

ISSN 1994 2052

# Peace and Security Review

Volume 6 ■ Number 12 ■ Second Quarter 2014

## I N S I D E

### **Will The Rise of China Remain Peaceful?**

*Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan*

### **Iran-U.S. Rapprochement and the Emerging Security Paradigm of Middle East**

*Muhammad Ruhul Amin*

### **Arab Spring and the Contemporary Geopolitics of the Middle East**

*Noor Mohammad Sarker*

### **The Race for Dominance in Indian Ocean: Is There Danger for Smaller Nations?**

*Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury*



**Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies**  
**[www.bipss.org.bd](http://www.bipss.org.bd)**

**Editor**

Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.)

**Assistant Editor**

Shafqat Munir

**International Editorial Board**

Professor Dr. Aseem Prakash, University of Washington, USA;  
Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Head, International Centre for Political  
Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR),  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore;  
Professor Dr. Syed Anwar Husain, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh;  
Professor Dr. Kazunari Sakai, Kobe University, Japan;  
Dr. Syed Mahmud Ali, Senior Editorial Coordinator, BBC World Service;  
Professor Rommel C. Banlaoi, Executive Director, Philippine  
Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR)

**Adviser**

Hamiduzzaman

**Guidelines to Contributors**

The *Peace and Security Review* is a multi-disciplinary quarterly journal of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The Journal provides a forum for debate and discussion on peace, security and development issues in national, regional and extra-regional perspectives.

Original write-up between 6000 to 8000 words not published or submitted elsewhere, may be submitted to the Editor of the journal. The Chicago Manual of Style should be followed in the write-up placing notes either at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or at the end of the essay (endnotes). Table, map and diagrams should be placed in separate sheets.

Contributors are requested to enclose short biographical note and abstract of the article.

The views expressed in the articles published in the each quarters of the Journal not necessarily represent the views and policies of the Editorial Board or the Institute.

# Peace and Security Review

Volume 6 ■ Number 12 ■ Second Quarter 2014



**Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies**  
[www.bipss.org.bd](http://www.bipss.org.bd)

**Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS)**

House No.: 405, Road No.: 06, DOHS, Baridhara

Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Telephone: 8414284-85

Fax: 880-2-8411309

E-mail: [info@bipss.org.bd](mailto:info@bipss.org.bd)

URL: [www.bipss.org.bd](http://www.bipss.org.bd)

Copyright © Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS)

No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored, in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, or otherwise, without permission of the Editor of the Journal.

ISSN 1994-2052

Subscription Rates (including air mail charge)

Single Copy: Tk. 500.00/ US\$ 40.00

Annual: Tk. 2000.00/ US\$ 160.00

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS)

Produced and Printed by S.A Printers Limited, 22/2 Sheikh Shaheb Bazar,  
Azimpur, Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh

## Contents

<i>Editor's Note</i>	v
<b>Will The Rise of China Remain Peaceful?</b> <i>Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan</i>	1
<b>Iran-U.S. Rapprochement and the Emerging Security Paradigm of Middle East</b> <i>Muhammad Ruhul Amin</i>	25
<b>Arab Spring and the Contemporary Geopolitics of the Middle East</b> <i>Noor Mohammad Sarker</i>	39
<b>The Race for Dominance in Indian Ocean: Is There Danger for Smaller Nations?</b> <i>Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury</i>	63

## Editor's Note

This edition of the *Peace and Security Review* appears in a tumultuous time of contemporary history marked by the 'return of geopolitics' and old fashioned power play. The annexation of Crimea by Russia, the indiscriminate bombing by the Israelis on Gaza in search of their own 'security', the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), the Arab Spring and the changing geopolitical landscape of the Middle East affecting the Iran-U.S. rapprochement, the increasingly assertive strategy by China towards some of her neighbours raising doubts about her 'peaceful rise', the desire for dominance in the Indian Ocean region by a number of emerging powers, etc signifies that the most vexing geopolitical questions are yet to be settled. Indeed, geopolitics and the emerging security paradigms have been the 'show stoppers' of current time and deservingly features as the central theme in the articles in this edition of the Peace and Security Review.

Posing the enduring question: "Will the Rise of China Remain Peaceful?" **Group Captain Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan** makes a convincing argument in the first article explaining the regional and geopolitical context. The intriguing discussion contrasting the traits of 'revisionist' vs 'status quo' power serves the reader as an important theoretical construct to analyze not just China but any rising state. Highlighting the liberal-authoritarian dilemma faced by of China, the author argues that, at the ideational level, the practices and decisions of Chinese leadership reflect exactly the mutually inclusive nature of the opposite. However, the author contends that China's spectrum of differentiated relationship with her neighbours, level of integration with the international system, trend of past military confrontation, and the geopolitical interests evidences that China's peaceful rise is possible with the exception of Taiwan issue. Indeed, for China, the issue of Taiwan is viewed as 'nation building' and any concession on Taiwan risk unacceptable political risk for the Chinese leadership – making it the only case where China may not hesitate using military force.

The second article by **Professor Muhammad Ruhul Amin** titled "Iran-U.S. Rapprochement and the Emerging Security Paradigm of Middle East" in

essence deals with the enduring quest for a security structure that will ensure the peace and stability of the Middle East. Tracing the historic rise and fall of US-Iran relationship, the author charts the most recent events including the phone call by US president Obama to the Iranian President Rouhani following his incarnation in June 2013 -- the beginning of the rapprochement era. However, the author paints a pessimistic picture of the current US-Iran rapprochement by drawing relevance from the dominance of realist paradigm in American foreign policy as opposed to Wilsonian idealism. According to Professor Amin, the question of Israel's security, U.S. domestic political compulsions and the anthropological and social psychology of the Iranian people who are unlikely to budge by 'America's idealistic chit-chat' remains the main obstacles for the rapprochement to succeed. The author argues that the unprecedented elevation of Israel's military strengths has been solely responsible for the regional instability in the Middle East and suggests that a deterrent strategy achieved through a nuclear balance of power between Israel and Iran can ensure peace and stability to the Middle East and wider international community. Author's contention that any step to destabilize the flourishing environment of the balance of power between the great powers of Middle East including Iran and Israel will not bring any good result for the international community is worth noting.

In the third article, **Noor Mohammad Sarker**, offers a smart understanding on the Middle East, its geopolitical significance and the implications of Arab Spring on the geopolitics of the region. Illustrating various illuminating facts, figures and strategic importance of the Middle East, the author makes a detail account of the Arab Spring that began with the self-immolation of a street vendor in December 2010 in Tunisia and subsequently spread to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and (arguably) Syria. Contrasting the 1989 people's uprising in the Central and the Easter Europe with that of the Arab Spring, the author, in essence establishes the centrality of geopolitics in international relations as he contends: "Geopolitically, the movement (i.e. Arab Spring) favoured the contingency of western influence over the region, along with the safeguarding of Israel's security." Indeed, the failure to consolidate an expected level of democratic reforms through the Arab Spring in key regional powers like Egypt and Syria has resulted in achieving minor structural transformation, leaving the wider geopolitical landscape of the Middle East undaunted, if not more complicated. Much of which is evident in the continued crisis in the Middle East and the race for regional rebalancing of power by the dominant actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran along the sectarian fault line. The blend of descriptive and theoretical analysis, together with its lucid expression makes the article suitable for both casual and serious reader.

The final article by **Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury**, examines the (potential) danger of the small states in the Indian Ocean region amidst the changing geo-political scenario and the rebalancing of power in the region. Highlighting the geopolitical significance of the Indian Ocean, the author, in essence, recognizes that the US unipolarity remains crucial for the small states in the region as it allows them the freedom of movement and access to explore the resources in the vast Indian Ocean and its associated seas/bays. Reviewing the naval military power of US, China and India in particular, the paper also underlines that the challenge to US (military) dominance in the region is markedly insignificant and the power transition is 'gradual' -- that may intern ensure a steady shift of power in due course, if at all.

Intriguingly, the articles in this edition of *Peace and Security Review* relate in some way or the other with the U.S. – once the “empire by invitation”, and the crowded geopolitical neighbourhood in which it has to operate today where shifts in power routinely provoke counterbalancing and rebalancing. In such a dynamic geopolitical context, the quest however remains in building a world, to borrow from President John F. Kennedy, “where the weak are safe and the strong are just.”

The authors of all the articles of this issue deserve our sincere appreciations for enlightening us through their thought provoking ideas to better comprehend the changing geopolitical landscape of our time. We deeply appreciate the support lent to us by our international editorial board and the handful of reviewers, whose expertise and intellectual acumen has clearly paid off, culminating in the accomplishment of this issue. As always, our esteemed readers and subscribers remains our source of inspirations for their valuable feedback and suggestions that we continue to welcome to enrich our endeavour of knowledge creation.

**Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.)**

Editor



## Will The Rise of China Remain Peaceful?

*Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan\**

### Abstract

As China continues her 'peaceful rise', all arguments surrounding the potential risks of military confrontation in the region revolves around whether China will emerge as a status quo or revisionist power. The economic benefits and conflict potentials posed by a rising China arguably affects its neighbours in a differentiated manner resulting diverse understanding and actions creating a unique regional and global security dynamics. Expanding the status quo vs. revisionist power argument, this paper takes account of China's cooperating behaviour at the international and regional level and its track record of using military force to understand whether the rise of China will remain peaceful or not. Highlighting China's spectrum of differentiated relationship with her neighbours from unilateral bellicosity to multilateralism, the paper contends that, with the exception of Taiwan issue, there are not many compulsions and incentives for military confrontation as China continues to rise in the world as a status quo power.

### Introduction

The seemingly never-ending debate about the implications of a rising China captivates scholars and policy makers alike dividing them essentially in two broad streams: one portraying the rise of China as a '*status quo*' power (Taylor, 2007; Kang, 2007; Chan 2008; 2004; Shambaugh 2005; Johnston 2003) while the others see it as a '*revisionist*' state<sup>1</sup> (Buzan, 2010, Kagan 2009; Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008). The ideological and cultural incompatibility<sup>2</sup> of China with

---

\* **Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan** is a Group Captain in Bangladesh Air Force and a Chevening scholar. Email: zahid8244@yahoo.com.

<sup>1</sup> Much of this debate is couched in realist or quasi-realist term extending the power transition theory. The power transition theory contends that the 'differential rate of growth' between the dominant nation and the challenger can destabilizes all members and precipitates world wars. See Organski Kugler, 1980; Buzan and Wæver, 2003, Lemke and Tammen, 2003, Chan 2008, 2004a, 2004c.

<sup>2</sup> The ideological factors are rooted in China's practice of one party communist system in an era of democracy while the cultural incompatibility was succinctly put by Huntington (1993): the "unholy alliance between Islamic and Confucian civilizations" is the most fundamental threat to the West.

the Western value system together with the geopolitical and geoeconomic factors have prompted some to conclude that “China cannot rise peacefully” (Mearsheimer. 2010, p.382). Amidst China’s ascendant status and future role in world politics, the reunification of Taiwan remains her *casus belli*; China views the reunification as a ‘nation building’ efforts; any concession by the Chinese leadership on Taiwan issue risks being labelled as “*qianguzuiren*” (i.e. ‘wrongdoer who would be condemned for a thousand generations’), (Kang, 2007, p. 80; Buzan and Wæver, 2003). Conversely, the ‘socializing’ effects of ARF, resulting in the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties (DOC) involving the South China Sea issue between China and the ASEAN is arguably on a more peaceful multilateral track (Kang, 2007; Calica, 2013; Sarith, 2013). Again, the relationship with Japan heightened by historical animosity, nationalistic fervour, US-Japan naval exercises, declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) by China and the resulting tension in East China sea, knots China’s security dilemma not only with the ‘Off-shore balancer’<sup>3</sup> but also their host countries in a multidimensional way (Chan, 2008; Ateba 2002). In such a compelling context, this paper examines the likelihood of military confrontation between China and her neighbours as it continues to rise to great power status. The paper *first* expand the ‘status quo’ vs. ‘revisionist’ power argument contrasting China’s cooperating behaviour and military modernization to validate the ‘peaceful rise’ and what it means to the countries in the region. *Second*, the paper examines China’s differentiated relationship with her neighbours highlighting the spectrum from unilateral bellicosity to multilateralism to identify scenarios under which China might consider using its military might. *Finally*, the paper contends that, with the exception of Taiwan issue, there are not many compulsions and incentives for military confrontation as China rise in the world as a status quo power.

### Status Quo Vs Revisionist

A rising state’s identity relative to the international society could be described as ‘status quo’ ‘detached’ or ‘revisionist’.<sup>4</sup> Identifying a state as a ‘revisionist’ or ‘status quo’ power is often *consequential*. China is no more detached (i.e. indifferent) from the international community. Over the last three decades,

<sup>3</sup> As, Ateba (2002) opines, ‘PRC’s security remains hostage to the behaviour of potential adversaries and unreliable neighbours hosting foreign troops or with alliances with the remaining superpower.’ (p.11). In his recent visit to Japan, US President Barak Obama reassured Japan that the disputed uninhabited islands in the East China Sea claimed by both Tokyo and Beijing “fall within the scope” of a US-Japanese security treaty, implying the US could step in militarily in the event of a clash over the territory (Mullen and Liptak, 2014)

<sup>4</sup> Qin (2009) offers these three categories correlating them with factors that can hold societies together namely, coercion (forced conformity of behaviour), calculation (instrumental self-interest), or belief (ideational acceptance).

China has struggled over the threshold of membership of international society and has evolved from a revisionist to a detached and now a status quo power (Qin, 2010, p.153, Johnston, 2003). From a Chinese perspective, Qin (2009) outlines three degrees of identification of a status quo state: A state may be *coerced* to identify itself with the international society; a state's integration with the international society may be driven by its *own calculated self interest*; or a state's *ideational identification* (i.e. identity, culture, legitimacy) may convince her for complete internalization of the international social system and norms without any need for coercion or drive of interests. In essence, a 'status quo' power aims to "maintain the distribution of power as it exists at a particular moment in history" (Morgenthau, 1978, p.46). The concept is partly viewed in terms of *intentions*, not just capabilities. A status quo power accommodates and operates within the norms of the primary international institutes. Such primary institutions of international society<sup>5</sup> includes fundamental, value-oriented, and constitutive of actors, including sovereignty, territoriality, diplomacy, great power management, nationalism, the market, equality of people, and environmental stewardship. Buzan (2010) suggests that a status quo power accepts the international society and institutions at the *ideational level*. China may be dissatisfied on certain aspects of the primary institutions' functions and authority, but it is not willing or capable of re-writing the primary international institutes and norms. Indeed, China's diplomacy in the past three decades has more or less maintained a 'no-enemy assumption' navigating along the 'middle course', even in crisis situation (Qin, 2010, p.147)

A 'revisionist' power, on the other hand, expresses a general *dissatisfaction* and wants to rewrite the rules by which relations among nations work. To secure her rightful place in the international society, a revisionist state may resort to measures that may in turn trigger military confrontation.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly thus, military modernization is an integral part of all states with revisionist intension.<sup>7</sup> Offensive realists believes that *any rising state* by default

<sup>5</sup> Differentiating between international system (as interacting parts) and international society (as self-conscious and in part self-regulating) Buzan (1999) contends that an "international system can exist without a society, but the converse is not true" (p.331). Also See Buzan (2004) pp.167, 187 and 241. Describing Buzan's account of international society as "Vanguardist, Syncretist, and Layered" euro-centric conceptualization, Qin (2010) outlines the 'process approach' to explain international society and argues that (international) "human society" is born out of an open process of dynamic and complex social relations where "rules, regimes, and institutions are not established to govern or restrain the behaviour of individual actors in society, but to *harmonize relations* among members of society". (See p.138).

<sup>6</sup> Contrasting this view, Chan (2004a) cites that the replacement of the UK by the US as the world's sole super power confirms that 'peaceful rise' is possible (p.14). Also see Organski and Kugler, 1980, pp. 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> A 'revisionist' will "employ military force to change the status quo and extend their values". (Schweller,1994;p.105)

is a revisionist power, as they are compelled to maximize their power in order to achieve security under an anarchic international system (Mearsheimer 2001,p.29). Cooperation only last as long as status quo is unchanged; the desire for re-drafting the rules is inherent. Defensive realists limit such general characterization and suggest: *only* those rising state *that want to change* the rules as the power distribution changes can be labeled as revisionist.<sup>8</sup> Buzan (2010) further classifies revisionist state as 'revolutionary', 'orthodox' and 'reformist' (pp.17-18). According to Buzan, *revolutionary revisionist* challenges the underlying normative content of existing system to become the new custodian of international society. Its main discord with the international society is on *ideational ground* as it seeks to overthrow both the status order and the form of international society. An *orthodox revisionist* shows a general acceptance of ideational content and institutional structure, but remains *discontent* with its own *status* within the international society. China does accept many of the main institutions of international society and operates within the international principles. However, China's assertive role and ambiguous stance on *some* international institutions together with her concern for great power status convinces some to classify her in this category. Finally, a *reformist revisionist* accepts the ideational basis of the international society but aims to reform others and if possible change its status in the international system through a combination of calculated and involved moves. China's acceptance of a pluralist society, mutual coexistence, free market etc and her resistance to more politically liberal institutions, democracy, human rights etc eludes to put her in this category.

Assessing whether or not a rising state has a revisionist or status quo intention, however, is not a straightforward issue. First, intentions remain in the minds of decision makers and cannot be empirically verified. Intentions can change as state's power increases; dissatisfied rising power has all the incentives to hide its revisionist intent. Second, it also begs the question: what constitutes the 'international community' to judge the revisionists intent of a state? The international community and its principles – the benchmarks to measure revisionist or status quo intentions remain highly contested and dynamic. Much of this contestation arises from the underpinning that the international community and its principles are often synonymous with the *dominant power* and the dominant power is *always* satisfied with the international order. A rising state's integration into the global community and its subscription to the shared standards can vary over time. The assertion that the dominant power is necessarily oriented toward the status quo automatically relegates all other states as revisionist. Navigating through such

---

<sup>8</sup> See Organski and Kugler (1980) p.23.

complexities, the most common benchmark used to judge whether a power is status quo or revisionist involves examining (i) her level of cooperation in the international society, (ii) nature and direction of alliance building in the system and (iii) pace of military modernization.<sup>9</sup> A brief comparison of China's status quo vs revisionist traits based on these three benchmarks are placed as annex A to this paper.

If we consider the United Nations as the best approximation of the 'international society' then the voting patterns of the states, particularly the pattern of exercising veto power by the permanent members of the Security Council can shed some lights about states' *intention*. Typically the Security Council resolutions are products of intense negotiation, compromises and reflective of the majority. In essence, a veto is a reflection when a minority overrides the wishes of a majority; thus, it could be a key indicator of judging state's positioning relative to the international community. In last three decades (1984-2014), China exercised veto power only in eight occasions in the Security Council as opposed to 42 times by the US and 12 times by the Russian Federation (see table 2). More revealing is the fact that only in two occasions (resolutions on Central America and Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) China was the only vetoing nation. Such voting pattern firmly places China with the majority of the international community.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the quest for operationalizing the 'status quo' and 'revisionist' concept, Kim (1991), highlights the alliance building while Werner and Kugler (1996) and Schweller (1994) adds rapid increase in military spending as an indicator that a state is dissatisfied (pp.86-88 and p.105).

**Table 1. Summary of Vetoes in the United Nations Security Council: 1984- 2014**

Country	Total Number of Veto Exercised between 1984 - 2014 (22nd May)	Issues
The USA	42	29 US vetoes broadly relates to the Middle East, Palestinian question, situation in the occupied Arab territories and Syria. Four each relates to Nicaragua and South Africa issue, two relates to Namibia, one each relates to Panama, Bosnia and Herzegovina and US air raid on Libya (1986).
Russian Federation*	12	Four Russian vetoes relates to Syria, two on Cyprus issue and one each for Middle East, Myanmar, Bosnia Herzegovina, Zimbabwe, Georgia and Ukraine related issues.
China	8	Four Chinese vetoes relates to Syria (in line with Russia), and one each relates to resolutions on Central America, Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (where China was the only vetoing nation), Myanmar and Zimbabwe (with Russia).
France	3	One vetoes relates to Panama, one each related to the Middle East (PLO) issue and US raid on Libya (1986)
United Kingdom	9	Four vetoes relates to the South Africa issue, two on resolution regarding Namibia and one each relates to Panama, Middle East (PLO) and US raid on Libya (1986).

\* In 1984 Russian Federation was listed as USSR.

**Source:** Author's compilation from Official UN website (Dag Hammarskjöld Library).

Kastner and Saunders (2011) in their empirical study based on the travel data of senior Chinese leadership and foreign policy priorities, foreign direct investment initiatives etc, also concluded China as a status quo power. Their study based on President Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin's travel abroad shows that both were avoiding visiting countries that are antagonistic to the United States and were somewhat less likely to visit countries that were the target of US sanctions.<sup>10</sup> They also found no evidence that China is attaching a disproportionate priority on relations with US allies in the region. All these patterns are consistent with the characterization of China as a status quo power. However, at the ideational level, the issue is more complicated as the practices and decisions of Chinese leadership reflects exactly the mutually inclusive nature of the opposites; for example in economic front, China has embraced market economy, became member of WTO and has been almost irreversibly integrated into the US dominated global system compelling her international behaviour increasingly bounded and shaped by global institutions. On the other hand China's political system based on one party communist agenda in a era of democracy, increasingly assertive posture on issues like Taiwan, South China Sea, declaration of ADIZ, Tibet, Xinjian, etc depicts a 'non-compatible' and 'dissatisfied' picture.

### **Spectrum of Regional Cooperation: From Unilateral Bellicosity to Multilateralism?**

Contrasting her chequered history of use of force from 1950-95 (see table 2), China, today is more 'socialized' and cooperative, perhaps with a notion of 'pull back the bow but do not let loose the arrow'. Coming out of the uncertainty and 'creeping assertiveness' of 1980's, China's relationship with her neighbours has arguably settled into a mix of unilateral bellicosity (over Taiwan issue) and an increasing comfort in multilateralism. Such changes can be linked to two fundamental drivers: First, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation leaders<sup>11</sup> the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) transformed China's security concerns from the areas of high politico-military dimensions to the *economic security* as a core issue. The emphasis on economic security was sustained and expanded by subsequent generations of CPC leadership (Qin 2009) to include other non-traditional security threats such as environmental security, global terrorism, proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons, cyber security etc. Such changes

<sup>10</sup> Despite some ambiguities during the Hu/Wen period the overall pattern that emerges from the study is most consistent with the characterization of China as a status quo power. See Kastner and Saunders (2011) pp.173-175

<sup>11</sup> The first generation of CPC leadership refers to the period of 1949-1976 with Mao Zedong at its core, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation 1976 – 1992 (with Deng Xiaoping at its core), 3<sup>rd</sup> generation 1992-2003 (Jiang Zemin at the core), 4th generation 2003-2012 (Hu Jintao) and 5<sup>th</sup> generation 2012 – on ward (Wen Xiabao).

attributed to China's positive identification and orientation with the regional and international society. As a result, East Asian states have seen more peace and stability than at any time since the Opium Wars.

**Table 2. Major Incidents of Use of Force by China: 1950 Onwards**

Period	Incident	Objective
1950-53	Korea: Major combat with US forces	Pre-emption (To obstruct interference from great power in immediate neighbourhood)
1954-55 and 1958	Taiwan: Offshore islands operations	coercion
1962	Taiwan: Deterrence deployment	coercion
1962	India: limited border war in Northern India to sanction Delhi for its alleged intrusion in Tibet	Coercion (to thwart India's 'Forward Policy')
1965-68	Vietnam: Support Vietnam against U.S. intervention.	deterrence (To obstruct interference from great power in immediate neighbourhood)
1969	Soviet Union: Limited border clashes by ambushing Soviet border guards in disputed Zhenbao island in the Ussuri river.	deterrence
1974	South Vietnam: Occupy Crescent Group in Paracel (Xisha) Island (unobstructed)	Fulfil long standing territorial claim at an opportune time
1979	Vietnam: Limited combat in retaliation of Vietnamese attack on Cambodia.	Coercion (also to obstruct Soviet strategic calculation)
1988	Vietnam: Naval skirmish near Spratly (Nansha) Island	Fulfil long standing territorial claim at an opportune time
1995-96	Taiwan: Missile firing and joint exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan	coercive diplomacy
1995	Philippines: Mischief Reef (Unobstructed)	Fulfil long standing territorial claim at an opportune time

**Source:** Author's Compilation from Burles and Shulsky (1999) Storey (1999), Whiting (2001), Buzan and Wæver (2003) and Holslag (2011).

Second, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) opened a new era of economic cooperation and integration into the global economic system.<sup>12</sup> Since China's accession to WTO the ASEAN countries have increased their exports to China by 390 percent and expanded their share in China's total imports from 6 percent to 9 percent (Ianchovichina et al, 2004, p.58). Several countries now enjoy a trade surplus with China. China also joined numerous regional and international institutions, playing an increasingly visible role in global and regional economy (Johnston 2003, Aaron, 1993/94). China has been lauded for playing positive role following the South Asian financial crisis and also for sharing the sub-region's emphasis on sovereignty and mutual non-interference. China has sought to build stable relationships with other major powers (Goldstein 2005; Zhang and Tang 2005) while reassuring neighbors about its peaceful intentions (Zheng 2005;Kang 2007). Despite the current impasse, China had dramatically improved tense relations with Vietnam and has worked to resolve many longstanding territorial disputes along its land borders with India (Shambaugh 2005, Taylor 2007). Chinese participation and conforming to the international non-proliferation, reducing exports of arms and sensitive technologies abroad (Medeiros 2007) closer integration with global economy<sup>13</sup> (Lardy 2002) paints a picture of a *cooperative China*. Thus, not surprisingly, most of China's neighbours have 'accommodated' the rising China rejecting the conventional wisdom of balancing (tightly defined as preparations for the use of force) or bandwagoning ("carrying favour" via alliances and close cooperation with the rising state) as they see more advantage than danger in China's rise, in making the region more stable. (Kang, 2007, pp. 52–55)

The creation of ARF in 1994 facilitated the process of 'socializing' China.<sup>14</sup> The limitation of ASEAN was partially overcome by ARF as it allowed addressing security issues involving all actors. Despite questionable and often rather anomalous results, several ministerial level committees of ARF, provides China and her neighbours a useful multilateral platform to generate and

---

<sup>12</sup> Deng Xiaoping's oft cited quote: "there are elements of market economy in socialism and elements of planned economy in capitalism" (Xiaoping, 1993, p.373) proved transformational for China's market reform and subsequent entry into the WTO. Also see Ianchovichina et al, 2004, pp.57-78) for the impact of China's accession to WTO.

<sup>13</sup> It is argued that China's development has a *symbiotic* relationship with world peace. (Zheng, 2005; Gungwu, 2008; Sunders, 2006; Chan 2004b; Qin 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Some argue that ARF came into being as US ended its long standing opposition to multilateral security ceding to its economic priorities in the region. (Buzan and Wæver, 2003,p.158; Leifer, 1996, p.55)

<sup>15</sup> The ARF Senior Officials' Meeting are held in each year in May or June. Two ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group (ISG) meetings and four Inter-Sessional Meetings (ISM) are also held annually on Confidence Building Measures, Preventive Diplomacy and focus areas like

sustain a network of dialogues to diffuse and control regional tensions.<sup>15</sup> In a bid to counterweight China's increasing penetration into Myanmar, 'strategic encirclement' of India, deployment of intelligence equipment around Indian Ocean, ARF has been successful in drawing all major parties into a shared inter-regional security cooperation. China also ratified the 2010 third protocol amending the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia that calls for settling disputes through regional process. China's role as a BRICS member state and its closer economic cooperation is an important catalyst in defusing potential tensions with her big neighbours: India and Russia. This however, does not preclude the likelihood of 'hedging and engaging' between China and India. China has become an observer of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and seemingly playing a balancing act in South Asia. While it continues its plan of strategic encirclement of India by engaging Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives with development assistance, greater economic ties (Krishnan, 2013) building naval ports etc, it has also set a target to boost bilateral trade with India to \$100 billion by 2015 (Karim, 2010). Given such willingness of China to multilateralism and mechanism in place, the possible flashpoints for military confrontation are indeed numbered.

### **Military Modernization: A Threat to Status Quo?**

Although China's military modernization in recent times is quite significant, its military capabilities does not quite match with that of US.<sup>16</sup> Leveraging her impressing economic growth, China has undertaken a rapid military modernization program.<sup>17</sup> Chinese navy doubles in size every 7 years enhancing its coastal 'sea-denial' capacities (Edward, 2010, Karim, 2012).

---

Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Disaster Relief, Maritime Security, and Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. Second track institutions, such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS), also generates ideas and inputs for ARF ("first track") consideration. Current participants of ARF includes: Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, South Korea, EU, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, North Korea, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, United States and Viet Nam.

<sup>16</sup> China defence spending increased from \$30 billion in 2000 to nearly \$129 billion in 2011. The US's defence budget still exceeds China's budget by 4.5 times. However if China continues its trend, her military budget would overtake the US's in 2035 (SIPRI, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> In terms of percentage of GDP, China's military expenditure has remained little over 2 percent while the US military spending is approximately 4.7 percent (SIPRI, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> A2/AD concept focuses on using targeted ground attack and anti-ship ballistic missiles, developing a fleet of more modernized submarines and cyber and anti-satellite weapons to exterminate hostile military bases from afar.

China's pursuit for "anti access/area denial" (A2/AD) capabilities<sup>18</sup> aims to limit US military power projection in the region. In August 2005, China conducted major Sino-Russian joint military exercises in the vicinity of China's Shandong Peninsula. Russia continues to transfer substantial quantities of advanced weaponry to China, including Su-30MKK fighter aircraft, 'Sovremenny'-class destroyers, 'Kilo'-class diesel submarines, and SA-10/15/20 surface-to-air missiles. Articulating China's security concerns, her National Defence Policy (NDP) describes the regional security as "becoming more intricate and volatile." Terming the South China sea issue as a "pressure points" dragging on "without solution in sight" China's NDP (2010) underscores that China is in a "critical phase" and facing heavy "demands in safeguarding national security." All these narratives register her concerns and possibly unmet aspirations. However, the stated "goals and tasks" of Chinese military remains internally focused such as Opposing and containing the separatist forces for "Taiwan independence", cracking down on separatist forces for East Turkistan and Tibet independence etc (NDP, 2010,p.5).

The scale and pace of Chinese military modernization, when matched with her stated goals and tasks does challenge the 'peaceful rise' theory. Successive Australian Defence white papers (2010, 2009) note that China's military modernization "appears to be *beyond* the scope of what would be required for a conflict over Taiwan" (2009, p. 42) and has the potential "to give its neighbours cause for concern" (2010, p.34). Some argue China's military modernization as a consequence of security dilemma, a "trouble within trouble without" syndrome rather than a desire to challenge the existing order (Kastner and Saunders, 2011, p.164; Whiting, 2001, p.185, Fravel, 2005). These views, however, are not divorced from the political and economic underpinning that characterizes China as the "biggest and most important case of liberal-authoritarian dilemma". Illustrating this dilemma, Buzan and Weaver (2003 p.147) characterized China's market communism as an "oxymoron", predicting its historical life will be short. Again Yue (2008 p.431) argues that China's integration in the global economy has defined its economic success in "growth terms" and cautions that China's "technologyless industrialization" will inevitably exacerbate making her economic growth hard to sustain. This may heighten domestic tensions and increased likelihood of conflicts. Managing and reconciling the contradiction between 'market communism' under a non-democratic one party political system with its destabilizing potentials has consequences for China, her neighbours and world as a whole.

Be that as it may, the economic underpinning together with the domestic liberal-authoritarian dilemma is perhaps the strongest undercurrent in making China a status quo power - reducing the likelihood of military confrontation

with its neighbours with the exception of Taiwan. China may be a 'dissatisfied' power but given the domestic compulsions, the *political will* to challenge the international order remains a far cry. Despite China's (apparent) intention to restrain US in the region by deflecting the current world order to multipolarity, her neo-liberalist economic development model with its deepening dependence on global system continues to draw legitimacy for an authoritarian regime at home reassuring that the 'rise' of China will remain peaceful (Yue, 2008; Gungwu, 2008).

### **Taiwan Issue: *Casus belli*?**

The infamous leak of a secret report from China's State Councils Policy Research Centre in 1997, periodic military posturing including the kamikaze style collision incident between a PLAAF fighter aircraft and US P3 Orion in 2001 and securitization of word,<sup>19</sup> manifests Beijing's continued *political will* to risk the use of force on Taiwan issue (Li, 1997, Whiting 2001). However, the cross-strait economic integration has been encouraging in recent years. Based on the WTO principles, a Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement was signed in 2010 to gradually reduce/eliminate barriers to trade and investment for each other. Following China's accession to WTO, the export from mainland to Taiwan grew fivefold totalling around 25-30 billion USD in 2009.<sup>20</sup> Despite such mutual dependency and extensive investment in manufacturing sector by the Taiwanese businessmen in mainland China, Beijing has repeatedly warned that any movement towards independence would be treated as a *casus belli* (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). For China, the domestic political and military underpinning makes the cross strait issue distinct from the others. First, Taiwan is an identity issue par excellence for China. China sees the island as part of its traditional territories and considers ultimate reunification of Taiwan as a '*destiny*' amidst 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (NDP 2010). Second, politically any concession on Taiwan would be risky for the ruling Communist Party challenging its legitimacy with disastrous consequence and possibly triggering secessionist movement in other parts like Tibet, Uyghur. The re-unification of Taiwan symbolizes China's efforts to restore her greatness flowing the 'century of shame' and any leadership who compromises risks being condemned by Chinese history. Third, diplomatically, China has remained very sensitive and consistent in isolating Taiwan including its participation in the regional security regimes. In 1995 Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's 'private' visit to US triggered large

<sup>19</sup> For a detail account of China's 'cross-strait' military exercises and its implication see Whiting 2001, pp.121-130. Also Buzan and Wæver (2003), pp.149-152 for excellent analysis of China's securitization of words on Taiwan issue.

<sup>20</sup> For a detail account of China-Taiwan economic relations see Rosen and Wang (2011) pp.4-22 and Taiwan Statistical Data Book (2011).

scale military exercise by China in Taiwan Strait prompting deployment of two aircraft carriers by US. Again, in 1999, crisis erupted when President Lee, in an interview with German radio characterized China-Taiwan relationship as 'state-to-state' prompting swift warning from Beijing. More recently, President Ma Ying-jeou have called the relations with Beijing as 'special between two areas within one state'. China's diplomatic efforts resulted in Taiwan's membership in international organizations in all kinds of names like China (Taipei), China (Taiwan), Taipei China, Chinese Taipei Taiwan- Republic of China, etc. Taiwan's bid for ARF membership was supposedly blocked due reservation from China, while 'rough' states like North Korea was admitted in.

Notwithstanding China's overwhelming importance attached to the eventual reunification of Taiwan, Beijing's current strategic posture appears to be aimed more on *preventing Taiwan drifting further toward independence* as opposed to coercing or compelling reunification (Taylor, 2007 p.36). Such strategic posture of China on a core issue for at least a decade now arguably fits China more as a status quo power. Most states in the region also agree that the status of Taiwan is for China to decide (Kang, 2007). However, the Taiwan Relation Act enacted in 1979 between US and Taiwan remains a thorny issue. According to this Act, any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, would be regarded as a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of *grave concern* to the US.<sup>21</sup> It also obliges US to provide Taiwan with arms of 'defensive' nature. Notwithstanding a possible direct/indirect confrontation, China's periodic military posturing along the Taiwan Strait,<sup>22</sup> signals her 'most serious warning' to alert those who thought they could 'break Taiwan away from China' with the support of foreign forces (Garver, 1997; Ateba, 2002 ). Thus political, diplomatic, military and identity dimensions makes the Taiwan issue the most probable area to use force if needed.

## Japan - China Tensions

Apart from the historical animosity, exacerbated by Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party leadership's repeated visit to the Yasukuni Shrine,<sup>23</sup> the

<sup>21</sup> See Taiwan Relationship Act (Public Law 96-8) section 2(b) (4).

<sup>22</sup> In Nov 1997, a ten-day simulated exercises of an invasion of Dongshan Island near southern Fujian involving more than 160,000 participants, 200 landing craft, and 100 other ships was reportedly the largest combination of ground, naval, and air units in PLA history. It was overseen by the then CCP Chairman Jiang Zemin (Whiting, 2001, p.121)

<sup>23</sup> For China and South Korea, a visit to Yasukuni shrine symbolizes Japan's lack of repentance for the brutal expansion during WWII. In April 2013, the visit by Japanese PM and a group of 168 lawmakers took place when 8 Chinese patrol ships reportedly had entered waters near the disputed islands, the largest number of ships at one time since the dispute started. See Fackler (2013b).

flashpoint between Japan and China revolves around a cluster of three islands and two big rocks called Senkakus/Diaoyu Island and associated territorial water and air space - a keystone for nationalist in both countries. Japan seized the island in 1895 and tension has been rising recently as increasing number of Chinese and Japanese ships and planes are frequenting the area (Pomfret, 2013, Fackler, 2013a). PLA navy reportedly made a more active intervention in the dispute in February 2013 when one of its frigates aimed its radar on a Japanese



naval vessel (Moss, 2013).

In November 2013, China also declared an East China Sea ADIZ<sup>24</sup> that greatly overlaps the Japanese ADIZ established in 1969 (Figure 1). This drew

<sup>24</sup> Chinese Ambassador to Vanuatu, Xie Bohua (2013) stresses that China's declaration of the ADIZ is a natural claim within the norms of international law to ensure flight safety over East China sea and not necessarily a territorial claim.

sharp reaction, particularly from US and Japan. Chinese ADIZ declaration requires all aircraft flying in this area to submit flight plan, report positions, maintain positive identification through radio/transponder and logo displaying nationality/aircraft registration number and follow the instructions of the Chinese administrative organs (Xinhua, 2013, The Economist, 2013). China also warns adopting 'defensive emergency measures' to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in the identification or refuse to follow the instructions. Rejecting the Chinese ADIZ claim, USAF flew its B-52 bombers in the disputed area within a few days. China's move of declaring the ADIZ is also regarded as a symbolic payback for Japan's action of buying some of the island in September 2013 and to add pressure on Japanese government set to unveil its first post World War II national security strategy. While it is perhaps too early to make a definitive determination about the impact of the Chinese ADIZ over South China Sea, any miscalculation by the parties involved has the potential to make this situation worse (White 2013).

Despite strong nationalist undercurrent of China- Japan tension, the economic dimension cannot be overruled. For Japan, a military confrontation with China would mean battering the lucrative Chinese market and choking the life of the economy which is brought to life recently by a \$117 billion stimulus package. With a nascent recovery in business and a 21.3 percent increase in exports to China in October 2013, escalating the tension would need serious thinking. On China's part, it would risk depriving up to 5 million Chinese workers of their jobs as the country looks to double the per capita income by 2020 (Moss, 2013). Thus, the extent of economic interdependence between the two countries dictates that any open hostility would amount to engaging in a sort of 'mutually assured destruction.' Indeed, the economic interdependence, interlocking structure of the globalized environment, unsettled domestic politics, extent of possible US involvement and its military implications, China's multilateralism in the region and policy of avoiding military confrontation during economic development remains crucial considerations to avoid military options.<sup>25</sup> Thus, China's relationship with Japan and ability to avoid confrontation will be key not only for the prospects of her peaceful rise but also to construct a peaceful Asian society.

### **Tension in South China Sea**

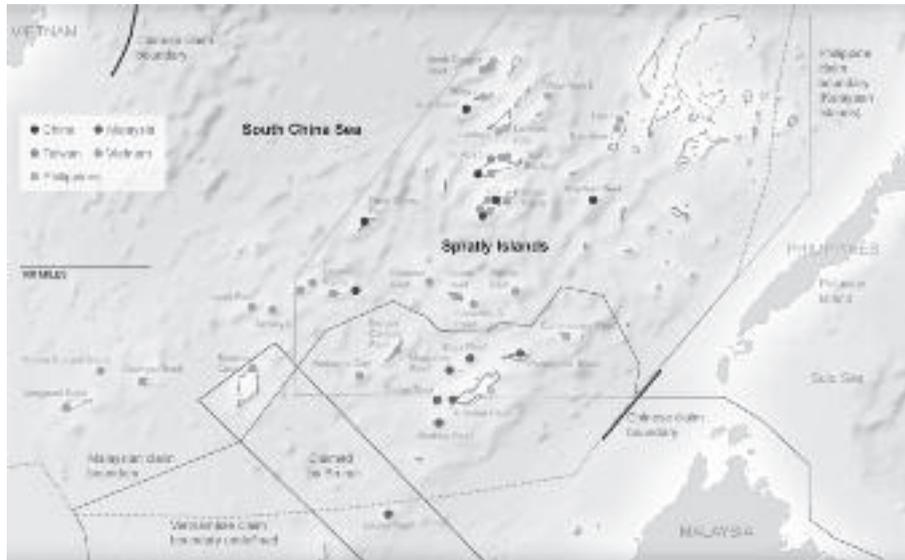
China's relationship with neighbours over Spratly Islands in South China Sea with overlapping claims (Figure 2) is arguably on a more multilateral track - thanks to the ARF's socialization efforts.<sup>26</sup> Despite initial resistance to keep the

---

<sup>25</sup> See Moss (2013) for '7 reasons why China and Japan won't go to war'. Also see Buzan (2010, p.35), White (2012) and The Economist (2013) for why a China-Japan war is likely.

<sup>26</sup> After the fall of Soviet Union, when Vietnam withdrew her troops from Laos (1988) and Cambodia (1989), ASEAN and ARF emerged as the best multilateral platform to deal with China. It also effectively ended the bipolarized conflict in South Asia. See for details Buzan and Wæver, (2003), p.155.

issue out of ARF agenda, China agreed to the DOC that lay down the framework for peaceful settlement of the disputes in 2002 (Sarith, 2013). In 2012, DOC was re-inforced by adopting a six point joint statement reaffirming its importance, though Philippines continued for her demand for the much needed Code of Conduct (Calica, 2013).



### Map. Occupational Status, Spratly Islands, South China Sea.

Source: US Department of States, Office of the Geographer

Some views the Chinese occupation of South China Sea in 1995 as part of a dual strategy of negotiation and occupation, influenced by domestic political factors (Storey, 1999). Though the progress of conflict resolution through regional security regime is slow, the multilateral track, together with the cultivation of ideas such as 'cooperative security', shared rhetoric of desecuritization,<sup>27</sup> reinforced by the promotion of norms regarding peaceful settlement, regular multilateral dialogue at different levels and adherence to non-proliferation, arms control agreements does make the likelihood of military confrontation on the South China sea a distant possibility.

<sup>27</sup> Such most recent desecuritized rhetoric on South China Sea issue came from the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi highlighting the importance of abiding by the DOC. (Xinhua, 2012)

### **Concluding Remarks**

Predicting the military consequence of a rising China with certainty is problematic. Notwithstanding her (perceived) regional and global ambitions, continuing the 'peaceful rise' casts a heavy mantle of responsibility on China –not just to safeguard her own vital national interests, but also reassuring and assisting her neighbours. China's deep integration with the global and regional system and institutions, preference to multilateralism suggests that she is unlikely to challenge the existing order and initiate conflict. A fortuitous combination of economic, geo-politics and internal liberal-authoritarian dilemma has placed China on a trajectory which generates its own security compulsions and affects her neighbours in a differentiated manner. While most neighbours of China do not unequivocally welcome her in all areas, some have accommodated the 'peaceful rise' and are willing to defer judgment about China's future role. The possibility of any military confrontation by China will perhaps depend on the calculation of political and economic cost. China's economic and social progress is inherently tied with regional stability. Judging by this standard, the possibility of military confrontation by a rising China with her neighbours becomes highly unlikely except Taiwan as it is regarded an identity issue and the *political cost* of ceding Taiwan bears disastrous domestic consequence. Even if China successfully manages and reconciles her liberal-authoritarian dilemma, the re-unification of Taiwan will remain central to her concerns and fulcrum of all politics, making it the only issue where China is unlikely to hesitate to use force.

### Annex: Status Quo Vs Revisionist Traits of China

	Cooperation in the Regional and International System	Nature and direction of alliance building	Military modernization
<b>Status Quo Traits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Less passive at the UN; voting pattern in line with majority.</li> <li>▪ Subscribes to the fundamentals such as: state sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention in internal affairs.</li> <li>▪ Member of WTO and seeks to benefit and play by its principles.</li> <li>▪ Engaged in regional forums: EAS, ASEAN, APEC, ARF and SAARC (as observer). Facilitator of Six-Party Talks.</li> <li>▪ Attending meetings of G8 Group (observer)</li> <li>▪ Promoting good neighbour policy: Positive role in Asian Financial Crisis, increased regional trade (some countries enjoy trade surplus).</li> <li>▪ Positive trend in non-proliferation standard especially after 9/11.</li> <li>▪ Draws legitimacy from the International System to sustain the one party communist rule in an era of democracy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Avoiding Confrontation and seeking cooperation with US (Exception: Taiwan Issue).</li> <li>▪ Strategic posture on Taiwan shifted from coercing/compelling for reunification to preventing further drift toward independence.</li> <li>▪ Senior leadership are less likely to visit countries that are antagonistic to the US or target of US sanctions.</li> <li>▪ No disproportionate priority attached to relations with US allies in the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No match to US military capabilities.</li> <li>▪ Military modernization for preservation of territorial integrity and national sovereignty.</li> <li>▪ Low risk taking propensity by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of CPC leadership.</li> </ul>

---

Revisionist Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Seeks to promote a multi-polar world order and deflate US dominance in the region.</li> <li>▪ Dissatisfied with <i>local status quo</i> on Taiwan. Seeks re-unification of Taiwan "at any cost."</li> <li>▪ Challenges the existing status quo in South China Sea by declaring ADIZ citing international law.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Geopolitical claustrophobia resulting limited external balancing act by forging Strategic Partnership Treaties with the second-tier powers (EU, Russia and India) <i>neglecting Japan</i>;</li> <li>▪ Active member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS. Engaged in curbing west dominated IFI's influence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disproportionate military modernization.</li> <li>▪ Assertive military posturing in case of Taiwan</li> <li>▪ Limited military posturing with Japan in East China Sea issue.</li> </ul>
--------------------	---	--	--

---

## Bibliography

- Aaron L. Friedberg, (1993/94) “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in Multipolar Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 pp. 5–33;
- Ateba, Bertrand., (2002) “Is the Rise of China A Security Threat?” School of International Studies, Peking University, Available at: [www.polis.sciencespobordeaux.fr/vol10ns/ateba.pdf/](http://www.polis.sciencespobordeaux.fr/vol10ns/ateba.pdf/) (accessed on 15 May 2014)
- Bohua, Xie, (2013), “Why China Established the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone”, *The Vanuatu Daily Post*. Available at: <http://www.dailypost.vu/content/why-china-established-east-china-sea-air-defense-identification-zone/> (Accessed on 12 May 2014)
- Buzan, Barry., (2010), “China in International Society: Is ‘Peaceful Rise’ Possible?” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, 2010, pp. 5–36.
- Buzan, Barry (2004), *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buzan, Barry (1999) “From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School” *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 327-352
- Buzan, Barry and Wæver Ole, (2003)., *Regions and Powers The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press.
- Burles, M. and Shulsky, Abram N., (1999) “Patters in China’s Use of Force, Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings”, *Project Air Force, RAND, USA*
- Calica, Aurea., (2013). “ASEAN Pushes Sea Code, Talks with China” *The Philippines Star*, available at: <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2013/04/26/935041/asean-pushes-sea-code-talks-china/> (Accessed on 26 April 2014)
- Chan, Steve., (2008) *China, the U.S., and the Power Transition Theory: A Critique*. New York: Routledge
- Chan, Steve., (2004a), “Realism, Revisionism, and the Great Powers”, *Issues & Studies* 40, No 1. pp.135-172. Available at: <http://iio.nccu.edu.tw/attachments/journal/add/4/4001-8.pdf/> (Accessed on 17 May 2014)
- Chan, Steve (2004b), ‘Can’t get no satisfaction? The recognition of revisionist states’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 207-238;
- Chan, Steve (2004c), ‘Exploring puzzles in power-transition theory: Implications for Sino-American relations’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring 2004), pp. 103 – 141.
- Edward, W., (2010), “Chinese Military Seeks to Extend its Naval Power”, *New York Times*, April 23, 2010.
- Fackler, M., (2013a), “Old Sore Spots Flare Up in China-Japan Disputes”, *The New York Times*, 23 April 2013. Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/world/asia/japanese-and-chinese-boats-converge-on-contested-islands.html?\\_r=0/](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/world/asia/japanese-and-chinese-boats-converge-on-contested-islands.html?_r=0/) (Accessed on 26 April 2013)

- Fackler, M., (2013b), "Japan Says China Aimed Military Radar at Ship", *The New York Times*, 05 February 2013, Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/06/world/asia/japan-china-islands-dispute.html?\\_r=1&/](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/06/world/asia/japan-china-islands-dispute.html?_r=1&/) (Accessed on 26 April 2013)
- Fravel, M. Taylor., (2005), "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes", *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 46–83.
- Garver John W.,(1997) *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Goldstein, A., (2005) *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press.
- Gungwu,W.,(2008) "China and the International Order: Some Historical Perspectives" in *China and the New International Order*, Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yonniian (eds.), London, Routledge.
- Holslag, J., (2011) *Trapped Giant: China's Troubled Military Rise* (Adelphi series) Routledge, pp.19-27
- Huntington, Samuel P., (1993) "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, pp. 22–49
- Ianchovichina, Elena, Sethaput Suthiwart-Narueput, and Zhao, Min., (2004) "Regional Impact of China's WTO Accession" In World Bank, Kathie Krumm and Homi Kharas (eds) *East Asia Integrates: A Trade Policy Agenda for Shared Growth*, World Bank, pp. 57- 78. Available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDEBTDEPT/Resources/468980-1206974166266/4833916-1206974192224/Chapter2EastAsiaIntegrates.pdf/> (Accessed on 28 May 2014)
- Johnston, A. Iain., (2003), "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 5–56
- Kagan, R.,(2009) "Ambition and Anxiety: America's Competition with China", In Gary J. Schmitt (ed) *The Rise of China: Essays on the Future Competition*, New York: Encounter Books.
- Kastner, Scott L. and Saunders, Phillip C. (2011). "Is China a Status Quo or Revisionist State? Leadership Travel as an Empirical Indicator of Foreign, Policy Priorities", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, pp. 163–177
- Karim, Mohd A., (2012), "Strategic Visions of China and the United States in South Asia and Beyond", *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. 24, No. 2, June 2012, 175–191
- Kang, David C., (2007), *China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Kim, W., (1991) Alliance Transitions and Great Power War. *American Journal of Political Science*, 35. pp. 833–850
- Kleine-Ahlbrandt, S., and Small, A., (2008) China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy: Is Beijing Parting with Pariahs? *Foreign Affairs* January/ February 2008. pp. 38–56. Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63045/stephanie-kleine-ahlbrandt-and-andrew-small/chinas-new-dictatorship-diplomacy/> (Accessed on 28 May 2014)

- Krishnan, A., (2013) “China unveils South Asia trade push with backing from India’s neighbours” *The Hindu*. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/china-unveils-south-asia-trade-push-with-backing-from-indias-neighbours/article4788587.ece/> (Accessed on 14 May 2014)
- Lardy, Nicholas R., (2002) *Integrating China into the Global Economy*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Leifer, M., (1996), *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, *Adelphi Paper* No 302. London.
- Li, Cheng (2007) “China’s Leadership, Fifth Generation”, *Caijing Magazine*, Brookings. Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2007/12/china-li/> (Accessed on 28 May 2014)
- Li, Tzu-Ching (1997). “CPC Thinks China and United States Will Eventually Go to War”, *Cheng Ming* 235. pp.15-16
- Lemke, D., and Ronald L. Tammen. (2003) “Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China”, *International Interactions* 29. pp. 269–271
- NYT (2012) New York Times. Map on Occupational Status of Spratly Island, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/05/31/world/asia/Territorial-Claims-in-South-China-Sea.html/> (Accessed on 28 Apr 2014)
- Mearsheimer John J., (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton.
- Mearsheimer, John J.,(2010) “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3 (4), pp. 381–396. Available at: <http://cjp.oxfordjournals.org/content/3/4/381.full#sec-1/> (Accessed on 21 May 2014)
- Medeiros, Evan S., (2007) *Reluctant Restraint: The Evolution of China’s Non-proliferation Policies and Practices: 1980–2004*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Morgenthau, Hans J., (1978) *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Moss, T., (2013) “7 Reasons China and Japan Won’t Go To War”, *The Diplomat*, February 2013. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/02/10/7-reasons-china-and-japan-wont-go-to-war/3/>(Accessed on 26 April 2014)
- Mullen, J. and Liptak, K., (2014) “Obama begins Asia tour with reassurance to Japan” CNN, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/23/world/asia/obama-asia-visit/> (accessed on 28 May 2014)
- NDP (2010) National Defence Policy of China, *Government White Paper*. Available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/5/5.2.htm/> (Accessed on 28 April 2014)
- Organski, A.F.K and Kugler, Jacek, (1980) *The War Ledger*, Chicago: Chicago University Press,
- Pomfret, J., (2013) “The U.S. interest in an Asian island dispute”, *Washington Post*, February 05, 2013. Available at: [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-05/opinions/36757731\\_1\\_senkaku-diaoyu-islands-china-and-japan/](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-05/opinions/36757731_1_senkaku-diaoyu-islands-china-and-japan/) Accessed on 26 April 2014.

- Qin, Yaqing., (2010). "International Society as a Process: Institutions, Identities, and China's Peaceful Rise", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, 129–153doi:10.1093/cjip/poq007
- Qin Yaqing., (2009) "National Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests: Three Hypotheses on the Interaction between China and International Society". Available at: <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series03/III-21/chapter-13.htm/> (Accessed on 26 May 2014)
- Rosen, Daniel, H. and Wang, Zhi (2011), *The Implications of China-Taiwan Economic Liberalization*, Policy Analyses in International Economics, Peterson Institute for International Economic, United Book Press, USA.
- Saunders, Phillip C. (2006) "China's Global Activism: Strategy, Drivers, and Tools", *Institute for National Strategic Studies, Occasional Paper 4*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.
- Sarith, H., (2013). "A job well done: Cambodia as ASEAN Chair in 2012", *East Asia Forum*, available at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/19/a-job-well-done-cambodia-as-asean-chair-in-2012/> (Accessed on 26 April 2014)
- Shambaugh, D., (2005) "Return to the Middle Kingdom? China and Asia in the Early Twenty-First Century", In David Shambaugh, (ed) *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- SIPRI (2012) Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database. Available at: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4/> (Accessed on 14 Apr 2014).
- Storey, Ian James, (1999)., "Creeping Assertiveness: China, the Philippines and the South China Sea Dispute", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 21, No1, April 1999. pp.95-
- The Economist, (2013)., "The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Dangerous shoals: The risks of a clash between China and Japan are rising—and the consequences could be calamitous." Jan 19th 2013 . Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21569740-risks-clash-between-china-and-japan-are-risingand-consequences-could-be/> (accessed on 27 April 2014)
- Schweller, Randall L. (1994), 'Bandwagoning for profit: Bringing the revisionist state back in', *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 86-88;
- Taiwan Statistical Data Book, (2011), Council for Economic Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. (Taiwan)
- Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8, Enacted 10 April 1979. Available at: <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/tra02.htm/> (accessed on 28 April, 2014)
- Taylor, N., (2007) "China as a Status Quo or Revisionist Power? Implications for Australia", *Security Challenges* Volume 3 Number 1 pp.29-45.
- The Australian Defence White Paper 2009 and 2010. Available at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/mr/> (Accessed on 16 April 2014)
- The Australian Defence Forces Strategy Frame Work, 2010. Available at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/mr/> (accessed on 29 April 2013)

- Whiting, A. S.(2001) "China's Use of Force,1950-96, and Taiwan", *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 103-131.
- Werner, S., and Kugler, J.,(1996) "Power Transitions and Military Buildups". In Jacek Kugler, and Douglas Lemke (eds) *Parity and War*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- White, Hugh, (2012), "Caught in a bind that threatens an Asian war nobody wants: Creative diplomacy is urgently needed for a face-saving solution", *The Sunday Morning Herald*, Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/caught-in-a-bind-that-threatens-an-asian-war-nobody-wants-20121225-2bv38.html/> (Accessed on 25 April 2014)
- Xiaoping, Deng (1993). "*Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*" (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping), Vol. III, Beijing, Renmin Chubanshe.
- Xinhua,(2012) "China's position on South China Sea consistent, clear: FM". Available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/05/c\\_131829526.htm/](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/05/c_131829526.htm/) (Accessed on 28 Apr 2013)
- Xinhua, (2013) "Announcement of the Aircraft Identification Rules for the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone of the P.R.C." Available at: [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2013-11/23/content\\_4476143.htm/](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2013-11/23/content_4476143.htm/) (Accessed on 17 May 2014)
- Yue, Jianyong., (2008)., "Peaceful Rise of China: Myth or Reality?" *International Politics*, 45, pp.439-456
- Zhang, Y., and Tang S., (2005) "China's Regional Strategy", In David Shambaugh (ed)., *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zheng, Bijian., (2005) "China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status". *Foreign Affairs* 84: 18-24.

## Iran-U.S. Rapprochement and the Emerging Security Paradigm of Middle East

*Muhammad Ruhul Amin\**

### **Abstract**

This present work argues that the regional peace and security of Middle East is largely related to the patterns of U.S.- Iran relations. Twists and turns in Iran-U.S. relations have been determining factors for understanding the fundamental structure of international security. The Middle East security has been seriously damaged as the relationship between the two countries has been strained since Islamic Revolution of 1979. The author holds that an innovative security paradigm seems to be emerging with the growing détente between the U.S. and Iran in the recent months. The article has discussed various schools of thoughts on the future of U.S.-Iran rapprochement and its implications for the emerging security structure of the region which has, for long, been marked by political conflicts, economic chaos and social instability. The author has critically raised the threadbare debate which is going on among academic circles regarding whether or not the recent apparent thaw between Iran-U.S. relations will soon evaporate into solid chill. Posing pessimistic about the future of the recent apparent rapprochement, the author purports to explain certain prerequisites for the survival of the recently-flourished U.S.-Iran normalization and to devise a viable security model for a new Middle East to be growing out of the changed context of the realities in the contemporary international relations. The author argues that a deterrent strategy may contribute to the balance of power among the regional countries which can ensure peace and stability of Middle East. He warns that any step to destabilize the flourishing environment of the balance of power between the great powers of Middle East including Iran and Israel will not bring any good result for the international community.

### **Introduction**

Twists and turns in Iran-U.S. relations have been determining factors for understanding the fundamental structure of international security. After about three decades and a half, some remarkable events are now-a-days taking place in Iran-U.S. bilateral relations leading to a historic rapprochement between the

---

\* **Muhammad Ruhul Amin** is a Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. Email: mramin68@yahoo.com

two countries. Optimists about the contemporary international system are chanting *thaws* of American relations with the countries that have, for long, been put on flaming oven by the omnipotent superpower. A threadbare debate is going on among academic circles regarding whether or not the recent apparent *thaw* between Iran-U.S. relations will soon evaporate into solid chill. The fastest growing realities of the changing dynamics of their relationships are very likely to give birth to the structure of an emerging paradigm of the Middle East regional security and stability.

### **Iran-U.S. Rapprochement: the Debate**

The Iran-U.S. honeymoon era began with the restoration and consolidation of the rule of Shah in Iran after CIA staged a military coup and ousted Mohammad Mosaddeq, the democratic Prime Minister of Iran. However, their honeymoon soon came to an end following the Islamic Revolution in which the Shah regime collapsed. A number of scholars noted that the 1979 Revolution was a belated response to an injustice perpetrated by U.S. a quarter century earlier.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Iran-U.S. relationship has been marked by hostility, discords and disturbances. Dramatically, the two countries seem to have been normalizing their bilateral relations in recent days. Those who see *thaw* in America's rupture with Iran are inspired by the events that have developed since the incarnation of Ayatullah Hasan Rouhani as the President of Iran. The first and the foremost among the arguments of this extreme of scholars spring from the soft spokenness of Iran's new President.<sup>2</sup> Their debate is relied upon the calculated impact of idiosyncrasy on foreign policy. The idiosyncratic analysis of Rouhani's personality builds the second argument of this line of thinking.<sup>3</sup> To them, President Hasan Rouhani unlike his hardliner predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pursues constructive foreign policy. For instance, soon elected as Iran's President in June 2013, Rouhani has continuously assured the West to resolve the nuclear issue which has fractured their bilateral relations. The Westerners are now convinced that Rouhani knows how to give glossy smile and gesture sweet talks. He emerged as the stalwart of peace in place of Ahmadinejad's provocative war rhetoric. His *charm offensive*<sup>4</sup> brought credibility among the many Westerners who have held negative attitude toward Iranian leaders' idiosyncratic values.

<sup>1</sup> Ray Takeyh, "What Really Happened in Iran: the CIA, the Ouster of Mosaddeq and the Restoration of Shah," *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2014, pp.2-12.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Ruhul Amin, "Iran-US Relations Beyond the Thaw," *The Independent*, Dhaka, October 10, 2013

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The term *charm offensive* has been widely used by the journalists and academicians since Rouhani took over as the new President of Iran and began soft diplomacy with the West.

The above strand of thought has seen the ray of hope in Rouhani's soft diplomacy which has pulled the U.S. very close to Iran at the present time. During his recent speech at the UNGA session, none of the Western countries left the venue. While the former President Ahmadinejad had set off a stampede of delegates from the hall, Rouhani packed them all in. The world leaders seemed very curious about him and curtailed pin-drop silence to listen to what he would speak to the world. Americans proposed to him a short, sideline conversation at a luncheon or dinner which he declined on the pretext of Iran's domestic resentments. However, he eased tension with the West by receiving Barack Obama's phone-call. Their phone-talk is evaluated by some as an unprecedented opening of an Iran-U.S. rapprochement almost thirty five years after the great debacle of their diplomatic understanding since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Some view, choreographed or not, the Iran-U.S. phone-conversation will be enshrined in the diplomatic history as the most important incident at a moment when tensions are flaring everywhere surrounding the Iran-U.S. relationship.

The second extreme of the debate is run by the pessimists who are of the opinion that the apparent normalcy grew out of the novelty of Hasan Rouhani's *charm offensive* will not thaw Iran's chill with the United States. The strategic considerations of America's foreign policy towards the world in general, and to Iran in particular, lead us comment that Iran's docility at present is just a temporary phenomenon. Therefore, it won't contribute to a permanent *détente* between the two belligerent states.<sup>5</sup>

Theoretically speaking, the U.S. policy is largely dominated by the *Morgenthauan realist* paradigm.<sup>6</sup> Be it *neoliberalism* or *neorealism*, America's foreign policy must achieve America's national interests just in the line with the Machiavellian principle *end justifies the means*.<sup>7</sup> The short-term realist calculation may, on some occasions, get influence from the *Wilsonian idealism*.<sup>8</sup> However, the long-term realist calculation soon proves a hard nut to crack. America's politico-economic and geo-strategic interests in the Middle East won't be undermined by any perceived preferences. To protect Israel, America's eternal ally would undoubtedly dictate the U.S. policy towards Iran. By

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Ruhul Amin, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: the struggle for Power and Peace*, (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli, "The Prince," cited in Emajuddin Ahamed, *Rashtrabiggyaner Katha*, (Dhaka, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Based on Wilsonian Idealism emanating from his fourteen points and four principles, the provision of the right of self determination was incorporated into the League of Nations following the First World War. See for details, E.H. Carr, *International Relations between the Two World Wars*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

reasoning we can say for sure that an American policy rejected by Israel must succumb to failure.

For example, the softspokenness, sweetness and charm offensive of Hasan Rouhani are belittled by Israeli leaders. Binyamin Netanyahu looks at Rouhani as *a wolf in sheep's clothing*.<sup>9</sup> He considers Rouhani as *a devious politician*, whose devilish aim is to drive a wedge between Israel and naïve Americans. He labels Rouhani's *charm offensive* as *honey trap*.<sup>10</sup> Yuval Steinitz, the former Israeli finance minister remarks that Rouhani *deceives* the world through his eloquent speech. Other Israeli officials close to its power centre regard Rouhani as an *existential threat*. Avnery, an Israeli writer and peace activist with Gush Shalom analyzes Hasan Rouhani as the *real bomb* and finds him more dangerous than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>11</sup>

Another reason why I pose pessimistic about the U.S.-Iran détente stems from the domestic political constraints of Iran, U.S. and Israel. The demand for absolute closure of Iran's nuclear program is very strong both in U.S.A. and in Israel. On the other hand, Iranians are adamant on holding their right to peaceful nuclear energy. This may, I'm sure, damage the emerging prospects for their normalization. Moreover, in exchange of pacifying nuclear conflict, Iranians might want to see the U.S. sanctions dropped fully. To that end, Barack Obama can't offer much to Iran. The U.S. sanctions on Iran have been imposed in two sets: one set by the President and another one by the Congress. In view of the on-going political stand-off between the Republicans and the Democrats that has contributed shutdown to the U.S. government, it's quite unpredictable that the Republican-dominated Congress would lift its sanction.

I sense from my insight into Iran's anthropological construct and their social psychology that Iranians can't be misguided by America's idealistic chit-chat keeping intact their realistic vigor. No Iranian including Rouhani has so far bowed down to the Western claim of *complete denuclearization*. Can it break the ice? No. No American, I believe, would agree on the *less than a full denuclearization* proposition. Can it then normalize their ties? No, not at all. Furthermore, we may measure the virulence and velocity of Iran's internal grievances spread out of the fifteen minute hotline connection between the two presidents on 27 September 2013. For example, the chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards General Mohammad Ali Jafari and the commander of its air-wing General Amir Ali Hadjizadeh severely lamented the phone call and wanted to

---

<sup>9</sup> Different news media including CNN, BBC, and Reuters had broadcast this during Rouhani's incarnation as Iran's President.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Uri Avnery, "Rouhani and Israel: the Real Bomb," *CounterPunch.org*, 25-27 September 2013.

make sure that the miseries and injustice incurred by the U.S. sanctions must be removed before any peace negotiation takes place.

### **Future of Iran-U.S. Rapprochement**

Notwithstanding the very strong forces that are demanding remarkable shift in the Iran-U.S. bilateral understanding, a number of issues may pose some severe challenges to the emerging structure of their relationship. The rapidly growing changes in the regional politics of Middle East and America's involvement in those regional events also indicate that the prospect of an everlasting rapprochement between Iran and U.S. is very bleak.

One may first look at Israel-Palestine issue. The way America has been awarding blind support to the cause of Israel at the total cost of Palestine seems to be the major barrier to the recent rapprochement. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War and the changed political map after the Second World War facilitated the United States getting involved in the Middle East politics. The rehabilitation of Jews who were scattered homeless here and there in the world and the formation of the Jewish state of Israel were made possible with the explicit cooperation of the U.S. immediately after the end of the Second World War. The U.S., since then, has continued to extend political and military assistance in order to defend Israel with a view to achieving America's long-term politico-economic and security interests in the Middle-East region. It may not be possible for the U.S. to keep itself a bit aloof from its eternal ally, Israel. However, in recent days the U.S. is likely to turn tactical and strategic postures in its relationship with Iran by maintaining its Israeli ties intact. This double standard, I assume, may fracture the emerging structure of the Iran-U.S. détente. Iran might be interested in seeing the projections of America's transparency and accountability in its foreign policy in view of the changed global context. Israel has already crafted renewed diplomacy to convince the U.S. to get away from its present policy to Iran.

Their involvements in the developing political events of Syria will also determine the future of Iran-U.S. rapprochement. The stability of the government of Bashar-al-Asad is strategically important for Iran. The outright American supports for the anti-Bashar rebels will be considered by Iran as detrimental to its regional ambitions. Iran may capitalize the fruits of the neo-cold war between the U.S. and Russia and try to minimize America's involvements in Syrian civil war. It is very difficult for the U.S., on the other hand, to ignore its strategic involvement in Syria for the greater cause of the survival of Israel. Such strategic considerations of both countries may jeopardize their ongoing partnership.

The declining global image<sup>12</sup> of the U.S. with regard to its role in the Middle East regional affairs is also likely to dismantle the Iran-U.S. emerging relations. The US' preemptive strike on Iraq in 2003 and its silence on the recent military coup of Egypt may cause the decay of the prospects for the new turn in the Iran-U.S. relations. Saddam Hussain, a Sunni Iraqi who was brought up by the U.S. served as a faithful U.S. ally until he turned to be an anti-U.S. strongman and opposed U.S. interests in the Middle East. Following America's preemptive strike on Iraq, Saddam was dethroned and replaced by Nuri-al-Maliki, a Shia Iraqi. For Iran, it was quite a difficult choice to recognize America-made Prime Minister Nuri-al-Maliki despite his belonging to the Shia community. U.S. high officials including Vice President Joe Biden, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin Dempsey and David Petraeus, the former top U.S. Commander in Iraq, have all either called for Maliki to be more inclusive or outright criticized them.<sup>13</sup> Now that America was advocating inclusive policy to include in Iraq Government the Sunni rebels who were gearing up the oust-government movement against Nuri-al-Maliki, had posed for Iran a more difficult option. The Sunni extremists have formed the radical Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that has overrun swathes of northern and central Iraq. The ISIL warriors have already captured the major cities of Iraq and were about to occupy Bagdad.<sup>14</sup> Had the U.S. not started bombing on Iraq, ISIL could easily move to the capital city. To counter the Sunni extremists, the U.S. has sent 300 military advisers to Iraq. Washington has already positioned air craft carriers in the Gulf and launched several Drone attacks on the ISIL fighters. The U.S. military officers have already confirmed that they used in Iraq F-18 fighter planes and Drones against the Sunni extremists.<sup>15</sup> Iran's strategic ally Russia took clear cut policy towards Iraq.

The Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Nuri-al-Maliki Moscow's support to fight the Sunni Jihadists. Russia has blamed the latest violence sweeping Iraq on the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of the country and said that any strikes on the ISIL forces would have to be authorized by the UN. The Russian step is deemed as the cold war strategy that was adopted after U.S. President Barak Obama stopped short of acceding to Maliki's appeal for air strikes against Sunni insurgents, prompting Shia Iran to charge that Washington lacked the "will" to fight terror.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> For details of America's declining global image, see Muhammad Ruhul Amin, "Getting Back US's Diminishing Global Image," *The Independent*, Dhaka, October 29, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, June 21, 2014

<sup>14</sup> *AFP*, June 20, 2014

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Ittefaq*, Dhaka, June 21, 2014

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, June 21, 2014

The Iraq situation placed Iran in a decision dilemma. It could neither support Maliki's government since it was manufactured by America, nor could it side with ISIL rebels since they are opposed to Bashar's Shia government. The present U.S. policy towards Iraq may be seen by Iran as America's next plan to topple Syria's Shia President Bashar-al-Asad against whom ISIL is fighting. Iran has historically been disturbed by the U.S. attempts at couples of "quick fix" to solve Iraq's problems.<sup>17</sup> Starting from the dethroning of Saddam to assisting Maliki to get in and again dethroning him and replacing him with Haider-al-Abadi, America's quick fix strategy has created resentments among both Iraqi and Iranian people. To them, both Maliki and Abadi are considered as "American stooge". Despite Maliki throwing the last serious U.S. reconciliation plan under the bus, America stood by and watched the Iranians broker a deal after the 2010 elections that gave Maliki another four years as Prime Minister. In the middle of June, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that the Iraqi conflict threatened to spill over Iraq's borders, interlocking with the civil war in neighboring Syria where ISIL is operating its activities.<sup>18</sup>

America's double standard in maintaining Egyptian democracy may have antagonized Iran, which, analysts have observed, will have long lasting effect on Iran-U.S. rapprochement. As a result of the Arab Spring, the dictatorial regime of Hosni Mubarak came to an end and a democratic chapter appeared to the fore. The nascent democracy soon fell victim of both domestic and global conspiracies. The Government of Muslim Brotherhood under Professor Dr. Muhammad Mursi was dismantled by the joint efforts of military and judicial elites with cooperation from the western-educated civil society people as well as secular and left political parties. The oust-government movement against Mursi who happened to be the first democratic President in the history of Egypt was geared up with direct and indirect western patronization. Had the U.S. taken responsible measures against the unlawful military coup d'état, the maiden democracy of Egypt would not have been nipped in bud. The U.S. has preferred undemocratic military rule to democratic Brotherhood which has borrowed poor external image for the U.S. foreign policy. Iran has continuously resented in different world bodies including the UN against the U.S. double game in such areas as democracy, human rights and justice.

Iran's recent rapport with Turkey seems to be a potential threat to the emerging rapprochement between Iran and U.S.A. Iran-Turkey relations appeared slightly bitter in recent months on the question of Syria. In U.S.

---

<sup>17</sup> Peter Van buren, "With or Without Maliki, Iraq Will Tear Itself Apart," *The Independent*, Dhaka, August 20, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Reuters*, June 19, 2014

consideration, a flourishing Turkey emerged important because of its European location and Islamic religious identity. To the U.S. strategists, Turkey can be used as the bridge between the Western and Muslim World. America may be uncomfortable with a Turkey having good terms with Iran. The recent visits of the high officials of Iran to Turkey may create important bottleneck for Iran-U.S. normalization.

The most important question affecting Iran-U.S. rapprochement concerns the much-talked about issue of the Uranium enrichment of Iran. According to U.S. judgment, Iran's present nuclear process can make nuclear fuel for civilian purposes, but also, when highly purified, for a nuclear weapon. It has been the main sticking point in negotiation with Iran for the past decade. Iran and "P5+1" powers have conducted five rounds of nuclear negotiation in the past few years. They left themselves with a lot to do in a short amount of time after a difficult fifth round of nuclear talks ended in Vienna on June 20, 2014. The five days' discussion of the fifth round did not provide any certain direction of a prospective solution. Iranian foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told the Iranian media that they have not reached any agreements on the main issues. He remarked that in some cases, they could see light for agreement but in some others, there was none yet. Gesturing a frustrating feedback, he considered the draft document contained "more brackets than words", implying that many sections were far from finalized. One of the diplomats of the P5+1 group told AFP that Iran was refusing to budge on most issues.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to Uranium enrichment, other bones of contention included the duration of the mooted accord, the pace of any sanctions relief and a reactor being built at Arak that might give Iran weapons-grade plutonium. The future of the Iran-U.S. rapprochement largely depends on how the events would develop in future nuclear talks between the adversaries.

### **The Emerging Security Paradigm**

My observation and study of Middle East politics of the last sixty years lead me conclude that the unprecedented elevation of Israel's military strengths has been solely responsible for the regional instability. The Western powers including the U.S. have ceaselessly rendered all-out cooperation to develop Israel's sophisticated weapons that include chemical, biological, cancer-bearing and undeclared nuclear arsenals. Unfortunately, however, these world powers did not pay any heed to other ambitious and dissatisfied countries in the region and nor did they feel any urge to develop the necessary weapons of those countries. This discriminatory policy of America has created power imbalance causing regional instability.

---

<sup>19</sup> AFP, June 21, 2014

A fresh awareness in the recent times has grown among a many international security analysts that the balance of power strategy would emerge as the best-ever security model for the Middle East region which has been vehemently destabilized in the aftermath of the Second World War. This, undoubtedly, might have installed the flowering of innovative security insights contrasting the conventional security paradigm of the post-cold war period when the rise of the lone super power destroyed all sorts of power balances. According to these scholars, the maintenance of the Middle East security and stability requires balancing powers among the regional great powers, such as Iran, Israel, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and so on. Such revised strand of thoughts on security is not new in the discourse of international relations. This all-encompassing security thinking is built on the premise that purports to explain the implications of nuclear balance of power for the regional security of Middle East. The proponents in this line argue that the Middle East regional peace as well as international security may be ensured by a deterrent strategy achieved through the nuclear balance of power between Israel, an undeclared regional nuclear state, and Iran, another prospective nuclear state of the region.

### **Inevitability of Nuclear Deterrence**

The theorists on nuclear deterrence are scattered into two groups- optimists and pessimists.<sup>20</sup> Nuclear optimists are of the opinion that peace and security can be maintained by nuclear balance of power.<sup>21</sup> A well-known wisdom of the contemporary International Relations suggests that the balance of power<sup>22</sup> and collective security<sup>23</sup> have been used as the two important principles for maintaining global peace and security despite debate among scholars with regard to their theoretical underpinnings and operational intricacies. The collective security system may have brought temporary peace in the world immediately after the two World Wars. However, it failed to establish long-lasting or ever-lasting global stability and security. For example, the League of Nations established after the First World War succumbed into failure as the collective peace effort. This failure of the League pushed the world into the Second World War, the most destructive and devastating event in the annals

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Knopf, "Recasting the Proliferation: Optimism-Pessimism Debate," *Security Studies*, Vol.12, No.1, Autumn, 2002, pp.43

<sup>21</sup> Narottam Gaan, "America and Nuclear Non-Proliferation in South Asia: Problems and Challenges," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.15, Nos.1&2, June & December 2011, pp.3-22.

<sup>22</sup> For details, see Inis Claude, Jr., *Power and International Relations*, (New York: Random House, 1962), p.146; Norman D. Palmer and Howard C. Perkins, *International Relations: the World Community in Transition*, (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 1970), p.212.

<sup>23</sup> For George Schwarzenberger's operational definition, see, Norman D. Palmer and Howard C. Perkins, *ibid*, p.66.

of the history mankind had ever experienced. Some writers, thus, considered the twenty years between the two World Wars as the intermission or armistice or interim period.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the Second World War, a second collective step towards peace was taken through the formation of the United Nations. Unfortunately, the UN, over the years, has lost credibility of the peace loving people to the extent that the *Structuralists* started labeling this global organization as the vehicle of exploitation.

The struggle for global supremacy between the then two super powers could not be diminished by the United Nations. The super powers implanted the seeds of discords, conflicts and war everywhere in the post-war world.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the failure of the UN, the then existing balance of power between the super powers served as restraint and succeeded in stopping them from initiating dangerous wars. The resultant effects of this power balance have been reflected at the individual, domestic, regional and global levels. For instances, some people, families or groups have been subject to forced stability in a number of countries despite achieving high esteemed power at their individual-state levels. Understandably, however, their insurmountable power structure crushed into pieces at some critical juncture of their domestic political turmoil. In spite of the domestic “super power image” enjoyed by the Arab dictators, such as, Hosni Mobarak of Egypt, Jain al-Abedin Bin Ali of Tunisia and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, they had to step down during the mayhem, when their power was challenged by the people’s resistance<sup>26</sup> and balanced by their power. That means, the inter-individual or inter-group struggle at individual-state levels intensified until their power had been balanced contributing to a deterrent situation. Thus the flaming fire of many drastic wars along the Afro-Asian Arab countries could have been extinguished with the emergence of the balance of power at different levels of these countries.

Another important example of preventing hostility and war by deterrent strategy is the nuclear power balance between India and Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> The regional peace in South Asia has been maintained by the balance of nuclear power<sup>28</sup> between the two nuclear countries of the region.<sup>29</sup> The most glaring

---

<sup>24</sup> Md. Abdul Halim, *Antarjatic Shamparka*, (Dhaka: Bithi Juthi Prokashana, 1986), p.4.

<sup>25</sup> For details, see Frank P. Chambers, Christina Phelps Harris, and Charles C. Bayley, *This Age of Conflict*, Harcourt, (New York: Brace and Co., 1950).

<sup>26</sup> Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephen, “Drop Your Weapon: When and Why Civil Resistance Works,” *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Lavoy, “The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: A Review Essay,” *Security Studies*, Vol.4, No.4, Summer, 1995, pp.700-702.

<sup>28</sup> Devin T. Hagerty, “Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The 1990 Indo-Pakistan Crisis,” *International Security*, Vol.20, No.3, Winter 1995/1996, p.114.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946)

example of preserving international peace and security through nuclear deterrence has been set by the U.S. and ex-USSR. Their dreadful nuclear weapons during the Cold War<sup>30</sup> years enabled them to deter each other from triggering military assault on the other. Over the years since the end of the Second World War, the sophistication of their nuclear weapons reached the zenith of development and restrained them from engaging into the first strikes. They have been able to keep each other away from dismantling each other's world-wide interests and goals only by dint of their balanced nuclear stronghold. In another word, their nuclear balance of power could avert total war between each other.

Assumed that the two superpowers signed unwritten, quasi-written or written documents to advance their exploitative activities. The balance of power that put them at equidistance psychologically could efficiently fine-tune their operational *modus operandi*. The reciprocal sense of security stemming from their balance of power made room for them of uninterrupted opportunity not to intervene in such affairs that might lead them to war.

In order to keep the *status quo* of their balance of power, both the giant powers wanted to keep monopolistic possession of nuclear weapons and none of them is convinced to endure the emergence of a countervailing nuclear power. This led them to the signing of a number of arms control and disarmament treaties. Despite the treaties, both have continuously enriched the stockpiles of nuclear technology and other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). On the other hand, the provisions of the treaties have been imposed on others as the binding force as if these may be used to block their inalienable universal rights to safeguard their own national interests.

The creation of IAEA can be cited as the example of such a measure, which obstructs other countries to build up their security shield. The deviation of IAEA from keeping a provision of universal equal rights for all countries limits IAEA being justified as the valid, lawful and legal international organization. That might make some countries vulnerable to the unjust treatment by such international treaties and obligations and compel them to install their own means of self-defence, which may not exclude the development of nuclear energy, nuclear power and nuclear weapons. Viewed from a realist perspective,<sup>31</sup> Iran may be noted as such a country. Being frustrated and dissatisfied with the role of IAEA and the Western countries with regard to its nuclear projects, Iran may rush to develop its nuclear weaponry for the cause of its self-defence. Looked upon the issue from a regional security point of view,

<sup>30</sup> For details on Cold War, see Wilfrid Knapp, *A History of War and Peace*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967)

<sup>31</sup> Also see Neo-realism and Structural Realism.

international recognition needs be accorded for the peaceful nuclear ambition of Iran. A nuclear Iran can deter a nuclear Israel, prevent escalation of war, and can contribute to regional peace and stability through nuclear deterrence. Thus there is no denying the fact that nuclear deterrence is a viable security paradigm for Middle East.

The Middle East region was used as the hot zone of the flashpoints of cold war between the capitalist imperialism and communist expansionism. Israel has been a “pushed in state” in Middle East since the UN was established. Born illegitimately and brought up by the West unlawfully, Israel has been continuing persecution on neighbouring Arab countries and extending its boundaries unjustly by dint of its regional superpower status which has been built only with its possession of sophisticated WMDs and undeclared nuclear stockpiles.

The erstwhile USSR failed to craft a cold war counter-structure in the region by nurturing a countervailing regional superpower vis-a-vis Israel. Equipped with the dangerous WMDs and supposedly nuclear weapons, Israel has been instrumental in the implementation of the grand strategy of the imperialists in the Middle East region and elsewhere of the world. Against this backdrop, revolutionary Iran threw blatant blow to the unchallenged power of Israel psychologically, politically and strategically. The news of Iran’s nuclear involvement came to the Western imperialists as the blue from the belt. Despite Iran’s repeated iterations that its nuclear programs are for peaceful purposes and are quite in line with IAEA provisions, the West as well as Israel have pulled their pants up to deprive Iran of its nuclear rights. Iran has been continuously threatened with series of economic embargo, trade and travel sanctions and couples of military aggressions, such as, Christmas attack, spring attack, winter attack, surgical operation and preemptive air strike and so on.

Having paid no attention to international pressures, Iran has continued its nuclear programs either overtly or covertly. We don’t know whether Iran has, by now, acquired nuclear bombs or come close to manufacturing nuclear weapons or cherished intentions to possess nuclear stockpiles. In view of the Middle Eastern political reconfiguration in the post-Arab Spring era, the nuclear deterrent strategy should not be kept aside. The West needs to understand the inextricability of the rivalry at the inimical psyche of the newly emerged regional great powers of Middle East like Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Tunisia vis-à-vis Israel. The newly-achieved strength of these countries can’t be contained easily by the military efficiency of Israel. Avnery, an Israeli knesset member acknowledged that Israel can’t defeat Hamas despite its strong military power. He recommends contributing to economic development of Gaza in order to resolve Palestine-Israel conflict.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Uri Avnery, “Post-Editorial,” *The Daily Prothom Alo*, August 20, 2014.

Renewed efforts are required for rebuilding the global image of the West so that new leaders may find the Western interests in the region in conformity and coexistence with theirs. It may take a few years for the Middle Eastern countries to tighten a concerted regional power base and by that time, Iran may achieve nuclear sufficiency. The changed reality of the regional politics demands international recognition for regional nuclear balance of power. It may replace regional enmity with regional rivalry and competition that might prevent any prospective regional war laying far-reaching consequences for the Middle East security.

Reuters reported that the interim international deal on Iran's nuclear program which was signed on November 24, 2013 could tilt the balance of power in the Middle East towards Tehran after two years of popular revolts that had weakened leading Arab nations.<sup>33</sup> Maclean analyzed the different perspectives of the deal.<sup>34</sup> The critics of the deal think that Iran will grow richer and stronger through the easing and eventual lifting of sanctions that have shackled its economy emboldening its Islamist rulers to step up support to Shi'ite Muslim allies in Arab countries. The supporters of the accord said that the rapprochement between Iran and U.S. could help stabilize a region in turmoil and reduce sectarian strains that have set Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims bloodily against each other. For example, Rami Khoury of the American University of Beirut described the interim deal restricting Iran's nuclear work as an effective policy option that could eventually lead to rapprochement between Tehran's clerical rulers and U.S.-allied Gulf Arab states. He remarked that the deal, in the short run, would encourage cooperation between the United States and Iran to try and deal with Syria and resolve its political crisis.<sup>35</sup> Known that no threat has so far been effective in stopping Iran's nuclear projects, West needs to adopt alternative conflict resolution strategies. Any harder policy may instigate Iran to turn much more aggressive. The present Iranian government under the liberal Islamic President may be easier to handle than any conservative government. Iran's liberal President Hasan Rouhani should not be disturbed. A policy of appeasement may also be adopted in order not to allow the extremists coming to power.

## Conclusion

Like I said before, Iran-U.S. estrangements that grew out of Iran's Islamic Revolution in the 1970s have been considered as the major determining factors behind the political instability and insecurity of Middle East. The recent rapport

---

<sup>33</sup> *Reuters*, Dubai, November 24, 2013

<sup>34</sup> William Maclean, "US-Iran Thaw Starts to Reshape Middle East Power Balance," *Reuters*, Dubai, November 24, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

between Iran and U.S. is likely to bring massive reorientation and redefinition of the Middle East security. The developing events in the contemporary Middle East provide clear indicator of a revised security paradigm. It appears crystal clear that America must want to safeguard Israel from their arch enemy Iran, and to ensure oil-flow from the Middle East, to defend their European allies' gains in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region and to sustain their political, economic and strategic interests. America always finds Iran countering the U.S. in its entire arduous journey to Middle East. That's how the US and Iran will find themselves at loggerheads instead of thawing their chill. The chill of their chill seems to create another irritating chapter in the U.S.-Iran bilateral relations. Under these circumstances, an innovative security paradigm for the Middle East region needs to be devised. My argument for the nuclear deterrence has been developed in view of the political realities of the region. Efforts need to be taken to ensure Iran's peaceful nuclear programs. The plan for attacking Iran is not a viable solution. Any step to destabilize the flourishing environment of the balance of power between Israel and Iran will not bring any good result for the international community.

## Arab Spring and the Contemporary Geopolitics of the Middle East

*Noor Mohammad Sarker\**

### **Abstract**

Throughout the recorded history, the Middle East has been playing a vital role in the global geopolitics. The significant geographic characteristics supplemented by an enormous oil reserve has turned the region as one the most highlighted geopolitical areas of the present-day international relations. The Middle East also contains some of the world's key oil choke points and straits by which petroleum has been supplied throughout the world, especially to the European, American and East Asian countries. Traditionally, the geopolitical structure of the region has been branded by military dictatorships and monarchies, largely backed by the western powers. However, the outset of the Arab Spring in December 2010 had paved the way to notice that the popular democratic uprising in these traditional authoritarian countries is about to bring a significant structural shift in the geopolitics of the entire region. Some scholars supported this observation based on the historical illustration of the outsets of 1989 Central and Eastern European movements for democracy. But, after more than three years, it is quite visible that the feeble application of Arab Spring for freedom and democracy could not bring about overnight shifts to the regional geopolitical calculations.

### **Introduction**

The nineteenth century French novelist Arthur De Gobineau once remarked, "The Middle East is a delicious meat, but it poisons those who eat it".<sup>1</sup> The twenty-first century international politics circling the Middle East precisely reflects his observation. For ages, the Middle East has been served as the birthplace of a number of major religions and civilizations. Repeatedly, it has

---

\* **Noor Mohammad Sarker** is a Research Associate at Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA). He graduated with B.S.S. and M.S.S. from the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. His research interest includes traditional as well as non-traditional security studies, theories of International Relations, foreign policy analysis, diplomacy, human rights, South Asian affairs, East Asian affairs, Middle Eastern Affairs and Southeast Asian affairs. He can be reached at: nmsrdu@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.vancepublications.com/cr/cr77ex.pdf>> (accessed on March 03, 2014)

also become a theatre of grand-chase among the great powers. The significant strategic location of the region as the 'middle man' among the three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe – and its abundance in petroleum reserves have made the Middle East geopolitically as one of the most significant areas in the world. Hence, the contemporary discourse of international relations can not subsist without deepening analysis on the Middle East. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Americans and their Western allies are increasingly being aware of its significance as an important oil producing region, as an area of tension and unrest, and as a major field for great-power rivalry and involvement. The Middle Eastern zone has traditionally been a contested ground between the land power of Russia and the naval power of the West, especially the United Kingdom. Therefore, no intelligent foreign policy can ignore the Middle East and its impact upon the rest of the world.

Besides, great power-politics during the Second World War, the Cold War, the post-Cold War, the post 9/11 era have relatively been cantered by the region. In reality, the Middle East has been a hub of world politics from the ancient period and especially after the discovery of oil-mines in the Middle East in the first-half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the region has often been viewed as a region that 'best fits the realist view of international politics'.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of December 2010, the uprising for democracy, termed 'Arab Spring', in the traditional authoritarian countries of the Middle East initially brought about crucial impacts on the geopolitical calculation of the entire region. It suddenly traumatized the foundation of a number of Middle East regimes and their decades-long alliances with the Western powers. Although, after more than three years, the uprising has so far achieved a little compared to the aspiration rested upon it.

To grip a smart understanding on the Middle East, its geopolitical significance and the implications of Arab Spring on the geopolitics of the region, the present study is divided into six major sections. Subsequent to the introductory remarks, the paper sketches an analytical framework in its second section describing some key concepts and theoretical foundation. The third section focuses on various determinants of the geopolitics of the Middle East. The following section explains the contemporary Middle Eastern geopolitics in the light of Arab uprising. The fifth section offers a brief theoretical implication. In line with all the discussions, at last, the paper draws few concluding observations. Considering the issue and the scope of the study, secondary sources have been extensively reviewed, including published books, journal articles and periodicals, reports from international organizations, published research manuscripts, newspaper articles, and online materials.

---

<sup>2</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 3rd edition, (New York: Longman, 2000), p.163.

## Analytical Framework

### Geopolitics

“Geopolitics” is a frequently-used term in international relations. The term is a merged form of two separate words: ‘geography’ and ‘politics’. Scholars, academicians, observers, and practitioners of global politics often use the term in order to describe or analyze specific foreign policy issues and actions.<sup>3</sup> It was first coined in 1899 by a Swedish, named Rudolf Kjellén.<sup>4</sup> But, while the term dates from the cusp of the twentieth century, the idea is very old, as are differences of view as to its worthiness and application. The Greek geographer-philosopher Strabo (64 BC–23 AD), for example, believed that geography was destiny, even that particular geographical circumstances conduced to certain political orders.<sup>5</sup> Whereas focusing on the development of ‘classical’ geopolitical, geographer John Agnew explains geopolitics as, “framed world politics in terms of an overarching global context in which states vie for power outside their boundaries, gain control (formally and informally) over less modern regions (and their resources) and overtake other major states in a worldwide pursuit of global primacy.”<sup>6</sup>

With the emergence of deeper understanding on the discourse, especially in the twentieth century, many scholars opined from the different viewpoints to define geopolitics. For example, in 1963, S.B. Cohen argued, “The essence of geopolitical analysis is the relation of international political power of the geographical setting.”<sup>7</sup> In 1969, Norman Dunbar Palmer and Howard Cecil Perkins asserted, “Geopolitics is the science of the relationship between space and politics which attempts to put geographical knowledge at the service of political leaders.”<sup>8</sup> Later, in 1988, Oyvind Osterud said, “Geopolitics traditionally indicates the links and causal relationships between political power and geographic space.”<sup>9</sup> In 2002, Francis P. Sempa described in his word

<sup>3</sup> Francis P. Sempa, *Geopolitics: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, (London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Strausz-Hupe, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power*, (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1942), p.18.

<sup>5</sup> James Fairgrieve, *Geography and World Power*, (London: University of London Press, 1941), p.26.

<sup>6</sup> John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics*, 2nd edition, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.1.

<sup>7</sup> S.B. Cohen, *Geography and Politics in a Divided World*, (Great Britain: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), p.8.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Dunbar Palmer & Howard Cecil Perkins, *International relations: the world community in transition*, (US: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p.266.

<sup>9</sup> Oyvind Osterud, “The Uses and Abuses of Geopolitics,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1988, p.122.

that, "Geopolitics is about the interaction among states and empires in a particular geographical setting."<sup>10</sup> Broadly defined, geopolitics indicates to the territorial dimensions of international politics. The study of geopolitics concentrate on the repercussions of nature, geography, and material factors on patterns of international politics defined primarily in terms of territorial competition between the great powers.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, the study of geopolitics involves the analysis of geography, history and social science. It is multidisciplinary in its scope, and includes all aspects of social sciences with particular emphasis on political geography, international relations, the territorial aspects of political science and international law.

### The Middle East

The "Middle East" defines a geographical area, but does not have precisely defined borders. It is a region that spans Southwestern Asia and Northeastern Africa. It has no clear boundaries, often used as a synonym to Near East, in opposition to Far East.<sup>12</sup> The region has been the central of three linked continents—Asia, Europe and Africa.<sup>13</sup>

The term "Middle East" was popularized around 1900 in the United Kingdom. But, the American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) first used the term in September 1902.<sup>14</sup> This region covers an area of about 5.0 million square miles and has a total population approaching 200 million.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Francis P. Sempa, *op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Deudney, "Geopolitics and Change," in *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*, edited by Michael W. Doyle & G. John Ikenberry (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *The international politics of the Middle East*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Saeid Naji & Jayum A. Jawan, "Role of the Persian Gulf's Oil in the US Geopolitical Codes during the Cold War Geopolitical Order," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 2011, pp.206-220.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Persian Gulf and International Relations," *National Review*, September 1902, p.31; see also, E.W. Anderson, *The Middle East: Geography and Geopolitics*, (London: Routledge, 2000); P. Bilgin, *Regional Security in the Middle East: a critical perspective*, (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); D. Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

<sup>15</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.15.

**Table 1. Countries of the Middle East**

Countries	Capital	Area (sq km)	Population (2013 est.)
Iran	Tehran	1,648,195	71,208,000
Turkey	Ankara	783,562	70,586,256
Iraq	Baghdad	437,072	24,001,816
Kuwait	Kuwait City	17,820	3,100,000
Bahrain	Manama	665	656,397
Oman	Muscat	212,460	3,200,000
Qatar	Doha	11,437	793,341
Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	1,960,582	23,513,330
United Arab Emirates	Abu Dhabi	82,880	4,496,000
Yemen	Sana	527,970	18,701,257
Israel	Jerusalem	20,770	7,029,529
Jordan	Amman	92,300	5,307,470
Lebanon	Beirut	10,452	3,677,780
Syria	Damascus	185,180	17,155,814
Egypt	Cairo	1,001,449	77,498,000
Palestine	Gaza	6220	3,376,289

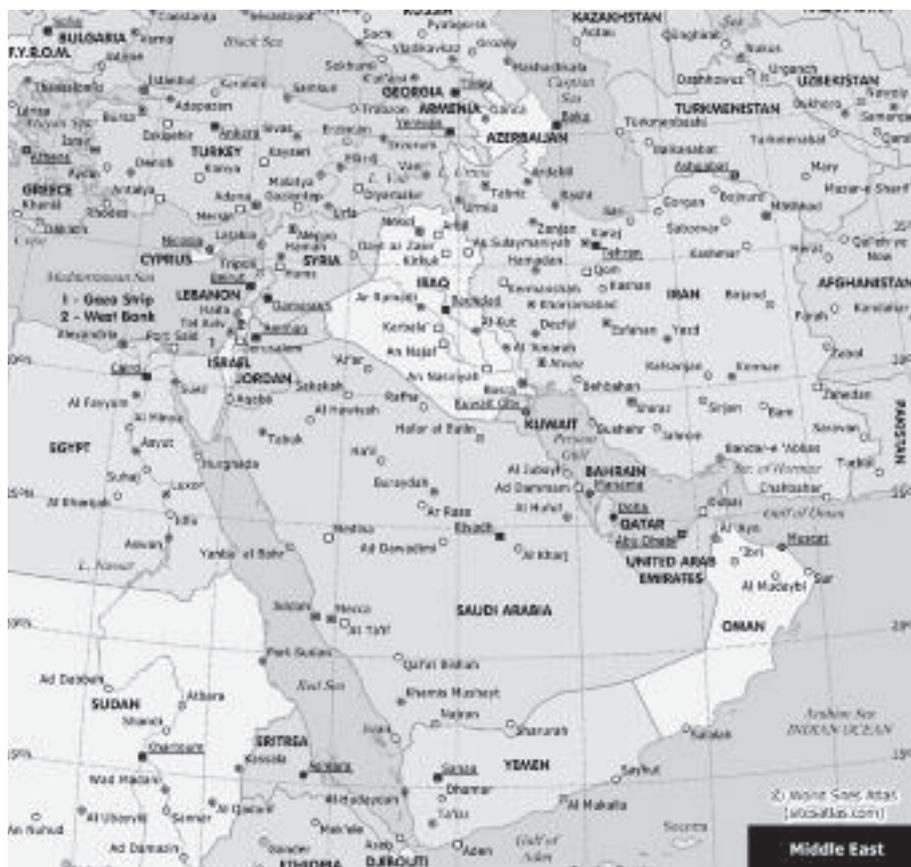
Source: <<http://www.mideastweb.org/countries.htm>>

The physical geography of the Middle East is varied. Vast deserts are common in the region. The Sahara Desert runs across North Africa. The desert of the Arabian Peninsula is so harsh that it has been given the name 'The Empty Quarter'.<sup>16</sup> In these areas better served by rainfall and rivers, rich agriculture is abundant. Mountain ranges exist throughout the region with some peaks rising as high as 19,000 feet. It should be noted that, between the mountains, the high plateaus are common within the entire region.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>17</sup> *Global Perspectives, "Middle East,"* <<http://www.cotf.edu/earthinfo/meast/MEgeo.html>> (accessed on February 28, 2014)

Map 1. The Middle East



Source: <[http://www.yourchildlearns.com/middle\\_east\\_map.htm](http://www.yourchildlearns.com/middle_east_map.htm)>

As for climate, the region again displays a great variety. In the desert areas, rainfall is low, averaging about four inches per year. Temperatures in such areas show great extremes. Along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the Black and Caspian Seas, the water serves to lessen the temperature extremes of the desert resulting in a more moderate climate that is similar to that of Southern Italy or California.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of political orientation, most of the countries of the region could be introduced as governed by decades-long authoritarian rules. The region's political history has been punctuated by the rise and fall of great powers, colonial domination, the birth or creation of new countries, and uneven

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

marches toward political and economic development. The multiple consequences of these developments for the Middle East have been particularly pronounced since the early decades of the twentieth century. The collapse of the Ottomans in the early twentieth century resulted in the large-scale introduction of European colonialism into the Middle East beginning in the 1920s. The basic patterns of relationship between the colonial states and their subject societies in the Middle East were detachment, minimal contact, and top-down flow of power. The emergence of sovereign, independent states in the Middle East in the 1940s and 1950s dramatically altered domestic power equations and the traditional foundations for state-society relations in each Middle Eastern country. These ostensibly modern states were thrust unprepared into a competitive international environment in which they had to foster rapid economic and industrial development and, most importantly, satisfy the growing nationalist aspirations of their populations. These nationalist yearnings emerged in response to domestic social and political developments and as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the latter itself serving as a catalyst for much regional conflict and instability. Not surprisingly, the political history of the modern Middle East as it unfolded in the twentieth century was one of wars, conquests, political turmoil, and extremism.<sup>19</sup>

## Arab Spring

The political upheavals in the Middle East since December 2010 have generally been known in a single popular term as 'Arab Spring'. It was a series of diverse albeit interconnected events of anti-government protests and armed rebellions that spread across the region.<sup>20</sup> The term was popularized by the western media in early 2011. The movement was at its core an expression of deep-seated resentment at the ageing Arab dictatorships, anger at the brutality of the security apparatus, unemployment, rising prices, and corruption that followed the privatization of state assets in some countries. Therefore, the key slogan of this movement was to overthrow authoritarian regimes and, thereby, restore democratic values. However, the course of uprising did not have equal impacts on all of the countries in the Middle East. Years long authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen had been collapsed by this popular movement.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Mehran Kamrava, *The modern Middle East: a political history since the First World War*, (London: University of California Press Ltd., 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, "The 2011 uprisings in the Arab Middle East: political change and geopolitical implications," *International Affairs*, Vol.88, No.1, 2012, pp.63–79.

<sup>21</sup> Hussein Yaakoub, "Revolutions for Democracy," *Perspectives*, Special Issue, May 02, 2011, pp.35-43.

Arab Spring began with the self-immolation of Muhammad Buazizi on 17 December, 2010 in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid. In order to portray the protest against humiliation by the police and the feared loss of his livelihood, Buazizi set himself on fire. It was yet a symbolic start of the uprisings. Soon after that shocking incident, demonstrations erupted and spread to neighboring cities. However, initially there was a slow political response from Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's regime.<sup>22</sup> Popular mobilization in Tunisia was largely spontaneous, but some sections of the country's main trade union, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), and professional associations subsequently played a significant role in organizing it. Police repression increased but then receded by 10 January 2011, as the army signaled it would not take action against the protesters. As a general strike unfolded on 14 January, Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia.<sup>23</sup> The overthrow of Ben Ali galvanized popular political action in Egypt. Demonstrations organized for 25 January 2011 by civil society and opposition groups unexpectedly brought out around 20,000 participants. Protests spread in Cairo and throughout the country. Mubarak's final speech to the nation on 10 February indicated that he was losing his authority, and on the same day the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) issued its first communiqué, endorsing the people's legitimate demands. On 11 February, Mubarak resigned and transferred his powers to the military. Six months later he was put on trial with his sons and key regime figures.<sup>24</sup>

A few days after Mubarak's fall, protests against Muammar Qadhafi broke out in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city, and quickly spread across the whole of the east and to some parts of the west, although they remained relatively small-scale in the capital, Tripoli. The rebellion was led by the National Transition Council (NTC). The UN Security Council sanctioned military intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from March, but it did not trigger a popular uprising in the West; outside intervention may even have hardened the attitude of some pro-regime loyalists. However, by early September 2011, after months of apparent deadlock and a war which cost tens of thousands of lives (the figures are as yet unverified), Gaddafi's regime imploded and he himself was brutally killed on 20 October, 2011.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), "Popular protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's way," *Middle East report*, No.106 (Brussels: ICG, 2011), pp.3–6.

<sup>24</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> ICG, "Popular protest in the Middle East and North Africa (V): Making sense of Libya," *Middle East report*, No.107 (Brussels: ICG, 2011), pp.1–3.

Likewise, in Yemen, small-scale demonstrations demanded President Ali Saleh's removal on 14 January 2011. A month later, after Mubarak's fall, protests grew being led by a new group of youth and civil society activists. On 18 March, the killing by snipers of 60 protesters alienated many Yemenis. Nevertheless, Saleh used a combination of repression, counter-mobilization, economic enticements, and promises of political compromise and reform to hang on to power. Injured in an attack on 3 June, he fled to Saudi Arabia, but returned on 23 September. Saleh agreed to hand over power but will continue to be a political player, particularly as his family retains control in the military and security apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, and some other countries of the Middle East have been impacted by the Arab Spring till the day. The most highlighted example is Syria, where the conflict still remains between the forces of Bashar Al Assad and the rival groups over the possession of state-power.

### Theoretical Sketch

Some scholars argue that, the 2011 uprising for democracy in the Middle East resembles to the democratic movement in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989.<sup>27</sup> The movements of Central and Eastern Europe by and large shared an ambition to replace their governments with western European forms of democracy, and, thereby, the entrenchment of human rights and the benefits of consumer-led economic growth. The movement had a significant geopolitical implication, since it led to the collapse of the former Soviet Union and to a lop-sided geopolitical world order in favour of the United States. As a result of the movement, most of the former Soviet Union allies in Central and Eastern Europe had become the allies of the US-led alliance in the Cold War.<sup>28</sup> The Arab Spring in the Middle East has the similar geopolitical implication to the Central and Eastern Europe in 1989.

---

<sup>26</sup> Mareike Transfeld, "Yemen: GCC Roadmap to Nowhere," *SWP Comments*, Vol. 20, May 2014.

<sup>27</sup> David Lesch & Mark Haas (eds.), *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, (Philadelphia, USA: Westview Press, 2013); David Held & Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Arab Spring and the changing balance of global power," *Open Democracy*, February 26, 2014; Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.90, No.3, May-June 2011, pp.8-16.

<sup>28</sup> David Held & Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *ibid.*

**Table 2. Analogy between 1989 and 2011 Movements**

<b>1989 Movement in Central and Eastern Europe</b>	<b>2011 Movement in the Middle East</b>
People's uprising for Democracy, Human Rights and Capitalism	People's uprising for Democracy, Rule of Law and Freedom of Speech
Overthrow of communist authoritarian regimes	Overthrow of some regional authoritarian regimes
Maximization of western geopolitical influence over Central and Eastern Europe	Strengthening the western geopolitical influence over the Middle East
Maximization of the security for the western allies in the region	Maximization of the security for the Western allies (e.g. Israel) in the region

Source: Author

Given the backdrop of decades-long authoritarian regimes, people's uprising in the Middle Eastern countries had a strong application for democracy, rule of law and freedom of speech. Geopolitically, the movement favoured the contingency of western influence over the region, along with the safeguarding of Israel's security. Hence, the rationale of selecting this particular theoretical interpretation is to analyze whether there is an analogy of geopolitical shifts fuelled by the successful political movements in different regions of the world.

## **Determinants of the Middle Eastern Geopolitics**

### **Strategic Location**

The Middle East has a unique geographical position. It is an area situated at the junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and as such it commands the strategic approaches to these three continents.<sup>29</sup> Of all parts of the middle zone of Asia, the Middle East has been most exposed to penetration by naval powers, since its long and curved coast line is washed by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Beaumont, Gerald H. Blake & J. Malcolm Wagstaff, *The Middle East: A Geographical Study*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1988), p.12.

The geo-strategic location of the Middle East coupled with possessing within its confines the world's largest reserves of oil and gas reserves have ensured that the Middle East always figured high in the global strategic calculus. It has constantly remained in the cynosure of the major powers of the day.<sup>30</sup> Although geographically most of its land area lies within Asia, the Middle East's largest city, Cairo, capital of Egypt, is situated in Africa. One of the region's important countries, Turkey, is located both Europe and Asia. The strategic location of the Middle East as a "bridge" among three continents makes more understandable its role as a "middleman" throughout world history. During the Middle Ages, important spice routes passed through the Middle East, linking Europe with the orient.<sup>31</sup>

Historically, the important strategic location of the Middle East stretching from cultural, political and economic aspects has attracted the attention of great powers and formed important conflicts and competitions to control of this area. The first western power that entered to this region was Portugal, which was the result of the circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, which was done by Vasco da Gama. After that Holland, then France and ultimately Britain and even the Ottoman Empire were other states that came to this area to pursue their colonial, political and commercial objectives in the region during sixteenth to twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> In the early of the 20th century, however, the United States entered to region instead of Britain and continued its presence in the Persian Gulf as the main external powerful player in region to date.<sup>33</sup>

### **Pasture of Civilizations and Major Religions**

The written history of the Middle East dates back to ancient times, and throughout its history, the region has been a major centre of world affairs. It was a cradle of world civilizations. The first full civilization emerged by 3500 B.C. in the Tigris-Euphrates valley in the Middle East. Relatively, soon thereafter civilization developed along the Nile in Egypt, and later spread to other parts of the Middle East.<sup>34</sup> Even, many scholars believe that civilization began in the Middle East. There is evidence that the peoples of the region

---

<sup>30</sup> <[www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers29%5Cpaper2855.html](http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers29%5Cpaper2855.html)> (accessed on April 27, 2013)

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p.18.

<sup>32</sup> Saeid Naji & Jayum A. Jawan, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> A. Sajedi, "Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf Security: Iran and the United States," *IPRI* (Islamic Policy Research Institute), Vol. IX, No.2, 2009, pp.77-89.

<sup>34</sup> <[http://history-world.org/rise\\_of\\_civilization\\_in\\_the\\_midd.htm](http://history-world.org/rise_of_civilization_in_the_midd.htm)> (accessed on April 29, 2013)

practiced agriculture in the pre-historic period. Agriculture made men food producers instead of food gatherers. As a result, men settled down, established organized societies, and developed the arts and crafts of civilization. As early as 10,000 years ago, they grew plants and domesticated animals in the Nile valley in Egypt, along the shores of the eastern Mediterranean in the area of present day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in parts of present day Iraq.

**Table 3. Some Well-known Civilizations Passed in the Middle East**

<b>Civilizations</b>	<b>Period/ Timeline</b>
Sumerians	3250 – 2000 B.C.
Ancient Egyptians	3400 – 1000 B.C.
Babylonians	1850 – 550 B.C.
Ancient Hebrews	1200 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Ancient Persians	550 – 330 B.C.
Roman Empire	200 B.C. – 476 A.D.
Byzantine Empire	395 – 1453 A.D.
Muslim Empire	622 – 1200 A.D.
Abbasid Caliphate	750 – 1258 A.D.
<i>Ottoman Turks</i>	1300 – 1918 A.D.

Source: <[www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk/home\\_set.html](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk/home_set.html)>

The Middle East is also the historical origin of three of the world's major religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Among these, Judaism was the first great religion to stress the idea of a single supreme being, God who created the universe and ruled it with justice and goodness. All three faiths accept the ethical teachings of the Hebrew Bible, popularly known as *The Old Testament*. Judaism stresses good deeds and righteous living. The 'Ten Commandments', given to Moses by God, are still part of the moral code of the mankind. Moses was the famous early Jewish leader who led the Jews out of captivity in Egypt. The Jewish population of the world is now approximately 15 million. Among them, about 6 million live in the United States of America and over 3 million in Israel.

Christianity also continues to be an important religion in the Middle East. Today there are two main traditions within the Christian faith, Western and

Eastern. The Eastern tradition includes the Orthodox, the Copts, and others. Within the Western tradition there are the Roman Catholic and the Protestant faiths. Christians consider Jerusalem as a holy place because it was the place where many important events in Christ's life occurred, including the Crucifixion.

Islam, one of the world's great religions and the faiths of more than 750 million people today, was born in the Arabian Peninsula. Islamic civilization has been dominated in this area for 13 centuries. Islamic civilization reached its political height between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries under the leadership of the Abbasid caliphs. Thereafter, its political cohesiveness fell apart until the coming of the Ottomans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Muslims have always considered Mecca and Medina to be their holiest cities. Jerusalem is considered the third most holy city because it too contains shrines and place important in the history of Islam.<sup>35</sup>

### **Major Oil Chokepoints**

A chokepoint is a strategic strait or canal which could be closed or blocked to stop sea traffic, especially oil. World oil chokepoints are a critical part of global energy security. About half of the world's oil production moves on maritime routes. Alone in 2011, total world oil production amounted to approximately 88 million barrels per day, and over one-half was moved by tankers on fixed maritime routes.<sup>36</sup> As a single region, the Middle East contains the most number of key oil chokepoints in the world, including Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, and Suez Canal (See, Map 2)

---

<sup>35</sup> <[www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/religion/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/religion/)> (accessed on April 27, 2013)

<sup>36</sup> <[www.eia.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Full.html](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Full.html)> (accessed on April 18, 2013)

## Map 2. World's Major Oil Choke Points



Source: <[http://www.eia.gov/cabs/world\\_oil\\_transit\\_chokepoints/full.html](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/world_oil_transit_chokepoints/full.html)>

### *Bab-el-Mandeb*

Located between the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, the Bab el Mandeb is a chokepoint between the horn of Africa and the Middle East and a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. It is surrounded by Yemen, Djibouti, and six-year old Eritrea. In 2006, an estimated 3.3 million barrels of oil passed through the strait per day, out of a world total of about 43 million barrels per day moved by tankers. An estimated 3.2 million bbl/d flowed through this waterway in 2009 toward Europe, the United States, and Asia.<sup>37</sup> Security became a concern of foreign firms doing business in the region, after a French tanker was attacked off the coast of Yemen by terrorists in October 2002. In recent years, this region has also been a hub of rising piracy, and Somali pirates continue to attack vessels off the Northern Somali coast in the Gulf of Aden and Southern Red Sea including the Bab el-Mandab.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Strait of Hormuz*

The Strait of Hormuz, in fact, has upheld the strategic importance of the Middle East. It is a narrow and curve channel with about 100 miles length and 21 miles in its narrowest parts. The strait connects the Persian Gulf to high seas through

<sup>37</sup> <[www.eia.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Full.html#babel-mandab](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Full.html#babel-mandab)> (accessed on April 18, 2013)

<sup>38</sup> <[www.ICIS.com](http://www.ICIS.com)> (accessed on April 29, 2013)

the Indian Ocean. This chokepoint became a household term during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. It is worth noting that, width of each used new sailing lines from 1979 is about 1 mile and the lines are separated from each other by a security line with 1 mile width, while there are several strategic islands in entrance of the Persian Gulf that six islands among them have created a curve line, where have the most strategic position in the Hormuz Strait and thus because these islands have short distances between each other, a virtual line has been drawn along the islands.<sup>39</sup> It has become more important when the ample amount of oil exportation to industrial world and also goods importation to the Middle East transport throughout this strategic strait. This strait named as world's economic main highway because it injects oil to world's economy heart.<sup>40</sup>

The Strait of Hormuz is another critical point in the lifeline flow of oil from the Persian Gulf area. The Strait is by far the world's most important chokepoint with an oil flow of almost 17 million barrels per day in 2011, which was between 15.5-16.0 million barrels per day in 2009-2010. Flows through the Strait in 2011 were roughly 35 percent of all seaborne traded oil, or almost 20 percent of oil traded worldwide. More than 85 percent of these crude oil exports went to Asian markets, with Japan, India, South Korea, and China representing the largest destinations.<sup>41</sup> This strait is closely monitored by the US military and its allies. The strait connects the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea and is surrounded by Iran, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. It is cited that between 20 percent and 40 percent of the world's oil supply passes through the strait, making it one of the world's strategically important chokepoints.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the strait is often termed as 'The Mother of All Chokepoints'.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> P. Mojtahedzadeh, *Political Geography of Hormuz Strait*, (Tehran: Saghir publication, 1995)

<sup>40</sup> J. Barnes, & A. M. Jaffe, "The Persian Gulf and the Geopolitics of Oil," *Survival*, Vol.48, No.1, 2006, pp.143-162 .

<sup>41</sup> <[www.eia.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Full.html#hormuz](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Full.html#hormuz)> (accessed on April 18, 2013)

<sup>42</sup> <[www.usatoday.com/money/industries/energy/story/2012-03-21/gas-prices-iran-strait-of-hormuz/53704546/1](http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/energy/story/2012-03-21/gas-prices-iran-strait-of-hormuz/53704546/1)> (accessed on April 29, 2013)

<sup>43</sup> Giacomo Luciani, "Geopolitics of Energy in the Middle East," May 02, 2011, <<http://www.princeton.edu/~gluciani/pdfs/Geopolitics%20of%20Energy%20in%20the%20Middle%20East%202011.pdf>> (accessed on April 17, 2013)

Map 3. Strait of Hormuz



Source: <[http://www.princeton.edu/~gluciani/pdfs/Geopolitics%20of%20 Energy %20in%20the%20Middle%20East%202011.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~gluciani/pdfs/Geopolitics%20of%20Energy%20in%20the%20Middle%20East%202011.pdf)>

### *Bosporus & Dardanelles Straits*

The Bosporus, also known as the Istanbul Strait, is a strait that forms the boundary between the European part of Turkey and its Asian part, Anatolia. It is the world's narrowest strait used for international navigation. It connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmora. It is approximately 30 km long, with a maximum width of 3,700 meters. Increased oil exports from the Caspian Sea

region make the Bosphorus Straits one of the busiest and most dangerous chokepoints in the world supplying Western and Southern Europe. With 50,000 vessels, including 5,500 oil tankers, are passing through the straits annually.<sup>44</sup> An estimated 2.9 million bbl/d flowed through this passageway in 2009, of which over 2.5 million bbl/d was crude oil. The ports of the Black Sea are one of the primary oil export routes for Russia and other former Soviet Union republics. Oil shipments through the Turkish Straits decreased from over 3.4 million bbl/d at its peak in 2004 to 2.6 million bbl/d in 2006 as Russia shifted crude oil exports toward the Baltic ports.<sup>45</sup>

The Dardanelles is a narrow strait in northwestern Turkey connecting the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmora. The strait is 61 km long but only 1.2 to 6 km wide. It separates Europe and the mainland of Asia, especially separates Asian Turkey from European Turkey (*Trance*), thus it also separates the two continents. The strait is an international waterway and together with the Bosphorus connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>46</sup>

### *Suez Canal*

The 103 mile long Suez Canal is located entirely within Egypt and it is the only sea route between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. With the tension in the Middle East, the Suez Canal is a prime target for many nations. The canal was completed in 1869 by French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps. The British took control of the canal and Egypt from 1882 until 1922. Egypt nationalized the canal in 1956.

During the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel seized control of the Sinai Desert directly East of the canal but relinquished control in exchange for peace. Year-to-date through November of 2010, petroleum (both crude oil and refined products) as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) accounted for 13 and 11 percent of Suez cargos, measured by cargo tonnage, respectively. Total petroleum transit volume was close to 2 million barrel per day, or just below five percent of seaborne oil trade in 2010. Almost 16,500 ships transited the Suez Canal from January to November of 2010, of which about 20 percent were petroleum tankers and 5 percent were LNG tankers. According to a report released by the International Energy Agency (IEA), shipping around Africa would add 15 days of transit to Europe and 8-10 days to the United States.

In addition to dramatically reducing transit time for trade worldwide, the Suez Canal is one of the world's most significant waterways as it supports 8

<sup>44</sup> <[www.eia.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Full.html#bosporus](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Full.html#bosporus)> (accessed on April 18, 2013)

<sup>45</sup> <[www.bosphorusstrait.com/](http://www.bosphorusstrait.com/)> (accessed on April 26, 2013)

<sup>46</sup> <[www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/dardanelles.htm](http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/dardanelles.htm)> (accessed on April 27, 2013)

percent of the world's shipping traffic and almost 50 ships pass through the canal daily.<sup>47</sup> Because of its narrow width, the canal is also considered a significant geographic chokepoint as it could easily be blocked and disrupts this flow of trade. There are a number of specific strategic values<sup>48</sup> that the Canal contains:

- The Suez Canal is considered to be the shortest link between the East and the West due to its unique geographic location; it is an important international navigation canal linking between the Mediterranean Sea at Port Said and the Red Sea at Suez. The unique geographical position of the Suez Canal makes it of special importance to the world and to Egypt as well.<sup>49</sup>
- This importance is getting augmented with the evolution of maritime transport and world trade. The maritime transport is the cheapest means of transport, whereas more than 80 percent of the world's trade volume is transported via waterways (seaborne trade).
- Saving in distance, time and in operating costs for vessels that transit the Canal, also firm up this importance.

### The Hub of Petroleum Reserves

There is this view that, in 21<sup>st</sup> century existing energy resources as geo-economic factors indicate importance and value of regions,<sup>50</sup> and nowadays, in projecting the foreign policies the geo-economic logic is more important than geopolitical logic.<sup>51</sup> From this view, the Middle East is one of the most important regions that plays main role to construct interstates relations in the new era. In this respect, ensuring regional security, constant production of oil and the security of oil flows to consumer states have always remain vital issues in their grand strategies.<sup>52</sup>

The Middle Eastern countries have over half of the world's known petroleum reserves. They produce over a quarter of the world's oil. The oil

<sup>47</sup> <[www.eia.gov/cabs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/Full.html#suezsume](http://www.eia.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Full.html#suezsume)> (accessed on April 18, 2013)

<sup>48</sup> <[www.suezcanal.gov.eg/sc](http://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/sc)> (accessed on April 27, 2013)

<sup>49</sup> <[www.ICIS.com](http://www.ICIS.com)> (accessed on April 29, 2013)

<sup>50</sup> A. J. Valdani, *New geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf*, (Tehran: publication of foreign ministry of Iran, 2002)

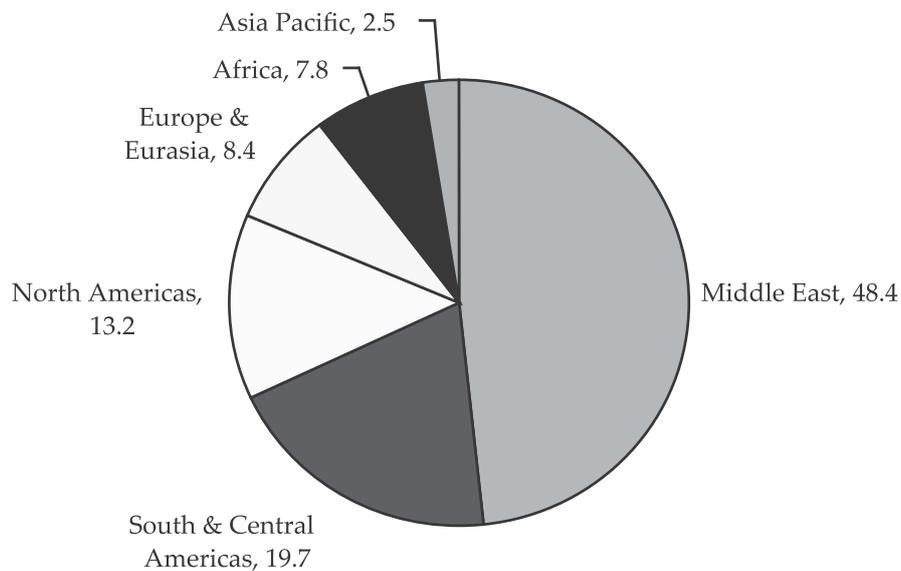
<sup>51</sup> J. Mercille, "The radical geopolitics of US foreign policy: Geopolitical and geo-economic logics of power," *Political Geography*, Vol.27, 2008, pp.570-586.

<sup>52</sup> H. Elahi, *The issues of the Persian Gulf*, (Tehran: Ghoomes publication, 2000); see also, Ian O. Lesser, *Oil, the Persian Gulf, and Grand Strategy: Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-4072-CENTCOM/JCS, 1991)

industry has become by far the most important industry in the Middle East. Since the early 1930s, billions of dollars have been invested in the production of this vital commodity.<sup>53</sup> Most of the Middle Eastern oil is exported. Petroleum exports now make up over three-fourth of the total value of the Middle East shipments abroad. Western Europe, the United States and Japan receive over 70 percent of these supplies.<sup>54</sup>

The Major oil producing nations of the Middle East are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Kuwait. In the early 1980s Saudi Arabia was producing over 10 million barrels of oil per day. Iran was producing 6 million barrels a day until the civil unrest in 1979, which reduced the production. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman are also important oil-producing states in the Middle East. As a geographic region, the Middle East has the record of the highest petroleum reserve (Figure 2). Among the highest ten countries of the world's leading petroleum preservers, six are from the Middle East region (Table 3 & Map 4).

**Figure 1. World Petroleum Reserve by Region (2012)**



**Source:** BP Statistical Review of World Energy (2013)

<sup>53</sup> Peter Beaumont, Gerald H. Blake & J. Malcolm Wagstaff, *op. cit.*, p.42.

<sup>54</sup> <[www.iags.org/futureofoil.htm](http://www.iags.org/futureofoil.htm)> (accessed on April 15, 2013)

**Table 4. List of Top 10 Oil Reserves Countries in the World (2013)**

Rank	Country	Oil Reserves (Billion Barrels)	% of World Total
1	Venezuela	297.6	18.2
2	Saudi Arabia	265.4	16.2
3	Canada	173.1	10.6
4	Iran	154.6	9.4
5	Iraq	141.4	8.6
6	Kuwait	101.5	6.2
7	UAE	97.8	6
8	Russia	80	4.9
9	Libya	48	2.9
10	Nigeria	37.2	2.3

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, International Energy Outlook (2013)

**Map 4. World's Top 10 Oil Reserves Countries (2013)**

Source: <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/world-top-ten-oil-reserves-countries-map.html>>

Oil income has also made it possible for Arab oil-exporting nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, to extend financial assistance to other Arab nations in need of it. Billions of Arab “Petrodollars” have been invested abroad or placed in foreign banks. Arab oil-exporting nations have joined with other oil-exporting countries to form the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to regulate production and prices of oil on a worldwide basis. The growing energy needs and dependence on the Middle East oil of developing nations as well as Western and other industrialized nations have made OPEC an increasingly important in world affairs. In many countries, particularly OPEC producers, the estimates of petroleum production and reserve may involve a great deal of political influence.<sup>55</sup>

### **Arab Spring and the Contemporary Geopolitics of the Middle East**

The geopolitics of the Middle East has, so far, undergone few changes due to the Arab uprising. The course of Arab Spring has led to the rise of some regional powers as well as shift power balance among the regional members and their foreign alliances. The uprising has not only overthrown some weighty regional Arab leaders, but has also disturbed the policy of the Western world over the region. The role of the USA and its allies in the Egyptian and Libyan crises, for example, has greatly reduced their support in the Middle East.

The regional geopolitics of the Middle East has long been dominated by Saudi Arabia and Iran, two key regional powers.<sup>56</sup> The two historical rivals have competed for political and religious influence over the region, and have engaged in proxy-rivalling in the region’s hotspots, such as Palestine and Iraq. Each side has led competing regional forces and division between Sunnis and Shias. Saudi Arabia maintains a pro-Western alliance, whereas Iran has its sound political and economic relationship with Russia and China. Both of these regional powers were surprised of the swings of Arab uprisings. They are challenged both domestically and regionally in terms of their political practices and alliances. Initially, it was perceived that, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia would be vulnerable to political developments in the rest of the region and would be forced to pursue reforms from above. However, Saudi Arabia has,

---

<sup>55</sup> <[www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/data\\_graphs/330.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm)> (accessed on April 15, 2013)

<sup>56</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee & Alireza Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*, (USA: RAND Corporation, 2013); F. Gregory Gause, “Why the Iran Deal Scares Saudi Arabia,” *The New Yorker*, November 26, 2013, <<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-the-iran-deal-scares-saudi-arabia>> (accessed on June 29, 2014)

so far, successfully balanced its foreign policy against all the domestic grievances by continuing close relationship with the Western world.<sup>57</sup>

Iran, on the other hand, was initially strained with the sudden political developments of the uprising. Tehran certainly opined some positive postures towards the demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt. Iran perceived that, the Arab peoples were ousting their leaders because they were mere puppets of the US and Israel.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Iran consistently viewed the uprising as an Islamic awakening from inside the Western-imposed Arab societies. Due to such Iranian posture, some Western observers were also afraid of possible Iran's geopolitical upper-hand over the region followed by the weakening of Israel's strategic advantages. The policy of Iran to build a regional alliance with Mohammad Morsi-led Egypt and Bashar Al Assad-led Syria was, therefore, apprehended as one of the key feature of the Middle Eastern geopolitics in the post-Arab Spring era. However, the overthrow of Morsi from Egypt, the continuous bloodshed in Syria and the domestic economic pressure out of Western-led economic sanctions have led the Iranian leadership to end-up the idea of regional geopolitical rebalance. Furthermore, Iran's Shia government maintains a closer relationship with its Iraqi counterpart led by Shia-majority people. Geopolitically, Iraq has become a transit point for Iran to supply arms and logistics to Syria. Despite all these, Iran's trustworthy friendship with China and Russia, as alternatives to the West, has strengthened throughout the ups and downs of the Arab uprising.<sup>59</sup>

Over the years, another key regional power, Turkey, has increasingly turned toward the Middle East and revised its former 'zero-problem' foreign policy strategy. Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, initially supported the Tunisian and Egyptian popular revolts. In terms of Syrian crisis, Turkey turned from its initial standpoint from supporting Assad regime due to the continuous domestic repression by the ruling elites in Syria. Nonetheless, Turkey has some historical border tensions with its neighbour Syria. This problem has been further fostered by the different political postures of democratic Turkey and dictatorial Syrian regimes. Egyptian authoritarian government has also substantial contradictions with Syria in terms of several political issues, particularly Palestine issue. Ongoing Iranian support to Assad's

---

<sup>57</sup> Allen L. Keiswetter, "The Arab Spring: Implications for US Policy and Interests," Middle East Institute, January 13, 2012, <<http://www.mei.edu/content/arab-spring-implications-us-policy-and-interests>> (accessed on June 15, 2014)

<sup>58</sup> David W. Lesch & Mark L. Haas, *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, (USA: Westview Press, 2013); see also, Mohamed A. J. Althani, *The Arab Spring and the Gulf States: Time to embrace change*, (Great Britain: Profile Books Ltd., 2012)

<sup>59</sup> See, Muriel Asseburg & Heiko Wimmen, "Civil War in Syria: External Actors and Interests as Drivers of Conflict," *SWP Comments*, Vol. 3, 2012.

regime in Syria has, therefore, ruined the possibilities of the emergence of a regional balance of power by Iran, Egypt and Turkey.<sup>60</sup>

Israel has initially been negatively affected by the Arab uprisings. The country seemed uneasy with the prospect of democratic change in the region. Israel and its US-led Western allies were more worried about the apparent regime changes in the region rather than peoples' uprising for the democracy. On Israel's part, regime change in the neighbouring countries might spoil the decades-long regional balance of power and turn it to be geopolitically favourable to the anti-Israeli forces in the Middle East. However, the overthrow of Mohammad Morsi and the restore of military rule in Egypt, the fragile conditions of domestic regimes in Tunisia and Libya, and the civil war in Syria have, so far, given a conformation signal to Israel that, the regional geopolitical calculation would not vary as it was expected to a certain level.<sup>61</sup>

In the essence, the Arab Spring, after more than three years, could not bring overnight shift to the regional geopolitical calculation in the Middle East. Initially, it was thought that, a number of Western-allied powers of the region would either form a new balance of power with some other powers of the region based on common religious and ideological standpoints, or shift their alliances to some non-Western extra-regional powers, like China or Russia. Israel's security was at stake in both of these options. However, none of these options has completely implemented due to the failure of expected level of democratic practices in some of the key regional powers, like Egypt and Syria. Therefore, despite some minor structural transformations in geopolitics over internal and external alliance formation, regional geopolitics in the Middle East has not faced any overnight changes due to the Arab Spring starting from early 2011.

### Theoretical Connotation

The present study nullifies the theoretical analogy of geopolitical implications of 1989 Central and Eastern European movement and 2011 Arab Spring. It argues that, the movements of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 shared an ambition to topple their governments and replace them with western European forms of democracy and, thereby, the establishment of human rights and capitalism. As the direction of travel was in western interests, governments in Europe and North America wholeheartedly welcomed them. By contrast, the signifier 'democracy' carried much more complex meaning in the Arab world in 2011. This was because the west had previously supported most of the Arab

---

<sup>60</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

autocrats, the US had led a war against terrorism largely in the Arab world and young Arabs across the Middle East had often protested against decades-long western imperialism in the region. In this backdrop, theoretically, the Arab Spring did not favoured the western geopolitical influence over the Middle East, rather often paved the way for the non-western powers, like China and Russia to build economic, political and strategic relationship with the regional members.

### **Closing Observations**

The Middle East represents the core of world geopolitics. A number of significant issues have made the region vital to the world. Since the origin of the Middle East as a hub of petroleum at the beginning of the twentieth century, the region has got a higher strategic importance to the international stakeholders. The entire area has served as a strategic playground for the major players of the international politics during both the Cold War and Post-Cold War era, especially for the growing economic powers like China and India. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Arab Spring remains the latest edition to the geopolitics of the Middle East. The uprising has spotted some minor changes in the regional balance of power, both in terms of internal reshuffling and external engagements among the major powers of the Middle East. Preliminary observations of a future political and strategic alliance among Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Syria at the start of the Arab Spring could not be succeeded because of the insolvency of internal political problems largely in Egypt and Syria. The overthrow of Mohammad Morsi government in Egypt, political turmoil in Libya, and the prolonged civil war in Syria have substantially prevented the re-emergence of regional Islamic militant and political organizations, like Hezbollah and Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, Israel's security and its geopolitical role in the Middle East also remained almost unchanged. However, the direct involvement of external powers, like China and Russia, has been extensively observed during Libyan, Syrian, and Iranian Crises. To some extent, such foreign policy projections by Russia and China have turned, indeed, the balance of decades-long Western monopoly of influence over the geopolitics of the Middle East and paved the way for non-western extra-regional powers to have strategic alliances with the key regional powers of the Middle East.

## The Race for Dominance in Indian Ocean: Is There Danger for Smaller Nations?

*Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury\**

*“The Indian Ocean area will be the true nexus of world powers and conflict in the coming years. It is here that the fight for democracy, energy independence and religious freedom will be lost or won.”*

*- Robert D. Kaplan*

### **Abstract**

There is certain fluidity in the strategic equation and balance of power in the Indian Ocean region in recent years. The old alignment of Cold War era has broken down and with emergence of new economic power house like China and, to some extent, India whose immense interest in the Indian Ocean and littoral region has cast anxiety among the smaller nations of the region with the prospect of being drawn into a big power's struggle. But there is a sense of gradualism, although feared as fragile sometimes, rather than rapidity that bring some assurance to the smaller nations. There is thus high expectation of steady shift in the order of power in the Indian Ocean region, if at all.

### **Introduction and Background**

Indian Ocean has historically been geo-politically significant and a favourite playground for colonial powers and, later, for modern world powers for

---

\* **Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury** is the Head of Operations and a member of Regional Studies Research Cluster at BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Formerly he was an Associate Research fellow at Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). He has a fairly wide ranging area of interest spanning the issues of international affairs, strategic affairs, politics, governance, development, peace and security etc. He is a regular contributor of analytic pieces on these areas in Bangladeshi and Indian English newspapers. He was an officer in Bangladesh Army for about 15 years and within that period he was deputed to Prime Minister's Office as Assistant Director for three years and to UN peacekeeping mission in Africa for a year. After opting for voluntary retirement from the army he completed a political sociology and developmental masters from School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Email: sarwar558@gmail.com

decades or even centuries now. By broader geo-strategic definition, alongside ocean proper, Indian Ocean includes all its associated seas and gulfs e.g. Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Bay of Martaban and Bay of Oman etc. The ocean is shored by some highly important regions of our world like the Middle East, Indian sub-continent, eastern edge of South East Asia, East and South East Africa and Western Australia. The oil supply routes and the trade routes from, to and across the ocean are lifelines for the regions and also, to a great extent, for many countries of the rest of the world. Vital bottle necks like Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Strait of Bab el Mandab and Suez Canal etc. are connected to Indian Ocean and hold crucial trade or supply routes within them. The Country that holds paramount position in the Indian Ocean can control the flow of energy, if it wants in a conflict situation, not only to the East Asia, one of the prominent centres of the global economic power, but also to other regions. As it stands now, the US, world's strongest naval power is dominating the region.

Indian Ocean has 36 countries along its littoral sections; in addition there are about 11 hinterland countries that aspire for maritime connectivity through Indian Ocean via third countries. Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith (2010-13) opined, "The countries of the Indian Ocean Rim are home to more than 2.6 billion people, almost 40 percent of the world's population. The Indian Ocean already ranks among the busiest routes for global trade. It will become a crucial global trading thoroughfare in the future."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the difference of opinion about southern the extent of Indian Ocean Rim among some countries this paper considers the traditional and more geo-strategy oriented understanding of the extent of Indian Ocean rim i.e. littoral states, which is up to south western tip of Australia in the East and southern tip of Africa in the West. The hinterland countries or areas are of course the land locked countries or provinces of a big such country of Asia and Africa which primarily seek access to Indian Ocean or its affiliated seas through one or more littoral countries. The examples are Afghanistan, South Sudan, Uganda, Nepal and even China for the provinces of south western part of the country. Indian Ocean Region encompasses both rim and hinterland. The adjacent regions of other parts of the continents of Asia, Africa and even Europe and Pacific Ocean are considered to be the extra-region for Indian Ocean region.

The big/ major powers here in this paper mean the major global or continental powers that matters correspondingly for Indian Ocean Region i.e. the US, China, India and to some extent Russia. Smaller nations meant the

---

<sup>1</sup> <<http://stratrisks.com/geostrat/7552>>

relatively weaker countries in terms of military and international/ regional political strength like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Oman etc. The medium strength nation/ countries means the countries in between the big and small e.g. Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Australia etc.

The power equation in Indian Ocean has its own history. In cold war period it was also the Americans who were the master of the Indian Ocean blue water like they were for many other equatorial or central maritime domains. The former USSR was hardly a challenge for the American naval power at least in these latitudes. In the later part of the cold war the economically weakened USSR adhered to defensive naval strategy. The regional powers were not really a significant party to the determining factors of the power equation in Indian Ocean, although India as the biggest and economically most powerful of the regional nations had some edge over her neighbours. In 1971 India made successful naval blockade in the waters of Bay of Bengal when war broke out against the Pakistani forces operating in the then East Pakistan. That was only threatened when 7<sup>th</sup> fleet of the US started approaching the bay. China is another Asian power taking great interest in Indian Ocean.

However changes in that scenario have been witnessed with massive economic growth of the regional powers and the corresponding increase of military muscle. Regional powers like India started asserting their claim in the maritime domain of Indian Ocean. It was the outgrowth of the fact that Indian Ocean is the key export-import route for their foreign trade and investment focused, yet rapidly growing, economy. Location of the world's biggest oil supplying region, the Middle East, at the adjacent northern landmass of the ocean has provided a critical dimension to its significance. 65% of world's oil and 35% of natural gas lay in the sub-surface of its littoral states. These states also holds 80.7% of world extraction of Gold, 56.6 % of Tin, 28.5 % of Manganese, 25.2 % Nickel and 77.3% Natural Rubber<sup>2</sup>. The Persian Gulf and the Hormuz Strait of the ocean's northern fringe is on the constant attention of traditional and emerging world powers.

Many thinkers already predict that we are entering the Geo-energy era in which issues of energy security, both security of demand and security of supply, would reshape inter-state relations and might herald re-configuration of global power hierarchy. Energy security is certain to be pivotal determinant in generating conflict and alliance conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of Indian Ocean in terms of energy supply and trade is simply immense. The ocean and its affiliated seas hold world's most important chokepoints for energy supply as demonstrated below:

---

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.thefrontierpost.com/article/6521/>>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 1. Volume of Crude Oil and Petroleum Products Transported through World Chokepoints (2007-2011)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Bab el Mandab	4.6	4.5	2.9	2.7	3.4
Turkish Straits	2.7	2.7	2.8	2.9	N/A
Danish Straits	3.2	2.8	3.0	3.0	N/A
Strait of Hormuz	16.7	17.5	15.7	15.9	17.0
Panama Canal	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.8
<i>Crude Oil</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0.1</i>
<i>Petroleum Products</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.6</i>
Suez Canal and SUMED Pipeline	4.7	4.6	3.0	3.1	3.8
<i>Suez Crude Oil</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>0.8</i>
<i>Suez Petroleum Products</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>1.4</i>
<i>SUMED Crude Oil</i>	<i>2.4</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>1.7</i>

*Notes:* · All estimates are in million barrels per day. · “N/A” is not available. · The table does not include a breakout of crude oil and petroleum products for most chokepoints because only the Panama Canal and Suez Canal have official data to confirm breakout numbers. · Adding crude oil and petroleum products may be different than the total because of rounding. · Data for Panama Canal is by fiscal years.

**Source:** EIA estimates based on APEX Tanker Data (Lloyd’s Maritime Intelligence Unit). Panama Canal Authority and Suez Canal Authority, converted with EIA conversion factors.

With the ongoing economic rise of eastern tigers like China, India and the South East Asian nations – enhanced interest of new regional or extra regional actors in Indian Ocean for their own geo-political and geo-strategic goal has been consistent which is mostly informed by energy and its supply sea route issues. This development also triggered alignment, realignment, weakening or strengthening of regional allegiances. The associated military strategic moves raised tensions in the region which potentially makes the smaller nations of the region vulnerable.

The purpose of such race for domination among the old and new power is obvious as mentioned. Land is still not an alternative to sea. For example it’s

cheaper to transport a ton of coal 5000 miles on a bulk carrier vessel than 500 km by rail<sup>4</sup>. Some 90% of world trade is done through sea<sup>5</sup>.

The following detail map illustrates the significance of Indian Ocean in terms of vital sea energy supply and trade route including other factors like areas under security threats from pirates; also, shows the major hinterland and littoral states including their level of access to sea.

### Map 1. Littoral and Hinterland States, Areas of Pirate Activities and Vital Sea Routes of Indian Ocean.



There are also new developments in recent time as Arabinda Acharya put it, "The maritime milieu now represents the new ground zero of asymmetric threats such as terrorism, piracy and organized crime. These non-conventional threats involving various types of low-intensity conflicts related to sea, pose significant challenge to the good order at sea<sup>6</sup>". Piracy is a rising security issue

<sup>4</sup> Eric Grove, "Maritime Power- Concepts and Prognosis," in *Maritime Dimension of a New World Order*, edited by Ravi Vohra & Devbrated Chakraborty, (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Arabinda Acharya, "Threats to Good Order and Prognosis," in *Maritime Dimension of a New World Order*, edited by Ravi Vohra & Devbrated Chakraborty, (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2007), p.86.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.ibtimes.com/pirates-global-waters-somalia-has-business-model-fallen-flat-criminals-oceans-high-sea-piracy>>

of Indian Ocean. Pirates around Somali coast, the most pirate infested part of Indian Ocean, attacked about 75 ships and hijacked 14 of them in 2012 where as the global figure was 28 hijacks<sup>7</sup>. Yemen coast, waters of southern India and Sri Lanka, Sumatra coast of Indonesia and northern Bay of Bengal are the other pirate prone areas of Indian Ocean.

Arms smuggling, especially small arms and explosives, is a significant activity in Indian Ocean region. East Africa, Middle, India East and Afghan-Pak area are now under major arms smuggling activities and threat. Even semi-volatile places like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh etc. are also under such threat to a great extent. Apart from conventional worries of the smaller nation with regards to competition amongst the bigger powers in Indian Ocean region, these asymmetric threats pose the danger of entangling them at odds with the bigger powers. There are international agreements and conventions not to allow illegal arms supply through any country or its territory, yet acts of non-state actors and sometimes assist from states make things complicated.

All in all, it appears that international relations and strategic equations are still mired by the dilemma or realism and idealism.

This paper examines the budding danger for smaller nations of Indian Ocean rim as the region tends to break out of the old power order and moves, seemingly, towards a new one with the economic, political and military rise of regional powers while the older world powers endeavour to cling on to their privileged influence in the region.

### **The Old Order**

The US led CENTO was one of the corner stone of the old strategic order in the Middle East. Its sway included a part of Indian Ocean region as Iraq, pre-revolution Iran and Pakistan was part of the 6 nation treaty until its dissolution in 1979. The mutual utility between the King and Emir ruled Gulf monarchies and the US defined the basis of stability in the Middle East. Soviet or recently Russian influence remained confined in parts of Arabian *Mashrek* (Syria, Iraq etc.) only. Number of American allies, visible or silent, in Africa's east and south-east coast and more importantly south-east Asia (e.g. Singapore, Indonesia) and Australia consolidated America's circle of influence in the Indian Ocean. US naval base in Diego Garcia, south of Maldives, became operational since 1973 providing the Americans the crucially important permanent presence in the very middle of the ocean.

---

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.ibtimes.com/pirates-global-waters-somalia-has-business-model-fallen-flat-criminals-oceans-high-sea-piracy>>

In line with the emergence of new economic power houses that heralded a new arms and technology race naval strategy constantly evolved in commensuration with changing geo-strategic understandings. It was observed that during the Cold War the Soviet Navy moved from a strategy of directly contending against NATO for influence over the blue water of the oceans to a concentrated defence of the Barents Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk bastions. Only the Black Sea Fleet was meant to move out as far as the Mediterranean Sea if there were indications of a major escalation. Thus the Soviets made a shift from the modern naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan's aggressive strategic theories. Land warfare as the mean and Western Europe as the immediate strategic land target was therefore the prime military strategic focus of the former USSR and its Warsaw Alliance, mostly as deterrence, and less as real time aggressive ideology.

Therefore for Indian Ocean region, Soviet manoeuvre had to come from land and so they did in Afghanistan a landlocked hinterland on their way to Indian Ocean. This Soviet miss-adventure was the first strategic step to reach Indian Ocean in a shorter land route with the expectation of engineering Baluchistan's secession from Pakistan. Combined US-Pakistan effort thwarted that. US support and help to successive Sukarno and Suharto regimes in Indonesia against Soviet supported left wing insurgency of Indonesian Communist Party ensured survival of pro-US regimes in that important nation in the eastern fringe of the Ocean.

Iranian revolution in 1979 was the only distraction in American geo-strategic design in the region at that time. But American military base in Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean since 1973, in Singapore since 1991 and military presence in the Gulf States since 1990 completed their physical web of domination.

Among the regional countries only India had naval elements of some strategic value. But that was no match to US strength in the Ocean. Again India as a democracy was not at any stark ideological odds with the US and the West, despite their strategic intimacy with the USSR, which was more of a counter act to US-Pakistan alliance.

### **The New Order and the Emerging Triangle**

The old order lasted until recently. Russia took over the position of the erstwhile USSR and don't matter much strategically in Indian Ocean; in fact, their sway lessened than the former USSR. The transition to new order witnessed some reckonable rise of Indian power first and Chinese influence in recent days. Indian enhancement of naval power hinges on some strategic considerations i.e. its extensive exposure to sea in its east, south and west and

vulnerability there from, it's fast growing economy and the need for secured sea route of massive export products and vital import route of essential oil energy that mostly comes from the Middle East via seaway of the ocean.

Militarily Indian Ocean theatre and the naval strength in it are of paramount importance for the major powers. Nuclear capability and deterrence are the other prime factors in the region for which all established and emerging powers cater for. India also aims for the Minimal Credible Deterrence in 'Second Strike' Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBN) capability in any potential nuclear scenario. Religious fanaticism inclined nuclear Pakistan, in particular, and the Ideology based undemocratic China - neither of them is a rational actor in Indian perception. The Americans and the West also share the same concern. Having Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN) is considered the safest capacity that can avoid a nuclear First Strike from a hostile belligerent to be able to launch a Counter Value or costlier Second Strike by the attacked. Therefore appropriate nuclear submarine operating in Indian Ocean with SLBN capacity is an Indian priority. The first one built, in India noticeably, is in the process of being completed and expected to start its trial run by 2013. India already has a nuclear propelled attack submarine in operation.

China's nuclear sub-marine strength is double than that of India's, both in attack and SLBN capacities, but their first concern is defensive and the locus is East and South China Sea and perhaps some part of western Pacific. Yet the indispensable energy supply from the Middle East naturally made Indian Ocean a priority for world's most rapidly growing and already second largest economy. Therefore, the Chinese appears to have adopted a 'String of Pearl' strategy in Indian Ocean which consists of setting up a series of ports/ facilities in friendly countries along the ocean's northern seaboard. Myanmar is already a Chinese ally of reliance for few decades now<sup>8</sup>. The Chinese involvement in the development of Gwadar and Pasni in Pakistan, a fuelling station on the southern shore of Sri Lanka; and a container facility with potential naval and commercial access in Chittagong, Bangladesh are in line with this approach. Both India and US are monitoring these closely. Hilary Clinton's visit to Dhaka in May 2012 and the unconfirmed news of an US proposal to set up a naval base in Chittagong fuelled speculation in Media and strategic fraternity.

The Strait of Malacca is a sensitive bottleneck in the seaway on the eastern edge of the ocean that virtually can control vessel movements eastwards and reverse from the ocean. This is crucial point for communication of all East Asian nations including China. But the Americans are in control of it. This 'Malacca or alternative' is a Chinese decision weakness termed as 'Malacca Dilemma'. Long term reliance on American benevolence isn't something China can accept.

---

<sup>8</sup> <<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/chinas-string-of-pearls-is-male-next/>>

They need their own means of some sort. To mitigate the 'Malacca Dilemma' China through its state-run China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) finished construction of a natural gas pipeline from Myanmar to China on 28 May 2013 and is close to completing an oil pipeline as well. It's clear that China aspires to open up its southwest hinterland provinces to the Indian Ocean. Many China experts opine that Beijing has in its mind a 'two-ocean strategy' — achieving desired naval control in the Pacific and Indian Oceans<sup>9</sup>. For China, energy security is a dominant factor in their geopolitical philosophy. Some expert things that with the expansion of China's core interests as a major economic power of the world Deng Xiaoping's two decade old guideline to maintain a low profile in International arena might have passed its utilities<sup>10</sup>.

Interestingly, outlines of geopolitical strategy are being put in public discourse in greater detail these days. In this age of democracy and greater international scrutiny this is important for both domestic consumption and also preparing the target international actors for what they might expect. It ensures relatively smoother functioning of the strategy. China's recent strategic 'Blue Book' on Indian Ocean by their establishment backed think tank Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) which they wittily titled "Development Report in Indian Ocean" reveals interesting and pragmatic insight of China's vision about the Indian Ocean. It coveys China's cautious and moderate move in the region despite the need for increasing Chinese role there. It stressed on mitigating the perception of 'Chinese threat' with careful steps<sup>11</sup>.

Increasing US intimacy with India with India being conceptualized as their key 'Regional Anchor' in the 'Asia Pivot' strategy that asserts more involvement of the former, does negates Chinese moves even surpass it to some extent . In this debatable policy swing the US has moved its priorities to Asia. Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta indicates that by 2020 the ration of the presence of US naval ships in Pacific-Atlantic would be 60-40 compared with the current 50-50 split<sup>12</sup>. More than half of the Indian Ocean, the eastern part, falls under US Military's Pacific Command. Some analyst worry that, it might antagonize China and switch on an arms race. This American response comes in reaction to the great advancements made by the Chinese military, such as the successful developments of its aircraft carrier, advanced jet fighters, and more cost-effective drones<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/06/19/the-geopolitics-of-chinas-new-energy-route/>>

<sup>10</sup> <[http://csis.org/files/publication/120413\\_gf\\_glaser.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120413_gf_glaser.pdf)>

<sup>11</sup> <<http://www.dailymirror.lk/business/features/31520-chinas-new-blue-book-for-the-indian-ocean.html>>

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.policymic.com/articles/20675/us-china-relations-why-obama-s-asia-pivot-strategy-could-start-a-nuclear-war>>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

It's also well known that, despite recent strategic understanding with the US, India has its own independent ambition to rise to a global power status. India will spend up to 2.03 trillion rupees (\$36.9 billion) on defence next year, up from a revised Rs. 1.78 trillion (\$32.4 billion) this year<sup>14</sup>. In strategic analyst Balaji Chandramohan opinion "Despite the current focus on immediate challenges to its national security, India will also expand its power-projection capabilities. Its defence budget has assumed great significance, especially for countries in the Indo-Pacific region, and this helps to explain the strategic culture and orientation that India is adopting for the future"<sup>15</sup>.

American reliance on India, as a proxy regional power, in relation to counterbalancing is also not beyond dilemma. M Shakhawat Hossain amply put it "Growing Indo-US strategic relationship provides later with platform over the development over in the region, directly or through proxy. From past experience and futuristic US policy, one cannot assume certainty that Washington would fully trust India to handle China and that would rather complicate inter and extra regional relationship"<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, India since its independence has never been willing to side any major super power too committed. See Chak Mun explains, "History has shown that India has been averse to multi-lateral security alliance that would constrict its strategic options"<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, emergence of a triangle is visible in Indian Ocean yet supremacy of the traditional power, the US, is unlikely to wane too soon. Malcom Cook mentions a few years back that, "despite its current woes, the United States remains paramount in Asia, and the world, according to virtually all material indices of power. The US economy is three times the size of China's in market exchange rate terms, While its defence expenditure though supporting a global force posture, and exceeds the combined defence spending of the next 34 countries"<sup>18</sup>. The situation hasn't changed much since then.

### **Alignments and Realignment of Alliances**

There are patterns of enduring, slowly evolving and feeble alliances in the Indian Ocean region.

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publications/indian-ocean/1194-india-s-defence-budget-implications-and-strategic-orientation.html>>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Shakhawat Hossain, "China-India-US Strategic Triangle: Challenges for Bangladesh," in *The India Doctrine*, edited by MBI Munshi, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Research Forum, 2007), p.187.

<sup>17</sup> Chak Mun, *India's Strategic Interest in South East Asia and Singapore*, (New Delhi: ISAS and Mcmillan, 2009), p.132.

<sup>18</sup> Malcom Cook *et. al.*, *Power and Choice: Asian Security Future*, (Sydney: Lowy Institute and McArthur Foundation, 2010), p.2.

China is trying to develop stronger ties with some medium and smaller nations. It is believed that China's military help in terms of conventional weapon supply to Sri Lankan Army was crucial for their decisive military success against the LTTE. Conventional weapon system of Bangladesh is mostly Chinese and China is a steady supplier of these. China's intimacy with Myanmar and Pakistan is well known. Malcom Cook posits that, "Like every great power China has good reasons to want primacy in its region". But he also maintain that "it's hard to see how Chinese primacy could arise without preceded by a long era of multi-polarity or a sudden and rapid disintegration of prevailing order- brought by a shock<sup>19</sup>". It's unlikely that change would occur in the strategic equation dramatically. Similar assertions were made by Robert D. Kaplan confirming the gradualism instead of rapidity in China's rise as big power, "This does not mean US navy will cede its pre-eminent position in Indian Ocean and western Pacific anytime soon. The figures indicate slow moving trends that are subject to reversal<sup>20</sup>."

The Arab Sheikdom in the Gulf and their long dependency on the US on the grounds of external threat coupled with US and western interest in reasonably cheap energy to fulfil their gigantic energy needs lay the foundation of one vital alliance.

As long as Pakistan was relatively stable and moderate in ideology, until late 60s, the US-Pakistan relations was held on relatively solid ground. It remained more or less the same till late 70s. Soviet military entry into Afghanistan kept US and Pakistan close despite the radicalization of the state structure under Zia-ul-Haq. Things started changing when Al-Qaida leadership, sitting in Afghanistan, turned their gun towards the US and Western interests finding new enemy in them after Soviet occupation ended in Afghanistan and pro-Soviet regime fell. Increasing presence of Al-Qaida sympathizers and Jihadi non-state actors in Pakistan and Pakistani establishment's patronage and support of ultra-orthodox Afghan Taliban created tension in US-Pakistan relation.

The non-state terrorists expressed their presence in the Middle East and even in the eastern Indian Ocean coast of Africa. The US and the West found new enemy in radical and militant Islam and turned their focus onto them. The spectacular and deadly terrorist attack 11 September 2001 turned out to be a watershed moment and that forced a big shift in US and Western approach towards terrorist infested areas of the Islamic world, a significant part of which is along the littoral belt of the Indian Ocean.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon*, (New York: Random House, 2010), p.279.

The aggressive US posture included both retaliatory and pre-emptive strikes against terrorist targets anywhere. Drone strikes have become a routine phenomena and invasion has become an option in an aggravated case. Due to some failure of the Gulf monarchies in subjugation of the international terrorist elements operating in and from their states the Americans have adopted a new cautious approach to their old friendship and have started putting increasing pressure on these regimes to act against radicals despite their population generally unfriendly and suspicious to the US and its activities. Yet the pick of the testing time appears to be over for now and the old equation survived.

The situation is far worse with Pakistan. Pakistan is found to be unable to deal with the activities of international terrorist and terrorist sympathizer radicals from inside her boundaries and their involvement across the border in Afghanistan where US led forces are in anti-Al Qaida and anti-Taliban operation. US drone strikes inside Pakistani boundary is another bone of contention between the two. Recent US strategic intimacy with India also alienated Pakistan. Yet the US did not abandon the policy of keeping Pakistan engaged for the fear that would push the incoherent nation over the edge and encourage graver radicalizing. Thus Pakistan still is one of the top US aid recipients. One aspect is amply clear as Jamshed Ayaz Khan posits, "The United States while engaging with South Asia in pursuit of its national interest cannot escape South Asia's internal dynamics, inter-state and intra-state as well"<sup>21</sup>.

Pakistani reaction came in the form of enhanced strategic and economic ties with another old ally of them, China. There are already plans being drawn to connect the seaport of Gwadar to Karakoram Highway that connects Pakistan and China. Pakistan also maintains close ties with Gulf power Saudi Arabia.

There is also Shia-Sunni realignment in the Middle East. The ascendancy of a Shia coalition in Iraq is engendering the shaping of a Shite Crescent in the region with Iran as the leader and Syria being other partner. But civil war waged by Sunni majority dominated opposition in Syria against the Alawaite Shia dominated regime complicated the scenario. Again in Bahrain the Shia majority populace is agitating for democracy against the Sunni Sheikh, who is supported by the core Sunni state of Saudi Arabia.

### **Military Angles**

Before getting into the specificities of the military structures in Indian Ocean, it is important to delve into the emergent contemporary concepts in relation to

---

<sup>21</sup> Jamshed Ayaz Khan, *Asia-Search for Security Cooperation*, (Islamabad: Pan Graphics, 2006), p.70.

maritime military strategies. Despite classical naval strategist Mahan's reservations about putting emphasis on amphibious operations, some prominent contemporary naval strategists favoured amphibious and other sea borne operations. Colomb saw 'attacks on territory from sea' as a major dividend of 'command of the sea'. Corbett considered 'defence of military expeditions' as key mode of exercising 'command of the sea'<sup>22</sup>. Stansfield Turner appreciated the current trend of naval power to project power against the shore; always assuming, of course, a sufficient level of command of the sea<sup>23</sup>.

Indian Ocean region is divided between US Central and Pacific Command. Both the commands are composed of highly effective and modern components of army, navy and marine with their integral air assets of overwhelming capacity and regular air power. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) is responsible for countries spanning from Egypt to Pakistan including central Asia in the north and western part of the Indian Ocean in the south starting from few hundred miles west of Maldives- Diego Garcia line. Both the Suez and Hormuz maritime bottleneck falls in the jurisdiction of USCENTCOM.

Forward HQ of USCENTCOM is in Qatar with the main HQ location in Florida in the US. This one of the two US Commands with it's the main HQ outside its AOR. The USCENTCOM elements are also spread in Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE and some support base in Central Asia that facilitates ISAF operations in Afghanistan.

US Naval Force Central Command (USNAVCENT) of the CENTCOM is virtually unchallenged in its southern maritime Area of Responsibility (AOR). Its HQ is in Bahrain. It consist of, primarily, US Fifth Fleet and couple of Submarine Task Force. An US Fleet has about 70 various types of warships including an aircraft carrier and about 40000 military personnel.

US Pacific Command (USPACOM) is responsible for the eastern part of the Indian Ocean region alongside its responsibilities in the Pacific and its associated seas. The US 7<sup>th</sup> fleet normally stationed in Japan can move to Indian Ocean in a short notice. Substantial marine and army components of the USPACOM can quickly be dispatched in Indian Ocean if any urgency arises.

American strategic edge over its challengers, if any, lies not only in numbers but also on its state of the art technology that enables their supreme capacity. In a normal situation, the US envision the possibility of only few major crisis

---

<sup>22</sup> Eric Grove, "Maritime Power- Concepts and Prognosis," in *Maritime Dimension of a New World Order*, edited by Ravi Vohra & Devbrated Chakraborty, (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2007), p.3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

at a time around the world where they are required to get involved and they are capable of concentrating appropriate volume of force at those fronts well in time. The dispositions of the Commands are flexible and military resource can quickly be moved from one to another.

Most NATO allies and many non-NATO allies of the US are likely to participate or support the US in case of a conflict. Locally powerful US allies in that part of the region like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and most importantly Israel are supplied with modern US and NATO armaments and are expected to side the US in any escalation.

Iran, the ideological adversary of the West and many other nations in that region, has been cornered for last few years through all out Israeli and Western diplomatic pressure. The country no longer aspires to export Islamic Revolution, rather backtracked in a defensive footing. They rely more on their people's orthodox power in support for their defence, rather than on military strength merely. Their reasonable military spending confirms the fact.

The Indian Navy with about 58,000 active personnel and a reasonably big operational fleet comprising an aircraft carrier, 08 guided missile destroyers, 15 frigates, one nuclear attack submarine, 14 conventional submarines, 24 corvettes and 155 aircrafts etc. looks to be in the rise as a naval power, regionally at the least<sup>24</sup>. But they are yet to catch up a lot in technical capacity and in numbers in key components if compared with the USNAVCENT.

Except for aircraft carrier the Chinese Navy is actually triple in size than that of Indian navy. But their outreach in Indian Ocean is limited by their priorities in defensive postures in East and South China Sea. Chinese naval vessels and armaments are also far inferior in technology than that of the US.

Iran has its self-styled regular and Revolutionary Guard navy. But they operate mostly at their coastal belt with an eye on the Hormuz.

The US is way ahead of other major powers in the world in military capabilities. Their military spending corroborate this fact. But some interesting shifting in the trend of military expenditure can be observed.

---

<sup>24</sup> <<http://www.defence.pk/forums/indian-defence/163018-india-military-strength-2012-a.html>>; <[http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=India](http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=India)>

**Table 2. US, China, India: Trends of Military Expenditure as per Purchasing Power Parity (in billions USD)<sup>25</sup>**

	2001	2013	2014*	2017*	Implications
<b>USA</b>	305	660	627	590	In 2013 to 2014 , a decline for the first time. Declines further gradually in next few years.
<b>China</b>	27	188	About 210 (nominal 132)		Increase from 2013 to 2014 is 12.5% officially, much more unofficially. Very high rate of accelerated increase would continue.
<b>India</b>	12	47.4	About 65 (nominal 37)		Increase of 9.98 % from 2013 to 2014. high rate of increase would continue.

\* *Projected.*

This massive military expenditure of the US is also related to its historical and perpetual security responsibilities with regards to its allies and defence of the non-communist domain in Europe and Middle East-Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific since the beginning of cold war period after the Second World War. Regardless of the fall of communism and its global spectrum, as per western understandings, new adversaries like Russia and China has filled that vacuum in certain ways. But a reduction trend of US military expenditure of late and in the near future can also be observed; opposed to massive increase in military expenditure of China and to some extent India. China's giant overhaul and expansion scheme of PLA Navy could be worrisome for the US. Yet China is unlikely to catch up with the US in terms of critical naval asset e.g. air craft carrier. The Chinese will have just two carriers even after a decade from now whereas the US will still have 11 - with most of them having state of the art technology.

### The Domination Dynamics

The aim of domination of smaller states by the powerful state could either be economic or politico-military or mixed. The ways of hegemonic domination

<sup>25</sup> <<http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2007/08>>; <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/world-top-ten-countries-with-largest-defence-budget-map.html>>; <<http://www.economist.com/news/china/21599046-chinas-fast-growing-defence-budget-worries-its-neighbours-not-every-trend-its-favour>>; <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>>

could be coercion, dependency or both. India's relation with Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives are some of the examples. Similarly Saudi domination over rest of the Gulf States could be mentioned. The alternative to domination is alliance of willing. Modern sovereign states abhor domination and fancy for autonomy to act in relatively free manner. US domination over the whole region perhaps includes some willing as well.

Americans appreciate the growing significance of the region and its already existing crucial sea lines of communications. 'US Rebalancing Towards Asia' or 'The Asia Pivot' policy, a much talked about politico-military strategic shift of the Americans relocating up to 60% of its naval assets to Indian Ocean in about a decade time, as mentioned already in the previous chapter, may mark a vital change of scenario in Indian Ocean Region. If not handled sensibly it may trigger erstwhile cold war like completion and struggle. Chinese response so far was very calculative. They have decided to develop sea port facilities in friendly and semi-friendly nations along the rim. This has been publicized by the western strategists as China's 'String of Pearls' response.

India has great geographic access to Indian Ocean. The emerging economic giant and an aspiring global power it wants to secure its substantial dominance of its own back yard – the Indian Ocean. This popular desire, along with India's historic link with South East Asia and the spread of Indian Diaspora in those nations and even up to Pacific Fiji has prompted India to extend the sphere of domination, to certain degree, of its growing Blue Water Navy.

Whatever may be the apparent reason, huge military assets at the disposal of major powers create, by itself, a potential for its misuse.

### Map 2. China's 'String of Pearls' Strategic Facilities.



The three-way military build up in Indian Ocean has left the numerous smaller nations wondering about their freedom and access to sea. Could a lack of balance of military power especially in the crucial sea route spell danger for the inferiors? The Indian Ocean region had been being a volatile and conflict prone region. Wars, domestic or trans-national turmoil, insurgency, terrorism, diplomatic break ups etc. are almost common in the wider region. The worry of the smaller nations stems from these past trends. Again could the race for domination in the Indian Ocean put the smaller countries between the rock and a hard place?

The prime danger lurks in the aggravation of arms race including race in naval power aimed at changing the existing equation of domination. The existing order is likely to be challenged with further rise of Indian and Chinese economic power. Again what reaction this would elicit from the US militarily in the region is also a key question?

Normally a gradual development would engender a smoother change; but a rapid development may herald a troubled transition which could be bad for the smaller nations as they would surely be drawn in the conflict equation like the cold war years.

The good thing, so far, is rapid change of balance of power is not being witnessed and the traditional strongman the US, and the aspirant candidates India and China, had been careful and rational about their moves. Hence slow and gradual change is taking place. Neither of the powers appears to be

exerting any disproportionate pressure on the smaller nations except the already existing domination in certain parts e.g. Persian Gulf. But that US domination has ensured a reasonably fair system for energy supply for all who needs and perhaps that's another reason for relatively moderate actual tension in Indian Ocean than perceived by some.

The US dominated unipolar world order has, in a way, evolved a seemingly fair system. The nations that somewhat adhere the mechanism get the benefit of it. Thus smaller countries and even country like China almost have free run in their exploration of energy and other minerals in different parts of the world. Same is applicable in their use of seas and oceans for communication and trade purpose.

One more factor that may trigger domination of smaller nations by the bigger emerging powers is increase of its existing alliance strength. Again a smaller nation's freely chosen closeness to one bigger power may prompt the latter's competitor to exert its counterbalancing pressure on the subject country. Or, the aggrieved major power may be tempted to draw other neutral nations towards it. The question of domination also arises when a bigger nation wants a smaller one to act in a certain way in bilateral or multilateral platform. Relation of many smaller countries of Indian Ocean Region like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia etc. with the US, China and India are being and will be dictated by these determinants.

### **Smaller Nations and the Evolving Conception of Alliance**

With the major ideological struggle of the world is over with the fall of Communism in early 1990s the Cold War period conception of alliance has changed a big way over these years. Spread of democracy has opened up public forum in the developing world and voices of peace and rational international approach found places in public discourse turning arbitrary decisions of autocrat a thing of past. Traditional and new media and independent experts nowadays examine all the facets of a nation's international relation freely. Rationality in foreign relation is in ascendancy. Indian Ocean region is no exception to that. The decrease of hostile rhetoric in mainstream politics of Pakistan and India is one example. Same is there in case of Bangladesh and India.

But greater tension endures in parts where there are irrational state entities e.g. the Middle East with Shi'ite theocratic Iran and Sunni Sheikdoms of the Gulf. China's pragmatic metamorphosis from a communist state to a semi-capitalist state and some degree of openness of public discourse is an attempt by Chinese Communist Party to transform itself into somewhat rational regime if not purely democratic.

Regional economic alliances focusing mutually benefiting trade, investment and commerce came in the forefront pushing aside politico-military alliances. ASIAN in the eastern fringe of Indian Ocean is one such alliance organization. They, of late, has also grown further to embrace political and military understanding as well. There are SAARC and its economic subsidiary SAFTA in South Asia with much lesser success though. Another similar organization of lower profile is BIMSTEC.

The cold world trend of smaller nations of being in one of either camp has eroded. Concept of multilateral relations in foreign policy is pervasive these days in many parts of Indian Ocean region. Mutual or collective interests or benefits are what that drives this approach. Every actor maintains some relations with all other actors. For example Bangladesh has good workable relations with both India and China. Pakistan is an ally of China and, technically, of the US as well. Alliances are feeble and fluid now. An existing alliance may get debilitated and new alliance pop up in short period of time. All depends on development of a mutually beneficial interests, major disagreement or clash of interest. Again in cases of some nations certain domestic political forces have good relations with some political forces of different nations for political ideological or historic reasons. Simultaneous incumbency of such forces in their respective countries may result in a good relation or temporary alliance.

Again domestic political regression e.g. religious radicalization, chauvinism etc. which propagates hostility towards neighbours can invoke tension in some parts of Indian Ocean region. South Asia and the Middle East are vulnerable in this regards.

Failed state of Somalia in the western littorals of Indian Ocean created a unique kind of crisis. The ungoverned land has become heaven of pirates operating in north western part of Indian Ocean.

There are some sensitive land and maritime boarder disputes among some Indian Ocean countries. Many of the countries are willing to stick to the peaceful status-quo but some didn't in occasions e.g. Kargil War between Pakistan supported intruders and Indian forces. US led international pressure could diffuse them before further deterioration. Some are willing to resolve dispute through International arbitration e.g. India-Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime boundary dispute.

Yet, above all, most of the smaller nations of Indian Ocean region ultimately look up to the military and diplomatic might of the US for their rescue if threatened gravely by stronger adversaries of the region. Until now and in

foreseeable near future the unipolar equation of the Indian Ocean region is unlikely to get dramatically changed.

## Conclusion

China is already the second largest economy in the world by both nominal and PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) GDP. Indian economy is 8<sup>th</sup> largest by nominal GDP and fourth largest by PPP GDP. Both the nations are the key players now in Indian Ocean region. It is natural that economic might is expected to be matched by military might eventually. Again rapid change in existing military balance may trigger another global arms race with the West. As long as the trade and commerce of the rising powers are safe through the prevailing order, initiation of another Cold War is unlikely. But any divergence from this principal would surely trigger competition of domination and influence among global and local powers in many regions; surely in the critical region of Indian Ocean. This could be a prime source of danger for the smaller nations as they are likely to fall in the tag of war of the powerful.

As usual there are tensions in the Middle East. Iran's nuclear programme and Israeli, Saudi Arabian and Western mistrust about that theocratic state has created a volatile situation. The looming possibility of Israeli or US led strike on Iranian nuclear sites could lead to angry Iranian reaction and Hezbollah retaliation from Lebanon. Russia and China are against any military action but unlikely to invest too much into this.

Non-state actors based in Pakistan and Afghanistan and both the state's inability to deal with them is another source of worry. Another Mumbai like attack could elicit robust reaction from agitated India and lead to further escalation. These non-state actors sometimes aim to carry out their activity from a third country which is often a smaller nation. Reported presence of some Pakistan–Afghanistan linked anti-India militant elements in Bangladesh could be a matter of concern. Growing strategic intimacy between Sri Lanka and China and also Bangladesh and China are viewed suspiciously in India. US and India is also trying to engage with an old Chinese ally, Myanmar which China is observing with caution.

Other than these, there is some sort of broader stability in Indian Ocean. Minor disputes are normally being contained under the auspice of regional organizations, UN, regional powers or global powers. Realism is still very much at work, and great powers interestingly attempt to idealize their realistic approach with a demonstrative veneer aimed at today's highly connected regional and global audience.

It's true that Indian Ocean region with the lucrative oil and gas reserves in its north-western part has all the potential to become the locus of future conflict

of major nature as new international powers emerge in the East which might put the smaller peace seeking nations in difficult and vulnerable position. Yet the prevalent careful and rational approach by all the major players cast the rays of hope for continuing peace in the region. Therefore a collective diplomatic stress on greater peace and de-escalation of politico-military competition for dominance among great powers in this part of the world ought to be natural agenda for the smaller states of Indian Ocean region.

## About BIPSS

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) is a leading institute in Bangladesh for informed analysis on all aspects of broad spectrum of peace and security studies in the region and beyond. It is a non party, non profit organisation and independent think tank which provides significant platform for the leading strategic thinkers, academics, former members of the civil, foreign and armed services and media persons to chalk out a comprehensive framework for peace and security issues. The Institute is headed by the President of BIPSS, Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd). He directs and coordinates all research and administrative activities of the Institute. A team of highly qualified full time researchers with varied social science background conduct research activities. BIPSS also maintains a pool of affiliated experts whom we engage frequently for different assignments.

BIPSS has also established two specialised centres within its framework named Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research (BCTR) and Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS). BCTR is the first centre of its kind in Bangladesh dedicated to the study and research on terrorism related issues. The Centre is headed by BIPSS President who has been engaged with various specialised centres on terrorism in the Asia Pacific region as well as other parts of the world. BCTR has been working in partnership with a number of international centres on terrorism research in South Asia, South East Asia, Europe and USA. On the other hand, Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS) has been established to understand, study and analyse Chinese Foreign Policy and Chinese strategic and security posture. It also aims to study Chinese economic advancement with a view to advocating greater economic and development cooperation between Bangladesh and China as well as China and the greater South Asian region.

BIPSS maintains an interactive website to inform, share and exchange knowledge and ideas to enrich the people who have a greater stake in peace and security. You are cordially welcome to visit our website at [www.bipss.org.bd](http://www.bipss.org.bd). You can also write to us to express your opinion via email at [info@bipss.org.bd](mailto:info@bipss.org.bd).

---

