

CONFERENCE REPORT



Institute of Social Sciences



Centre for Vietnam Studies

Conference on

Challenges and Opportunities for India in the Indo-Pacific Region

Venue: Seminar Room, Institute of Social Sciences
08, Nelson Mandela Marg, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

New Delhi **8 October 2018**

Organised by:



Institute of Social Sciences



Centre for Vietnam Studies

Venue:

Institute of Social Sciences

08, Nelson Mandela Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

Ph: 011-43158800; 43158801

Programme

Monday, 8 October 2018

9.30 am **REGISTRATION**

10.00 am **INAUGURAL SESSION**

Theme: India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific Region

Welcome Address

Dr. Ash Narain Roy
Director, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi

Keynote Address

Lt-Gen (Retired) S. A. Hasnain
Distinguished Fellow, VIF and Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

Special Address

Dr. Gurpreet S. Khurana
Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi

11.00 am TEA

11.30 am **Working Session I**

Theme: Situation in the Korean Peninsula and Emerging Challenges

Chair: Prof. Partha S. Ghosh
Senior Fellow, ISS, and former Professor of South Asian Studies, JNU

Special Address

H.E. Mr. Pham Sanh Chau
Ambassador –Designate, Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Speakers:

1. Dr. Rajaram Panda
Lok Sabha Research Fellow
2. Dr. Jojin V. John
Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs
3. Dr. Shreya Pandey
Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

1.00 pm LUNCH

2.00 pm **Working Session II**

Theme: *Stakes and Perspectives of Global and Regional Powers*

Chair: Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia
*Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai
Former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar*

Speakers:

1. Prof. Baladas Ghoshal
*Secretary General, Society for Indian Ocean Studies and former Professor,
Southeast Asian Studies, JNU*
2. Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli
Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU
3. Prof. Sanjay Kumar Pandey
Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, JNU

3.30 pm **Working Session III**

Theme: *Economic, Security and Maritime Dimensions*

Chair: Prof. S.D. Muni
Professor Emeritus, Centre for South Asian Studies, JNU

Speakers

1. Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retd)
Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi
2. Mr. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury
Senior Assistant Editor, Economic Times, New Delhi

VOTE OF THANKS

5.00 pm TEA

CONCEPT NOTE

The Indo-Pacific region, home to nearly 3 billion people and with a combined Gross Domestic Product of nearly \$20 trillion, has a tremendous relevance for India in pursuit of its “Act East” policy and for forging trans-regional strategic partnerships. It has three of the four largest economies in the world i.e. China, India and Japan. The strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region is only bound to grow in the decades to come. However, with the rise of China, a new geo-strategic contestation is beginning to unfold at a time when global uncertainty is growing and traditional power relationships are in a flux. As outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue, “India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific region is a positive one” and is not directed against any country. As he said, “when the oceans are open, seas are secure, countries are connected, the rule of law prevails...nations small and large prosper as sovereign countries”.

India has taken several steps to protect its interests and raise its profile in the region like holding naval exercises and entering into regional partnerships and strategic dialogues with a host of countries. However, the challenges of “free, open and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region are bound to increase in the coming years.

With the Trump-Kim summit, war games in the Korean Peninsula may have halted for now, but the US continues to upgrade missile defence. The US Defence Department is sticking with plans to bolster the high –altitude interceptor known as THAD as well as lower-altitude Patriot interceptor batteries deployed in the Korean Peninsula. It is equally important to get a sense of major powers’ perspectives of the Indo-Pacific region. A discussion on the economic, security and maritime dimensions of India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific is also timely.

To discuss these developments, the Institute of Social Sciences is organising a day-long conference on "**Challenges and Opportunities for India in the Indo-Pacific Region**" on October 8, 2018. The conference aims to focus attention on sub-themes like India's vision of the Indo-Pacific Region, continuing threats of missile deployment in the Korean Peninsula, stakes and perspectives of global and regional powers and economic, security and maritime dimensions.

REPORT

Challenges and Opportunities for India in the Indo-Pacific Region

8th October 2018

The Institute of Social Sciences and the Centre for Vietnam Studies, New Delhi today organized a day-long conference titled “**Opportunities & Challenges for India in the Indo-Pacific Region.**” As we know, the Indo-Pacific region, home to nearly 3 billion people and with a combined Gross Domestic Product of nearly \$20 trillion, has tremendous relevance for India in pursuit of its “Act East” policy and for forging trans-regional strategic partnerships. It has three of the four largest economies in the world i.e. China, India and Japan. The strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region is only bound to grow in the decades to come. However, with the rise of China, a new geo-strategic contestation is beginning to unfold at a time when global uncertainty is growing and traditional power relationships are in a flux. As outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, “India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific region is a positive one” and is not directed against any country. India has taken several steps to protect its interests and raise its profile in the region like holding naval exercises and entering into regional partnerships and strategic dialogues with a host of countries. However, the challenges of “free, open and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region are bound to increase in the coming years.

The theme of the Opening Session was **India’s Vision of the Indo-Pacific Region** which was well deliberated upon by the two eminent scholars Lt-Gen (Retired) S. A. Hasnain and Dr. Gurpreet S. Khurana and was chaired by Dr. Ash Narain Roy, *Director*, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi. The session discussed how India has actively and successfully conducted multilateral diplomacy and identified the prospects and challenges of the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ in the larger context of things in the region. Right after the two speakers, the Conference was graced by a Special Address delivered by the new Ambassador-Designate of Vietnam to India H.E Pham Sanh Chau who found a new middle path in the narratives of Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific. He coined a new term “Indo-Asia-Pacific” and said that Vietnam seeks a meaningful role in the region and is ready to partner with India to contribute towards a rules-based order. He recognised the fact that the rise of China has created tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and Vietnam seeks to balance power equations with India playing a definite role in maintaining peace, prosperity and unimpeded commerce. Answering a question addressed to him from the audience, the Ambassador said that “Vietnam is willing to participate in any initiative if its inclusive in nature and respects International law.”

The Second Session, i.e. the Working Session 1, ***Situation in the Korean Peninsula and Emerging Challenges*** saw scholars addressing the current Korean Question and pondered over the future challenges and prospects of any nuclear deal which North Korea might clinch with the US. Dr. Rajaram Panda, Lok Sabha Fellow and eminent columnist said that the current situation in the Korean Peninsula should be understood from the context that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is seeking international legitimacy and acceptance and his summit meeting with US President Donald Trump was assertion of the fact. But questions remain over any talk about De-Nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The Working Session 2, chaired by Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, *Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, Mumbai*, was themed ***Stakes and Perspectives of Global and Regional Powers***. Eminent speakers like Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli and Prof. Baladas Ghoshal deliberated reflected on the issue of Global Leadership and discussed the role of China and other regional powers in the region. Prof. Sanjay Kumar Pandey talked about Russia and how it is vital to the whole concept of Indo-Pacific.

The Final Working Session chaired by Prof. S.D Muni was themed ***Economic, Security and Maritime Dimensions***. The Speakers were Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (Retd), *Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi* and Mr. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, *Senior Assistant Editor, Economic Times, New Delhi*. The session saw intense deliberations on the maritime challenges the region is facing and indentified future prospects.



Welcome Address

Dr. Ash Narain Roy

Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

Living in the middle of the Indian Ocean, India relies heavily on the ocean for its energy and trade but also faces both conventional and non-conventional security challenges. Indo-Pacific is a far bigger geopolitical region.

Alongside the broadening horizon, India needs to reckon with the rise of China whose military presence has increased considerably. Indo-Pacific is increasingly being described as the “Asian Paradox”. The region doesn’t have region-wise security institution like NATO or EU. Instead, there are only spaghetti of overlapping regional blocs, military alliances and diplomatic forums.

Dealing with new China needs a strategic response. China is worried about QUAD and the Indo-Pacific strategic construct. It believes trade war is not about trade. It feels Washington is simply reluctant to accept its rise. Trump is constructing his own reality. What you are seeing and what you are reading is not what is happening. Dealing with China’s rise is one thing, McCarthyism is not. Trump is pursuing a mercenary attitude towards its alliance partners and narrowly mercantilist approach to trade. India too is experiencing this. As one Indian analyst says, in one his first meetings, Trump told Prime Minister Modi what India could do for him strategically.

India is strengthening its interactions with South East and East Asian countries and many of the regional groupings. But India has a long way to go. India can’t afford to be seen merely as a useful balance to China’s heft. Nations in East and South East Asia have their own sense of themselves and their history. This has to be factored into any matrix of geographical equations that India is seeking.

Dangers of a ruinous war in the Korean Peninsula are far from over. One should not be fooled by the new calm following Trump-Kim Summit. The optimists believe economic interdependence and nuclear weapons make war insane. Pessimists contend humanity has a huge capacity for blundering into disaster.

War games in the Korean Peninsula may have halted for now, but the US continues to upgrade missile defence. The US Defence Department is sticking with plans to bolster the high –altitude interceptor known as THAD as well as lower-altitude Patriot interceptor batteries deployed in the Korean Peninsula.

Weapons deployed in the Korean Peninsula have become faster, more precise and more powerful. US Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis says, US and South Korea could resume military exercises. Trump himself has said that if the two countries could resume military drills, these will be far bigger than ever before.

India has been engaging with various stakeholders. India has now formally announced that it wants to open Indo-Pacific dialogue with both Moscow and Beijing. India is for neither a world dominated by US nor China. Japan is important but Russia remains a critical partner.

Keynote Address

Lt-Gen (Retired) S. A. Hasnain

Distinguished Fellow, VIF and Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

China's dependence on the ocean is far greater than its dependence on the land, in terms of security. It has no threat from Russia; it knows very well that India will never go back on the continental borders. For China, the natural way to look at for its economic security and for its physical security was not towards its east but towards west and that made the Indian Ocean region and West Pacific region far more relevant to China than the Pacific Ocean itself.

China knows that a strong navy could deny the security that it is seeking. Ideally one should have strong relations with nations which dominate all these sea links which are the nations of the IOR. It should have a geo-strategic connect with them and that should include India too. This is the rationale for the belt and road initiative. Without this China cannot boast that its sea lines of communication will be secured. To secure sea lines of communication, it also needs the Indian Ocean countries also to be alongside India.

According to him, China does not consider India as an adversary state but a serious competitor of power in Asia. Its markets are very important to China. Another reason for China's contemptuous attitude towards India is the fact that India is the core liberal state of the IOR region, with a geo-strategic position, literally controls the east-west sea lines of communication.

The Malacca syndrome also remains China's greatest worry. The configuration of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, in conjunction with the Strait of Malacca - any naval officer can tell what a wall it creates between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean and how the Indian navy in conjunction with any of the navies of South East Asia, or the large US navy, can take control of this entire region.

A joint US-India-Japan-Australia naval coordination, supported by the French, British and Vietnamese could be very unmanageable for China. The contemptuous attitude it adopts each time, that China sees India in equation, it feels threatened.

The sheer land-mass, its critical geo-strategic position and the Indian Ocean region, India's economy – all are significant for the USA. If the land mass of Asia and the oceans, straddling the Malacca straits can be harnessed to the advantage of a US-led combined, it can ensure that China's coercive rise could be curtailed.

The normal way of limiting India's strategic concerns is to keep it pegged to the continental domain of physical security, its northern and western borders. If you keep India's attention on Himalayas, in Kashmir, on the Rajasthan desert and Pakistan, India will not have the time and attention to focus on maritime zone. This is a huge strategy that China has been playing.

China has no intention of fighting India. China will continue to threaten India, through a combination of 3-4 strategies: cyber, psychological, legal warfare, media warfare. This is a wonderful strategy that China has been working to its advantage. Doklam was nothing but a ploy to keep India focussed there. He believed that there will be more Doklams in the near future.

China took a back step in October last year after Doklam. It was not interested in converting Doklam into a war. What it led to was a reset of relations between India and China. It has also led to lesser energy which India has been showing towards the quadrilaterals.

India has been looking at the Pacific part of Indo-Pacific and has been succeeding in its relationships with ASEAN and nations of that side, while the Indo part of it has completely failed. A lot of things have been happening in the Pacific and IOR region which seem to be pointing towards a dilution of China.

Dr. Gurpreet S. Khurana

Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi

To achieve geopolitical objectives, one need to make a geo-strategy and it has various elements in it: economic strategy, energy and military strategy. All geo-strategies need to be implemented in consonance with apex national policies.

India's geo-strategic frontier is expanding eastwards and southwards due to China. One needs a balanced geo-strategy. Why is Look West not talked about? India needs to balance relations with GCC on one hand, with Shia-dominated countries and Israel. This is why Look West is not being given prominence but Look West is important. We are reliant upon Persian Gulf, Africa for our energy security.

Chinese have now been coming into Indian Ocean and that is why we started SAGAR. In 2015, PM articulated the concept of security and growth for all in the region and that was the main reasons for us to not have China displace India's influence in the region. Act East, Look West and SAGAR all gives you the imperative for going into Indo-Pacific which has now come in Shangri-La dialogue in June this year.

To achieve shared prosperity, one needs to have a common interest and in a free and open maritime order. China is the elephant in the room. It was the security dimension which caused the genesis of Indo-pacific concept in the more contemporary terms.

H.E. Mr. Pham Sanh Chau

Ambassador –Designate, Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

The President of Vietnam, who recently passed away, had come up with a new concept - what we call 'Indo-Asia Pacific'. What does this mean for Vietnam? There is a lot of commonality between what has been said by PM Modi at the Shangri-La Conference and the understanding of Vietnam. This region is extremely important to Vietnam.

It is well connected with other parts of the world by different oceans. The region has also witnessed the rise of China and its rise brings a certain change in the concept of power. The region has also witnessed a sharp increase in the economic performance. India is the 5th largest economy and China is the 2nd largest and together they are strongest economically and subsequently security wise. Most important, this region has seen an increasing confrontation, competition of different superpowers like USA and interaction of other players like Australia, Japan, Indonesia, and ASEAN. All this makes the picture very complex from economic point of view. All this makes the region very important.

This part of the world is important for Vietnam. The term Indo-Asian Pacific includes all the strategic partners for Vietnam. We have India as one of the three comprehensive partners, as also China, Japan, USA and Australia. This is a theatre of interaction for major powers but also medium powers and emerging powers.

The first fundamental element of the concept according to Vietnam is that it should be of inclusive nature. We believe our utmost objective is that this region should continue to enjoy peace and security. For that, any initiative or concept to bring in on board the interest of all party concerns. This concept should be inclusive and open. China has mentioned very explicitly in the 3rd Indian Ocean conference in Hanoi that it is a part of Indo-Pacific region. If it is open to China, Vietnam will welcome it.

If Russia is excluded, it will not be very happy. Russia indeed has nothing geographically to do with this part. But it can claim that Russia is also an Asian country because it has the vast land in Asia.

Any structure or newly established structure in the world, must abide by international law. We have to abide by UN charter, the law of the sea, etc. In accordance to that we must abide by the peaceful sentiment, which is not only through law but also through dialogue.

Vietnam joined ASEAN very late. But it is among the countries that protects the principle of centrality. ASEAN is the most successful regional grouping so far that can bring together at the table all the major powers. We need to be together in one umbrella. ASEAN should embrace the concept of Indo-Pacific.

It should respect the territorial integrity, security of the country involved. What is important that any mechanism must respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the countries.

Dr. Rajaram Panda

Lok Sabha Research Fellow

Korean peninsula has the potential to disturb the peace and solidarity of the entire region, so security is of utmost importance for interest of the Indo pacific region. Situation changed when Kim Jong, during his New Year address expressed to have dialogue and since then the inter-Korean have moved very fast, giving possibility of peace returning to the peninsula. From the South Korean side, there is a liberal PM who has been sincerely trying to reach out to N. Koreans.

The denuclearization is not same for US and North Korea. For US, the concept means that N. Korea must give up on all its nuclear programs and dismantle its entire nuclear arsenal. For N. Korea, it entails that nuclear weapon should not have any space in the political space, which means that S. Korea must also be free from this. Once N. Korean perspective is acceptable to President Trump, it will automatically mean withdrawal of all American troops stationed in S. Korea. The signing of this peace treaty will dramatically alter the situation in the Korean peninsula.

There has been an urge among people in Korea to unify. If Korean peninsula is unified, will it serve interest of other stakeholders like China and Russia? China might not be comfortable as it will go against the strategic interests. If America expands during this entire process, will it serve China's interest? It is difficult to comment.

The threat of war is far from over. The deployment of THAD poses a serious threat to peace. Trump may be planning second summit, but his unpredictable behaviour poses a threat to peace in the Korean Peninsula.

Dr. Jojin V John

Indian Council of World Affairs

Situation in Korean peninsula has dramatically changed over the last nine months. Today we are in a situation where people are busy counting the number of visits and this marathon of diplomacy and summits and the historic Kim & Trump summit. N. Korean president has now

announced that Kim Jong will also be traveling to Russia soon. There has been an intense diplomatic process.

There is a strategic shift- from Kim Jong's nuclear speech and also the sanctions that were implemented in 2017. Another important factor was the mediating diplomacy by S. Korean leadership and there has been a relaxation to the American approach to the N. Korean issue. It is a very complex factor where we are today.

If one were to look at the changes, there are different aspects- one is diplomatic opening of N. Korea which includes the improvement of bilateral relationships between the Indo-Korean relations, N. Korea-US relations and N. Korea-China relationships and the other is the security conditions of the Korean peninsula.

Kim Jong's meeting with Xi Jinping in March 25th happened after announcement of Indo-Korean summit and the N. Korea-US summit. Since then, what we see is the three - wheel bilateral relations. With reference to Indian relations, it is in a state where we have not seen anything unprecedented. Except on the economic front, the level of interaction between two Koreas has been much better than what we have seen during the sunshine period. During the Pyongyang summit, it was announced that they will announce the Indo-Korean rail projects, the connectivity projects this year. In reaction to all this has happened is an improvement in N. Korea-China relations which has been at its tallest point in the time of Xi Jinping and Kim Jong.

On re-escalation of security tension, we are at a point where people are feeling relieved, as there has been no missile test for the last ten months and there is the first time one has not seen any missiles under Kim Jong. The cancellation of joint military exercise has also reduced and that is actually one of the points of security tension in the Korean peninsula.

Do not believe that N. Korea will give up on all of its weapons. It is also in the interest of N. Korea to stay engaged in the diplomatic process. Kim Jong wants to have it all but if diplomatic negotiations fail, he doesn't exist.

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia
Gateway House, Mumbai

Japan-US-China triangle is becoming more complex. It used to be conventional wisdom that US and Japan are allies but even Japan had to start looking elsewhere when they realised that they had an unconventional partner in the White House. In the last few years, Japan and China relations have improved considerably and that adds to the new resilience. Where does Russia fit into all this? What is clear is that with all its assets- close relations, with India, Vietnam, Myanmar and special relation with China, Russia wants to be an able Indo-Pacific power.

Prof. Baladas Ghoshal

Secretary General, Society for Indian Ocean Studies and former Professor, Southeast Asian Studies, JNU

Indo-Pacific is not one, there are many. India has one concept, so is America, Japan, Australia and the latest is France. None of these formulations match others as well as their concerns and needs. PM Modi's concept of Indo-Pacific as explained during Shangri La dialogue was much broader stretching to almost 28 countries. Each country is trying to push through its own concept of Indo-Pacific at the expense of the other. If the formulation does not lead to peace, obviously there is a problem with the concept of that. One has to give a serious thought, to what purpose are we designing the concept of Indo-Pacific. Longevity of debate will depend on these issues whether that concept will contribute to a common understanding of a region and that region has its own resilience to survive the onslaughts that might come with various interests.

Indo-Pacific cannot sustain itself unless ASEAN is included. ASEAN is right in the middle of the two oceans. Individually, South East Asian countries might edge against China because they are apprehensive of its future designs and they also perceive some economic threat from China. Many in India look at the issue of China from their own prism. It is different from how Southeast Asian countries view China. They see China as an opportunity. Indo-Pacific will not be successful unless Southeast Asian countries subscribe to this concept.

Any region has to serve economic purpose. Indo-Pacific will not survive unless it is viewed in economic terms. It has to deliver economic goods to people. One has to rise above one's own national interest in order to make things acceptable to others. If India-China together can come closer to each other and identify issues like climate change, energy issues, terrorism and others, then this whole concept of Asia trying to exercise the impact of global international order will be the determining factor in the 21st century.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli

Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU

Indo-Pacific as a concept, the Chinese have debated extensively. They are using the term increasingly in the press which also means that they have changed the term from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific in a gradual manner. Asia Pacific in the 80s when it was coined, it benefitted China in terms of China rise. The investment flew into China, the FDI, special economic zones and the manufacturing sector became direct benefits of this shift from the Atlantic to Asia Pacific. In the 80s, 90s, 2000s Asia Pacific concept really benefitted China and it remained a major stakeholder.

China has amassed a lot of material capabilities in these 4 decades. Yet strategically it has a sense of fear because of the Indo-Pacific idea. There are others who have seen this as providing a shift from economic strength to other countries that is happening already because labour costs are rising in China. But China could be seen as a loser in the economic aspect overall. To an extent, there is a concern that a shift from Asia Pacific to Indo-Pacific has both strategically and economically disadvantaged China.

President Xi Jinping addressed a Foreign Affairs work conference where he mentioned that apart from protecting the core interests –Taiwan, Tibet, South China sea, etc. he mentioned Chinese efforts to protect its major interests. That is a new concept that has come up in China's policy. Major interest would mean China as the second largest economy, China as the largest trading partner for 148 countries in the world, China is a permanent member in the UNSC. China with so many other initiatives it has had - Belt and Road Initiative, the concept of community of common destiny and so on, major interests would mean it is a major power in Asia. It has to protect those major interests. These are developmental as well as security related.

The concept of Indo-Pacific also evolved to contain China. We don't see the classical containment that existed between the US and Soviet Union because today China and India are more competitive in nature. The Chinese have started building in the last 5 years the Belt and Road initiative, in relation to the Indo-Pacific. Apart from BRI, would be Chinese concept of community destiny, instead of alliances, they would like to build partnerships and partnerships are very different in the Chinese parlance. Partnership is the new initiative that Chinese have been proposing.

Prof. Sanjay Kumar Pandey

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, JNU

Unlike China and Japan, who get most of their energy supplies from Middle East, West Asia and that passes through Indian Ocean and other sea routes, Russia does not have any similar stake. In all these terms, Russia's interests are not there. This despite the fact Russia has had very old and long standing stakes and relations with Vietnam and other countries of Indo China but definitely ASEAN was not among its core interests (with respect to Soviet Union).

In the post-Soviet period, during the initial decade and half, Russia's main focus was Europe and US. By the beginning of present century, Russia was already contemplating a slight change in its strategy, initially it was mainly because Russia needed to develop its far eastern region. For that it believed that the north east Asian countries – Japan, Korea and china can be of great interest to develop its far east region; also because China was rising.

The rise of China created opportunities and challenges for Russia, which it had to deal with. By 2007-08, Russia's relation with Europe, were worsening. Russia was feeling uncomfortable due to the overemphasis of Europe. Its partnership with China was taking shape. By 2011-12, Russia was already talking about its important stakes in Asia Pacific.

In the last 7-8 years, if Asia Pacific is the real region of growth then Russia needs to be there. Russia's long standing ties with Vietnam, Russia always says that in Asia Pacific it has 3 major partners: China, India and Vietnam. Beyond these, Russia has very important military ties with countries like Indonesia and Vietnam. It is going to build a nuclear power station in Vietnam. Its relations with Malaysia, Brunei and countries of Southeast Asia, in the wake of South China Sea, they are realising that they need to bank upon not just US, but many other partners.

In the wake of new ties between Russia and China, they see that Russia needs to be engaged. Russians have followed a very nuanced approach vis-à-vis South China Sea. They did not acknowledge the tribunal ruling which disappointed many of its allies. They are engaged in naval exercises in South China Sea, which is seen as accepting China's interests or pre-eminence in South China Sea. They have taken care never to fully acknowledge Chinese position on South China Sea. Russia's military ties with India and Vietnam are very significant. It is something more than strategic partnership. We are very apprehensive about growing ties between Russia and China but at the same time, the Russians are very careful in maintaining a balance with India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, etc. Russia has been trying to engage with Vietnamese support. It believes that it has important stakes in the region. It has important friends and partners in the region and the power balance in this region will have implications for Russia's long term security.

Except for their interactions with India, they do not use the term Indo-Pacific. They are sensitive to Chinese concerns about the term. China is concerned about the emerging quadrilateral partnership in the region. As opposed to it visualising a trilateral partnerships-engaging Russia, India and Vietnam would be a good idea that might give signal to the growing assertiveness of China.

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan

Director, National Maritime Foundation

China's dependence upon external merchandise trade continues to be the dominant feature of China, not with-standing Chinese communist party's efforts to switch over to domestic consumption. As the engine of China's growth demands greater resources, the bulk of these imports are being drawn from increasingly distant areas that are accessible only by sea. Of China's total merchandise trade, 90% is sea borne and that would be about \$3.7 trillion as of 2017. In any given month in 2017, \$300 bn worth of Chinese trade was on the sea, so it is no wonder that China worries about the activities at sea.

With the geographic competition space between India and China coinciding with the Indian Ocean, it is inevitably USA's next defensive line. Is China plotting to surround India? The answer is no. Is India getting surrounded? The answer is yes. As far as India is concerned, maritime connectivity is our major plan for an alternative to China's geo-strategic aim. As far as BRI is concerned, nations only have geo-economic aims and the rest of them are strategies to achieve those economic aims. The geo-strategy of the BRI is that it is an extractive model of connectivity.

Dipanjn Roy Chaudhary

Senior Assistant Editor, Economic Times

The Indian Ocean holds the key to our future. Ocean carries 90% of India's trade and resources. To the east, the Malacca strait and South China Sea connect the Indian and the Pacific and the two most of our major partners, including ASEAN, Japan, China and USA.

In the IOR region, India's relations are becoming stronger. India is also looking at maritime security for its friends and partners. Indo pacific is the region for vast global opportunities. 'Inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN's centrality lie at the heart of Indo Pacific,' said PM Modi at the Shangri La dialogue. India does not see Indo Pacific as a strategy or a club of limited members. According to him, RCEP must be comprehensive as the name suggests. It must have a balanced trade investment and services and India-China are also talking about RCEP for their own trade and investment.

Beyond East, India's partnerships are going strong. India's strategic partnership with Russia has matured. At the Shangri La dialogue, President Putin's name was the first name that PM Modi mentioned in his speech.



Ash Narain Roy

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Ash Narain Roy is the Director of Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi. He spent more than four years as a Visiting Scholar in the early 1980s at El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico City. He worked with Hindustan Times as Assistant Editor from 1990 to 2001. Dr. Roy was a member of the international team of observers for the Sri Lankan parliamentary elections in August 2015 and participated in several international delegations.



Baladas Ghoshal

Email: baladas_1@yahoo.co.in

Baladas Ghoshal, currently Secretary General and Director (Academic) Society for Indian Ocean Studies; former Professor of Southeast Asia and South-West Pacific Studies and Chairman of the Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, JNU; ICCR Chair in Indian Studies at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow; Honorary Distinguished Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. He has published extensively on Indonesian politics, ASEAN and regional security issues; reads, writes and speaks Malay and Bahasa Indonesia.



Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

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Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury is Senior Assistant Editor at *The Economic Times* and writes on foreign and strategic affairs. Prior to that, he was Program Director at the Aspen Institute India, and a journalist with *Mail Today* (India Today Group), the India Bureau of Kuwait News Agency, and United News of India. He is also a commentator on Indian Foreign Policy on All India Radio. He has participated in several roundtables, courses and programmes organised by national and international bodies and represented India in several international forums.



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Jojin V. John

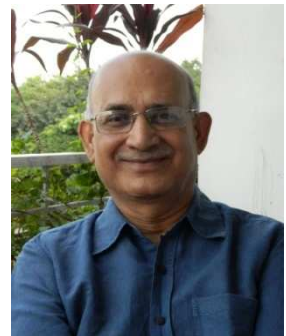
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