



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Super Power Rivalry in the IOR: The Possible Role of the IAF

**Guest Lecture by
Dr Amit Gupta
Assistant Professor
Air War College, USA**

Date: October 09, 2018

1. The US –China relations initiated with President Nixon’s visit to People’s Republic of China under Chairman Mao in 1972 as the first US president to the country. The two signed an agreement wherein; US agreed to recognize PRC in return for China’s withdrawal from other Asian countries (such as Vietnam). Both countries had interest in thwarting Soviet expansion globally. This recognition brought China to the international platform.
2. Nearly half a decade later, now, Chinese growing military capability has pushed the US to the Second Island Chain. China is also competing with US in terms of economic parity.
3. One of the basis for US military capability was the ‘Control of Commons’- such as of the airspace upto 15,000 feet, sea waters, etc.
4. What has changed is Chinese response. China is making it painful for the US to fight a war in the era of high-tech warfare. China is focusing on ‘Multi-domain warfare’ that includes air, land and sea components with the use of ASATs, missiles as well as cyberwarfare.

5. Chinese are aware that they will lose a war with the US in the South China Sea. However, they are also aware that the US cannot sustain its continuous presence in the SCS for a longer duration such as 60-70 years.
6. But the fight is not between US and Chinese militaries, it's a fight of economic might between the Federal Reserve Bank of the US and China's Central Bank.
7. China was proactive during 2008 financial crisis to ensure that Asia doesn't go into recession. The region only slowed down as China invested \$16 billion in several South East Asian economies.
8. Currently, China is headed towards building of 'alternative economic world order' with BRICS, OBOR, AIIB, RCEP as new economic institutions. Alternately, it is trading with other countries in Yuan instead of Dollar as a part of 'currency swap'. Additionally, China is the largest holder of the US treasury bills. Nine out of ten China's top trading partners are US allies.
9. US President Trump understands that 'Artificial Intelligence' is the next big thing and China wants that from US. Therefore, China is investing in US technology and IT based industries. Trump wants to secure American economic-technological processes from China.
10. President Trump's Foreign policy is based on two tenets:
 - a. The US to have a smaller military footprint globally. In his "Globalism is dead" speech, he meant the end of global intervention and not globalization.
 - b. US has three focus areas in Asia currently- Middle East, Russia and China.
11. The West has no emotional ties with India. The relationship is all about trading and economic interaction that can be furthered by student exchange, Hollywood-Bollywood cultural exchange and Silicon Valley- Bengaluru IT exchanges, apart from the defence trade.

On QUAD:

12. Australians are the best talkers but not good at fighting. Hence, Australia can't be trusted for their participation in Quad. They are also economically dependent on China.
13. ASEAN also cannot be considered as a part of Quad to counter China as the individual countries such as the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos etc. favour China.
14. Similarly, other South East Asian countries such as Indonesia have redrawn their Nine Dash Line map to favour China. Singapore is strategically dependent on the US but economically aligned with China.

On the role of IAF in the IOR:

15. IAF needs to play its role in protecting the 'Global Commons'. IAF should work towards coalition effort with the US in this regard.
 16. China's 1000 km range missile is targeted to Andaman & Nicobar Command.
 17. India should not try to build indigenous fighter aircraft. HAL doesn't possess the capability to provide the fighters and other equipment in the stipulated time frame.
 18. What India needs is fighters capable of nuclear delivery and submarines with missiles.
 19. Therefore, India's strategy should be threefold:
 - a. Work with both the US (strategically) and China (economically)
 - b. Work towards building a new rules-based order.
 - c. Promote economic integration within Asia.
 20. However, the US is facing 'India Fatigue' for its bureaucratic and political delays. India needs to be willing to spend money to get the technologies/ systems it needs.
-