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Shifting Global Power Dynamics:

Challenges and Strategies in the Rise of China and Russia



With the turn of the 21st Century, the unipolar world order led by the United States is rapidly debilitating due to the rise of China and Russia as the new superpowers of the world. The role of middle powers has also surged in recent years in the international power structure. Russia and China are seen with much empathy within the developing world due to their inclusive outlook towards developing and underdeveloped nations. The expansion of BRICS has further elevated the international stature and soft power of these two states. However, their rising influence has infuriated the United States and the West to a great extent. All over the world, the United States is attempting to target the interests of these two rising superpowers. Surging terrorist attacks against the Russian and Chinese interests in the South Asian region seem to be a part of this strategy.

The West attempted to undermine Russia's sovereignty by trying to include Ukraine in the NATO countries. However, the alleged hand of the United States behind the recent Crocus City Hall attacks, after the successful and strong retaliation by Russia against Ukraine, demonstrates a shift in the Western strategy to counter the rise of Russia. China is also facing a similar predicament in the region. The United States and many of its allies are hostile to burgeoning Chinese influence. The United States has long been endeavoring to ensnare China in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the construction of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has provided China with an alternative to the Indian Ocean route for trade and can help it avoid rival naval forces. This route will also save travel costs and time for Chinese cargo ships. China is also establishing Chabahar port in Iran. However, international sanctions on Iran and the volatile situation in Afghanistan have impinged the progress of this project. The United States and other regional competitors of China are highly skeptical of the CPEC project. US officials have labeled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the CPEC, as a debt trap for poor nations. The US government has been pushing the Pakistan government for long to abandon this project. However, the Pakistani government never paid heed to the US warnings about this project.

In recent years, Chinese engineers in Pakistan have been victims of terrorist attacks. Most of the terrorist organizations, including TTP*, IS-K*, and BLA* have been targeting Chinese engineers working on the CPEC. Recently, five Chinese engineers were killed in a terrorist attack in Besham, Pakistan. This was not the third terrorist attempt to attack Chinese engineers within the last ten days of March 2024. On 20th March, terrorists belonging to the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) tried to enter the Gwadar Port Authority complex in Baluchistan province. Moreover, terrorists belonging to the same militant group also tried to enter Pakistan's second-largest naval base, PNS Siddique. However, both these attempts were thwarted by the Pakistani military. In August 2023, a similar terrorist attack by BLA on a Chinese convoy was foiled by the Pakistan military. Although no terrorist organization has yet claimed responsibility for the Besham attacks, the Counterterrorism Department (CTD) has confirmed the involvement of the banned Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in these attacks. The CTD has also warned that there are no distinctions between the TTP and Daesh/IS* as both have identical ideologies and ambitions. IS-K*, the same group that claimed responsibility for the recent Moscow attacks, was also involved in multiple attacks on the Chinese engineers and the CPEC project. In 2017, the group assassinated a Chinese couple after kidnapping them from Quetta.

Chinese engineers and locals working on the CPEC project have been victims of terrorist attacks since the commencement of the project. In many of these attacks, these terrorists have been found using US-made weapons. Pakistani officials also claim that the terrorists have access to the NATO weapons that the US forces left behind in Afghanistan during their hasty withdrawal. The forces against the CPEC and BRI project are also fueling separatist movements in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. They are portraying China as a colonizing power through their propaganda campaigns. The intentions of these attacks on the CPEC are palpable. They seek to derail Chinese investment in Pakistan and to fracture the cordiality between the two countries. Attacks on Russian and Chinese interests in the South Asian region by different terrorist organizations portend their backing by the United States. The director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), Alexander Bortnikov's accusations of the US, UK, and Ukraine for the Moscow attack further bolsters this perception. Many in the past, especially Iran, accused the United States of creating ISIS*. Ostensibly, these terrorist activities intend to entangle China and Russia in regional instability and to fracture rising cooperation between the South Asian nations. However, the prudent and pragmatic steps being taken by the two regional powers will render these strategies ineffective. The Chinese leadership has stated that its relations with Pakistan remain unaffected, despite recent terrorist attacks on Chinese officials. On the other hand, the Russian leadership is also taking cogent measures by following an inclusive approach towards Afghanistan and other regional countries.

* – are banned in Russia

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