



Approach Towards Eurasia

This article is based on [“The Eurasia Opportunity”](#) which was published in the Indian Express on 10/11/2021. It talks about India’s need for a new, integrated approach towards Eurasia.

New Delhi’s intensive diplomacy in recent years has led to [India’s Indo-Pacific strategy](#) acquiring political and institutional traction. However, the Indo-Pacific is only about maritime geopolitics and **India must equally focus on its continental strategy too.**

The time has come for India to begin a strategic conversation with Europe on **Eurasian security** for Eurasia plays a key role in the recalibration of India’s continental strategy.

India must now **devote similar energy (as Indo-Pacific) to the development of a “Eurasian” policy** as it will be a natural complement to the fledgeling engagement between [India and Europe on the Indo-Pacific](#).

All About Eurasia

- **What Comprises Eurasia:** Geographically, Eurasia is a [tectonic plate](#) that **lies under much of Europe and Asia**. However, when it comes to the political boundaries, there is **no shared international understanding** of what constitutes the region.
 - For Delhi, it makes sense to use the broadest possible definition of Eurasia in reimagining the region.
- **India-Eurasia Historical Ties:** There are references to India’s ancient civilisational links with Eurasia; the **collaboration between the Sangha and the Shreni** in the Buddhist era produced lasting interaction between the two regions.
 - The **arrival of the British in India** and the **consolidation of the Raj** as a territorial entity in the subcontinent saw the outward projection of India’s influence into Central Asia.
 - **British rivalry with Russia** during the [Great Game](#) in the 19th and early 20th centuries put Eurasian geopolitics at the top of undivided India’s security agenda.
 - The **Partition** of the subcontinent and **India’s physical disconnection** from inner Asia, however, cut India off from Eurasian geopolitics.
 - Overcoming the **geographic limitation represented by Pakistan** is central to an expanded Indian role in Eurasian geopolitics.
- **India’s Eurasian Strategy:** The recently held [Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan](#) is a part of **developing a Eurasian strategy**. India’s [National Security Advisor](#) invited his counterparts from Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, Russia, and China to join this discussion.
 - However, **Pakistan and China skipped the meeting**. Pakistan’s reluctance to engage with India on Afghanistan reveals **Delhi’s persisting problem with Islamabad** in shaping a new Eurasian strategy.
 - It also **reinforces the urgency** of an Indian strategy to deal with Eurasia.

- **USA's Interests in Eurasia:** Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy does not seem to account adequately for the rise of Eurasia.
 - **US' interests in Asia lie primarily in the western Pacific** and the [South China Sea](#). Both regions are far from the core of the Eurasian theater.
 - However, amidst mounting challenges from China in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain, Washington has begun to rethink its strategic commitments to Eurasia.
 - **The USA and EU are engaging in talks** about rebalancing the trans-Atlantic responsibilities for Europe's collective defence.
- **China, A Major Player in Eurasia:** The recent most important development in Eurasia is the dramatic rise of **China and its growing strategic assertiveness**, expanding economic power and rising political influence.
 - Beijing's approach to the long and [disputed border with Bhutan](#) and [India](#), its **quest for a security presence in Tajikistan**, the active search for a [larger role in Afghanistan](#), and a **greater say in the affairs of the broader sub-Himalayan region** speak volume about its growing influence.
 - As the world's second-largest economy, **China's commercial influence is felt across the world** and the **physical proximity multiplies China's economic impact** on the inner Asian regions.
 - The expansion of [China's Belt and Road initiative](#) across central Asia and Russia, onto the shores of the Atlantic, and Europe's growing economic interdependence with China have added to Beijing's powerful leverages in Eurasia.
 - These leverages were reinforced by a **deepening alliance with Russia** that straddles the Eurasian heartland.

Way Forward

- **Putting Europe Back into India's Continental Calculus:** Before independence, many **Indian nationalists turned to Europe to secure the nation's liberation** from British colonialism.
 - However, post-independence, Delhi's drift towards an alliance with Moscow saw India neglect Europe's strategic significance.
 - As India now steps up its engagement with Europe, the time has come for it to **begin a strategic conversation with Brussels** (often dubbed as the **capital city of the EU**) on Eurasian security.
- **Greater Engagement with EU and NATO Members:** India's Eurasian policy **must necessarily involve greater engagement with both the [European Union](#) and the [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation](#)**.
 - A **dedicated military office in the Indian mission to Brussels**, where both EU and NATO are headquartered, will be a crucial step towards a sustained security dialogue with Europe.
- **Intensifying India-Russia Dialogues on Eurasian Security:** While Indo-Russian differences on the Indo-Pacific, the [Quad](#), China, and the Taliban are real, the two have good reasons to **narrow their differences on Afghanistan and widen cooperation** on continental Eurasian security.
 - Moreover, Russia has cultivated links with the Taliban in recent years. **India would need Russia's support** in any form of direct engagement with the Taliban.
- **Geo-Economic Cooperation:** India can **pursue EU countries to engage in Indo-pacific** narrative, geo-economically if not from security prism.
 - It can **mobilise massive economic resources for sustainable development** of regional infrastructure, wield political influence and leverage its significant soft power to shape the Eurasian discourse.
- **Substantive Indian Collaboration with Persia and Arabia:** If Persia's (Iran's) location makes it critical for the future of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the religious influence of Arabia is quite consequential in the region.
 - India's **partnerships with Persia and Arabia** are also **critical in overcoming Turkey's alliance with Pakistan** that is hostile to Delhi.
- **Integrated Approach in Eurasia:** It will require a response far more nuanced than placing most bets on the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Bolstering deterrence** and simultaneously walking the talk on **multi-alignment** may be the answer which will require re-centering Eurasia by **repairing fraying relations with Iran**, striking a hard **geopolitical bargain with Russia** and perhaps even the

unspeakable, **outreach toward Pakistan.**

Conclusion

- India, over the decades, has dealt with Eurasia's constituent spaces separately but what Delhi now **needs is an integrated approach to set a strong foothold in Eurasia.**
 - India will surely encounter many contradictions in its path between and among the USA, Europe, Russia, China, Iran, and the Arab Gulf but it should not let these contradictions hold India back.
 - The **key for India lies in greater strategic activism** that opens opportunities in all directions in Eurasia.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the significant role that Eurasia plays in India's continental strategy and how China's increasing political and economic influence in the region impacts India's 'Eurasia policy'.

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