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## Global Balance of Power 2017 weighted heavily against China-Russia Nexus

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Global balance of power 2017 is weighted heavily against perceived combined strategic weight of the China-Russia nexus as the history of 20<sup>th</sup> Century World Wars would indicate that Hitlerian impulses do not triumph against democracies coalescing against them.

Democracies have long patience and forbearance in tolerating the strategic delinquencies and provocations of 'revisionist powers' like China. The United States and the West have for far too long attempted to steer and motivate China to emerge as a 'responsible stakeholder' in global peace and security. China has misinterpreted this effort as appeasement by a Superpower on the decline. And, therein exist the combustible dangers which historically have led to major conflagrations in a heavily surcharged security environment between 'revisionist powers' and coalition of democracies ignited by a solitary and unintended spark.

Russia gets type casted in the same category for nothing else but by Russia's synergising its strategic outlook and policies supportive of China and in consonance with China's power ambitions oblivious to the underlying reality that in China's long-range strategic calculus, Russia too figures as an impediment to China's Superpower ambitions. But till such time that Russia displays policy inclinations to the contrary, in geopolitical and strategic analyses, the China-Russia strategic nexus has to be calculated as one entity for balance-of power assessments.

China and Russia today with pretensions of being Superpowers do not count much as 'balance-of- power' game-changers in the global power calculus, even with their combined strategic and military might. At best, they are strategically- irritant powers with propensities for disruptive turbulence generation. This applies more to China. Russia gets drawn into the same league by virtue of its perceived strategic nexus with China and also by the perception that Russia is now not an independent power-centre.

Historically, the combined might of democracies takes time to coalesce, as democracies are more patient and forbearing against revisionist fascist tendencies. Perceptionally, this gives China and Russia strategic space to generate impressions that the United States, the West and other democracies like Japan, India and Australia are powerless or lack firm intentions to limit their strategic waywardness. Such historical examples abound in the run-up to the First World War and the Second World War of the last century.

The above trend also leads to misperceived and distorted discussions in strategic debates that comparatively the power of major democracies ranged against revisionist powers is on the decline. Such is the case of the impression that has been growing for some time that the United States power and those of its Western Allies is on the decline. But is that really so?

It is not so, as an accurate analysis of United States power potential would indicate that the strategic weight, its military might, its force projection assets and capabilities and its global geopolitical and economic dominance still remains intact. The same is true for the Western democracies. In case of the major Asian democracies, namely, Japan and India, there are concerted efforts by both nations to build up their power potential spurred by the rising 'China Threat'. Both Japan and India have appreciable deterrent power potential against China. The arms build-up of Japan and India, it needs to be pointed out is China-centric and not aimed at Russia. To that extent, this neutralises China's misperceptions of the combined weight of the China-Russia nexus.

In the overall power-potential comparative analyses the combined weight of the United States, the Western democracies, and Japan and India would far outweigh the might of China or Russia or both combined together. That strategic coalescing in relation to China is underway as is evident more noticeably from the evolving US-Japan-India Trilateral and the US-Japan-India-Australia Quadrilateral. In relation to Russia, NATO still continues in existence and also an enlarged NATO at that, more than the NATO that existed at the height of the Cold War confrontation.

China's exponential growth in its military power may be a reality but the double-digit growth of its economy which sustained it is petering out. It is debatable that in the years to come that with other fissiparous tendencies coming into play, how much power-potential would China be left with even to protect its so-called "Core National Interests". On the other extreme, should China with the arrogance of newly acquired military power and the arrogance arising that US power is on the decline be tempted to push the envelope in its illegal South China Sea and East China Sea claims and risk an armed conflict, then it is possibly destined to meet the same fate as Hitlerian Germany.

Russia's resurgence as an independent power centre was well underway in the last decade under President Putin, but somewhere along the way Russia ended up as a perceptual B-Team player of China, despite its superior power-potential than China. Russia by its actions in the Ukraine and in the Crimea provided the stimulus for NATO to get its act together against earlier impressions gaining ground that NATO was becoming redundant. Russia's forays in Syria too have not added much to its true strategic weight with its image of being a junior partner of China. Russia pushing the envelope further in Europe, more particularly in the Baltics, may be risking a combined NATO confrontation in which China can play no part.

China-Russia strategic nexus getting operationalised militarily ever, may not be unthinkable but it is a remote scenario as too many existing and potential geopolitical contradictions between China and Russia come into play to impede it. This has been examined in my past SAAG Papers and the conclusion was that in the event of China or Russia getting into an armed confrontation with the United States, neither Russia or in the reverse situation China would come to the aid of the other.

Russia is unlikely to be in a situation of any armed conflict with any nation in the Indo Pacific Asia region and hence not would be faced with the scenario of a military confrontation or showdown with the United States and the West. China in marked contrast has any number of explosive flashpoints with its Asian neighbours which by Chinese brinkmanship or accidental causes could draw China into armed conflict with Japan, Vietnam and Taiwan to begin with. China inevitably would be drawn in into any United States showdown with North Korea. Would Russia be inclined to bail-out China from flashpoints and conflicts of China's own making and provocations? And that too, when China gets ranged against the United States and its allies and its strategic partners?

Potential also exists for China being drawn singularly into conflict over its South China Sea sovereignty claims, irrespective of its dispute with its neighbours, if it chooses to impede free flow of traffic and navigation both in the maritime expanse and so also the air-space over the South China Sea. In that case China may have to face the combined might of a multinational coalition under the UN flag or otherwise.

While dwelling on the issue of the global balance of power in relation to the China-Russia nexus it is also for consideration that while Russia adds strategic ballast to China, the same is not true of China adding strategic ballast to Russia, in global power equations.

Historically, it needs to be recalled that Russia as the then Soviet Union has a record of combatting Germany in the Second World War, fighting on the same side as the United States and the Western democracies. Even post-Soviet Union disintegration the then Russian Foreign Minister described Russia as the 'Natural Ally of the West.' China's record is otherwise.

Concluding the foregoing analysis, it needs to be reiterated that the global security environment in 2017 stands seriously challenged by China's 'revisionist power' impulsive military brinkmanship reminiscent of Hitlerian Germany and therefore it becomes more imperative for powerful democracies like the United States, the West, Japan, India and Australia to unitedly checkmate China's aggressive instincts. This is

all the more imperative till such time Russia disassociates itself from China's national aggrandisement and stands on the right side of history and which in consequence prompts China to restrain its revisionist impulses.

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