**Upping the ante in the Indo-Pacific**

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Our domestic political affairs kept us aloof from the important developments in our region. Having achieved a stalemate in Russia-Ukraine war, the US re-laid its focus on the Indo-Pacific as significant developments took place during the last months (April-May, 2022). A little earlier than the 4th Quad Heads of States meeting (2nd in person) in Japan on 24th May 2022, the US President hosted the first ever Washington Summit of leaders from the ASEAN on 12th May, while the Chinese President introduced the Global Security Initiative on 21st April, thus proposing security spiced countermeasure against the US Indo-Pacific strategy. It seems that the overtures against China by the US and its allies have finally pinched the Asian Tiger to come up with a security initiative for the region.
President Xi Jinping, while addressing the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022, proposed for the first time the Global Security Initiative (GSI) aimed at building on the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. He stressed upon his opinion that the Cold War mentality was still persisting and needed to be rejected. The Global Security Initiative focuses on six areas; work for common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, uphold the principle of indivisible security, resolving differences and disputes between the countries through dialogue and consultation and maintain security in both traditional and non-traditional domains. China’s approach to negotiate the Indo-Pacific strategy is somewhat similar to what the US has charted out for containing China. As compared to the Indo-Pacific, China in GSI has however, focussed more on security as China is already leveraging its economic muscle through BRI which is spread over many countries. One commonality between both the constructs is the use of multilateralism that both have advocated as the solution to regional problems. GSI even proposes to work with the US for the betterment of the region while support of China in Indo-Pacific construct is totally ambivalent.
One contrast very vivid is the fact that China enjoys an edge of its economic investments that it can always leverage to further her national interests. Conversely, the US can mostly rely on her military might. How much both can further respective strategies is something to be closely observed. However, given the experience it can be deduced that the regional countries have been more into following economic path rather than the military confrontation in their area and are therefore likely to be tilted towards the strategy that China may like to pursue.
During the Quad leaders’ meeting in Japan the participants reaffirmed their support for common causes. A wide range of issues was agreed upon yet most of those were same. Two of the Prime Ministers that is of Japan and Australia were new to their respective offices yet their commitment stood as per previous. An important change in the current meeting was the initiative of Maritime Domain Awareness among the member states. The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), is aimed at responding to humanitarian and natural disasters, and combat illegal fishing. It will support and work in consultation with Indo-Pacific nations and regional information fusion centres in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands by providing technology and training to support enhanced and shared maritime domain awareness.
There is no denying the fact that the US and China are the two leading powers in international politics. Both have immense potential which can be leveraged for the betterment of the world at large. Instead of coming to loggerheads would it not be more apt to count each other in multilateralism desired by them? Pakistan is one of the few countries that enjoy importance to both the leading nations in world politics. It enjoys traditional strategic relationships with the US as well as China and understands their capacity, also the requirements. Pakistan thus has the liberty of sailing alongside both instead of siding with one over the other. This upping the ante in the Indo-Pacific should therefore be viewed as opening new vistas for Pakistan instead of merely bringing challenges to us.
Maritime domain awareness affords visibility over sea areas which Pakistan has always been aspiring to achieve. Given the kinds of threat existing on our coast and at sea the subject has been of importance to Pakistan. In order to move in this direction, Pakistan Navy has established Joint Maritime Information Coordination Centre (JMICC) which is networked with domestic and foreign stakeholders. Leveraging our relations with the US, should Pakistan reap benefits of IPMDA or not is something that merits evaluation by the concerned stakeholders.