

The power dynamics of South Asia: Chinese dominance and its various aspects

Mr.Ramappa Savadatti
Guest Lecturer
Government Degree College
Dandeli, Uttara Kannada
Karnataka

Abstract:

The following abstract is a part of the paper ' The power dynamics of South Asia: Chinese dominance and its various aspects' which tries to analyse the Chinese actions which signal China as a potential Superpower in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and it's possible rise of a global superpower which has been a constant challenge to India in the Asian dynamics of Politics, economy & geography. The repeated & strengthening claims of China over various island masses stretching from Beijing to Horn of Africa or be it the expansion over land through its initiatives like Belt & Road initiative (BRI) & Silk Route has also rung a bell to the American dominance in the region. The paper thus tries to bring out the different ways of Chinese dominance which has encircled India creating a 'string of pearls' which alarm India of the constant presence of China in the Indian Ocean.

Key Words: Superpower, Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Route, String of Pearls

Introduction:

China's rapid economic development over the course of the last quarter century has been heavily dependent on foreign sources of energy, and it is likely that foreign sources of energy will prove even more critical to the continued growth of the Chinese economy.. China is the world's largest oil consumer and the largest oil importer. Oil imported from the Gulf States and Africa comprises 70% of total Chinese oil imports, and remains China's most critical source of energy apart from domestic coal burning and nuclear power. This has prompted to be concerned for the energy resources which it plans to generate from the oil rich nations by means of a network created specially for that purpose.

In order to meet future demand, China has signed a number of long term contracts to develop Iranian oil fields and to build a pipeline, refinery, and port in Sudan for oil export. Energy security also sits at the core of China's anti-piracy efforts, which figure into its larger maritime objectives. The expansion of Chinese naval patrols off the Coast of Somalia, and China's decision to join multi-nation defense patrols in 2010, indicate China's greater assertiveness in the policing of shipping corridor.

Infrastructure: The age of Chinese megastructures.

The ambitious Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) the flagship program by the China which is an enormous infrastructure project and possibly the most prominent infrastructure project of the 21st century witnessed China invest more than 100\$ billion yearly since its inception in 2013 in various countries along Asia and Africa. China has also sought support from International community for the project. It has been building roads, laying rail lines, constructing ports in developing countries with a view to boost its initiative even though the returns

from such undertakings are not guaranteed. But, China's uniqueness lies in the fact that even if the returns may not be quick or in the form of monetary profits it does give China an advantage in the long run geo-political dynamics at an international level.

Major places around Asia and Africa can be given as an example for China's infrastructural expansion including the Khorgos Eastern gates SEZ, a strategically prominent point in the Eurasian geography which is being developed with Chinese assistance to the Gwadar port of Pakistan as a part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor(CPEC), one of the many elaborate economic partnership by China through which it seeks to affect the power dynamics of Asian region. Russia and China are reported to have agreed jointly to build an 'Ice Silk Road' along the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic, along a maritime route which Russia considers to be part of its internal waters. It also plans to rejuvenate the so called ancient Silk route involving Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The China thus proposes three such belts viz., North Belt , South belt, Central belt in an order to increase cultural exchanges, and broadening trade.

Thus, the Chinese government has involved itself in development of such infrastructure in more than 130 countries in Asia, Europe, Middle East and the Americas affecting about 60% of world population. The Chinese government has set a completion date of 2049 which also coincides with the centenary of PRC and although China maintains its stance of promoting economic development and maintain regional harmony, its intentions have been questionable due to its long standing rivalry with the West and its aim of being the global superpower ousting the dominance of the United States.

The case of Neocolonialism:

The port town of Hambantota was devastated completely in the 2004 Tsunami which proved to be a major challenge for the SriLankan authorities to rebuild the ruined port town. However, it was not until the China's intervention which proved to be a panacea for the problem. The port of Hambantota was reconstructed but not with rising winds of caution in the island nation which have very recently been experienced by other countries who sought assistance of China's rapid infrastructure building capabilities in the form of China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy which has allowed China gain access of the port of Hambantotafor the next 99 years as SriLanka expressed its inability to repay the enormous debt that came as a bill of reconstruction. This has also raised doubts about China's policy which seems to mortgage the resources which have been speculated to be strategic in the future. Hambantota, as expressed by many South-asian countries especially India as China's move to militarily consolidate the region by constructing a military base have only reaffirmed the Chinese agenda to be an influence in South Asian affairs. Although, a few experts have opined that such claims of China's policy by the West to be Exaggerated and used to fuel mistrust regarding China's intentions. But, the explicit warnings by the Malaysian PM in2018 regarding the Chinese intensions which also led Malaysia withdraw from the bilateral agreement with China, fearing the imperialistic motivations behind such efforts by Beijing.

The Debt-trap diplomacy followed by China has already raised concerns for the African nations which have been receiving assistance from China in terms of infrastructure building & China also being a major source of debt for the developing African nations. It was estimated that the debt owned by China from African economies was in excess of 180 billion dollars in 2016 and which continues to see an increasing trend & constituted 20% of International debt owed by African countries. Especially the nation of Zambia, Camerons & Djibouti owe 24% of their external debt to China which repeatedly assert to the Chinese dominance in the Horn of Africa in the very near future. Thus, the debt policy of China towards the developing countries has cooked concerns & SriLanka seems to be an early case of such concern which is very likely to be experienced by such countries which strongly hints to the case of neocolonialism.

Rising concerns and necessary response:

The suspected expansionary policy of China has led to mid tensions for the countries in South Asia including the likes of Japan and Australia and those harbouring US interests. The growing rivalry between China and India and China's aggressive expansion of its influence has created concerns on the Indian front. Although China advocates its projects and actions as being helpful for economic growth and advertise the creation of a mutually beneficial trade route with a view to consolidate its economic situation and assist the unprivileged economies to do so. But, the concerns emanating from various countries suggest the contrary.

The major concerns has been felt by India which stands cornered due to the establishment of Chinese bases in key & strategic places such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan etc being a few of many such areas which have been speculated to act as choke points ultimately creating a string around the peninsular India and restring Her activities and abandoning its mobility of any kind in the Indian Ocean. It is also an object of a deep concern due to the fact that a majority of the Oil needs of India are fulfilled by sea routes as 90% of India's fuel is transported through such sea routes and a strategic placing on such routes would surely give China the necessary edge over India.

Also, China's presence in the Horn of Africa would lead to compromise in the fight against Somalian pirates who have plagued the major trade route by constantly hijacking the merchant ships and create an unsafe ambiance for trade to flourish. The menace of the pirates was upto an extent curtailed due to the naval efforts of countries including USA and India. But, the Chinese involvement in the economies of Africa has raised doubts regarding the effectiveness of such actions against the pirates considering the China's stance over war on terror and it's repeated protection of terrorist based in Pakistan by using the Veto power, the move which has been criticized by India & the West and has been acting as an obstacle against counter-terrorism. Thus, the China's String of Pearls has not just emerged as an economic concern but also elevated tensions at a geo-political level.

Conclusion:

The activities of China has thus prompted India to take swift actions against such imperialist strides and as a part of which India had tried to improve its diplomatic ties with the South Asian countries by means of bilateral talks and agreements and also indicate considerable progress in some regards. Banana republics such as Maldives thereby have become game changers under such circumstances of power play. India therefore strives to be the favourite ally of the island nation since any instability in the region would mean a setback for india's diplomatic efforts. It is also the cause for India adopting a Look east policy and consolidate its position with forums such as BIMSTEC.