

South Asia's Role in the Pentagon's "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report"

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

Global Research, June 04, 2019

Region: [Asia, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

The US' recently released "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report" envisages India playing a key role in this vast transregional space in order to "contain" China, while Pakistan is conspicuously absent from the text despite being one of the few nuclear weapons states, among the most populous countries in the world, and the transit route for China's overland access to the Afro-Asian Ocean via CPEC.

"Containing" China

The US officially unveiled its "[Indo-Pacific Strategy Report](#)" over the weekend and tasked Defense Secretary Shanahan with [sharing a summary](#) of it during the Shangri-La Dialogue forum in Singapore. The gist of the document is that the US is committed to "containing" China through the crucial support of its many regional partners per what can be described as the "[Lead From Behind](#)" stratagem. South Asia, and especially aspiring hegemon India, naturally figures prominently in this vision, though the conspicuous absence of the [global pivot state](#) of Pakistan from the text — one of the few nuclear weapons states, among the most populous countries in the world, and the transit route for China's overland access to the Afro-Asian Ocean via [CPEC](#) — hints that the US wants to "isolate" it from this seemingly inclusive geostrategic concept. Interestingly, even landlocked and mountainous Nepal has a part to play in this paradigm, but that's probably because the US regards it as a zone of Indo-Chinese competition unlike Pakistan which is solidly in the Chinese camp, hence why the US sees no need to touch upon it at all because it likely regards the country as a "lost cause".

The Integral Role Of India

There are only several pages that specifically deal with South Asia (33-36), though India is also briefly mentioned in other parts as well. The US emphasizes the "common outlook" that it shares with India and how New Delhi's "Act East" policy of ASEAN engagement supposedly proves its commitment to the "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept, Washington's new euphemism for "containing" China. The "convergence of strategic interests" between these two Great Powers manifests itself through India's unique designation as the US' only "Major Defense Partner" and the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue that was commenced last year between their Defense and Foreign Ministers. The document also lauds the effect that COMCASA will have in improving "interoperability" between their armed forces, though it noticeably omits any mentioning of the LEMOA pact that allows them to use some of the other's military facilities on a case-by-case "logistical" basis. Even so, the Pentagon praises the increased "scope, complexity, and frequency" of military exercises with India and the upcoming tri-service exercises later this year, on top of their rapidly expanding arms trade.

South Asian Satellite States

As for the other countries of South Asia (apart from Pakistan and Bhutan), the US speaks highly about the “increased cooperation on mutual logistics arrangements” that it agreed to with Sri Lanka earlier this year, as well as the “avenues to expand security cooperation” with the Maldives after its “democratic transition” late last year. Concerning Bangladesh, it’s described as having a “strong defense relationship” with the US and being an “important partner for regional stability and security”. The “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report” also applauds the “annual Bilateral Defense Dialogue” between the two for “setting the strategic direction of their relationship”. Lastly, landlocked and mountainous Nepal is curiously included in the text despite not being a country that ordinarily comes to mind when one thinks of the Afro-Pacific (“Indo-Pacific”) region. The document talks about the opportunity for expanding defense ties in light of last year’s “Land Forces Talks” and several landmark visits by high-ranking US defense officials, including the head of USINDOPACOM.

Network-Centric Proxy Warfare

While the aforementioned South Asian states are implicitly conceived of as Indian satellites whose overall role in the larger paradigm is very limited, the aspiring hegemon itself is expected to fulfill a transregional one as regards the Pacific part of the Afro-Pacific (“Indo-Pacific”) concept. Later on in the document the Pentagon talks about how India is contributing to the formation of a “networked region” by being one of several trilateral partnerships that the US and Japan are forming. It also points out the “emerging intra-Asian security relationships” that India is bilaterally involved in with Japan and Vietnam, as well as the trilateral one between itself, Japan, and Australia. Furthermore, the Quad of the US, India, Japan, and Australia is mentioned once, but it doesn’t play a major role in policy formation, probably because Washington considers it better to expand its “Chinese Containment Coalition” beyond those three major states to include medium and smaller ones too, thus allowing it to incorporate the entire Afro-Pacific region into this concept.

Concluding Thoughts

In sum, the US’ “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report” envisages India playing a leading role in “containing” China in the Afro-Asian (“Indian”) Ocean region and then using its strategic partnerships with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam to expand its influence into the Pacific portion of this transregional space. Likewise, its very presence in its eponymous ocean serves as the gateway for more robust Japanese military involvement on the other side of ASEAN, with these South and East Asian Great Powers strategically uniting in the ASEAN middle ground between them. For all intents and purposes and apart from the exceptional involvement of landlocked Nepal (Laos, and Mongolia), the “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report” deals entirely with maritime nations and therefore naturally has a naval focus, though it’s still strange that nothing is mentioned about Pakistan when considering that [S-CPEC+](#) is China’s multimodal connectivity shortcut to Africa. In any case, Islamabad’s lack of inclusion in this policy planning document doesn’t take away from its global pivot significance, it just means that an entirely separate strategy report will likely need to be written for countering it.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

This article was originally published on [Eurasia Future](#).

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Andrew Korybko](#), Global Research, 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Andrew Korybko](#)

About the author:

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca