**President Biden and South Asia**

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US’ South Asia policy, as an obvious subset of its Asia policy, will seek to stem China’s rise as a competing global economic and military power. To this end it has gathered like minded countries under the QUAD (India, Japan, Australia) Strategic Dialogue and is moving decisively to attain its declared policy objectives. The sub-areas of Asia, the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the South-Central Asian Region (SCAR) and the Greater Middle East Region (GMER) are all thus woven into one overall plan to dominate Asia and to stop hostile powers like China from mounting any viable challenges to US’ singular position as the global hegemon.

At the geopolitical level, the US’ interests would have been well served had India established itself as the uncontested hegemon of South Asia and subdued Pakistan too. India could then have been employed against China without being distracted by Pakistan’s belligerence and uncompromising defiance. It has not happened so. India’s position has been further vitiated by China’s emphatic einmarsch into the region through its BRI-CPEC. This has precipitated deep paradigm shifts in the geopolitics of the region. Much to India’s chagrin, China’s sphere of influence and strategic reach now encompass the whole of South Asia and beyond. The BRI has spread to all countries bordering India leaving it literally isolated within South Asia. There is now a very perceptible clash of interests between the two in the region. The US has cleverly created a convergence of interests with India against China. It is now building India up as a military and economic power to challenge and circumscribe China’s rise as a regional and global power—strategy of ‘offshore balancing’ all over again? The US might also want to wean Pakistan away from China. However, Pakistan is irretrievably committed in its strategic all-weather, multidimensional partnership with China. Pakistan is not likely to be easily intimidated by US coercion or even accept yet another transactional deal. Instead of a zero-sum game, Pakistan ought to retain good ties with both major global powers. China now has a clear advantage in the geopolitical milieu in South Asia. Period.

[Motorway closed after dense engulfs parts of Punjab](https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2021/lahore-abdul-hakim-motorway-closed-as-fog-blankets-parts-of-punjab)

On the geo-economic plane too, China is ascendant in South Asia. Its BRI-CPEC is creating mutually beneficial interconnectivity and economic interdependence within the region and beyond. India has chosen not to become a part of the BRI-CPEC and is senselessly letting this obvious economic bonanza pass it by. There is a convergence of US and Indian interests in trying to delay, disrupt and, if possible, destroy CPEC. The BRI as a whole is clearly beyond the US and its allies reach and capacity now. The US-India combine will want to disrupt the emergence of the East-West and North-South trade corridors that are likely to crisscross Pakistan and the region. It will also want to deny China access to the fossil fuel and mineral deposits of the GMER and SCAR. CPEC has now literally become a vital national interest for Pakistan. It is already moving decisively to secure it against India-sponsored terrorist attacks emanating from Iran and Afghanistan—right from under the nose of the US forces there. The BRI-CPEC is now well established in the region and acquiring irreversible proportions. The US and its wealthy allies have been unable to come up with a competing package for South Asian nations much less for the world at large. Advantage China!

[Real Madrid beat Valencia 2-0 in La Liga](https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2021/real-madrid-beat-valencia-2-0-in-la-liga)

At the geostrategic level, President Biden must realise that three of the world’s most formidable military and nuclear powers are at daggers drawn in the confines of the larger Kashmir region, a sub-region of South Asia. Any miscalculation, misunderstanding or error of judgement by anyone can consign the region and the larger part of the world to a bleak and catastrophic nuclear winter.

President Biden has three options.

He could continue the current US policy of trying to contain and manage China’s rise. It has not been successful thus far and is unlikely to be so in the future. The Chinese economic juggernaut seems unstoppable. Its sphere of influence and strategic reach are acquiring global dimensions now.

In the second option, the US just might not be too averse to a limited war between India and China along the LAC, staying well below the nuclear threshold. The conventional and nuclear differential between China and India, however, is too heavily stacked in favour of the former. The odds against India worsen when pitched against a Sino-Pak Combine. Pakistan is not likely to again miss an opportunity to move into IIOJ&KR—as it did during the Indo-China war of 1962. Thus, India is already at a distinct strategic disadvantage. On its own, it is in no position to launch kinetic operations against China much less against it and Pakistan together. In the scuffles along the LAC, the Indian military has demonstrated a clear lack of grit and determination, shying away from meaningful combat and meekly acceding to China’s interpretation of the LAC. India has not demonstrated the political or the military will to aggressively confront China. It is most unlikely to fight, bleed and suffer on Uncle Sam’s behalf. US beware!

[Afghan leader warns US against quitting peace deal](https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2021/afghan-leader-warns-us-against-quitting-peace-deal)

The worse-case option would be an all-out, multidimensional and multidomain war against China by the US and all its allies. Such a war would span the IPR, the IOR and the South Asian region. It would actually be World War III. A war in the deadly conventional, nuclear, cyber, space and electro-magnetic spectrum domains is a sure shot recipe for a global nuclear winter. US allies might not acquiesce to such an horrendous option, readily.

Therefore, one can infer that beyond pursuing its current policy on China, the US and its allies have precious few realistic and practical options available to them. President Biden may yet be constrained to accept and live with China’s rise. A multipolar world is a reality, already.

The US and China can either fight and annihilate one another and the world in the process or learn to co-exist, peacefully and profitably, at the apex.

Either option could start in South Asia.