

GEO-POLITICS AND STRATEGY FORMULATION

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Is there a limit to human will? Is geography a constraint or a legitimate determinant which checks human zeal? Are political geographers overtly deterministic in their analyses and detached to the possibilities of human capabilities? Or are they prudent realists who see the world as it is and not how it should be? These questions form the essence of the use of geo-politics in strategy formulation. It is often rued that American power oscillates among the Vietnam psyche of overstretch, lack of exit strategy or disproportionate force to the Munich psyche of interventionism, regime change, human rights and promulgation of a liberal international system even at stretched costs. The wars of Iraq and Afghanistan are symptomatic of the former while the Yugoslavian intervention was symptomatic of the latter. Renowned strategist Robert D. Kaplan argues that while there are many human processes at work, such extremes can be avoided if nations prioritise one major factor in their calculation: geography.

GEO-POLITICAL THEORY: KEY PROPONENTS AND CONCEPTS

Friedrich Ratzel¹ (1940) presented a number of key concepts that would be developed further by others in the field of geo-politics. For example, it was Ratzel who gave the earliest and most complete definition of the

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1. W.J. Cahnman, "The Concept of Raum and the Theory of Regionalism," *American Sociological Review*, 9(5), 1994, pp. 455-462.

The frontier region creates opportunities for the emergence of enclaves of ethnic sub-groups that struggle to exercise a degree of political power and influence over the larger society.

term *raum*, or room. Alternatively understood as “space,” this concept relates to Ratzel’s conceptualisation of organic state theory and states as spatial organisms that require room or space in which growth is possible. Borders become insignificant in that a developing state or one that is advancing is likely to require annexation of territories that are controlled by other less powerful states. Ratzel recognised, as did Darwin, that there is an inevitable struggle for life that occurs even in the case of nation-

states. Such a struggle requires a state to grow or to die, losing or gaining influence in direct proportion to its capacity for defeating or overcoming its rivals.

Frederick Jackson² Turner proposed a major thesis focussed on the role of the frontier in political life. Turner held that the frontier was a major influence in shaping the unique character of America and American culture. It was his contention that the experience of the rugged and challenging life in the frontier regions of the country as it expanded ever westward was instrumental in fostering self-reliance and sectionalism. Sectionalism, in his view, was a direct result of the coming together of specific ethnic and other groups in a particular place, creating in essence a unique sub-section of the American polity that would come to define a place as well as a people.

The frontier region creates opportunities for the emergence of enclaves of ethnic sub-groups that struggle to exercise a degree of political power and influence over the larger society. However, Turner’s most significant contribution is his understanding of the role played by the frontier in shaping national character and in forging sectional relationships and sectional conflict.

Friedrich Naumann’s (1917) text, *Mittell-Europa*, proposed that within Europe there existed a central entity composed of the Germanic countries which should be joined together to create a formidable force to be called

2. Ibid.

“Central Europe.” Such a force would have the political and ideological capacity to stave off any and all attacks or threats from other European countries. It would further be capable of preventing the Ottoman Empire, then one of the most powerful and aggressive forces in the world, from making further inroads into the European heartland. For Naumann, the combined forces of the German *volk* were of such substance that they could, working in concert, achieve European hegemonic domination. Using a military organisation as the basis for this new state entity, in Naumann’s view, would establish a viable source of European security in a perilous age. There is also the contrarian concept – a liberal dream – of Mittel Europa which should be spread throughout the world with its liberal political philosophy but which, as shown by the current European crisis, has fallen prey to the nationalistic geography driven ethnic divisions. Although the European Union (EU) supra state is alive and feasible, its future evolution and consequent relations with the US and Russia will have strong geopolitical considerations and irritants.

Halford MacKinder³ (1904, 1919) proposed that the world had experienced three unique geo-political periods. The closed heartland of Eurasia was the geographical pivot or location that was central to establishing global control. This was premised on the conviction that the age of maritime exploration which began with Columbus was drawing to a close as the 19th century ended. The next period of geo-political influence would be based upon land transportation technology which would reinstate land-based power as opposed to sea power as essential to political dominance. This would lead to a resurgence of Eurasia because it was adjacent to the borders of so many important countries, was not accessible to sea power, and was strategically buttressed by an inner and outer crescent of landmasses. The third or preliminary period of geo-political interaction was also a period in which land transportation dominated. Thus, MacKinder (1919) proposed the periods of land, sea, and land transport again as shaping geo-political relationships while the heartland remained the key position on the global battlefield regardless of which type of transportation dominated.

3. H. MacKinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *Geographical Journal*, 23(2), 1904, pp. 421-444.

Rimland states such as Japan, India, China were likely to become superpowers over time.

Alfred Thayer Mahan,⁴ on the other hand, was convinced that beginning with the Age of Exploration, the nation-states that achieved great power status did so because they had mastered sea power. He further contended that the mastery of commercial activities that elide on seaborne transportation was critical not only in times of war but also in times of peace. He felt that any country building a fleet that could destroy an enemy's main force in a single battle would become a hegemonic force. Mahan's fundamental assumption regarding the importance of sea power was his belief that economic competition sat at the heart of all rivalry between nations. One should recall that when Mahan presented his ideas, there were limited methods of communicating and transporting ideas as well as goods from one part of the world to the other. Mahan emphasised the highway aspect of the sea and argued that any country that was dependent on the world economy needed to be able to secure access to the world and could do so only if no enemy fleet dominated the seas. What differentiates Mahan from other thinkers is his constant emphasis on the overarching significance of sea power and sea transport which he felt were destined to remain the dominant mode of international interaction even in an era when the railroad and land transport systems were expanding at a dramatic rate.

For Nicolas Spykman (1938), Eurasia's periphery and not its core are seen as the key to global power. This periphery in Spykman's viewpoint should be known as a rimland. Rimland states such as Japan, India, China were likely to become superpowers over time. Because rimland states had greater contact with the outside world or the countries that were not part of the heartland itself, they received more in terms of innovation than did the heartland countries. Rimland states also possessed a wealth of natural resources and though Spykman agreed with MacKinder on this particular concept, he gave greater credence to the capacity of rimland states to

4. A.T. Mahan, "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History," 2008, available at www.gutenberg.org/files/13529

capitalise on their natural advantages and resources than did MacKinder⁵.

Moving on, Deibel and John Lewis Gaddis (1986) suggest that the policy of containment evolved over time as the United States moved away from direct military confrontation of Communist expansionism in South Korea and Vietnam to a less militaristic response that employed economic and foreign aid as a means of leading the non-aligned nations into the Western sphere of influence. At the same time, the continued willingness of the US to participate in the arms race which lasted into the Reagan Administration was very much a military response to the perceived Soviet threat. Containment emerges as a strategy that was designed to offset Soviet hegemonic ambitions in terms of the Eurasian heartland and countries within the periphery or the rimland. It is an excellent example of great power politics being played out in a bipolar world wherein two determined superpowers are willing to compete almost indefinitely for dominance.

Saul B. Cohen⁶ (2003) makes use of the related concepts of gateways and shatterbelts. A shatterbelt is a region of the world wherein enormous political volatility exists and wherein conflict is endemic and dominant world powers are often seen as threatening entities which must be resisted. Cohen claims that the Middle East is an excellent example of a contemporary shatterbelt wherein tensions run high and the potential for conflict that could spread outside the region is also present. Gateways, in comparison, are seen by Cohen as points of entry into autonomous or semi-autonomous heartlands. Eastern Europe, the Trans-Caucasus, and Central Asia are gateways that have at times also been shatterbelts. The difference between a shatterbelt and a gateway depends on the degree of internal stability that the region has achieved or which it is able to maintain in the face of internal and external ideological and economic forces. While Samuel Huntington foresaw a clash of civilisations as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, Cohen suggests that globalisation and the diffusion of technology will favour accommodation even within the highly volatile shatterbelts. Cohen's

5. N. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 32(1), 1938, pp. 28-50.

6. S.B. Cohen, *Geopolitics of the World System* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

(2003) analysis identifies a new hierarchy of geo-political units. These units range from the sub-national to the geo-strategic and global. By emphasising the interaction between these units, Cohen has essentially proposed that a new world order is likely to develop as a consequence of new economic activities.

CONTEMPORARY GEO-POLITICS

Geo-politics as a field of study was furthered in its cause by many of these strategists like Mackinder, Spykman, Braudel, Bracken, Hodgson and A.T. Mahan. Mackinder theorised (in the language of his time) that whoever controls the Eurasian landmass controls the World Island. Spykman and later A.T. Mahan posited that the rimland on the southern periphery of the Eurasian landmass, with insistence on sea power, was critical to projection of power on the Eurasian landmass. He also considered India the core region of the rimland with potential to project sea-based power across East-West in the Indian Ocean. The Turkish and Arab Middle East which approximates Hodgson's Oikoumene and Mackinder's continental satellite, North America, are two other crucial actors in this geo-political international system. All these analyses have been familiar constructs over the past century, especially during the World Wars and the Cold War. Undoubtedly, however, these 20th century analyses have undergone critical corrections over the last 20 years, especially due to the revolution in communications, technology and globalisation. The end of the Cold War was hailed as the end of history with American preponderance consolidated by the global proliferation of liberal democracy and modern capitalism. The rate of technological progress compressed distance and time, and "a flat world" was born, in the words of Thomas Friedman. Yet globalisation that has brought people together, has simultaneously accentuated nationalist and sovereign trends as well. Consider the Arab spring as an example where self-immolation by a Tunisian fruit seller, while initiating region-wide demonstrations across countries, eventually progressed in very different ways in each of these countries. The results have been different in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. The difference

lies in the fact that human processes and actions can instigate short-term and middle-term factors but certain features of a nation remain deeply ingrained due to the long-term glacial processes of culture, state formation, societal changes all of which are affected by the most inflexible of them all – geography. Kaplan in his book, *The Revenge of Geography*, eloquently elucidates why certain countries in spite of their vigorous societies and dynamic institutions owe a lot of their success and failure to geography! The US, protected by oceans on either side and the Arctic belt on the north, Britain with the English Channel separating it from continental Europe, Russian land-based power with no outlet to the sea because of the frozen sea lanes on the north, the historical northwest threat to the Indian subcontinent, the Chinese continental power along with natural harbours and vast coastline, the Anatolian land-bridge that is Turkey and the fragmented geography of Iraq are all good examples. The point I'm trying to make is that while human constructs and processes can achieve a lot, human strategies need to be seriously tempered by geographical constraints. Although somewhat basic, this has often been overlooked and taken for granted in the 21st century strategy formulation. US neo-conservatives proved it in Iraq. The Soviet Union had proved it in Afghanistan. India too suffered a setback in 1962 due to these reasons.

Geography helps in determining the probability and feasibility of long-term grand strategic goals.

This is not to say that geography is a roadblock – after all, science and technology have proved otherwise. In fact, geography helps in determining the probability and feasibility of long-term grand strategic goals. For example, while the Munich mentality of the 1990s was at work during the American intervention in Afghanistan, further justified by the proven culpability of a completely rogue and irrational Taliban regime in the 9/11 attacks, the post-Vietnam mentality would have called for a coherent exit strategy which, in turn, would be governed by the geo-political fact that Afghanistan over centuries has remained stable only when ruled by a central Kabul with power sharing agreements with the provincial governments, devoid of external intervention. Further, geo-political logic would suggest

that the stabilisation of the Afghan economy centres on minerals and energy transit facilities for Iran, Central Asia, Pakistan, India and China. This, in a nutshell, is the role geo-politics plays in the articulation of any Grand Strategic Goals. The *zeitgeist* of the time is to respect your weaknesses more than your strengths.

China is proceeding with the same after witnessing American predicaments. The US itself is trying to realign strategy in this direction as shown by the pull-outs, pivot to Asia and budget sequestration. Beyond a point, it has to be realised that intervention may be necessary in the case of a regime like the Taliban, but perhaps not in the case of a regime like Saddam's, and an exit strategy respecting the geo-political factors of the region has to be thought out to avoid a quagmire. A look at Iraqi geography would have showed that the fragmented politics of the mountainous Kurds, the central Sunnis and the Iran influenced minority Shias has always required a strong semi-dictatorial central control, and absence of a modern liberal political philosophy in the region would result in violent power struggles in case of a power vacuum. It is undeniable that the Saddam regime had allegations of excesses but the dilemma to be answered in 2003 was: what kind of Iraq was the US striving for? As it turned out, the US made the wrong choice in initiating that action. A history of the geo-politics of Iraq could have served as deterrence. In geo-political terms, the Vietnam mentality is about limits; the Munich mentality about overcoming them. Each extreme can be dangerous on its own. It is only when both are given equal measure that the right strategy has the best chance to emerge. As the dictum goes, "The art of statesmanship is about working as close to the edge as possible, without stepping over the brink."

CLASSICAL REALISM: A THEORETICAL CONFIDANT OF GEO-POLITICS⁷

Modern realism was most comprehensively summed up in 1948 by Hans J. Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.

7. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House Publications, First Edition, 2012), ch. 2, pp. 23-38.

Morgenthau begins his argument by noting that the world “is the result of forces inherent in human nature” And human nature, as Thucydides pointed out, is motivated by fear, self-interest and self-help. “To improve the world,” writes Morgenthau, “one must work with these forces, not against them”. Realism appeals to historical precedent rather than to abstract principles and aims at the realisation of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good without ruling out the achievement of the latter in the process. Good intentions have little to do with positive outcomes, according to Morgenthau. All nations are tempted—and few have been willing to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. To know that nations are subject to the moral law is one thing, while to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations is quite another. Furthermore, states must operate in a much more constrained moral universe than do individuals. The individual may say to himself, “Let justice be done, even if the world perishes,” but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care. Realists expect conflict and realise it cannot be avoided; they are less likely to overreact to it. It is, ultimately, only the existence of a universal moral conscience which sees war as a “natural catastrophe” and not as a natural extension of one’s foreign policy that limits war’s occurrence. Realism does have a tendency of making people uneasy. Realists understand that international relations are ruled by a more anarchic limited reality than that governing domestic polity. Domestic polity is defined by laws because a legitimate government monopolises the use of force, and the international system is still in a state of nature, in which there is no Hobbesian leviathan to punish the unjust. Realists prioritise order above value judgements: for them, the latter become important after the former has been established. In Iraq, the order, even of totalitarian dimensions, turned out to be more humane than the lack of order that followed. And because world government will forever remain elusive, since there will never be a fundamental agreement on the ways of social betterment, the world is fated to be anarchic and ruled by different kinds of regimes.

On the relatively stable foundation of geography, the pyramid of national power arises.

On the relatively stable foundation of geography, the pyramid of national power arises. For at the root, realism is about the recognition of the bluntest, most uncomfortable, and deterministic of truths: those of geography. A state's position on the map is the first thing that defines it. A map, explains Halford Mackinder, conveys "at one glance a whole series of generalizations". Geography, he goes on, bridges the gap between arts and sciences, connecting the study of history, politics and culture with environmental factors, which specialists in humanities sometimes neglect. "That technology has cancelled geography contains just enough merit to be called a plausible fallacy" writes Colin S. Gray. Having said that, factors like geography, history and ethnic characteristics influence but do not determine future events. Immediately the question beckons: how do you split the difference between recognising the importance of deterministic factors and the danger of overemphasising them? Raymond Aron tried to solve this question with his concept of probabilistic determinism. Strategy, he concluded, should always come out of a rigorous probabilistic analysis of determinist, individualist and miscellaneous factors.⁸

INDIAN GEO-POLITICS AND STRATEGY

The traditional threat to the Indian subcontinent has always emanated from the northwest. India was artificially divided into India and Pakistan which itself involved seismic human processes of migration, partition and assimilation. Thus, the relatively continuous transition from Central Asia to the subcontinent has been impeded by man-made disputed and porous boundaries. Some analysts even state that like the post-Westphalia period in Europe, the process of fixed boundaries and state making is still to unfold in the region. In other words, the states are still evolving. Historically, invaders often treated the areas around the Hindu Kush as a base camp to invade the subcontinent. Although overrunning invasions and foreign control are fanciful in 21st century India, it still goes a long way to explain why Indian

8. Ibid.

decision-makers are extremely sensitive to developments in the Af-Pak region. The current Pakistani belligerence in the region affects both American and Indian strategy. It is important to impress upon the Punjabi dominated Pakistan Army that covert support of the Taliban might radicalise southeast Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) on either side of the Durand Line, thus, uniting the Pashtuns under a radical leadership and, in turn, antagonising the comparatively moderate Pakistani provinces of Punjab and Sindh. This would jeopardise Afghan and Pakistani state building efforts in a major way. Free and fair elections in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and a departure from Pakistani insistence on Afghan strategic depth and covert warfare against India are critical to the stabilisation of the Indian northwest. Only a stable northwest can bring India into a fair bilateral negotiation about Kashmir. Pakistan, by continuing its present strategy, is playing into the trap of what Sumit Ganguly calls the *jihad* paradox. Pakistan is employing non-state actors to fight its adversaries because the state is relatively weak compared to the adversaries but the continued employment of such non-state actors is, in turn, further weakening the state-making process in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan needs to transcend the paradox by more state control, institution-building and more diplomatic forms of national strategy. The nuclear parity between India and Pakistan should, in the words of Kenneth Waltz, lead to nuclear stability rather than covert activities by either government under the nuclear threshold. The land contiguity, sea connectivity and proximity can transform the economic and trade relationship but the same geography can lead to brinkmanship, higher stakes and extremely small margin of error. India, on its part, needs to understand that beyond a certain point, geographical limitations will restrict its ability to influence events in Afghanistan and Pakistan and, therefore, it needs to maintain a development and diplomatic footprint in the two countries and invest in quarantine strategies of homeland security and American alliance.

The US strategy in the subcontinent needs most seriously to take geography into account. America is transitioning to the phase where its grand strategy will operate on limited resources, flexibility, rebalancing and

alliance building. The Asia pivot suggests that America will look to extricate itself from the Middle East quagmire, barring traditional allies, and prioritise the Asia-Pacific. Here, it will look to delegate certain responsibilities to the allies, with American sea power being projected in alliance with the Japanese and Indian Navies.

The Chinese strategy is obviously cognisant of this. The Chinese naval presence in Gwadar is a game changer. With an allied Pakistan which could be coerced to facilitate a stable transit to Afghanistan, China will have increased access to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia along with the planned Silk Route all the way to Turkey. Indian presence in Chabahar port is critical to our counter calculations. This might involve some tricky give and take between the US and India on the issue of the alliance structure and strategy on the two vital geo-political areas of the Persian Gulf and Asia-Pacific. America is focussed on continuing as an influential Asian power while India's core interest lies in domination of the arc of the Indian Ocean across East and West. A port in northeast Africa could be another strategic asset for both India and China in projection into the Middle East. An India-China relationship has been set back by a festering border dispute with topography and capabilities in favour of the Chinese side, leading to a competitive relationship, in geo-political terms. Robert Kaplan, alluding to the Sino-Indian relationship states that "India could emerge as the global pivot state supreme, tilting on some issues toward the United States and on others toward China. "If you accept the notion that the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century will be that between the United States and China, then India⁹ – because of the size of its population and economy – emerges as the weathervane of international politics. The more turbulent Central Asia and South Asia become politically, the less of a chance there is to develop those pipelines, thus, slowing the emergence of the Indian Ocean as the premier strategic region. The growing dominance of China will lead the citizens of India – particularly its ruling economic classes – to become increasingly frustrated with the inefficiencies of their own tumultuous

9. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/discussions/interviews/qa-with-robert-kaplan-on-geopolitics-in-the-indian-ocean?page=show>

democratic system. I am not talking here of a desire for authoritarianism but for more efficient and less corrupt governance. Competition with China could be the catalyst for the Indian government to perform better than it does. Precisely because there will be points of tension in the Indian-Chinese relationship, India must do all that it can to seek out points of agreement with China in order to stabilise relations. Merely seeking cooperative economic agreements with other countries along the rimland of the Indian Ocean will strengthen India's strategic position vis-à-vis China.

An average Chinese seems to prioritise order and an average Indian prioritises individuality and freedom.

While the South China Sea and East Asia Sea are undoubtedly Chinese areas of influence with America continuing to be muscled out by an assertive Chinese Navy, future American strategy involves nimble-footed flexible patrolling from areas like Guam and other American owned islands in the region and quick intervention in the event of Chinese action against an ally. This is in coordination with other navies of the region which can quickly come together to form a coercive fleet in the event of a crisis. The credibility of the American military machine remains intact. America is still the preponderant military power with a core competitiveness of high-tech disruptive warfare. Despite the draining wars in West Asia, military expenditure still doesn't form the major chunk of the debt with issues like health care still dominating domestic politics. The US, thus, is realigning its strategy while still retaining credible capability of deterrence and swift, selective intervention in any part of the globe.

Chinese-American geo-politics will decide the future of the international system. China and the US are both continental powers with natural harbours and long coastlines. China's proximity to the Eurasian landmass and Spykman's rimland gives it exceptional strategic assets of power projection similar to the US in the Western hemisphere. The Chinese have somewhat succeeded in homogenising the geography of the Chinese state with a few exceptions of Tibet and Taiwan. That is because, as the Indian strategist Air Commodore Jasjit Singh opined, an average Chinese seems to

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prioritise order and an average Indian prioritises individuality and freedom. It remains to be seen what the Chinese response to the greater assertion of the latter would be. China has a rich civilisational platform at the Yellow and Yangtze river basins from where the Chinese people flourished. In that sense, it is similar to the civilisational history of the subcontinent which too flourished in isolation for centuries before foreign dominance. Hence,

China is a civilisational state and its geo-political strategy is planned in the long term. Time is defined in a much broader sense in the Chinese lexicon. Historically, the Chinese leadership has centralised and emphasised authoritarian control to maintain order but with greater growth and stability, China needs to reinvent itself politically. With greater interaction with the neighbourhood and the world, geography is forcing structural changes in Chinese society. The urbanisation, the export driven growth stagnation, the different systems of Hong Kong and Macau, the stand-offs with East Asian neighbours, and the rising inequality in different regions have resulted in new challenges for the leadership which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has coped with so far but it is still an ongoing challenge. In fact, even if the CCP fails and the extreme event of democratisation takes place, a democratic China might become an even more dynamic economic power, so the Indian strategy should be primarily governed by geo-political factors. There is an adage in geo-politics: "A world balanced is a world free". Thus, whatever be the result of internal and human processes in China, other nations should also look to check it geo-politically. Therefore, the US will look to either balance or bandwagon China in a regional arrangement which would make it unfavourable for China to be disruptive or revisionist. Structural regimes like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus and Pacific community, inclusive or exclusive of China, are possible outcomes. The nature of Chinese power would ultimately decide the direction but it would have to follow the classical balance of power

logic. Due to the proximity of China to the countries and in the absence of institutionalisation, unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), countries would look to balance China with US help. Although the US will continue to decline in relative terms, it is the process of its decline which is crucial to the US. A smooth transition, similar to Britain's rather than a systemic collapse like the Soviet Union's, is what the US is aiming for. The timeline may be variable but the geo-political logic suggests that no hegemony can be perpetual but the transitions can be disruptive, gradual or variant. Space is always contested among nations but strategy and nature of engagement decide the eventual pay-offs and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper was an attempt in contextualising the geo-political puzzle before India. India, with its burgeoning demographics and huge economy, needs to focus on wealth creation and political stabilisation through proper redistribution and respect for civil liberties to first homogenise its own geography. It has a diversity of ethnicities, central location in the Eurasian continent, crippling energy dependency on the northwest and secure lanes of communication, proximity to a continental power, an outward global outlook of the citizenry, command of the English language, huge investments in education and infrastructure, nascent manufacturing in spite of rich endowment of natural resources, economic and political reforms which respect the decentralised nature of Indian geography along with central direction and strategy formulation. Effective implementation and promulgation of Acts like the Land Reforms Bill, GST, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Forest Rights Act, Judicial Accountability Bill, Ombudsman Bill, Social Safety net legislation, etc., sustenance of the services economy and continuing progressive use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Research and Development (R&D) are critical factors to equip ourselves for the geo-political challenge. These strong fundamentals will both influence and enable our central leadership and armed forces to strategise cogently for the geo-political challenge ahead. The alliance choices, the force structure, the investment in defence

imports and indigenous defence production are directly linked to the factors mentioned above. In my analyses, an alliance with the US, hedging behind the US to delay confrontation with China while increasing trade and staying sensitive to China's Tibet concerns, diplomatic mechanisms and avoiding conflagration on the Chinese border for another 10-15 years, domination of energy routes through the Indian Ocean and quarantining the northwest frontier are the core challenges of the Indian geo-political strategy.

The probable grand strategy dealing with these respective core geo-political challenges could have the following elements:

- A strategic treaty with the US with proper institutionalisation of mutual trust to impress upon them the Indian security stakes in a stable Afghanistan, similar to theirs in the Persian Gulf (a *quid pro quo* to that effect can be considered).
- Investment in disruptive air and sea power technologies.
- More clear yet independent strategic choices perhaps in coordination with US policy in the Asia-Pacific and the Persian Gulf.
- Steering clear of the radical human processes on either side of the Durand Line while maintaining a developmental footprint; no political or military overtures to transform Af-Pak or engage the region without action; and institutional assurances on terrorism and employing economic levers in the short-term across the geo-political region.

Finally, I revert to two central ideas of geo-politics and classical realism which could steer the Indian grand strategy: "There is a Limit to Human Will" and "A World Balanced is a World Free".