ‘Arab Spring’ a much awaited opportunity and strategic space for shaping the international environment needed for the Libya War. According to William Blum: “Holy Triumvirate, literally can do whatever it wants in the world, to whomever it wants, for as long as it wants, and call it whatever it wants, like ‘humanitarian’.”⁴⁶ Blum says, Holy Triumvirate succeeded in getting the UN mandate for military intervention in Libya after Russia and China chose to abstain instead of exercising their veto power despite the fact that China had huge economic and strategic stakes in Libya and Sudan’s energy and the construction sectors. The dreadful events that followed the Libya-intervention

⁴³ Mohammed Ali Saeed, “Sudan VP Vows Resistance to UN Peacekeepers,” *Agence France-Presse*, September 1, 2006. Sudanese leaders have been admiring “Hezbollah” as a model of resistance for Sudan and pledged to offer fierce resistance to US, NATO and other extra-regional forces if they ever entered in Sudan.

⁴⁴ The US was upset since 1969 as closure of its base by Gaddafi left US to rely only on Djibouti in East Africa; and when most of the African countries flatly refused the US to establish its African Command (AFRICOM). US had to retain AFRICOM HQ in Stuttgart, Germany. Similarly, France was also upset as its influence had eroded in its former colonies in Africa, partly on Gaddafi’s inducement.

⁴⁵ William Blum, “Real World Motives for Libya War,” Consortium for Independent Journalism (US, Virginia), September 1, 2011, (accessed April, 2013), [http://consortiumnews.com/2011/09/01/real-world-motives-for-libya-war/A similar adventure by Saddam Hussein led to Gulf War](http://consortiumnews.com/2011/09/01/real-world-motives-for-libya-war/A%20similar%20adventure%20by%20Saddam%20Husse%20in%20led%20to%20Gulf%20War).

⁴⁶ Ibid. William Blum refers US, NATO and EU as ‘Holy Triumvirate’ as he considers that the Holy Alliance recognizes no higher power and believes.

proved William Blum was right.⁴⁷ The cold-blooded murder of Gaddafi and public humiliation of his dead body came full circle haunting when on the eve of 9/11 anniversary in 2012, US ambassador to Libya, Chris Steven along with three co-workers was brutally murdered (like Gaddafi). It shocked the US, proving that the ‘blow-back’ of US policies is real and simmering in Libya.⁴⁸

The Syrian civil war-like situation did open a window of opportunity for the Western powers to push for overthrowing the Assad-regime or demand for a ‘reformed and power-sharing regime’; which meant a Libyan-style war was about to be imposed on Damascus.⁴⁹ Russia and China started flexing their muscles at the Western powers and sending a political-message of “an unequivocal ‘No’ to the bombing of Iran and an unambiguous ‘No’ to a regime-change in Syria through a Libyan-style bombing.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, both Russia and China were in great strategic difficulty to continue supporting the Assad-regime.

However, Russia recently played a trump card with the US and UN. As the consequence of the Russian initiative, UNSC adopted a Resolution 2118 (2013) on September 27, 2013 on the ‘Scheduled Destruction of Syria’s Chemical Weapons’⁵¹ which does not authorize automatic punitive military strikes or other measures/ sanctions under Chapter-VII if Syria did not comply. On the contrary and at Russia’s insistence, the Resolution makes it very clear that a second UNSC Resolution would be needed to authorize punitive military strikes or sanctions.⁵² The Russian initiative and the UNSC Resolution have immense strategic implications for the Middle East. In the short term, it did provide a face-saving option for the US camp

⁴⁷ Triumvirate supported radical Islamist groups including that of Libyan rebel leader (Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi) who had claimed to have fought against the allied forces in Iraq. Libyan infrastructure and the society were torn apart, and Libya was literally turned into killing fields for the Triumvirate-funded-supported-armed rebels and mercenaries that led to cold-blooded murder of Gaddafi and his family.

⁴⁸ Pepe Escobar, “Mr Blowback Rising in Benghazi,” *Daily Times* (Karachi), September 14, 2012.

⁴⁹ Patrick Cockburn, “Why War is Marching on the Road to Damascus,” *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 4, 2012.

⁵⁰ Brendan O’ Reilly, “China and Russia Flex Muscle at the West,” *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 7, 2012.

⁵¹ UN Security Council, “Scheduled Destruction of Syria’s Chemical Weapons,” UNSC Resolution No 2118 (2013), September 27, 2013

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11135.doc.htm>

⁵² Steve Wilson, “UN Security Council Votes to Adopt Resolution Demanding Destruction of Syria’s Chemical Weapons,” *Telegraph* (UK), November 28, 2013.

to climb down from the brink of imminent Syrian war which the US economy could have ill-afforded under the on-going 'economic shutdown'. The deal has yielded to Russia more strategic and dominant space to manoeuvre in the Syrian situation as well as to influence the future events in the Middle East besides impinging upon the image and credibility of US as the sole super power.

For Syria, the use of chemical weapons in any future conflict had almost become untenable and it could now have them destroyed free of cost by the US & UN etc. Moreover, in the long term, it would also bring Israel under tremendous international pressure for dismantling its chemical programme, if any, and find diminishing international support on the 'bogy of Syrian threat to Israel's security'. So, for the time being at least, a disastrous conflict getting triggered in the Middle East is under a strategic pause.

The US reversal over the Syrian situation has also caused (probably irreversible) fissures and discords with Saudi Arabia over and above the strategic set-back caused by the US-Iran nuclear deal. The prospects of a foreign abetted and home grown instability now look like staring the Saudi monarchy in the face. Iran is likely to fully exploit (beyond anyone's expectation) the window of opportunity just dawned, and revitalize its decaying elements of national and regional power to secure heightened influence and mantle in the region. Iran could attempt to trap the US into the latter's strategic dependence on Iran for the safe withdrawal of US-NATO forces as well as for the cost-effective sustenance of US forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014. It is not unlikely Iran could spring many surprise in the space it has recently acquired through the nuclear deal.

Rivalry in South Asia and Indian Ocean

The US-NATO scheme of operation in South Asia on the shores of the Indian Ocean is aimed at controlling the vital sea lines of communication and preventing the establishment of a secure energy route to China. Therefore, India and Pakistan are vital pillars of the US-NATO Great Game but for different reasons. India is being set up as a counterweight to China and a strategic pillar of the US-NATO's 'Contain China Strategy'.⁵³ According to Aiyar, such strategy is evident from the US-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Treaty (2006), NATO Summit (2010) in Lisbon

⁵³ Pallavi Aiyar, "NATO Asks for Dialogue with India," *Business Standard* (Delhi), November 24, 2010. US used the same strategy in the Middle East during the Iraq-Iran War; and Great Britain employed it between various European powers in the European continent.

calling for military and security dialogue with New Delhi, and a fast growing India's strategic nexus with the US, NATO, Japan and Australia. India's successful launch of a 5000 km-range nuclear capable missile (April 2012) did not invite any criticism from the US.⁵⁴ The US has also been accused of stoking disturbances in Xinjiang and Tibet to weaken China and thus make securing of the "energy corridor" for China untenable.

Pakistan has been the key to the success and sustenance of the US-NATO mission in Afghanistan and would play the same role in their exit strategy yet the West by and large has been unhelpful as far as Pakistan's stability is concerned. It has tried to create a wedge between Iran and Pakistan by aiding certain extremist groups to launch terrorist attacks in Iran from Pakistani territories. The strategic aim of such activities has been to paint Pakistan as a failed state, roll back its nuclear programme and thwart establishment of a secure energy corridor with China. The case in point is the adoption of a resolution on Balochistan by the US Congress on February 12, 2012. The resolution stated: "Balochistan is currently divided between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan; and that the Balochi nation had a historic right to self-determination."⁵⁵ Such security concerns and destabilization dynamics have pushed Pakistan strategically closer to China and compelled it to explore strategic partnership with Russia, both at the same time.⁵⁶

China, now, is well poised to further its economic interests in Afghanistan and South Asia at a faster pace. Building of railway in Tibet and construction of 38-gigawatt dam on the great-bend of River Brahmaputra in Tibet are the indicators of Chinese strategic mindset for the region and have also provided impetus to the rivalry between China and India. Yet another heartburn for India has been the support from Russia and China to help Sri Lanka decisively defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), and also to facilitate its joining of SCO as an 'associate member' (like Belarus).

⁵⁴ Robert D Kaplan, April 25, 2012, "The India-China Rivalry," Stratfor Global Intelligence (US, Austin), (accessed April 11, 2013), <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/india-china-rivalry>

⁵⁵ Chidan and Rajghatta, "Balochistan Resolution in US Congress Draws Pakistan Crazy," *Times of India*, February 18, 2012. The resolution on Balochistan was moved by the US Republican Congressmen Dana Rohrabacher (California), Louie Gohmert (Texas) and Steve King (Iowa) in US Congress.

⁵⁶ Bhadrakumar, "Pakistan Gets a Cuddle and a Hug..." Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers visited Pakistan in the last week of May 2012 i.e. A Cuddle from China and a Hug from Russia, both at the same time.

China is also developing several ports in Kenya, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan to safeguard its energy security and other maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan has recently handed-over the re-development work and operational control of Gwadar port to China which has long-term strategic and economic implications as it is located at the mouth of energy-rich Arabian Gulf.⁵⁷ Similarly, China has reportedly signed a deal in February 2013 to sell Pakistan a new nuclear reactor with the capacity of 1000 MW.⁵⁸ Such developments have brought the Great Game counter-struggle in South Asia and Indian Ocean, i.e. to India's backyard.

In the beginning of 2013, there appeared to be some strategic shift in the US policy towards Pakistan which indicated some accommodation and acceptance of Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan, albeit to the great distaste of India. Pakistan had also released from its custody some of the key Taliban leaders to facilitate dialogue between the US and Taliban etc. It was expected that in the post withdrawal scenario, Pakistan could have exercised better leverages, a fair accommodation of its interests in Afghanistan, managed the implications of North-South divide in Afghanistan and finally secured relative peace for its people.

Similarly, when former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and his Irani Counterpart Mahmoud Ahmedinejad jointly launched the construction of US\$ 7.5 billion Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline on March 11, 2013 in the face of US opposition and threat of economic sanctions,⁵⁹ mistrust and apprehensions between Iran and Pakistan got alleviated to a meaningful extent. Launching of such project also reflected an element of 'strategic defiance' in Pakistan's posture towards the US; and above all it had sent a message to energy-starved India of the advantages of energy independence from US-dictated solutions.

With the conclusion of US-Iran nuclear deal and consequent lifting of petroleum related sanctions, Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline has become a realizable project but contrary to expectations Iran has cancelled the loan of US\$ 500 million that it had earlier committed to Pakistan in 2014 for the

⁵⁷ Jason Webb, "Pakistan Hands over Management of Strategic Gwadar Port to China," *Reuters*, Feb 18, 2013.

⁵⁸ Jeff M. Smith, "China and Pakistan's Nuclear Collusion," *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2013.

⁵⁹ AFP and Reuter, "Pakistan Risks US Sanctions over Iran Pipeline," *Dawn* (Karachi), March 12, 2013.

construction of the gas pipeline.⁶⁰ Pakistan has to correctly read the US-Iran thaw and its implications particularly with reference to the situation in Balochistan.

In the shifting playing fields of the New Great Game particularly in the wake of US-NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan could again find itself relegated to the 'part of the problem' rather than 'part of the solution'. The internal security threat to Pakistan from Afghanistan could increase manifold. Pakistan has to carefully watch the developments in Afghanistan, and pro-actively put in operation a well orchestrated strategy to create more diplomatic space, make best use of any window of opportunity that may open and forge closer relations with China and Russia.

Rivalry in Asia-Pacific and South China Sea

Asia-Pacific is an extremely complex theatre of the new Great Game where the US doctrine of 'Preventive Diplomacy and Strategic Pivot'⁶¹ is seriously conflicting with China's 'Peaceful Rise and East Asia Strategy'. This new Great-Game rivalry is fast taking dangerous shape in the regions of Southeast Asia, East Asia and South China Sea; which together with the flash-points of Taiwan and North Korea are pushing the Asia-Pacific towards military confrontation and armed conflicts. According to Lee, US's 'Return to Asia' notion is primarily shaped around a security paradigm that seeks to frame China as an arrogant, aggressive and destabilizing presence in the region. In the words of Brzezinski: "China is an unfinished business; the US and NATO march to war will ultimately lead to East Asia and the borders of the Chinese."⁶²

Southeast Asia includes the countries that are located south of China, north of Australia, east of India and west of New Guinea. The most important Southeast Asian countries are: Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and East Timor etc. East Asia, geographically, is a sub-region of Asia that comprises China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Taiwan, Mongolia, Japan, North Korea and South Korea. However; in economic and business references, East Asia is usually referred to the ten countries of the ASEAN, China, Taiwan, Japan and

⁶⁰ "Iran Cancels Pakistan Gas Pipeline Loan," *News International* (Karachi), December 14, 2013.

⁶¹ Peter Lee, "May be War with China isn't so Far off," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), December 22, 2011.

⁶² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Geo-Strategic Triad: Living with China, Europe, and Russia*. (Washington DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2000), 5.

South Korea. South China Sea is a sub-part of the Pacific Ocean; extending from the Straits of Taiwan to the Malacca Straits.

The US has a number of security alliances in Asia Pacific which have several axes with competing or confronting dialectics, such as: US-Japan axis, US-Singapore-India-Japan axis and US-Japan-India-Australia axis etc. The US has recently strengthened its security affairs with Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand and Vietnam, and has also reached several military accords and agreements with the Philippines, Singapore and Australia.⁶³ The Philippines which is another pillar of the US 'Preventive Diplomacy' in Southeast Asia has re-allowed the US in November 2002 to store military equipment, and also deploy drones to pursue its GWOT. Similarly, in January 2012, the Philippines has made military agreements that would allow the US a "rotating" and "frequent" presence. The US-Taiwan military relations are growing stronger; thus strategically threatening the Chinese sea lines of communication passing through South China Sea. But then Taiwan's new leadership is opening up to the mainland and their commerce is growing.

In June 2012, Vietnam sent a strong signal to China by hosting a red-carpet visit of US Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta, on Cam Ranh Bay which during the Vietnam War was one of the biggest US military bases abroad.⁶⁴ During the visit Panetta while pursuing the US's 'Return to Asia' policy said, "Make no mistake...US military is rebalancing and brings enhanced capabilities to this vital region."⁶⁵ According to Seth, the enhanced capability would mean: deployment of 50-60 per cent of total US naval forces including 6 aircraft carriers, Virginia-class submarines and positioning of joint strike fighters. Therefore, the danger of a major conflict is looming large in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. Similarly, the danger of local wars in South China Sea is also becoming more real.

ASEAN is a very active forum of 10 members.⁶⁶ The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation' is a mandatory (but crafty) requirement which has helped

⁶³ Rajan, East Asia Integration — China's Reservations.

⁶⁴ C. Raja Mohan, "Vietnam Welcomes Panetta: US Eyes Cam Ranh Bay," *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 5, 2012.

⁶⁵ S.P. Seth, "Asia-Pacific's Great Power Game," *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 13, 2012.

⁶⁶ "ASEAN," (accessed April, 2013), <http://www.asean.org/2833.htm> ASEAN Members are: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam with East Timor aspiring to become 11th one. In 2010, ASEAN reached a combined GDP up to US \$ 1.8 trillion; making it the 9th largest economy in the world.

ASEAN so far in curtailing the liberty of action of those seeking to advance their interests through conflict and confrontation; thus maintaining a fine power-balance in the region.⁶⁷ The term ASEAN+1 refers to the addition of China; ASEAN+3 refers to a forum comprising 10 ASEAN countries plus China, South Korea and Japan; whereas ASEAN+6 refers to the addition of Australia and New Zealand and India to ASEAN+3 grouping. APEC is a forum or community whose member countries are limited to those that are situated in the region of the Pacific-rim.⁶⁸ With the US 'Return to Asia' strategy, ASEAN would find it difficult to keep the region free of the armed conflict. However, with diminishing relevance or credibility of the US's new strategy, ASEAN countries would be constrained to look for regional-cum-self-reliant security arrangements to face China's policies, particularly in the South China Sea.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a forum of 18 members; most of them have joined the forum for the fear of the other or prevent the other from gaining undue advantage.⁶⁹ EAS composition reveals that not only the emerging regional powers (China and India) are now represented in the EAS but it also includes the treaty-allies of the US, namely: Japan, Australia, South Korea, Philippines and Thailand. There have been competing and divergent viewpoints amongst ASEAN, China, India and the US over the role of the EAS in community building and dealing with the people-to-people connectivity and security issues.

Australia and New Zealand are the countries though located in the East but have western orientation by virtue of their geography and colonial history. They are important pillars of the US Asia-Pacific strategy and offer great positional advantage to the US and its allies for pre-positioning weapons and rotational forces to support operations in Asia-Pacific, particularly in the Southeast Asia, East Asia and South China Sea. While New Zealand has been trying to hedge or minimize its military participation, Australia has usually been with US' game-plan for Asia-Pacific.

Australia, despite being separated from mainland UK and geographically and economically tied to the East, identifies itself more with the West and maintains constitutional links with the Queen as that extends

⁶⁷ Ibid. "Charter-Overview," <http://www.asean.org/64.htm>

⁶⁸ "EAS-World Model UN 2012," (accessed April 11, 2013), http://worldmun.org/upload/EAS_Update1.pdf

⁶⁹ 6th EAS (November, 2011) included: Australia, Brunei, Burma, China, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and also the US.

Australia the space and liberty of action needed to pursue its conflicting national interests in the Asia-Pacific; and also benefit from its polygamous ties with both Asia and the West:

- China is Australia's biggest trading partner whereas the US is its closest strategic ally. Australia has been trying to balance its grand strategic orientation by projecting itself as a bridge between East and the West but actually it has been furthering US and UK's interests in the region as a trusted strategic partner.
- Australia has recently permitted the US to use the Australian bases or set up its own in Brisbane, Perth, Darwin and Keeling (Cocos Islands) in the Indian Ocean, apparently to deal with the emerging Chinese threat.⁷⁰
- In Australia, the opposition to China's investment in mining and agricultural sector is growing popular. According to Seth, such opposition is very dangerous as it could incite China to do to Australia what Japan did to China and others during WW-II; like Japan threatened Australia with invasion when the US imposed a trade embargo on Japan which led to the Pacific War.

Flash Points in Asia-Pacific

- **North Korea** is a flash-point that has divergent geo-political and geo-strategic implications for the new Great Game rivalry in the Asia-Pacific. North Korea has been a China's proxy that continued to extend China an enhanced role and leverages in the Six-party talks but apparently now becoming an 'Achilles' Heel'. North Korean grand-strategic orientation, its geo-political character, and nuclear and missile programme have enabled the United States to strengthen its security alliances with South Korea and Japan, and also create justification for its enhanced military foot-print in the Asia-Pacific; thus posing real challenges to the Chinese strategy of 'peaceful rise.' The US is also building a missile-shield in Northeast Asia on the pretext of shielding South Korea and Japan against the North Korean nuclear and missile threat. Similarly, the 'Sunshine

⁷⁰ Jacob Zenn, "US Presence Evolves in Southeast Asia," *Asia Times* (Hong Kong), April 4, 2012.

Policy' of South Korea has so far failed to yield the intended dividends or mitigate its vulnerability to North Korea's brinkmanship due to geographical proximity. Is North Korea becoming an 'Achilles' Heel' for China or is it still a useful China's proxy that helps keeping the security threat simmering in the region and provide justification for the enhanced defence spending? The resultant dynamics obviously calls for higher US defence allocations for the Asia Pacific from which it can shy away only at the cost of its credibility in the region.

- **Taiwan** could be a real flash-point but China has deliberately been maintaining the status quo and regulating the 'security threat over Taiwan' as it provides China the liberty of action and a sustainable justification for the modernization of its military. Taiwan is the fruit China would allow to ripen and naturally fall into its lap and would go to war only when the dialectic of opposing wills and the grand-strategic dimensions of the conflict are decisively tilted against China's core interests.
- **US-Japan Security Alliance** is another radix of insecurity for China and a major thorn in the calculus of Asia-Pacific peace. US military alliances in the region have formed several axes with confronting dynamics and dialectics of wills. All such axes pivot around Japan. Probably, China wants to keep alive the 'burden of history' with Japan so as to derive energy from the Chinese nationalism and continue presenting itself as the 'victim'. Chinese brinkmanship with Japan would most probably continue until Chinese military grows to a formidable strength and/or the US freedom of action and military threat irreversibly recedes in South China Sea. The burden of history between China and Japan could then fade away in the annals of history; and the people could also forget as they have usually short memories.
- **South China Sea** is also a fast-emerging flash point in the region. It is a transit route of about one third of the global shipping. Spratly and Paracel archipelagos are the two chains of islands that are disputed amongst six countries of the region, namely: China, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei; and China has marked nine red-dotted lines, i.e. claiming around 75 per cent of the South China Sea.⁷¹ The Sea

⁷¹ Edward Wongs, "Beijing Warns US about South China Sea Disputes," *New York Times*, June 22, 2011.

is also estimated to have huge oil and natural gas reserves.⁷² China calls it ‘Second Persian Gulf’ as its crude-oil reserve is estimated to be around 17.7 billion tons as compared to 13 billion tons of Kuwait; a quantity that is equivalent of China’s oil requirement for about 60 years; The Sea is also abundantly rich in fishing resources.⁷³ In early 2010, China had declared South China Sea to be a core-interest at par with Taiwan and Tibet and also made it a non-negotiable national-agenda.⁷⁴ There have been a number of incidents where China has asserted its claim by flexing its muscles by intercepting, harassing or interfering with the rival vessels operating in the disputed zones of South China Sea.⁷⁵ An editorial of China’s *Global Times* cautioned the regional countries: “If these countries do not want to change their ways with China, they will need to prepare for the sounds of cannons. We need to be ready for that, as it may be the only way for the disputes in the sea to be resolved.”⁷⁶ China has also declared an Air Defence Identification Zone in East China Sea, particularly over Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands and declared its intention to enforce it with ‘emergency defensive measures’.⁷⁷ In the face of past tensions with China over the said islands, Japan had already started to seek defence and security relations with ASEAN countries, particularly

⁷² “South China Sea Oil and Natural Gas,” Global Security.Org (US, Virginia), (accessed April 11, 2013),

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/spratly-oil.htm>, The proven oil reserves are about 7.5 billion barrels. Spratly and Paracel Islands could contain 105 billion barrels of oil, and South China Sea could have 213 billion barrels. US Geological Survey (1993/94) suggests 28 billion barrels. Chinese estimates of natural gas resources 2,000 Tcf. The USGS estimates are 266 Tcf.

⁷³ Ibid. In 1988, South China Sea accounted for about 8% of the total fishing catches made in the world.

⁷⁴ Susan V. Lawrence and Thomas Lum, January 12, 2011, “US-China Relations: Policy Issues,” US Congressional Research Service, 4, (accessed Apr 11, 2013), http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/R41108_20110112.pdf

⁷⁵ These incidents included: Vietnamese survey ships (26 May 2011); Norwegian-flagged seismic ship hired by Vietnam (June 9, 2011); stand-off with Philippines war ships (14-16 April 2012).

⁷⁶ “Don’t Take Peaceful Approach for Granted,” *Global Times* (China), October 25, 2011.

⁷⁷ Tom Phillips (Shanghai) and Julian Ryall (Tokyo), “China Monitored US Flights over Disputed Islands in East China Sea,” *Telegraph* (UK), November 27, 2013.

Vietnam and Philippines.⁷⁸ Such nervousness in the region indirectly benefits China both from the military and economic perspectives. China's assertiveness here is pushing the regional countries into intra-regional security arrangements instead of keep relying on the US, an extra regional player.

Russia-China-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India Entanglement and the Limits of American Power

Pursuing the New Great Game, the US had been shaping a global military alliance and multi-national deployment of combined armed forces of more than 40 countries for the last two decades; and has also developed the wherewithal to undertake military operation from a number of military bases located in more than 63 countries.⁷⁹ The US-NATO-Israeli alliance has also undertaken extensive stockpiling of weapons in places that are strategically and militarily vital for supporting the Great Game. Another 21 members of 'Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, ten Arab countries of the 'Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative', and several non-NATO countries such as: South Korea, Japan, India, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Australia had been almost on board the US-NATO camp in one way or the other. The world has been structured as a wide battlefield to cater for 'Pentagon's War without Borders or Obama's Long Wars'.⁸⁰

To undertake military operations across the globe, US military has been organised in a structure of Unified Command. These commands are named as USNORTHCOM, USSOUTHCOM, USEUCOM, USCENTCOM, USPACCOM and their 'Areas of Responsibility'.⁸¹ This structure shows Pentagon's ability and design to conduct military operations across the globe, and also trigger and fight regional wars. Regional commands are also entrusted with the responsibility to oversee stockpiling of weapons, impart training and achieve inter-operability with the allied armed forces. Similarly, Eurasian countries, particularly China, Russia and Iran are continuing to divert significant resources towards the

⁷⁸ AFP, "Japan Seeks Defence Ties with ASEAN amid China Rows," *Daily Times* (Karachi), March 14, 2013.

⁷⁹ Jules Dufour, July 1, 2007, "The Worldwide Network of US Military Bases," Global Research, (accessed June 8, 2012), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=5564>.

⁸⁰ Dufour, "Worldwide Network of US...,"

⁸¹ "Unified Command Plan-2011," April 27, 2011," US Department of Defence (Washington), (accessed April 11, 2013), http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2009/0109_unifiedcommand/

development of new weapons, aircraft carriers, space weapons/ projects and asymmetrical war tactics. China is also developing several ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Kenya to mitigate its energy vulnerability and vital shipping, particularly in the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea; and also take its geo-strategic struggle to India's backyard.

Shaping of the global environment for a wider conflict was evident from the themes that the US and Western media had played from time to time. For quite some time Western media kept hammering Iran as an 'imminent danger to world peace'. With the signing of US-Iran nuclear deal, the talk of real and imminent danger has fizzled away. Similarly, in the case of Syria as discussed above, a catastrophic war was called off from the brink when Russia brokered a deal for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

At one point in time a major conflict looked so imminent that the former Chinese Leader Hu Jintao had to warn Russia of the 'Coming American Great Event', and Russian President Putin had also to comment to his top generals to 'Prepare for Armageddon'.⁸² Henry Kissinger (former US Secretary of State and a renowned realist practitioner) is quoted to have said in an interview: "If You Can't Hear the Drums of War: You May be Deaf."⁸³ Although Kissinger's remark was only satirical but it was accurate enough to reflect upon the mindset that had prevailed in his time and continues to prevail even today amongst the US realist policy-makers and practitioners.

Nevertheless, since the later part of 2013, a major conflict does not appear to be on the horizon, rather it is held at bay by the unfavourable dynamics of drained US and Western economies, anti-war deterrence and dialectics of opposing wills, such as: announced withdrawal of US-NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014, conclusion of deals for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and also for Iran's nuclear programme, toning down of war mongering by the Western media, less-aggressive US posture

⁸² Federal Security Services (FSB), "Russian Leader Tells Top Generals: Prepare for Armageddon," *The European Union Times*, October 6, 2011. FSB also cites that the US plans for 'Total Global War' were first revealed to China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) by the former Black-Water mercenary Bryan Underwood who was held by US authorities for spying as reported in *EU Times* on October 4, 2011.

⁸³ Alfred Heinz, "Henry Kissinger: If You Can't Hear the Drums of War You May be Deaf," *Daily Squib* (UK), November 27, 2011.
<http://www.dailysquib.co.uk/world/3089-henry-kissinger-if-you-can-t-hear-the-drums-of-war-you-must-be-deaf.html> (accessed April 16, 2012). Heinz quotes Kissinger to have said, "Control oil and you control nations; control food and you control the people."

on the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and handing over of the operational control of Gwadar port to China; and lately by the US offer for the ‘full-spectrum revival of strategic alliance’ during Pakistan’s Prime Minister’s official visit to US on October 20-23, 2013.⁸⁴

It may also be noted that the fulcrum of the New Great Game that has been partly shifted to Asia-Pacific and South China Sea, has limited prospects of success. The grand-strategic orientation of the US Camp in the Asia-Pacific seems to be vulnerable especially in the light of North Korea’s nuclear test of February 2013 which has turned out to be a litmus test for the will and capacity of the US war machine in the Korean peninsula. The event might have been a ploy to create conditions for wearing down the US military, bleed US, economy and eventually cause a re-coil of US confrontationist posture in the Asia-Pacific. Similarly, China’s recent declaration and enforcement of Air Defence Identification Zone in East China Sea by sending its war planes just a few days before the commencement of the US Vice President’s visit to China, Korea and Japan starting from December 01, 2013 may turn out to be yet another litmus test for Japan and the US⁸⁵ The armed conflict, if any, in the East China Sea, South China Sea or Korean Peninsula could drag the regional countries into a wider conflict of varying intensity. China, Russia, Japan, India and Australia would remain precariously charged, ready to jump-in no sooner their core-interests are decisively threatened or the conflict reaches their strategic backyards. Therefore, in the overall analysis, US’s policy of ‘Preventive Diplomacy, Strategic Pivot and Return to Asia’ appears to be fast becoming untenable for the following main reasons:

- Firstly, the US only knows how to build alliances, especially in which it is the leader but it does not understand how to build relationship and trust which are taken as ‘the real values’ and work best in an Asian mindset.⁸⁶
- Secondly, the US regional allies are apprehensive of its capacity to sustain 60 per cent of its naval forces in the region as declared by Panetta, especially when there is a looming-

⁸⁴ White House (Office of the Press Secretary), “Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif,” (accessed November 29, 2013), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/10/23/joint-statement-president-obama-and-prime-minister-nawaz-sharif>

⁸⁵ Spencer Ackerman, “Biden to Press on Air Defence Zone in Bid to Ease China-Japan Dispute,” *Guardian* (US), November 27, 2013.

⁸⁶ Krista Mahr, “Does India Want to be a Part of America’s Plan for Asia?” *Pakistan Today* (Islamabad), 11 June 12.

danger of an automatic cut in US defence allocations for the next 10 years, if the US legislators fail to agree on defence reduction as mandated under the current US law.⁸⁷

- Thirdly, without Indian strategic partnership, the US cannot effectively implement its new 'Pivot to Asia' policy. Unfortunately, India could ill-afford to upset China by becoming a full strategic partner of America's new game-plan for Asia. Moreover, India's capacity is also limited to meet the top ten US expectations, such as:⁸⁸ "be ready for a conflict with China; fight fires in the Indian Ocean; help with the transition in Afghanistan; pressure Iran; build a better bureaucracy; play a role in Southeast Asia; reform the procurement process; prepare for the worst with Pakistan; sign cooperation agreements; and conduct more exercises with the US and its allies." There are real reservations as regards to India's capacity to meet the US expectations. Such limitations are evident from the lack of enthusiasm that India displayed over the 'Return to Asia Policy' that Panetta tried to sell during his visit to Delhi on June 5, 2012. The following day, in the SCO Summit at Beijing, Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Karishna made a 'determined case for SCO membership' where he was assured by China's Vice Premier Li Keqiang that 'China and India's was the real relationship of the century.'⁸⁹
- Fourthly, the economies of the regional countries are tied to that of China. Any major armed conflict would be more damaging to ASEAN, South Korea and by extension to Japan than it would be to China.
- Last but not least, regional countries cannot change their neighbours and would have to live for times to come with the fall-outs of an armed conflict in the South China Sea, particularly when their economies are also tied to that of China;

⁸⁷ Nayan Chanda, "US Pivot towards Asia is Untenable," *Pakistan Today* (Islamabad), June 11, 2012.

⁸⁸ Christopher Clary, "Will India Ever Be America's Partner?: Ten Big Things Washington is Still Waiting on from New Delhi," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, June 14, 2012, (accessed June 14, 2012), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/11/will_india_ever_really_be_a_mericas_partner

⁸⁹ Mahr, "Does India Want to be a Part of America's Plan for Asia?"

whereas, extra-regional players like US etc., can pull-out if the cost is not worth it.

It may also be noted that historically, the US has not been good at winning wars since 1945 except small victories in Panama and Grenada etc., but the US is too good in fomenting instability and chaos. The US war-making has also undergone some doctrinal transformation under ‘Obama’s Six-point Plan for Global War.’⁹⁰ The new ‘American way of war’ now involves an altered paradigm of warfare and an aura of geo-political ambiguity and blurriness. The new formula includes everything from classical precepts of colonial warfare to the cyber-warfare, use of state of the art military and space technologies, and replacement of large military foot-print with special ops, drones, civilian soldiers and proxy-fighters.⁹¹ The application of ‘new way of war’ can be seen in the African continent which is witnessing the influx of US special forces, CIA spies, secret prisons, and massive inflow of US arms and dollars to African troops and other mercenaries. The new American way of war which has been sold as a ‘safer and saner brand of warfare’, and a cheap formula for power projection and furthering US interests is fraught with great danger of unforeseen entanglements that could spread beyond borders and fan the ‘brushfires into wildfires’. The wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq all started small before growing large and becoming costly adventures. Therefore, the new American way of war in reality could turn out to be anything else but not a panacea for the ills of US national security.⁹²

In the overall analysis and grand strategic calculus of Russia-China-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India entanglement, the US camp seems to be losing strategic foot-hold in Eurasia; particularly in the Central Asia and the Caucasus theatres, and to some extent also in South Asia and the Middle East theatres. The war in Afghanistan has almost cost \$4 trillion to the US economy but the US Camp has failed to secure its long-term strategic objectives in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The US’s ‘Pivot, Balancing and Return to Asia’ Strategy is likely to suffer serious setbacks. Conclusion of deals on Syria’s chemical weapons as well as on Iranian nuclear programme has put the Middle East under a ‘Strategic Pause’ but has also exposed the limits of American power. The danger of Saudi Arabia becoming a victim of a fresh wave of ‘Arab Spring’ as well as destabilization, denuclearization have increased manifold.

⁹⁰ Nick Turse, “Obama’s Six-point Plan for Global War,” *Daily Times* (Karachi), June 16, 2012.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

Afghanistan is just on the tipping point of proving or disproving to be a ‘graveyard of empires’ and further exposes the limits of American power. The US’s latest offer to Pakistan for the full-spectrum revival of strategic alliance (though caused jitters in India) could merely turn out to be a bait or ‘Strategic Deception’ for Pakistan. Probably, the US wants to keep Pakistan on the hook for some more time to achieve its minimum objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan before scaling down its military-footprint in Afghanistan. The US-Iran nuclear deal may thus provide additional space for US strategy and additional lines of operations to achieve its minimum objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran and Syria could be re-visited later once US forces are free from the Afghanistan-Pakistan mess. It is hoped that the strategic wisdom would eventually prevail amongst the regional stake-holders, particularly Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia and India; forcing the US to tone down its confrontationist approaches in the Middle East, Afghanistan-Pakistan and Asia-Pacific. Any strategic failure of the US strategy for the region could turn out to be a deadly-blow to American power. Its implications, when read with the strategic losses already suffered by the US Camp in Central Asia, Afghanistan, South Asia and Middle East could be horrendous for the global economy; particularly for the US, EU, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN. Such tectonic changes could boomerang at the US and roll the ball for a new balance of power; thus shrinking the area of US imperialism and hegemony; and may thus open up spaces for the manifestation of ‘Chi-Merica’ (China-America) or a multi-polar world. However, Russia, though keen and anxious, would have to wait for the next rung of geo-politics to dawn new vistas for the re-discovery of Russia’s lost honour and global stature. ■