



The Strategy for Eurasia

This editorial is based on [“The Sail That Indian Diplomacy, Statecraft Need”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 11/01/2022. It talks about the recent geopolitical shifts going on in Central Asia and Eurasia and what diplomatic strategy India needs.

For Prelims: Eurasia, Central Asia, China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

For Mains: Securing India’s continental and maritime interests in Central Asia and Europe, Recent geopolitical developments in Eurasia, China’s increasing influence in Eurasia, Russian centrality in the Eurasian geopolitics.

The year 2021 was an *annus horribilis* on account of the [Iran nuclear imbroglio](#), rising oil and gas prices, sputtering [crises in Yemen](#), Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and the [Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan](#) following a [United States \(US\) withdrawal of troops](#). All these developments are of high concern for India’s continental security interests.

India’s continental strategy, in which the [Central Asian region is an indispensable link](#), has progressed intermittently over the past two decades — promoting connectivity, incipient defence and security cooperation, enhancing India’s soft power and boosting trade and investment.

It is laudable, but as is now apparent, it is insufficient to address the broader geopolitical challenges engulfing the region. **Striking the right balance between continental and maritime security** would be the best **guarantor of India’s long-term security interests**.

Geopolitical Developments in Eurasia

- **Recent Developments:** China’s assertive rise, the **withdrawal of the US/NATO forces** from Afghanistan, the **rise of Islamic fundamentalist forces** and the changing dynamics of the historic **stabilising role of Russia (most recently in Kazakhstan)** have all set the stage for a sharpening of the geopolitical competition on the [Eurasian landmass](#).
 - The geopolitical competition is marked by a **weaponization of resource** and geographical access as a form of domination, practised by China and other big powers.
- **Russian Centrality in Eurasian Geopolitics:** Each of the current crises in [Belarus](#), [Ukraine](#), the **Caucasus**, and **Kazakhstan** might have a specific logic and trajectory of its own, but together they are reshaping the geopolitics of Eurasia.
 - Russia, with its geographic spread across Eurasia, is **at the very centre of that restructuring**.
 - Moscow’s military intervention in Kazakhstan and its recent negotiations with the US on European security underline the Russian centrality in Eurasia.

- **Rising Chinese Interventions:** The Chinese willingness and capacity for military intervention and power projection are growing far beyond its immediate region.
 - Its rise is not merely in the maritime domain but is also expanding on the Eurasian continent via:
 - The **Belt and Road Initiative** projects in Central Asia extending up to Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, **undercutting traditional Russian influence**.
 - Gaining **access to energy and other natural resources**
 - **Dependency-creating investments**
 - **Cyber and digital penetration**, and
 - Expanding **influence among political and economic elites** across the continent.
- **Declining US Influence:** Though it has a substantial military presence on the continental peripheries, the American **military footprint has shrunk dramatically on the core Eurasian landmass**.
 - While the U.S. had over 2,65,000 troops under its European command in 1992, it now has about 65,000.
 - Even with the rise of China's military power, the U.S. which had about 1,00,000 troops in the early 1990s under what is now called the Indo-Pacific Command, currently has about 90,000 troops mostly committed to the territorial defence of Japan and South Korea.
 - **However, the U.S. is a pre-eminent naval power**, even more so in the **Indo-Pacific region**, and defines its strategic preferences in the light of its own strengths.

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Challenges Associated

- **Limited Influence on Landmass:** The U.S., which might be an important ally for India in gaining a strong foothold in Eurasia is a powerful player in the Indo-Pacific region but has left comparatively lesser influence in the

- However, **maritime security and associated dimensions of naval power are not sufficient instruments** of statecraft as India seeks diplomatic and security constructs to strengthen deterrence against Chinese unilateral actions and the emergence of a unipolar Asia.
- **India's Border and Connectivity Issues:** The persistent **two-front threat from Pakistan and China** set the stage for a tough continental dimension of India's security. There has been **increased militarisation of the borders** with Pakistan and China.
 - India has been subject for over five decades to a land embargo by Pakistan that has few parallels in relations between two states that are technically not at war.
 - **Connectivity has no value if the access is denied** through persistent neighbouring state hostility **contrary to the canons of international law.**

Way Forward

- **Central Asia is Key to Eurasia: Bulwarks against Chinese maritime expansionist gains are relatively easier to build** and its gains easier to reverse than the long-term strategic gains that China hopes to secure on continental Eurasia.
 - Like the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) centrality is key to the Indo-Pacific, **centrality of the Central Asian states should be key for Eurasia.**
- **Resolving Connectivity Issues:** It may appear strange that while India joins the U.S. and others in supporting the right of freedom of navigation in the maritime domain, it **does not demand with the same force the right of India to conduct interstate trade**, commerce, and transit along continental routes — be it through the lifting of Pakistan's blockade on transit or the lifting of U.S. sanctions against transit through Iran into Eurasia.
 - With the recent Afghan developments, India's physical connectivity challenges with Eurasia have only become starker.
 - The marginalisation of India on the Eurasian continent in terms of connectivity **must be reversed.**
- **Ensuring Continental and Maritime Interests:** It is quite clear India will not have the luxury of choosing one over the other, it would need to **acquire strategic vision** and **deploy the necessary resources** to **pursue its continental interests without ignoring the interests in the maritime domain.**
 - This will require a **more assertive push for the continental rights** (transit and access), **working with the partners in Central Asia**, with Iran and Russia and a **more proactive engagement with economic and security agendas** ranging from the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#), [Eurasian Economic Union \(EAEU\)](#) and the [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#).

Conclusion

India will need to define its own parameters of continental and maritime security consistent with its own interests. In doing so, maintaining strategic autonomy will help India's diplomacy and statecraft navigate the difficult landscape and the choppy waters that lie ahead.

Drishti Mains Question

“Striking the right balance between continental and maritime security would be the best guarantor of India's long-term security interests in the central Asian region”. Comment.

