

## **Identifying and Addressing Major Issues Including “Trust” and Trust Deficiency**

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### **Major Issues in Asia and Indian Ocean Region**

At present, in the short term, the most urgent issue for the whole world is how to deal with the Covid-19. The pandemic situation not only poses a serious threat to the health of people in the world, including those in Asia and Indian Ocean region, but also seriously affects the development of the world economy. Many countries in Asia and Indian Ocean region are facing economic recession, and people's daily life is greatly affected. How to control the pandemic is the most urgent challenge for the whole world, including Asia and India Ocean region.

In the long run, the biggest issue facing Asia and the Indian Ocean is the unprecedented change. It has been occurring in the whole world, including the shift of the world economic center of gravity, the transfer of wealth, the transfer of the world power center, a new round of scientific and technological revolution, the impact and transformation of national and social governance in the information age, the thought of anti-globalization, the rise of populism and the challenge of democratic and liberal values. Global governance and national governance are facing unprecedented challenges, and the international economic and political order is undergoing disorder and reorganization. At the same time, the natural environment in which human beings live is also changing, especially the climate change and the spread of epidemic diseases. The Covid-19 pandemic is the latest example, which is a common challenge faced by mankind.

From the political and economic point of view, the unprecedented changes in the world are mainly reflected in the “the rise of the East and the decline of the West” (Dongsheng Xijiang) as well as “the ascent of the South and the fall of the North” (Nanshang Beixia), that is, the overall rise of developing countries, especially Asia, and the relative decline of the West. From the perspective of civilization, it is the revival of Eastern civilization such as China and India and the relative decline of the West. From the perspective of geopolitics, it is the geopolitical competition between China and the United States. Asia, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean are the central stages of this unprecedented change. In the view of some strategic scholars, the Indian Ocean is of special significance. They call the Indian Ocean region “the geographical pivot of the 21st century”.<sup>1</sup> Now, the Covid-19 pandemic has

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, New York: Random House, 2010.

accelerated the unprecedented change. The international economic, technological, cultural, security and political structures are undergoing profound adjustment, and the world is entering a period of turbulence and change.

### **Major Challenges Facing Asia and Indian Ocean Region**

1) With the increasingly fierce geopolitical competition, the United States hopes to maintain its global hegemony, and the Trump Administration has resorted to every conceivable means to achieve "America First". The United States put forward the "Indo-Pacific" strategy to promote regional security bloc, constantly stir up dissension and troubles, and create regional tensions. On the basis of consolidating the old bilateral military alliance, the United States tries to promote some regional powers to form new bilateral, trilateral and multilateral military alliances and exclusive security and military cooperation, including the US-India, India-Australia, Japan-Australia, US-Japan-Australia, US-Japan-India, and QUAD, etc. Britain, France, and some other traditional Western powers are not willing to decline and be loneliness, hoping to intervene in the regional security affairs. The maintenance of the old exclusive security framework and the establishment of new exclusive security framework are contrary to the call of most countries in the region for the establishment of an open, inclusive, democratic, and equal regional security architecture. ASEAN has put forward its own "Indo-Pacific Outlook".

2) Secondly, trade protectionism, anti-globalization and geopolitical competition hinder regional economic cooperation. With China's continuous development and growth, the mentality of some countries has changed: on the one hand, some countries have increased expectations for China, hoping to share more of China's development dividend and let China take more responsibility; on the other hand, some countries are more concerned about China, afraid that China will be "dominant" in Asia. Some countries, such as the United States and India, are trying to reconstruct the industrial chain, value chain and supply chain in Asia, and then change the current global political and economic pattern. China's "Belt and Road " Initiative was hedged by the US, Japan, and India. After the outbreak of Covid-19, countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia and India are accelerating the so-called "Desinicization" process, but the effect is very limited.

3) Western powers are dissatisfied with the choice of different political systems suitable for their own national conditions by some countries in the region. Especially when the instability of the so-called democratic system in the West is increasing and the superiority of the political system of the countries in the region is becoming more and more obvious, the great powers outside the region attempt to stir up the debate on ideology and values. Some countries in the region echo the Western powers, and the cold war atmosphere has risen. In this context, some of the remaining ethnic and religious issues in the region are also on the rise. The Rohingya issue in Myanmar has aroused extensive attention of the international community under the hype of Western

media. The political stability of some countries carrying out economic cooperation with China is under threat.

4) Due to the economic backwardness of some countries in the region and the lack of national governance capacity, illegal activities such as drug smuggling, transnational crime, terrorism, and piracy are rampant. The development of information technology has intensified the speed of information dissemination and the difficulty of governance, encouraged these illegal activities, put forward new challenges to national sovereignty, security and development interests, and posed a serious threat to regional stability. In April 2019, there was a terrible terrorist attack in Sri Lanka. With the increase of climate change and economic activities, ecological and environmental problems have become increasingly prominent, and the spread of epidemic diseases has intensified. The outbreak of Covid-19 has exposed some serious deficiencies in national governance and social governance capacity. In addition, due to glacier melting, river pollution, regional inequality of water resources distribution, cross-border water resources problem is increasingly becoming a serious issue affecting regional peace and tranquility. The above issues and challenges urgently need the international community and the countries in the region to seriously deal with and seek common governance.

Generally speaking, the region is at a critical crossroads. At present, there are two dominant trends in the region: one is the geopolitical competition and even confrontation led by the United States and other foreign powers, represented by the Cold war style exclusive regional security architecture and the QUAD; The other is the B&R and other economic cooperation projects. Only through cooperation can we avoid geopolitical competition and confrontation, and achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

### **Building an Asian Community of Shared Future**

In order to solve these challenges faced by Asian and Indian Ocean countries, we must have new ideas and new thinking. Chinese leaders put forward the concept of building a community of shared future for mankind, which has been paid wide attention and highly recognized by the international community, and has been written into the UN resolution. The 19th Communist Party of China National Congress has put the construction of the community of shared future for mankind into the constitution of the CPC, and has become an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. It has also been written into the preface of the constitution of People's Republic of China. This shows the firm determination of the Chinese Communist Party and the government to make greater contributions to shaping a new international and regional order of peace, development, cooperation and win-win.

Compared with the traditional western political philosophy and international relations theory, which emphasizes the dominance and control of a single country or

some groups of countries over the whole international affairs, and emphasizes the "hierarchical order" in the international community, the concept of "community of shared future for mankind" takes the whole human being as the basic unit, transcends some differences and conflicts between narrow ideologies, countries or between different civilizations, cultures and religions, and has made in-depth thinking on major issues such as "what kind of world to build and how to build this world", and has formed a scientific, complete, rich and profound ideological system:

First, build a world of lasting peace. We should respect each other, discuss issues as equals, resolutely reject the Cold War mentality and power politics, and take a new approach to developing state-to-state relations with communication, not confrontation, and with partnership, not alliance. Second, build a world of universal security. All parties should establish a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept. Third, build a world of common prosperity. We should stick together through thick and thin, promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and make economic globalization more open, inclusive, and balanced so that its benefits are shared by all. Fourth, build an open and inclusive world. We should respect the diversity of civilizations. In handling relations among civilizations, let us replace estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence. Fifth, build a clean and beautiful world. We should be good friends to the environment, cooperate to tackle climate change, and protect our planet for the sake of human survival.<sup>2</sup>

Specific to Asia and Indian Ocean region, the basic goal of the Asian community of shared future is to establish a new regional political order of harmonious coexistence, a democratic and equal regional security order, and a win-win regional economic order.

To establish these new orders, countries in the region need to make their own choices. At present, there is a lack of trust among countries in the region and outside the region. But in fact, it is exceedingly difficult to achieve complete mutual trust between countries, especially among big powers. Even if there is no complete trust between the United States and its allies, for example, the United States has been monitoring German leaders for many years. Trust in the psychological sense involves three different meanings: predictability, credibility, and good intentions.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, trust may simply mean that we believe that the actions of others are predictable. During the cold war, trust between superpowers was also based on the predictability of each other's behavior. Secondly, trust may also refer to credibility, that is, we believe that others will keep their promises. Third, trust may mean that we expect others to have charitable intentions and will not "exploit" us.

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<sup>2</sup> *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Welch Larson, "Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations", in *Political Psychology*, Vol.18, No.3, 1997, p.714.

In any sense of trust, China's goal of building a community of shared future for mankind and Asia is trustworthy for countries in the region. The so-called China's plot to trap regional countries into "debt trap" only exists in the Western and Indian media and in the articles of some sinister strategic scholars. The predictability, credibility, and goodwill of China's behavior are in sharp contrast to the unpredictability, unreliability, and malice of the Trump Administration of the United States. At present, China is cooperating actively with regional countries to help them deal with the pandemic, maintain the stability of the industrial chain and supply chain, and restore the economy.

### **The Construction Approaches of Asian Community of Shared Future**

1) To establish an open economic structure and a new framework for regional cooperation: Regional countries should promote RCEP to reach a consensus as soon as possible and promote the synergy of B&R with national development strategies and regional economic integration plans. China should join hands with South Asian and Southeast Asian countries in climbing to the top of global value chain and industrial chain. China should not only develop itself well, but also give other countries opportunities for full development.

2) Establish a non-group, open, inclusive, democratic and equal regional security framework. China and Asian countries should make use of the existing bilateral mechanisms and multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations, East Asia Summit, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization and CICA, and create new mechanisms to establish a regional security framework including foreign powers, instead of jointly formulating a set of rules with foreign countries to impose on other countries in the region. China adamantly opposes the establishment of military blocs in Asia and Indian Ocean Region.

3) We should promote people to people exchanges and dialogue among Asian civilizations, especially among young people, and build a bridge for people to people exchanges.

### **The Role of Central States**

Within the community, members enjoy equal status and follow democratic principles. However, the community needs some "central countries" with political, economic and social capabilities, such as France and Germany in the European community, Indonesia and Singapore in ASEAN. China should strive to play the role of central state, share international responsibilities with regional and foreign powers such as the United States, Russia, Japan, India, Indonesia, and play a leading and coordinating role. In view of the various problems facing Asia, China should start from the foundation and provide more material, security, and ideological and cultural public goods for the construction of Asian community of shared future.

In Asia and the Indian Ocean region, small and medium-sized countries should also play a leading role. The Indian Ocean is an international trade and energy channel,

not the lake of any country. The peace and tranquility of the Indian Ocean is very important not only to the countries in the region, but also to the great powers outside the region. Therefore, stakeholders inside and outside the region should establish an inclusive mechanism to maintain regional peace and tranquility. In history, Sri Lanka and other countries have advocated the "Indian ocean zone of peace ". Such a proposal can still be discussed under the new historical conditions.