Multilateralism and the Emerging World Order: Challenges and Perspectives

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The recent decade has been witness to a very strong process whereby a large number of states have begun to raise voices against any kind of hegemonic policy that was being thrust open the world by the so called big power be it in the area of geopolitics, trade or economic cooperation. This rising demand for multipolarity has not only made these countries very dominant global and regional actors, it has also had the effect of checkmating the policies of the big power, leading to not only holding of various rounds of negotiations on many a major issues with these new actors but also for non finalization of views in these for a due to lack of unanimity amongst the involved powers.

Not surprisingly, this new development has led to setting up of the powerful group like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa),G20 etc, who are increasingly able to come up with several alternative plans as compared to the policies of

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Big power but also have been able to play very important role in the emerging world order, these developments, in the words of commentators, have as such made the emerging multilateralism much more complex and challenging and have brought about a policy framework whereby the great powers are now caught in the race to enter into numerous bilateral arrangements with them in the name of strategic partnership, which is nothing but aimed at amplification of their capabilities in order to control these new states who have emerged as significant powers. This increasing preference for bilateralism over multilateralism has the danger of halting the ongoing process of democratization in the context of international relations but also will be a losing proposition for the weak developing countries as multilateralism only has the assurance of increased participation of the developing countries in the strategic shaping up of the emerging world order and a guarantee of making their voices heard, particularly regarding the use of force or enforcement of universal norms.

As multilateralism is no longer limited to that of the states and now also is inclusive of various regions and other actors, which has the capability of profoundly changing the present day emerging world order, in my paper I want to analyze critically the efforts of the big powers for strengthening the bilateral relationships and examine the challenges to the rising multilateralism which alone has the hope of making the developing countries equal and significant powers in the emerging world order.
Emerging World Order and Strategic Partnership

In the aftermath of the Cold War, it became clear that United States would be the only global hegemonic power, unchallenged by any other power or country that is. However, discussions may be held between serious commentators, policy analysts and intellectuals about the permanence durability of the United States as a hegemonic power or rather its declining role in the international politics at present, yet one cannot underestimate the hegemonic role being currently played by it in the emerging scenario of global politics and, at the same time, the manner and strategies it employs to thwart the faster socio-economic growth and rise in military importance of that of those emerging powers who may gain ascendancy to counterbalance the US supremacy both in their neighbourhood and the world at large.

It has been pointed out that Asia as a region enjoys the unenviable position in the world today since it is considered that it has the required potentiality for the historic rise among the global community of nations between now and 2050. With the additional three billion Asians, who could enjoy living standards similar to those in Europe today, it could account for over half of global output by the middle of this century, according to the ADB report. This potentially promising future for the region sometimes referred to as the “Asian Century” as it sounds plausible has again redrawn the attention of United States given the economic boom being achieved by both China and India. It has been cleverly employing both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power not only to enhance relations with these two important countries but also over others as the intensification of such relationship will ensure advantage over other powerful states
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and also keep its hegemonic power intact. The occurrence of several border and other forms of conflict has also been another factor towards US’s growing influence in the region as it’s said that if Asia has been so peaceful for the past 40 years is only due to America's primacy, which it attached up to the Cold War days.

Over the last years, it is particularly seen that China has consistently made various moves to challenge America for regional leadership. Its aggressiveness has been seen over the Border issue with India, recent Chinese incursion into India’s territory and over the South China Sea issue, which has got the policy analysts worried over the question of Asia’s security. As far as India is concerned, the occurrence of several border and other forms of conflict made it to be wary of China’s policies. At present, Asia’s security is being felt to have been greatly weakened with the continuous Chinese assertiveness over the regional issues. According to commentators, by such assertiveness, China poses a direct threat not only to the power and influence of other regional powers in Asia but also can usher in a potentially dangerous global military conflict, particularly as China continues to challenge US regional leadership. In this changing scenario of global politics, China’s assertiveness is rapidly transforming the strategic landscape, making both India and ASEAN countries feel unsecure in the face of China’s military strength and also that such conflict would thwart their faster socio-economic growth being achieved over the years.

In this context the US strategy for rebalancing towards Asia being followed under Obama Administration has been hailed as a counterpoise to checkmate the rising threat coming from
China’s rise and its various military and economic policies in the region. Further it is felt that India’s military importance as an emerging power in the larger Asian region and its growing closeness with the ASEAN countries as seen in the support it receives for its Look/Act East Policy from within ASEAN and outside besides the US supremacy both in the Asian neighbourhood and the world at large can greatly help not only to prevent China to gain any ascendancy and also will counterbalance its influence in the region and keep this region far from getting involved in any kind of bigger military conflict.

Besides the fact of rise of China as a likely major threat in the Asia Pacific to the predominance of US in the region and Russia’s growing assertiveness in the European affairs, the Asia-Pacific and in the Middle east, as seen over the Syria issue, has largely altered the global strategic equations, throwing further a challenge to United States. Further the growing strategic partnership between Russia and China has also made the strategic equation on the Western rim of the Pacific more unstable. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist challenges in the Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan etc are also said to be primarily aimed at challenging the pre-eminence of the United States and West. The threat of possibility of fast Talibanisation of Pakistan and the recurrent instability in West Asia besides Afghanistan appeared to have unnerved the United States, forcing it to go in search for newer and stronger allies in contrast to its erstwhile Cold War alliances and relationships, in order be able to face the emerging formidable global challenges. In this respect, US also realized that natural partners to overcome such challenges for USA can only be vibrant democracies in Asia. These complex strategic
developments are said to be significant trigger points for US to forge a strategic partnership with India. India, on the other hand, as was concerned by the Chinese activities along the side of its international border, felt assured with such move by the US to increase its growing influence in the region, which is what got reflected in the upgradation of its relations to that of Strategic Partnership with US in 2004.

**Rise of India**

India's emergence as a growing economic power on the world stage; its acknowledgement of its long sustained democracy and shared values, its challenging neighbourhood, AfPak region on one side and China and Pakistan on the other, and its wariness about its security and neighbourhood, also influenced India to go in for “strategic partnerships” with more than 30 countries. For instance, India has strategic partnerships with most of the major countries, like, United States, Russia, China, Japan, UK, France and others. Within these strategic partnerships, some are said to be guided by dominant political elements, while others have a prominent economic dimensions. In certain cases, the security dimensions also appear to be the most important. As one analyzes these various strategic partnerships, one discovers that these are many shades higher as they cover wide range of issues within the bilateral relations, ranging from defence to education, health and agriculture as well as issues concerning economy, trade, investment etc.

It is to be further noted that these “strategic partners” have other strategic partners as India. U.S. also has such partnerships throughout the world, except that with Europe,
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and Britain. The arena of international relations as such can be said to be filled up with many a contradictory partnerships as these strategic partnerships in certain cases run the risk of colliding with each other. It has been pointed out that the U.S.-India partnership on the one hand appears to run aground with the U.S.-Pakistan one on the other. Further India’s historically close partnership with Russia may come in the way of India seeking to improve the strategic content of the partnership with the U.S. and vice versa.

It can be seen that the emerging world order is marked significantly by much bilateralism with countries entering into all kinds of bilateral partnerships with other important countries, the hopes of a secure multilateral world order seems to be a far cry even today. The failure of UN in redressing the concern of the developing countries is said to have ignited the desire for more bilateralism.

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