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United States recent primacy to Indo Pacific security in its National Security Strategy 2018 and India's primacy to its Act East Policy are implicitly focused on checkmating belatedly, China's hegemonistic control over South East Asia, and this leads to increasing strategic convergences between the US and India

South East Asia security concerns centring on China's threatening moves in South China Sea maritime expanse stood underwritten in what appears to be convergent strategic interests with India hosting all the ten Heads of ASEAN for its Republic Day Parade 2018 and visits of US Defense Secretary Mattis to Vietnam and Indonesia.

Noteworthy is the fact that while Communist China has maintained a sustained focus in establishing its hegemony on South East Asia, the United States mandatory focus on the region has been subject to distractive attentions. India's strategic attention commenced with PM Narasimha Rao's enunciation of Look East Policy in the 1990's.

China has loomed menacingly over the South East Asia region for decades which China considers as its strategic backyard and therefore its rightful preserve. In earlier decades, China was on an ideological crusade to convert South East Asia to Chinese brand of communism. It failed. China then switched to resort to 'soft power' diplomacy to make political inroads into the region. It was successful partially.

From the last decade onwards, China switched to use of 'Hard Power' to enforce its illegal claims to the South China Sea maritime expanse. Its military adventurism has paid off primarily because of United States China Hedging policy of the last decade.

China has unopposed established military control over the South China Sea and also in the bargain divided ASEAN. But it has come at great strategic costs to China which it may presently be dismissive of.

Resultantly in 2018, United States and India now have a shared strategic convergence and stake in the security and stability of South East Asia. The United States is now seriously embarked on various initiatives to bolster Indo Pacific security and India concurrently adding more substance to its 'Act East Policy'

In both cases, what is implicitly visible is the strategic aim of checkmating China's threatening moves in Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The South East Asia region has a pivotal role to play towards this end.

South East Asia's geostrategic significance lies in the geographical reality that either some share common land borders with China while others stand located astride the strategic waterways of navigation through the South China Sea. Within South East Asia confines are located the strategic chokepoints of the Malacca Straits, Lombok Straits and the Soya Straits which China perforce needs to traverse to give shape to its maritime ambitions of achieving a substantial naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

The United States and India have convergent strategic interests therefore which can briefly be summed up as follows: (1) Checkmate China's hegemonistic designs over South East Asia (2) Checkmate China's unchallenged maritime sway over the South China Sea (3) Pre-empt China from establishing control over the strategic maritime chokepoints stated above.

Towards this end-aim both the United States and India seem to have made appreciable progress even though much more has to be done. United States and India have given primacy to ASEAN as a regional grouping whose unity needs to be bolstered up against China's divisive attempts.

Since the China Threat to South East Asia is military and maritime in nature essentially, what is visible in 2018 are a two pronged strategy being given emphasis, coordinated or not, of building-up the South East Asia Navies' capacity to face China's maritime strength.

Concurrently, United States and India, both bilaterally and multilaterally are engaged in joint naval exercises with South East Asian Navies.

The United States and India are not alone in this task of building-up South East Asia's regional capacities for ensuring security and stability in a comprehensive manner. Japan and Australia too have lined up in this effort too. This virtually adds up to an international effort in shoring up the security and stability of South East Asia.

The revival of the Strategic Trilateral and the Quadrilateral of the above named countries is an indicator that the China Threat, in whatever form or manifestation, indicates that the United States, India, Japan and Australia have recognised strategic challenges that China poses to

South East Asia and to their stakes in the region.

Fortunately, United States and India have a convergence on the pivotal role that Vietnam and Indonesia can play in the security and stability of South East Asia. India has a head -start over the United States in terms of strategic ties with Vietnam and Indonesia. The United States is engaged in a catch-up effort to solidify its strategic linkages with these two vital leading South East Asia nations.

United States and India fortunately have robust strategic partnerships with the small but powerful State of Singapore which also hosts US Navy presence sitting astride the Malacca Straits

Concluding, it needs to be stressed that South East Asia region and in particular the South China Sea maritime expanse cannot be left to the mercy of China's hegemonistic designs. South East Asia's security and stability, the unity of ASEAN regional grouping and the maintenance of freedom of navigation through the global commons should be the primary focus of United States and India's security establishments sustained by joint endeavours.

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