

## Why China is acquiring foreign military bases

Syllabus-GS 2 - India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

### Why in news:

- ❖ The United States has prevailed on the United Arab Emirates to stop China from secretly constructing a military facility at an Abu Dhabi port should not come as a surprise. In Abu Dhabi, the Chinese contract was to build a civilian facility.
- ❖ But satellite imagery and other intelligence convinced US policymakers about China's secret construction of a military facility.

### China's assertive and expansionist nature in Indo-Pacific region:

China as the world's second-largest economy, a great trading power with a rapidly growing navy, and a massive geopolitical ambition, China is bound to get, sooner than later, a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean that will profoundly alter India's security environment

China has started the phenomenon of cartographic assertion not just in the territorial boundary but also maritime in Indo-Pacific region because:

- ❖ Global leadership vacuum : With US resorting to protectionism and Russia dealing with economic sanctions, China sees it an opportunity to become the next world leader.
- ❖ Behavioural factor: China has registered massive growth over the year and now counted among top economies, & this success has made her arrogant which can be seen in its behaviour of challenging status quo on contentious issues, violating international law, putting sanction on dissent etc.
- ❖ Economic clout: increased voting share in IMF, structural change in economy required china to maintain influence in global markets.
- ❖ Economic factor: China has developed into massive production unit such assertiveness also points her search for new market more demand.
  - Inclusion of Chinese **Renminbi** in IMF to special drawing right basket enhances power of Yuan by giving boost in stock trading.
  - Chinese investment at multilateral institutions like AIIB, NDB and leading to expansion of Chinese investment to emerging and African Nations.
  - Resource hungriness: China wants to gain max resource of the region ex- south china disputes.
- ❖ Display of military might- China display of power in response to India-US defence partnership as in recent Malabar exercises. It is also critical of pivot to Asia policy of US.
- ❖ Historical unresolved boundary disputes which has led to the misunderstanding which turn has resulted into contentions.
- ❖ Signals to **ASEAN**: Claims over south china sea gain weight with this assertion.
- ❖ Confidence in BRI : This is a confidence booster to participant nations of BRI that investments are well protected.

- ❖ **Further alienation of India from neighbours:** Stand-off at **Doklam** to pressurise Bhutan will also influence Nepal and Tibet to take sides with China.
- ❖ **India warming ties with the US** - seen by China as Anti -China - so it's a bit insecure because of it having so many enemies across the border i.e. ASEAN members and India.
- ❖ **Such assertiveness also meant to challenge India:** its rival in Asia. Closeness of her rival with any country say USA, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA prickles like a thorn to China.
- ❖ **US's Asia Pivot policy** to contain China which is due to the perceived threat of rimland has been one of the most important reason for its assertiveness in South China sea having conflict with all the US allies including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and so on. Also strategic agreements like **LEMAO** between India, US and exercises like **Malabar**, **AUSSINDEX** makes them paranoid.
- ❖ It is also leading conflict situation within China. Ex- issue of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Xing Xiang etc.
- ❖ International communities are started grouping against China and this in turn making China more expansionist.
- ❖ **Internal politics:** Chinese premier wanted him to pose as the strong leader in Asia and in World. Eg. Doklam issue, Mansarovar Yatra route denial.
  - The China has adopted several aggressive and expansionist policies & stances across multiple fronts. It is constantly trying to distract its citizen from problems like rampant corruption, **Tofu-dreg projects**, increasing gap between rich and poor, through an aggressive foreign policy.
  - **Communism** and **Fascism** both thrive on one singular principle of unflinching nationality. So with problems at their home, democracy movements and their offshoots resuming (Umbrella Revolution and death of Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo), so they have to show and **emasculate** their problems in nationalistic issues like us/them in conflict with India, USA and other countries.

### **New world Order:**

In the past, Communist China claimed that it was quite different from the West and had no interest in projecting power to distant seas or foreign military bases. China also actively campaigned against foreign military presence in Asia.

Mao Zedong, who founded Communist China, saw the US military presence in Asia in the 1950s as part of the American effort to roll back its communist revolution. But Mao was quite happy to live with US military bases in Asia, as its relations with Soviet Russia turned sour and ties with America improved. **Now Beijing is trying to push America out to hegemonize Asia because:**

- ❖ 19th century was dominated by Europe. Europe is less united, the space is again vacant
- ❖ In 20th Century US dominated world, now as US is facing economic slowdown.
- ❖ By the 1970s, China saw the value of US military presence in containing "Soviet social imperialism" and "latent Japanese militarism". Today, as China's military capabilities improve and its political ambitions rise, Beijing is trying to push America out of Asia to take the stage for itself.
- ❖ US dominated world trade through water routes, China is altogether into efforts of making sea routes less relevant. Belt and road initiative requires a both psychological and technological supremacy over other participants, which China is displaying time and again.

Thus **economic self-compliance, strategic calculation** and **aspiration to become the global power**, has manifested into China's increasing assertiveness

### China's Dual-use approach:

- ❖ Beijing knows the term “military base” is politically loaded and is careful to avoid using it.
- ❖ It understood that the military imperative for bases, so necessary for power projection, must be balanced against the inevitable politics of nationalist resentment in the host countries.
- ❖ China's focus, therefore, was on building dual-use facilities rather than explicit military bases on foreign soil. China's focus, therefore, was on building dual-use facilities rather than explicit military bases on foreign soil.
- ❖ China's dual-use approach to gaining strategic access on distant shores benefited immensely from its expansive foreign port construction in the last two decades and the more recent **Belt and Road Initiative** to build infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific.

### China dual-use bases:

- ❖ Hambantota in Sri Lanka(Debt diplomacy)
- ❖ Beijing has approached Tonga country to set-up dual-use base to one of the island to clear the debt trap
- ❖ Djibouti(Military base)
- ❖ Pakistan- Gwadar
- ❖ Maldives-Feydhoofoolhu atoll(Chinese puppet Abdulla Yameen leased the Feydhoofoolhu atoll to Beijing for 50 years, for four million USD)
- ❖ Myanmar- KyauKpyu(BRI)
- ❖ Tajikistan-near Wakhan corridor(Military base)

### Belt and Road Initiative:

- ❖ The Belt and Road Initiative is a Chinese foreign policy initiative promoted by president Xi Jinping in 2013.
- ❖ Initially the idea of **Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)** and **Maritime Silk Road (MSR)** was put forward. Subsequently, the two projects together came to be known as ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) Initiative. Later, it came to be known as **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**
- ❖ **Aim of BRI:** Build a trade, investment, and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the ancient trade routes, gain new Market, increase soft power through market
- ❖ The Communist Party of China (CPC) has incorporated Belt and Road Initiative into the Chinese Constitution.

China's Belt & Road Initiative



### Significance of BRI for China:

1. **Financial Institutions:** Promotion of Chinese-led financial institutions like the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*(AIIB) to counter global established institutions like the IMF, World Bank and *Asian Development Bank* which it claims are heavily dominated by American, European and Japanese interests.
2. **Maritime power:** to project China as a maritime power in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and its littoral
3. **Development of Western Provinces:** Development poorer western provinces of China like Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region by making it core zone to attract investments in that area.
4. **Energy route:** Creation of an energy route from the Middle East and Africa for energy security in case of conflict at chokepoints like Hormuz and the Malacca strait.
5. **Market:** Transportation links will help access rich European markets better and boost trade and dump the surplus at cheap rate to monopolize European Markets.
6. **Boost to domestic infrastructure industry:** Development of ports, railways, pipelines and highways across Asia and the Indian Ocean will help China utilise its excess capacity in steel, cement and infrastructural engineering
7. **Trading norms and regimes:** Help China to compete with Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and to challenge USA's economic dominance over Europe and Asia.

### Indian Approach to deal with China's expansionist tendencies:

- ❖ In 20<sup>th</sup> century, Delhi, like Beijing, opposed foreign military bases in Asia and the Indian Ocean.
- ❖ But For China, opposition to foreign bases was rooted in an assessment of the direct security consequences of foreign military bases.
- ❖ Indian opposition foreign military bases became an essential part of India's non-aligned foreign policy.
- ❖ In fact, the absence of foreign military bases was long considered as the main criterion for admitting a nation to the non-aligned movement.
- ❖ Military isolationism had become a conscious ideological choice for India through the 20th century.
- ❖ In 21<sup>th</sup> century, Delhi began to recognise the need for military access to strategic locations in the Indo-Pacific.
- ❖ Delhi's efforts to **secure access** involved negotiating arrangements with friendly states in the Indian Ocean as well as developing deeper strategic partnerships with the US and its regional allies to counter china's aggressive nature.
- ❖ Delhi's open denouncement of china' flagship programme of BRI, calling it debt trap diplomacy and means for chinese hegemony by huge trade deficit
- ❖ Delhi's extension of **Line of credit** to debt-trapped countries, like Maldives and Myanmar to help them out of dept-trap
- ❖ Formation of Quad Group( Indian, USA, Australia, Japan) to counter china's expansionist behaviour
- ❖ India to develop Iran's **Chabahar** port to counter Gwadar port under the CPEC.
- ❖ **India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** Initiative and **Project Mausam** aims to highlight India's commitment to safe, secure and stable maritime space – thereby seeking to offset the Chinese MSR.

But Delhi is a long way from matching the speed and intensity of Chinese military diplomacy in its near and extended neighbourhood.

**Conclusion:**

- China's assertiveness is more of a psychological attack on India to make it comply. India needs a wise diplomatic solution to resolve this and should focus on developmental aspects like building of border roads and enhancing military capabilities.
- It is likely that as its economic clout grows further, china will try to exert greater political influence on the rest of the world. India may well have to get used to dealing with the **"New normal"** of an increasingly assertive neighbour on its northern frontier.
- India in particular and the world in general need an apprehensive approach to sustain themselves amidst Chinese assertiveness.

**"Tofu-dreg project "**

It is a phrase used in China to describe a poorly constructed building. This phrase was coined by Zhu Rongji, the former premier of the People's Republic of China. It is used as a metaphor for shoddy work, hence the implication that a "tofu-dreg project" is a poorly executed project for which the government should accept responsibility.