

Sino-US Engagement in Asia-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Asia Pacific is a global growth engine and remaining cognizant to this fact, the US is striving to maintain its regional supremacy. China has achieved a remarkable growth in last two decades while the US was involved in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The current transformation of China at global landscape forced the US policy makers to revisit and review their strategic priorities in Asia Pacific to harness the China's expanding political clout. Thus, Sino-US strategic engagement in Asia-Pacific is quite significant under the prevailing geo-political landscape and deems thorough research. The US-China strategic engagement in Asia-Pacific is a blend of cooperation and competition simultaneously. In keeping with the core realist theories and postulates of power transition, the US is and will remain as a dominant power. However, economically the US is giving away its some influence which is taken over by China. The US think tanks consider China as a competitor and hence managing China's rise is a test case for the US diplomacy in Asia-Pacific. China as a rising power has posed a substantial challenge to the US led global order. The research concludes that contrary to the US approaches the China is currently focusing on soft power approach and pursuing a peaceful rise to extend its economic signature across the globe to economically influence the regional geo-political order. US-China clash of geo-strategic interests in Asia-Pacific has led to regional polarization and the phenomenon is quite devastating in South Asia with two nuclear armed arch rivals India-Pakistan. Thus, the developing global scenarios merits visibility of both powers strategies so that the world may not witness another catastrophe owing to great powers engagement. Pakistan also needs to put its house in order and keep its policy open instead of aligning any power.

Keywords: US, China, Asia-Pacific, regional and global Order

Introduction

Asia-Pacific being the global growth and economic engine holds a sizeable share in global economic activity. The region has immense strategic importance and homes the great economies of the world; United States of America, China, Japan and rising India. Collectively the region is rich in human resource and counts for 22 % of world population (Muhammad, 2014). Inagaki Manjiro, a Japanese think thank called this century as Pacific century and commonly Mediterranean is referred as

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ocean of past, Atlantic as ocean of present and Pacific as ocean of future (Muhammad, 2018). Thus, American Century is paving way to Asian Century. Keeping in view the significance of the theatre the US desires a dominant role in the affairs of the region.

Geographically the region has immense strategic significance owing to world's five major Sea lines of Communication (SLOC) connecting the world's six largest ports alongside others. Region includes Strait of Malacca, Lombok, Omesar, Mekasar and South China Sea (SCS). Strait of Malacca was an old sea trade route between Middle East (ME) and China. In fourteenth century Portugal took over the control of the strategic location of Malacca which enabled the Portugal to control the significant strait area. Later in late seventeenth century British took over the control of strait till the independence of Malaysia and Singapore. The choke point of Strait of Malacca is quite crucial for passage of ships from Indian Ocean to SCS and daily approximately 600 ships cruises through the narrow channel. Its width is 600 miles between Thailand and northern Sumatra whereas it is 3 kilometers narrow between Singapore and Southern Sumatra. The strait is principally the energy life line of China and Japan and daily 11 million barrels oil transit through this channel. Considering the increasing demand of energy in future the transit of crude oil is also likely to increase as well.

Strategically controlling this passage during any future conflict will be a deciding factor in SCS theatre since for quick build up and smooth logistic a force will entirely rely on the passage through Strait of Malacca. Considering this vital choke point, China is heavily dependent on this passage for its uninterrupted energy flow. In recent years US chalking out a strategy of Rebalance to Asia Pacific or Pivot to Asia Pacific to show its engagement and commitment to her allies East Asia and South East Asia but China responded with a well-crafted Belt Road Initiative (BRI), commonly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) and Maritime Silk Road Concept alongside Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Tehsin, 2017). Moreover, there is also a possibility of availability of off shore rich resources, which gives significant importance to the region by all stake holders. Thus, keeping sight of above developments the region is likely to attract more attention by the two major powers in coming times as no power is willing to leave its due space to other in the regional arena.

Thus, in future Sino-US engagement in the regional affairs will exacerbate and Pakistan being at important strategic crossroad and part of OBOR will also attract the focus of both powers. Any outcome arising from the engagement of both powers in regional politics will have a deep impact on Pakistan.

Objective of Study

The objective of study is to research the regional geo political landscape under the ambit of US - China interaction and engagement on various regional issues along with future course of action available to both powers. US China cooperation and conflict over regional developments is likely to affect the global strategic stability and may have lasting implications for regional states.

Statement of the Problem

The US considers China as threat and challenge to its global led political order. China is economically taking over the US in Asia-Pacific and thereby influencing the regional states policies. In this backdrop, the US announced its Strategy of Rebalance to Asia Pacific or Pivot to Asia Pacific for perseverance of its long dominant role in the region. The management of Sino-US clash of interests in Asia-Pacific is a test case for the policy makers of both powers.

Hypothesis

The increasing US engagement in Asia Pacific is challenging Chinese regional influence as hegemon hence affecting regional power dynamics.

Significance of Study

The research on the topic is quite relevant and significant since the strategic re-orientation to Asia Pacific was carried out during Obama's administration in shape of US rebalance to Asia Pacific or Pivot to Asia Pacific in 2011 and now with the change in US administration there is a need to carry out a reassessment of its viability in wake of changed priorities of Trump administration. Research will also focus on in depth analysis of US China relations under current power transition and power struggle in regional politics.

Research Questions

1. What is the state of Sino US engagement in Asia Pacific?
2. What is China's Core Interest in engagement with USA in regional strategic milieu?
3. What all challenges and opportunities are available to both powers in Asia Pacific?

Literature Review

Philip C. Saunders in his article, “China’s rising power, the US rebalance to Asia and implications for US China relations” highlights importance of Asia’s economic progress and rapid growth and argues that region’s significance has raised its value and attention of US policy makers, and merited enhanced focus of attention for US officials in future. Thus, rebalance to Asia Pacific was announced to address US concerns in Asia Pacific in terms of shifting US priorities from west to east (Saunders, 2014).

William G. Brown and David Lai in their research project, “US – China Competition: Pacific land force Implications” argues that it is difficult to predict the impact of Sino US engagement on response of regional countries in shaping the strategic environment in Indo-Asia-Pacific. USA has maintained its military presence in Asia Pacific since 20th century and the relations between both US China has been normalized after 1970 but still territorial disputes in the region and North Korea issue are the main source of concerns where both states pursues their own principal national interest. David Lai has termed Sino US relations whether conducive or crucial as the guiding principle for the relationship among regional states (Brown and Lai, 2016).

Muhammad Tehsin in his research paper, “Sino US Competition: Implications for South Asia and Asia Pacific” highlights that cold war with USSR was an ideological rivalry, which on termination paved way for unipolarity. However, the nature of polarity is still arguable. With the dawn of new century and at culmination of current decade there is remarkable shift in hubs of global wealth. This trend has crafted new terminologies of Asian and Pacific Century. Thus, considering the declining power of US and EU, global power is likely to tilt in favor of rising China, provided economic strength is converted into military might (Tehsin, 2017).

Dr Adam Lowther in his paper, “Thinking about Asia Pacific” while compiling the panels discussion views regional economic interdependence as positive omen for improving the economic growth across the region and ultimately it is in favor of rising China since the US is finding it hard to influence the regional states. Moreover, the regional states are also finding it cumbersome to balance out their ties with China for trade and with US for military assistance. However, any economic crisis in Asia Pacific will have global implications (Lowther, 2016). Justin Logan in “Contradictions of US China Policy” shares his ideas that US due to changes in global strategies and battle concepts anticipate a potential threat and a peer competitor, the China. China by 2018 is likely

to surpass the US in GDP and currently to move forward US China relationship in right path is the biggest challenge for US policy officials since it has a lasting impact on security and domestic politics in USA. Nevertheless, the US top most concern in Asia Pacific is security relationship with China and it is believed in US quarters that US cannot deter China's rise. However, it can make effort to ensure that China exercise its power in line with global norms and laid down parameters of global institutions (Logan, 2016).

Francesco Femina and Caitlin E. Warrel in their paper, "A Climate Security Plan for Asia Pacific Rebalance: Lessons from Marshall Plan" highlights that US being a pacific nation / power is deeply concern with security and stability of pacific and in keeping with regional security concerns in Middle East and Europe, the US has placed greater strategic emphasis on Asia Pacific. This commitment is explicitly explained by US officials in shape of Rebalance to Asia Pacific or Pivot to Asia where the region has been given due priorities for security, diplomatic and economic engagement with the regional states (Femina and Warrel, 2015).

Michael Nacht, Sarah Laderman and Julie Beeston in their study, "Strategic Competition in China US Relations" elucidated that trump administration has considered both China and Russia as strategic rivals to US interest, power and influence. The administration being highly critical to previous regimes has described both Russia and China as revisionist for changing the international order to their benefit. Both are also crafting strategies to influence the Indo Pacific region while challenging the US in all dynamics of power (Nacht *et al.*, 2018).

Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J Tellis in their report, "Revising US Grand Strategy Towards China" foresee long time US China strategic rivalry with China's current economic and military expansion posing a threat to US interests globally and in Asia Pacific. In their view China has crafted a grand strategy to establish her control over its own society, periphery and thereby construct a global order to replace US as a dominant regional power and US now needs a balancing strategy to counter China's rising power (Robert *et al.*, 2015).

Ronald L. Tammen and Jacek Kugler in their work, "Power Transition and US China Conflicts" views that in order to achieve economic ascendancy both US China are focused on a long-term engagement where China is a minor competitor progressing fast and furiously than the US economic engine, and it is foreseen that by 2025 – 2035 China is likely to change the global order. They further argue that when parity exists, both powers are contented but if the rising power is dissatisfied then possibility of conflict is on cards (Ronald *et al.*, 2006).

Ryan Hass, in his article, “Principles for managing US China Competition” argues that amidst the trade issue despite positive public statement by Trump and Xi Jinping to establish a working relationship the relations are at lowest ebb after 1979. Both powers are directed in confrontation mode and rivalry is intensifying and if this is not properly thought out it may lead to a global disaster which will be detrimental to both powers. However, the authors desire the US China to undertake practical measures to limit the growing Cold War tension which in long term is neither in any state interest nor cost benefit (Hass, 2019).

In line with USA, National Defence Strategy 2018 the key challenge to US security and prosperity is revival of strategic competition with Russia and China. Both China and Russia desires to alter the world as per their ideology and this power politics deems a revisit of US priorities and strategies of old cold war to this new type of near peer competition in pursuit of global interests (Robbert and Haffa, 2018).

Thus, after analyzing the literature review it is evident that China is a raising power and US is quite wary of this fact. Although US policy makers are cognizant of this situation and they are crafting policies and strategies in Asia Pacific to retard the China overtaking US political and economical dominance. Yet, there is a research gap in the literature pertaining to the China response strategy where she can convert her economic power into military might while engaging with USA. Nevertheless, access to global critical resources and its acquisition by both powers may be one such scenario leading to conflict of interest in the projected future.

Moreover, there exist a research gap and clarity on the regional state’s responses in the dealing with both Sino–US on various political issues in the region. Additionally, the research gap is identified in the implications of hard power challenge posed to both power in view of various disputes in SCS and ECS. Chinese excessive land reclamation projects and construction on disputed islands needs a deliberate reappraisal since there is lack of clarity on the US and regional states response strategy. Although, a lot of discourse and research has been concluded by various think tanks and researchers yet considering the immense importance of both powers relations, further research is required to highlight the increased tensions the US China relationship currently in the context of changing nature of global and regional power dynamics.

Research Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to further expand the available discourse on US China relations with the prime focus on Asia Pacific within the domain of international relations. It is a qualitative

research where maximum use of secondary sources of data has been made in shape of books, research papers, official documents, statements and various foreign and local think tanks reports available on the internet. Additionally, recorded interviews, speeches and lectures of head of states and diplomats have also been utilized for making own analysis in the absence of primary sources. The tools for data collection included opinion-based analysis of experts' interviews on the subject. Content analysis technique has been employed for the analysis of data.

The researcher has also utilized seminars, workshops and lectures on the subject while serving at Institute of Strategic Studies Research and Analysis, National Defence University.

Theoretical Framework

In order to conduct the research, US China engagement in Asia Pacific can be analyzed under different international relations theories and various sub groups of theories can be applied. However, the subject will be discussed through lens of core assumptions of classical realism with its sub strands of Neo realism. The present-day US-China relationship is ideally designed to be studied under the complex interdependence model offered by Neo Liberals. However, the dominant theory applied is the classic realism.

Thus, in order to sum up the theoretical approach, it is evident that either China will contest US or cooperate within the system and follow her policy of peaceful rise and get maximum benefitted till the time she is not dominant enough to formulate her own leading world order. But peaceful rise is also doubtful and it preeminent that she will be contested by the USA in wake of conflict of interest. However, keeping in view Chinese economic and political engagement in Asia Pacific it is likely possible that she will be able to establish her own hegemonic order. USA in line with Neorealism perspective will strive for sustenance of existing international order and forge alliances with countries in periphery of China such as South Korea, Japan and India coupled with off shore balance in terms of stationing Naval assets. Nonetheless, a realist paradigm is clearly evident in US policy makers approach towards China contrary to liberal aspect, being part and parcel of US approach after World War II (Tehsin, 2017). In line with realist postulates USA is likely to pursue a strategy of active engagement with China for global power politics and attain all elements of power since international system is dictated by the power politics and power maximization.

US-China Engagement in Asia-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities

Sino – US power matrix has witnessed challenges in various sectors which indeed are natural for both powers to compete at global landscape and influence the political order. Sino – US competition is a determining factor in shaping the international and regional environment for attainment of geo-political and geo-economical ascendancy in Asia Pacific. China is a leading power in Asia Pacific and it is further exerting its power potential to become more assertive and influential. The US has overlapping interests with China in Asia-Pacific and more pronouncedly the disputed and contested maritime claims in SCS and ECS are a source of continuous tension in relationship of both powers.

Sino-US Engagement in Asia-Pacific

The Sino – US relationship in Asia-Pacific have been evolved into a sequential action and reaction scenarios. China executes an action to safeguard its interests and the US responds and objects. Envisaging response from the US, the China feels threatened and takes further measures as additional safeguards. Thus, this set of action and reaction imitate the classical struggle of power transition in the context of rising and established powers (Lai *et al.*, 2018). This aspect of power struggle in gray zone was evident once US condemned China's militarization of disputed islands in SCS and the US surged its navigation operations in SCS which antagonized China's quick response (Lai *et al.*, 2018). The preposition is concerning for the other regional states since any miscalculation can lead to hostilities which can be detrimental to regional peace and order. There is also a possibility of such regional conflict to escalate into a bigger conflict which can endanger global peace and stability.

The US has resorted to Rebalancing Strategy in Asia-Pacific primarily to contain China though, she never admitted it officially. Rather, the US termed the strategy as a tool for broad based engagement with her regional allies diplomatically and politically. The China has equally responded by initiating Belt and Road projects in the region to offset the US designs in the regional political order. Thus, both powers are actively engaged to gain political ascendancy and edge over each other in regional domain of SCS.

China's Core Interest

President Xi has crafted a regional approach which is part and parcel of Chinese grand strategy encompassing the notion of shared future for all states. It is based on singularity of destiny for all states with focus on a new type of relationship model. This model calls for mutual respect, cooperation, development and furtherance of existing collaboration in

wake of global developments and issues (Lewis, 2016). Thus, remaining cognizant to this approach China has adopted a road to peaceful development while not compromising on China's core interest. The Core interest encompasses sovereignty and territorial integrity of China including a principle stand on Taiwan issue. Currently, China has adopted a firm stand on the territorial disputes in SCS and ECS and termed it as an issue of sovereignty and national prestige.

Sino-US Engagement: Challenges and Opportunities

The Sino – US relationship is currently wading through a variety of challenges and opportunities in Asia-Pacific while engaging at multifarious avenues in regional political order. The US-China power dynamics in regional geo-political domain is presented with numerous challenges and opportunities and can also be viewed in the context of established and rising power (Lai, 2011). Following is highlighted:

The China's Rise

China's rise has been the cause of permanent friction in Sino – US relationship and has been considered as the one of the challenging factors for management of both powers relations. The US has been viewing the economic and military rise of China as a biggest challenge to its policies and interests in Asia Pacific. The main concern and challenge for the US is the implications of growing influence of China's rise in the regional spheres and its economic clout across the globe. The US is wary of the current situation where if China plays a lead role in the Asia Pacific regional institutions then it would diminish the role and influence of the US, which would be detrimental to US interests in the region.

Taiwan Issue

Taiwan has been an issue of immense importance for both Sino – US policy makers and has been a source of constant friction between both powers since ages. US – China relationship in regional power dynamics on issue of Taiwan has remained strained but both states have made a lot of efforts for the peaceful resolution and effective management of the Taiwan issue. The US enjoys strong defense ties with Taiwan including high level of political exchange. The US has concluded large arms sale deals with Taiwan and Taiwan relations act which guarantees the present status to Taiwan in view of China's claims over Taiwan. China on the other hand has been long struggling for the reunification of China and various official documents have been issued in past to highlight China's stance on the issue.

North Korea Issue

Pyongyang has been another challenging issue confronting both US – China in management of their relationship in Asia Pacific.

Pyongyang has long troublesome terms with the US owing to the US perceived security concerns emanating from the North Korea's nuclear and missile program but still dialogues has been the regular feature of both states relations. The US considers the North Korea's nuclear and missile development program a security threat for the regional political / security order in general and specifically it is a source of continuous grave concern for RoK and Japan due to the assistance and support tendered by China to the Pyongyang (Rajagopalan, 2013).

Cyber Domain

Cyber domain is quite significant for Sino - US strategic quest for attainment of global ascendancy. This domain potentially influences land, maritime and space domain and resultantly the employment of power across all these domains. US – China cyber domain relationship has remained strained and has worse affect on both states relations with increasing the mistrust (Pierce, 2018). The friction between both states on cyber security is growing and the mistrust has reached a level where both states negatively assess each other strategic intentions (Pierce, 2018).

Economic Rivalry – Trade Wars

Sino – US trade and commerce relationship has been subjected to competition as well as cooperation since opening up of China to global investments in 1979. The US is apprehensive of China's state controlled economic policies which have distorted the smooth flow of trade and investments. Moreover, the US shares deep economic concerns over certain actions of Beijing which in a way has affected the business opportunities of US business firms and entrepreneurs. These complaints include China's steps to undervalue Yuan, non-compliance to WTO terms and conditions, issues of copyrights / intellectual property rights and economic espionage against US companies (Morison, 2011). Thus, these economic issues are irritants to bilateral relations and both states deem it harmful towards pursuit of economic interests.

Space Militarization

Space being a global common has been a competitive and contested domain especially by the great powers relying on space technology in context of defence and commercial activities. Although the international community is actively striving to regulate the space domain towards use of weapons but it has not been succeeded in completely banning the weapons in space. In view of this increasing significance of space, the militarization of space has also come in limelight as a point of contention for US-China relationship and both states share own version of understanding and concerns (Defrieze, 2014).

Maritime Territorial Disputes – The Flash Point

The Sino – US rivalry in the region is aggravating owing to both states action and reaction in SCS and currently they are in a state of direct clash over each other's aggressive actions. China is increasing its assertiveness in SCS and the territorial aspirations have been a key factor in pursuit of maritime claims with the neighbors. Additionally, disrupting the freedom of navigation operations, land reclamation on disputed islands along with construction of military infrastructure have been the concerning issues for the US which has led to strain relations between the both powers (Department of Defence, 2015). The US is apprehensive of China's growing activities which indeed are challenging the global order led by the US and the China's opposition to the global norms and rules of international law is basing on its aspirations to increase its assertiveness and regional influence at the expense of the US.

Climate Change, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management

A climate change phenomenon is a potent threat to global security and Asia Pacific is one of the worse affected regions prone to the devastating effects of climate change owing to tropical storms, tsunamis, rising levels of sea, food shortages, low lying urbanization in deltas and ever-growing race for energy resources (Caitlit *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the climate change tends to be an accelerant of already existing threats to the regional security and stability and if it is not tackled timely then certain parts of the region will be unlivable, creating a dilemma for the governance.

China and US are signatory to United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) since 1992 which significantly directs the members to assist in global stabilization of climate change induced by humans.

Anti Piracy Operations

Sino – US security cooperation in wake of joint Anti Piracy campaigns provides an opportunity to both states to formulate joint strategies and work together for a global cause of countering the rampant activities of pirates. The issue of piracy originated off the shores of Somalia which threatened the global maritime trade from east to west and vice versa. The coast line of Somalia is 3800 kilometers and anti piracy operation are challenging and cost effective. Thus, Sino – US maritime cooperation in Gulf of Aden has led to a successful forum of multinational coordination with a cost benefit initiative (Cheng, 2009). This has not only led to securing the global shipping lanes in a coordinated fashion but also has given opportunity to jointly work.

Sino-US Engagement in South Asia

US – China engagement and competition in South Asia is formulated on ideological and geo strategic interests. The competitive nature of both states policies in the region is evident from the literature review of various think tanks. Stephen Walt has highlighted in his work ‘balance against threat’ that the US engagement in South Asia has been driven by the factors of China’s rise and its active role in war on terror. Similarly, Franz- Stefan Gady has also put across his argument that US political engagement in the region and alliance with India is clear manifestation of global great power politics and it is also reflected in the US policy of rebalance to Asia Pacific (Gady, 2015). The India’s role at couple of occasions has been termed as an anchor for the US strategic reorientation in Asia Pacific and US Asia’s policy.

Nevertheless, the US engagement post 9/11 in the region is actively seeking and forging a strategic alignment with India so as to balance out the expanding influence of China in the regional political order and Indian Ocean. Like previous administrations, Trump Administration has also initiated various economic and strategic maneuvers with India in an effort to duly recognize the Indian role in the US Asia’s policy. Moreover, the India factor in US policy commensurate with its peculiar geo strategic location, market potential and maritime competency in the region. Contrary to this, the US policy in dealing with Pakistan has remained ambiguous and mistrust prevailed in strategic cooperation between both states as well post 9/11.

The US-China power dynamics in South Asia has a deep impact on regional political order and stability and the same has equally contributed to the security environment in Pakistan. Both powers interplay in the regional political order has led to polarization and imbalances in Indo-Pak power parity matrix. Additionally, the competitiveness and interplay in Sino – US policies in South Asia has overtaken the entire region which is next to the energy corridors of Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Gulf (Riaz, 2016). Nonetheless, the role of both powers has been power balancing in Pakistan since Pakistan gives an opportunity of shortest possible route to Arabian Sea from the energy rich CARs. Thus, the geographic positioning of Pakistan has compelled both powers to pursue an alliance policy in dealing with Pakistan and same has been clear manifestation of China’s BRI in expanding its political / economical interests to West Asia. In keeping with Indo-US Strategic Cooperation in the region, the Sino-Pak expanding strategic relationship is reactionary response in order to counter weight and has further dragged Pakistan towards China.

Implications for Pakistan

Sino-US engagement in Asia Pacific has maximized regional polarization and insecurity for Pakistan. Although, in shape of CPEC (60 billion \$ investment) Pakistan has got an opportunity for improvement of socio-economic development but at the same time it has increased security challenges for Pakistan and has also led to alienation of US administration. Thus, Sino-US clash of geo-strategic interests has posed an issue of socio-political coherence and geographic entity for Pakistan. Moreover, Indo-Pak rivalry has also enhanced due to strategic balancing of great powers (Sino-US) post 9/11. Indo-US strategic cooperation in the region has left Pakistan with no other option but to look towards China as an all-weather friend to deter Indian strategic clout in the region. China enjoys economic relations with India but to balance out and offset Indo-US strategic alliance it strengthened its politico-military collaboration with Pakistan in regional political order. As a matter of fact, Pakistan convergence of strategic interests with China was due to security concerns emanating from India in the region. The Indo-US nuclear collaboration and transfer of military gadgetry was responded with the Sino-Pak defence collaboration and joint ventures in missile technology domain. Pakistan security apprehension has been increased with the Indo-US nuclear deal and defence collaboration in the regional political order. Thus, the conventional balance in South Asia has been disturbed and has tended to lower the nuclear threshold.

Implications of Sino-US Engagement

Sino-US engagement in Asia-Pacific is blend of cooperation and conflict in accordance to the changing nature of international politics. China's rise at global landscape has paved the way for transfer of global power from Atlantic to Pacific. China as a rising power has challenged the established order of the US and international system is experiencing transition in power in some domains. The US while remaining cognizant to this factor takes China as a revisionist power in Asia-Pacific and articulates its response strategies for preeminence of its power to maintain status quo in global political order. Thus, both powers divergence of interest in Asia-Pacific has emanated interesting pattern of conflict and competition in the region.

The US being the dominant power desires to stick to its global political order and the China being a rising power intends to bridge the gap whilst challenging the present US led order. China's economic might is a concerning factor for the US officials since they fear that the surplus capital can be utilized for the modernization of China's defence forces. The US is also concerned about the China's growing assertiveness in SCS and ECS which is challenging the US long presence in the region and deterring the freedom of navigation under UNCLOS.

Sino-US maritime interplay in Asia-Pacific along with the common threat perception of China rise has been the overriding factor of Indo-US strategic collaboration and maritime coordination in the region. China's expansion of maritime interest in Indian Ocean has been responded by India through strategic alliance with the US and naval coordination with Japan and Australia. Sino-US maritime competition in Asia-Pacific also has its security implications for Pakistan due to China's investment on Gawader Port, close to Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, strategic partnership with US has provided Indian Navy strategic expansion in Indian Ocean which has also increased Pakistan's maritime security concerns.

The US authorities highlighted that the strategic reorientation to Asia-Pacific has nothing to do with the containment of China or targeting any other state. However, the cardinals of the US strategy under various administrations in last decade explicitly display its China centric approach and policy initiatives to deter China's regional political and economic clout. China has also increased its regional diplomatic engagement and has crafted a response strategy to offset the containment effort by the US administration. China has utilized the strength of its soft power diplomacy to extend its political and economic influence across the globe. China's response strategy included Built and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asia Infrastructure Development Bank (AIDB) to extend its signature from Asia to rest of the world. Moreover, soft loans are also part of BRI projects to build infrastructure in host countries.

Conclusion

Analysis of Sino – US engagement in Asia Pacific can rightly be described as conagement and cooptation. The competition and cooperation are likely to coexist in both states' areas of interest side by side. The US is increasing its engagement in the region owing to its perceived declining power in regional political order and China's increasing influence and assertiveness. The regional states are economically engaged and dependent on China and cannot risked their survival and economic life line but at the same time they want the US to play its dominant role in the military domain while exerting maximum pressure on China to curtail its hegemony in SCS and ECS over disputed maritime claims. Sino – US power struggle in regional political domain is more orientated towards management of crisis in relationship instead of a conflict owing to the existence of complex interdependence and a globally knitted economic interdependence where no state can afford for a longer time to disengage and intimidate. Both states are firm on their core principle issues in the region but at the same times are flexible in their

strategic approaches / options while engaging and responding to each other.

The hypothesis has been proved from the discussion that the US is increasing its influence in Asia-Pacific to deter China's regional clout and curtailing its hegemony in regional power matrix. The US strategy in Asia-Pacific post 9/11 is clear manifestation of the stated hypothesis where it is striving to maintain its political preeminence and military dominance in the region. China is influencing the regional states foreign policies due to its economic engagement and soft power diplomacy. The US is losing some political space which is fully bridged by China's through its economic might.

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