

**POLITICS OF SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGIES OF  
THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA SINCE 2017**

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## **Introduction**

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the principal focus of international relations, where economic dynamism, political contestation, technological rivalry and maritime strategy intersect. It is a widening cartographic understanding that substantiates the geopolitical power-play of the present times. It is a term that denotes a broader theatre of activity connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans where relations are bound by dense economic currents, connectivity networks, cultural diversity, flow of ideas, information and diplomacy. The region has gained focus due to the concentration of major actors in region, such as the United States of America, India, China, Japan, Australia, the Southeast Asian countries among others. Over the decades, the region has assumed greater salience in terms of strategic and economic centrality. Two major developments have are central to this geopolitical shift towards the Indo-Pacific. First is the emergence of Indo-Pacific as the hub of global growth. This has taken place with the gradual yet steady relocation of economic weight towards Asia, the increasing reliance on the uninterrupted movement of goods that make the sea lanes from the Gulf to the western and central Pacific along with the Indian Ocean the circulatory system of the world economy and the lifeblood of international commerce. Secondly, the region has witnessed sharpening competition catalysed by China's rise and the responses of other stakeholders in the region. This has turned the Indo-Pacific region into a strategic space with significant opportunities and serious challenges. Though different stakeholders articulate the Indo-Pacific in various manner, the common factors remain in its recognition as a geopolitical space of simultaneous cooperation and contestation.

Indo-Pacific's emergence in contemporary diplomacy and strategy can be traced from Japan's articulation of the "Confluence of the Two Seas," at the Parliament of India and consolidated by the United States comprehensive articulation of "Indo-Pacific" strategy in its 2017 National Security Strategy. As a result, Indo-Pacific is being re-imagined as a geopolitical region where the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Strait, the South China Sea and the western Pacific are treated as one connected theatre. The Indo-Pacific analytical frame positions India at the centre of gravity of this strategic space.

This research examines the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific since 2017 and deconstructs the factors that shape the Indo-Pacific security complex. It studies Indo-US relations and investigates how their security partnerships contribute to the shaping the emerging security framework of the region. It treats Indo-Pacific not simply as a geographic

expansion but as a strategic construct animated by competing ‘mental maps,’ where power transitions are predictable and the evolving network of institutions are in a constant quest to produce a durable, rules-based security architecture.

### **Context and Premise**

The Indo-Pacific region is understood as a single strategic continuum reflected in the integration of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It links trade routes and commodity flows and embeds different geo-political sub-regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the western Pacific within one analytical regional frame. This broadening reflects three impulses that is evident since 2017. Firstly, it is the concern over China’s rise, and its consequential impact on regional and global power-structures. The concerns stem from its coercive maritime posture in the South China Sea, its bid for technological and infrastructural leverage through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its intrusions across the Indian political space and the perceived erosion of a rules-based order. Secondly, there is a rising preference among many regional states for inclusive mechanisms and in such inclusive understandings, ASEAN remains central. Thirdly, the spread of minilateral cooperation can be linked to the rising significance of India’s role in the region and the United States of America’s efforts towards issue-specific, flexible arrangements in the region. This has led to the re-emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue that circumvents the rigidity of alliances while delivering practical outcomes that is essential to the security of the region. The consequential impact on security politics in Indo-Pacific is rather complex.

Within this re-imagining of Indo-Pacific geopolitical space, security politics have thickened. One of the key security concerns in the region emanates from China’s activities in the region which signal its ambitions during a power-transition, as a rising China seeks to revise elements of Indo-Pacific order. There has been an alarming increase in Chinese assertiveness across the entire spectrum of the Indo-Pacific. This is reflected in its strategic positioning, economic coercion, rapid transformation and military build-ups, with a focus in maritime presence and pressurising the smaller countries. Chinese rule-altering manoeuvre is evident in the South China Sea as well as through its military presence in the Indian Ocean. Such manoeuvres also include the use of infrastructure finance to cultivate strategic leverage, island-building and grey-zone activities, which have led many regional states to hedge and re-analyse their politics and re-organize the collaboration among themselves. However, economic interdependence with China remains a reality for all the stakeholders in

the region and this also sustains incentives for restraint. Therefore, rather than erstwhile binaries comprising blocks or armed alliances, the Indo-Pacific region manifests an evolving web of 'sovereign strategic networks' and minilateral formats, through which middle and major powers pursue functional cooperation without committing to hard alliances. India's rise, and its preference for inclusive, rules-based order and commitment to ASEAN-centrality, further pushes the region towards plural forms of security architecture. The United States, for its part, has moved to an Indo-Pacific strategic framework that is enduring and is contingent upon deepening maritime partnerships and freedom of navigation, rule of law and resilient supply chains. Both Washington and New Delhi converge on core norms of the security politics involving the region, yet there remains divergences in geographic prioritization. Their views on the region are shaped by their ordering of power, foreign policy goals and national interests as well as their penchant for risk tolerance; making practical coordination a matter of 'managed convergence' through strategic partnerships and cooperation.

The United States of America has reframed its regional policy around a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) emphasising upon maritime law, alliance modernisation, denial-oriented force posture, enhanced deterrence. USA's policy is geared towards building techno-economic coalitions. Its strategies include presence operations, posture adjustments, defence technology co-development with allies and partners, investment screening and export controls, supply-chain funding, and norms for critical infrastructure. Indo-Pacific strategic space is understood by Washington as a bid to retain its dominant status in global politics. India is considered as important due to its geographical location that translates into an advantage coupled with India's imagination of the Indo-Pacific that coincides with America's FOIP to a large extent. America's coordination with India is deepening but the relationship is also confronting certain structural hurdles.

India's Indo-Pacific approach reflects its self-understanding as both a civilizational and regional power. India frames the Indo-Pacific as a 'seamless' maritime space which is inclusive and non-coercive. India considers ASEAN centrality as important, it upholds the UNCLOS, freedom of navigation, respect for sovereignty and believes in peaceful dispute resolution as foundational to Indo-Pacific framing. India's policy vocabulary is informed by 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). These are operationalized through maritime capacity building for littoral states, acting

as first responder in crisis and natural disasters, information-sharing arrangements, logistics and access agreements, and regular participation in exercises that strengthen interoperability such as the Malabar Exercises, while guarding India's own strategic autonomy. New Delhi links geopolitics with geo-economic security and therefore engages in resilient supply chains, clean energy grids, developing robust ports and rule-observing behaviour. India is a significant security enabler in the region and this makes India a credible and reliable Indo-Pacific power. India prefers pluri-lateral formats that preserve strategic autonomy while scaling practical cooperation and therefore is keen on working with the Quad, which has widened its operation that now ranges from maritime security to vaccines, critical technologies, cyber resilience, climate, space and infrastructure standards. Quad is flexible and responds to all issues that pertain to security matters. The lack of a formal structure facilitates its flexibility and it can function in all areas of security convergences and respond effectively to imminent threats.

This study investigates Indo-Pacific as a complex security scenario. It is not just a geographic space but a strategic theater, a locus of geopolitical contestation. Here, order-building is neither hierarchical nor alliance-centered, but a set of overlapping institutions and flexible arrangements that allow states to address specific problems without committing to a single, hierarchical design. This study is an assessment of the outlook and policies of the United States of America and India in the Indo-Pacific region and the impact of their cooperation on the geopolitics of the region. This dissertation intends to contribute meaningfully to the discourse on Indo-Pacific security and the role of the United States and India in offering a pragmatic yet principled road map for peace, stability and prosperity of the region.

## **Scope of the Research**

This research studies the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific since 2017 by assessing how the United States and India have conceptualised the region, calibrated their strategies and coordinated with partners. It investigates framing of the Indo-Pacific security narratives, underlining the geostrategic significance of the rise of the Indo-Pacific. It examines power politics across the region, elaborating upon the imperatives and drives of the politics of security in the region. It critically analysis the role of ASEAN in the region and asses its contribution to the regional security framework.

A key thematic concern is the understanding of security and the process of securitization in the region. Once the imperatives and drivers of security are evaluated, the research delves into understanding the potential of power transition in the region and the viability of a rule-based security order involving multiple stakeholders, especially the ASEAN countries- to assess how strategic partnerships and rivalries are being configured in this emerging region.

Along with examining the impact of Indo-Pacific construct, the research investigates the trajectory of power distribution, in shaping regional security narratives by analysing and explaining power politics, cooperation, and engagements among the regional stakeholders in the context of rising Chinese assertiveness. The study investigates the trajectory of regional power distribution, and the viability of a rule-based security order

## **Research Questions:**

1. What is geo-strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific?
2. What is the power trajectory in the Indo-Pacific region? Is it possible to formulate a suitable security architecture in the Indo-Pacific?
3. What the role of the India and the US in shaping the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region?
4. How effective the Quad has been in addressing the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific?
5. What is the reaction of the ASEAN in light of the politics of security in the region?
6. Can India become the 'Net Security Provider' in the region?

## **Research Methodology:**

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretative approach combined with quantitative analysis to evaluate the evolving security politics in the Indo-Pacific. It employs descriptive and historical-analytical approach to analyse India's evolving strategic role in the Indo-Pacific. The methodology is designed to capture multiple perspectives from policy experts, diplomats, and academics, supplemented by quantitative scoring of key strategic variables to ensure a balanced and evidence-based analysis. This research draws inferences from both theory and empirical developments, using critical interpretations of geopolitical and security studies theories.

From the theoretical lenses, the research investigates geopolitics and mental maps. The study treats maps as policy instruments, examining the differing structures, partnerships and risk appetites. Sea-lane security, chokepoints and littoral capacity-building are analysed as the connective links between geo-economics and strategy. The study uses the concept of securitization to understand the layers of security and applies this to the Indo-Pacific context. The Regional Security Complex Theory frames the Indo-Pacific as a set of interlocking sub-regions whose security dynamics are more tightly coupled internally than externally. This helps explain why ASEAN-led mechanisms retain convening power despite limitations, and why the Indian Ocean and western Pacific remain distinct but connected in the security understandings. The study treats US-China rivalry as a potential parity transition, shaped by status-quo satisfaction and risk perception, an understanding that can be garnered from power transition theory. It expects "competitive coexistence," constrained by deterrence and geography but punctuated by crises, and tests whether networked cooperation can bound rivalry.

This research has used discourse analysis as part of the qualitative methodology to examine language, symbols, and narratives constituting political reality. It provided a practical lens to understand the finer nuances of language and power and their role in the co-production of geostrategic narrative building. Applied to the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, it scrutinizes the texts of policy papers, official speeches, strategy papers, parliamentary debates, media and think-tank reports, maps and images to show how they construct India and America's sense of Indo-Pacific security including their interests, articulation of risks, existential threats, and regional goals and ambitions.

The study uses a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are semi-structured interviews, analysis of official documents, archival sources and reports from the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence of India, the Ministry of Culture, U.S. State Department, Department of Defence publications, Congressional Research Service reports, data published by the Embassy of India, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, Ministry of Japan, and the Defence White Papers released by the Government of Australia.

Interviews constituted a vital component of the research, which were semi-structured in nature. They offered nuanced insights into the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. Both in-person and virtual interviews were conducted with distinguished scholars, diplomats, and retired defence officials to capture grounded perspectives on the region's evolving strategic landscape. Importantly, the interviews included experts, senior diplomats, retired naval officers and practitioners not only from India but also from the United States, the ASEAN countries, Australia and Japan. Thus, the interviews ensured a diverse and comprehensive understanding of regional viewpoints. The semi-structured expert interviews were chosen for their depth and ability to provide context-specific insights based on professional experience in policy formulation, international negotiations, and academic research on Indo-Pacific security dynamics. The interviews allowed for open-ended responses to questions about India's maritime strategy, its partnerships with the US, its engagement with ASEAN, and its ability to counter Chinese influence, including perspectives on BRI and the multilateral frameworks of Quad. A thematic analysis was undertaken to identify recurring concepts, points of divergence, and shared views across the expert responses. Recurring themes such as India's limited but aspirational security role, non-interventionist posture, Quad's role, unpredictability of US commitments, political nature of the BRI, ASEAN's fragmentation, and underutilisation of India's soft power were identified from the interview data.

Data interpretation was carried out through narrative synthesis, combining qualitative insights with quantitative trends to present a coherent picture of India's evolving role. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of both the strategic rhetoric and practical limitations shaping India's actions and external perceptions in the Indo-Pacific. Thematic coding was used to categorise data under six research dimensions: India as a net security provider, Quad's role, US engagement, China's influence through BRI, ASEAN's centrality and India's soft power. In addition to qualitative analysis, a quantitative element was incorporated

using a scoring framework applied to each expert's responses. Variables such as India's security role, Quad support, trust in US reliability, threat perception of BRI, ASEAN centrality, and soft power effectiveness were rated on a scale of 1 (strong/high) to 3 (weak/low). This scoring allowed for a comparative assessment of expert opinions, visually represented through a tabular format and a bar chart, to highlight areas of consensus and contention. The quantitative scores strengthen the validity of findings by illustrating patterns in perceived strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for India's regional role.

Secondary sources included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, think tank reports, and reputed news media. Content analysis was undertaken to identify recurring themes, narratives, and discursive patterns related to the Indo-Pacific construct and the strategic postures of key actors such as India, the United States, China, and ASEAN member states. Content analysis also facilitated the triangulation of insights gathered from interviews, enhancing the validity and depth of the research findings. Secondary sources are used to contextualise the findings of the interviews. This triangulation ensures that the analysis is not solely reliant on expert perceptions but is situated within broader scholarly and policy debates on Indo-Pacific security

### **Structure of the Study**

This study is organised through five chapters that reflect upon the research questions and answer them in the course of a logically sequenced, theory-informed, and empirically grounded analysis culminating in the principal findings and implications. The purpose and finding of the chapters are summarized below:

#### ***Chapter 1- Introduction***

The first chapter sets out the research problem, explains the significance of the Indo-Pacific construct, engaging in an extensive literature review. The chapter introduces the central concepts of the research and outlines the research questions, the focus of the study and the purpose of the research. It also focused on the various research methods or tools that were used during the course of the research. Explanations of various concepts used in the course of the research been provided in this chapter.

#### ***Chapter 2: Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: A Theoretical Understanding***

The second chapter operationalizes the concept of the Indo-Pacific, arguing that it is not merely a dominant understanding but a consciously constructed supra-region that redraws earlier mental maps and, thereby, reshapes the behaviour of nation-states. The terminology fuses the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a single strategic continuum that is held together by sea-lanes, chokepoints and archipelagic corridors, through which trade and commerce flows and also connects and divides countries and their interests. The region subsumes the Asia-Pacific terminology into a wider arena where economic vitality and maritime security are inseparable. The chapter's core findings explain the manner in which states imagine this geopolitical space, which is termed as mental maps. This cartographic understanding impacts upon their articulation of national interests and foreign policy choices while guiding budgets, military posture, coalitions and thresholds for risk. The United States' Indo-Pacific geopolitical understanding emphasises the Western Pacific, freedom of navigation and continuity of the American order. It builds on alliances and partnerships to maintain 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. New Delhi's prioritises the Indian Ocean, its island chains and energy routes, non-aggression, mutually prosperous peaceful order and ASEAN centrality. The chapter makes sense of regional dynamics by studying important geopolitical thinkers such as Ratzel, Kjellen, Mahan, Mackinder, Haushofer and Spykman. It also studies Organski's power transition model to understand the rivalry between the United States and China and illuminates the United States as the incumbent, China as a dissatisfied challenger and India as the pivotal balancer. From this, the chapter infers a condition of 'competitive coexistence': rivalry that falls short of war but is punctuated by recurrent tests of resolve which makes credible signalling, habits of cooperation and denial capabilities essential. The chapter reveals that material power alone cannot account for outcomes. Complex interdependence, institutions and norms condition behaviour by raising the costs of coercion and creating venues for agenda-setting and problem-solving. The chapter also registers the contest over narratives: proponents of the Indo-Pacific frame (Japan, the United States, India and many partners) embed openness, the rule of law and UNCLOS at sea, while critics cast the term as a discursive instrument of balancing. The chapter also presents a non-Western normative perspective that translates into India's preference for inclusive, law-anchored order which contradicts blunt realpolitik. These arguments yield a clear analytical position in the chapter, presenting Indo-Pacific as a complex yet networked geopolitical space.

### ***Chapter 3: Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific Region: Imperatives and Drivers***

Chapter three operationalizes the term ‘security’ and explains its meaning and significance in international relations. It illustrates that the concept has widened from a narrow, military-centric focus to a multi-sector agenda that includes and gives equal weightage to political, economic, societal and environmental risks. Classical and structural realists anchor security in anarchy, self-help and power. Alliances, deterrence and capability accumulation therefore, sit at the core of any security architecture. At the other end, liberal and neoliberal institutionalism prefers to assign important status to institutions, regimes and complex interdependence that can temper power politics by creating venues and incentives for rule-governed coordination and enhance security. The Copenhagen School explains how issues become ‘securitised’ through ‘speech acts’ that frame these issues as existential threats warranting exceptional measures. So once it is accepted that security is socially constructed, then it is pertinent to understand who defines threats, for whom, and with what consequences. The chapter adopts this widened lens to argue that contemporary security cannot be reduced to armies and borders: it also involves supply chains, standards, technology, global governance, climate and human security.

Then, the chapter defines ‘security architecture’ as the region’s evolving structures, mechanisms and norms for managing threats across multiple levels- individual, state, regional and global. Drawing upon Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), it contends that the Indo-Pacific is best read as interlocking sub-complexes of South, Southeast and Northeast Asia, which is now function increasingly as one ‘super-complex’ and articulated as such. This is due to the proximity, dense trade and cross-border problems that bind actors together in a manner that their securities cannot be analysed in isolation. What counts as amity or enmity among neighbours is not compartmentalized but over-lapping. The practical implication is that order-building in the Indo-Pacific is layered: U.S.-anchored bilateral alliances provide deterrent backbone; ASEAN-centred multilateralism offers convening legitimacy and norms; and minilaterals deliver targeted outcomes ranging from maritime domain awareness to cyber security and humanitarian aid. The region’s architecture is identified as a multiplex and networked rather than hierarchical, and that effectiveness will be judged by reliable provision of security-relevant goods.

The chapter maps the drivers that are hardening this architecture. China’s rise is the central driver and a source of ambiguity. It has joined institutions and trade regimes and behaved responsibly in some crises, yet it has also acted more assertively during others, especially at sea and along disputed borders. Such acts are aggravating its neighbours’ ambiguity

regarding its intent coupled with ‘grey-zone’ tactics that impose serious cumulative costs in the South China sea area. India’s rise has been steadier and it is more consequential in the Indian Ocean and increasingly engaged eastward, connecting the Southeast and Far East. The United States, has consolidated its Asian position by deepening alliances and elevating partnerships with India and others. The chapter’s key findings demonstrate that most regional actors hedge and balance against Beijing. So while Indo-Pacific security is widened and deepened including military balances, economic statecraft, finance, technology, climate and human security, the region operates as a super-complex within which regional frictions and great-power competition are inseparable, yielding a latticework architecture of alliances, ASEAN-centric forums and minilaterals, rather than a single hierarchy.

#### ***Chapter 4: India-US Relations and the Emerging Security Framework in the Indo-Pacific Region***

This chapter argues that India-US relations have become a central driving force of the Indo-Pacific security architecture, as regional issues have been progressively securitised. The chapter traces the historical trajectory of India-US relations and examines how historical legacies, the impact of China’s rise, and the formation and articulation of security imperatives and unilateral formats together shape the Indo-Pacific security dynamics.

The US approach has been to prioritize Indo-Pacific as revealed in successive National Security Strategy documents from 2017, which calls for intensifying strategic cooperation in the region. Washington recognises long-standing allies and explicitly courts India as a strategic partner and Quad member. The Trump administration’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) turns that priority into a policy idiom: a flexible (non-treaty) framework organised around four pillars—freedom, openness, partnership, and sovereignty backed by alliance modernisation, economic instruments, and a sustained forward presence at sea. The chapter highlights the quintessential role of Quad as the most promising vehicle to deliver security in the Indo-Pacific region. Its function is felt in maritime domain awareness, cyber security, laying of undersea cables, HADR, critical technologies etc. India’s approach in the Indo-Pacific is aimed towards building an inclusive order and is calibrated upon partnerships that protect autonomy while enabling capacity-building and rule-making. India’s Indo-Pacific

thinking aligns with principles of a free, open, inclusive, rules-based order, ASEAN centrality, and respect for UNCLOS and sovereignty.

The chapters finds that the positions of India and US converge on their individual goals and vision of the regional order which can be identified as openness, rule of law, freedom in the seas, and resistance to coercion. FOIP and IPOI has convergences when it comes to respecting rule of law and freedom of operation conforming the UNCLOS and on ASEAN centrality. Minilateralism is a very important function in the regional architecture and India and the USA have a robust and comprehensive role to play through Quad. Quad is the bridge between declaratory principles and deliverables. The Quad's widened agenda exemplifies how practical cooperation can proceed even when a formal alliance is neither feasible nor desired. However, the study has also revealed that US and India's mental map's differs as India anchors its policy more on the India Ocean while US prioritises the Western Pacific. India prefers inclusive regionalism while Washington is motivated towards defence-centric architecture. India focuses on strategic autonomy, multi-alignment and strategic de-hyphenation, aiming to become a net security provider in the region while Washington's capacities are much higher and its deliverables are larger than India. The result is a composite security architecture where US-anchored alliances deter and reassure; ASEAN-led bodies provide convening legitimacy and norms; minilaterals like the Quad deliver targeted public goods; and India-US strategic partnership stitches these layers together on maritime rules, economic transparency, technology collaboration, and crisis response.

### ***Chapter 5: Conclusion:***

This chapter's central finding is that the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a vast, consolidated, interconnected yet politically fragmented strategic space that now anchors twenty-first-century power politics. It subsumes the compartmentalised mental maps of East, Southeast and South Asia into a single, and sometimes conflicting theatre, which is connected by dense trade, finance and technology flows. Three interlocking features explain its geostrategic salience: it is the hub of global growth; it fuses geo-strategy with geo-economics by tying political security economic prosperity and it is the arena where rules and norms are continually contested and renegotiated. Security in this setting has widened beyond the military balance and deepened across sectors, so outcomes at sea increasingly shape outcomes on land and in the digital and economic domains.

Within this re-imagined region, the United States and India supply distinct but overlapping logics. Washington frames the Indo-Pacific through strategic competition with China and asserts its relevance as a resident power committed to lawful seas and regional prosperity. New Delhi advances an inclusive, capacity-building vision under SAGAR and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, emphasising peace through development, strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Southeast Asian states hedge, insisting on ASEAN centrality and inclusivity to avoid bloc politics. Normatively, Indo-Pacific works as more than coordination. It creates diffusion of power rather than singular dominance. The study underscores that power transition here is not a linear replacement. The United States remains the most consequential military actor and security guarantor but it must operate through a thicker web of alliances and partnerships. China's material rise and economic statecraft complicate calculations; and uncertainty is endemic as strategies are continually redrawn across sub-regions.

The emergent security architecture is layered and adaptive. At its core, bilateral alliances provide deterrent backbone and handle hard-security tasks. ASEAN-centred institutions furnish a diplomatic canopy for agenda-setting, confidence-building and crisis management; and minilaterals such as the Quad deliver functional cooperation on maritime domain awareness, critical technologies, resilient supply chains and HADR without the rigidity of a formal alliance. The study's interview-based evidence portrays India as a consequential but still capacity-constrained actor which is widely recognised as a first responder and reliable security shareholder in the Indian Ocean. However, it is not yet a comprehensive 'net security provider.' The Quad's deliberate ambiguity is a strength that enables flexible cooperation, but its credibility hinges on tangible deliverables and is contingent upon sustained US commitment. China's BRI remains the principal structural challenge: despite questions over financial sustainability, rapid delivery, risk tolerance and the layering of newer initiatives which sustain influence across the region. ASEAN retains centrality but political fragmentation and consensus rules limit decisive security action, which has pushed India to work bilaterally with key members such as Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. For India, accelerating maritime and economic capabilities, improving project delivery, institutionalising soft-power outreach and articulating a persuasive strategic narrative is of utmost priority. As to the security of the Indo-Pacific region, a robust, mutually workable India-US partnership remains pivotal to sustaining an inclusive, rules-aware, peaceful and prosperous order in the region.



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