

GEOSTRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Geostrategically, Bangladesh's importance cannot be overemphasized. Its importance is on the rise as the days are passing. It has both the constraints and opportunities as far as geopolitics is concerned. Militarily speaking, it is highly vulnerable, mainly because of tyranny of geography. To overcome the natural and other handicaps, Bangladesh should pursue, in right earnest, both diplomatic initiative and military preparedness. Diplomatically it may try balancing and collective security and militarily it may go for a policy of deterrence through modernization. However, Bangladesh's weak economy is a big constraint; all out efforts should be made to overcome this constraint. This is important in order to survive like a self-respecting nation.

Introduction

Geostrategy, the main strand of classical geopolitical thought, focuses less on the state *per se* and more on discovering patterns of state development and behavior within a broader geographic context. Geostrategy links between political power and geographic space; it can also be seen as a body of thought on specific strategic prescriptions based on the relative importance of land power and sea power in world history.¹ The core of geopolitical theory concerns with the role of strategic geography - factors of location and size and militarily important terrain, maritime choke points and areas containing critical resources. It distinguishes the territories of one state from the territories of other state; it selects neighbors and more arguably friends and foes. Geographical settings impose constraints on the one hand and provides distinctive opportunities having profound implications for policy and strategy on the other. Gray argues that the relevant geostrategic question is not between land power and sea power, as generally understood looking at the theories given by Mackinder and Mahan; it is the translation of superiority overall. He poses questions if technology, communications and culture, geoeconomics and joint warfare have impacted on the traditional theories of geostrategy. It probably has but to

take the case of geoeconomics, as an example, careful study of geographical settings can yield relevant economic benefit just as it can be done in respect to military advantage. The point Gray harps here is that economic success may be more attractive but this can be cancelled by military failure.² Gray, in another analysis, shows national security policy must be responsive to geopolitical realities, it should be tolerable to one's political and strategic culture and should set requirements for strategy which has implications for the force posture and deployment. A nation should identify those interests that merit military support as a last resort.³

Keeping these theoretical framework in mind, one can view the overall *real political* scenario, after the Cold War, both vertically and horizontally. Bipolarity is gone and as Huntington sees America at the peak of the Pyramid of the security architecture, whom he calls as the "Lonely Super Power." Realistically, the security scenario of the entire world is now pegged to American interests and intentions. At the next layer, Huntington sees six other major powers i.e. Russia, Japan, China, Germany, the U.K. and France. Following them are the emerging powers of the third world where in South Asian sub-system, India is currently the most predominant one. Present scenario is, therefore, neither unipolar nor multipolar - but a peculiar hybrid - a unimultipolar with one super power and several major powers. At the peak is the United States, as already shown, followed by major regional powers that are preeminent in their respective areas. They are German - French condominium in Europe, Russia in Eurasia, China and potentially Japan in East Asia, India in South Asia, Iran in Southwest Asia, Brazil in Latin America and South Africa and Nigeria in Africa. At the third level are the regional secondary powers whose interests often collide with the more powerful regional states like Britain in relation to German - French condominium, Ukraine in relation to Russia, Japan in relation to China, South Korea in relation to Japan, Pakistan in relation to India, Saudi Arabia in relation to Iran and Argentina in relation to Brazil.⁴

Now let us see the scenario horizontally. The paper would cover basically the Indian Ocean system, the South Asian sub-system and the Asia-Pacific system. Now looking at the Asia Pacific region, the United States, China, Japan, Russia and India are the group of Great Powers. The United States is having global influence, China is emerging with a voice in the world economy and greater influence in the Region, Japan is

an economic power, Russia is still a strong military power and India is mainly confined to the South Asian Region and is also viewed as a rising power tending to outstretch to Asia Pacific.⁵ However, the NATO or EU system or the American system have definitely tremendous impact on the security environment of the Region specially after what we have witnessed in Afghanistan or what we are about to witness in Iraq. American interests are overriding and their realization is not constrained either by time or space due mainly to Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Central Asian Republics, Middle East, Indian Ocean passage for oil, South China Sea, Areas around Japan and Taiwan are some of the areas where American interests are also overriding and that is how the regional actors get involved in the security scenario. Asia-Pacific Region is now rising and rising very fast. Experts say 21st Century is the century of the Asia-Pacific Region. It is going to be the hub of security and economic activities of the world. China is the major player followed by Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asian countries. China is a competitor of the United States and Japan in the Region. Her military and economic modernization is simply impressive. It's ripples are also felt in the South Asian sub-system. India is her main contender in the South Asian System. Experts say China is trying to keep India 'boxed in' in the sub-continent by arming Pakistan and other smaller neighbors of the Region like Myanmar. India would probably like to challenge China in the Indian Ocean Region and thereby project herself as a regional super power. After 1971, Stephen Philip Cohen, an expert on India, commented that the South Asian leadership has devolved on India since Pakistan was defeated during the liberation war of Bangladesh. India, at the moment, is probably not happy with her already established supremacy in the Sub-Region; she would like to exert beyond and as such she has adopted the Look East policy i.e. towards Southeast Asia as part of the Gujral Doctrine.

Now let us see the geostrategy of the Indian Ocean region having the East Indian islands, Australia and Tasmania on the East, the shore of Asia in the North, Africa on the West. It is the third largest of the oceans - its geographical personality having two distinct facts - the oceanic area and the surrounding area which has a profound impact on the saga of war and peace in the region. A unique characteristics of Indian Ocean is it is having-'landlocked seas' with major constituents like Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, Java Sea, Timor Sea and the great Australian Bight. With that one can see an