Maritime Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

Dr. Braham Parkash

Associate Professor Department of Political Science C.R. Kisan College, Jind (Hr.)

Abstract:

Recently policy makers and various scholars have paid much attention to the emergence of the term Indo-Pacific to describe the changing regional security system in Asia. More accurately this region is re-emerging for historical pattern of commercial, cultural and strategic importance in the changing global scenario. The Indo-Pacific is not a concept framed solely by the rise of India; rather it might be called an Indo-Pacific strategic system. Japan has also become more active and confident as a strategic player internationally, and it can be expected to join the rank of the key Indo-Pacific powers. The central sea lane in the South China Sea attracts China to enter in this region that may be very critical for the peace and stability of this region. Now the question arises whose region is Indo-Pacific and what is the strategic perspective and security structure including natural resources and environmental changes in the Indo-Pacific relations. The present research paper highlights some maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific relations in the present global security scenario.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Security Challenges, Global Scenario, South China Sea, Strategic Perspectives, Environmental Challenges.

Introduction: Indo-Pacific region has its strategic importance and a set of regional actor including the US, India, China, Australia, Indonesia and Japan has taken keen interest in this region. Moreover, the shift of the US and some other countries towards the Indian Ocean has also changed the security scenario including by the dramatic economic growth of China and the steady rise of India's trade, the increased importance of raw material and resources, the escalating crude oil exports of the middle east to Asia have critically affected the security perspectives in the region. Some radical changes in security environment have also been characterized by the regional and global powers ranging from maritime partnership and trade initiatives in Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, the recent rebalance of United States towards the Asia Pacific has included strong naval presence for several purposes and among some major US interest in Indo-Pacific region are

concerned with the freedom of navigation for trade and commerce, ensuring a stable balance of power monitoring and deterring threats from actors such as Iran and North Korea, and directing various maritime security operations, counter trafficking, counter piracy missions etc. Meanwhile India and China have also sought to thread a needle between their strategic relations. Likewise a host of economic and political interest around the region have changed the security perception between the US and regional powers.

What is the Indo-Pacific Region?

It means recognizing the accelerating economic and security connection between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean which is known as a single strategic system in the contemporary security environment. This system can be understood as a set of geo-political power relationship among major powers in the region. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific system may be defined by the geographically expanding interests and reach of China and India including the presence of the US in both the pacific and Indian Ocean which recognizes the arc of trade routes, energy flows, diplomatic bonds and strategic connections between the two oceans. These links become more important and crucial from the rise of China and India as outward

looking economic and military power including the expansion of their economic interest and strategic imperatives in the maritime zones of the region. In a particular manner this concept may be underscored under the fact that the Indian Ocean has replaced the Atlantic as the world's most busiest and strategically very significant trade corridor carrying 2/3 of the globe's, oil shipments. It is not only a new name for the Asia Pacific rather it is a region which accurately may be termed Indo-Pacific Asia.

One of the most common interests of China, India and Japan is to control the maritime resources in the region. However a major driver of interaction between the pacific and Indian Ocean, economically and strategically has been the extension of Chinese interest and presence in the region. It is hardly to decide whose region is Indo-Pacific. It is the expansion of China's interest, diplomacy and strategic reach in to the Indian Ocean that most of all defines the Indo-Pacific. China is hardly the only East-Asian Power with substantial interest in the region and its vital sea lane through the Indian-Ocean and the South China Sea makes its strategic presence in the region. Likewise power house economies of East Asia depend accurately on oil imports across the region. Therefore, it is a major strategic

importance for China to claim on the region. Japan also sees in India and Australia strategic partner of considerable potentials including the Japan's maritime security concerns with China. Some of the most innovative and consequential of Japan's move in security diplomacy has strengthened security ties with its Indo-Pacific partners.

Security Challenges: Recently it has been observed that Indo-Pacific region is expanding regional and global trade in goods and resources that has raised a new set of maritime security challenges in the region. Some security concern such as internal political upheaval, insurgency, interstate tensions, sea lane security and territorial dispute are new growing security threats in the region, likewise there are some other growing security risks from non-state actors such as terrorism, trafficking, piracy, environmental degradation, climate change, natural disaster and depletion of natural resources. These security challenges confront equally to all nations bordering this region.

This region is also home to a number of prominent maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea. However, some of these disputes have been managed peacefully and all efforts to keep stability in the region have also been taken by China and other regional power. It is believed that a peaceful resolution of such conflicts can be promoted through International law, particularly the 1982 United Nations convention on the law of sea. Legal measures must be combined with policy initiatives that demonstrate consistency, creativity, durability and adequate resource availability. A combination of these legal, naval and policy measures can ensure Indo-Pacific nations act as capable, adaptive partners rather than disputatious, tense competitors. The inability of regional and global powers to secure the vast Indian Ocean has also allowed for the sustained trafficking of illicit narcotics, weapons, and common contraband such as oil, cigarettes, charcoal and endangered species.

The Indo-Pacific rising geostrategic profile has boosted demand for maritime activity and infrastructure through the region. `In long turn this region may change as a regional industrial hub enabling of technological innovation and stimulation of world trade flows. However, maritime development may be brought with their own cost by the global powers. The existing threats of armed robbery, kidnapping and sabotage from pirates, organized criminal gangs and terrorists networks are likely to increase as the region's offshore industry expands and the development of possible

targets increased. Likewise demand for coastal development of aquaculture, roads, buildings, and infrastructure exacerbates the degradation of mangroves, coral reefs, wet lands and other ecological habitats. Therefore, an environmental imbalance in the region has increased the vulnerabilities in the maritime infrastructure of the region.

The climate change has endangered the maritime infrastructure in the region. The exposure of coastal assets and urban infrastructure, rising sea level and climate change threaten, bio-diversity loss, shoreline erosion, salt water intrusion into reverse and fresh water aquifers, severe storm surges, the forced replaced and migration of population are emerging security concern in Indo-Pacific region which may create problem for food security, economic security and regional security in the region. However, fisheries in the Indo-Pacific region are influenced by dynamic factor such as trade access, security and climate change and likewise some other regional security concern such as the use of fishing vessel for piracy, terrorism, trafficking, organize crime and prostitution, conflict over resources, territory and maritime boundary may further extend security problem in indo-pacific region. Here it is also noteworthy that energy resources may also affect security

relations in the region. However, most of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region are facing common environmental challenges and it requires framing a holistic approach to facilitate integration, communication, negotiation, data sharing, transfer of technology and best practice dissemination among the regional and global powers of this region.

In the South China Sea, large scale land reclamation and militarization activities have been taking place which may in long term raise some security tension in Indo-Pacific region. Here the South China Sea contains Japan and Australia's vital sea lane upon which our mutual transportation of good and energy resources depend. Therefore, we have a legitimate rise to express our serious security concerns in the present global security environment. These concerns have also been reflected in the joint statement of the US and ASEAN leaders summits held in Feb 2016. Therefore, it is urgently required for all powers in the regions to play a cooperative and constructive role in the region. In order to preserve an open and free navigation, it is expected to all countries to maintain the principle of Sea Law under UN convention. It has become more critical after the increasing Australian Patrol activities in the

South China Sea. Likewise, in the Indian Ocean, it has become necessary for India to work together in order to secure stability and peace of the region. However, some positive development has been brought about by the anti-Piracy cooperation by the global powers. Nevertheless, we still need to work together for the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion: To conclude it can be said that most of the regional powers in Indo-Pacific region share a common interest on the economic, political and environmental ground. If they want to ensure peace and stability of the region, it can be achieved only through capacity building and regional cooperation. It is suggested that capacity building measures such as financial aids, assessed provision, military training and education, regional cooperation schemes such as multi-lateral exercises, information sharing and joint patrol should be exercised by the regional and global powers. Here some deterrence strategic may play a vital role to deal with security threats in the region. Nevertheless we cannot ignore the facts that some significant relationships have not only developed between great powers in Indo-Pacific region, but also between smaller states. Now, most of the regional and global powers seem to share threats of environmental degradation and fragile coastal eco-system, vulnerable infrastructure, terrorism, trafficking etc. Now we need to provide a pragmatic platform for the solution of security challenges in the region which can be realized only through the cooperative and elaborative thinking adopted by global powers as well as regional powers.

References:

- J.M. Caffrie, **Positioning Navies for the Future,** Halstead Press, Sydney, 2006.

- D. Hinrichsen, **The Atlas of Coasts and Oceans: Eco System, Threatened Resources and Marine Conservation,** University of Chicago Press, 2011.

- Z. Gao and B.B. Jia, "The Nine – Line in the South China Sea; History, Status and Implications", **The American Journal of International Law,** Vol. 107 (1), 2013.

- D. Michel and R. Passrell, **Evolving Maritime Geo Politics in the Indo-Pacific Region,** Steamson Centre, Washington, 2014.

- R. Pedrozo, "The Bull in the China Shop: Raising Tensions in the Asia Pacific Region", **International Law Studies**, Vol. 90, 2014.

- D. Brewster, **Indo Pacific Maritime Security: Challenges and**

Cooperation, Australian National University, 2016.

- E. Lyndon and Others, "A Road Map to A Sustainable Indian Ocean Blue Economy", **Journal of the Indian Ocean,** Vol. 12 (1),2016.