

## **Speaking Note on Indo-Pacific for Pune Dialogue on National Security on 8<sup>th</sup> November at Pune**

Speaking specifically in the context of security dynamics in the Indo - Pacific, it is important to read evolving equations as well the legacy ones. In doing so, I will borrow some of the thoughts from my good friend Shakti Sinha, whose brilliant commentary on *Changing Security Dynamics in the Indo Pacific*, was published recently by CUTS as a part of the collection of essays in honour of Sanjaya Baru's lifetime contribution to Geo-Economics. The book is published by the name ' World in a nutshell - Essays in honour of Sanjaya Baru' and is available on Amazon.

Coming back to the point - There is a popular perception that Indo-pacific construct and the concept of burden sharing is something that President Trump brought about and that it implicitly hints at lesser involvement of the US in the region.

To my mind this is too simplistic a view and may be an incorrect one. The first thing that we have to remember here is that it is in fact under the Presidency of Obama that this 'so called' retreat of the US started to take some tangible form. Granting India the status of major defence partner by Obama is one example. Trump merely continued that momentum, and perhaps expedited it by rechristening the US Asia-Pacific command as the Indo-Pacific command. We all know the

kind of conversations and perhaps 'enthusiasm' that it created amongst the policy wonks in the region. The fact that today's talk is also on Indo-Pacific suggests that we are still trying to make a better sense of this construct.

But again it must be remembered that even for President Obama, it wasn't a sudden departure. Gradual foreign policy initiatives by successive US Presidents, especially from Clinton's time, and simultaneous rise of China, expedited by muscular diplomacy of Xi Jinping - had set the stage for what we see today.

Now, the question is what implications does it have on the security dynamics in the Indo- Pacific? Clearly what ones sees is that Trump seems to have not just a strategy but a grand one to contain Chinese growth at any cost. In doing so, he has perhaps already factored ( or not ) that when countries rise, they don't rise in isolation. In a globalised world, the rising tide also lifts up others as well.

Therefore, Trump's economic assault on China or for that matter on Iran, comes with a collateral damage on the neighbourhood of these countries, India being one of them.

This collateral damage, to my mind, creates an additional sense of insecurity in the region as a whole. To overcome this insecurity, the

countries in the region have to be more accommodating of those who can extend an olive branch.

In that sense it will be folly to assume that there is any kind of retreat from global security commitments by powers like the US. To my mind, the concepts like burden sharing signal a new configuration to retain and share power with like minded countries, and what's interesting is that it comes with an economic opportunity for big powers like the US. This is most evident in extraordinary efforts being made by the US to get India to buy more and more weapons from her.

The second point that I want to make is that amidst the unsettling reconfiguration of global power, the countries of the Indo-pacific must think of greater cooperation without having either the US or China as part of it. This thought has earlier been resonated by strategists like Raja Mohan and Medcalf. What they have in fact suggested is that a non US and non China coalition can act as a stabilising force in the Indo Pacific, and thus crucial to retain the power balance.

My third and final point in this context is that while we are witnessing rapid developments, little is being done towards making existing security configuration more meaningful. I am pointing towards Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Indian Ocean Rim Association

(IORA). While the Indian Prime Minister has expressed greater need for a collective security mechanism in Indian ocean region, a convergent narrative on political and security matters is missing. This ultimately has a telling effect on both IONS and IORA, and therefore no wonder that there is sub optimal coordination between the two.

In brief, I would say that to address the security dimension in the Indo-pacific, clearly a lot more needs to be done. Big countries like India, Japan and Australia can play a significant role towards that, both in concert with US and China, and even without them.