

The Battle for Eurasia and the Indian Balancer

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Abstract: The battle for Eurasia is engaged, and it is not the result of chance or strategic miscalculations. One cannot say if it was planned, but a structural analysis of the long durée, along with an eye on economic and geopolitical trends, shows that there was a convergence on Eurasia, or what Mackinder defined as being the “heartland”. It seems quite possible that the Russian elite was aware of this convergence. However, the reaction to counter or abort it was late or inadequate, given the scale and swiftness with which the strategic tsunami was arriving. This slight haphazardness pushes Russia to fall back on certain “all-weather” structural elements. One of these elements is its partnership and friendship with India. One can convincingly argue that this relationship has the potential to impact the fast-approaching battle for Eurasia but also to help Russia co-define the world order for the next 50 to 100 years. In this relationship, India will always be India, but it will make Russia even more Russian. And interestingly, this will suit the United States in its careful path towards sustainable multipolarity.

Keywords: Eurasia, Indian Civilization, Russian Civilization, Core Russian Eurasia, Indic-system.

Methodology

When we make a geopolitical and structural analysis of an issue, we consider, of course, what happened before and what is happening now. But more importantly, we are interested in what will transpire over the next few decades. We seek to identify structural alignment over time. In the first part of this study, I will develop and assess some concepts and theoretical

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constructs. The aim is to develop concepts that will help the reader understand the geopolitical situation and evolutions relating to both Eurasia and the Indic system, which together form a unique international phenomenon that I define as the Global Middle Sphere (GMS). Then, in the second part of this study, I will describe how each other's positional structure provides them with mutualized resilience to confront common threats posed by new imperialistic expansionism from Communist China and re-feudalizing and re-arming Europe. Europe increasingly declares that Russia cannot and should not win its civilizational renovation. In the rest of the world, especially in India, the echo of this is, "If Russia cannot win its civilizational re-emergence then we are all lost because Europe and China will go on a massive genocidal killing spree again". Without a strong Russia, the Global South will feel very unsafe and disarmed. I would like to argue that the outlines of Russian and Indian defence and foreign policy strategies point to the emergence of a united structure, the GMS, as a defensive measure against this eventuality. Furthermore, through this illustration, I would like to show how India will become a balancer in the international arena.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Unitary-Punitory Civilizations and Polymeric Civilizations

The current dominant civilizations can be classified into two distinguishable types. The first type wants to see uniformization – everyone put into one mould. What does not fit the mould is considered an abnormality and an enemy of civilization. Here, punishment can go as far as genocide. We can, therefore, call this type the Unitary-Punitory civilization type. Both China and Europe belong to this category. One of the reasons China believes it can slip into the Western hegemonic order without much struggle is that it basically has the same modus operandi as Europe. The United States is moving away from this model through its structural dynamism, but it acts as if it belongs to the European unitary-punitory model. One of the reasons for this is that European culture is stuck in the 19th-century feudal mentality of privileges and is hardly compatible with today's universalism envisioned by India, the US, and Russia. The famous Indian strategist, K. M. Panikkar, puts it this way: "The Westerners were, therefore, considered by the peoples of India during these early periods as

uncivilized barbarians who paid no heed to the laws of humanity” (Panikkar, 1960, 138). And, talking about the feudal structure of European relations with the Indian Ocean Region, Panikkar highlights the following: “British authority did not make a distinction between Englishmen and Indians, but between Europeans and Indians. The exclusive privileges which they assumed were not for themselves alone but for Europeans as such” (Panikkar, 1960, 138). The United States, possessing one of the most enlightened constitutional systems in the world, cannot sponsor the survival of this abstruse unitary-punitory model. In the future, the United States will actively disengage from all discriminatory models. As Panikkar puts it: “The fact that for over 150 years political power was centred in Europe has favoured the development of a general European-centrism, which has led to a narrowness of spirit and a condescending approach to other civilizations” (Panikkar, 1960, 140). The same narrowness of attitude is shared by the Chinese system. All other civilizations had a different approach to humanity.

The second type is polymeric, where diversity is the basic structure of civilization. Unity is the result of a careful balance between uniformity and diversity. India and Russia are the best examples of this second type. Here, integration need not be conflictual; although it has to be mentioned that the Fringe Mesopotamian caste system could quickly turn into a punitive model, there is a structural risk. Polymeric civilizations are better suited to accommodate and consolidate an eclectic membership of ethnicities and communities. While the unitary-punitory model sees incompatibility as its main strength, the polymeric model sees compatibility as its foundational strength. What is interesting about the first type is that the United States is showing signs that it might be slowly blending itself into a unique polymeric civilization, making it compatible with both the Indian and the Russian civilizations. That is a reason why, in the long run, one is led to believe that there will be a structural alignment between these three powers.

However, it has to be said that both models could experience cyclical out-of-norm periods when they diverge from their core principles. That could create the illusion of rapprochement and compatibility, but, in reality, we could be in a period of extreme divergence from the core tendencies of a civilization. It could, therefore, be detrimental to misread the structural

evolution of a civilization. It is very important to clearly distinguish between patterns of compatibility and those of incompatibility.

The Heartland Construct and its Existential Reasons

The reasons why Mackinder proposed his Heartland Theory in 1904 are fundamental to a better understanding of his much-quoted contribution to geopolitics. When he formulated his famous theory, the British Empire was in a deep crisis; India was boiling with Bengali militant nationalism; Britain had just finished with the gruesome Boer War; and above all, it was beyond the idea of creating an Imperial Federation out of its white dominions. The object of the federation was none other than the cost-sharing of the ruinous Royal Naval and its competition with the newly unified Germany in Europe, the US in North America, and Japan in the East, who had just defeated the Eastern naval forces of Tsarist Russia. All this coincides with the British ambition to dominate the four great civilizations: Indian, European, Chinese, and Persian. Out of these four, it was controlling three using its sea power. The idea was that if Britain managed to knock out Russia, it could totally dominate three civilizations by land and sea, even more so by controlling the resource-rich Eurasian hinterland (Mackinder, 1904, 436). In this manner, it could keep continental European powers like Germany at a distance. Far beyond that, it could keep the rise of the United States in check. In this way, Britain could maintain its hegemonic status and racial hierarchy. Ruling the world would become an unchallenged, eternal feudal birthright for Global Britain. In short, Mackinder presented his Heartland Theory when the British (imagined) power in the world was on the verge of collapsing (Kearns, 2010, 190). In a similar manner, the same argument is echoed by Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard Theory. More specifically, he argues that the Western coalition (the Greater United States) should control the Ukraine as a stepstone to controlling the Russian (Eurasian) resources and, by doing so, keep the industrial power of Germany insulated from the Russian reserves of natural resources (Brzezinski, 1997, 46). Both Mackinder and Brzezinski were working under the shadow of declining empires, and their theories might not have any universal or scientific value beyond that.

For our purposes, the core of Eurasia is the prime domain of Russian civilization today. We can easily reject the vision of it being a civilization

torn between Europe and Asia. We must accept it as a unique domain of its own, and on its own. For the same reasons, it cannot be considered an intermittent region between the Chinese compact civilization and a relatively compact European civilization. Russia is a civilization, not a hinterland to be conquered or exploited by the West or China. The sooner we all realise this, the better it will be for everyone, because it is a reality.

The Concept of Middle Space/Middle Ground/Middle Sphere

In geopolitics, besides inter-civilizational relations, the concept of middle space, middle ground, or middle sphere is necessary to understand the structural nature of world affairs, in particular those pertaining to Central Asia, core Eurasia, and the Indic system. The middleness is multidimensional and forms the bedrock of India's and Russia's global positioning as well. In their civilization, tradition of statecraft, and conduct of foreign policy, Indians and Russians always prioritise and privilege the middle ground and the middle spaces. All this makes them uniquely aligned with all that is tied to Central Asia and Eurasia in general. In his 2015 article, Luis Simón explains that "The security of Europe and East Asia cannot be separated from "middle spaces" such as the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and (to a lesser extent) the Arctic, which straddle the Euro-Mediterranean Basin and the Asia-Pacific" (Simón, 2015, 2). What are the main intrinsic (theoretical) characteristics and geopolitical aspects of these middle spaces? There is no simple or obvious answer to this question.

The "middle ground" or "space in between" allows for mitigated relations or transmission with transition, a possibility of reconfiguration to the compatibility of relations with others who otherwise might not be readily compatible. In this process, the middle spaces can be considered an instrument of compatibility. One of their chief functions is to generate compatibility between extremities that would otherwise remain dead ends, unconnected due to the lack of a structure that provides palpability. This intermittence, palpability, and compatibility-creating function could become a geopolitical and strategic asset if the possessor of the middle ground is fully aware of its functional potential. The middle ground is also a posture, unwilling to accept polarity in a "this or that" configuration. Instead of saying "this and that", one could substantiate that India, Russia, and maybe

France are civilizations characterised by a non-polarity posture. For them, it is a way of life. This should not be seen as pulling towards neutrality but, on the contrary, as pulling the extremities to the middle ground. As such, it could also mean an interruption of a certain process or phenomenon, a pause before the continuation of it as something different or modified and made palpable. In an argument or debate on something, we can say that there is a middle ground to be found or that the divergence of opinions is so extreme that there is no middle ground to be sought.

Samuel Walker, discussing the issue of Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan, puts it in the following way: "The polarisation and acrimony over Truman's decision to use the bomb muddied efforts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the competing positions and to reach a defensible middle ground" (Walker, 2005, 311). He then goes on to describe how the distance between the extremes, traditionalists and revisionists, has narrowed over the years (Walker, 2005, 312). Further on, he says that "During the 1990s, scholars of a middle-ground persuasion contributed fresh perspectives on familiar issues that accepted some key elements of the opposing interpretations while rejecting others" (Walker, 2005, 324). Walker then goes on to demonstrate how Barton J. Bernstein made his contribution by basing his arguments on the middle ground: "Bernstein not only questioned the foundations of both the revisionist and traditionalist interpretations but also offered his own middle ground view of whether the use of the bomb was necessary to achieve victory at the earliest possible moment" (Walker, 2005, 327). In the concluding comments of his essay, Walker makes an excellent remark concerning the richness of opinion within the middle ground: "... the middle ground covered a wide spectrum of opinion that allowed much room for conflicting views" (Walker, 2005, 333).

This final remark gives us a fabulous insight into the structural aspects of the middle ground. Notably, it is diverse in content and is characterised by its fluid nature. While the polarities are characterised by immobility and inflexibility, the centre ground is fluid and flexible. This is the structural mapping of an intellectual debate in a metaphysical sphere. It is now up to geopolitical analysts to take this structure further and see if we can make a geopolitical reading of this tri-dimensional intellectual structure. In essence, we would like to know if this sheds light on the function and fate of middle

spaces, middle countries, or landlocked countries. We want to know if these above-described aspects could in effect be a guide to building a resilient foreign and strategic policy for the middle spaces or middle-positioning countries like India, Russia, Central Asia, and even countries like Serbia, which have not yet joined the European Union and can still be considered middle spaces.

In a different context, an Indian scholar, Suhas Palsikar, takes us into another dimension by showing us that the concept of middle ground can be applied to a political spectrum: two contending extremes and the majoritarian middle ground (Palsikar, 2004, 5426). He explains that not many people among the Indian electorate wanted to embrace the extreme political polarity offered to them, so they tended towards the middle ground. This political structure shows us that, in reality, consensus does not happen in extremities; instead, it happens in the middle space. This means that the purported “leading ideologies” sit on the extremities, but those preferred by a majority sit in the middle. In other words, although people succumb to the rule of extreme minorities, they nonetheless aspire for the middle ground and what it offers. In this particular case, there is no one representing the middle ground ideology, which forces people to vote for the extremes because they have more visibility. Richard White gives us an explanation: “There are instances in which the process can be evident, but the space may fail to emerge” (White, 2011, XIII). India has long steered on this international middle ground, and Russia has structured itself to do the same, with the fight against racism and decolonization as the main topics that define the middle ground.

Similar dynamics and the effervescent structure of the middle ground are explored by Richard White in the encounter between the first-nation American Indians and the invading European settlers. He explains: “A middle ground is the creation, in part through creative misunderstanding, of a set of practices, rituals, offices, and beliefs that, although comprised of elements of the group in contact, is as a whole separate from the practices and beliefs of all of those groups” (White, 2011, XIII). Sometimes, the middle spaces do not exist and have to be created to fulfil a much-needed function. White thinks that “The space of the middle ground depended on the creation of an infrastructure that could support and expand the process, and this infrastructure was possible only when there was both a rough balance

of power and a mutual need between the parties involved" (White, 2011, XIII). His understanding in this context can be extrapolated to the international system in a meaningful way. He confirms my interpretation when he goes on to explain that these spaces are potentially "a place in which peoples adjust to their differences while positioned between cultures" (White, 2011, XIII). Accommodation and compromise are possible in the middle ground.

For his part, James C. Scott describes the middle spaces as anarchic places, as bases for revolt and rebellion, and also as places of escape and refuge, where sovereignty has a variegating meaning: "Beyond such zones, sovereignty was ambiguous, plural, shifting, and often void altogether. Cultural, linguistic, and ethnic affiliations were, likewise, ambiguous, plural, and shifting" (Scott, 2009, 61). Furthermore, sovereignty in such circumstances is the result of insubordination, a reunion of shattered pieces: "Those populations that had managed to fight free of European control for a time came to represent zones of insubordination. Such shatter zones, particularly if they held abundant subsistence resources, served as magnets, attracting individuals, small groups, and whole communities seeking sanctuary outside the reach of colonial power" (Scott, 2009, 132). In short, these spaces can be considered "...extra state zones of flight and refuge. The inhabitants of such zones often constitute a composite of runaways and earlier-established peoples" (Scott, 2009, 133). Just notice how two forms of sovereignty cohabit, one permanent and another temporary: "Between these two zones of forced servitude, however, there was a seam of relative immunity to which many of the migrant poor, particularly gypsies, fled. This no-man's land, this narrow zone of refuge, became known as the 'outlaw corridor'" (Scott, 2009, 133). Interestingly, Scott leads us convincingly to believe that where frontier expansion happens, there are bound to be adjacent spaces transformed into middle spaces of refuge and revolt and, on rare occasions, reconquest (Scott, 2009, 138). This means that middle grounds are "...zones of political and cultural difference" (Scott, 2009, 166). In conclusion, for Scott, these spaces are locations of marginality because "... physical mobility, subsistence practices, social organisation, and settlement patterns can also be deployed, often in combination, to place distance between a community and state appropriation" (Scott, 2009, 183). As an escape route from oppression and colonialism, these middle grounds are transformed into bastions of anti-colonialism and liberation.

Maybe it is this confusion of motivations and intentions that makes Jonathan N. Lipman consider the middle ground as being ambiguous: “Though it may be dominated by one side or the other, the middle ground is always ambiguous ground, always capable of multiple interpretations” (Lipman, 1997, 183). When we look at some Central and Eastern European countries’ actions, we can understand what Lipman is proposing. He goes on to assert that this ambiguity could have its origins in the tribal nature of the middle ground. “Tribes are what have been called a “secondary form”, created in two ways and only in the context of a state or empire. The antonym or binary to “tribe” is “peasantry”. The difference, of course, is that the peasant is a cultivator already fully incorporated as a subject of a state. Tribes, or tribals, on the other hand, are those peripheral subjects not (yet?) brought fully under state rule and/or those who have chosen to avoid the state. Colonial empires and the modern state have been most prolific at creating tribes” (Lipman, 1997, 257). This means that in an imperialistic international order, there are bound to be counter-imperialistic forces and actions that tend towards the middle ground. Middle spaces are a structural inevitability seen from this angle.

To conclude on these conceptual and theoretical aspects of the middle grounds and middle spaces, I would like to return to the arguments proposed by Luis Simón. It is important to consider his perspective because he is part of the transatlantic contingent of ideologues that see the world as being centred in the West and projecting an imperial control over the main resource-rich regions of the globe: “Peace and economic interdependence are institutional expressions of geopolitical balances. For the past two decades, the international geopolitical balances have been largely defined by Western strategic primacy, both globally and in Europe” (Simón, 2013, 1). Contrary to Lipman and others, Luis Simón sees the middle spaces as targets for neo-colonial or neo-imperial control because he sees them as temporary or semi-permanent “strategic middle grounds”: “The ‘middle spaces’ – the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and the Arctic – should be placed at the centre of the security dialogue between Japan and Europe. These regions harbour considerable energy and economic potential and constitute the main inter-Eurasian conduits. As such, they offer the keys not only to the prosperity and security of Europe and East Asia but also to the preservation of a rules-based international liberal order. Ultimately, the effective integration of the “middle spaces” into a rules-based international

liberal order depends upon political stability and the preservation of a favourable balance of power. This requires proactive engagement on the part of Europe, Japan, and like-minded allies" (Simón, 2015, 2). And he continues: "If Europe and Japan are to fully exploit the energy and mineral potential of Central Asia, they must help uphold a favourable balance of power in the region" (Simón, 2015, 2). In other words, Europe should exercise imperialistic control over Eurasia (the Russian civilizational domain) and the Indian Ocean Region (the Indian civilizational domain).

India, Russia, and the Global Middle Sphere (GMS)

One major geopolitical reality that has been overlooked over the centuries is that the Core Eurasian Region (CER) is a mirror reflection of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with India at its core. The defence of one cannot be guaranteed or secured without the defence of the other. Together, they represent the Global Middle Sphere (GMS). Since the middle of the 19th century, the strategy has been to keep these two antagonistic regions apart. This was possible because much of the IOR was in the hands of the European colonials, who believed in feudal and racial hierarchies. Soviet Russia, following the longstanding tradition of integration without racism of the former Russian Empire, mobilised considerable resources to decolonize the region and fend off the encroachment of neo-colonialism. It has to be mentioned that the United States, in its own way, mustered all its weight to make decolonization in the IOR region possible, especially in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Today, the CER and the IOR have reached a new maturity, and although coaxed by "boundless" friendship from both the East and the West, Russia does not believe that, in the long run, its civilization is safe from these extremities sitting on its borders. India, at the core of the IOR, along with prominent countries like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, believes the same dangers haunt its neighbours. Rather than being short-sighted, both regions have set their eyes on creating a Global Middle Sphere, allowing any country threatened by "Eastern-Western" racism and colonialism to join this "middle ground" platform in global politics and contribute to the formation of a new strategic balance.

Without surprise, the United States would welcome the creation of the GMS because it would mean the stabilisation of its own position at the global

level. It would give the United States the necessary time and means to adjust its transition from a position of contested unipolarity to an acceptable multipolar configuration. In 2020, long before the Ukrainian conflict re-erupted, Manjeet S. Pardesi argued that “Not only is this psychological dimension significant, but so are its implications. A rising India seeks to emerge as a pole in “a multipolar Asia” and “a multipolar world”. However, Australia and the US are unlikely to re-establish Western dominance in Asia – an order under which Australia has lived ever since the first European settlements in the Antipodes” (Pardesi, 2020). From this, it becomes clear that the creation of the GMS is not only about creating a protective system against European and Chinese predatorism but also about managing the United States’ transition to multipolarity, allowing time and flexibility for it to adjust without noticeable declassification. It knows that it can safely retreat and have a hold on how things evolve only if the Indic Sphere is revived. No other option would be viable in the long term. The United States wants to delegate Asia’s security to reliable patterns of relations so that it can wisely use its resources and time to consolidate what it considers to be Western civilization and its core. The US will support the resurgence of a tried and tested security mosaic aimed at bringing order to the Indic superstructure in the world system.

This is exactly what Indo-Russian cooperation in Eurasia and the Indic system is about. The Russian Civilizational Sphere, along with Central Asia and the Indic Civilizational Sphere, are not only mirror reflections of each other, but, together, they constitute the “Great Vertical” in world affairs. The middle ground that will become a framework for all those who want to create a non-discriminatory, non-racist, and multipolar platform in world affairs is sitting on the extremities of Eurasia: East Asia and Europe. They both have problems with racism and colonial tendencies, as history has shown us at regular intervals. Hannah Arendt wrote the following in 1944 in relation to European racism: “The historical truth of the matter is that race-thinking, with its roots deep in the 18th century, emerged during the 19th century simultaneously in all Western countries. Racism has been the powerful ideology of imperialistic policies since the turn of our century” (Arendt, 1944, 36). Using the Ukraine conflict as an excuse, both China and Europe have embarked upon unprecedented arms procurement programmes. Interestingly, their targets are found mainly in the middle ground, namely in the Indian and Russian spheres. These very reasons have

led to a sustained rapprochement between India and Russia. They share the same disdain for racism and neo-colonial tendencies, or at least have consistently done so since 1945. They share the same tradition of consensus-building in international relations. And they need each other since both are currently economically weaker than the old/new predatory elements of the new international system.

The key alignments in the immediate Indian Ocean Region are the rise of local powers and two outside stakeholders that will form the crux of the region's security system. Since the rise of their belligerent capacity, the Europeans and the Chinese are the potential threats to the region, and because of this, it becomes obvious that the United States and the Russian Federation are the obvious outsiders who have a stake in the region's peace and security. The regional champions will, of course, be India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Australia, Iran, and South Africa. With the possible exception of Iran and Australia, what is particular about this group is that they all enjoy excellent relations with both Russia and the United States. This is a promising constellation for the GMS to take root and consolidate its position, in which the US is a key player.

One of the biggest geopolitical changes over the last two decades that largely went unnoticed in Europe is the shift in the attitude of the United States towards India and the Indian Ocean Region (Roy 2023). The same can be said of India's attitude towards the United States and the role it can play in the Indian Ocean Region. Since the 1970s, India has been suspicious of the US entering its civilizational lake for two reasons. The first was the increasing cosiness between Communist China and Capitalist America. The second reason was the willingness on the part of the Nixon administration to use US naval forces against India during the Bangladeshi War of Independence. For its part, the US was willing to contain or restrict India because of its friendship with Soviet Russia, a friendship that was offered to America as well but was received with disdain. The general feeling is that the US military establishment was very sceptical of the US posture in the region, one reason being that India had rendered a valuable service to the US during the Second World War as a rear base for its operations in China and the Pacific against Japan. Today, the relations between the two are very constructive; the United States is now willing to place greater reliance on India to secure the IOR so that neither Europe nor China can make a

predatory re-entry into the Indian Sphere (Roussi and Guillot 2023). Furthermore, the United States wants to see the rise of India economically and militarily in order for it to take responsibility for its own sphere, similar to what it is probably expecting from Russia, to seal off Eurasia from possible incursions by expansionist powers.

Therefore, India has a double-edged responsibility, similar to what is happening with Russia today. In international and global affairs, India is considered a nation-state. But, for its part, it sees itself as a civilization whose engagement and scope far exceed the colonial borders of 1947 (Express News Service, 2023). India's defensive system collapsed once the colonials disturbed the Indic System in the IOR. To regain its pre-colonial strength, India has to have a civilization-wide perception of its security arrangements. Thus, India is faced with a gigantic uphill mission to rebuild the entire superstructure of the Indic system piece by piece. It cannot do it alone; it must build and fend off Euro-Chinese expansionist conjunctures in its sphere. The only solution possible is to implement the middle ground method, pulling diverse forces to a common "middle ground" of understanding and approach towards a defensive mechanism for the whole of the Indic system (IOR). Even in its basic construction, the Indian Sphere will exemplify the global middle sphere. There is absolutely no scope for unilateralism or belligerent posturing on its part, and this was true in earlier periods.

An Indian security analyst, Ravindra Varma, explains: "As a country with major interests in the Indian Ocean, India cannot afford to plan her defences on her own frontiers. She has to encourage naval development in the area" (Varma, 1967, 60). This means India would welcome regional initiatives to build security capacity for the IOR. But today, the reality of this civilizational ocean is that it has become a pool of weakness due to the accumulation of developmental hindrances and economic dislocations. This was evident right from the beginning. K. M. Panikkar, another Indian expert, pointed out in 1945 that India cannot secure the whole of its sphere alone and that it needs to take appropriate steps to stabilise the situation: "Clearly no country in this region is able on its own to undertake the responsibility of ensuring peace and security in the area. Owing to the weakness of the units comprising this area and their great importance as the reservoir of raw materials, the organisation of the region for security is of vital importance to future world peace" (Panikkar, 1945, 248). And he continued by concluding

that “A regional organisation alone offers the possibilities of future security” (Panikkar, 1945, 249). To make things worse, the political situation of India’s partner countries in the region has not radically changed since the Europeans withdrew from the IOR. If all the member countries of the Indian civilization were decolonized at the same time, there might have been a common awakening, but it stretched on into the 1980s, and the British “Divide and Run” method of decolonization transformed sister nations into enemies. As Panikkar reminded us in 1945, “Politically, the countries of the Indian Ocean area are not yet fully emancipated” (Panikkar, 1945, 250). The first step for India, therefore, is to restore political unity to the IOR civilization.

Then intensive economic planning has to be undertaken to revive the same unity and rehabilitate the principle of “spherical primacy”, meaning that priority should be given to the region before considering relations with friendly regions. And, most importantly, never give a foothold to countries with belligerent intent. In 1945, Panikkar suggested that India should take several steps to reinvigorate the IOR: 1) find the means to remove backwardness; 2) urgently eliminate the colonial exploitative economic model; and 3) improve living standards (Panikkar, 1945, 250-251). Almost 80 years since Panikkar’s prescription was put to paper, the situation has not radically changed. The problem was that Europe soon developed a neo-colonial industrial policy to strengthen Communist China to the disadvantage of the democracy-loving Indian Ocean Region. India was robbed of industrial capacity development and market possibilities for its goods. The region was handicapped first by colonialism and then by “Communist China-loving” neo-colonialism. Structurally speaking, for these reasons, the region needs impetus from friendly powers like Russia and the United States.

On top of this, India, as the principal guardian of this regional order, has a lot of catching up to do in terms of physical infrastructure and organisational capacity. The colonials had disrupted the Indic system and radically altered its strategic mix. “Countries in South Asia had a very limited conception of defence, which ignored the sea altogether. In India, defences were built to checkmate threats from the North-West and, occasionally, Central Asia. This made the conquest of Asia by the maritime powers of Europe easier” (Varma, 1967, 60). This means that India has to build an unparalleled superstructure from scratch overnight in order to

confront the security threats posed by the combined naval strengths of predatory powers. South Asia is one of the poorest regions in the world, with almost 2 billion people; if we add its civilizational sphere, then it would be closer to 2.5 or 3 billion people. No other country in the world faces such a gigantic strategic mission. Recalibrating its strategic needs and turbocharging the region's economic development would be a colossal venture, complex, and fraught with difficulties. But let us not forget that we are talking of India, the historical epitome of the middle sphere method of pulling diverse interests together. As Varma argues, "In evolving an appropriate strategy of defence in the Indian Ocean, India has to play a leading role in concert with other nations" (Varma, 1967, 61). Building a defensive alliance in the region with all the members is in itself a constant pillar of India's strategic thinking, which means reaching out to great powers beyond the region. Harsh V. Pant concurs with this when he writes: "In all likelihood, India will look towards cooperation with other major powers in the Indian Ocean region to preserve and enhance its strategic interests" (Pant, 2009, 280).

Two French security experts, Samaan and Grare, see things happening in several phases. In the initial period, they see India building coalitions with resident and non-resident middle powers in order to anchor the regional security mechanism. Once this is accomplished, it will then go on to federate all the others around the system. Both believe that the aggressive Chinese intrusion into the Indian civilizational sphere would act as a catalyst to transform the mechanism into an overwhelming, all-encompassing security system: "In the process, the nature of Indian Ocean regionalism is changing, moving away, even if in a very uneven way, from post-colonial concerns to the reappropriation of the region" (Samaan, 2022, 208). This could possibly lead to the formation of a loose poor man's military alliance in the IOR. Most Indian strategic thinkers would agree with this line of thought, but they would see the revival of the common Indic civilization at the centre of the process rather than seeing it as a solely Indian national initiative. There are practical reasons for this: "... though India has historically viewed the Indian Ocean region as one in which it would like to establish its own predominance, its limited material capabilities have constrained its options" (Pant, 2009, 280). When national capabilities are limited, you turn to civilization — the global middle sphere as a natural way out. It is all about building cooperation and finding the high middle ground.

Although diverging in other regional engagements, Russia and the United States are destined to have a constructive and supporting role in this Indic re-construction and consolidation. The Indian national strategist, K. M. Panikkar, was clear on this geopolitical evolution: "Direct Russian access to the Indian Ocean will obviously revolutionise the whole conception of security in the area" (Panikkar, 1945, 247-248). In essence, after WWII, the US was active in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, while the USSR was active in East Africa and the Arabic region. Since the 1990s, both have been intermittently active in the whole of the IOR. What is more important is that we are witnessing the progressive extinction of the colonial and neo-colonial influence of Europe in the region. As for China, since 2012, it has literally invaded the IOR with its chain of pearls strategy. Contrary to some, I think this is a very positive development because it wakes up the countries of the region to the expansionist and colonial actions of China. For both Russia and the United States, it becomes obvious that there is a seamless replacement of European influence in the region by Chinese influence, as if there was an agreement between them behind closed doors. For both superpowers, it becomes evident that this Chinese "replacement" process has to be disrupted before it can do lasting harm to the Indic Renaissance. We are witnessing this in Eastern Europe with the Ukrainian conflict. The first casualty is the 17+1 forum that China tried to use to replace both US and Russian influence in this key region, and Europe knowingly allowed this to happen. Region by region, the US needs Russia's cooperation to square things up and foil Sino-European designs on the strategic middle spaces. Russia has a military base in the IOR, and it might build on this to increase its presence to counter Chinese encroachment.

Nonetheless, whatever future increases in Russian presence in the IOR, they have to be concomitant with the Indic system restoration. Any other format or reason will be considered an intrusion by all the powers contingent on the IOR, especially India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, and Australia. It is most probable that even the US will be against such moves. Every action by outside powers has to be envisaged as a considerate step to support the regeneration of the Indic system. What might define the future involvement of both the US and Russia might not be the number of bases each has in the region but how much defence manufacturing capacity they will have in the core of the IOR to cater to the integrated procurement needs of the regional players. India has insufficient defence manufacturing

capacity to fulfil the security needs of the IOR, which means that as a lead trend-setter, it will look for several safe and trustable partners for regional defence procurement. We should also mention that India will want not only a trustworthy partner but also a supply of armaments without interruption. Understandably, a clog in supply could seriously compromise its defence capability. India and its two superpower supporters should think of integrating the defence procurement considerations of IOR countries into the larger defence strategy of the Indic Sphere. The two superpowers, Russia and the United States, have to see the process as part of stabilising the multipolar world order by giving physical strength to the GMS.

Both Russia and the US have to take part of their defence manufacturing capacity to India so that, in the long run, it can become a common defence procurement base for the whole of the Indic system. There are substantiated reasons for this. The first reason is that it seems that Russia and the United States are having capacity problems, creating tensions on the receiving side (Pant, 2009, 294). This does not date from the Ukrainian conflict; it is a continuous problem. Now that the world, especially China and Europe, is re-arming and becoming increasingly belligerent, defence capacities everywhere will come under strain, and there could be delays in supply chains. This is bound to happen with spare-part producers as well as assemblers. Sanction policies and geopolitical upheavals could further add constraints. What this shows is that countries like Japan and South Korea, as countries with major industrial know-how, should actively participate in the process and converge towards an Indic security platform.

In the long term, this trend can result in two very important geopolitical and structural consequences. Firstly, Russia has to give guarantees that it will not engage in implicit or explicit defence or security arrangements with China. If Russia allies itself with China, it will disqualify itself from playing a predominant role in the IOR strategic architecture (Kaura, 2019, 51). As mentioned earlier, it is primordial for Russia and the Eurasian core to be part of the GMS superstructure that the IOR is. It is not an easy task for Russia because it is also a notable supplier of armament to China, although this might change in the future. Russia will soon realise that making China a strong military power will go against its own national security and integrity in the long run. It shares a long border with China and has a protective civilizational responsibility towards the Central Asian nations

and their territorial integrity (Kaura, 2019, 54). In a similar fashion, the US has to completely disassociate its NATO strategy from its Indic strategy. The United States cannot bring neo-colonialism through the back door into the Indic Sphere. It has to keep NATO as far away from the IOR as possible if it wants to make a success out of its IOR strategy.

What Westerners and Chinese often forget is that before the discovery of the Americas, India and the Indian Ocean were at the centre of a sophisticated world system, also called the Indic System. As G.V.C. Naidu puts it, "Let us not forget that for nearly two millennia, the Indian Ocean has been at the centre of much of global political, economic, and cultural activity, with India as the chief contributor and facilitator of these interactions. Even though none of its myriad kings and emperors ever possessed a great navy, with the possible exception of the Cholas, never once did India's status come under threat" (Naidu, 2013, 236). The structures, patterns, and traditions of the GMS have been there for a long time. They just have to be strengthened, and this is exactly what Russia and the United States want to do in the IOR. The durable security of Russian Eurasia depends upon that.

Conclusion

Eurasia. A confusing, ambiguous, and inspiring concept, as all middle spheres are. These middle spheres and spaces are keys to a balanced and peaceful world order; in other words, they are the shock absorbers and conflict interrupters. Eurasia is only one-half of the world's main shock absorber system; it is a land-based system. The other half is the Indic system, the sea-based mirror reflection of the land-based core of Russian Eurasia. Europe's 30-year, well-sequenced plan with China seems to have been to take over core middle spaces at the expense of Russia, India, and, to a certain extent, the United States. Furthermore, strategic and geopolitical initiatives like 17+1 and the Belt and Road Initiative were designed to stifle the Russian Sphere by isolating it from the Indian Sphere, a repetition of a British classic of the 19th century. Those planning to attack the land-based core could simultaneously attack the sea core, the Indic System, sending the balanced world order into an unpredictable spiral of whirlwind and war. From this point of view, both Russia and the United States have a strong interest in

revivifying the Indic system, which, by its nature, is also the Global Middle Sphere. That, however, is easier said than done. There has to be intensive strategic and industrial coordination between the leading countries of the Indian Ocean Region – Russia and the United States. Securing the global multipolar world order is synonymous with securitizing the Indian Sphere. As military superpowers, Russia and the United States know that for this order to take root and be sustained, the predatory extremes should be kept outside the Indian System for the foreseeable future. That said, things could radically diverge if Russia decides to make a formal alliance with China and the United States restricts itself to the West, in which case the Global Middle Sphere would come under the leadership of India.

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