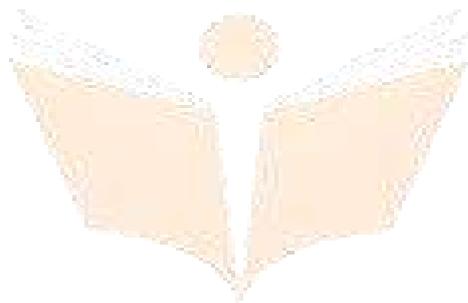


General Studies-2; Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

Geo-Political Scenario in South Asia



1) Introduction

- The nature and dynamics of South Asian geopolitics are undergoing a radical transformation.
- India needs to see through many balancing acts to deal with regional tensions.

2) Present Scenario

- South Asia is one of the world's most volatile regions and dominated by the United States.
- South Asia is today at an inflection point with far-reaching implications for the states in the region, and for India in particular.
- There is a great power competition in the region.
- Russia and China are challenging the U.S.'s pre-eminence and influencing smaller countries of the region.
- The resultant geopolitical competition for space, power and influence in the region is undoing geopolitical certainties in South Asia.
- Unbalanced multipolarity when combined with a situation of power transition in the regional sub-system might be destabilising.

3) China Pivot in the Region

- There is the emergence of the 'China pivot' in the region.
- Washington's role as the regional pivot and power manager is becoming a thing of the past with Beijing assuming that role.
- Regional geopolitics, from Iran to Central Asia and from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean region, is increasingly being shaped by China.
- When new powers are on an ascendance, its neighbours tend to recalibrate their policies and old partnerships and alliances.
- By using its economic strength to expand its relations with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar China has attempted to control India's rise, while simultaneously supporting Pakistan's development.
- A significant driver of change in South Asia's political geography has been the string of infrastructure projects in the subcontinent.
- The projects in Pakistan and Sri Lanka have given China strategic access points in the oceans surrounding India.

4) Trust-Deficit in the Region

- Another feature of the current regional sub-system is the presence of an extreme trust deficit among the various actors in the region.
- There is trust deficit between India and Pakistan, or China and India.
- Trust deficit exists between U.S. and India, Russia and China.
- It also exists among traditional partners such as Iran and India, and Russia and India.
- Trust deficit combined with other factors such as unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings or the occurrence of a crisis could push the region towards more conflict and friction.

5) War Talk

- The rising war talk in the region is yet another contemporary feature of the South Asian regional sub-system.
- Possibility of a military conflict between Iran and the U.S, would draw many more countries in the region into it.
- It could lead to widespread instability.

- **Other Issues**

- a. India-Pakistan border skirmishes.
- b. Escalating China-U.S. trade war
- c. Many proxy and cold wars in Afghanistan and West Asia

6) India's Approach

- India has found interest in ASEAN countries, Central Asia and its neighbours in the Bay of Bengal region.
- ASEAN is India's fourth largest trade partner with a free trade agreement that has helped facilitate trade and the movement of manpower and investments.
- It has also taken steps to increase its diplomatic engagement with Central Asia, as a part of its "extended neighborhood".
- The International North South Transport Corridor, along with the Chabahar port have been two of India's large scale projects in the region.
- BIMSTEC has received a push for revival from India.
- India has used different bilateral and multilateral strategies to pursue a regional leadership role in South Asia.
- Its outreach towards Southeast Asia, Central Asia, as well as the wider Indo-Pacific underscores the renewed importance that New Delhi is giving to Asia and its own footprint in the region.

7) Way Forward for India

- India must adopt a slew of balancing acts which is the most appropriate strategy to adopt under the present circumstances.
- **U.S**
 - a. India must balance its desire to get closer to the U.S.
 - b. Getting too close to the U.S. will provoke China, and vice versa.
- **West Asia**
 - a. India will have to take care of its energy and other interests (including the Chabahar project) with Iran.
 - b. By doing so, it should not alienate the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel.
 - c. While Iran's share in India's energy imports is steadily decreasing, alienating Iran might not suit India's strategic interests in the longer run.
- **Russia-China partnership**
 - a. Dealing with the Russia-China partnership will be crucial for India's continental strategy.
 - b. This is with regard to arms sales, the Afghan question or checking Chinese dominance of the region.
 - c. The growing relationship between Pakistan and Russia which must be dealt with smart diplomacy.
- **Pakistan - China Partnership**
 - a. Another layer that requires careful balancing by India is the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China.
 - b. Both Beijing and New Delhi share a stake in the region's stability.
 - c. India must convince Beijing that it has great stakes in regional strategic stability.
- **Handling Afghanistan**
 - a. If India is serious about having a say in Afghanistan's future, it would need to enact several balancing acts

- b. This is between Russia and China, China and Pakistan, the Taliban and Kabul, and the Taliban and Pakistan.
- c. In a constantly changing Afghan geopolitical landscape, the contents of India's interests should also evolve.
- d. Engaging in a delicate balancing game is undeniably the need of the hour and is what smart diplomacy is meant to achieve.

