

**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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By

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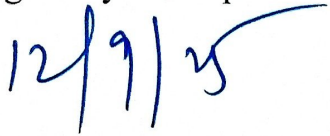
‘POLITICS OF SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA SINCE 2017’ submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Prof. Imankalyan Lahiri, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

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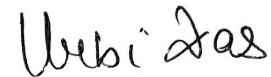


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Dedicated
To
My Parents

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ABSTRACT

Security is one of the main concepts in the study of international relations. The thesis “Politics of Security in the Indo-Pacific region: An Assessment of the Geopolitical Strategies of the United States and India since 2017” is an attempt to analyse the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. The study explains the rising significance of the region, along with the presence of many players that makes Indo-Pacific vulnerable to the changing dynamics of conflict and collaboration. The thesis traces the narratives surrounding the Indo-Pacific and the quest for securitizing the region. The focus of the research is to understand relations between India and the United States, and the emerging security architecture in the region, mapping how partnerships and rivalries are being configured in the Indo-Pacific. It explains key drivers and imperatives in the region- the complex equations among the Southeast Asian states, the role of China and its impact, and the emergence of the Quad. While highlighting upon the security perspectives of India and United States, the study analyses their role in shaping the security architecture of the region.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADMM- ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting

AEP- Act East Policy

AIIB- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

AOIP- ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

AOR- Area of Responsibility

AORA- Asia Open RAN Academy

APEC- Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ARF- ASEAN Regional Forum

ARIA- Asia Reassurance Initiative Act

ASEAN- Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASEM- Asia-Europe Meetings

AUKUS- Australia-United Kingdom-United States

AUSINDEX- Australia India Exercise

B2B- Business-to-Business

BRI- Belt and Road Initiative

BRICS- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

BUILD Act- Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act

CDRI- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

CECA- India-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Cooperation

CEPA- Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

CLMV- Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam

COMCASA- Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

COP- Conference of the Parties

COFA- Compacts of Free Association

CPTPP - Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

DCS- Direct Commercial Sales

DOD- Department of Defense

DPI- Digital Public Infrastructure

DPRK- Democratic People's Republic of Korea

DTTI – Defense Technology and Trade Initiative

EAMF- Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum

EAS- East Asia Summit

EDCA- Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement

EU- European Union

EV- Electronic Vehicles

FDI- Foreign Direct Investment

FMS- Foreign Military Sales

FOIP- Free and Open Indo-Pacific

FTA- Free Trade Agreements

HADR- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

HPV- Human papillomavirus.

IAEA- International Atomic Energy Agency.

ICD- Indian Ocean Dialogue

IDA- International Development Association

IDFC- International Development Finance Corporation

IFC-IOR- Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region

ILO- International Labour Organization

IMAC- Information Management and Analysis Centre

IMEC- India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

IMF- International Monetary Fund

INDOPACOM- Indo-Pacific Command

IN-Indian Navy

IOD- Indian Ocean Dialogue

IORA- Indian Ocean Rim Association

IPD- Indo-Pacific Division

IPEF- Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

IPMDA- Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness

IPOI- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative

ITEWC- Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre

JASDF- Japan Air Self-Defense Force

JGSDF- Japan Ground Self-Defense Force

JIMEX- Japan-India Maritime Exercise

JMSDF- Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force

JWC- Joint Working Group

JWG-DETC- Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation

LEMOA- Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

MAITRI- Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific

MAKV- Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047

MDA- Maritime Domain Awareness

MDB- Mission Based Deployment

MGC- Mekong-Ganga Cooperation

MILAN - Multilateral Naval Exercise.

MOOTW- Military Operations Other Than War

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organizations

NCQG- New Collective Quantified Goal

NDA- National Democratic Alliance

NDB- New Development Bank

NDC- Nationally Determined Contribution

NORTHCOM- U.S. Northern Command

NPT- Non-Proliferation Treaty

NSS- National Security Strategy

ODA - Official Development Assistance

PDF- Project Development Fund

PDI- Pacific Deterrence Initiative

PLA- People's Liberation Army

PRC- People's Republic of China

Q-CHAMP- Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package

QUAD- Quadrilateral Framework/ Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

QUIN- Quad Investors' Network

RAA- Reciprocal Access Agreement

RAN- Radio Access Network

RCEP- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

R&D- Research and Development

RIMPAC- Rim of the Pacific Exercise

ROK- Republic of Korea

RSTP- Regional Tsunami Service Provider

SAGAR- Security and Growth for All in the Region

SDG- Sustainable Development Goals

TTX- Table Top Exercise

UAS- Unmanned Aerial System

UN- United Nations

UNCLOS- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNDP- United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFCCC- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

UNGA- United National General Assembly

UNOCHA- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UPA- United Progressive Alliance

US- United States

USA- United States of America

USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WHO- World Health Organization

WTO- World Trade Organization

YSEALI - Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Indo-Pacific has gained prominence in the geopolitical calculations of nation-states in the 21st century. It is the hub of economic, diplomatic, military, environment and cultural activities. This is due to the rising economic significance of Asia and consequently the shift in the epicentre of power from the West to the East. It is an expansive maritime region covering the east coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean to the western and central Pacific Ocean. It includes strategic sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, the South China Sea, and the western Pacific, and economically and strategically significant countries such as India, China, Japan, Australia and the presence of the United States of America. It represents an integrated view encompassing the Indian and the Pacific Ocean into a single strategic space. Developments in the region carry huge potential to determine some of the most prominent issues in international relations- such as war and peace, rival military build-ups, the power of economic forces, and information, diplomatic manoeuvres, which impact upon the political and strategic calculations of nation-states.

The earliest usage of this term can be traced back to Karl Haushofer, a German geographer in the 1920s, who spoke of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ as a geopolitical space influenced by maritime dynamics. In contemporary international politics, the re-emergence of the term is often credited to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who in his 2007 speech to the Indian Parliament introduced the idea of a ‘Confluence of the two seas’¹, referring to the Indian and Pacific Oceans as one connected maritime zone. The United States of America has adopted the term in its National Security Strategy (NSS), 2017 under President Donald Trump, and this marked a key geo-strategic shift of US re-positioning itself in the region, replacing the older ‘Asia-Pacific’ framework with ‘Indo-Pacific,’ and signalling a greater maritime-focused and India-inclusive regional strategy.

¹ Abe, Shinzo. “Confluence of the Two Seas.” Speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

The significance of the Indo-Pacific is in the context of great power competition, concerns over maritime security and economic connectivity, and efforts towards regional order building with India playing a central role in shaping the region. For India, the Indo-Pacific is a gateway to securing economic interest and strategic rise, and reinforce its identity as a civilizational and maritime power.

One of the primary drivers of security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region is China's rising power, which, combined with increasing anxieties over maritime security have led to a significant shift and diffusion in the regional balance of power. There is concern over conflicting views and geopolitical narratives regarding the nomenclature and this has led to politicizing Indo-Pacific as a theatre of power play in the present century. The security challenges in the Indo-Pacific have led to the emergence of minilateralism, serving as a key indicator of efforts to securitize the region.

For India, the growing Chinese presence carries far-reaching implications, especially China's assertive behaviour and expanding influence in India's strategic periphery that could potentially undermine efforts to establish a stable and inclusive regional security framework. It is therefore imperative for India to comprehend and respond to the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the region. As a responsible power, India is increasingly seen as capable of taking on a leadership role in shaping the region's future within a rules-based global order.

This study investigates the evolution of Indo-Pacific as not just a geographic space but a strategic theatre, a locus of geopolitical contestation; where ideas of minilateralism, inclusiveness, and maritime freedom are being constantly tested, representing the most glaring picture of the politics of security. The study is an assessment of the approaches undertaken by the United States of America and India in the Indo-Pacific region about the how the dynamics have impacted upon the geopolitics of the region. It investigates their vision in the region, examining the convergences, challenges and whether such integration can build a rule-based security architecture in the region. This dissertation intends to contribute meaningfully to the discourses on Indo-Pacific security and the role of the United States and India in offering a pragmatic yet principled roadmap for peace, stability and prosperity of the region

Literature Review

The study of geopolitics is essentially a multi-disciplinary one which uses methods and knowledge drawn from geography, topography, oceanography, political science, economic, strategic studies, demography and geology, to explain complex phenomenon that characterize international relations. Charles B. Hagan in his article titled *Geopolitics* traces the relationship between geography and politics and ascertains the germination from the writings of Bodin, Montesquieu and Ritter to the concept of ‘political geography’ in Friedrich Ratzel’s claim that the state is an organic community that is bound to soil and ‘space’ (Raum). His scheme of understanding geopolitics is essentially attached to expansion of the space of as nation-states, according to Ratzel is a fragment of human community that is organized and attached to a piece of soil. This essentially calls forth the organic theory of state and its existence based on the territory attached to it. Ratzel prefers to call this ‘Raum’, that is, the existence and growth of a nation-state is quintessentially contingent upon the space or ‘Raum ’which is the main source of its political life, whereas the frontier forms the peripheral organs. Again, the specific terminology of ‘geopolitics’ is attributed to Rudolf Kjellén defining state as a living organism with territorial, economic, governmental, demographic and societal dimensions. He understands domestic and foreign policy as complementary and implying continuous expansion of the state to secure space that is linked to its growth.²

The state centric notion of understanding geopolitics brings us to the concept of power, which is intrinsic to the realist school of thought. Power here suggests not only military prowess and strategic assets but in the contemporary study of international politics the notion of power includes economic and well as control over strategic resources. In the course of time, the state centric notion of security has given way to understanding security from a broader perspective.

Ashok Kapur in understanding the *Geopolitics and the Indo-Pacific Region*³ makes a comparison between Indo-Pacific and Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and South America and ascertains that the Indo-Pacific region’s unique significance is attributed the role of the actors that are constantly setting new norms and frameworks that are affecting the entire global order. Several indicators have been identified such as trade and economic exchanges amounting to trillions of dollars, the rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) which has implications

² Hagan, Charles B. “Geopolitics.” *The Journal of Politics* 4, no. 4 (1942): 478–490. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2125653>.

³ Kapur, Ashok. *Geopolitics and the Indo-Pacific Region*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2024.

both for the region and at the global level, the presence of five nuclear powers- PRC, North Korea, India, Pakistan and Iran. Along with this, the region has a wide network of illicit and nuclear trade, constantly shifting alignments and diplomatic engagements that transcend older sub-regional boundaries. Increasingly, the countries across the vast territorial and maritime expanse across South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Gulf, and the Indian Ocean littoral are forging interlinked partnerships. Reflecting upon the change in the analysis of global politics, the region marks the end of Cold-war style geopolitics, when international relations were largely defined by state actors such as the United States, the Soviet Union, and to some extent China, and a few regional players, and interpreted through the balance of power framework. During the Cold war strategic patterns were then studied in discrete geo-political categories such as South Asia from Pakistan to Bangladesh; Southeast Asia from Myanmar to the Philippines; East Asia comprising China, Japan, and the Koreas, and the Pacific Ocean dominated by the United States, Australia, and Western allies. During that time, the Indian Ocean was ordained a relatively marginal status to global and regional competition, and most importantly, the Pacific and Indian Oceans were treated as distinct theatres of naval, commercial, and diplomatic activity. Moreover, non-state actors including Islamist movements, jihadist groups, civil society organizations, and even socio-cultural networks across South and Southeast Asia that remained peripheral in the study of mainstream international relations analysis. In contrast to this, there has been a great shift in this sort of compartmentalized understanding and strategic patterns of geographic continuity of the region is studied the Indo-Pacific geopolitical coinage of the 21st century, along with the prominent role of non-state forces, interacting with state-centric strategies and further complicating the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a significant strategic concept in contemporary international relations, particularly in response to the shifting balance of power and the rise of China. G.V.C. Naidu in *'Indo-Pacific' as a New Template of Analysis*⁴ offer an insightful analyses of the conceptual evolution, strategic utility, and geopolitical implications of the idea and narrative pertaining to the Indo-Pacific. His article evaluates the construction of the terminology of Indo-Pacific, where he finds that the Indo-Pacific nomenclature is not merely a geographic expression but has close connection with strategy articulation. It is driven by the urgency of the nation-states to respond to a rising China in economic and military terms and, its

⁴ G. V. C. Naidu "Indo-Pacific Construct: Emerging Geopolitical and Strategic Dimensions." *Debate: Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2021): 21–34.

consequential maritime assertiveness. The geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific terminology therefore integrates the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific into a single strategic continuum, thereby increasing the horizon of regional politics beyond East Asian confines. Naidu underscores that America, Japan, India, and Australia are the main actors in the region that tend to promote the Indo-Pacific framework, which reflects their interest in maintaining a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based regional order. In connection to this they have created the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), a minilateral approach within the broader Indo-Pacific construct. The framing of Quad as a regional security minilateral arrangement offers a flexible cooperation among like-minded democracies devoid of any rigidities that are attached to formal alliances. This can suggest that while the Indo-Pacific narrative building is still evolving, it represents a novel dimension in regional security perspectives and is moving towards greater strategic coordination manifested in engagement in maritime governance, infrastructure connectivity, and supply chain resilience.

Along the same line Sanjay Singh in *Indo-Pacific: A Construct for Peace and Stability*⁵, explores the evolution of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical and strategic idea shaped by emerging power rivalries and shifting security dynamics. His paper argues that the Indo-Pacific is not just a spatial realignment of two oceanic region- the Indian and Pacific Oceans- but a strategic framework born out of concerns over PRC's expanding maritime influence. Another significant factor along with China's rise has been the relative decline of American influence in the region. This has led to the need for a new balance of power in Asia, if not a power vacuum. He resonates Naidu's arguments is reinterring that the Indo-Pacific construct brings together actors with differential powers and common interests such as the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. These countries despite having differing threat perceptions share a common interest in maintaining free, open, and rules-based regional order. Importantly, the article underscores the normative character of Indo-Pacific idea as an attempt to reframe regional diplomacy around shared principles of sovereignty, freedom of navigation, rule of law. The Quad is a visible manifestation of this emerging consensus, serving as a flexible mechanism for coordinating maritime security, connectivity, and strategic dialogues and information sharing. While recognising ASEAN's centrality and inclusivity, it also hints at the its institutional dilemma in dealing with strategic challenges posed by rivalries in the region

⁵ Singh, Sanjay. "Indo-Pacific: A Construct for Peace and Stability". *Debate: Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2021): 35-45.

and here lies the significance of Quad. Indo-Pacific, therefore becomes a contested construct, reflecting a shift away from a unipolar system towards new geopolitical realignments on the one hand and on the other a broader effort to institutionalise a regional order in response to China's undemocratic activities.

A central theme brought out in these writings pertaining to China's rise and perspectives in the Indo-Pacific, is that the Indo-Pacific concept seeks to counterbalance China's hegemonic ambitions. This can be done at multiple levels and preferably the countries prefer a mix of strategic partnerships, economic cooperation, sovereign rights and normative promotion of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and maritime freedom. However, there is lack of convergences among participating states in their perceptions and goals.

Echoing the same apprehensions regarding China's rise, John Mearsheimer in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*⁶ warned against China's rise which would not be peaceful. He argued that conflict between status-quo powers and revisionist states is ultimately unavoidable. While a full-scale military confrontation has not occurred, an indirect strategic rivalry between the United States and China has already begun, which is particularly evident in the Indo-Pacific region. This strategic contest is unfolding not only in military terms but also in the form of a trade war, with both countries imposing escalating tariffs on each other's goods. Additionally, major littoral powers in the region are forging new alliances, leading to evolving power equations and intensified geopolitical competition across the Indo-Pacific.

China's evolving role in the Indo-Pacific has been dealt by Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah in their edited volume *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations*⁷. They point out that Beijing has situated itself as a focal point of contemporary geopolitics, within this contested regional framework. PRC is uncomfortable and sceptical regarding the terminology Indo-Pacific and prefers to use the term "Asia-Pacific". The geopolitical nomenclature building is akin to and consistent with its historical narratives and strategic preferences. However, it is interesting to note that in spite of its discomfort with the Indo-Pacific discourse, Beijing cannot avoid engagement with this regional construct because of its deepening economic, diplomatic,

⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

⁷ Singh, Swaran, and Reena Marwah, eds. *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations*. Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023

and security entanglements in the region. China's rise in the Indo-Pacific has prompted the other countries to rethink their ties and strategies, since China's activities implies reshaping of regional security and affecting the global order. This happens since the rise is not viewed as peaceful but as a challenge to U.S.-led norms and institutions. Again, China is keen on advancing its own interpretation of a multipolar world with China as its central fundamental core. China's view of the Indo-Pacific architecture is through the lens of strategic rivalry with the United States and its allies. It contests the interests of other powers such as India, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN. Such an aim of China can be observed through initiatives such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that sought to shape regional narratives through its own economic outreach and aims to bind countries into networks of infrastructure, trade, and connectivity that reinforce Chinese influence. Yet, initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Dialogue are interpreted by Beijing as Beijing as attempts at containment, framing the Indo-Pacific as a theatre of competition rather than cooperation. This can be assessed as a duality reflects China's dilemma as it cannot fully reject the Indo-Pacific discourse, yet it seeks to delegitimise it while simultaneously offering alternative visions. This duality is also reflected in terms of its foreign policy. China's approach towards the region is strategic mix of assertiveness and pragmatism. On one hand, Beijing demonstrates military modernisation, coercive grey-zone tactics, and expansive maritime claims, especially in the South China Sea. On the other hand, it pursues multilateral engagement with some of the important nation-states using multilateral organizations like the ASEAN and other regional forums, emphasising economic cooperation and non-interference. This two-pronged approach allows China to project both hard and soft power, but it also generates mistrust among regional actors, many of whom are wary of Chinese dominance, as they continue to remain economically dependent on China and China continues to manoeuvre their behaviour. So a complex scenario emerges as one cannot comprehend China in either purely antagonistic or cooperative terms. PRC is undoubtedly the engine of economic prosperity and connectivity but also a big reason for strategic uncertainty. So, the resulting strategic landscape is a complex competitive coexistence where Beijing's assertive strategies are continuously juxtaposed against the balancing efforts of other actors, the outcome of which will be contingent upon China's intersecting ambitions with other regional stakeholders and the ability of Indo-Pacific states to manage competition without escalation

Writing on India-China relations, Harsh Pant in *The Growing Complexity of Sino-Indian Ties*⁸, observes that the relations between the two Asian giants is fraught with a deep sense of security dilemma. Even as their economic interdependence is on the rise, China's rapid growth in military power both on land and at the sea has sharpened India's sense of vulnerability leading to strategic competition. Official sources from India confirm that China can now surge more than 10,000 troops across the border in weeks which can lead to altering the correlations of forces given PRC prior intrusive history and past incidents along the line of control. In addition to this, PRC's change in maritime posture from coastal defence to maritime deployment and power projection across the entire Indian Ocean, especially closer to the Malacca chokepoint and India's maritime neighbourhood, signals Beijing's intent to intimate New Delhi both on land and at sea. This complements the wider 'string of pearls' narrative of encircling India through a lattice of ports, access facilities and dual use arrangements from the development of Gwadar port in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and up-gradation of facilities around the Coco Islands. All these activities and collectively expand Chinese maritime prowess along key sea routes from the Gulf to East Asia. So in the regional cartography of the Indo-Pacific, India faces a two-front pressure- one from the land, which is militarized China connectivity across the Himalayan crest; and on the other hand growing Chinese naval and commercial footprint across the Indian Ocean region. A regional dis-balance in continuously fostered by PRC's simultaneous continental and maritime push. He claims though geography favours India in the Indian Ocean, but accelerating Chinese assertive activities along with region threaten India's sea lanes and therefore prescribes for widening regional coordination along with modernizing India's defence build-ups.

While trying to understand US perspectives towards China, Harry Harding in *American Visions of the Future of U.S.-China Relations: Competition, Cooperation, and Conflict*⁹, notes that American strategy has often followed a dual track diplomacy by trying to integrate China into the global economy and institutions on the one hand that is aimed to socialize China as a responsible participant in the existing order. On the other, hedging against it in Asia by trying to balance rising China through alliances building, forward military presence, and technology.

⁸ Pant, Harsh V. *The Growing Complexity of Sino-Indian Ties*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2014. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11423>

⁹ Harding, Harry. "American Visions of the Future of U.S.-China Relations: Competition, Cooperation, and Conflict." In *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, Edited by David Shambaugh, 389-402. UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc

This is intended to deter PRC's coercive activities and prevent any bid for regional dominance. Such a dual policy is in-lieu of the changing regional dynamics as US desegregates its objectives into four interacting goals- security, economic, political and human rights and global governance. Washington aims to maintain a favourable strategic balance in the Western Pacific, reassuring allies, and keeping flashpoints especially Taiwan, the South and East China Seas, and the Korean Peninsula and its force posturing is intended to inhibiting any war. Economically, the United States emphasizes deep interdependence along with seeking reciprocity in market access, intellectual property protection, and fair rules for trade and investment, aimed to retaining US position as a world economy. On matters concerning political and human rights, the United States continues to press for liberal norms- liberal internationalism and institution building without letting them eclipse their security and economic priorities. Finally, in the realm of global governance, Washington wants Beijing to share the burden of international non-proliferation regime, climate governance within the existing US centred institutions rather than building a parallel one that in the long run might challenge the USA's global role. Such blending of strategies is a product of the shift in power dynamics, regional statuesque, inducing American policy-making to frame policies encompassing all directions. However, such goals are difficult targets since friction in policy arena has far reaching consequences in another realm. The consequent path of US-China trajectory is far from being linear and is regarded by Harding as 'competitive coexistence', a scenario where there is persistent rivalry bounded by nuclear deterrence, cartographic compulsions, geopolitics, and economic costs. As a way out from this, US should align with its allies in the Indo-Pacific, maintain its military posture that would be optimized for denial rather than being offensive and employ economic statecraft as and well required, along with continuing with diplomatic maneauvors for incremental gains. It must be a multiple edged strategy of shaping where it can, hedging where it must and keeping all channels of bargaining open so that rivalry in the region do not default into a crisis.

While delving into the underlining reasons behind the lack of warmth in US- China Stephen Walt in *Rising Powers and the Risks of War: A Realist View of Sino-American Relations*¹⁰, uses a realist baseline for his understanding stating that a new-comer's (in this case China)

¹⁰ Walt, Stephen M. "Rising Powers and the Risks of War: A Realist View of Sino-American Relations." In *Will China's Rise Be Peaceful? Security, Stability, and Legitimacy*, edited by Asle Toje, 13–28. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018

ascendance towards parity with the superpower in an anarchical international system which is fraught with uncertainty, pusher each of the contending powers into a shaper competition. This cannot be assessed though virtue or vice but the issues pertain to the very structural dynamics of international politics. Walt points out two specific structural features that complicate this situation. One is geography- the lies in the expansive breadth of the Indo-Pacific which makes it difficult, if not impossible for sustained power projection of any one power, also making it virtually impossible for conquest. This vulnerability has been magnified by the presence of nuclear weapons that complicate the situation, making vulnerabilities mutual and unacceptable cost to all nations, in case of any all-out war. Despite this, it is this same condition that allow both the countries- PRC and USA to engage in limited skirmishes such as limited encounters at sea and in the air, alliance entanglements, threat and misperceptions. In the case of economics and ideology, Walt recasts his logic of understanding through the lens of realism, stating that trade and financial ties accentuate the pace of conflict. Though each of the countries have to pay a heavy price in case of a conflict, this do not discount the logic of security priorities when core interests clash. The economic interdependence can turn into political and strategic leverage such as sanctions, export controls, and supply-chain pressures, thereby intensifying the conflict rather than dissolving rivalry. Similarly, the type of regime of political values simply shape rhetoric and suspicions, as calculations remain mostly concerned with relative capabilities and long term intentions. So as PRC's economic strength and military might rises, it is the structural conditions make it interpret as a threat to each other. Consequently, both of these countries lay overt emphasis on alliance building, networking for support, modernizing their military forces and increasing forward deployment. So, it is this very structure or system that discourages a total war, leaves ample space for both PRC and USA to engage in short military competitions. In other words, the resulting scenario is that of rivalry, which though is short of war and all out conflict, but makes uncertainties, risks and friction a durable and regular feature in the Indo-Pacific landscape. Since the structure makes rivalry an inescapable reality, US-China relations can be at best described as 'managed competition' that is if they grudgingly accept limits of operations and rules of ground to what in reality is actually a 'competitive coexistence' that is reflective of sustained arms racing, tighter alliance politics, and periodic crises constrained by geography, nuclear risks, and prudence.

A different and positive trajectory in US-India-China relations is drawn by Antara Ghosal Singh in *India, China and the US: Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific*¹¹ While exploring the evolving dynamics among the three key powers in the Indo-Pacific region, she proposes a shift away from the realist views of analysing their relations in a purely competitive manner to a more cooperative constructivist framework. She challenges C. Raja Mohan's metaphor of *Samudra Manthan*, which harps upon strategic rivalry in the region and the consequential tale of conflict, suggesting the immense possibilities of cooperation and collaboration for mutual benefit. She argues that instead of highlighting the tensions, one should assess the emerging cooperative trends among India, China, and the US, which she assesses as important factors leading towards a gradual convergence of strategic visions. Moving forward the same logic can be applied to the Indo-Pacific discourse, due to their economic prosperity, military strength, and their historical roles in shaping the region's geopolitics. While some studies do repudiate the idea of any converging strategic triangle due to power asymmetries, Singh argues that the trilateral interactions are increasingly defining the nature and trajectory of Asian security dynamics. The paper then discusses three divergent schools of thought that aid scenario building in the Indo-Pacific- the American view which positions the US as a pivot managing Sino-Indian competition; the Indian view which sees New Delhi as a hesitant balancer torn between strategic autonomy and alignment; and the PRC whose views warn against assuming a natural Indo-US alliance, assuming Beijing as the stabilising actor. Using a constructivist theoretical paradigm and suggesting that the international system is malleable and shaped by state interaction, she explains in her writings that the three powers are showing signs of shift in their behaviour- that is, from competition to cooperation, especially in maritime domains. Her view of China's security doctrine under President Xi Jinping, such as initiatives like the Belt and Road and the Maritime Silk Road, is comprehensive and towards sustainable security, regional cooperation, and mutual development through. India's SAGAR vision similarly emphasises shared security and prosperity in the Indian Ocean, promoting inclusive maritime collaboration. Also the United States of America advocates a 'shared regional architecture,' supporting inclusive economic growth and rule-based order while maintaining strategic presence. The article remarks that bilateral cooperation further substantiates these convergences. India and China have begun modest naval cooperation and defence exchanges. India and the US, have levelled up their defence partnership, have progressed with agreements

¹¹ Singh, Antara Ghosal. 2016. "India, China and the US: Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific." *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 12 (2): 161–76. doi:10.1080/19480881.2016.1226752.

like Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and have enhanced their joint naval exercises such as MALABAR. The US and China, despite tensions, have expanded economic, military-to-military confidence-building measures and increased cooperation in non-traditional security areas such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief that make a collaborative scenario between these three giants in the Indo-Pacific a plausible possibility. As a way forward to this, the paper calls for institutionalising a China-India-US trilateral dialogue to address the shared dimensions of their relations such as transnational challenges like maritime security, climate change, terrorism, and disaster response. Drawing parallels with existing trilateral formats and the emerging networked security architecture in Asia, the article is firm in its claims that such a trilateral framework could foster strategic trust and regional stability, transforming perceived rivalries into constructive partnerships.

Dattesh D. Parulekar¹² while decoding the nature and scope of the ‘sovereign strategic networks’ that are increasingly being deployed in the Indo-Pacific as mechanisms to respond and contest China’s rapid rise, situates China’s ascendance and the manifesting regional anxiety due to the transformation of the economic rise into military assertiveness and political influence, making its presence felt across the Indo-Pacific. Here also, the author cites examples from the expansion of Chinese political clout and militarization of the South China Sea, the deployment of grey-zone tactics, and projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)- all these pointing to its ambition to reshape the regional order. This very ambition has created apprehensions among the neighbours and major powers, leading them to seek alternative frameworks of cooperation that do not mirror rigid Cold War alliances. In this respect, sovereign strategic networks is conceptualized as pragmatic tools to respond to Chinese assertiveness without being bound by the exclusivity of military pacts. These sovereign strategic networks are flexible, interest-driven, and issue-based coalition mechanisms that allow states to preserve autonomy while engaging in cooperative frameworks. It is very different from traditional alliance mechanism and is a forward looking evolutionary diplomatic and security architecture in the region. Undoubtedly, China is the prime factor for the development of such strategic networks which has led to collective yet fragmented responses

¹² Parulekar, Dattesh D. “Decoding ‘Sovereign Strategic Networks’ in the Indo-Pacific: Contesting China’s ‘Ascendent-Rise.’” In *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations*, edited by Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah, 13–28. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023

from other seeking that seek to balance Beijing's ambitions. The Quad is regarded as one such initiatives towards sovereign strategic networks that remain flexible and offers a broad range of cooperative activities among the four members. India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), Japan's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), and Australia's advocacy for ASEAN centrality, ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific- all these are carefully driven frameworks that avoids any offensive claims against China. Again, the significance of middle powers are visible in these mechanisms such as AOIP and IPOI that avoid being labelled as hegemonic and therefore plays a greater role in building inclusive and multi-layered frameworks that attract a broader coalition of states.

Analysing the politics of security is one of the central task of this thesis. The understanding of security and security complex is an essential task of this dissertation. The research draws significantly upon the Copenhagen school's security studies and works of Barry Buzan has been cited throughout including Ole Weaver, Jaap de Wilde and Amitav Acharya's works on understanding security complexes. Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver work on *Security: A new Framework of Analysis* and *People, States and Fear, The National Security Problem in International Relations*, highlights upon the broader framework of understanding security from a neorealist to the social and economic aspects of security to a globalist and regional theoretical perspective, thus making it more holistic in nature.

Again, Barry Buzan's, *The South Asian Security Complex in a Decentring World Order: Reconsidering Regions and Powers Ten Years On*¹³ decodes the concept of South Asian Security Complex is rooted in the broader theoretical framework of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Arguing from a premise that security dynamics are often regionally concentrated, and shaped greatly by interrelations among neighbouring states than by global systemic factors. He cites examples from the South Asia context where India-Pakistan rivalry dominates a tightly interlinked regional security, which fundamentally structures the security perceptions and policies of the region's states. Buzan opines that despite India's potential to lead a cooperative regional security framework, its bilateral disputes and the absence of robust multilateral institutions have prevented the emergence of a stable security architecture in South Asia.

¹³ Barry Buzan, "The South Asian Security Complex in a Decentring World Order: Reconsidering Regions and Powers Ten Years On," *International Studies* 48, no. 1 (2011): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002088171204800101>.

Amitav Acharya's *The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics*¹⁴ and *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*¹⁵ provide a nuanced analysis of Asia-Pacific regionalism and its manifestation to global power shifts. Such a shift is situated in the rise of China, leading to the strategic recalibrations of the United States of America, and interestingly the fluidity of all the regional entanglements. The central theme of the article revolves around the notion that the emerging regional architecture is not hierarchical or it is being determined or dominated by any single power, but rather it is characterised by what is called 'multiplexity'- which is a coexistence of multiple institutions, leading to frameworks, and competing power centres contributing to the formation and articulation of the regional order. Acharya identifies three defining features of this emerging architecture. First, it is inclusive and open-ended, thereby allowing participation from both regional and extra-regional actors. The open-endedness ensures that platforms like ASEAN, and ASEAN-led mechanism such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has a role to play and therefore serve as a constructive forum for dialogue and discussion rather than exclusion. Arguably, ASEAN, China, Japan, Australia-each of these nations play a unique role in the evolving security architecture and economic dynamics in this region.

Secondly, the security architecture in the region is informal and consensus-based, reflecting Asia's political values that prefers gradualism and non-confrontational diplomacy. The ARF, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus, and the East Asia Summit (EAS) emerge as crucial multilateral platforms where the ASEAN plays a mediatory role, ensuring stability and fostering regional cooperation, contributing to regional framing. Third, it is normatively driven, with ASEAN favouring norms such as non-interference, sovereignty, and consensus- shaping the agenda and process. A key argument here is that ASEAN remains central to any regional security architecture building despite its growing strategic tensions and institutional overlaps. Its ability to convene dialogue and maintain neutrality, added to its geographical position has enabled it to retain an important role. However, Acharya recognises the limitations of ASEAN centrality, especially with regard to managing major power rivalries in the region and providing collective responses to hard security challenges. The work further

¹⁴ Acharya, Amitav. "The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics." *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (July 2007): 629–652. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2008.0000>

¹⁵ Acharya, Amitav. *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014.

explores the idea of ‘Asia-Pacific regionalism without regionalism’, a very interesting phrase where the architecture exists more in practice than in formal structure, and there the cooperative mechanism is driven by strategic convergences rather than binding rules or treaties. The article is also critical to notions of regional order imposed from the outside, advocating for a region-led and normatively grounded framework emanating from the regional stakeholders that respects diversity and sovereignty. Again, the regional architecture is also influenced by minilateral groupings such as the Quad and trilateral engagements, which complements multilateralism. These developments reflect the emerging pragmatic response to the rise of China and also reflects the limits of consensus-based institutions. The article very aptly hint at the emerging regional architecture stating it to be a fluid, pluralistic, and norm-driven one where the order is shaped by power politics at one end and shared norms at another. Rather than seeking a fixed hierarchy, the article situates the order in it emphasis on the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and inclusive dialogue, where ASEAN is given a central role but not an exclusive one. The significance of the article also lies in the analytical framework that offers an alternative to Western-centric, balance-of-power models, and highlights upon the value of Asian institutional and normative traditions in managing regional order.

While investigating the power play in the Indo-Pacific region, the dissertations delves into the Power transition theory developed by A.F.K. Organski in his *World Politics* and further refined by Jacek Kugler. Power Transition is essentially is a structural and dynamic approach to the study of international relations that scripts the nature of world politics in terms of a hierarchical order. It elaborates upon the varying degree to cooperation and competition and the reasons and possibilities of great power shifts in the international relations. Power transition propose that major global conflicts are most likely to occur when a rising power approaches parity with the dominant power in the international system. The novelty of the theoretical premise lies in its challenge to realism’s static assumptions of the balance of power approach that narrates peace as a likely outcome of an international situation of a clearly existing power hierarchy. According to this notion, peace becomes threatened only during the episodes of transition, particularly with the rise of a dissatisfied challenger. Kugler and Organski¹⁶ in *The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation* asset that war can never be an inevitable outcome of shifting power dynamics but is highly situated in a condition where rising

¹⁶ Jacek Kugler and A. F. K. Organski, “The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation,” in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 171–194.

power or the challenger is highly unsatisfied with the existing status quo and therefore engages in a project or aims to restructure the global order in its favour. According to them, the dominant power (hegemon) seeks to maintain the status quo, whereas a challenger, if dissatisfied, is more likely to initiate conflict to revise existing rules and institutions. This understanding makes the dynamics among the dominant and challenger critical and it is contingent upon the timing of the parity, which is to say that conflicts, escalation and war tends to erupt not when a challenger is weak in terms of power and capacity, but when it is nearly equal in strength, power and capacity to the dominant state in question.

Further building upon these ideas, David Lai in his 2011 book *The United States and China in Power Transition*¹⁷ gives the most eloquent exposition of the how the Power Transition Theory can offer the most magnificent lens and compelling logic to understand, decode and predict the strategic rivalry between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.

Lai applies Organski's theoretical framework to the contemporary U.S.-China relations, identifying China as the potential contender having near parity with the United States and therefore the West has labelled it as a revisionist power. Beijing's rise has unnerved the US policy makers, though they had initially hoped to integrate China in their world view. PRC's partial integration generated both hopes and fears in the Western world. The duality of being labelled as an economic insider but a political outsider is triggering such threat perceptions which is shaping US- China relations in the region. The initial hope to integrate China into the US- centric world order received a backlash with the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 and the reaffirmation of communist one party rule in Beijing, leading to a permanency of the politico-ideological divide. Along the same time, Deng Xiaoping's *tao guang yang hui* strategy of hiding capabilities and biding time and PRC's economic take-off led to this sharper divide as Western commentators and analysts such as Bernstein and Munro depicted China as an ambitious, dissatisfied power that is destined to dominate Asia and consequently its clash with the United States is inevitable. Mearsheimer's offensive realism found relevance in offering a structural explanation to this scenario and he expressed that it is natural and inevitable for great powers to seek regional hegemony, and that a rising China would definitely be in a quest to expel the United States of America from Asia. To add to such a pessimistic competition driven scenario-building, Huntington added a civilizational fervour, arguing that China's economic success to be fuelling cultural self-confidence and a therefore an eventual challenge to Western

¹⁷ David Lai, *The United States and China in Power Transition* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011),

dominance, which in a broader sense is ‘West versus the rest’ conflict. Together, these perspectives popularised the ‘China threat’ in the discourses in policy, media, and academic circles. Lai, however contends that the goal of the PRC, as it appears to him is not to confront the US power in a direct manner. But its accelerating economic and military strength coupled with its strategic ambitions especially in the Indo-Pacific region is definitely marker of China emerging fast as a challenger state. Though, he suggests that global interdependence and institutional entanglement may moderate the likelihood of direct military confrontation but that definitely does not discount China as a challenger nation to the United States in the region. Perceptions and signalling play a very important role in this Indo-Pacific power transition as the way the dominant power and challenger nation perceive and interpret each other’s actions and reactions and either led to exacerbating conflicts or may alleviate tensions. For example- U.S. containment policies or alliance formations (like the Quad), if perceived by China in a negative manner or against it may harden China’s sense of insecurity. In the same manner, Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea may intensify threat perceptions in Washington. In both the cases, escalation and de-escalation is a factorial of political will and mutual perception. A significant contribution of David Lai is the comprehensive-ness of the application of Power Transition Theory in the Indo-Pacific regional context as well as global, reflecting upon the growth of China’s influence politically, economically and militarily and the reaction of US and other stakeholders such as India, Japan, ASEAN in the Power-Transition paradigm of major power, challenger, middle-level and lower-level players.

Together, both works reinforce the importance of status quo satisfaction in managing peaceful transitions. While Organski and Kugler provide the structural basis for understanding power shifts and potential conflict, Lai brings a more contemporary and nuanced perspective, noting that cooperation and strategic engagement, if properly institutionalised, can mitigate the risks associated with power parity. Nonetheless, both texts agree that if the challenger is dissatisfied and feels strong enough to alter the system, the risk of conflict significantly increases.

To this end, the Indo-Pacific exemplifies the great power competition of the 21st century and the presence of multiple actors only adds to the complex security narratives of the region.

Arvind Kumar in addressing the *Challenges to Indo-Pacific Regional Security Architecture*¹⁸, situates it in the context of great power competition where there is divergence of national

¹⁸ Kumar, Arvind, “Challenges to Indo-Pacific Regional Security Architecture,” *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Political Studies*, no. 1 (2021): 10–20

interest among the countries that manifests in differential articulations. He argues that while the Indo-Pacific has gained prominence as a strategic construct integrating the Indian and Pacific Oceans into one geopolitical space, its security framework remains largely fragmented, contested, and also underdeveloped. This he opines as one of the major challenges towards building a coherent and inclusive Indo-Pacific regional security architecture. Like all the other analysts he blames China's assertive rise in unilateral actions- particularly in the South China Sea and increasing presence in the Indian Ocean to be responsible for this lack of coherence and inclusivity, which pose a threat to the established rules-based order. Kumar also underscores the lack of consensus among regional players regarding the purpose of the framework, the details of its composition, and lack of any institutional mechanisms of the Indo-Pacific framework, along with the absence of comprehensive institutional structure to manage regional security collaboratively. This is attributed to the diversity of interests of the stakeholders- ranging from the United States' strategic containment of China to ASEAN's emphasis on inclusivity; creating layers of asymmetries in strategic perceptions, and thereby hindering regional cohesion. He also points to India's evolving role, asserting that India aspires to be a key architect of the regional security order. This is grounded in its leveling up of policies- such as the Act East policy and vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). However, New Delhi's dilemma lies in the multiplicity of challenges that it faces in balancing strategic partnerships with autonomy, especially while navigating its relations with both the United States and China. Furthermore, regional security is threatened by non-traditional issues such as cyber threats, climate change, piracy, and transnational terrorism, which require cooperative mechanisms that are currently lacking or weakly institutionalized. Indo-Pacific needs a more structured, inclusive, and norm-based security architecture to prevent strategic fragmentation and ensure regional stability. He advocates for greater institutional innovation, stronger political will, and enhanced multilateral engagement to address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the region, highlighting upon the urgency for stakeholders to move beyond rhetoric and build a durable regional order that accommodates power transitions while upholding shared norms.

India's role in the Indo-Pacific is significant to upholding the rule based order in the region. Robert Kaplan, in his seminal work *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, very aptly articulates the prevailing geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific argues, "India stands dramatically at the commanding centre of the Indian Ocean, near to where the US and China are headed for a tryst with destiny. Just as America is evolving into a new kind

*of two-ocean navy – the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, rather than the Pacific and the Atlantic-China... may also be evolving into a two-ocean navy – the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, too.*¹⁹

Nadège Rolland in *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*²⁰ makes an eloquent exposition of China's role in the Indo-Pacific region. His study reveals that PRC's involvement has been a blend of cooperation on the one hand and contestation on the other. As one of the largest economy in the world, China has pursued a dual strategy of economic expansion and military assertiveness. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has enabled Beijing to magnify its influence across the Asia, Africa and beyond through infrastructure investments, increasing its economic leverage over multiple nations.

This argument has been extended by Robert D. Kaplan in his book *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*.²¹ He writes that China's expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea, and its aggressiveness is evident in its encroachment upon artificial islands, also its island-building ventures and then installations of military infrastructures, have triggered regional apprehensions, prompting countermeasures from the regional stakeholders such as ASEAN nations, the United States, Japan, and Australia.

Writing about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) that consists of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, Josukutty, and Joyce Sabina Lobo in their edited volume *The New World Politics of the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions, Policies and Interests*²², points out that the formation of the Quad is largely perceived as a counterbalancing mechanism to such Chinese assertiveness. China's growing military presence, particularly in the East China Sea and its doubtful strategic alignment, further complicates the regional security landscape. Additionally, its role in the Indo-Pacific, being indirectly affected by trade dependencies that flow across the vertical and horizontal plethora of engagements, highlights its significance in terms the economic salience with regard to the regional actors. It is significant to note that PRC's relations with Japan and Australia are particularly complex. This is because their strong

¹⁹ Kaplan, Robert D. *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*. New York: Random House, 2010

²⁰ Rolland, Nadège. *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Seattle, WA, and Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017

²¹ Kaplan, Robert D. *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*. New York: Random House, 2014.

²² C. A., Josukutty, and Joyce Sabina Lobo, eds. *The New World Politics of the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions, Policies and Interests*. 1st ed. London: Routledge India, June 3, 2024.

economic ties do not lead to alleviations of mistrust, rather geopolitical frictions, such as Beijing's trade sanctions on Australia and territorial disputes with Japan, continue to pose direct and serious challenges.

While tracing India's framing of the Indo-Pacific, Shruti Pandalai in her article *The Indo-Pacific Consensus: The Past, Present and Future of India's Vision for the Region*²³, claims that the intention behind the Indo-Pacific construction is not new but it is a return of the older vision of a seamless connected maritime space which has been broken down due to political entanglements into the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean since the second world war. History justifies India's conception of being a primary Indo-Pacific actor, it is shaped by geography, trade and security interests, institutional memberships in important Indo-Pacific frameworks. India's has earned its position of being the first responder as it endorses inclusivity (against any sort of containment), ASEAN centrality, respect for international law (particularly UNCLOS), freedom of navigation and over-flight, peaceful dispute resolution, and rules-based, open, and sustainable connectivity and commerce. All these tenets have been set out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 Shangri-La speech. The speech became a normative preamble to building later initiatives such as the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). A central point noted by the author in the significance of 'sovereign flexibility' and functional cooperation in New Delhi's Indo-Pacific approach that exceeds over formal alliances. The article also isolates three durable trends that help shaping India's Indo-Pacific engagements. Firstly, India pushes for issue-based coalitions, as these are function-oriented and allow states to collaborate on discrete problems without entering into treaty obligations. Secondly, these overlapping formats- bilateral, minilateral, and plurilateral (such as the Quad working groups) are platforms and mechanism to scale practical initiatives that are also embed into the national agendas of these countries. Thirdly, is the focus on capacity-building that is translated into a strategy, thereby offering partners' a viable alternatives in health, connectivity, standards, and technology. This reduces vulnerability to great-power pressure and sharpens regional agency. So, the networked structure of India's Indo-Pacific engagements hedge and manage the risks of U.S.-China rivalry without forcing binary choices.

²³ Pandalai, Shruti. "The Indo-Pacific Consensus: The Past, Present and Future of India's Vision for the Region." *India Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2022): 189–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284221090717>

Scope of Research:

This research endeavours to understand the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific region, decoding the contesting geopolitical narratives involving the Indo-Pacific power-play. This study delves into the fundamental factors that have made Indo-Pacific the nerve centre of global politics, and here theoretical propositions of understanding regions, mental maps and geopolitical constructs have been invoked.

This study aims to critically assess geopolitical strategies of the United States and India in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly since 2017 when the QUAD was revived. It examines how the Indo-Pacific construct has reshaped regional security narratives by investigating power politics, alliance formations, and multilateral engagements in the context of rising Chinese assertiveness.

This research focuses on analysing the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region- its drivers and imperatives and analysing the strategic orientations of India and the United States of America. It seeks to understand how India's unique geographical location and the geopolitical dynamics of the region have shaped its Indo-Pacific policy, along with India's positioning as a potential leader in the regional security architecture.

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 power politics in the region, and the viability of a rule-based security order involving multiple stakeholders, especially ASEAN countries- to assess how strategic partnerships and rivalries are being configured in this emerging region.

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.

This research has used discourse analysis as a 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 speeches and 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 relies on a combination of primary sources- semi-structured interviews, analysis of official documents, archival sources and reports from the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence of India, Ministry of Culture, U.S. State Department and 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, Government of Australia and the Defence White Papers.

Interviews constituted a vital component of the research, which were semi-structured in nature, offering 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 personnel 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, ASEAN countries, Australia and Japan thereby ensuring 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 minilateral frameworks of Quad. A thematic analysis was undertaken to identify recurring concepts, points of divergence, and shared views across the expert responses. Themes such as India's limited but aspirational security role, non-interventionist posture, Quad's role, unpredictability of US commitment, political nature of BRI, ASEAN's fragmentation, and underutilisation Indian soft power were extracted 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 primary 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

Overall, this mixed-methods approach, combining expert interviews, thematic analysis, scoring of key variables, and corroboration with secondary sources, provides a comprehensive research framework. It captures nuanced strategic perspectives and quantifiable trends, offering a robust foundation to assess India's current and future role in shaping Indo-Pacific security dynamics.

CHAPTERIZATION:

The study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1- Introduction

The first chapter introduces the topic by giving the background of research and engaging upon an extensive literature review. The chapter will elaborate upon the statement of the problem along with focussing of the research questions, investigating whose answer forms the core purpose of the research. It will focus on the various research methods or tools that were undertaken during the course of the research in order to validate and authenticate the research work. Explanations towards various concepts used in the course of the research will also be provided in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region: Theoretical Understanding

The second chapter endeavour to understand the concept of the Indo-Pacific and the geopolitics surrounding the region. The Chapter defines the Indo-Pacific construct and situates the region for the further analysis in the subsequent chapters, the contesting narratives surrounding the

Indo-Pacific are delineated in this Chapter. Various geopolitical theories and ideas are invoked such as Mahanian ideas, securitization and power-transition theory shall be done in this chapter along with the indept understanding of the concept of security. The Chapter will also present the views of the United States of America and India regarding the Indo-Pacific, critically analyzing the reasons behind such conceptualization along with the investigating changes and continuities in the geopolitical understanding shall be made in this chapter.

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

The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of security as a concept within international relations. It begins by asserting the centrality of the state in political studies and the contested nature of the concept of security since the Westphalian system. Traditional realist thought, led by figures like Morgenthau and Mearsheimer, views security in terms of military capability and state survival in an anarchic international system. Realists argue that in the absence of a central authority, power and self-help guide states' actions. This culminates in a state-centric view of security architecture as a framework of alliances, deterrence, and power balancing aimed at safeguarding national interests.

In contrast, liberal theorists like John Locke and Keohane and Nye introduce the idea of cooperation, institutions, and interdependence. Liberals believe that individuals, transnational corporations, and international organisations play pivotal roles, and that security can be achieved through diplomacy, trade, shared norms, and institutional mechanisms. This "cobweb" model expands the understanding of security to include economic and societal well-being, challenging the narrow militaristic focus of realists. Post-Cold War shifts gave rise to non-traditional security concerns such as terrorism, climate change, human trafficking, and cybersecurity, prompting the emergence of critical and constructivist approaches. Critical theorists, such as Ken Booth, redefined security as emancipation from oppression, advocating for human, environmental, and social security. The Copenhagen School, led by Buzan and Wæver, introduced the concept of securitisation—how political actors frame certain issues as existential threats to justify extraordinary responses. Their Regional Security Complex Theory highlights how neighbouring states are bound together by shared security dynamics, with South Asia as a prominent example. This leads into the discussion of the Indo-Pacific as an emerging security complex, shaped by overlapping military, economic, and institutional frameworks. The region's strategic importance has drawn attention from major powers, with the United States, Japan, India, and Australia promoting a "free and open Indo-Pacific." Traditional

military alliances (e.g., US-Japan), multilateral institutions (e.g., ASEAN, ARF), and newer unilateral arrangements like the Quad and AUKUS all contribute to a complex security architecture. China's rise has added urgency to these efforts, as its military assertiveness in the South China Sea and economic initiatives like the Belt and Road have raised concerns. The United States has responded with Indo-Pacific strategies focusing on rule of law, freedom of navigation, and alliance building. India, Japan, and Australia have aligned with these goals through economic partnerships, infrastructure development, and defence cooperation, even as ASEAN continues to advocate for inclusivity and centrality despite internal constraints. The chapter also evaluates analysts like Jagannath Panda who advocates for a broader "Quad Plus" structure to increase inclusivity and legitimacy. The Chapter investigates the Indo-Pacific as a contested yet cooperative geopolitical construct where economic integration, political alignment, and security coordination converge in the face of evolving regional power dynamics.

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

The Chapter explores India-US evolving engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, with particular emphasis on its strategic convergence between them in response to the growing assertiveness of China. The paper positions the Indo-Pacific as more than a geographical concept—it is presented as a geopolitical and geostrategic framework shaped by multiple actors seeking influence in a fluid and contested environment. The central argument is that India, driven by a combination of strategic autonomy and pragmatic cooperation, has emerged as a key player in shaping a multipolar and rules-based Indo-Pacific order. This transformation is particularly significant since 2017, when the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia) was revitalised, marking a turning point in India's regional outlook. It examines how India's traditional principles of non-alignment and strategic autonomy have gradually given way to more flexible strategic partnerships, especially with the U.S., to ensure its national security interests amidst an evolving regional power dynamic. It argues that India's Indo-Pacific strategy is both a response to China's increasing assertiveness in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region, and a proactive attempt to shape regional security architecture. It also highlights the role of ASEAN and smaller states in Southeast Asia, arguing that their preference for inclusive regionalism and aversion to great power confrontation

necessitate India and the U.S. to adopt a calibrated approach and assesses the possibility of India becoming the Net security provider in the region.

Chapter 5 Conclusion:

The conclusion synthesises the findings of the research highlighting security aspirations, limitations, and opportunities within an evolving and contested regional order. It reflects on the core argument that India's status as a net security provider remains largely aspirational, constrained by limited capacity. The conclusion positions India as a cautious stabiliser and its relationship with the United States is significant while striving to expand its influence in East and Southeast Asia.

It also analyses both the strength and the weakness of the Quad, which enables flexible cooperation without provoking direct confrontation with China but failing to deliver substantial, long-term outcomes. The conclusion highlights the indispensable yet unpredictable role of the United States, the structural inevitability of China's rise through initiatives like BRI, and ASEAN's economic centrality but political fragmentation as factors that collectively shape India's strategic environment. Additionally, the underutilisation of India's soft power is identified as a critical gap in its regional strategy, leaving space for China to dominate the narrative.

The conclusion consolidates the findings and argues that India stands at a strategic crossroads in the Indo-Pacific. It suggests that for India to transition from aspirational rhetoric to credible regional leadership, it must enhance naval and economic partnership with the USA, institutionalising soft power diplomacy, in developing a clear, consistent strategic Indo-Pacific narrative. The conclusion calls for pragmatic, capability-driven, and trust-building approaches to navigate the volatile geopolitics.

CHAPTER 2

GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

“Geopolitics sees a nation as a geographical organism or as a spatial occurrence; in other words, a nation as land, territory, area or, perhaps most emblematically, as empire.”

-Rudolf Kjellén, Der staat als Lebensform, 1917

Introduction

Indo-Pacific has entered the focus of study of international relations and has enlarged and complicated the contours of existing geopolitical interpretations by demarcating a broader area of operations. The term represents a vibrant space that suggests that the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are connected through trade, commerce, culture, ideas and diplomacy.

The geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific garners attention due to the presence of a number of significant players such as the United States of America, the Republic of India, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Japan, Australia, the ASEAN countries, and some of the European countries such as France and Britain. In the last decade, the region has gained economic and strategic prominence and is regarded as the hub of global growth. This is largely due to the growth of India and China and the growing reliance on uninterrupted flow of goods, connectivity routes facilitated by the year-round movement of vessels in the Indian Ocean, serving as the life blood of global trade and commerce. With the relative decline of the United States of America, the region is undergoing a structural shift that diverted the attention of the world from the Euro-centric world order to Indo-Pacific centric geopolitics. Referred to as a supra-region, subsuming what was previously known as the Asia-Pacific²⁴ and beyond, Indo-

²⁴ All geopolitical entities are constructs. The concept of Asia-Pacific can be traced from the 1960s and 1970s and includes East Asia and the Western powers of the Pacific such as the US, Australia and New Zealand. Indo Pacific is a construct that includes the vast area surrounding the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean has emerged as the most crucial geopolitical and geo economic reality that subsumes the

Pacific is an arena of opportunities and challenges. The logic of the vast area lies in unravelling the myriad of its geo-strategic and geo-economics dynamics. Some of the largest economies of the world are situated in this region that makes it the ‘heartland’ of contemporary international relations. Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical space that has been articulated differently by different actors. It is an area of both cooperation and contestation. The geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific garners attention due to its strategic location, cultural diversity, and economic growth including connectivity links. The first and foremost task of the chapter is to define the region, along with understanding it as a geopolitical entity. The Chapter then situates Indo-Pacific in relevant theoretical domains trying to bring out the geopolitical and geo-strategic character of the region as how various constructs aid in understanding its salience of Indo-Pacific.

Defining the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region can be defined as a spatial concept that, however it has differing narratives from various players in the region. The region is the primordial artery of economic growth that garners attention among various players, making it vulnerable to varying and at times conflicting maritime and strategic configurations. Although the concept of the Indo-Pacific has appeared in the writings of theorists and strategists since the 1920s as explained in the later part of this chapter, the term has regained prominence as the centre of global power has shifted eastward, encompassing the seas and land links between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans.

Doyle and Rumley²⁵ reflects upon the Indo-Pacific idea as a re-emergence of classical geopolitics in terms of regional security thinking. Analysing in terms of nomenclatures, narratives backing the terms such as ‘pivot’, as well as ‘Indo-Pacific’ has been built most exclusively by the American analysts and policy makers. It is suggestive of the interest ascribed to several global evolutions, but at its core, it brings into the foreground Western anxieties over the rise and potential dominance of Asian powers. Also, the strategic discourse of such terminologies is both to delimit the Western area of operation and also to define China’s

Asia Pacific. Its expanse ranges from the eastern shores of Africa to the western coast of the United States of America.

²⁵ Doyle, Timothy, and Dennis Rumley. *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2019.

boundaries, something that has trouble in finding acceptance in several non-Western states as well (some of the Southeast Asian countries are not open to the idea of Indo-Pacific and still believe in the Asia-Pacific terminology). So, the broader understanding it presages the recognition of a multipolar order and the rising apprehension of challenge to American-led global security primacy that expedited the formation of the geopolitical mental map of the Indo-Pacific. It equally heralds a clear American identity as an 'Indo-Pacific' power, extending its strategic map away from the Greater Middle East.

Firstly, Indo-Pacific as a spatial concept can be defined as the coalescence of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. In other words, the term generally refers to the area spanning the Indian and Pacific Oceans, encompassing some of the world's most dynamic economies and nearly half of the global population. As a consortium of landscape and seascape it depicts a continuity in human civilization across centuries.

It can be said that the regional and geopolitical coinage of the term signifies the growing significance of the two busiest oceans of the world and the rising gravity of the countries surrounding the oceanic landscape. Geopolitically, the vast area reaches out from the Indian Ocean to include the central and western seaboard of the Pacific Ocean. It includes the equatorial waters of the Indonesian archipelago along with the South China Sea.²⁶ Strategically, it the confluence of two oceanic lifelines that are connected through the Strait of Malacca, which is a 900-kilometre sea lane that connects Asia with the Middle East and Europe.²⁷ Along with this, some of the busiest and most important sea lanes of communication and critical maritime constrictions are located in this region- such as, Malacca Strait, Singapore Strait, Babel-Mandeb, the South China Sea, East China Sea and the huge littoral of Bay of Bengal. It has rich flora and fauna, unexplored energy reserves and serves as excellent connectivity channels. Taken a regional whole, Indo-Pacific connects India and Pacific region, comprising Africa, Asia and Oceania.²⁸ Within Asia it is an aggregate term that includes, connects and combines

²⁶ Das, Urbi. "Regional Responses to Quad." In *Rise of the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives, Dimensions and Challenges*, edited by Chintamani Mahapatra. New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2019.

²⁷ Reuters. "Factbox - Malacca Strait Is a Strategic 'Chokepoint'." March 4, 2010. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-46652220100304>.

²⁸ Press Information Bureau. "Text of Vice-President's Address at the 2023 Edition of the 'Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue.'" Press Information Bureau (Government of India), November 15, 2023. Accessed [today's date]. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977077>

East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Asia- Pacific. As a geo-political entity, it binds spaces that were earlier segregated in terms of regional articulation.

Secondly, Indo-Pacific can be explained through its economic significance. This region encompasses nearly thirty-eight countries, contributing around 62 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and accounts for two-thirds of global economic growth. It is home to about 64 per cent of the world's population, including 60 percent of the global youth. About 50 percent of the Global Trade and 40 percent oil passes through Indo-Pacific region. As for India that includes 90 percent of our trade and 80 percent of our critical freight such as petroleum, coal, natural gas, iron ore, fertilizers, among others. The Indian economy is regarded as a one of the major driving forces in the Indo-Pacific.²⁹ It is currently the world's fourth largest economy and by 2030 it is poised to become the third largest global economy with a projected GDP of US \$7.3 trillion. Again, it is one of the world's fastest growing economy.³⁰ Therefore, it is the nerve centric of world economic growth.

The Indian Ocean itself is home to a number of regional organisations such as ASEAN, SAARC, IORA, and the African Union that accounts for over a third of global humanity, and a significant share of world GDP, and is a vital conduit for global trade and energy flows. The rapid rise of economies such as Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and China adds further weight to the region's geopolitical importance, making it a contested arena for influence among major powers.³¹

Notable among these developments, is the economic prominence attached to the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The emergence of globalization and the adoption of neo-liberal market economics, has led to a change in the understanding of power where economic statecraft has trade, investment have emerged as the new language of power. The People's

²⁹ Press Information Bureau. "*Text of Vice-President's Address at the 2023 Edition of the 'Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue.'*" Press Information Bureau (Government of India), November 15, 2023. Accessed [today's date]. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1977077>

³⁰ Press Information Bureau. "*India Becoming an Economic Powerhouse.*" Press Information Bureau (Government of India), June 16, 2025. Accessed August 8, 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NoteId=154660>

³¹ Modern Diplomacy. "New Regionalism: Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific Region." *Modern Diplomacy*, July 1, 2024. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/01/new-regionalism-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

Republic of China has gained attention due to its remarkable economic rise in the last decade. According to the World Bank Report, China's average annual GDP growth has been more than 9 percent since Beijing began to open up its economy since 1978.³²

China has therefore emerged as one of the economic giants in the region whose influence is comparable to that of the United States of America. While both the countries are each other's largest trade partners, China has gained prominence in the region after the US economy faltered in 2008-09. This has led to Beijing consolidate its ties with the smaller countries in the region. Again, India has emerged a key player in the region with a different perspective. The World Bank projects India as a resilient economy and one of the fastest-growing economies with 7.2 per cent of annual GDP growth in FY 2022-23³³, emerging as the second highest growing economy among the G20 countries³⁴. India has immense capacity in sustaining the growth of the region. Also, much of India's trade and commerce is connected to the peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. This economic emergence of Indo-Pacific had led to the rising concern for securitization among the nation-states whose economic and political stakes are vital to the Indo-Pacific.

Thirdly, Indo-Pacific is a statist concept since states have played a central role in its articulation as a geopolitical and strategic space. Each nation-state has its own idea of narrative building focussing upon the Indo-Pacific. While some nations agree to the usage of the nomenclature, others might contradict to the very idea of the Indo-Pacific. The term came into focus during Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to the Parliament of India titled 'Confluence of the Two Seas'. In his oration, he conceived the idea of 'broader Asia' located at the convergence of the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe while explaining the concept of broader Asia which is linked to Indo-Pacific understanding remarked that "*The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas*

³²World Bank, "China: Overview," *The World Bank*, accessed July 3, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

³³ World Bank Data. Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2015 prices, expressed in U.S. dollars. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.

³⁴ World Bank, "India's Growth to Remain Resilient Despite Global Challenges," World Bank, October 3, 2023, accessed July 3, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/10/03/india-s-growth-to-remain-resilient-despite-global-challenges>

*of freedom and of prosperity. A "broader Asia" that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability -- and the responsibility -- to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparenence."*³⁵ – Shinzo Abe (2017), Prime Minister of Japan.

The United States of America has always been a Pacific power and America's commitment to securitizing the Asia-Pacific dates back to 1898. It can be said that the United States of America had recognised the importance of this geopolitical space long before the term 'Indo-Pacific' became popular in the policy articulations of the countries. It has for two centuries sought to maintain stability and freedom of navigation in the region through its robust maritime positioning. What is new is the increase in the area of operation and geo-strategic vision from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-pacific. In this sense, the term Indo-Pacific is inclusive of the geopolitical space of Asia-Pacific.³⁶ The US regards Indo-Pacific as vital to its security and prosperity. In this sense America's vision of 'free and open Indo-pacific' coincides with New Delhi perception in the region.³⁷

A shared and recognition dimension that sets apart the concept of the Indo-Pacific from the earlier Asia-Pacific is the India's prominence in the Indo-Pacific. Such inclusion and pre-eminent role in light of India's geographic ties to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean along with New Delhi's potential as a growing regional power. Therefore, the various Indo-Pacific frameworks are shaped by a desire to engage India as a constructive force.³⁸ India projects herself as a benevolent and reliable partner that envisions the idea of shared prosperity and equal rights in contrast to the intimidating attitude of any nation. India's strength emerges from her history and cultural ties with the nations of the Indo-Pacific along with her robust economic

³⁵ Abe, Shinzo. "Confluence of the Two Seas." Speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

³⁶ Mahapatra, Chintamani, ed. *Rise of the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives, Dimensions and Challenges*. New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2019.

³⁷ The White House. *The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*. Washington, D.C., 2022. Accessed August 27, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

³⁸ Wada, Haruko. *The "Indo-Pacific" Concept: Geographical Adjustments and Their Implications*. RSIS Working Paper No. 326. Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 16 March 2020.

growth. New Delhi articulation of Indo-Pacific narrative is aimed to protect the freedom of navigation in the sea lanes of communication and curb the rise of any traditional or non-traditional threats. India's approach regarding the Indo-Pacific was enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018 where he talked about 'free, open, inclusive' Indo-Pacific that champions the 'common pursuit of progress and prosperity'.³⁹ India's priority for the Indo-Pacific, according to External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, includes the Act-East policy which is the elevated and dynamic Look-East policy. He reiterated the significance of SAGAR (an acronym for Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative, enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 and India's constant quest for rule-based world order, equality, sustainable and transparent investment, freedom of navigation and over-flight, mutual respect and peaceful resolution of any disputes that may arise in the region. The collaborative stance of New Delhi is reflected in the confluence of Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which recognises the synergies of Indo-Pacific and shaped policies towards connecting the East.⁴⁰

Again, in contrast to the idea of Indo-Pacific envisioned by US and India, China has shown resistance to the very narrative of the Indo-Pacific. Beijing apprehends that the change in the nomenclature is sought to 'contain' its rise in the region and that the strategy is supposedly 'bound to fail'.⁴¹ China criticised the Indo-Pacific construct, dismissing it as a renewed Cold War like region-building designed to constrain its influence and obstruct the expansion of BRI.⁴² For Beijing, the concept risked undermining both its domestic security and trans-

³⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue." 2018. https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri_La_Dialogue_June_01_2018

⁴⁰ Jaishankar, S. "Address to Chulalongkorn University on 'India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific.'" Ministry of External Affairs, August 18, 2022. In this lecture, EAM Dr S. Jaishankar explicitly refers to Prime Minister Modi's 2015 articulation of Vision SAGAR in Mauritius, describing it as foundational to India's Indo-Pacific outlook. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/35641/#:~:text=6.,Minister%20in%20Mauritius%20in%202015>

⁴¹ PTI. "Ahead of Quad Summit, China Says US' Indo-Pacific Strategy 'Bound to Fail'." *The Economic Times*, May 21, 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/ahead-of-quad-summit-china-says-us-indo-pacific-strategy-bound-to-fail/articleshow/91726745.cms?from=mdr>

⁴² Modern Diplomacy. "New Regionalism: Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific Region." *Modern Diplomacy*, July 1, 2024. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/01/new-regionalism-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-indo-pacific-region/>

regional interests. China resorts to identifying its role as Asia-Pacific power, where Beijing's influence is nothing but a natural outcome of its economic growth and has its roots in Chinese history.

So different interpretations of the Indo-Pacific exist; while structuralist approaches underscore the role of global capital and state hegemony in shaping a liberalised trading order across the region, constructivist perspectives argue that the 'Indo-Pacific' is largely a political and social construct, emerging through discourse and policy narratives rather than fixed geography.⁴³ The emergence of the Indo-Pacific conceptualization at one end, is a reflection of an abstraction of geopolitical mental-maps. At the other end, state-centric geopolitics are detrimental to softer, multi-dimensional explanations of world politics more prominent in today's era of rapid geopolitical change. Despite the continuing dominance of nation-states, there exists a need for other perspectives focussing upon 'place' and 'space' in an interconnected world. A case in point for such a perspective is the re-emergence of geo-economic regionalism. In such an understanding, regions and regionalism taken to be both products of, and reactions to, globalization. Regions at one point of time in the history of world politics were at the centre of world order. This conception of regions in the modern era have become instruments of challenging standardised forms of macro geopolitics in an increasingly transnational and interconnected world of nations.⁴⁴ While there can be difference in interpretations, what stands out as a geopolitical reality is the increasing focus of all nations across the globe on the Indo-Pacific region, exemplifying a complex myriad of maritime, economic, strategic and environmental challenges, unravelling the finer thread of geopolitics in the study of international politics. These nomenclatures aid narrative building and justify each countries outlook towards the region.

Indo-Pacific as Geopolitical Construct

The study of geopolitics can be traced back to the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804).⁴⁵ The study of geopolitics is essentially a multi-disciplinary one that uses

⁴³ Modern Diplomacy. "New Regionalism: Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific Region." *Modern Diplomacy*, July 1, 2024. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/01/new-regionalism-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

⁴⁴ Doyle, Timothy, and Dennis Rumley. *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2019

⁴⁵ Banerjee, Jyotirmoy. *Strategic Studies*. Calcutta: Allied Publishers, 1998

methods and knowledge drawn from geography, topography, political science, economics, strategic studies, demography, oceanography and geology, to explain complex phenomenon that characterize the relations among nation-states. According to Hagan⁴⁶, it essentially deals with the relation between man and his geographical environment, explaining the complexities underlying social organization, the casual links between the naturally provided conditions for livelihood along with social customs and practices. The study of geography therefore embraces the prefix of economic or social geography. Again, political activities and institutions comprise a sizable part of economic and social organization. Therefore, the study of political geography has interested human kinds since the time of the Greeks. However, at this juncture of study, the subtle difference between political geography and geopolitics has been drawn, though the two terms tend to merge into the one another. Political geography is essentially concerned with elaborating upon the historical and factual transposition in the circumstances of states, and it identifies nations mostly to be a condition of rest or repose. On the other hand, geopolitics, perceives states as a dynamic entities and observes and postulates upon the influence of geographical prerequisites upon political events, occurrences and changes in the political forms of the states. The present discussion is premised upon understanding the Indo-Pacific region as a geopolitical entity that has garnered the attention of states in the 21st century. In order to understand and interpret Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct, the study recalls some of the significant geopolitical thinkers whose ideas have helped develop the subject of study.

Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) was a pioneer in developing political geography in its modern connotations. His writings in *Politische Geographie*, translated as *Political Geography* first published in 1897 and later in 1903, deals with state as the primary entity in the inquiry of political geography. In his attempt to establish the general relations between man and his geographical environment, Ratzel subscribes to the organic theory of state, as reflected in both his seminar works- *Anthropo-Geographie* and *Politische Geographie*, where *Anthropo-Geographie* is considered as a more structured work to establish the relationship between man and his geographical environment.⁴⁷ The state according to him is a ‘fragment of humanity on a piece of soil’, territory or space, that is significant in political life. Ratzel prefers to call this ‘Raum’ (space) which is the main source of its political life, whereas the frontier forms the

⁴⁶ Hagan, Charles B. “Geopolitics.” *The Journal of Politics* 4, no. 4 (1942): 478–490. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2125653>.

⁴⁷ Ratzel, Friedrich. *Anthropogeographie*. Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1899.

peripheral organs. *Raum*, understood as an organism, is quintessential to the existence of a state, where growth is represented as expansion and decay or death by shrinking of territory.⁴⁸ He describes the state as a ‘spiritual and moral organism’⁴⁹ anything that may range from a tribe of nomads to a great power, the notion that is attached closely to land and its people as a political community where the state functions.⁵⁰ Resonating the organic theory of state, Ratzel’s idea of the state is therefore linked to the notion of territory or space, which he believes is extremely important to engage in political activities.

Influenced by Ratzel and along the same line of thought, Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen, who is arguably the first writer to use the term ‘Geopolitik’ viewed states as real living organisms, and considered the contest for space as “*The ambition of the state to become organically united with the soil. States try to choose geographical units, such as a region, to ally themselves with, and through this alliance transform themselves into natural units.*”⁵¹ - Kjellen Rudolf in *Der Staat als Lebensform* (1917).

Kjellen considered expansion as a means of self-preservation and developed five-fold understanding of geopolitics. The first was *Krato-politik*, that is the study of the legal institutions and the power of state; the next and the most significant that is *Geo-politik* that translates as the scientific study of the state as a realm within the notion of the space the next being the science of understanding the forms of political organization among the masses, that is, *Demo-politik*; *Eco-politik* or the study of the forms and means of production and consumption of goods and services and, finally, *Socio-politik* that translates as the study of how

⁴⁸ Hagan, Charles B. “Geopolitics.” *The Journal of Politics* 4, no. 4 (1942): 478–490. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2125653>.

⁴⁹ Ratzel’s idea of the state as quoted in Kristof, L. K. D. (1960). The origins and evolution of geopolitics. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 4(1), 15–51. doi:10.1177/002200276000400103

⁵⁰ Rumley, Dennis, Julian V. Minghi, and Frank M. Grimm. “The Content of Ratzel’s Politische Geographie.” *The Professional Geographer* 25, no. 3 (1973): 271–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1973.00271.x>.

⁵¹ Kjellen, Rudolf. *Der Staat als Lebensform*. Translated by Marg. Langfeldt. Leipzig, 1917. 4th ed., revised by J. Sandmeier, Berlin-Grunewald, 1924.

policies are formulated and implemented in a socio-political unit.⁵² However, Kristof⁵³ in his interpretation of Kjellen's ideas observed that the nation and its individuals are more important in Kjellen's geopolitical ideas than the state. Kjellen's observations that '*the life of the state is, ultimately, in the hands of the individuals*' translates into suggesting that nation will survive even if the state disappears but the state will not be able to revive itself in case the former becomes extinct. The state in his conceptualization is elevated from being a mere legal body of basic laws and constitution but as Powers. Referring to Kjellen's thoughts as being 'quasi-organic theory', he infers that the soul of the state lies in the hands of the nation and its individuals. The state is therefore elevated from a mere body of abstraction, a dead letter of law, to be integrally linked to the community and the nation, which interacts as a whole and enlightens it.

German geopolitical thinkers, for a significant period, had rendered significantly in the development of the subject. Sir Karl Haushofer was a geographer, geologist, soldier who served as the Major-General of the First World War. He was appointed as the Honorary Professor of Geography in the University of Munich in 1921 and his geopolitical ideas aimed to giving Germany its legitimate place in the sun. He derived from Ratzel his conceptualization of the '*lebensraum*' and applied it to articulate German (Nazi) geopolitical ambitions. He believed that a country needs to be economically self-sufficient in order to develop military power and engaged in the scientific study of geopolitics.⁵⁴ According to Haushofer, '*Geopolitics is the scientific foundation of the art of political action in the struggle of the state organisms for existence and for Lebensraum*' -*Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans*, published in Berlin: Vowinkel, 1924. He made a distinction between political geography and geopolitics, where geopolitics was about comprehending the notion of 'vital space' and the science of conditioning of political developments. He believed that geopolitics is a guide to the political life and the nature of terrestrial space provided for the framework of geopolitics. Therefore, '*Geopolitik*

⁵² House, F. N. "[Review of *Der Staat als Lebensform; Bausteine zur Geopolitik*, by R. Kjellen, K. Haushofer, E. Obst, H. Lautensach, and O. Maull]." *American Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 4 (1930): 660–662. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2765939>.

⁵³ Kristof, Ladis K. D. "The Origins and Evolution of Geopolitics." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, no. 1 (1960): 15–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/172582>.

⁵⁴ Banerjee, Jyotirmoy. *Strategic Studies*. Calcutta: Allied Publishers, 1998.

*will and must become the geographical conscience of the state’ - Haushofer et. al., Bausteine zur Geopolitik, Bausteine zur Geopolitik.. Berlin-Grunewald: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, I.*⁵⁵

The spatial understanding linked to the idea of geopolitics acquired a new dimension with Halford Mackinder’s *The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)*, where he enunciated his most celebrated *Heartland theory*. His famous dictum, ‘*who controls East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World Island, and who rules the World Island commands the world*’ essentially calls for a Euro-centric interpretation of geopolitics, identifying the inner area of Euro-Asia as the pivotal region of international politics.⁵⁶ He geopolitics visualized a ‘closed system’ of political order that was based on the worldwide distribution of land and sea, where identified that ‘pivot area’ as the ‘natural seat of power’, where the major zone of conflict was between the land and the sea power.⁵⁷ Mackinder’s theory found its applicability during the Cold War as his ‘heartland’ roughly represented the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Mackinder’s thesis in spite of its limitation of not taking into account the capability of air power, had therefore become the intellectual basis for the United States military strategists, policy makers.⁵⁸ One of the most influential geo-politician of the 20th century, he was referred to as the ‘Cold War prophet’, his emphasis of alliance building, influenced the proponents of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), justifying an elementary geographical pattern for stockpiling of nuclear weapons to counter the USSR.⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that Nicholas J. Spykman⁶⁰ (1893–1943), Professor of International Relations at Yale University in his book, *America’s Strategy in World Politics*, employed a similar approach as Mackinder’s ‘heartland’ theory, and following Mackinder’s ‘inner

⁵⁵ Kiss, G. “Political Geography into Geopolitics: Recent Trends in Germany.” *Geographical Review* 32, no. 4 (1942): 632–645. <https://doi.org/10.2307/210001>.

⁵⁶ Kiss, G. “Political Geography into Geopolitics: Recent Trends in Germany.” *Geographical Review* 32, no. 4 (1942): 632–645. <https://doi.org/10.2307/210001>.

⁵⁷ Flint, Colin. *Introduction to Geopolitics*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁵⁸ Flint, Colin, and Peter J. Taylor. *Political Geography: World Economy, Nation-State and Locality*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

⁵⁹ Flint, Colin. *Introduction to Geopolitics*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

⁶⁰ Spykman, Nicholas J. “Geography and Foreign Policy, I.” *The American Political Science Review* 32, no. 1 (1938): 28–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1949029>.

crescent'⁶¹ identified the 'rimland' as the key geopolitical arena of power. His geopolitical study was aimed at making America stronger, advising for a pro-active foreign policy and be geared towards preventing any nation-state or a combination of countries from dominating either the Europe or the Far East.⁶² He subscribed to Mackinder's perspective as a framework to explore the subject of geopolitics, but unlike Mackinder, he attached more significance to the periphery of Eurasia which he renamed as the 'Rimland'. The 'Rimland' according to Spykman would manifest the geopolitical realities of post-war world order.⁶³ He was not in favour of any international government or organization to maintaining statuesque, rather believed in the doctrine of balance of power as a principle envoy to fostering foreign policy goals and of the United States to be based on balance of power principle observed that the US should shun isolationism. He urged for US involvement in the affairs of the world across the Atlantic and the Pacific.⁶⁴ In explaining the Indo-Pacific, he denoted the region as '*the circumferential maritime highway which links the whole area together in terms of sea power*'- Spykman, Nicholas (1944), *The Geography of Peace*, New York: Harcourt, Brace.⁶⁵

In understanding the significance of sea power, Alfred Thayer Mahan emphasized upon the significance of navy in understanding the geopolitical trajectories of nation-states. His revolutionary piece, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, was a treatise to enhancing US global influence, urging the Washington to emphasize upon maritime strategies and naval build-ups. His geopolitical thinking rooted in sea-power kindled Washington's move to globalism. His treatise mentions the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean to play a decisive role in fate of the continental world islands.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Mackinder's inner crescent is the marginal lands of Eurasia encircle the pivot area on its west, south and east. It forms a circular arc of coastlands of Eurasia from Scandinavia to Manchuria.

⁶² Hagan, Charles B. "Geopolitics." *The Journal of Politics* 4, no. 4 (1942): 478–490. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2125653>.

⁶³ Meinig, D. W. "Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History." *Western Political Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1956): 553–569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591295600900302>.

⁶⁴ Furniss, Edgar S. "The Contribution of Nicholas John Spykman to the Study of International Politics." *World Politics* 4, no. 3 (1952): 382–401. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009129>.

⁶⁵ Spykman, Nicholas John. *The Geography of the Peace*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944.

⁶⁶ Prabhakar, W. Lawrence S. *Growth of Naval Power in the Indian Ocean: Dynamics and Transformation*. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2016.

While tracing the origin of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’, one has to revert back to the great strategist Karl Haushofer who is credited with enunciating the term Indo-Pacific in the 1920s in his work, ‘Indopazifischen Raum’.⁶⁷ As geopolitical thinker and a strategist, he aimed to creating Germany’s ‘lebensraum’ in the thrust to build maritime strength beyond Germany’s impediment of being a land-locked country. Indo-Pacific is therefore a spatial concept that sought to strengthen Germany’s role beyond the affairs of Europe. Again, in one of his most noted work, ‘Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans’, translated as ‘Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean’, Haushofer, aims to build a global vision for Germany. In order to realise Germany’s maritime strength, he calls for the integration of Indian and Pacific Ocean, which is the key to Germany’s power projection.⁶⁸

Geopolitics can be understood as the struggle for the control over ‘spaces’ with the primary focus upon power and influence. Interpreted from all the above stated major political thinkers, Indo-Pacific denotes a spatial zone encompassing land and the seas that manifests the current paradigm shift in power. It also denotes the natural linkages between the two largest Oceans—the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is embodiment of the rise of Asia, as evident in the growing influence of India and China as well as the renewed focus of Washington in the affairs of the region.⁶⁹

At the core of all geopolitical theorization and interpretation is the implied notion of the race for global supremacy, the quest for power and closely linked to that is the idea of security. Whereas power permeates through the logic of understanding and interpreting international relations, the concept of security has changed over the years. Today, the Indo-Pacific is the new zone of geopolitical power play. The idealistic notion of seamless connectivity and cooperation has been overshadowed by the realist logic of survival, power and security. All the major nation-states of the world have their economic and strategic security closely linked to this region. For the United States of America, it is nothing but Washington’s new foothold to power. For India, Indo-Pacific is vital for economic growth and maritime and strategic security;

⁶⁷ Pulipaka, Sanjay, and Mohit Musaddi. “In Defence of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ Concept.” ORF Issue Briefs and Specials, 2021. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/in-defence-of-the-indo-pacific-concept/>.

⁶⁸ Lai, David. *The United States and China in Power Transition*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011.

⁶⁹ Prabhakar, W. Lawrence S. *Growth of Naval Power in the Indian Ocean: Dynamics and Transformation*. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2016.

for the People's Republic of China (PRC), it is the prime zone for the return of the 'Middle Kingdom'⁷⁰ and for the countries of Southeast Asia it's the primordial artery of growth and security. Therefore, while 'Great power' looks for sustaining its role as the fundamental force, 'the rising power' is in a constant quest to alter the balance in its own favour. Amidst this, the stable power tries to maintain equilibrium and counter hegemonic rise through multilateral mechanisms. What manifests, is a complex myriad of balancing and counter-balancing acts, and the clash of orders, along with ranging ramifications upon the region.

Indo-Pacific amidst Great Power Transition

Yet another segment of analysing the theoretical framework of Indo-Pacific draws upon power transition theory as a means to expose the complex power-play in the region. Power transition theory was first enunciated by Alfred A Knopf Organski in his *World Politics*⁷¹ published in 1958, is a structural and dynamic approach to the study of international relations that scripts the nature of world politics in terms of a hierarchical order. It elaborates upon the varying degree to cooperation and competition and the reasons and possibilities of great power shifts in the international relations.⁷² Organski in his voluminous and methodical analysis of world politics observes that the nation-states are irreplaceable in the understanding world affairs, whose behaviour is determined by their respective goals and the power of achieve those goals. He asserts that peace as one of the major goals is less important to a nation-state that is growing in power. Since the world is characterised by differential level of economic growth, the current epoch is 'characterized by great and sudden shifts in the distribution of power'. He divides the three stages of power-transition- 'the stage of potential power', a pre-industrial stage where a nation is still in its nascent stage of industrialization and possess little power. The second stage is 'the stage of transitional growth' where rapid industrialization takes place adding to the power of the nation. The final stage reaches with the completion of industrialization when a nation continues to grow in wealth, is referred to by Organski as 'the stage of maturity'. Interestingly here a nation continues to grow economically but its power declines in

⁷⁰ Zhongguo, or the 'Middle Kingdom', as imperial China described itself, was supposed to be the 'civilised' centre of the world, surrounded by 'barbarians' and 'savages'.

⁷¹ Organski, A. F. K. *World Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

⁷² Lai, David. *The United States and China in Power Transition*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011.

comparison to the second stage. The uniform path for development is set forth by Organski as each nation passes through these stages of power escalation. As a nation-state industrializes accompanied by population growth and modernization, it goes through a sudden zeal of power leaving behind other states in the race and narrowing the gap between the already powerful industrialized states. If the nation-state in question 'is large to begin with, this sprint may upset the existing international order'. The next section is devoted to world order which according to Organski is not chaotic but are patterned to suit the most powerful nation-state at that given point of time. He terms this state as the 'dominant nation', and those states that accept the rules of international relations (trade, diplomacy and war) set forth by the 'dominant nation' and acknowledge the existing distribution of wealth and power is said to belong to the same international order. International order is therefore headed by the most powerful nation, that is, the 'dominant nation' that has created the international order, 'used its power to obtain the lion's share of whatever benefits there may be, and designed the rules to perpetuate its privileges, the dominant nation is highly satisfied with the status quo'. The dominant nation has allies that together occupy the pivotal and the most favourable position in the world order. Below this are the lesser powers who either benefit from the international order and therefore acknowledge the existing world order or are too weak to revolt against it and therefore have no other way but to accept the existing system. At the lowest rung of the hierarchical ordering are the 'weakest nation and the dependencies' who are also a part of the existing world order 'for they provide the spoils'. A very important part of the study of World Politics concerns decoding the role of 'the Challenger', that is disgruntled with the existing world order and therefore 'seek to overturn it'. The challenger attempts to replace the existing order since it feels that its rightful place is being denied in the existing international order. The challenger state may also form an alliance of dissatisfied nation-states and this forms the basis of competing international order. However, all nations that are that are growing economically need not turn out to be challenger nation, nor do nation-states remain a challenger forever. The case of Germany, the nation-state that was once a challenger, after faced defeat has finally accepted the existing world order, is an example in this regard. In contrast to the classic balance of power theory as a means to international peace, power transition theory claims "*an approximate balance of power increases the danger of war, whereas a clear preponderance of power in the hands of the satisfied nations assure world peace.*"⁷³

⁷³ Organski, A. F. K. *World Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

The current power equations in the Indo-Pacific region can be analysed through the prism of power transition theory. Here the ‘dominant power’ is the United States of America and the ‘challenger’ is the People’s Republic of China. India is middle level player whose role will shape the future security or insecurity of the region. *World Politics* points out the hierarchical ordering of nation-states amidst complex interdependence and the quest for securitization in the Indo-Pacific. To this end, the Indo-Pacific exemplifies the great power competition of the 21st century and the presence of multiple actors only adds to the complex security narratives of the region. Indo-Pacific manifests the transition in international politics where the dominant power is constantly challenged in land and maritime domain by the ‘challenger’ state. So the geopolitically constructed ‘super-region’ of the Indo-Pacific intends to counterbalance China—a rising power and arguably a challenging power, through minilateral cooperative formats such as the Quad—consisting of the US, Australia, Japan, and India, that presents a certain (differing) understanding of geopolitical perspectives, that is not accepted by China. The United States of America’s recurring geopolitical vision has its roots in the foundation of American foreign policy that believes in America as ‘children of freedom,’ and they are destined to shoulder the responsibility of freedom and liberal order across the globe. Most pertinently, their sense of security at home and abroad is ensured by establishing a ‘space’ for freedom and then protecting it by all means. Scholars like Chengxin Pan remark that this sort of geopolitical narrative building often translates into the exercises that can be labelled as ‘imperial-like’ sovereignty across a broad strategic area.⁷⁴

The tussle over power configurations, the rising strategic postures of the Indo-Pacific powers raises important questions, including whether the Indo-Pacific represents the new strategic focus for a declining U.S. superpower, particularly in its efforts to advance economic and security interest. In the subsequent chapters, power transition theory find its practical applicability to analyse the multi-layered power-play among the actors in the Indo-Pacific region.

⁷⁴ Pan, Chengxin. “The ‘Indo-Pacific’ and Geopolitical Anxieties about China’s Rise in the Asian Regional Order.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 4 (2014): 453–69.

Indo-Pacific: Alternative Constructs to the Realist Vision

The final segment of the theoretical premise of the Indo-Pacific can be through the alternative constructs to the realist school of understanding international relations. This alternative has its roots both in the West and in the East. The Western approach to mitigate the ‘lawless state of savagery’ draws upon the Kantian arguments of ‘perpetual peace’, Michael W. Doyle further illustrations of ‘democratic peace theory’, and Keohane and Nye’s proposition of complex interdependence.

Keohane and Nye⁷⁵ in *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* depicts a cooperative model of international relations where states are connected to each other by means of *complex interdependence*. In analysing the theoretical framework of complex interdependence, this book serves as a textual reference point. Presenting a picture of world politics which is the polar opposite of political realism, the study starts with neo-liberal critique of realist view. Keohane and Nye departs from the realist imagination of world politics characterized by conflict among nation-states where the use of force and organized violence is the only means to defend territory. They even go to the extent claiming that cooperation is possible even in anarchy. Challenging the view that political integration is limited to serving that national interest of the most dominant states in the international system and the insignificant role of the translational actors; complex interdependence depicts a world politics devoid of any hierarchical ordering of issues, actors other than nation-states engaging in international politics directly and where force ceases to be an effective instrument of foreign policy. What characterises complex interdependence is the presence multiple channels of formal and informal ties and modes of communication among formal governmental offices, non-governmental elites and trans-governmental organizations. These multiple channels of communication serves as transmission belts, where issues are neither hierarchically ordered nor limited to serving only political interests, manifesting into an expanded bargaining power among nation-state and challenging and eroding the boundary between internal and foreign policy. The conventional realist segregation between high and low politics is contested since issues like trade, energy, climate change and the environment have similar significance in Keohane and Nye’s understanding of international relations. Therefore, defence and military security is neither the primary nor the, dominating the agenda, rather in the realm of complex interdependence military is accorded a very minor or limited role. Cooperation among nation-

⁷⁵ Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence*. Boston: Pearson, 1997.

states takes place by means of negotiation or bargaining where the gains are evenly shared by the actors. The theory places its conviction upon the role of international institutions for dialogue and political bargaining, in a world where “*coalitions are formed transitionally and transgovernmentally*”, and institutions help in setting “*the international agenda, and act as catalysts for coalition-formation and as arenas for political initiatives and linkage by weak states.*”- Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye in *Power and Interdependence* (1997).

The sketch of the world is therefore a peaceful one, where nation-states are linked to one another by interdependent issues and work together for maintaining peace and development. In this understanding institutions serve as an effective mechanism to resolving disputes. The world order presented is something akin to the cobweb model of international relations depicted by liberal internationalism.

The dynamism of the Indo-Pacific captures the logic complex interdependence in addressing certain issues and also in analysing certain dimensions of inter-state relations. Known for its economic exuberance and connectivity channels, the region serves the neo-liberal logic of analysing the varied aspects of traditional and non-traditional issues, along with studying the behavioural patterns of state whose stakes are linked to the prosperity of the region. Again, the rise of a number of multilateral and mini-lateral institutional mechanism with states forming a coalition of issue based alliance can be witnessed in the region. It does reflect the presence of multiple channels connecting societies and people, the presence of robust economic linkages, cultural connectivity and their significant stake in preserving the peace in the region. States also emphasis on the role of institutional mechanisms (for instance ASEAN) and engagements in dealing with non-traditional security threats (Tsunami Core Group) which is reflective of the interdependencies in the region.

Again, in contrast to the pessimistic view of international politics presented by realist scholars, a peaceful alternative through democratic nation-states as well as through civilizational contacts from a uniquely non-western perspective from an area which is now defined as part of Indo-Pacific had been advanced by scholars, statesman and thinkers of the region from the late-colonial period. India is source of this view that is intended to building a peaceful, non-hegemonic and sustainable world order

Gandhian concept of nationalism can be construed as his critic of western modernity as well as the Western civilization which he considers as the source and inspiration for the Western mode

of nationalism. Gandhi assumes western modernity as wholly reliant on a supposed superiority of instrumental reason and materialistic pleasure which has rendered the 'West' devoid of empathy or soul. This monstrous assertion of modernity is, in the eyes of Gandhi responsible for the evil inherent in colonialism.

When viewed from the angle of contemporary international politics, remnants of colonial politics can still be observed, especially in the assertions of the newly powerful Eastern nation-states who view their respective zones of influence as an arena for a zero-sum game where narrow national interest still defines the rationale behind their activities. This is exactly the kind of nationalism which Gandhi rejected as a force of evil. However, and in contrast in Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi did not perceive the very idea of nationalism as corrupting.⁷⁶ Tagore's belief was that nationalism inevitably leads to greater powers to the state and resultantly greater tyranny. Where Tagore could see only greed and violence in nationalism and even cautioned Gandhi against the uncontrollable passions that Gandhian movements such as the non-cooperation movements might stir, Gandhi believed that nationalism can be achieved or conceived sans violence.

Tagore's understanding of nationalism was premised on the belief that it is an alien concept that does not agree with the inclusive nature of Indian civilization or its message of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', that is one-world. Therefore, Tagore focused on liberal and humanistic internationalism. For Tagore, universal brotherhood and acceptance were more humane virtues than any narrow expressions of nationalism. Gandhi countered this message in two ways. Firstly, in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi put forward the view that the concept of nation is not alien to India, rather Indian nationhood was defined in terms of cultural markers such as shared beliefs and common pilgrimage sights.⁷⁷ Secondly, he put forward the view in an article published in *Young India* that nationalism is a pre-requisite for achieving internationalism. However, he defined nationalism not as a narrow selfish expression of a people's perceived superiority but as the ability of people to act as one man. When such nationalism is achieved it will serve for lasting peace in the international arena as well as humanity at large. Thus, Gandhi attempted an inversion of the colonial epistemology of knowledge as power where the formerly derided Indian cultural knowledge and concepts were portrayed as superior.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Hardiman, David. *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.

⁷⁷ Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1909.

⁷⁸ Hardiman, David. *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.

Tagore's ideals of internationalism and humanism ultimately leads to a situation of global peace which greatly influenced the foreign policy of India. In achieving this peace, according to Tagore a meeting or confluence of Eastern and Western ideals were necessary. He aspired for peaceful relations and enhanced cultural exchanges between old Asian civilizations such as India, China and Japan. He believed that Asia with its young population and vast untapped resources would ultimately emerge as a leader in international affairs. However, he was well aware of the perils of jingoistic nationalism that might accompany such a rise. The re-arming of Japan during Tagore's lifetime worried him greatly and thus in the conduction of foreign policy in Asia, Tagore's emphasis was on those factors which would later be termed as elements of soft power. Tagore relied on the cultural aspects of the Asian civilization to foster greater connection understanding between the Asian nations.

Again, Gandhian approach to international politics can be viewed through the prism of pacifism which is a concept of non-violence seeking inwardly and outwardly peace for a nation-state. Whereas Gandhian concept of nationalism and *Swaraj* can be viewed as rather passive concepts, pacifism is an active theory of international relations which comes as a rejection of war or warlike actions as a means of foreign policy. It is an extension of Gandhian rejection of violence and his embracing of tolerance in the field of foreign policy. Gandhian pacifism is absolute where any concept of Just War is not accepted. This leads us to a moralistic approach in international politics where external relations can be based on morality and not on national interest alone.

If the concepts of Kantian *perpetual peace* or Michael Doyle's *democratic peace theory* are juxtaposed with Gandhi or Tagore's concept of international politics, one finds points of similarities as well as divergences. Whereas in Kant's vision we find a critic of Western Republic Democracy which is congruent to Gandhian critic, but the reasons advanced in his theory for a democratic peace are different. While for Gandhi and Tagore, the achievement of peace is a moral imperative derived ultimately from their religious beliefs, the Kantian view accepts peace as instrumental. It argues that it is the shared political culture of democratic societies alone and the characteristics of Western democratic institutions to exercise checks and balances which leads democratic countries to maintain peace. As such this Western notion of peace negates the uniquely Eastern understanding of Gandhi and Tagore, who focused more on civilizational ties rather the commonalities between democratic systems as defined by the West.

Dealing with the Indo-Pacific region which transcends the political boundaries of the East and the West, one needs to undertake an analysis of these two viewpoints as they are still very much relevant in locating the contested political claims arising in this region. For example- China's attempts at reclaiming a supposedly glorious past when it was the pre-eminent power in this region is linked with China's new-found confidence in the superiority of the Chinese culture and ultimately of the Chinese civilization. The reason why the response of many states in his region to the Chinese position also needs to be viewed from their own understanding of the legitimacy of what they view as Western standards of democracy and international relations. Since, inward democracy is fraught with contradictions in many of the South East Asian nations which are active players in the Indo-Pacific, their support towards democratic peace is also questionable. The concept of 'Asian values' as espoused by the leaders of Singapore and Malaysia at the beginning of the new millennium underscored the guarded stance of the Southeast Asian countries to the enthusiasm of Western Europe and the United States to export its own values and politics to Asia in the post-cold war euphoria.

Harmony, consensus, unity and community values which have been mentioned as the four pillars of Asian values are considered to underplay the centrality of democracy and human rights in international affairs. The focus on a collective, on family and on traditional belief system which inform the Asian values are incongruent with the individualistic notions of democracy. Asian values imply non-interference in the affairs of another state, even on the issues of human rights violations. Thus, once again, one arrives at the crossroads between Western and Asian notions of international politics in the Indo-Pacific. However, it is perhaps premature to assume that selective interpretations of civilizational values of the Asian nations will finally be able to construct a viable alternative morale edifice to the predominant Western ones in the region.

Analysis

Mental maps are interpretations and consequential representations of a country's statecraft.⁷⁹ Bilateral or multilateral relations - be it of the nature of competition or cooperation, entail a landscape of the mind which termed as a mental map.⁸⁰ This defines what each country refers to as the natural 'region' of operation, equating to what geopolitical thinkers regard as strategic system or a regional security complex, that is, demarcating a particular area where the behaviour of one or more states is said to have a powerful and inescapable impact on the interests of other nation-states.⁸¹ It aids strategizing since maps are then not static, but a dynamic reflection or symbol of power. What a nation depicts on its map is representative of what it considers to be its world vision and objectives, and, therefore leaders and policymakers define a region to suit their best interest.⁸² This is perhaps what is shaping the regional nomenclature and geopolitical narratives surrounding the Indo-Pacific. Differing interpretation of the Indo-Pacific from different nation-states suggest the emerging trends in the region, linking the idea of prosperity with geo-strategic security. Indo-Pacific can thus be said to unfold the emerging of geopolitical realities where the locus is shifting from the obsession of physical security to geo-economic security and this is attracting countries all over.

The chapter defines and understand the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific by analysing some of the major theoretic perspectives that explain the complexities of the region. Indo-Pacific provides a new outlook to untangle and decipher the geopolitical realities of the present century. Consequently, there has been a contestation over securitizing the Indo-Pacific. It chapter follows a descriptive and analytical approach to study the stipulations of the theoretical underpinnings of major geopolitical thinkers whose ideas aid to understanding how the Indo-Pacific region has been envisioned as a geopolitical entity and how regions. The geopolitical configuration and the theoretical inflections help situate Indo-Pacific as the landscape of mind

⁷⁹ Kaplan, Robert D. "Center Stage for the 21st Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean." *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009.

⁸⁰ Medcalf, Rory. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the Contest for the World's Pivotal Region*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

⁸¹ Buzan, Barry. "Security Architecture in Asia: The Interplay of Regional and Global Levels." *The Pacific Review* 16, no. 2 (2003): 145–148

⁸² Medcalf, Rory. *Indo-Pacific Empire: China, America and the Contest for the World's Pivotal Region*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

among the powers in the region. It's a continuous quest to draw and re-draw the mental map to suit their game. While the US delineate the power-structure and push for Indo-Pacific to suit their world view, the People's Republic reject the very coinage if the word Indo-Pacific and believes in the logic of the Asia Pacific and a China centric view of the Asia-Pacific power distribution. While complex interdependence narratives a tale of growing web of political, economic, and cultural linkages among the Indo-Pacific stakeholders, and states coming together in common platforms (for example- COP) and protecting global commons, , power transition theory aptly describes the regional dynamics and the emerging challenge to the very power structure, which is slowly germinating in the Indo-Pacific. Finally, Indo-Pacific narratives draw an interesting debate between the Western individualistic ideas of power politics, statecraft vis-à-vis the Eastern approach to understanding international relations based upon a system of values, culture and non-aggression.

CHAPTER THREE

SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: IMPERATIVES AND DRIVERS

“Men are driven by two principal impulses, either by love or by fear.”

— *Niccolò Machiavelli, Discourses*

Introduction

State is the most important actor in the study of politics. Closely connected to the survival of state, is the concept of security that lies at the heart of the study of international relations. Political philosophers beginning from Socrates have tried to decode security as closely related to the idea of a stable state which is linked to securing human existence. Since the Treaty of Westphalia and the emergence of the notion of co-existing modern sovereign nation-states, the concept of security, has also been the most contested one.⁸³ Consequently, international relations theories have been premised on the discovery of a state of equilibrium often decoded by a sense of security.

The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly becoming a theatre for geopolitical competition, with major powers vying for influence and strategic interests.⁸⁴ This geopolitical rivalry has manifested in territorial disputes, military build-up, and strategic alignments, raising concerns about regional stability and security.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Pacific Islands face a myriad of non-traditional security challenges, including climate change impacts, natural disasters, and resource depletion, which exacerbate vulnerabilities and strain governance capacities.⁸⁶ Again,

⁸³ Baylis, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, eds. 2020. *The Globalization of World Politics*. 8th ed. London, England: Oxford University Press.

⁸⁴ Friedberg, Aaron L. *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.

⁸⁵ Brewster, David. *The Great Power Competition and the Pacific Islands: China's Rise and the Challenge to US Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

⁸⁶ Barnett, Jon, and John Campbell. *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge, and the South Pacific*. Earth scan, 2010.

the concept of security and security architecture has undergone significant evolution over the years. From traditional military-centric approaches to more holistic frameworks encompassing diverse non-traditional threats, scholars and policymakers have continuously redefined its understanding in the study of international relations. This chapter initiates the discussion by defining security and delineating the various layers of security to analyse the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific. Thereafter, the chapter attempts to explain the security framework of the Indo-Pacific by analysing the role and interests of various actors in region. By examining the vast gamut of literature devoted to security studies and then analysing the strategic alliances, defence partnerships, and diplomatic engagements, it endeavours to identify the key developments that highlight a significant transformation in regional security dynamics.

Understanding Security: From Security to Securitization

The search for a comprehensive definition of security and the quest for achieving it has always fascinated political scientists and strategists. The understanding of security is as old as the existence of human association and is the primary prerogative of highest form of human organization, viz. the state. Security which can be simply understood as assurance against insecurity, is regarded as the ideal condition for the existence of nation-states. Yet, it is the most controversial and intensely scrutinized topic in international politics. The earliest understanding comes from Kautilya and Thucydides who gave the earliest versions of security. Belonging to the 4th century BCE, Kautilya's Arthashastra is the most exquisite and voluminous work (consisting of 15 books or Adhikarana) on securing the state from all forms of threats (internal and external). Known as the 'science of politics', Arthashastra presents the most comprehensive identification of security which is embedded in political, military, economic, environment, food security. Each as every domain in this identification is used to maximize the power of the state and to protect the welfare of the citizens. His conception of security binds both internal and external connotations whereby the well-being of the citizens is one of the core responsibilities of the state. Kautilya asserts, "*In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good.*"⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Shamasastri, R. *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Bangalore: Government Press, 1915.

Arthashastra, often referred to as the 'science of politics' is the oldest testament of what is now known as political realism. It is a vivid the elaboration on the duties of the King, the instruments of diplomacy and statecraft and the art of fighting and winning a war. Its relevance is profoundly present in today's international relations and foreign policy choices of nation-states. For instance, the various forms of diplomacy prescribed by Kautilya such as Yana (preparedness for war), Asana (neutrality), Samasraya (alliance formation) and Dvaidhibhava (duplicity that is making peace with one and waging war with another state), is still relevant in today's geopolitical configurations among nation-states. For instance, US political game with China and Soviet Union during the cold war, more specifically the détente can be regarded as Dvaidhibhava, while India's military preparedness against Pakistan can be analysed under what Kautilya referred to Yana. India's strategic autonomy or non-alignment of the cold war times can be categorized under neutrality. Samasraya is the most commonly evident feature of international politics. India- USSR Treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation in 1971 can be regarded as Samasraya. Also, alliance politics has become a very common feature of contemporary international relations, only to modify itself to meet the novel complexities. Indo-Pacific countries now are increasingly prioritizing bilateral, minilateral and multilateral partnerships and trade negotiations to address regional security concerns. Though Kautilya is focussed more upon illustrating an exhaustive statecraft, rather than a universal diplomacy, the underlying prescription of the lack of any permanent friends or enemies as the only constant feature of international relations is all-pervading and timeless.

Carrying forward, Thucydides in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, advances the centrality of power politics in international relations. The anarchic structure of international system leads to domination of the stronger power over the weaker ones, and ordains very limited role to justice and morality in statecraft. He doesn't dismiss the role of cooperation but believes in the fragility of alliances due to the unpredictable nature of states that forth the security dilemma and consequently shapes the behaviour of states. For him, fear, desire for glory, and self-interest are the fundamental drivers of conflict and war, which remains an unavoidable feature of the international system. He believed in fragility of the balance of power and that peace can be maintained only till no state becomes disproportionately powerful. His theorization is based decoding the underlying reasons for the inevitability of the Peloponnesian War, attributing it

to the growth of Athenian power that invoked fear and security dilemma in Sparta.⁸⁸ The basic understanding laid by Thucydides that a fast-rising challenger threatens to displace an established power, and that fear and security dilemma can lead to conflict, is relevant in interpreting US-China relations in the Indo-Pacific. The theoretical premise has been used in Graham Allison's work titled *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*⁸⁹, that provides an elaborate exposition of the rise of China and its challenge to US dominance. Allison contends that power transition sets up this 'Thucydides Trap' whereby the US apprehends losing its primacy due to China's rise, and this dynamics of fear, ambitions and mistrust might lead to conflict.

So, it can be said that the realist understanding of security is shaped by the overarching conditions of anarchy where nations-states are constantly engaged in a struggle for power. It views the world as a realm of power seeking nation-states, where 'self-help' is the primary goal and state is the supreme agent of security defined in terms of power. The concept of security is therefore understood in close connection with delineating the logic of insecurity and its constant threat upon nation-states. This traditional understanding of security stemming from the realist school of thought views it physical statist terms relating to military. It traces the logic of insecurity from the very nature of human being that classical realists consider to selfish, egocentric, self-centred and unsuited for cooperation in the long run. According to Machiavelli, "For it is a good general rule about men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain..."- Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*⁹⁰. Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Machiavelli, 1532/2003), draws upon this pessimistic human nature and its manifestations upon the political organization that humans form, that is, the sovereign nation-states. The primary aim here to secure the nation-state from any intimidation- internal or external. Regarded as a statist theory, it identifies nation-states as key actors operating in a condition of uncertainty where power and self-help are the only means of surviving and

⁸⁸ Oldemeinen, Mareike. "The Political Realism of Thucydides and Thomas Hobbes." *E-International Relations*, February 15, 2010. Accessed August 21, 2023. <https://www.e-ir.info/2010/02/15/the-political-realism-of-thucydides-and-thomas-hobbes/>.

⁸⁹ Allison, Graham T. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

⁹⁰ Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Translated by George Bull. Penguin Classics, 2003 (Original work published 1532).

securing national interest in the international system.⁹¹ The state and security are construed in terms of power dynamics, competition, and the pursuit of national interests. This conception of power politics is responsible for the systematization of the discipline of political realism where the paradigm of knowledge is based upon the understanding of human nature.

Similarly, Thomas Hobbes in his pursuit to addressing the endemic conflict manifested upon by anarchy, prioritises the formation of Commonwealth. He writes-

*“This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner as if every man should say to every man: I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that you give up, your right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner” where all the powers are rested upon.”*⁹²- Thomas Hobbes

The Commonwealth is referred to by Hobbes as the mortal god or Leviathan that united all powers and ends ‘*a war of every man against every man*’, also providing a philosophical articulation of the fundamentals that underpin the realism in international relations. For Hobbes, the first and foremost obligation of the Commonwealth is to ensure security and for that the consolidation of all powers in the hand of the Commonwealth is essential. Interestingly, Hobbes views power both as a mean of protection and also as a potential threat. Termed as ‘Hobbesian dilemma’, it refers to the paradox between the monopolies of coercion in the hands of the state that he considers essential for the functioning of the state, maintaining rule of law, deterring violence and aiding in economic and social progress vis-à-vis the concentration of power that can turn the state itself as an oppressive force undermining human security and development.⁹³

⁹¹ Baylis, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, eds. 2020. *The Globalization of World Politics*. 8th ed. London, England: Oxford University Press.

⁹² Hobbes, Thomas. *The Leviathan* (1651). Edited selections on “State of Nature,” “State of War,” and “Formation of the State.” Accessed August 3, 2024. [https://courses.washington.edu/hsteu302/Hobbes%20selections%20\(edited\).htm](https://courses.washington.edu/hsteu302/Hobbes%20selections%20(edited).htm).

⁹³ Keohane, Robert Owen. *Hobbes's Dilemma and Institutional Change in World Politics: Sovereignty in International Society*. Working Paper Series, vol. 93, no. 3. Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1993.

A vivid discussion on the realist school of thought is found in the writings of Hans J. Morgenthau in his classic text, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*.⁹⁴ In this book, Morgenthau depicted a condition where nation-states are engaged in a persistent struggle for power, aiming to achieve their national interest and security objectives where survival and growth are the core elements of international politics. He firmly believes, “*International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power*”⁹⁵ where is defined in terms of power. The central question asked by political realism is “*How does this policy affect the power of the nation?*”⁹⁶ So, Morgenthau’s central conception relies on power, where politics is essentially the struggle for power with national interest at its core. In the absence of any central authority (denoting anarchy in the international system), state must accumulate power and moral principles have no claim to override the pursuit of national interest. Derived from this, it can be said that security as per Morgenthau’s realism, takes up a statist character that is the core objective of statecraft. It revolves around ensuring survival and growth of the state which is the fundamental goal of foreign policy, pursued through power politics, diplomacy, and military capabilities.

Realism is, however, not a monolithic theory. In the twentieth century, Kenneth N. Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer delves into what is widely known as structural realism providing an insight into political realism which is driven by specific ‘structure’ of the international system of states. This anarchic structure of the international system, drives the rational actors, that is, states in a perpetual struggle for power and security. For them, the number of ‘great powers’ present in the global system is a critical determinant of the overall structure of the system. Here, security dilemma arises because measures taken by one state to enhance its security has an impact on the insecurity of other states, prompting arms races and conflicts.⁹⁷ Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*⁹⁸ elaborates upon what is termed as ‘defensive realism’ where he focuses less on human nature and more on the structure of world politics. Nation-states differ

⁹⁴ Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.

⁹⁵ Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Knopf, 1948.

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ Jackson, Robert H., and Georg Sørensen. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

⁹⁸ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. 1st ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1979

in terms of power, that Waltz termed as ‘capabilities’ and recommends states to adopt moderate and a restrained approach to maintain security, since there remains a propensity to balance powerful revisionist states due to the innate structure that impacts upon international relations. Similarly, John J. Mearsheimer⁹⁹ provides an insight into political realism which is driven by this anarchic understanding of the international system, where states are engaged in a perpetual struggle for power and security. In the absence of any central authority to enforce cooperation or prevent conflict, they seek to maximize their relative power to ensure their survival in a competitive international environment. Affiliating to the offensive branch of structural realism, he underscores the importance of military capabilities and strategic considerations in states’ behaviour, highlighting the significance of power balancing and all activates of the state that is geared towards deterring potential and actual adversaries.

Therefore, grasping the ethos of security is contingent upon the realist world view corresponds to the billiard ball model of where states are hierarchically placed by differential power equations. Emphasizing power politics, competition, and the pursuit of national interests as fundamental concepts, political realism believe that the pursuit of security through power projection and alliance-building is a fundamental aspect of statecraft in global politics. Traditional realist perspectives, emphasizes the centrality of state security and prerogatives of power politics in international relations. Realists¹⁰⁰ argue that states exist in an anarchic system where self-help and survival are paramount, leading to competition and conflict among states for power and security. Consequently, security architecture, from a realist perspective, revolves around military capabilities, alliances, and deterrence strategies aimed at protecting state interests and maintaining a balance of power. Political realism has been criticised as providing a very narrow definition of security with its limited applicability in understanding contemporary international relations.

Charles L. Glaser’s¹⁰¹ aims at providing an optimistic outlook on international politics within the realist logic. He challenges pessimistic and conventional view of realism and sheds lights into the prospects for international cooperation by analysing of realist theory, particularly structural realism (or neorealism) to show that there can be a considerable degree of

⁹⁹ Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York, NY: WW Norton, 2001.

¹⁰⁰ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. McGraw-Hill, 1979.

¹⁰¹ Glaser, Charles L. “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help.” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 50–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539079>

cooperation under certain conditions. Dealing with two sub-sections of knowledge within realism: defensive realism and offensive realism, he argues that defensive realists believe that the structure of the international system encourages states to maintain their statuesque rather than aiming to maximise power. This gives way to a certain degree of balance of power and some amount of stability. Offensive realists, on the other hand, are more invested into viewing the international system as anarchic which tends to motivating states toward relentless power accumulation, thus fostering a state of perpetual conflict and a pessimistic portrait of international relations. Glaser is critical of John Mearsheimer's offensive realism, which he views as overly deterministic and empirically unconvincing since Mearsheimer's assumption, that states are inevitably revisionist, is not supported by historical evidence and so the theorization underestimates the strategic calculations of status quo states. Glaser points out to the historical episodes, such as arms control during the Cold War and patterns of restrained behaviour among great powers to critically analyse Mearsheimer's contentions. Glaser in presenting 'realists as optimists' aligns more towards the defensive realist school and contends that realism can work towards building and supporting meaningful cooperation depending on the strategic environment. He presents an optimistic perspective of reframing realism as flexible, would accommodate both competition and cooperation and aid to explaining the variations in international outcomes and to reduce instability in international politics. He believes that realism should analyse specific conditions under which cooperation is not only possible but strategically the best possible solution. He highlights upon strategic conditions that can make cooperation possible- even under anarchy. This is refers to as 'contingent cooperation', where nation-states even under anarchy can adopt to cooperative measures or strategies that impact upon the behaviour of other states. He gives examples such as arms control agreements, reduction of arsenals, alliance restraint, or the avoidance of unnecessarily provocative military deployments. A nation-state can undertake such strategic measures which often appears to be more rational and cooperation a rational self-help behaviour of actors which can also be sustained in the long run through mutual interactions, discussions and adjustments.

A central argument of his article is that the security dilemma, that is, the idea that a state's measures to increase its own security often reduce the security of others or is contingent upon the insecurity of other states, is not always insurmountable. Glaser demonstrates that the severity of the security dilemma is contingent upon factors such as the offence-defence balance and the degree to which military capabilities are distinguishable between offensive and defensive postures. When defence has the advantage and is distinguishable from offence,

cooperation becomes more feasible because states can pursue security without threatening others.

A distinct break from this understanding comes from the liberal school of thought, where the logical integrity of the philosophy is based upon a certain conception of human predisposition. Such an understanding is imbibed in the writings of classical liberal scholars such as John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant among others. Liberals believe human nature to be inherently amicable and prone to cooperation. Liberals are convinced that human reason surpasses all pessimism and is based upon rationality that guides their actions in international affairs.¹⁰²

Liberals believe in the possibility of cooperation among nation-states through shared norms, institutions, and economic interdependence. It highlights upon a significant point that states seek security not only through military means but also through economic prosperity, political stability, the promotion of democracy and human rights. Liberals rely on international institutions as mechanisms for conflict resolution and the promotion of collective security. Without denying the role of the state in international engagements, liberals believe there are other more or equal important actors in this game of power changing equations. Liberals view individuals, multinational corporations, transnational actors, and international organizations as key players in global politics. Rather than conceptualizing the state as a singular, unified entity, liberals see it as comprised of individuals and their aggregated societal preferences and interests.¹⁰³

Liberal world view is akin to the cobweb model of international relations, where the concept of the state and security is understood in a multifaceted manner that underscores interdependence, cooperation, and the role of institutions in managing conflicts and ensuring peace. Liberals argue that states are not solely driven by power politics but also by economic interests, values, and norms.¹⁰⁴ Security, therefore, extends beyond military defence to encompass economic, political, and societal dimensions. Contrary to realist views, neoliberal

¹⁰² Jahn, Beate, ed. *Classical Theory in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁰³ Baylis, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, eds. 2020. *The Globalization of World Politics*. 8th ed. London, England: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁴ McGlinchey, Stephen, Rosie Walters, and Christian Scheinpflug, eds. *International Relations Theory*. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017

institutionalism introduces a more cooperative approach to security architecture. Advocates of neoliberalism argue that states can achieve security through institutional cooperation, collective security arrangements, and the establishment of international regimes. Institutionalism, regionalism and forums supporting cooperative mechanisms are significant for them to alleviate suspicion and conflict. They opine that institutions such as the United Nations and regional organizations like the European Union play crucial roles in facilitating diplomacy, conflict resolution, and cooperation among states.¹⁰⁵ From a neoliberal perspective, security architecture encompasses not only military alliances but also economic interdependence, shared norms, and institutional mechanisms for conflict management and resolution.

Michael Doyle¹⁰⁶, however believes that liberalism is neither completely pacifist nor is it purely imperialist. He writes that liberalism creates a dual legacy where it fosters peace among the liberal states, along with conflict with non-liberal ones. This duality, according to him stems from the diverging ideas of the purpose of the states, issues of citizenship and rights and role of individuals that shape the liberal foreign policy in a rather complex manner.

The end of the Cold War have led to the emergence of multiple scenarios that have led to a re-evaluation of international politics. While America did emerge as the sole powerful nation, international politics was no longer unipolar. There was a silent transition of international politics taking place where Asian countries were rising as power-centres leading to the emergence of multipolar world order and international issues differentially coloured in terms of the nature and degree of threat perception leading to diversification of security identifiers. Such a multipolar world order and diversification of issues led to a re-evaluation of security paradigms. The emergence of non-traditional security threats, ranging from human trafficking to international narcotics, terrorism to cyber security, have emerged as critical concerns affecting human life indirectly and sometimes threatening the very survival of nation-states. These threats, often non-conventional and propagated by non-state actors, pose challenges that extend beyond conventional warfare tactics and addressing these multifaceted security challenges requires a comprehensive approach.

¹⁰⁵ Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Little, Brown, 1977

¹⁰⁶ Doyle, Michael W. "Liberalism and World Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1960861>

Ken Booth¹⁰⁷ considers “*security and emancipation two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order produces true security. Emancipation theoretically, is security.*” Drawing upon the tradition of post-Marxist ideology, with a specific emphasis on the principles of the Frankfurt School, Booth in his *Theory of World Security*,¹⁰⁸ redefined security beyond conventional military or state-focused paradigms. He contends that security extends to a wider array of concerns, spanning social, economic, environmental, and human rights domains. He underscores the interdependence of global challenges and advocates for comprehensive security strategies advocating for a shift towards a more inclusive and cooperative understanding of security that prioritizes human well-being and sustainable development. Critical security studies offer a distinct perspective on security architecture by challenging mainstream assumptions and highlighting the socially constructed nature of security threats. Critical theorists argue that security is not solely about protecting state interests but also involves addressing underlying power structures, inequalities, and injustices that contribute to insecurity.¹⁰⁹ Security architecture, from a critical perspective, extends beyond state-centric approaches to include human security, environmental security, and social justice concerns.¹¹⁰ By deconstructing dominant narratives and emphasizing the voices of marginalized groups, critical security studies advocate for a more inclusive and holistic approach to security governance.

However, there has been ongoing debates among the scholars of security studies and international relations relating to the prioritization of issues with regard to threat perception and consequently the inclusion and/or exclusion of various threats within the logic of securitization.

Stephen M. Walt¹¹¹ claims that there has been a ‘renaissance of security studies’ in the post 1970s and more specifically in the post-cold war due to states’ increasing obsession with nuclear weapons, articulation of grand strategy and an increasingly technology driven warfare.

¹⁰⁷ Booth, Ken. “Security and Emancipation.” *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 4 (1991): 313–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097269>.

¹⁰⁸ Booth, Ken. *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, Paul D. *Security Studies: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2003.

¹¹⁰ Booth, Ken. *Theory of World Security*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹¹¹ Walt, Stephen M. "The Renaissance of Security Studies." *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 211–239. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600471>.

He also points out to the revival of security studies in international relations which is geared by the renewed interest of the states in the traditional hard power issues which underlines the military-security along with the emerging non-military challenges characterizing the present century. According to him, security is rooted in the statist understanding, focussed upon how states and other actors achieve the objectives or prevent other actors from achieving their goals where the identification of security is premised upon threat, use and control of the military objectives. So, here the conceptualization of security can be said to be based upon a realist and strategically oriented framework, with military security at its core.

Walt is not too keen to include issues such as environmental degradation, migration, or economic inequality into his conceptualization of security which he believes might dilute its analytical utility. While he does acknowledge the value of these broader perspectives of security and its even-expanding scope, he cautions that any uncritical expansion of the scope of security studies would undermine its coherence and lead to diluting its ability to generate cumulative knowledge. He opines for a clear criteria or methodological rigour without which incorporating non-military threats would be unwarranted and also argues for a well-defined disciplinary boundary is necessary to preserve intellectual focus. However, recognizing the need to adapt to the new global realities and changing international politics, Walt welcomes debates and methodological pluralism that would encourage deeper theoretical refinement and empirical testing within the field of security studies. It can be said that the primary objective which he believes to be at the core of security studies is in the understanding the causes of war and conditions of peace, especially through empirical and theoretical approaches grounded in political science and therefore works towards a proving an analytical clarity in the understanding of what constitutes security.

David A. Baldwin¹¹²'s in this article *The Concept of Security* (1997) tries to decode the idea of the security by offering a conceptual analysis of the term security. He endeavours to present a complete definition of the term, which he feels in the earlier discourses have been incomplete, often loaded with value-driven entanglements which fail to clarify inherent understanding of the term. His writings build on Arnold Wolfers¹¹³ seminal essay *National Security' as an*

¹¹² Baldwin, David A. "The Concept of Security." *Review of International Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210597000053>.

¹¹³ Wolfers, Arnold. "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol." *Political Science Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1952): 481–502. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2145138>.

Ambiguous Symbol (1952) which defined security as “the absence of threats to acquired values,” and reformulates it as “a low probability of damage to acquired values.” This reformulation of the term, according to him, is best applicable to the understanding of security at all levels- be it individual, or state or international given that it specifies the several dimensions of security, deliberating upon the most pertinent questions surrounding security, that is, security for whom, for which values, how much security is in question, the identification of threats, by what means, along with the cost and time frame analysis. He evaluates security through three different approaches: the prima value, the core value and the marginal value approaches. While in his analysis, he rejects the first two since they attribute an unqualified significance to security almost assigning an absolute value to the term, he advocated for the marginal value approach for measuring security in the understanding of international politics which would provide for a more realistic appraisal of the degree of security, aiding the optimum allocation of resources. Resonating Stephen Walt¹¹⁴, he too prioritizes the traditional domain of understanding security. Baldwin was critical of scholars like Barry Buzan and Richard Ullman, who he believes coalesce the domain of security studies. He challenges such identification of security as a contested concept, which often lack specification and he opines that it does not portray any large philosophical divide. He is also critical of neo-realists like Kenneth Waltz’s where the survival of the state at the core of the conception of security. To Baldwin, the understanding of security cannot be simply equated with survival as this obscures the significant distinctions between the values and degrees of security along with the costs and alternatives to achieving security. Though Baldwin does acknowledge the incorporation of economic, environmental, and identity dimensions of security, calling it ‘new thinking’ in security studies, he submits that these compartmentalization of the concept may seem to broaden the areas of security but they do not fundamentally change the concept and these developments according to him can be accommodated within the framework already outlined by Wolfers in the 1950s.

A seminal breakthrough in security studies emerges from the Copenhagen school of security studies that emerged in the 1990s from the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. Emerging from the writings of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde¹¹⁵, it focuses on the concept

¹¹⁴ Walt, Stephen M. "The Renaissance of Security Studies." *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1991): 211–239. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600471>.

¹¹⁵ Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998

of security and emphasizes the importance of securitization, which refers to the process by which certain issues are constructed as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures beyond regular political procedures. The Copenhagen School's contribution to security studies indeed marks a significant shift from earlier military-centric perspectives to a broader perception encompassing social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Their aim is to reconceptualise security from a narrow state-centric notion of analysing security to include a much broader interpretation to include 'the people'.¹¹⁶ The qualifying point of security threats is the justification for the use of 'extraordinary measures' and the legitimate use of force. Therefore, Weaver opines that security does not generate a situation of admiration, rather states should opt for de-securitization that brings back issues from the emergency mode to the normal process of bargaining.¹¹⁷ What can be gathered from the very elaborate discussion regarding security is that the term security cannot be decoded in simplistic terms and requires a rather complex understanding.

Barry Buzan's *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*¹¹⁸ presents a foundational and critical re-conceptualisation of the concept of security. He argues that security is a multidimensional and socially constructed concept that must move beyond the narrow, traditional military-centric view dominant in realist international relations theory. Buzan challenges the conventional understanding of national security as the protection of state sovereignty against external military threats and instead proposes a broader framework that incorporates multiple sectors and referent objects.

Ole Waever in the chapter titled '*Securitization and De-securitization*'¹¹⁹, reconceptualises security as a 'speech act' rather than a fixed condition or objective of a state. His central proposition is that security is not an objective reality but a declarative, action-inducing utterance that is constructed and has its own reality. When a state or actor declares something

¹¹⁶ Wæver, Ole. "Securitization and Desecuritization." In *On Security*, edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 46–86. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995

¹¹⁷ Buzan, Barry, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A new Framework of Analysis*, London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1998.

¹¹⁸ Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

¹¹⁹ Wæver, Ole. 1995. "Securitization and Desecuritization." In *On Security*, edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 46–86. New York: Columbia University Press.

to be a security issue, it elevates the matter beyond the realm of normal politics, thereby qualifying the usage of extraordinary measures. Such framework of analysis brings forth the focus on the politics of labelling and to the power exerted by those who can authoritatively securitize an issue. Therefore, security becomes a socially constructed field that is shaped by inter-subjective understanding, historical nuances and institutionalised practices. The most significant disposition is “*security and insecurity do not constitute a binary opposition,*”¹²⁰ although they denote the same underlying security dilemma. Security refers to a condition where there exists a threat or a problem and a response to this regard has already been initiated. In contrast, insecurity also denotes the presence of threat, but the response to this regard has not been initiated. When there is no threat perception, then there is no reference in terms of security. In other words, it becomes irrelevant. Again, the notion of security is always relative, and there is nothing called absolute security since ‘*if one has such complete security, one does not label it ‘security’*’ and hence it ‘*never appears*’. As a result, resolving a security issue cannot be achieved by continuing to frame it in security terms; rather, it requires shifting the discourse away from the language of security altogether. This performative view of security foregrounds the discursive and political nature of securitization, challenging essentialist and positivist approaches. Security, therefore is not an objective concept to be measured, but a contested site of meaning, struggle, and mobilisation.

Securitization theory finds its most elaborate illustration in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wilde.¹²¹ To conceptualize security in a holistic manner, Buzan and others¹²² departed from the state centric notion of understanding security to a sectoral perspective to include society, economic, environment; along with the military and political aspect of security. Their analysis explains security from a perspective of three levels of analysis- individuals, state and the international system. Security is understood as the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of society and nation-state to sustain their independent identity and virtue against any change that might seem to be hostile. The notion of power, therefore, becomes a much fluid concept, not limiting itself to strategic and military

¹²⁰ Wæver, Ole. 1995. “Securitization and Desecuritization.” In *On Security*, edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 46–86. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹²¹ Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997.

¹²² *ibid.*

proWess, and manifesting upon the economic and social aspects of life. Defining securitization as ‘*a more extreme version of politicization*’, that transcends the understanding of politics beyond the established framework to ‘*a special kind of politics or as above politics*’. Though the study initiates with the politico-military notion of security as survival and states as the referent object, the idea is not limited to this; rather referent objects can transcend the narrow perspective of its survival of state, to imply society, economy, political units, and environment. Therefore, the understanding of security broadens the domain of analysis related to the conceptualization of security. The identification of the objects of security is also enlarged as any threat in any domain can be perceived as ‘existential threat’ would render the need for securitization. As any public issue, therefore, can be positioned on a broad spectrum that ranges from being non-politicized (something that has does not concern the state) through politicized (issues that concern the state, part of public policy, concerns governance or allocation of resources) and to being securitized (something that presents itself as an existential threat and calls for emergency measures). The placing of issues is contingent upon the circumstances and therefore eliminates the rigidity in conceptualization.

One of Buzan’s¹²³ central arguments is that the state should not be the only referent object of security. While the state is a principal actor in international relations, the individual (person) and the international system (or society) also deserve attention as objects that can be threatened and require protection. This tripartite structure- people, states, and the international system—forms the basis for a more comprehensive security analysis. Furthermore, Buzan introduces a sectoral approach to security, identifying five key sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. Each sector represents a different dimension where security can be threatened and where responses may be necessary. For instance, economic insecurity may involve trade imbalances or resource dependence, while societal insecurity could stem from threats to identity or cultural cohesion.

A core contention in his arguments is that security is not just about material capabilities or physical survival, but also about perceptions, values, and the legitimacy of political structures. Buzan places strong emphasis on the role of ideas, ideologies, and identity in shaping what is perceived as a security threat. Thus, the concept of security is inherently political and

¹²³ Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997.

subjective. Buzan also critiques both traditional realist and neorealist paradigms for their narrow focus on anarchy, power, and military force. He argues that such approaches overlook internal vulnerabilities within states, such as weak institutions, identity fragmentation, or economic instability, which can pose more significant security threats than external aggression. He thus highlights the internal dimension of security, focusing on state cohesion and societal integration as vital to national security.

By adopting regional, and global approaches, they have expanded the discourse on security beyond conventional state-centric paradigms. Security, in this context, is defined not merely as the absence of military threats but as the absence of all forms of threats, risks, vulnerability, perils and fears, whether traditional or non-traditional that can have a substantial impact on an individual or state or region and can elevate the issues to the level of politicization qualifying extraordinary measures. It encompasses all facets of life- including social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and environmental. Moreover, it is not limited to the individual level but extends to communities, civil society and also extending into the global scenario.

It can be said that Buzan's main focus and contributions are the broadening of the concept of security beyond military threats; the introduction of multiple referent objects and sectors; the insistence on the subjective and socially constructed nature of security; and the call for more inclusive frameworks that incorporate both internal and external dimensions of insecurity. His work laid the foundation for the 'widening' and 'deepening' of security studies. Since, national security remains at the nucleus of state, security complexes can also be regarded as a necessary corollary in the field of international politics.

In the present context, Indo-Pacific is perhaps the best exposition of securitization and reflects the best scenario of the politics of securitization in the multipolar world order. Here, securitization is linked to understanding the Indo-Pacific power play where there are multiple levels of understanding the region. The region (as already explained in the previous chapter) has experienced a tremendous rise in the last few decades and this economic prosperity manifested in terms of greater political in international politics. Consequently, the issues pertaining to the region has been progressively securitized in the context of this rise. The security issues therefore revolved along the entire spectrum of securitization- from politico-military security to economic, environmental and finally to human security. The region has the presence of nation-states as contenders for greater leverage, and then there is non-traditional security concerns arising out of climate change, rising sea-levels, disappearance and

reappearance of islands and the tussle for control over it and the increase of piracy, over-fishing, and freedom of navigation. Along with this, the presence of non-traditional actors such as terrorist, international narcotics and human trafficking, add to the existing concerns in the region. So, geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific is manifested in terms of the quest for securitization should address these labyrinth of contending claims and concerns.

Defining Security Architecture

The term ‘security architecture’ combines the concepts of security and architecture reflecting upon the complex interplay of both the concepts. As explained in the previous section, ‘security’ pertains to the absence of both traditional and non-traditional threats, ‘architecture’ refers to the structural framework of a given region. This integrated concept establishes a collective security framework that interlinks the security interests of diverse socio-cultural, economic, political, and geostrategic factors within the region. Such architecture solidifies the security of a specific region by addressing mutual dependencies arising from economic, geographical, or some common security-related interconnections among its constituent parts. In order to understand security architecture, it is first important to decode the idea of security.

Security architecture in international relations refers to the structures, mechanisms, and norms that govern and manage security challenges at the global, regional, and national levels. In *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* Buzan introduces the concept of a security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.”¹²⁴ This theoretical framework is pivotal for understanding regional security dynamics, where geographical proximity and shared security issues bind states together into distinct enclaves within the global security order. Buzan utilizes the South Asian security complex as a case study to demonstrate that security concerns extend beyond individual states, illustrating instead their interconnectedness through a network of mutual perceptions and strategic interactions. The dynamics within this complex underscore how localized security issues can reverberate, affecting regional stability and global peace.

¹²⁴ Buzan, Barry People, *States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, University of Michigan: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983

Furthermore, he delves into the concept of amity and enmity within security complexes, elucidating how states within a complex can transition from adversarial relationships to cooperative security arrangements. These shifts depend on factors such as changes in leadership, strategic interests, and external influences. This fluidity underscores the potential for change within security complexes, suggesting that they are not fixed entities but are subject to evolution over time, influenced by alterations in power dynamics and diplomatic engagements. In his analysis of the South Asian security complex, Buzan¹²⁵ also addresses the roles of smaller states in the region. Despite their relatively limited power, these states wield significant influence within the complex by engaging with major powers and contributing to its intricate dynamics. In the later work *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever¹²⁶ present a compelling regional perspective on the broader security discourse, emphasizing the heightened vulnerability of regions to military and political threats due to their proximity. They contend that the shift from the Cold War to the Post-Cold War era has significantly altered the security landscape in Asia, diminishing the constraints posed by geography. This transformation has resulted in the integration of three distinct security complexes in the region such as Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and South Asia into a unified Asian super-complex, coinciding with one of the perceptible region- the Indo-Pacific.

Barry Buzan's article "Asia: A Geopolitical Reconfiguration" examines how the security dynamics of East and South Asia have evolved into what he calls an Asian supercomplex—a network of closely connected regional security complexes (RSCs) shaped by the rise of China and India, the strategic presence of the United States, and the interplay of regional institutions and balancing behaviour. The paper builds on the framework Buzan and Ole Wæver developed in *Regions and Powers* (2003), where RSCs are defined as groups of states whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be addressed independently. Initially, East and South Asia were treated as distinct RSCs with limited interaction, but Buzan now argues that the last decade has seen them merge into a weak but definite supercomplex.

He begins by revisiting the earlier analysis: East Asia in the 1990s had merged Northeast and Southeast Asia into a single RSC, unusually shaped by the presence of two great powers—

¹²⁵ Buzan, Barry. *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

¹²⁶ Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

China and the US—and regional institutions led by smaller states. South Asia, in contrast, was dominated by the India–Pakistan rivalry, limited economic integration, and India’s outward-looking foreign policy. At that stage, connections between the two RSCs were marginal, mainly revolving around the Sino–Indian border disputes, China–Pakistan ties, and competition over Burma. By the early 2000s, however, the rise of China, India’s “Look East” policy, and growing interregional interactions hinted at the formation of a broader Asian framework.

Buzan identifies five major trends driving the geopolitical restructuring of Asia over the last decade: the rise of China and India, the relative decline of US global power, contestation over the idea of “Asia” as a regional identity, and the emergence of balancing behaviour against China. These trends, he argues, have thickened the links between East and South Asia, creating a supercomplex where developments in one subregion increasingly shape the other.

China’s rise is the central driver. Its rapid economic growth and international integration have generated both optimism and apprehension. On the positive side, China has engaged constructively with ASEAN-led institutions, pursued regional free trade agreements, contributed to peacekeeping, and behaved responsibly during financial crises. On the negative side, Beijing has displayed growing military assertiveness, taken a hard line on internal dissent, and pursued uncompromising territorial claims in the East and South China Seas as well as against India. Its relationship with Japan remains fraught, and it has used its influence to block reforms such as Japan’s bid for a UN Security Council seat. These conflicting behaviours produce uncertainty among neighbours, fuelling a perception that China is following the realist trajectory of rising powers—becoming more assertive as the relative strength of the US declines, especially after 2008.

India’s rise, while slower and less spectacular, has been consistent and steady. It has expanded its focus beyond South Asia, cultivated stronger ties with the US, and leveraged its nuclear deal to bolster its great power credentials. India’s naval development and engagement in East Asia—through its “Look East” policy—signal its intent to play a larger role in the Indo-Pacific. While China is more powerful overall, it recognises India as a significant actor, especially in the Indian Ocean. Some of India’s neighbours view it with suspicion, but its democratic character softens Western anxieties compared to those about China.

The United States, despite a relative decline in global influence, has strengthened its position in Asia by capitalising on regional concerns about China’s assertiveness. Its alliances with Japan and Australia have deepened, and its strategic partnership with India has grown. This

dynamic reinforces the triangular interaction among the three big powers—China, India, and the US—at the core of the Asian supercomplex.

Beyond power politics, Buzan highlights the contest over Asian regionalism. The proliferation of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) since the 1990s has created overlapping and competing frameworks, each reflecting different visions of what “Asia” should be. China generally prefers smaller, more exclusive East Asian groupings where its influence is maximised, while Japan, India, and many ASEAN states support broader membership to dilute Chinese dominance and strengthen links with the global core. Cross-membership patterns blur regional boundaries: East Asian states participate in South Asian organisations like SAARC, while South Asian states are observers in East Asian forums. This creates a complex web of connections that, in Buzan’s view, dilutes the distinctiveness of “Asia” as a region. The US exploits this by promoting vast regional constructs—like the “Indo-Pacific”—that legitimise its role while preventing exclusionary regional blocs.

A key feature of the supercomplex is the emergence of balancing behaviour. China’s tougher posture has pushed states such as Japan, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Australia closer to each other and to the US. India, in particular, has intensified military cooperation and strategic dialogues with Southeast Asia, Japan, and the US, often framed as hedging rather than overt alliance-building. Sino–Indian interactions occur both directly—through their disputed border and regional rivalry—and indirectly, via competition in each other’s spheres of influence. China has deepened ties with Pakistan, Burma, and Sri Lanka, while India has cultivated relationships with Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia, and expanded its naval presence in the South China Sea.

India–Japan relations, though politically warm and symbolically significant, remain limited in economic and military depth. Both hedge between the US and China, and both are interested in technologies like ballistic missile defence. The idea of a “democratic axis” linking the US, India, Japan, and Australia emerged by 2007, irking Beijing, but remains loosely coordinated. For India, this is a way to align with the US-led security architecture without formal entanglements.

Buzan’s conclusion is that the Asian supercomplex now exists in a tangible, though still thin, form. China is stronger than India and more entrenched in South Asia than India is in East Asia, but India benefits from a closer relationship with the US. Most Asian states practise strategic hedging, this is balancing against China while avoiding over commitment to the US. A shadow

coalition from Japan to India, via Vietnam and Australia, is visible. If China continues on its post-2008 trajectory of assertiveness, this coalition will solidify, though nuclear deterrence, US presence, and economic interdependence will keep the risk of major war low.

The balance between security and economic linkages will be a crucial variable in shaping the supercomplex's future. While East Asia's economic interdependence constrains conflict, South Asia remains less integrated, and interregional economic ties are weaker still. Military competition could intensify, as China pursues great power symbols like a blue-water navy and space capabilities, prompting similar moves by Japan, Southeast Asia, and India. The likely outcome, Buzan suggests, is not an outright conflict spiral but a "cold armed peace" marked by mutual caution, competitive armament, and complex diplomatic manoeuvring.

In essence, Buzan's argument is that Asia's security landscape has been reconfigured into an interconnected structure linking East and South Asia, embedded in US–China–India dynamics and layered with institutional rivalries and balancing behaviour. The uncertainty about China's intentions—more than its sheer power—drives this process, as regional actors hedge against multiple risks: Chinese dominance, American withdrawal, or entrapment in a new great power rivalry. The irony, Buzan notes, is that the most effective way for China to weaken US influence would be to reassure its neighbours, but its current posture does the opposite, strengthening the very coalitions that balance against it.¹²⁷

Incorporating insights from various theoretical perspectives allows for a nuanced understanding of security architecture, acknowledging the complex interplay of power dynamics, institutions, and social factors shaping security outcomes. By integrating these perspectives, the concept of security and security framework is developed in a comprehensive and adaptable manner that addresses both traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the contemporary global landscape. In order to understand the emerging security complex in the Indo-Pacific, the next section of the chapter delves into understanding the dynamics of the important actors in the region.

¹²⁷ Buzan, Barry. "Asia: A Geopolitical Reconfiguration in the Face of China's Rise." *Politique étrangère* 77, no. 2 (Summer 2012). Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI). Accessed August 15, 2024. <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/fv8qrp>. COI: 20.500.12592/fv8qrp.

Indo-Pacific as a Security Complex

Regional security complex theory posits that states' security concerns are interconnected within a specific geographic area. The interactions among states, influenced by historical, cultural, and economic factors, shape their security policies and strategies. In the Indo-Pacific context, several elements underscore the region's characterization as a security complex such as geographic proximity, that is, the physical closeness of states fosters a shared security environment, the level of interdependence which can be measured by the economic ties and regional trade create interlinked vulnerabilities and incentives for cooperation and most significantly the common threats and security challenges, including maritime disputes, terrorism, and climate change, affect multiple states, necessitating collaborative approaches.

The security architecture in the Indo-Pacific is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the region's strategic importance and the diverse interests of its stakeholders. At the heart of the Indo-Pacific security architecture is the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific," championed by countries such as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. This vision emphasizes the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and respect for sovereignty, all of which are critical to maintaining regional stability in the face of growing challenges from China's assertive policies in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

At its core of the security architecture, the Indo-Pacific strategizing is framed as the main arena of competition between free and open systems on one side, and authoritative, repressive ones on the other. Combining power transition approach and securitization theory, China is singled out as the biggest challenge in the region. This is dealt with in the subsequent section where a detailed examination of China's economic pressures, infrastructure projects, and military assertiveness especially in the South China Sea has been done that expand its influence at the cost of eroding sovereignty of the countries in the region. The rejection to this model come naturally from the United States of America as pledges to support allies and partners in protecting their independence and keeping the region open and rules-based. China has therefore been placed as a significant referent object by India and the USA.

The Role of China in Shaping Security Architecture

China's rise in the international politics is not an anomaly, rather an epochal shift. China has emerged as a global economic giant, ranking as the world's second-largest economy with a GDP of US \$18.743 trillion dollars approximately.¹²⁸ China's foreign exchange reserves is more than US \$3 trillion, while its domestic savings exceeds US \$7.5 trillion annually.¹²⁹ In addition, it holds a net creditor position internationally, valued at approximately US \$1.8 trillion.¹³⁰

China's growing influence in international politics has its roots in unprecedented economic growth, military modernization, technological advancement which is manifested in terms of institutional influence and geopolitical ambitions to reshape the global order and counterbalance American dominance. Graham Allison¹³¹ presents an elaborate exposition of the rise of China in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth, consumption rate, manufacturing which are indicators of a power-transition underway. China's historic rise in economic terms is one of the most dramatic power shifts in the world. In 1980, PRC accounted for barely 2 percent of global GDP which rose to 18 percent in 2016 and has a projection of about 30 percent by 2040. It reflects a transformative leap that was accelerated by the Beijing's role after the 2008 global financial crisis, when it alone accounted for 40 percent of global economic growth, which was more than the combined growth of United States, Japan and Europe. This set the stage for China's rise as the economic centre of the world after 'century of humiliation'. The massive scale of infrastructure development and urbanization in China that can be visualized from the consumption of cement between 2011 and 2013, which was more than what the United States did in the entire 20th century. In 2015 which reflected slower economic growth, China's production more than many other countries of the West. By 2017,

¹²⁸ World Bank. "GDP (Current US\$) – China." *World Bank Open Data*. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>

¹²⁹ People's Republic of China, The State Council Information Office. "China's Foreign Exchange Reserves up to 3.2659 Trillion U.S. Dollars at End of November." *The State Council of the People's Republic of China*, updated December 7, 2024. Accessed August 23, 2025. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/statistics/202412/07/content_WS6753e479c6d0868f4e8edc11.html

¹³⁰ Prasad, Eswar. "Path to Influence." *Finance & Development* (IMF), September 2017. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2017/09/prasad.htm>

¹³¹ Allison, Graham T. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017

Beijing's GDP had reached to 61 percent of the size of the United States compared to only 7 percent in 1980.

The accelerating growth metrics, rapid transformation of the entire economy encapsulate a shift that is not only temporal but structural, altering the balance of economy (in terms of wealth), innovation and finally influencing the international system. Beijing channelized resources into providing aid, investments, and varied forms of financial assistance to countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean countries which are rich in natural resources that is essential for fuelling PRC's manufacturing sector. Over the past few years, China was an investment of about US \$290 billion in sub-Saharan Africa and about US \$160 billion in South America. President Xi Jinping committed US \$60 billion to Africa and the China-Africa strategic partnership featured a broad based area of cooperation in infrastructure development, industrialization, green development and public health.¹³²

Again, this economic might translated into China's military capability with the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s rapidly expanding its defence power into a modern fighting force. PLA's strategic power has increased beyond the prediction of the West with significant investment in naval power, cyber warfare, space capabilities, and nuclear deterrence. China's defence budgets which is only second to the United States enables it to project power beyond its shores, particularly in the South China Sea, which China considers its natural and historically ordained area of influence where it has increasing built artificial islands, claimed already existing ones and fortified them with bases. China's increased confidence in this period was reinforced by military demonstrations that signalled its growing ability to contest U.S. power in the Western Pacific. In 2006, the unexpected surfacing of a PLA Navy submarine in the midst of a U.S. carrier strike group engaged in freedom of navigation operations can be regarded as more than a tactical move. It was an intentional act of strategic signalling. By confronting the U.S. Navy, the world's most powerful maritime force globally, Beijing underscored both its capability and its willingness to challenge what it perceives as a U.S.-imposed security order.¹³³ For Beijing, the U.S. naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is not merely a balancing mechanism; it is viewed as the single greatest obstacle to realising its aspirations

¹³² Prasad, Eswar. "Path to Influence." *Finance & Development* (IMF), September 2017. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2017/09/prasad.htm>

¹³³ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara. "China and the United States in the Indian Ocean." *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (2008): 41–60. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss3/4>

for regional leadership and eventual hegemony. These moves serve as a direct challenge to US naval presence and long standing role as the security guarantor in Asia.

Again, it can be noticed that PRC's pre-eminent role and increasing dominance is not confined to the economic and the military sphere but also extends to international institutions and global governance. China has been diplomatically and institutionally countering American dominance in world politics. A study by the Centre for Global Development¹³⁴ has revealed China's multifaceted role in global institutions as a major donor, shareholder, and commercial partner with its emancipated role in aid diplomacy. The study has observed China's growing influence extending beyond its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), across 76 international institutions, including the World Bank, UN agencies and Gavi (a global public-private vaccine alliance). China borrowing from international institutions has declined over the year and now it has emerged as a significant lender. This dual strategy reflects a deliberate effort of Beijing to boost its influence both by raising voluntary contributions and by creating new platforms of operations, causing unease in the United States as it establishes China's dual role both as a beneficiary and a donor. China has emerged as the fifth-largest donor to the United Nations development agencies, and also the sixth-largest sponsor of the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). Added to this, China has already overtaken Japan as the second-largest contributor to global development. To magnify its positioning in global development funding, China has spearheaded the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB), providing nearly \$40 billion in aiding and assisting infrastructure. Chinese firms has been dominating financial contracts in the infrastructural sector, securing over US \$7 billion in 2019. While the United States of America still holds the largest voting share in International Monetary Fund (IMF), China's voting share in has increased to 6.08 percent making it the third largest voting share and also narrowing the gap between Japan (6.14 percent) which has the second largest voting share. India's voting share still remains very low with 2.63 percent.¹³⁵ It is also a powerful member of the WTO and undertakes a leadership role in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). China's

¹³⁴ Morris, Scott, Rowan Rockafellow, and Sarah Rose. *Mapping China's Multilateralism: A Data Survey of China's Participation in Multilateral Development Institutions and Funds*. CGD Policy Paper 241. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, November 2021. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/mapping-chinas-multilateralism-data-survey.pdf>

¹³⁵ International Monetary Fund. *IMF Members' Quotas and Voting Power, and IMF Board of Governors*. Last modified August 23, 2025. Accessed August 23, 2025. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/About/executive-board/members-quotas>

bid to lead the BRICS that feature the major emerging economies accounting for nearly one-fourth of the world's GDP and about two-fifths of global population, can also be analysed as a major step to reform the rules of global finance. Also, China's role as a debt collector is increasing in the recent years. Though these Chinese debts repayments strain fragile economies, a retrenchment in Western aid and trade has compelled these states to look to China, further eroding the geopolitical leverage traditionally exercised by the West. This is evident as vulnerable nations of Asia and Africa make a record repayment of US \$22 billion to China in 2025. This underscores a major shift in Beijing's role as the heavy debt servicing costs of BRI loans from the 2010s now exceed new disbursements. Despite, the general contraction of global lending, PRC still engages in direct financing towards strategically important and resource-rich partners such as Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia remain key recipients, alongside countries central to the supply of critical minerals and battery metals, including Argentina, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Indonesia.¹³⁶

With regard to climate governance, China has joined the Paris Agreement with conditions that its commitments remains voluntary. As per the Climate Action Tracker, China's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is 'highly insufficient' to achieve global emissions goal and only marginally better than the United States which is 'critically insufficient.'¹³⁷ In global infrastructure building, China's BRI has pledged to halt financing of new coal plants and expansion of renewable investments. These transitions have been steadily positioning China as a leader of the developing world. Its recent performance highlights several developments, such as in the reduction in the approval of coal power plants by 83 percent (comparing 2024 and 2023 data), lowering of carbon emissions and an increasing shift towards clean energy sources.¹³⁸ Clean energy industries have emerged as a leading divers of China's economic growth accounting for 40 percent of China's electricity generation in 2025, as Beijing's target

¹³⁶ Duke, Riley. *Peak Repayment: China's Global Lending: China's Transition from Lead Bilateral Banker to Chief Debt Collector of the Developing World*. Lowy Institute (interactive feature), May 2025. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/peak-repayment-china-global-lending/>

¹³⁷ Dollar, David. "Reluctant Player: China's Approach to International Economic Institutions." *Brookings Institution*, September 14, 2020. Accessed August 23, 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/reluctant-player-chinas-approach-to-international-economic-institutions/>

¹³⁸ Qin, Qi, and Christine Shearer. "China Puts Coal on Back Burner as Renewables Soar." *Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air*. Press release, August 22, 2024. Accessed August 24, 2025. energyandcleanair.org/publication/china-puts-coal-on-back-burner-as-renewables-soar/.

of installing 1,200 GW of wind and solar capacity by 2030, was reached six years ahead of schedule.¹³⁹ China has made significant efforts towards protecting forest areas and has made great strides in renewable energy investments and green transformations, especially in the automobile sector (Electric Vehicles).¹⁴⁰

China assumed a pivotal role at Conference of the Parties (COP) 29 in shaping the central agenda of New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for climate finance, where the EU is key negotiating partner. The PRC contends that the developed nations must follow the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities,’ highlighting that financial pledges from advanced economies remain insufficient to meet developing countries’ needs. Along with this, China reaffirmed commitment to achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, and that its forthcoming 2035 NDC will apply economy-wide and encompass all greenhouse gas emissions. By this dual strategy- voicing the equity concerns of the developing nation and setting itself as an example, China is slowly claiming its position as a central pillar in climate governance. This is evident especially during the time when the United States appears less engaged in climate negotiations. Beijing has also sought to expand dialogues on climate beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework, intensified outreach to the countries of the Global South, aligning climate action with development priorities, along with participating in the G20 to strengthen its claim in climate leadership. The new Chinese rhetoric of ‘ecological civilization’ forms the philosophical basis for global leadership, which reconciles environmental protection with economic needs emphasizing upon renewable energy, emission reduction and ecological restoration. Such trajectory is indicative of PRC’s growing centrality in global climate governance.¹⁴¹ China’s strategy- motivated by economic growth, security coupled with geopolitical ambitions signals an increasingly assertive role underscoring a shift towards an architecture of climate action in which Beijing is no longer just a participant but a potential agenda-setter.

¹³⁹ Březovská, Romana J. “COP29 and Beyond: Is China Holding the Trump Card?” *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*, December 5, 2024. Accessed August 24, 2025. <https://chinaobservers.eu/cop29-and-beyond-is-china-holding-the-trump-card/>

¹⁴⁰ *China a Key Player in Global Climate Action. UNDP China Blog*. November 1, 2024. Accessed August 24, 2025. <https://www.undp.org/china/blog/china-key-player-global-climate-action>

¹⁴¹ Březovská, Romana J. “COP29 and Beyond: Is China Holding the Trump Card?” *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*, December 5, 2024. Accessed August 24, 2025. <https://chinaobservers.eu/cop29-and-beyond-is-china-holding-the-trump-card/>

These multifaceted role give China a uniquely influential position in terms of global economic and institutional dominance. So, Beijing is gradually and favourably altering the modalities of global governance binding it into China's own economic and political statecraft. Most importantly, PRC's rise as an economic and military power has a profound impact on the Indo-Pacific's security architecture. China's assertive policies in the South China Sea, where it has constructed artificial islands and militarized several outposts, have raised concerns among its neighbours and prompted calls for a more robust regional security architecture. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to expand its economic and strategic influence across the Indo-Pacific, has also been viewed with suspicion by other regional powers, particularly India and Japan.¹⁴²

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

President Xi Jinping's announcement of two major initiatives in 2013 that reshaped global perceptions regarding China and redefined the country's future trajectory.

The *Silk Road Economic Belt*, connectivity project this is designed to link China with Europe through Central Asia and the *21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*, which is primarily maritime, intends to connect Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe through sea routes. Collectively, these projects constitute the as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁴³ Unlike the ancient Silk Road, which was a loose network of routes that encouraged trade and cultural interaction across Eurasia, the BRI is designed as a comprehensive framework spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa and reflects the ambitions of China's economic development coupled with its grand objective to influence trade and governance. It is a massive infrastructural investment through roads, railways, bridges, port development and maritime corridors, that links diverse economies ranging from wealthy, advanced nations to poorer countries with significant growth potential, integrating China with Europe, and Africa. The initiative outlines five major priorities: financial integration, policy alignment, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, socio-cultural linkages and people-to-people exchanges, with the Indo-Pacific forming a key geographical and strategic focus. The logic of Beijing's enormous ventures is premised upon the economic fortunes of these regions that together account for nearly two-thirds of the

¹⁴² Singh, Swaran, and Reena Marwah, eds. *China and the Indo-Pacific: Maneuvers and Manifestations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

¹⁴³ Belt and Road Portal. *Xi Jinping and B&R Initiative*. Accessed August 30, 2025. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/special/xjpydy1>

world's population and about one-third of global GDP.¹⁴⁴ Complementing this vision, the Silk Road Fund was launched in December 2014 with an initial capital of US \$40 billion and sets a financing target of US \$1 trillion. China Development Bank has extended large volumes of overseas credit and the Export-Import Bank of China facilitating the country's global reach by offering financing that underpins international trade agreements and overseas infrastructure projects, reflecting the role of China's financial institutions as central to Beijing's global ambitions.¹⁴⁵

Among the multidimensional engagement of the BRI in the Indo-Pacific, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is a flagship projects launched in 2015 with an estimated value of US \$60 billion. CPEC aims to strengthen regional integration by linking Pakistan with China and extending influence into Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia through major transport and energy projects. Again, ASEAN has emerged as a central pillar of BRI cooperation, and interestingly all the ASEAN countries are China's BRI partners. The engagement is both through collective frameworks and bilateral agreements. The '2+7 Cooperation Framework', is a collaborative mechanism that balances strategic trust with economic development priorities in maritime security, finance, and environmental cooperation, and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank exemplify institutionalised cooperation. Bilateral partnerships are mostly economic such as The ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA). At the bilateral level, Indonesia is a leading BRI partner due to its strategic location between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. From 2019 to early 2024, it hosted over 21,000 BRI projects valued at more than US \$30 billion. This economic engagement has translated into deepened political ties, highlighted by a 2023 Joint Statement on Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation and reaffirmed in 2024 with pledges for an expanded partnership.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Modern Diplomacy. "New Regionalism: Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific Region." *Modern Diplomacy*, July 1, 2024. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/01/new-regionalism-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

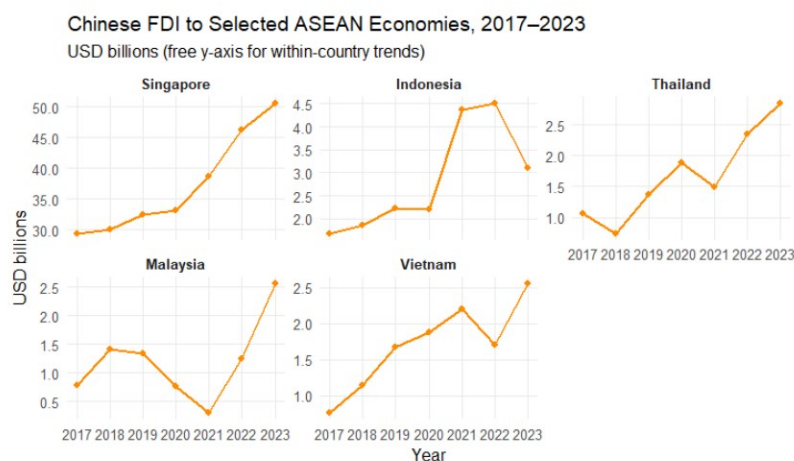
¹⁴⁵ Prasad, Eswar. "Path to Influence." *Finance & Development* (IMF), September 2017. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2017/09/prasad.htm>

¹⁴⁶ BRI- Modern Diplomacy. "New Regionalism: Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo-Pacific Region." *Modern Diplomacy*, July 1, 2024. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/01/new-regionalism-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

The Asia Institute and Green Finance & Development Center¹⁴⁷ observed that since 2017, BRI has operated through four main channels. Firstly, capacity and industrial policy: green energy parks, Electronic Vehicles (EV) and battery manufacturing, solar manufacturing lines, and metals processing facilities can integrate technology diffusion, workforce up-skilling and export platforms. For example- Indonesia’s battery value chain build-out. Secondly, there are resource-for-infrastructure deals which signifies large construction packages collateralised by oil and gas revenues or mineral rights create predictable repayment streams and secure Chinese industrial sturdiness, while alleviating upfront fiscal constraints in host countries. Thirdly, geopolitical leverage via concentration with regard to durable supply contracts and political goodwill. Fourthly, creating an economic path dependence. This is done by setting up midstream assets (refineries, pipelines, storage), then hardening trade patterns and standards, and finally stabilising China’s commercial role and complicating partner diversification- for example, the Middle East (hydrocarbons, transit megaprojects), Africa (minerals and processing) and Southeast Asia (manufacturing platforms).

The following figures reflect Chinese FDI in the ASEAN countries.

Figure: 1

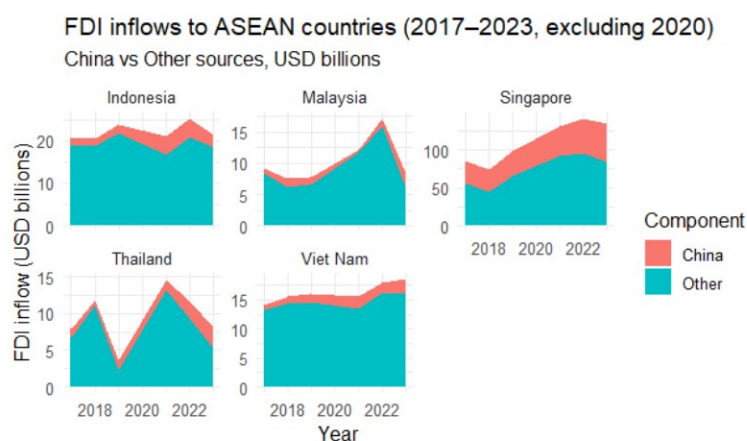


Graph has been created by the author using data from the source cited below:

Source: ASEAN Secretariat. 2025. Flows of Inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to ASEAN Countries (in billion US\$) [Indicator Code FDI.AMS.TOT.INF]. ASEANStats Data Portal. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://data.aseanstats.org/indicator/FDI.AMS.TOT.INF>

¹⁴⁷ Christoph Nedopil, China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2024 (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute and Green Finance & Development Center, FISE, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/5784>

Figure: 2



Graph has been created by the author using data from the source cited below:

Source: ASEAN Secretariat. 2025. Flows of Inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to ASEAN Countries (in billion US\$) [Indicator Code FDI.AMS.TOT.INF]. ASEANStats Data Portal. Accessed July 1, 2025. <https://data.aseanstats.org/indicator/FDI.AMS.TOT.INF>

Taking stock, it can be analysed that over the years, the scale and trajectory of China’s investment has grown under the aegis of BRI. The year 2024 was a milestone with about US \$121.8 billion across roughly 340 deals, such as US \$70.7 billion in construction contracts and about US \$51 billion in investments. Cumulatively since 2013, engagement was about US \$1.175 trillion (US \$704 billion construction; US \$470 billion non-financial investments). Against this, 2024 marks a renewed expansion and the strongest year since the initiative’s launch, signalling a robust post-pandemic consolidation. There was a noticeable shift in the composition, shifting from investment whose share fell to roughly 42 percent from 53 percent in 2023; while construction dominated the scenario, especially large, resource-backed engineering contracts in hydrocarbons, rather than solely equity-led entries, explaining the high record despite tighter global credit conditions. Also, average construction deals grew to about US \$498 million (from US \$394 million). Often referred to as ‘smaller-ticket equity, larger-ticket construction’ pattern is consistent with efforts to manage equity risk while leveraging state-backed contractors for flagship builds. Again, it has been found that energy, though remains the anchor, accounting for roughly one-third of total 2024 engagement, its internal composition is changing. There has been a calculative shift towards green energy which hit a record both in absolute and relative terms- about US \$11.8 billion in solar, wind and waste-to-energy (accounting for approximately 30 percent of energy engagement), plus around US \$ 639 million in hydropower. At the same time, oil and gas surged to about US \$24.3 billion (US \$13.5 billion oil; US \$10.8 billion gas), primarily via processing facilities and upstream-linked

construction, highlighting a dual-track approach: scaling renewables and storage while locking in hydrocarbon processing and off-take security. Coal plant development remains constrained after the 2021 pledge, but 2024 saw renewal of activity in coal mining and related infrastructure, signalling that coal has not vanished entirely from the BRI portfolio. There was also a noticeable shift along this energy value chain as investments in transmission projects fell sharply from roughly US \$7.4 billion in 2023 to below US \$0.5 billion in 2024 reflecting prioritisation shift towards supply-security assets and midstream processing over the grid-enabling investments, even as China aims to expand its green capacity. Mining has remained prominent since 2017, reflecting strategic positioning in battery minerals and processing (nickel, lithium, cobalt, graphite), with strong footprints in Africa, parts of Latin America, and Indonesia, and by 2024 this reached a record high of US \$21.4 billion. Technology and manufacturing is another area that crossed US \$30 billion in the same year, with high-tech engagements in manufacturing of EV, batteries and solar powered vehicles. These projects can be regarded as China's futuristic thinking to deepen industrial linkages and situate partner countries within China-centred clean-tech supply chains. In terms of transport, which was another hallmark of BRI, there is a downward trend and now has only 12 percent share (lowest), reflecting that the pivot has shifting from corridor-building to energy, resources, and technology projects that directly support industrial upgrading and export resilience in partner countries. So, it can be observed that since 2017, the portfolio that has moved from an early emphasis on connective infrastructure (transport corridors) toward a mix that binds energy systems, mineral value chains and clean manufacturing to Chinese firms and standards, with BRI having served as a counter-cyclical vector for recipient investment, particularly in energy, mining and clean-tech manufacture sectors that can catalyse domestic industrialisation but also deepen commodity and technology interdependence with China.¹⁴⁸

A distinctive feature of the BRI's operation is non-interference in the domestic politics of host states. This sets the BRI apart from the Western aid programs and therefore enhances in approach and initial goodwill. This creates more favourable imagine in the Southeast Asia as it echoes the 'ASEAN Way' of consensus-building and non-intervention and also finds its acceptance in regional groupings such as the African Union, IORA, making BRI attractive to

¹⁴⁸ Christoph Nedopil, China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2024 (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute and Green Finance & Development Center, FISF, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/5784>

governments wary of external intrusion. Beyond these precise economic endeavours, BRI also fosters cultural and social linkages. For instance, initiatives such as the ASEAN-China Youth Exchange Visit Programme aims to build regional identity, mutual trust, and long-term cooperation by bringing together young leaders through exchanges thereby they can gain experiences through programmes on education, leadership, and development challenges. This ‘people-to-people diplomacy’ underscores BRI’s aims and purpose that seeks to anchor China’s presence in the Indo-Pacific not only through infrastructure and trade but also through sustained societal engagement. While BRI narrative the economic statecraft of China’s dominance in world politics, it political dominance is mostly witnessed in the maritime zone.

China’s grey zone tactics:

One of the primary causes of concern in the Indo-Pacific security-scape is PRC’s bid to enhance its domination in the Indo-Pacific through what is referred to as the grey zone strategy. It is understood as a certain form of geopolitical competition which is beyond diplomacy but short of conventional war¹⁴⁹. It refers to a range of techniques, strategies employed by a state to intimidate another state while very tactfully avoiding explicit open armed conflict. It can be through a combination of one or more geopolitical instruments- such as military, cyber, economic. The methods can also engage deployment of paramilitary units, militarisation of contested territories, influence campaigns, interference in domestic affairs, or the bullying tactics to gain greater leverage through economic and trade instruments. China, however opposes the use of the term ‘grey zone’, claiming that these instruments are natural and have been historically used by powerful states, and extend beyond diplomacy and other traditional instruments of statecraft. Beijing prefers using the term Military Operations other than War (MOOTW) to provide insight into Chinese behaviour. In Chinese discourse, externally directed MOOTW that has coercive or confrontational elements are regarded as efforts to preserve stability, safeguard rights, or conduct protective security operations. It serves a dual purpose- one of shaping choices in PRC’s favour, and two, avoiding tripwires that might trigger a full scale armed conflict. Significantly, MOOTW is the inclusion and combination of non-military actors and instruments alongside traditional military roles. The non-military tactical

¹⁴⁹ Melissa Dalton, Kathleen H. Hicks, Megan Donahoe, Lindsey Sheppard, Alice Hunt Friend, Michael Matlaga, Joseph Federici, Matthew Conklin, and Joseph Kiernan. *By Other Means, Part II: U.S. Priorities in the Gray Zone*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2019. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Hicks_GrayZone_II_full_WEB_0.pdf

instruments are orchestrated at the global level (for example- influencing multilateral fora to constrain rivals or to limit sanction), the bilateral level by targeting trade restrictions or diplomatic threats, and at the lowest grassroots levels using local elites, corporations, or even through media acquisitions to advance Chinese narratives and interests.¹⁵⁰ While these practices by themselves not new as strategies and have been used by states in the past, their application in the Indo-Pacific region is novel and in recent times has become frequent and intensifies, particularly with China's increase in cyber capacity, posing risks to the region's collective security and stability.¹⁵¹

China's grey-zone tactics ranges across a wide spectrum of coercion. China's intent is incremental but strategic, and oscillate from altering facts on the ground (map making), eroding resistance to normalising Chinese preferences across diplomatic, economic, informational, and military domains- a very calculative approach without crossing the kinetic threshold. There are several ways though China plays out it in the region. For instance, there is a blurring lines between state and civilian activities in the seas. This is done by combining military and non-military actors and assets such as fishing fleets, state-owned firms, and proxy groups. Then it leverages pressure tactics at multiple nodes simultaneously. This expands as military modernization and economic growth are closely connected to facilitate dual-use capacity and logistics that support persistent presence. The integration of military and paramilitary forces, most importantly the maritime militia and coast guard that have work both to escalate and de-escalate a conflict. In terms of practical operation, Beijing engages in layers and sequential tactics, using geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/information instruments in its grey zone operations and alternate between one domains to another in order to maintain pressure while denying escalation. Such grey zone behaviour is evident against five key US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific such as Japan, Vietnam, India, the Philippines and Taiwan. In the last ten years, PRC has employed nearly 80 diverse grey zone tactics against Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines, and being the worst offender in Taiwan. All these involved air, land and maritime activities, with parsed military activities yet heavy emphasis on operations in or

¹⁵⁰ RAND Corporation. *A New Framework for Understanding and Countering China's Gray Zone Tactics*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RBA500/RBA594-1/RAND_RBA594-1.pdf

¹⁵¹ Commonwealth of Australia. *2020 Defence Strategic Update*. Canberra: Department of Defence, 2020. https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020_Defence_Strategic_Update.pdf

near disputed spaces, reinforcing presence and testing red lines through patrols, incursions, and large-scale exercises.¹⁵²

Increasingly, China adopted a more aggressive approach towards territorial disputes. Since 2009, Beijing has intensified claims to the controversial ‘Nine- (later Ten-) Dash Line,’ expanding both the scope and the forcefulness of its assertions. Land reclamation in the waters of the Indo-Pacific (more specifically in the South China Sea), investing in infrastructure building, port development, militarisation of the artificial islands further entrenched China’s presence in the contested waters.

As per China’s perspectives, instability or uncertainties in the South China Sea arise from three interlocking factors. Firstly, China accuses USA of abandoning neutrality and openly siding against Beijing in matters pertaining to the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, China claims some of the countries are purposely using the disputed space to consolidate their vested interests in the region. Thirdly, the arbitration pertaining to the South China Sea is problematic and unacceptable to China as it completely denies Beijing’s position and claims in the South China Sea, something that had sharpened contention in the region. As against the Western claims of China’s unlawful activities and island building in the Spratlys, PRC argues that its move towards reclamation is a lawful response against the arbitration initiated by Philippines and is an effort to change and correct what China viewed as a strategically unfavourable position. Therefore PRC’s action is claimed as lawful and rational. Also with regard to understanding frictions in the maritime zone, it is described to occur at two levels. One involves the regular issues and disputes between China and the claimant nation-states. These can be legal battles, and issues pertaining to right or wrong. Another layer of dispute is more critical as it pits PRC against the ‘non-claimant’ countries, and here lies the great game between China and the United States (at times Japan) in the context of broader security competition. Chinese scholars, analysts make their position clear by stating that Beijing’s sovereignty and maritime positions have been consistent since the year 1947 and from the late 1990s, China has declared its approach towards ‘shelving disputes’ and preserving the status quo, the only change emanating from China’s capacity to resolving and also defending its stated rights in the South China Sea

¹⁵² RAND Corporation. *A New Framework for Understanding and Countering China’s Gray Zone Tactics*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RBA500/RBA594-1/RAND_RBA594-1.pdf

region. An important point to note is PRC alleges that the South China Sea and Southeast Asia was rather a peaceful and stable zone when the United States paid less focus to this area. It is USA's policy shift since the year 2009 from a position of relative neutrality to active involvement in the region articulated through military signalling and policies such as 'pivot,' 'rebalance,' and 'Indo-Pacific' frameworks that had changed the geopolitical environment in the region and subsequent equations among nation states.¹⁵³

Under President Xi Jinping, this strategy accelerated, underpinned by China's rising economic strength and global role as the 'world's factory'- the manufacturing giant. Also, China's advancing military strength, for instance its development of anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities has raised concerns across the Indo-Pacific maritime space. In response, Washington introduced the 'Air-Sea Battle' concept for 'networked, integrated attack-in-depth' operations to counter A2/AD threats. Officially, the Pentagon maintains that Air-Sea Battle is not aimed at any specific adversary, though it can be argued that it clearly focuses upon China, reflecting the broader reality that the U.S. strategic pivot to Indo-Pacific is also a shift toward air- and sea-based military strategies.¹⁵⁴

The impact of grey zone tactics in the Indo-Pacific region is cumulative and corrosive. It leads to erosion of sovereignty and seeks to normalise Chinese administrative control and reshape baselines without formal annexation. Constant pressure from Beijing forces the targeted nation-states to spend political and material capital on monitoring and response, complicating alliance coordination and crisis decision-making, causing deterrence fatigue. Economic coercion that takes the shape of calibrated curbs on trade or market access impose costs while preserving plausible deniability, encouraging self-censorship by firms and politicians dependent on Chinese demand, hurting the economically diverse and vibrant markets of the Indo-Pacific. Also it leads to information shaping which a very significant dimension is of power. Beijing influences grassroots media and its cyber operations blur attribution, fragment domestic consensus, and clouds the clarity of communication between states, which can lead to uncertainty, misinterpretation, and even miscalculation in foreign policy or security affairs.

¹⁵³ South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPI). "Chinese Experts on the Situation of the South China Sea." November 5, 2024. <https://www.scspi.org/en/dtfx/chinese-experts-situation-south-china-sea>

¹⁵⁴ Headquarters Marine Corps. "The Air-Sea Battle Concept Summary." *Headquarters Marine Corps*, November 10, 2011. U.S. Department of Defense. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/News/Article/Article/553062/the-air-sea-battle-concept-summary/>

The rising escalation risk in air and sea surfaces causes tensions and raise the probability of accidents and miscalculation even as Beijing claims to remain below the threshold of war.¹⁵⁵

These tactics appear to be punitive as it undercuts US and its partner countries objectives in the region. Balancing U.S. priorities with the concerns of regional partners, many of the serious challenges are in the military domain and these are close to disputed areas. China's routine incursions, big joint exercises, military build-ups, and the setting up of bases or dual-use facilities threaten the sovereignty and the peace of the Indo-Pacific region. But it's not just military activities that dominate Chinese repressions in the region. Non-military efforts such high-level diplomatic manoeuvres that isolate or penalise countries in multilateral forums, economic projects on the ground that quietly advance territorial claims (like using Chinese companies or projects in sensitive areas), cyber hacks or local political meddling, cyber and information operations targeting government, military, and business systems. Strategically, Beijing's methods can be observed to rest on three core habits- that firstly its adaptability-tailored to the target's strengths, alliances and domestic politics, secondly, it is integrated-drawing on different tools of power to avoid over-reliance on any single domain, while exploiting gaps in rivals' responses, thirdly it is sustained- aimed at gradual patience steady gains rather than dramatic wins that might alarm US or other adversaries to entrench presence and narratives over time.

In response to China's growing influence, the United States has sought to strengthen its alliances and partnerships in the region. The Indo-Pacific strategy, articulated by successive U.S. administrations, emphasizes the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, where the rule of law prevails, and coercive behaviours are deterred. Through initiatives like AUKUS and the Quad, the United States has deepened its security engagement in the region, reinforcing the Indo-Pacific security architecture with a combination of military, economic, and diplomatic tools.¹⁵⁶ PRC's multiple levels intimidations including that of grey-zone measures are difficult to counter for Indo-Pacific stakeholders and requires a coordinated

¹⁵⁵ RAND Corporation. *A New Framework for Understanding and Countering China's Gray Zone Tactics*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RBA500/RBA594-1/RAND_RBA594-1.pdf

¹⁵⁶ Smith, Jeff M. "A Closer Look at the Growing US-China Rivalry in the South China Sea." *The Diplomat*, January 2017. Accessed August 10, 2022. <http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/a-closer-look-at-the-growing-us-china-rivalry-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

counter-strategy. It makes it imminent for the democratic leaders in the region for joint action and priority-setting, government-wide strategies that treat disputed areas and key international institutions as front-line issues, and strong investments and collaboration in domain awareness, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and cyber defence to expose, attribute and blunt grey-zone tactics before they become the ‘new normal’ in the Indo-Pacific.

China’s impact upon the upon the evolving security architecture in the Indo-Pacific is multifaceted and compelling, shaped by the interplay of traditional military alliances, emerging multilateral and minilateral frameworks, economic manipulation and the broader security assertions. As the region continues to grow in strategic importance, the rise of China and the intensifying competition between the U.S. and China, the security scenario of the Indo-Pacific will remain contested and unpredictable.

David Lai¹⁵⁷ while analysing the power transition between the United States argues that the scepticism towards China stems from the belief that it is an ‘outsider to the U.S./West-led international system’, and even if its economy has integrated into the liberal market system, its government is still authoritative and contrasts the Western democratic system. This divergence keeps China in a ‘dissatisfied’ category, and its rise is therefore interpreted as a threat to the established order. Interestingly, the United States had initially facilitated the opening up of China’s economy. Beginning with President Nixon’s visit in 1972, Washington’s strategy aimed to counter Soviet power, and gradually democratise China political system through economic growth. Washington expected that the integration in the economic sphere would eventually have spill-over effects in other areas and this will eventually align PRC with US values, transforming Beijing into a cooperative partner. However, these hopes eventually collapsed with Beijing rejecting political reform and reaffirming communist rule. The suppression or prohibition of any form of dissent was evident in the repressions that followed the Tiananmen crisis of 1989. This set the stage for mistrust, followed by the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-96. Taiwan’s democratisation and assertions of independence further heightened tensions, when Beijing went into missile tests to halt its democratization and independence, prompting the US security commitments in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. military responses reaffirmed its commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act, while acting as a

¹⁵⁷ Lai, David. *The United States and China in Power Transition*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011.

catalyst to China's military modernization.¹⁵⁸ These rekindled ideological divisions and redefined U.S.-China relations as unfinished business of the cold war or as some analysts term as the new cold war. China also underwent a decisive transformation in its regional policy, marked by legislative and military actions that signalled a more assertive strategic posture. The 2005 Anti-Secession Law was particularly significant, as it explicitly authorised the use of 'non-peaceful' measures should peaceful avenues for reunification of Taiwan fail. This formalised Beijing's long-standing position on Taiwan and institutionalised the threat of force, raising tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

President Xi Jinping's consolidation of power, alongside China's economic ascent as the 'world's factory' provided the material and political resources necessary to sustain this assertiveness. This strategic recalibration gained sharper expression in the South China Sea. Since 2009, China has doubled down on its expansive territorial claims through the 'Nine-Dash Line,' later extended to a "Ten-Dash Line" under Xi Jinping. These claims, coupled with large-scale land reclamation and militarisation of artificial islands, represented an escalation of disputes with Southeast Asian states such as Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.¹⁵⁹

So, China's rapid modernization, economic ascent fuelled debates in the Western circles with regard to its actual intentions and goals. Analysts such as Bernstein and Munro contented that this rise was unyielding and that the combination of economic strength and military ambition made China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific inevitable. The China threat was widely circulated across the discourse of international relations academia and US policy making, shaping America's perception towards China and the silent fear that Beijing's rise is inherently destabilising to the Western world order. For instance, Mearsheimer provided theoretical grounding, analysing the scenario through offensive realism. He argued that that great powers naturally seek regional hegemony and China would eventually try to expel the U.S. from Indo-Pacific in general and Asia in particular, in a similar pattern that America once enforced its Monroe Doctrine. Samuel Huntington framed the evolving US-China scenario as a challenge in civilizational terms, contending that China's economic success emboldened its cultural distinctiveness and sharpened the clash between 'the West and the rest.' China rejected these

¹⁵⁸ Nathan, Andrew J., and Andrew Scobell. *China's Search for Security*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Bill Hayton. *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.

claims as being racist, self-serving, or rooted in cold war logic, arguing that the West sought to deny it a rightful share of resources and influence. Chinese leaders advanced the idea of a ‘peaceful rise’ (later remaining it as ‘peaceful development’), stressing that China would avoid imperial practices, pursue resources through markets and globalisation, and reform the international order from within rather than overthrow it. These responses however, failed to dispel US anxieties, who interpreted this as strategic concealment under Deng Xiaoping’s maxim of *tao guang yang hui* (hide your capabilities and bide your time), and continued to view China as a geopolitical challenge, feeding into narratives of rivalry and great-power competition.¹⁶⁰

So, it can be deduced that these developments underscore a broader transition: from cautious participation in the regional order to overt attempts at reshaping it in ways that secure China’s strategic primacy. While decoding the imperatives and drivers of the Indo-Pacific’s security architecture it is also significant to understand the role of ASEAN, Japan and Australia as one of the most determining stakeholders in the region’s security narratives. It can be said that the most interesting behaviour towards China’s shaking the regional order comes from ASEAN, who are also placed by India and USA as ‘centrality’ to regional security and economic architectures

Role of Regional Players:

ASEAN: Formed on 8 August 1967 by five countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has expanded to include other Southeast Asian states such as Brunei Darussalam (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999), and today it represents a regional grouping of ten members, that aims to promote economic, political, and security cooperation among the member countries. It is the third largest populous region in the world after India and China. As per 2023 data, ASEAN is the world fifth largest economy with a nominal GDP at around US \$3.8 trillion.¹⁶¹ ASEAN was founded on the principle of sovereign equality of all

¹⁶⁰ Lai, David. *The United States and China in Power Transition*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011.

¹⁶¹ ASEANstats. *ASEAN Key Figures 2024*. Jakarta: ASEANstats, December 2024. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AKF2024.v1.pdf>

the member-states. The regional grouping is an excellent example of multilateralism where ‘regional peace and stability’, and ‘collaboration and mutual assistance’ are among the chief negotiating principles.¹⁶² It is a non-military grouping, formed during the heydays of the cold war bipolar politics where member-states agreed to set aside their political disputes and fragmentations disputes to create a regional framework focused on fostering economic development, ensuring political and economic stability, advancing social progress, and encouraging cultural growth in Southeast Asia. It is also a platform for addressing and managing intra-regional differences, along with voicing common concerns in the region.

ASEAN has emerged as the most important multilateral platform in Southeast Asia and any discussion regarding the Indo-Pacific would be incomplete without taking into account the ASEAN nation-states. ASEAN represents a dual role in the Indo-Pacific. On the one hand, they are the countries whose stakes are vitally linked to the security of the Indo-Pacific, and on the other their allegiance or cooperation is essential to framing a stable architecture in the region. Another interesting point is the lack of uniformity or cohesiveness within the ASEAN nation-states themselves towards the Indo-Pacific security outlook. They themselves are not homogenous in terms of their size, economic strength, military build-ups and political assertion. For instance in terms of the size of economy, the ten members are at the differential level of contributions. As per 2023 data- Indonesia had the dominant share of the region’s GDP that stood at 36.2 percent, Thailand 13.6 percent, Singapore 13.2 percent, the Philippines 11.5 percent, Vietnam 11.3 percent, Malaysia 10.5 percent, followed by the other ASEAN members that together make up the remaining 3.6 percent of the regional economy.¹⁶³

Therefore, their responses to the evolving dynamics of Indo-Pacific remains deeply fragmented and reflect a diverse orientation in economic, political and strategic terms. Professor Rajat Ganguly¹⁶⁴ puts forward his analysis on China- ASEAN relations explaining that the relation is rooted in the historical understanding of the region in general and China- Southeast Asia in particular. Chinese scholars assert Beijing discomfort with America’s involvement in Asia and its asserting of claiming to be the net-security provider in Asia is an historical aberration. Looking back, it can be seen that in 1945 America had dropped two atomic bombs on Japan,

¹⁶² ASEAN. “What We Do.” ASEAN. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://asean.org/what-we-do/>.

¹⁶³ ASEANstats. *ASEAN Key Figures 2024*. Jakarta: ASEANstats, December 2024. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AKF2024.v1.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ Ganguly, Rajat. Interview by Urbi Das. Personal interview. January 14, 2025.

thus creating unconditional surrender of Japan. Thereafter the United States apparently converted Japan into a satellite country, re-writing Japan's constitution and manipulating its defence and security matters. In addition to this America's dominance in Asia, particularly Eastern Asia started after the Korean War, leading to the division of Korea. America has military presence in South Korea, bases in Okinawa, Philippines and subsequently, the increase in the number of bases in Guam, America's redevelopment of Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, inflated America's military presence in Asia as America escalated its role as a security provider in Asia. These developments were questioned by Chinese and whom they were directed to? They felt it was directed towards the PRC. According to China Asia for the last 3000 years until 1945 was always dominated by China. Though this does not discount the persistent issues that Southeast Asia with China (referring to Kishore Mahbubani's¹⁶⁵ writing about this duality between China and Asia, the interviewee refers to this as a love-hate relationship). On the one hand, Southeast Asia requires China for economic reasons. On the other hand, China's magnanimity in terms of geographical and economic size was always been intimidating to them. So, it's a complex relationship, but China believes that whatever issue arises between China and Southeast Asian nations will be dealt by them bilaterally. Therefore, China major worry is American presence in Asia. Interestingly, PRC beholds that Asia has paid a price whenever China was weak. On the contrary, if China dominates Asia, there will be no war in Asia. This argument goes back to history stating that when there was China's domination in Asia, this is, for those 3000 years, then Asia was peaceful. Consequently, ASEAN's view of China is very different from the West's view of China or American view in particular. Given that geography is an unchangeable determinant in foreign policy, which makes changing neighbours impossible, whether they want it or not China will be present in the neighbourhood. Also PRC is the economic lifeline of Asia. So in Asia, viewing the issues from ASEAN's angle, they have to adopt a softer approach as their assessment of the threat is very different compared to America's assessment of threat posed by China. Southeast Asia is not scared by the rise of China as to the degree or manner Americans are, contrarily a lot of Asian countries welcome this rise because they think that this rise of

¹⁶⁵ Kishore Mahbubani's book such as *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (2009), *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World* (2013), *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* (2020), consistently explores how China's rise is both a reflection and a driver of the broader Asian ascent. He frames the relationship as dual and interlinked: China plays a distinctive role, yet cannot be separated from the wider trajectory of Asia's political, economic, and cultural shifts. His works blend strategic analysis, historical storytelling, and philosophical reflection to unpack this duality.

China will also benefit them economically. China is also engaged in signalling Asian countries not to emulate the American path, at the very least remain neutral. Contrarily, harming Asia is also not in China's interest because Asia is also the home to China. ASEAN countries are therefore very sensitive and cautious regarding pushing the western narrative too hard in Asia. Asia's history resides with the Asian countries and considers America an outside power- not an Asian power. This, however is not to America's liking since it believes in global hegemony and China is an obstacle to its quest to becoming a 'hyper-power'.¹⁶⁶

While as a collective entity, they endorse 'ASEAN centrality', individual countries have calibrated their responses in a manner that reflect a distinct and differentiated attitude in terms of their national interest and their varying degrees of dependence on the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. According to Ambassador Anup K. Mudgal,¹⁶⁷ ASEAN views itself as an affected party in case of any conflicts arising out of any regional contestations amongst the major powers. They have therefore been seeking ASEAN centrality of any such initiatives. They do not wish to see any open conflict because of the big power rivalries as their development and prosperity is contingent on the regional peace and stability.

Indonesia which is one of the largest stakeholders in the region, is also the strongest proponents of 'ASEAN centrality' in the Indo-Pacific discourse. Along with Thailand, Indonesia has maintained an enduring unity among the ASEAN member states and ensuring that as a bloc ASEAN is neither side-lined nor marginalized by any extra-regional powers. Jakarta has actively sought to articulate a common vision for a 'free, open, inclusive and rules-based' Indo-Pacific order- a position that has been endorsed by the Quad members. Vietnam has been more vocal regarding condemning China due to its territorial disputes with PRC in the South China Sea. It endorses the Quad initiatives and emphasis on upholding international laws and freedom of navigation as resonating its own security concerns. Singapore in contrast has defence ties with the USA and supports principle of rule-based order in the region. Though it has been a steady partner of the United States of America, it has been cautious about being drawn into

¹⁶⁶ Michael Mandelbaum in his book *The Four Ages of American Foreign Policy: Weak Power, Great Power, Superpower, Hyperpower, 1765–2015*, offers a fresh perspective on America's ascent to global dominance and presents a new framework for understanding U.S. foreign policy, dividing its evolution into four periods marked by rising American power: weak power (1765–1865), great power (1865–1945), superpower (1945–1990), and hyper-power (1990–2015). He explores major events and figures in each era while highlighting three enduring traits of U.S. foreign policy: its ideological goals, economic tools, and democratic decision-making.

¹⁶⁷ Mudgal, Anup Kumar. Interview by Urbi Das. Online interview. August 27, 2025.

arrangements that could be interpreted as explicitly anti-China. Its approach can therefore be regarded as pragmatic one that is balanced by deep economic links with Beijing against its strategic reliance on Washington.

The Philippines represents an ambivalent case. While Manila has clear security concerns over PRC's assertiveness in the South China Sea, its leadership has at times opted for accommodation with Beijing in exchange for economic incentives.¹⁶⁸ This oscillating behaviour has produced inconsistency in its approach to Indo-Pacific security cooperation and also towards the Quad. Similarly, Malaysia has expressed reservations about direct confrontation with China, preferring a more cautious and non-escalatory stance. Cambodia's response is even more problematic for ASEAN unity: Phnom Penh's alignment with China has often undermined ASEAN consensus on South China Sea issues, and by extension, its ability to engage collectively with Quad-related initiatives.

Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos are the countries which are heavily dependent on Chinese economic and political support. More specifically, their infrastructural development is funded by Beijing. These ASEAN countries have a natural tendency to avoid any overt alignment with any of the power blocs. Their governments at home are quite cautious and remain reluctant to openly criticise China or endorse the Indo-Pacific narratives. It can be said that they are engaged in a tight rope-walking lest any of their gestures antagonise China jeopardising their ties with Beijing. However, all the ASEAN national cannot be clubbed into one group. Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos' muted positions contrast sharply with the more enthusiastic engagement and sharper dealings of Vietnam and Indonesia with the democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific. This divergence demonstrates that even within ASEAN, some members seek to hedge against China by aligning more closely with the narrative of 'free and open Indo-Pacific', while others prioritise their economic dependence on Beijing and therefore shy away from displaying any overt support to narratives and organizations that is not likable by China.¹⁶⁹

These divisions underscore ASEAN's enduring dilemma- although all members recognise the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific and share concerns about the implications of China's

¹⁶⁸ Zhao, Hong. "Sino-Philippines Relations: Moving Beyond South China Sea Dispute?" *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2012): 57–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23595518>.

¹⁶⁹ Acharya, Amitav. *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014.

rise and debt-trap diplomacy, their responses vary widely. While Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia show greater willingness to engage with democratically-driven principles such as maritime cooperation and rules-based order, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar lean towards Beijing's camp, and countries like Malaysia and the Philippines adopt cautious, at times stances, balancing both ends. Consequently, ASEAN as a bloc has struggled to establish a unified voice in shaping the Indo-Pacific's evolving security architecture. This lack of cohesion limits ASEAN's capacity to influence regional order as group, leaving the field more open to external interpretations multiplying the complexities of the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

Indo-Pacific is a layered security framework and with ASEAN's emphasis on the principle of ASEAN centrality, this has led to a multilateral approach to deal with the rising security challenges in the region, with South China Sea being the primary security concern for ASEAN. The adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 is ASEAN's articulation of its strategic positioning, advocating for inclusivity, openness, and adherence to international law in maintaining regional security. However, despite its diplomatic weight, ASEAN faces significant challenges in forming a unified response to major geopolitical tensions, largely due to its internal divisions that affect consensus-building on crucial questions pertaining to security along with its economic dependence on China.

Japan:

Japan has played a pivotal part in framing and articulating the regional security integration in the Indo-Pacific region. Tokyo is a major advocate of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). This translates into a vivid strategic argument of sustaining peace and prosperity that is premised upon rule based order and not coercion in the Indo-Pacific region that exhibits intensifying competition among the great powers. Japan's advocacy of FOIP stresses on the demographic pre-requisites and economic growth of the region making lawful order and open Indo-Pacific indispensable. Tokyo firmly articulates that its concept of FOIP is not about creating parallel structures but is based upon cooperation or coalition of actors who are willing to uphold the open and inclusive order. FOIP endorses a shared vision of cooperation, and is a converging agenda among a wide range of countries such as EU's and its Indo-Pacific strategy, India's IPOI, ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy, along with minilateral formats such as the Quad.¹⁷⁰ It underscores maritime security

¹⁷⁰ Japan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. n.d. "Japan's Effort for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'." Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100056243.pdf>

assistance as Japan equips and trains coast-guard and law-enforcement agencies across Southeast Asia, providing patrol vessels, high-speed boats, coastal radar, embedded experts, and joint training. This signals FOIP's security edge in the maritime domain, which is based upon capacity-building to deter crime and coercion while remaining consistent with international law.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of Japan brought out in December, 2022 highlights upon the country's concerns regarding the geostrategic environment and complexities in the Indo-Pacific, since Japan is situated close to the potential zones of emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific. At the core of Tokyo's assessment is the identification of economic dynamism of the Indo-Pacific coupled with the rise of strategic rivalry. While Japan's positioning makes it reap the advantages from this economic rise, it is deeply alarmed by the rapid military expansion in its neighbourhood, that includes nuclear proliferation- North Korea's missile build-ups, China's unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, rise of grey zone" tactics such as cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns, and coercive activities in contested maritime and air domains. The challenges are multifaceted and rewires the security domains as the blurs the boundaries between war and peace, as well as between military and non-military affecting all four layers of securitization.

Japan's NSS labels China's assertiveness as the foremost among its security concerns. China's rising defence budgets, opaque dealings, non-adherence to international standards and laws, expanding militarization translating into eroding the sovereignty of the islands in East and South China Sea including the Senkaku Islands (sea and air space) is viewed as a direct threat to Japan's territorial integrity. China's growing nexus with Russia, coupled with its pressures on Taiwan has led to identifying Beijing as the 'greatest strategic challenge' that directly impinges upon Tokyo's national interest.

At the same time, Japan maintains a nuanced stance toward China. While strongly opposing Beijing's coercive actions and demanding greater transparency in military matters, Tokyo also stresses the importance of dialogue to prevent escalation. It calls for confidence-building mechanisms, communication frameworks, and cooperation with China in areas of common interest, such as climate change, economic exchange, and people-to-people contacts. This dual approach reflects Japan's recognition that managing competition while preserving channels of cooperation is essential for long-term regional stability.

Japan advocates shaping maritime norms that should be grounded in international law, peaceful resolution of disputes, engaging through public diplomacy and legal outreach. It is pursuing a multi-layered security strategy that is rooted in its FOIP vision, that voices in favour of rule-making to widen a free and fair economic order; securing hard and soft connectivity across the Indian and Pacific Oceans; strengthening governance via capacity building; and ensuring maritime security and safety.¹⁷¹

Economically, Japan advocates liberal, open trade and high-standard rule-making as integral to a ‘free and open’ region.’ It points to economic instruments such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the Japan- U.S. Trade Agreement (and Digital Trade Agreement), and the launch of a ministerial Economic “2+2” to hard-wire standards for the twenty-first-century economy.¹⁷² Quality infrastructure is major strand and FOIP itemises connectivity projects across Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral. It details port, road, and airport upgrades and two flagship land corridors (Southern Economic Corridor; East-West Economic Corridor), tying them to measurable outcomes: faster travel times (for example, 4.5 hours cut to 2 hours on a key Myanmar route), doubled or tripled traffic volumes on upgraded roads, and doubled container throughput at Sihanoukville Port (Cambodia). Japan also deploys fiscal policy experts to improve macroeconomic and public-debt management and runs training and seminars for finance officials. The Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, aimed at connecting 70 per cent of the population to electricity by 2030, is regarded as an illustrative coalition project that marries development and strategic objectives. It highlights customs modernisation and large-scale human-capital training, debt sustainability, environmental and social safeguards, and resilience that yields durable, inclusive growth. FOIP is comprehensive statecraft toolkit that is backed by diverse partners, linking legal norms, economics, infrastructure, and security assistance so as to widen choices for regional states, reduce vulnerabilities to coercion, and embed a stable equilibrium without forcing countries into exclusive camps.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Japan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. n.d. “Japan’s Effort for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific.’” Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100056243.pdf>

¹⁷² Prime Minister’s Office of Japan. *National Security Strategy of Japan*. Provisional translation, December 2022. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

¹⁷³ Japan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. n.d. “Japan’s Effort for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific.’” Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100056243.pdf>

With regard to the wider articulation of security of the Indo-Pacific, Tokyo's foreign policy closely aligns with the USA and other democratic partners in balancing Chinese influence and strengthening cooperation with cooperation with ASEAN, India and Australia.¹⁷⁴ Japan has been offering a significant alternative to China's BRI and has contributed to infrastructure development in the ASEAN countries under the Official Development Assistance (ODA). Japan has security partnerships with Australia- the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), and India that underscore a cooperative model among like-minded partners to ensuring regional security.¹⁷⁵

US- Japan security partnership dates back to 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the parallel Security Treaty between the two countries. Under the Yoshida Doctrine¹⁷⁶, Japan prioritized post-war economic reconstruction, emphasizing upon industrial modernisation and economic advancement while limiting military expansion. For defence and military security, Japan had security guarantee of the United States, itself maintaining a restrained defence posture. Though the original 1951 Treaty have extensive powers in the hands of America to deploy forces without consultation and lacked a broad-based commitment towards Japan. So this Treaty was subsequently revised with the outcome of 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security that strengthened bilateral obligations in defence and security.

In addition, recognizing U.S.-Japan alliance as indispensable, ensuring broad-based cooperation across diplomacy, economics and defence, Tokyo is progressively expanding ties with other democracies in bilateral and minilateral frameworks. Japan has intensive, wide ranging cooperation with India which were strengthened since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India in 2007 regarding "*India as a partner that shares the same values and interests and also as a friend that will work alongside us to enrich the seas of freedom and prosperity,*

¹⁷⁴ Pant, Harsh V., and Madhuchanda Ghosh, eds. *India and Japan: A Natural Partnership in the Indo-Pacific*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2024.

¹⁷⁵ Medcalf, Rory. *Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future*. Carlton: La Trobe University Press, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ The Yoshida Doctrine refers to Japan's post-World War II foreign policy strategy, primarily formulated by Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. This doctrine emphasized economic recovery and reliance on the United States for security, allowing Japan to focus on rebuilding its economy while minimizing military expenditures and avoiding direct involvement in international conflicts.

which will be open and transparent to all."¹⁷⁷ Its defence cooperation with India is under the aegis of India- Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership (2014) and the Memorandum on Defence Cooperation and Exchanges. The 2015 Annual Summit was a major step in further consolidating ties through two significant agreements- the Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation, and the Security of Classified Military Information. This was followed by 2+2 Dialogue, Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation (JWG-DETC), Annual Defence Ministerial Meetings, defence industrial linkages with the first have business-to-business (B2B) being held in Tokyo in 2017 and most importantly, the conclusion of the Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Agreement in September 2020, and implemented during Multilateral Naval Exercise (MILAN) in 2022. These measures have facilitated logistics and operational coordination during joint exercises, port calls, and exchanges. Highlighting the new phase of comprehensive dialogue, the Indo-Japan first ever Joint Services Staff Talks were held in Tokyo in 2023 which facilitated service-to-service interactions. Since then, joint exercises- both bilateral and multilateral have multiplied. The Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) conduct the annual bilateral JIMEX exercise, while also meeting in larger multilateral settings such as MALABAR and MILAN. The Indian Air Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) participate in Veer Guardian and Shinyuu Maitri exercises, in addition to other multilateral drills. The Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) conduct the annual infantry exercise called the Dharma Guardian. Parallel to these, the Indian Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard maintain yearly cooperation, including reciprocal ship visits and joint drills on maritime law enforcement and environmental protection.¹⁷⁸

Since India and Japan shares similar regions concerns with regard to traditional and non-traditional security threats, an enduring partnership between these two democracies can aid to building the most formidable and stable architecture in the Indo-Pacific. There are immense convergences between India and Japan that can translate into the most magnificent 21st century all-encompassing relations in the Indo-Pacific region- an example setter.

¹⁷⁷ Abe, Shinzo. "Confluence of the Two Seas." Speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

¹⁷⁸ Embassy of India, Tokyo. "*Defence Cooperation.*" n.d. Accessed August 28, 2025. https://www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in/eoityo_pages/NzE

Japan's Indo-Pacific priorities are situated upon deterring unilateral aggression, safeguarding the rule of law, protecting universal values and building resilient economic and technological foundations. Its measures range from strengthening alliances and minilateral groupings to advancing, connectivity, demonstrating a comprehensive attempt to preserve stability in a region where the risks of conflict and coercion are rising.¹⁷⁹

Japan forms an important player in the Indo-Pacific security complex. Japan faces imminent security concerns due to Beijing contested territorial claims over Senkaku Island coupled with North Korea's missile build-ups have led to Beijing foster closer cooperation with USA, engage in joint military exercises such as the Malabar exercise, JIMEX and to boost ties with Quad partners. At the regional level, Japan is pivotal to the San Francisco System¹⁸⁰ that binds US relations with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines and forms part of a broader multilateral alliance in the Indo-Pacific. Relations with Japan have received a renewed boost in light of the growing regional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific- China's growing assertiveness in South and East China Sea, maritime issues that driven both the courtiers to reaffirm their strategic alliance, and the 2013 Guidelines for Defense Cooperation were updated via a "2+2" statement deepening their military integration stressing upon extended deterrence, up-gradation to command structure and expanded joint military exercises.¹⁸¹ Japan adopted a more pro-active stance in the Indo-Pacific security initiatives, proactive defence posture, taking leadership role in collective security arrangements and minilateralism such as Quad, and joint exercises with other allies

Japan has always advocated for the construction of the collaborative and durable regional security framework. It has been one of the significant agenda setters- starting from the strategic metaphor of 'free and open Indo-Pacific' to Prime Minister Shinzo's 'confluence of two seas'.

¹⁷⁹ Prime Minister's Office of Japan. *National Security Strategy of Japan*. Provisional translation, December 2022. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ A 'hub-and-spokes' model binding U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines

¹⁸¹ Johnstone, Christopher, Nicholas Szechenyi, and Leah Klaas. "The Evolution of the U.S.-Japan Security Partnership." *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*. July 11, 2024. Accessed August 27, 2025. <https://features.csis.org/evolution-of-the-us-japan-security-partnership/>

Tokyo has always encouraged collaboration among like-minded partners to secure the global commons in the Indo-Pacific region.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revived the idea of ‘Democratic Security Diamond’ linking four strategic nodes of the Indo-Pacific- Australia, India, Japan, and Hawaii (as the U.S. anchor) in 2012. The primary object of this ‘Democratic Security Diamond’ was to protect the shared maritime concerns across the vast stretch of the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific. When plotted on map, these points trace a diamond-like structure and hence the name. This concept was developed upon the ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity,’ an informal framework among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.¹⁸² The strategic logic behind the ‘Democratic Security Diamond’ was to construct a durable security framework in the region with shared responsibility including developing a code of conduct on the seas and management of maritime disputes.

While America’s commitment is considered as indispensable to Japan, it also recognises the need to complement it by expanding ties with multilateral is deemed essential among policy makers and analysts; catering to a close-knit security formation with multiple layers. Japan is intensifying cooperation with Quad (with the U.S., India, and Australia), the Japan- U.S.-ROK trilateral, and dialogues with Europe, ASEAN and NATO. These partnerships extend beyond diplomacy to concrete measures such as joint exercises, reciprocal access agreements, defence equipment cooperation, information-sharing, and capacity-building initiatives.

Australia:

Australia’s is both a country and a continent, and like Japan is an island nation. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia¹⁸³, the country’s future is contingent upon what Australia considers its own neighbourhood- the Indo-Pacific. In spite of living in an interdependent world, the Indo-Pacific region is where Canberra’s biggest

¹⁸² Lee, Lavina, and John Lee. “Japan–India Cooperation and Abe’s Democratic Security Diamond: Possibilities, Limitations and the View from Southeast Asia.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 2 (2016): 284–308. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916633>.

¹⁸³ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Australia in the World – 2025 Snapshot*. Accessed August 28, 2025. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/international-relations/australia-world-2025-snapshot>

prospects and greatest hazards converge. It is a unique region where most of the world's fastest-growing economies, have their vital stakes, yet it is also experiencing a scale of militarisation, sharper great-power rivalry that might escalate into conflict, various forms of coercion, and the mounting effects of threats such climate change. Australia's interest lies a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, where there is no incidence of domination by a single state and every country retains the freedom to determine its own path of development without interference. It seeks a rule-based environment that encourages stable distribution of power across the region. The primary strategic interest remains in the defence of the region against any direct confrontation, and towards the stability and cohesion of its immediate neighbourhood. These factors shape Indo-Pacific as a singular strategic arc.

Rory Medcalf¹⁸⁴ analyses that the country's worldview is built around the Indo-Pacific mental map that regards the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as a single sphere of interacting system. Also, Australia's conception of 'region is wider, focussed upon maritime, and more interconnected than the Asia-Pacific frame implied. For Australia, the nomenclature of Indo-Pacific reframes the erstwhile Asia-Pacific, with shifting priorities on the arc from India to Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia with the primacy of the sea-lanes that sustain the continuity.¹⁸⁵ This is interesting since such regional framing refrains from separating East Asia and South Asia, implying a very critical calculation that power shift or imbalance in one sub-region can increasingly reverberate across the entire Indo-Pacific, single the whole zone has become a single global centre of economic and strategy power politics. Such identification captures the amalgamation of reality and narrative building, as Canberra's geo-economics and geo-strategy is linked to securing the sea lanes, energy flows, and great-power interactions stretching from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean, where a large share of the world's trade and commerce moves, and shapes Australia's security outlook in the Indo-Pacific region

Dr. David Brewster,¹⁸⁶ Senior Research Fellow, National Security College, Australian National University, observes that Australia is better positioned as compared to other countries. Though

¹⁸⁴ Medcalf, Rory. "Australia's new strategic geography: making and sustaining an Indo-Pacific defence policy." In *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Drivers, Dynamics and Consequences*, edited by Priya Chacko, New York: Routledge, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Australia. Department of Defence. *Defence White Paper 2013*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013. Accessed August 28, 2024. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172498/Australia%20defense%20WP_2013_web.pdf

¹⁸⁶ Brewster, David. Interview by Urbi Das. Personal interview. August, 2022.

the trade balances favour China, Australia has evolved and has become economically more resilient. He expresses that regional nomenclatures and constructed for serving certain purposes and interests. Australia believes in the idea and narrative of Indo-Pacific and not Asia-Pacific. The nomenclature of Asia-Pacific excluded India, however, with the changing geopolitical realities and compulsions, the narrative is also changing with countries like Australia, Japan gaining prominence.

Australia's Defence White Paper 2013 express concerns over China's rise as a global power and also recognises the emergence of India as a global power in the Indian Ocean region. So, the primary intent of Australia remains in defending it against any direct confrontation and maintaining a stable Indo-Pacific. The 2009 Defence White Paper anticipated this economic and political shift that generated new configurations among the nation-states that shapes the emerging order. Two themes had been pointed out- firstly, the evolving strategic balance between the United States of the America and China that continues to play a decisive role for Australia's strategic setting. Here, the security environment is shaped both by Washington's regional power articulation and Beijing's rise. Secondly, an Indo-Pacific strategic arc is taking shape, linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia. India's East engagement and rising trade, investment, and energy flows have deepened interdependence and drawn greater attention to the Indian Ocean's vital sea lane.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, in terms of policy making, Australia has turned towards diplomacy, defence planning, and force posture in three reinforcing ways. From the diplomatic stand-point, the term Indo-Pacific appears in Canberra's foreign and defence policy doctrines, speeches, White Papers and in all the Summit level meetings hosted and participated by Australian officials. This is suggestive of the growing diplomatic significance of the region to all levels of policy-making, along with normalizing a shared geographic frame across key actors and partners, namely India, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States. These diplomatic gestures make coordination easier, legitimising wider-ranging partnerships from the eastern Indian Ocean to maritime Southeast Asia. In terms of defence planning, Australia sought to align material capabilities with other partners. Though defence spending fell in 2012, creating a gap between widened strategic commitments and resources, the government subsequently endorsed

¹⁸⁷ Australia. Department of Defence. *Defence White Paper 2013*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013. Accessed August 28, 2024. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172498/Australia%20defense%20WP_2013_web.pdf

restoring defence expenditure to around 2 per cent of GDP, flagging new capabilities to match the assessments of strategic environment. Since Australia is primarily a maritime state, securing the oceans is quintessential among all the foreign policy measures and strategic calculations. Tangible steps were taken towards maintaining an Indian Ocean naval presence from west-coast bases, joining counter-piracy and enhancing wide-area maritime surveillance. Deepening defence cooperation with the United States- maritime and in space, including potential use by U.S. surveillance drones and the role of HMAS Stirling near Perth along with space-tracking along with improving facilities at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Learmonth in Western Australia. Each of these steps maps directly onto the geography of Australia's Indo-Pacific interests that aims at long-range eyes and logistics in the eastern Indian Ocean, allied interoperability, and readiness to operate across wider maritime spaces. Finally, Australia's force posturing has intensified with alliance management and minilateral diplomacy that is suited to deal with the complexities of the region where no singular state can shoulder all responsibilities. Here, just like Japan, Australia considers US alliance as central. However, its approach remains flexible, function-specific partnerships. Again, Australia- India relations have evolved since the lifting of uranium export ban in 2011 to initiating high level diplomatic visits, regular bilateral naval exercises such as the AUSINDEX (focusing upon interoperability), collaborating in the Malabar exercise along with conducting a major drill in the Bay of Bengal in September 2015. The growing bonhomie reflects a conscious effort to turn a once-neglected relationship into an enduring pillar of Indo-Pacific balancing. Additionally, Australia's deepening military cooperation with Japan, India, and the United States through joint exercises such as the Talisman Sabre underscores its commitment to regional stability. Australia also coordinates with Indonesia, multilateral platforms such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and to use IORA and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium as platforms for practical maritime security cooperation. This, along with leveraging the region's principal strategic forums such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, showcases Australia meaningful contributions in multinational efforts that span the Indo-Pacific. Australia's pattern of maritime exercises ranges from bilateral drills with India to participation in counter-piracy tasking, building habits of interoperability with regional and extra-regional navies, which remains consistent with the role of a networked security provider. The policy logic is clear- through building bilateral alliance along with minilateral and multilateral ties,

Australia can help uphold a rules-based maritime order without portraying the Indo-Pacific as a bloc against China.¹⁸⁸

Again, Australia's China policy is based on careful balancing of engaging along Beijing coupled with the use of selective minilateralism depending on the function and on the situation. Despite its strong economic relationship with China- being a major exporter of iron ore, coal, and agricultural products, Australia has faced economic coercion through Chinese trade restrictions, as Canberra's urged for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19. As a crucial actor in the Indo-Pacific security framework, Australia therefore has to balance economic ties with China, along with engaging in strategic partnerships with the United States, India, and Japan would essential along with a stronger voice to shape the geopolitics of the region. Canberra's approach couples patient multilateralism with targeted bilateralism, underpinned by a credible and capable defence posturing. The *Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS)* alliance, announced in 2021, represents a significant development in regional security cooperation, enhancing Australia's naval capabilities through nuclear-powered submarines. Australia's strategic positioning in the South Pacific has made it an essential partner in countering Beijing's assertiveness, particularly in the Pacific Islands region. Australia's *Pacific Step-up* policy aims to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with Pacific Island nations, also countering Beijing's outreach.¹⁸⁹

It can be observed that Australia considers the Indo-Pacific as its strategic neighbourhood, its main aim is to inculcate a sense of common diplomatic and geo-strategic understanding among its key partners. Canberra has been consistently adjusting its posture and increasing its capability that includes surveillance reach, capacity building, infrastructure development and allied integration, to meet the emerging challenges in its maritime neighbourhood. It urges towards building a network of alliances and multi-layered ties including minilateral frameworks along with opportunities for inclusive cooperation. Such an understanding is

¹⁸⁸ Medcalf, Rory. "Australia's new strategic geography: making and sustaining an Indo-Pacific defence policy." In *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Drivers, Dynamics and Consequences*, edited by Priya Chacko, New York: Routledge, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Bisley, Nick. 2024. "The Quad, AUKUS and Australian Security Minilateralism: China's Rise and New Approaches to Security Cooperation." *Journal of Contemporary China* 34 (154): 564–76. doi:10.1080/10670564.2024.2365241.

grounded in a realistic assessment of Australia's maritime geography and the system-wide nature of Asia's strategic risks and opportunities.

Analysis

From the above deliberations, it is clear that Indo-Pacific can be understood through layers and levels of interplay between and among the regional players, whose interests at times converge and at other times diverge. This can be attributed to the heterogeneity of actors, in terms of economy, size, and defence build-ups and political influence. Also, they have multiple interests in the region and these interests differ in priorities, though they are not mutually exclusive.

As a result, the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region reflects a complex web of cooperation, competition, and strategic alignment and re-alignment. It involves multiple sectors and layers of security articulation- political, economic, military, societal and environmental. Each segments, however, are not water-tight compartments but manifest upon another to give comprehensive understanding the security architecture of the region.

While enquiring into the spectrum of Indo-Pacific security partnerships, scholars such as Miguel Alberto Gomez, Gregory Winger, and Lauren Sukin¹⁹⁰, point out to the layered set of relationships ranging from ad hoc collaborations to binding alliances. Alliances are explicitly treaty-based commitments that are formal and serve as a crucial signal of credibility, making it difficult to abandon it since it increases the cost of defection. In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States of America has forged alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines. During the cold war, these formal alliances formed the bedrock of US regional security system that was termed as the 'hub and spoke'¹⁹¹ system. Though these alliances remain significant, with the end of the cold war international politics has undergone a remarkable transformation. This very change in the geopolitical landscape has impacted upon the very nature of 'alliance' in the Indo-Pacific. He identified the changing etymology to 'coalitions', 'security communities', and 'strategic partnerships' which are all prominently

¹⁹⁰ Gomez, Miguel Alberto, Gregory Winger, and Lauren Sukin. 2025. "Allies and Partners: US Public Opinion and Relationships in the Indo-Pacific." *Contemporary Security Policy*, July, 1–31. doi:10.1080/13523260.2025.2522708

¹⁹¹ In international relations, the hub-and-spokes system refers to a bilateral alliance structure in which one dominant power (the hub, namely the USA) maintains separate security relationships with multiple allied countries (the spokes, namely Japan, South Korea), but there is no multilateral alliance among all the countries. The relations remain unequal in nature.

distinguishable from the conventional template of ‘alliance’.¹⁹² Security relationships are much more varied than the earlier ally-partner model of the 20th century. They may range from alliances with formal defence commitments, informal security assurances, and regional partnerships to non-partnership engagements. Today, nation-states often tend pursue looser forms of cooperation, known as strategic partnerships in order to avoid treaty commitments, still allowing for joint military exercises, arms transfers, and diplomatic coordination. This form of partnership is flexible and offers greater mutual benefits of cooperation without any binding obligations. Most importantly, partnerships allow states with differing interests to cooperate, contributing to trust-building and interoperability while avoiding dangers of entanglement. This form of adaptability is especially beneficial when it comes of Indo-Pacific where there are countries with differing power equations and interests that has compelled regional architectures to be framed beyond the rigid cold war era of alliances, in order to accommodate the flexible and functional nature of cooperation.

China’s emergence as an economic great power and its maritime assertiveness, trying to alter the existing statuesque is at the core of security calculations. This is reflected through the official speeches of Chinese leaders, policy documents and finally regional engagements as enunciated in the preceding sections. China’s growing presence across the entire stretch of the Indo-Pacific- be it political influence, cultural soft power, economic integration with the Chinese style debt-servicing and infrastructural funding and most importantly, its growing presence in land and in the maritime domain continue to fuel regional tensions, prompting enhanced security partnerships among the democratic nations- the formation of the Quad, which is dealt with in the next chapter. As significant stakeholders Japan and Australia, are leveraging their strategic partnerships, and are instrumental in counterbalancing China’s influence, encouraging a rules-based order, in a quest to ensuring a stable Indo-Pacific.

With regard to the largest bloc in the region- ASEAN, it can be analysed that though it remains central to the security imperatives, and it has its own internal divisions and limitation as a political grouping along with limited military capabilities that hinder its ability to address security threats decisively. It can be inferred that the greater possible impact of the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific is on these Southeast Asian nations.

¹⁹² Wilkins, Thomas S. “‘Alignment,’ Not ‘Alliance’ - The Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment.” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 53–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210511000209>

So, the politics leads to unfolding of a complex and complicated scenario- China's assertive economic and military policies on the one hand and on the other all the countries in the Indo-Pacific region, be it India or USA or ASEAN, Japan, Australia; all of them are heavily linked to China and it has successfully established itself as the manufacturing capital of the world. China can then be considered as the most vital 'referent object', a significant driver of the imperatives for securitization. So, one can witness ASEAN's diplomatic balancing act, Japan's proactive engagement in regional security and economic initiatives, and Australia's considerations pertaining to its economic dependence along with its evolving defence posture- all these are significant drivers and imperatives that collectively shape the Indo-Pacific order. As the geopolitical shifts continue to unfold in the long-run, the security scenario is likely witness further realignments, necessitating continued dialogue, multilateral cooperation, and strategic adaptability among regional actors to alleviate the risk of conflict, escalation.

CHAPTER FOUR

INDIA-US RELATIONS AND THE EMERGING SECURITY FRAMEWORK IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

“When our partnership progresses, economic resilience increases, innovation grows, science flourishes, knowledge advances, humanity benefits, our seas and skies are safer, democracy will shine brighter, and the world will be a better place. That is the mission of our partnership.”

-Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi,

Excerpt from Address to the Joint Session of the US Congress, June 23, 2023

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the discussion regarding the emerging trends in Indo-Pacific security politics was undertaken. It is clear that the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a focal point of global strategic interest and the issues present in the Indo-Pacific region has been elevated to the level of securitization. The present chapter focuses upon the emerging dynamics of India-US relations in the region. The region as a whole has witnessed tremendous rise in terms of its economic prosperity, defence and military build-ups, the rise in inter-state conflicts and the role of transnational actors. Consequently, issues that were earlier regarded as low-politics have been elevated to high-politics.

One of the significant reasons behind the geopolitical significance of the Indo-Pacific is the rise of India. Again, the security imperatives that has been illustrated in the previous chapter, has induced the United States of America to renew its focus and consolidate ties with the democratic partners in the region. Indo-Pacific security momentum has rejuvenated ties between India and the United States of America, leading to a reassessment of security strategies within the strategic and diplomatic circles of India and the United States- notably the two most remarkable players in the region. Their collaboration is driven by shared concerns over maintaining freedom of navigation, ensuring unimpeded maritime commerce, strengthening

collaboration in countering challenges of global commons and countering territorial aggressiveness by regional powers. This chapter explores India-US relations and its impact on the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of India- US relations, then focussing upon to their respective policies and outlooks pertaining to the Indo-Pacific region. The rise of minilateralism as a significant outcome of security concern in the region, as the chapter lays emphasis on discussing the Quadrilateral Security Framework. It subsequently examines the points of convergence and divergence in their strategic outlooks and its impact on the security of the region

India-US Relations: Brief Outline

Diplomatic relations between India and United States of America was established even before India achieved independence from the British rule. The American Embassy was set up in New Delhi on November 1, 1946, when the U.S. Department of State raised the American Mission at New Delhi to an Embassy.¹⁹³ Official recognition to India came soon after independence when the President of the United States President Harry S. Truman recognized the Union of India as an independent state on August 15, 1947. India- US relations have evolved over the years as both embraced and upheld democracy as the pillar of socio-economic development. Economic relationship premised on trade and investment and developmental assistances has been one of the defining features of their bilateral engagement. In 2022, India was ranked as the United States' tenth largest export market for goods, accounting for a 2.3 percent share of total U.S. goods exports. Conversely, the United States stood as India's largest trade partner, representing nearly one-fifth of its total exports.¹⁹⁴

Though the United States had always morally and politically supported India's freedom struggle, the systemic compulsions of international politics eventually shaped America's perceptions towards independent India. India gained independence from the British in August, 1947- a very critical time in the history and trajectory of world politics. The World War ended in 1945, leaving Europe divided and devastated and eroding the power of Britain. The moment

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian. "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: India." Accessed 20 June, 2023. <https://history.state.gov/countries/india>.

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Congressional Research Service. "U.S.-India Trade Relations." Accessed July 13, 2024. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47597#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20in%202022%2C%20India,of%20nearly%20one%2Dfifth>.

was seized by the United States of America, and world witnessed yet another paradigm shift in power, with the rise of USA as the superpower- militarily and economically, taking a leadership role in world affairs. The United States also enjoyed a brief moment of uni-polarity by becoming the first nuclear power on July 16, 1945, until the Soviet Union broke that uni-polarity in August 29, 1949. The expansion of Soviet Union's power especially in Eastern Europe despite its acute economic losses played a decisive role in shaping post-war international politics. The pre-war allies turned into post-war hostiles that is conditioned by opposing ideologies, political mistrust leading to power contestation- the bipolar politics and its profound impact beyond the Atlantic sphere.

Relations between the India and the United States was greatly shaped by America's view towards Asia, which during the cold war days, was through the prism of bipolar politics. The Republic of India embraced democracy as a system of governance and for a few decades after independence followed a mixed economic system as a path of economic development. The mixed economic system was unique to India as it presented the best of both socialism and capitalism; the presence of free market mechanism and public distribution system to meet the needs of the diverse citizens of the country and also to bring economic development after about 200 years of colonial drain. India's uniqueness lies in its advocacy of foreign policy too. India stood as a leader of the Global South, voicing the concerns of the post-colonial nation-states. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru advocated the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an independent course of foreign policy that voices the issues of the Global South and aims to ease international tensions and promote peace in the global order. NAM spoke of solidarity among the Afro-Asian world, and this was a third path, away from siding with the Soviet model of development and the US liberal camp. This third path insulated the post-colonial countries from getting entangled into cold war politics, since both camps have disastrous effects on the development priorities of the Global South. Nehru's vision found its pertinence as the intrinsic philosophy of India's foreign policy as he spoke of One World.

Since independence, India assumed the role of an important power. However, India's independence did come with a cost- the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan that quickly sided with the USA camp. India vehemently opposed militarization of the South Asia and therefore did not side with the American military alliances. Again, India's confident articulation of vivid foreign policy objectives, its aim of building a unified peaceful and prosperous world order, the mixed economic model and most importantly, viewing India

through the lens of Pakistan, coupled with dilemma associated with the cold war that led to an erratic relation between the two democracies.

The end of the Cold War reshaped the structural constraints of India-US relations, enabling both countries to reassess their bilateral priorities. The United States emerged as the most important power projecting liberal internationalism as its economic statecraft. Again, India's domestic priorities and foreign policy goals pushed New Delhi to embrace a liberal democracy, transforming from a closed-door economy to an open economy. As India embarked on economic reforms and global integration, it became apparent that a more substantive engagement with the United States was inevitable. While economic convergence and mutual interest brought the two democracies closer, significant impediments remained- most notably scepticism and resistance to India's nuclear programme and America's continued tendency to view India through the lens of its Pakistan policy. Again, the 1998 nuclear tests, though removing ambiguity around India's nuclear status, provoked tensions with the US, which remained firmly committed to non-proliferation, especially with regard to horizontal proliferation.¹⁹⁵ The United States of America imposed a series of sanctions on India under Section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act, better known as the Glenn Amendment. These measures included the suspension of all assistance under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, except for humanitarian aid in the form of food and agricultural commodities. Additionally, the U.S. terminated the sale of defence equipment, related services, and infrastructure support as stipulated under the Arms Export Control Act. This included the cancellation of export licences for items listed on the United States Munitions List. All forms of foreign military financing to India were also withdrawn. Furthermore, U.S. government departments and agencies were prohibited from offering any form of credit, credit guarantees, or financial assistance to the Indian government. The United States also took a firm stance against the provision of financial or technical aid to India by international financial institutions, pledging to oppose any such proposals. Finally, American banks were forbidden from extending loans or credits to the Indian government, except when intended for the purchase of food or other essential agricultural products.¹⁹⁶ These punitive measures exasperated the relations between

¹⁹⁵ Horizontal proliferation with regard to nuclear weapons signifies the spread of nuclear weapons to more number of countries.

¹⁹⁶ U.S. State Department, "India Sanctions - May 13, 1998 – State Department," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, May 13, 1999

Washington and New Delhi. Arguably, the role of Indian diaspora was significant during this time. The diaspora communities worked towards leveraging better ties and softening the rough edges of the relationship. They lobbied for the revoking the sanctions that has a detrimental effect in the business and commercial ties between the two countries and petitioned for softening America's nuclear non-proliferation goals in light of India's security concerns.¹⁹⁷ During this period there was also sustained diplomatic dialogues between the officials of both countries that laid the groundwork for future strategic cooperation.

A clear shift in U.S. policy toward India was evident with President William Jefferson Clinton's visit to India in 2000, which marked the first visit of US President since Jimmy Carter's trip in 1978. This marked a turning point in bilateral ties. President Clinton remarked,

*"In the new century, India and the United States will be partners in peace, with a common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security. We will engage in regular consultations on, and work together for, strategic stability in Asia and beyond. We will bolster joint efforts to counter terrorism and meet other challenges to regional peace. We will strengthen the international security system, including in the United Nations, and support the United Nations in its peacekeeping efforts. We acknowledge that tensions in South Asia can only be resolved by the nations of South Asia. India is committed to enhancing cooperation, peace and stability in the region."*¹⁹⁸ - Joint statement issued on March 21, 2000, during President Clinton's visit to New Delhi.

Echoing similar vision, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, during his 2003 address to the Asia Society in New York, referring to the India and America as *"natural allies in the quest for a better future"*.¹⁹⁹ Such mutual recognition signified a symbolic reversal of Cold War-era

¹⁹⁷ Bagoria, Mukesh. "Indo-US Relations and the Role of the Indian Diaspora," in *Indo-US Relations: Dimensions and Emerging Trends*, ed. Mohammed Badrul Alam. New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2013. 197–203.

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State. *"U.S.–India Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century."* Joint statement issued on March 21, 2000, during President Clinton's visit to New Delhi. *White House Archive*. Accessed August 8, 2024. https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/SouthAsia/fact_sheets/india4.html

¹⁹⁹ Vajpayee, Atal Bihari. "India, USA and the World: Let Us Work Together to Solve the Political-Economic Y2K Problem." Speech delivered at Asia Society, New York, September 28, 1998. <https://asiasociety.org/india-usa-and-world-let-us-work-together-solve-political-economic-y2k-problem>

alignments and a significant milestone in the evolving partnership came in January 2004 with the launch of the 'Next Steps in Strategic Partnership' initiative that aimed to enhance collaboration in areas such as civilian nuclear energy, space exploration, advanced technology commerce, and missile defence systems.²⁰⁰

The real breakthrough in the relations came with President George W. Bush. The Bush administration reconceptualised India's strategic value, viewing it not merely as a regional actor but as a potential global power. This shift in perspective was articulated even before Bush took office, particularly by Condoleezza Rice, who argued for decoupling India from Pakistan in US foreign policy discourse. The post-9/11 strategic environment and the rise of China further propelled the US to reconfigure its South Asia policy, and India emerged as a natural partner due to shared democratic values, geostrategic location, and mutual interests in regional stability. The most transformative development in bilateral ties was marked by the seminar civil nuclear deals that initiated nuclear cooperation between them. Despite longstanding concerns about nuclear proliferation, the Bush administration decided to accommodate India's nuclear status outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework. In 2005, the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative, a landmark agreement was announced that signalled Washington's willingness to support India's entry into the global nuclear mainstream. This was perceived in India not just as a diplomatic victory but as international recognition of its status as a responsible nuclear power. The United States and India pursued this initiative with three primary goals: to resolve longstanding issues that had hindered their strategic partnership for over three decades, to promote India's economic development and energy needs through environmentally sustainable means, and to reinforce the global nuclear non-proliferation framework.²⁰¹

However, negotiating the terms of the agreement proved arduous. The most contentious issue was the separation of India's civilian and military nuclear facilities. Ultimately, India agreed to subject 14 of its 22 reactors to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards,

²⁰⁰ Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India. "India and United States Successfully Complete Next Steps in Strategic Partnership." *Bilateral Documents*. July 18, 2005. Accessed August 8, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6789/India+and+United+States+Successfully+Complete+Next+Steps+in+Strategic+Partnership>.

²⁰¹ U.S. Department of State. *United States-India: Civilian Nuclear Cooperation*. June 2005. *U.S. Department of State Archive*. Accessed August 8, 2024. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/c17361.htm>.

while keeping strategic facilities outside the inspection regime. India also secured a commitment of uninterrupted fuel supply for its civilian reactors. The deal's architecture preserved India's deterrent capability while granting it access to global nuclear commerce- an outcome considered highly favourable from the Indian perspective. The US, on the other hand, presented the deal as a strategic investment in an emerging global partner, one that could contribute to regional stability, counterbalance China, and advance shared interests in democratic governance and global security. After prolonged negotiations, and substantial reservations from both sides- the 123 Agreement was undertaken detailing the operational framework of the deal was finalised, ensuring fuel supply guarantees, reprocessing rights under safeguards, and a clear commitment from the US not to impede India's strategic programme. Though some critics in the US viewed this as a capitulation, others saw it as a realistic accommodation of India's unique status. Globally, the deal received broad support from major powers such as France, Russia, and the UK, who were keen to benefit from nuclear commerce with India. China, however, viewed the development with suspicion, perceiving it as part of a broader strategy to contain its rise and responded by bolstering its own nuclear cooperation with Pakistan. The Indo- US nuclear deal thus became a pivotal moment in bilateral relations, symbolising a significant shift in both countries' strategic calculations. For India, it represented a departure from decades of nuclear isolation and an entry into the global technological mainstream. For the US, it marked a strategic investment in a rising power that shared its democratic values and regional security objectives. The agreement was not merely about energy cooperation but something more than that. It signalled the maturation of a strategic partnership that would extend into areas such as defence collaboration, joint military exercises, counter-terrorism, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.²⁰² India-US relations continue to shape evolving regional dynamics, the strategic environment is also affected by the occasionally conflicting visions stemming from their respective political calculations.

In the changed geopolitical environment, the contours of India and the United States relations have transitioned from the estrangement of the Cold war days to a strategic partnership, though there remains some divergences in interests, perceptions, and expectations. This has much to do with the geopolitical transition of the political environment and also to the rising economic profile of the Asian countries. India-US relations are quite unique and they have never been

²⁰² Pant, Harsh V. *Contemporary Debates in Indian Foreign and Security Policy: India Negotiates Its Rise in the International System*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

like those of hub-spokes²⁰³ or client-patron²⁰⁴ as may be evident in US relations with some of the Asia-Pacific countries.

In June 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden while hosting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that US-India relations have emerged to be ‘*most consequential in the world*’ and ‘*stronger, closer and more dynamic than any time in history*’.²⁰⁵ The event signalled India’s salience in the Indo-Pacific also reflecting Washington’s endeavours in bringing New Delhi into the strategic fold of the Indo-Pacific. President Biden’s outreach to New Delhi reflected his broader approach of cultivating networks of cooperation with like-minded states through flexible coalitions. India, now the world’s fifth-largest economy and projected to become the third-largest by the later 2020s with a huge population, is looked by America as a strategic and economic power.²⁰⁶ Prime Minister Modi’s visit was widely celebrated in both the countries, as it demonstrated success in business agreements and strategic partnerships.

While decoding the nature of India-US relations in the present security scenario, Walter C. Walter Ladwig and Anit Mukherjee²⁰⁷ infers that unlike alliances, which involve formal commitments often directed against a common enemy, strategic partnerships are flexible. They are informal arrangements which are focused on achieving shared but non-binding goals. These partnerships are often pursued to maximise absolute gains and facilitate cooperation without constraining sovereignty. This is a significant point for India as New Delhi has traditionally eschewed alliance politics.

²⁰³ In international relations, the hub-and-spokes system refers to a bilateral alliance structure in which one dominant power (the hub, namely the USA) maintains separate security relationships with multiple allied countries (the spokes, namely Japan, South Korea), but there is no multilateral alliance among all the countries. The relations remain unequal in nature.

²⁰⁴ In international relations, a client–patron relationship is a hierarchical bilateral relationship in which a dominant power (patron, the USA) supports a weaker state (client, the Philippines) in exchange for loyalty, alignment, or strategic cooperation from the client. The relations remain unequal in nature.

²⁰⁵ Pandey, Vikas, and Soutik Biswas. “How Modi and Biden Turbocharged India-US Ties.” *BBC News*, June 22, 2023. Accessed May 30, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-65982053>

²⁰⁶ Tzinieris, Sarah, Rishika Chauhan, and Eirini Athanasiadou. 2023. “India’s A La Carte Minilateralism: AUKUS and the Quad.” *The Washington Quarterly* 46 (4): 21–39. doi:10.1080/0163660X.2023.2285540.

²⁰⁷ Ladwig, Walter C., and Anit Mukherjee. “India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership.” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019): 3–18. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26642261>.

Indo-US relations appear to be underpinned by shared democratic values and converging geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific - especially in response to the rise of China, along with structural and political factors. India and the United States share common ground on many key issues concerning the Indo-Pacific. Both countries work together to uphold a democratic, rules-based order in the region, and their partnership has grown increasingly important for ensuring regional and global stability as well as long-term prosperity. The subsequent sections shall investigate upon the visions, policies and priorities of the United States and India with regard to the Indo-Pacific region and analyse their strategies for securing the region.

For the United States of America, Indo-Pacific is Washington's primary focus area as the nations of the Indo-Pacific are underscoring the very nature of international relations in the present century and the US has vital stakes in the region. President Joe Biden in Quad Leaders' Summit, 2024 declared the core ethos of America's Indo-Pacific shift since, "*The Future of Each of Our Nations- And Indeed the World- Depends on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Enduring and Flourishing in the Decades Ahead.*"²⁰⁸ The United States has an enduring vision in the region and its approach is based on alliances and partnerships among Washington's closest friends in the region. The United States in this sense upholds India as a strong partner in the region and resonates with India's positive vision in the Indo-Pacific. Supporting India's rise and her regional leadership, Washington believes that India's role is crucial as a net security provider in the region and has robust strategic partnership with New Delhi encompassing military security and defence partnership, regional alliance such as Quadrilateral Strategic Alliance and economic framework such as the IPEF. India and the United States are both aiming to build a stable and prosperous order in South Asia in particular and the Indo-Pacific premised upon the notion of a stable and prosperous South-East Asia and the centrality of the ASEAN countries. Both the nations are working together in all aspects of security ranging from traditional to non-traditional sectors such as space, cyber space, health, technology cooperation and securing the Indian ocean and maritime orders. India is a driving force in the Quadrilateral Framework (Quad) and both the nation-states seek to harness the potential of the region since Indo-Pacific is the engine of regional growth and global development.

²⁰⁸ United States, President (Joe Biden). 2021. *Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Morrison of Australia, and Prime Minister Johnson of the United Kingdom Announcing the Creation of AUKUS*. Speech, East Room, September 15, 2021. The White House. Accessed September 09, 2023. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/09/15/remarks-by-president-biden-prime-minister-morrison-of-australia-and-prime-minister-johnson-of-the-united-kingdom-announcing-the-creation-of-aucus/>

The United States of America and the Indo-Pacific

Over the past few decades, the US has undergone a significant shift in reassessing the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region. This has partly been because of the rise of various non-traditional security issues, alongside the economic opportunities and risks emanating from the Indo-Pacific region. This has also led to the change in the strategic military profile in the region. This shift towards Asia-Pacific was the first step before enlarging it to the Indo-Pacific regional construct. It can be traced from Obama Administrations re-assessment of strategic focus, calling “*the 21st century will be America’s Pacific century, a period of unprecedented outreach and partnership in this dynamic, complex, and consequential region.*”²⁰⁹

The Obama Administration’s approach marked a decisive shift in U.S. foreign policy by positioning the Asia-Pacific as the central arena for 21st-century American engagement. Historically, Washington’s focus in the region leaned heavily toward East Asia’s major economies and security flashpoints, while the Pacific Islands received less sustained attention. Under the pivot, or ‘rebalancing’ strategy, the United States sought to give equal weight to the Pacific dimension, revitalising ties with island nations and tackling shared concerns such as climate change, environmental degradation, and pandemic threats. This recalibration was grounded in the recognition that the Asia-Pacific, stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, was emerging as the world’s strategic and economic centre of gravity. The region’s vast population, fast-growing economies, vital shipping lanes, and persistent security challenges made it indispensable to U.S. long-term interests. The drawdown from Iraq and Afghanistan further enabled the reallocation of diplomatic, economic, and military resources toward this theatre. A central feature of the pivot was the ambition to replicate, in adapted form, the successes of the post-war transatlantic system. In the latter half of the 20th century, U.S.-led institutional networks in Europe advanced democracy, collective security, and economic integration; the administration envisioned a comparable, though more flexible, transpacific architecture. This would require deeper engagement with regional institutions, a stronger web of bilateral partnerships, and a shared commitment to rules-based order. The strategy, described as ‘forward-deployed diplomacy,’ involved sending senior officials, development experts, and security personnel across the region to signal commitment

²⁰⁹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” remarks delivered at the East-West Center, Honolulu, November 10, 2011, *U.S. Department of State*, originally published in 2011, accessed August 15, 2024, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>.

and cultivate long-term influence. Operationally, the policy rested on six pillars: strengthening treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand; expanding cooperation with emerging powers such as India and Indonesia; engaging robustly in forums like APEC, ASEAN, and the East Asia Summit; advancing trade and investment through agreements such as the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); maintaining a broad and resilient military presence; and promoting democracy and human rights. The economic dimension was framed around fostering a rules-based order to underpin trade and investment. Initiatives like the TPP were designed not only to expand market access but also to set high standards for intellectual property protection, environmental safeguards, labour rights, and fair competition. This rules-first approach linked economic policy to governance norms, reinforcing the United States' role as both a commercial and normative leader. The strategy toward China illustrated the dual-track nature of the pivot: on one hand, Washington emphasised cooperation through platforms such as the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, aiming to expand common ground in areas like global growth and maritime security; on the other, it pressed Beijing on currency reform, intellectual property enforcement, and human rights. Engagement with Taiwan was reaffirmed, and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea was identified as a core interest. Alliance modernisation was another pillar, with the aim of ensuring political support at home, operational adaptability, and material capacity to deter a wide range of threats. The U.S. military posture was recalibrated to be more geographically dispersed and resilient, enhancing deterrence and enabling rapid humanitarian response. This security architecture was complemented by an explicit values agenda. The United States linked its advocacy for open markets with support for open societies, encouraging political reforms in countries such as Vietnam and Burma, and speaking out on human rights issues in places like Tibet. Such value-based diplomacy was intended both to consolidate ties with democratic partners and to distinguish U.S. leadership from other powers in the region. Importantly, the pivot did not come at the expense of transatlantic relations. The United States sought to align European partners more closely with its Asia-Pacific objectives, recognising the potential benefits of coordinated Atlantic–Pacific strategies for addressing global challenges. Throughout, the administration worked to dispel doubts in Asia about American staying power, framing the pivot as a generational commitment rooted in mutual benefit. Drawing inspiration from the patient institution-building of the transatlantic community, the Obama Administration envisioned a sustained, multidimensional presence that could anchor peace, prosperity, and cooperative norms in the Pacific for decades to come. This strategic reorientation signalled not just a geographical shift but a structural recalibration of

U.S. global engagement, driven by the belief that the decisive economic, security, and governance contests of the century would unfold in the Asia-Pacific. Under President Obama, the Asia-Pacific rebalance reshaped U.S. strategy in Asia, signalling the rise of a ‘super-region’ in American strategic thinking. While elements of Indo-Pacific terminology entered military discourse, the U.S. armed forces avoided fully embracing the terminology, instead keeping the geographic scope of this emerging super-region deliberately flexible. This nuanced approach was reflected in the U.S. Department of Defence’s *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*.²¹⁰ Although was referred to “Asia-Pacific” maritime security, the document also used the term “maritime Asia” on several occasions. Its introduction highlighted Washington’s enduring economic and security interests in the Asia-Pacific, describing the region- from the Indian Ocean, across the South and East China Seas, to the Pacific Ocean- as predominantly maritime in nature, and emphasizing the priority placed on maintaining peace and stability at sea.

In subsequent discussions, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, stressed the importance of reframing alliances and partnerships to adapt to new challenges in the region. She highlighted the pivotal role of alliances, particularly the U.S.-Japan alliance, and advocated for transforming relationships like the U.S.-Australia partnership into Indo-Pacific frameworks.²¹¹ Additionally, Clinton underscored India’s significance as a democratic partner in safeguarding freedom of navigation. The 2019 Progress Report of the U.S. Department of State’s further articulated principles guiding this strategy, emphasizing free trade, open investment, good governance, and freedom of the seas.²¹²

Indo-Pacific as America’s Central Priority – After being elected as the 45th President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump regarded the Indo-Pacific as a central

²¹⁰ United States Department of Defense. *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*. August 2015. Accessed August 15, 2024. <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/614488/us-outlines-asiapacific-maritime-security-strategy>.

²¹¹ Clinton, Hillary Rodham. *Remarks on America's Pacific Century*. Speech, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 10, 2011. U.S. Department of State (2009–2017 Archive). Accessed September 9, 2024. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>

²¹² United States Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*. Press release, Washington, DC, November 4, 2019. U.S. Department of State. Accessed September 9, 2024. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-advancing-a-shared-vision/>.

priority area of his administration. The National Security Strategy (NSS)²¹³ of the United States of America, 2017 is the core strategic document of President Trump's America First policy. It aims to preserve peace through strength, enhance American prosperity and foreign policy. The document identifies key theatres of protecting and promoting American interests, and places the Indo-Pacific as a topmost priority when it comes to America's regional strategic calculations. The NSS asserts that the shift in Washington's focus towards the Indo-Pacific is due to the increasing geopolitical competition between two competing models of world order that is underway in the region- one that is rooted in freedom and another that is repressive. The document for the first time underlines the significance of 'free and open Indo-Pacific' that is subsequently taken up as a central pillar of America's Indo-Pacific strategy. The NSS expresses concern over Chinese behaviour in the Indo-Pacific, where Beijing uses economic leverages, political influence, and coercion, military threats that manipulates regional choices and hinders American interest in the region. While the US and China have extensive economic linkages when it comes to bilateral trade and linkages, China's Belt and Road Initiative is viewed as a threat that tends to destabilize the region. Washington emphasizes upon collective action to ensure rule-based order in the region.

Along with this, the NSS as identifies North Korea's nuclear missiles as a global threats and there calls for alliances and partnerships, which is also the bedrock of US Indo-Pacific strategy. The US seeks to strengthen ties with its traditional allies, form new alliances as well as use multilateral platforms (such as ASEAN) to advancing a regional order that is grounded in freedom, cooperation and rule of law. The NSS mentions the role of Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand that remains crucial to the regional order, and at the same time, recognises India rising global power and its role as a strategic partner in the region. The NSS mentions Washington's intention to deepen cooperation with the Quad countries. America's strategy for the Indo-Pacific is a political tool of preserving US positioning in the region, and has economic and military constituents attached to it. It is a strategic blue-print signalling Washington's comprehensive and enduring engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, aimed at magnifying America's power in the present century.

²¹³ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), accessed August 17, 2024, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) – President Donald Trump, introduced the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) during the APEC CEO Summit in Vietnam, 2017.²¹⁴ With regard to turning the concept of FOIP into policy papers, doctrines and practice, the White House came up with *The United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific*²¹⁵, which asserts and highlights the United States of America as an Indo-Pacific power as the Washington implement its National Security Strategy in 2017. The Framework underscores the essential and prominent role of American leadership in the region, and USA’s practical approach to work through a broad network of alliances and partnerships in the region. It seeks to complement Japan’s *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, India’s *SAGAR* policy, Australia’s *Indo-Pacific outlook*, South Korea’s *New Southern Policy*, and ASEAN’s regional vision centred within situating its own central position. President Trump builds his narratives on Shinzo Abe’s vision of the Indo-Pacific as a ‘broader Asia’ that values freedom, prosperity, and the rule of law, along with emphasizing upon India’s role as a key democratic partner of the USA. Subsequently, in 2018, the United States in consultations with the regional partners identified shared principles of Indo-Pacific framework- sovereignty, rule of law, ASEAN centrality, freedom of navigation and cyberspace, peaceful dispute resolution, transparent trade and investment, and environmentally and socially responsible infrastructure development.²¹⁶

The Department of State resonated this policy by releasing a 32 pages document in 2019 titled as ‘A Free and Open Indo-Pacific- Advancing a Shared Vision’ which served as a vivid articulation of Trump Administration’s policy shift towards the Indo-Pacific. The vision was presented during President Trump’s visit to Vietnam in November 2017, where he spoke of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP), where the countries of the region can prosper together

²¹⁴ The White House. “Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit | Da Nang, Vietnam.” *The White House*, November 10, 2017. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>

²¹⁵ Robert C. O’Brien, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (Washington, DC: The White House, January 5, 2021), PDF document, Office of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, archived at Trump White House, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OBrien-Expanded-Statement.pdf>.

²¹⁶ Robert C. O’Brien, *The United States Is and Always Has Been an Indo-Pacific Nation: The United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific*, (Washington, DC: The White House, January 5, 2021), accessed August 17, 2025, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OBrien-Expanded-Statement.pdf>

while preserving their sovereignty.²¹⁷ It served as a guiding philosophy of US long term engagements in the region in light of the shifting balance of power to Asia, the economic prosperity and dynamism of the region, particularly hinting at the rise of China. FOIP re-establishes USA's central role in the Indo-Pacific region and ensures peace, free trade, freedom of navigation, and good governance, with the enduring role of Washington in shaping.

FOIP is premised upon four pillars- freedom, openness, partnership and sovereignty. The primary aim of the United States in the Indo-Pacific is to preserve freedom in the region and prevent coercion. This is linked to preserving the economic vitality of the region and for that freedom of over-flight and navigation is essential. Trump administration calls protection of the maritime domain, upholding international laws specifically in terms of the freedom of sea lanes of communication in the South China Sea. Secondly, Washington promotes openness both in terms of free trade and in terms of open access to sea lanes. This also suggests transparency in economic relations and for that end maintaining access to sea lanes is essential. Thirdly, President Trump highlighted upon the centrality of Washington's alliances in the region. The United States Indo-Pacific policy works in close cooperation with US alliances in in region- Japan, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea and the growing ties with India and the ASEAN countries. Finally, the Trump administration in its aim to sustaining a regional order which is free from the domination of a single power, calls for respect and upholding sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific region. It underscores territorial integrity and the ability of the smaller states in the region to make their independent decisions without falling into the external pressures. It calls for transparency in relations among the stakeholders of the Indo-Pacific and is against any 'state-led, opaque, and coercive' actions in the region.²¹⁸

What can be analysed from the elaborate blue-print of America's Indo-Pacific outlook is a clear hint towards China's revisionist tendencies in the Indo-Pacific region and a reassurance of American support and commitment to the nations resisting such domination and intrusive tendencies of Beijing. FOIP, plays a dual role- first as a geopolitical strategy and, secondly, as

²¹⁷ President Donald J. Trump, "President Donald J. Trump's Trip to Vietnam," *The White House* (archived), November 12, 2017, accessed August 17, 2023, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-trip-vietnam/>.

²¹⁸ United States Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, November 4, 2019), accessed August 17, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

a normative project, presenting the U.S. as a stable source of leadership, values and security provider in the region. FOIP has diplomatic, economic, military, political and connotations and coordinates all these wings at the administrative level. Diplomatically it promotes ASEAN centrality, the significance of minilateralism such as the Quad, bilateral and trilateral alliances (such as with India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand). Economically, it links to initiatives such as the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act acronymic as BUILD Act²¹⁹ and Indo-Pacific Business Forum that is intended to mobilise private investment and reduce dependency on China. It counters China Belt and Road Initiative and, alternatively promises infrastructure development in the region that is transparent, high-quality and sustainable. Along with providing an alternative to BRI, one of the primary motivations behind the BUILD Act is to expand Washington's economic reach in the developing countries. In order to meet this end, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) was created to strengthen American influence in the region by urging private-sector investment as an alternative to PRC's state-led model. The Act also targeted streamlining and consolidating American development finance operations, and has a dual purpose of improving efficiency and greater savings.²²⁰

Importantly, President Trump's vision of FOIP emphasized partnership and cooperation among Indo-Pacific nations, and is not described as a formal treaty or alliance system. It is a flexible, evolving approach that adapts to regional needs. Militarily, it justifies the presence of Washington's forward presence in the waters of the region, partnering with countries to enhance interoperability and logistical sharing. Overall, it is a political doctrine that counters China's political ambitions in the region presenting the U.S. as a stable source of leadership, values and security provider in the region. Through FOIP, the United States positions itself as a resident power and as a security guarantor of the region. It also suggests that the US security and prosperity is integrally linked to the Indo-Pacific region and this translates into a broad-

²¹⁹ The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act of 2018 (BUILD Act), which was signed into law on October 5, 2018 (P.L. 115-254), represents a potentially major overhaul of U.S. development finance efforts. It establishes a new agency—the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC)—by consolidating and expanding existing U.S. government development finance functions, which are conducted primarily by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and some components of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

²²⁰ Akhtar, Shayerah I., and Marian L. Lawson. *BUILD Act: Frequently Asked Questions About the New U.S. International Development Finance Corporation*, CRS Report R45461, January 15, 2019. Congressional Research Service. <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R45461.html>

based strategic drive of the United States in this region; something that guides the US to counter any direct challenge to the regional order.

The FOIP strategy, emphasizes freedom from coercion and the importance of good governance and transparency. It aims to ensure open sea lanes, trade, and investment while recognizing India's growing role in the region.²²¹ This strategy reflects a balancing logic that positions India and the U.S. as democratic bookends opposite China. Official documents, including the National Security Strategy and State Department reports, underscore China's challenge to the rules-based order and its coercive policies.²²² The U.S. seeks to counter PRC's assertiveness through partnerships, military preparedness, and promotion of a networked region. The Indo-Pacific concept encompasses the entire Indian Ocean region, extending from U.S. territories to states like Hawaii and California. Trump's emphasis on fair and reciprocal trade relations reflects broader principles of sovereignty, good governance, and open access endorsed by the U.S.

Defence Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: The strategic positioning of U.S. defence infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific is influenced by historical decisions made during the Cold War era. Following the announcement of a 'pivot to Asia' during the Obama administration, there has been a shift in U.S. strategy towards competing with peer or near-peer rivals, notably China. Since 2011, the United States has negotiated access to 12 new defence sites in the Philippines and Australia, constructed new installations in Japan and Guam, and expanded facilities at numerous existing sites across the region. The US Congress has played a significant role in these developments, including appropriating over \$8.9 billion for new military construction projects in the Indo-Pacific since fiscal year 2020. Moreover, infrastructure improvements have been prioritized through initiatives like the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), reflecting Congress' commitment to enhancing U.S. defence capabilities in the region. The Indo-Pacific region holds significant importance in U.S. security strategy, and the presence of defence infrastructure in the form of US bases, logistical hubs, access agreements and

²²¹ Clinton, Hillary Rodham. "America's Pacific Century." Remarks delivered at the East-West Center, Honolulu, November 10, 2011. *U.S. Department of State*. Originally published 2011. Accessed August 15, 2024. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>.

²²² United States Department of Defense. *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*. August 2015. Accessed August 15, 2024. <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/614488/us-outlines-asiapacific-maritime-security-strategy>.

prepositioned defense and strategic assets forms a physical manifestation of American grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific. In terms of its coverage, it stretches across the enormous geographic arc from Alaska in the East to Diego Garcia in the West, having more than 375,000 U.S. military personnel across 66 distinct defence sites. The varied and heterogeneous nature of defence posturing ranges from massive installations like Kadena and Camp Humphreys to smaller radar stations and logistics facilities. The troop presence in the region totals nearly 90,000 personnel, with 55,000 in Japan, 28,500 in South Korea, about 5,000 on Guam, and rotational forces spread elsewhere.²²³

The recognition of Indo-Pacific as the ‘epicentre of 21st century geopolitics’ is explicitly mentioned in 2022 National Defence Strategy²²⁴ of the United States calling for the securitization of the region in terms of defence positioning. At the core, Washington maintains more sixty-six military bases in the region, out of which twenty-six are located to the East of International Date Line and forty to the West. The majority of the defence infrastructure and personnel are within the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s (INDOPACOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), while some are under the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) AOR but are under the broader Indo-Pacific region. However, the defence sites are not homogenously distributed; they are positioned in terms of the priority area and threat perception in the region. The maximum cluster is in Japan, South Korea, and Guam that serve as central hubs for American power projection and can also be referred to as the backbone of America’s Indo-Pacific defence posture.

This growing concentration is in light of China’s growing defence build-ups in the region that manifests in terms of its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities. This largely translates as a threat or challenge to America’s defence calculations. For instance, Japan has roughly fifty thousand U.S. troops stationed, with the majority of Marine Corps assets stationed in Okinawa. Its proximity to Taiwan makes Okinawa a valuable asset in Washington’s strategic thinking. South Korea has about 28,500 troops stationed, most of them concentrated at bases like Camp

²²³ Nicastro, Luke A. *U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress*. CRS Report R47589. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 6, 2023. Accessed August 17, 2024. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589>

²²⁴ United States, Department of Defense. *2022 National Defense Strategy: National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, Missile Defense Review*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense, October 27, 2022. Accessed September 9, 2024. <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf>.

Humphreys, which has grown to become one of the largest American overseas installations in the region. Guam, is another strategically important island where Andersen Air Force Base and Naval Base Guam are located, both of which act as springboards for operations deep into the Western Pacific. It is a US territory and this makes it a uniquely reliable base of operations. However, Guam is located about 1,800 miles from East Asia, that places it directly under the sights of China's missile force, more specifically China's intermediate-range ballistic missiles like the DF-26, often nicknamed the 'Guam Killer'. To address this, the United States has invested heavily in missile defence systems for Guam, including the planned deployment of Aegis Ashore. The island also plays host to submarine tenders, bomber rotations, and prepositioned stocks, all of which allow it to act as both a launching pad and a sustainment hub.

This vulnerability also calls for stricter surveillance and defence readiness in the region. To offset these vulnerabilities, the United States has been exploring what it calls 'distributed basing' or 'agile combat employment.' Also, to reduce the vulnerability of US assets to Chinese targets, US assets are spread across the region, aiding in operational flexibility. This involves dispersing aircraft, supplies, and troops across a larger number of smaller, often more austere facilities. For instance, access agreements with the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) have been expanded, giving U.S. forces the option to use four additional Philippine sites. Again, Australia has also emerged as a major partner in this distributed approach, hosting rotational deployments of Marines in Darwin and offering facilities for joint air and naval activities. It can be noted that the United States relies on bilateral alliances and partnerships in the region. Most of these countries where US defence infrastructures are located are US Treaty partners, example Japan, whose role is particularly critical, not only for the sheer scale of forces stationed there but also for the facilities it provides. Yokosuka, south of Tokyo, is home to the only forward-deployed U.S. aircraft carrier strike group, and Kadena Air Base in Okinawa is one of the largest U.S. air bases outside the mainland. These facilities make Japan an indispensable partner in sustaining the democratic values and 'free and open' security narrative of the region.²²⁵

Beyond this, United States is increasingly developing what it calls 'peripheral nodes' of security. Australia forms an integral part of the peripheral defence alliance where the U.S.

²²⁵ Nicastro, Luke A. *U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress*. CRS Report R47589. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 6, 2023. Accessed August 17, 2024. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589> .

Marine Rotational Force- Darwin, established in 2011, has steadily grown to include several thousand troops. Australia and the United States have engaged in Joint exercises where the US military gets access to Australian facilities. This along with trilateral cooperation with Japan have turned Australia into a southern anchor for U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. Similarly, access agreements in Singapore allow U.S. naval vessels to operate regularly out of Changi Naval Base, even though no permanent American forces are stationed there. In the Philippines, the revival of EDCA in 2014 and its recent expansion in 2023 signal Manila's renewed willingness to host U.S. forces after years of uncertainty. The additional four sites granted under EDCA are particularly valuable because of their proximity to Taiwan and the South China Sea, making them strategically useful in both deterrence and crisis scenarios. The Defence doctrine also underscore the significance of smaller Pacific island states in the security arc, where the US is negotiating or renewing Compacts of Free Association (COFA). These agreements with the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau, whose geographic positions are critical for maintaining a U.S. footprint across the Central Pacific. Palau, for instance, has already offered land for U.S. radar installations. These peripheral arrangements are part of a larger effort to ensure that US posture is not overly concentrated in few hubs, thereby reducing their vulnerability and providing maximum security guarantee.

It can be analysed that through the huge expanse and sheer magnanimity of US defence infrastructure, its diversification and deepening presence in the Indo-Pacific, is to reassure US allies and to deter China's aggressive tendencies. Again, Washington has shifted from its earlier posture of post-cold war like dominance to a sort of denial. This is done through dispersed forces, hardened shelters and prepositioned stocks, that aims to deter potential adversaries, since any war or conflict would be costly and prolonged, rather than being swift and decisive. These assets not only serve as war preparedness but also play of critical political role hinting at an enduring US presence in the region. Washington's web of allies and commitments binds the countries of the region more closely to the US centric world view and for a perfect recipe for securitizing the region

US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM):

The INDOPACOM, one of six geographic unified combatant commands under the Department of Defense (DOD) and forms the backbone of US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Described by the Pentagon as 'priority theatre', it is the heart of America's military presence in Asia with its area of responsibility stretching across the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, covering some of the

most strategically contested spaces in the world. Headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, INDOPACOM commands around 3,75,000 military and civilian personnel, representing not only the largest but also the most complex of America's geographic combatant commands. It is led by Admiral Samuel Paparo, and has a uniquely unified structure of Commanders, Directorates and Special Staffs.²²⁶ Broadly, it ensures the protection of U.S. national security interests in a region where great power competition, territorial disputes, and flashpoints like Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula dominate the strategic landscape.

It is interesting to note that the 2022 National Defence Strategy explicitly identifies China as the 'most comprehensive and serious challenge' to U.S. security interests. This can be identified as the most significant factor that has placed the command squarely in the middle of America's evolving posture. The INDOPACOM labels the Taiwan Strait as the 'pacing scenario,' meaning it is the primary contingency around which U.S. planning, modernization, and force deployment are organized. It is an extensive defence body that performs a wide array of functions including updating military capabilities, shifting posture through access agreements in places like Australia and the Philippines, and testing new operational concepts such as distributed maritime operations and agile combat employment are included. The command also plays a balancing act: deterring adversaries like China, North Korea, and to some extent Russia, while at the same time reassuring allies such as Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines that American commitments remain credible. The command coordinates joint exercises, maintains access to over 40 bases, and provides a framework for interoperability with regional forces. Ground units, naval warships, and various aircraft are deployed across these locations. Along with this, it is tasked with non-traditional security roles, from disaster relief assignments to countering piracy and ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. In terms of position, INDOPACOM is the forward edge of U.S. deterrence and reassurance in Asia.²²⁷

So, the US INDOPACOM can be regarded as the physical manifestation of America's 'Pacific Century' that operates through a broad-based network in the region. Being a core embodiment of US Indo-Pacific strategy, it serves both as the military shield and a political signal of U.S as

²²⁶ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. "Leadership." Accessed August 16, 2025. <https://www.pacom.mil/Leadership/>

²²⁷ Caitlin Campbell, Cameron M. Keys, and Luke A. Nicastro, *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM)*, CRS In Focus no. IF12604 (Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 5, 2024), accessed August 15, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12604>

a resident power in the region. It is suggestive of the shifting pivot of Washington towards this region, exemplifying it as the centre of global politics and economics. As noted from the above discussion the purpose is to secure U.S. influence in Asia. This is attained by deterring adversaries and reassuring allies. In this sense, INDOPACOM is both the spear and the shield of U.S. engagement in the region, ensuring that Washington remains a resident power in the Indo-Pacific. Over the years, in light of the pressing security concerns, its role has extended beyond deterrence and, now is deeply embedded in Washington’s extensive network of alliances and partnerships, making it a hub for military cooperation across Indo-Pacific in general, and Asia in particular.²²⁸

A map of US INDOPACOM Area of Responsibility has been shown below that depicts the America’s positioning across the vast stretch of the Indo-Pacific region.

Figure: 3
Map of US INDOPACOM Area of Responsibility



(Notes: AFB is Air Force Base; JB is Joint Base; MCAS is Marine Corps Air Station; MCB is Marine Corps Base; NB is Naval Base; and USAG

Source: Luke A. Nicastro, U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress, Congressional Research Service Report R47589 (Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, June 6, 2023), accessed August 15, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589>.

²²⁸ Caitlin Campbell, Cameron M. Keys, and Luke A. Nicastro, *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM)*, CRS In Focus no. IF12604 (Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 5, 2024), accessed August 15, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12604>

Building Alliances and Partnerships: In order to realise the goal of ‘freedom and open Indo-Pacific’, the United States emphasizes on a ‘connected Indo-Pacific’. In order to realize this, Washington has been working very closely with the allies and partners in advancing a resilient Indo-Pacific framework, which is designed to address regional challenges, along with seizing new opportunities. Also, one of the significant points that can be garnered from the map above is that the United States Indo-Pacific policy is mainly centred towards the Western Pacific, concentrated in the security of the island states of East Asia, which makes India’s role as a partner in US Indo-Pacific strategy of primary significance. These measures encompass diplomatic, economic, defence and environmental prerogatives of security engagements. The evolving architecture has been shaped by multiple initiatives- bilateral, trilateral, minilateral and multilateral.

In this regard, The White House²²⁹ has elevated relations crucial Indo-Pacific countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia and they are now a part of Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships. The US has reaffirmed commitments with India, Japan, Australia, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea with regard to defence, economic, technological, and digital (including the domain of cyber security). Climate, clean energy are transformative drivers of the bilateral engagements. India forms a significant partner in ensuring ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ and collaboration on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) has reinforced strategic technology, collaboration on semiconductors, critical minerals, and start-up ecosystems and defence-industrial partnership between the two democracies. India also plays a primary role when it comes to securing the Indian Ocean region and therefore Washington has an unprecedented level of engagements with India that virtually covers all the aspects of securitization. The Indian Ocean is a vital and huge arena where the US has been working with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) on climate adaptation, blue economy initiatives, and maritime security, while launching a Young South Asian Leaders Initiative to promote regional innovation and leadership. With the Pacific island states, the US has diversified and enhanced engagements by opening embassies in Vanuatu, Tonga, Maldives, and Solomon Islands, established diplomatic ties with the Cook Islands and Niue, along with announcing additional commercial offices and creating or upgrading USAID missions across South Asia and the Pacific. During Biden

²²⁹ The White House. 2025. “The United States’ Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific Region.” *Statements and Releases*. January 10, 2025. Accessed August 19, 2025. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2025/01/10/the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-region/>

administration, the US had hosted the Pacific Islands Forum leaders at the White House, appointed a special envoy to the Forum, and unveiled the first U.S.-Pacific Partnership Strategy. Along with substantial and long-term economic assistance with the Pacific Islands, defence cooperation has been enhanced through new agreements with Papua New Guinea and Fiji, the expansion of the National Guard partnership programme, and the strengthening of Compacts of Free Association with Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands. The United States has also committed US \$7.1 billion in economic assistance over the next 20 years under the Compacts of Free Association to Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. In terms of trilateral engagements, the 2023 Camp David Summit marked a breakthrough in U.S.-Japan-South Korea relations, ushering in deeper security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The collaboration is in response to the growing regional threats and challenges to the Indo-Pacific collective interests and security. The trilateral partnership enhanced information sharing, established cyber security measures, countering chain disruptions and institutionalised military exercises through the annual Freedom Edge exercise- a trilateral multi-domain military exercise. The increasingly complex security environment of the region necessitates such expanded joint military exercises deepening the trilateral coordination where naval and air assets from Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States participated in the second iteration of exercise Freedom Edge in November 13, 2024. The second edition of the military exercise showcased advanced air and maritime defence, integrating fifth-generation fighters within a multi-domain command-and-control architecture. Japan contributed the destroyer JS Haguro, P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, F-15 and F-2 fighters, and an E-767. The Republic of Korea deployed ROKS Seoae Ryu Seong-ryong and ROKS Chungmugong Yi Sun-sin, together with P-3 aircraft, F-35s, and F-15s. The United States fielded USS George Washington, USS Higgins, USS McCampbell, and USS Dewey, supported by F-35s, F-18s, P-8s, and KC-135 tankers. Training serials covered ballistic-missile defence, air defence, anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, maritime interdiction, and defensive cyber operations, strengthening high-end interoperability across the three forces.²³⁰

Similarly, a new trilateral partnership with Japan and the Philippines, launched in 2024, has strengthened maritime security, technology cooperation, and economic investment,

²³⁰ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. "Japan, ROK, U.S. Conduct Second Exercise Freedom Edge." *News Release*, January 15, 2025. <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3962934/japan-rok-us-conduct-second-exercise-freedom-edge/>

particularly in response to destabilising actions in the South China Sea. In terms to multilateral engagements, Washington reinforced ASEAN centrality and relations were strengthened through high-level summits, including a historic special summit in Washington. The partnership was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022. Nearly all goals of the ASEAN-U.S. Plan of Action have already been implemented, and new cooperative mechanisms such as the U.S.-ASEAN Centre in Washington and the ASEAN USAID Partnership Program have been initiated. Defence cooperation has expanded through new leadership programmes and joint maritime exercises, training and support for climate resilience efforts while youth engagement has been reinvigorated through initiatives that have benefitted hundreds of thousands of participants. Finally, the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) as a minilateral platform has been the most significant security drive in the region that has been elevated to the Leader level in 2021 with a broad-based area of strategic convergence and collaboration among US- India- Japan-Australia on issues such as maritime domain awareness, cyber-security, infrastructure development, health security, and disaster relief among others.²³¹ The Quad is also a significant marker of India-US collaborative security framework in the Indo-Pacific region and have been elaborated in the subsequent sections.

In the changed geopolitical environment, Washington underscores the imperative of collective action to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific region, stressing the need for adapting and modernizing alliances, organizations, and regulations in tandem with partners to construct a network of robust coalitions. Priority is placed on fortifying existing alliances and partnerships, such as the regional treaty agreements with Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand, while also deepening ties with other regional collaborators like India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Encouragement is extended to allies and partners to bolster connections with each other, particularly between Japan and South Korea, alongside providing support for them to assume leadership roles in the region. Moreover, the text affirms commitment to a robust and independent ASEAN, endorsing ASEAN centrality and committing to enhancing cooperation on various fronts including health, climate, energy, and gender equity. Emphasis is laid on enhancing ASEAN's resilience as a primary regional institution and exploring avenues for collaboration between ASEAN and the Quad. The United States also prioritizes engagement

²³¹ The White House. 2025. "The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific Region." *Statements and Releases*. January 10, 2025. Accessed August 19, 2025. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2025/01/10/the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-region/>

with South Asian partners to address humanitarian needs, maritime security, and pandemic response. It underscores the significance of people-to-people connections, with a focus on educational and professional exchanges, English-language training programs, and collaborative research endeavours in critical fields of science and technology. Furthermore, the action plan for Indo-Pacific underscores the growing commitment of allies and partners outside the region, such as the European Union and NATO, to the Indo-Pacific. The aim is to align strategies and synchronize initiatives to bolster regional connectivity, uphold international law, and foster connections between the Indo-Pacific and other regions. This involves advancing mutual objectives through close coordination aligning with global institutional frameworks such as the UN. The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, evolving from the Obama to Trump administrations, seeks to maintain a rules-based order, counter China's rule-altering behaviour, and promote cooperation among the democratic nations in the region. This strategy underscores the geopolitical and geo-economic significance of the Indo-Pacific and emphasizes principles of freedom, openness, connectivity and respect for sovereignty.

While the US outlooks, policies and operations have been discussed, the next section is a detailed exposition of India's Indo-Pacific policy.

INDIA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

The significance of Indo-Pacific to India comes not just from its strategic location but also from its growing economic strength. Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated India's vision for the Indo-Pacific during his address at the Shangri La dialogue in Singapore on June 1, 2018. To quote Prime Minister Narendra Modi, *"For thousands of years, Indians have turned to the East. Not just to see the Sun rise, but also to pray for its light to spread over the entire world. The human-kind now looks to the Rising East, with the hope to see the promise that this 21st century beholds for the whole world, because the destiny of the world will be deeply influenced by the course of developments in the Indo-Pacific region."*²³² - Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue on June 01, 2018.

²³² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. *Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue, June 1, 2018*. Accessed August 9, 2023. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>.

In April 2019, the Ministry of External Affairs set up a dedicated Indo-Pacific Division in response to the growing global focus on the Indo-Pacific. This move had two main objectives: first, to ensure that India's Indo-Pacific vision articulated by the Prime Minister in June 2018, was consistently implemented across different arms and programmes of the government; and second, to design concrete policy measures and initiatives to advance that vision.²³³ The division's mandate covers a wide range of responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region from engagement with ASEAN, to the East Asia Summit, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), encompassing all facets of India's engagements in the region.

It can be said that India's Indo-Pacific vision reflects her magnanimous and holistic world view and incorporates the entire region from the Eastern coast the African continent encompassing the Western Pacific and reaching to up the United States of America.²³⁴ India's outlook in the Indo-Pacific region is a constructive and a 'positive one', which is centred on inclusivity, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. It champions the idea of a 'free, open and order in the Indo-Pacific' in contrast to the ambitions of any aggressive actor. For India, adherence to international law, including the Law of the Sea, is essential, with all nations enjoying equal rights to freedom of navigation and over-flight in international waters. A cornerstone of India's approach is its commitment to 'ASEAN centrality' and its belief in cooperation and collaboration to address shared challenges. This vision rests on faith in multilateralism and regionalism.²³⁵ India also recognises the Indo-Pacific as a major centre of global economic growth and advocates for a stable, open, and balanced trading environment, prioritising connectivity while steering clear of destructive rivalries. While competition for economic influence is inevitable, India stresses it should never escalate into conflict. Instead, it urges both established and emerging powers to act responsibly, safeguard the region, and promote common values, mutual interests, and inclusive development.

²³³ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. *Indo-Pacific Division Briefs*, February 7, 2020. Accessed August 11, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf

²³⁴ Singh, Udai Bhanu, "The Geopolitics of Acting East: Past, Present and Future." In *Five Years of India's Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep24268.pdf>.

²³⁵ Press Information Bureau, Government of India. "Press Release." Accessed July 13, 2024. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1878750>.

On policy implications, New Delhi's approach towards the geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific aligns closely with its Act East Policy, and its overarching emphasis on diplomatic, political economic, military, social, environmental, common good and cultural relations with the Southeast Asian nations. It is premised upon strengthening common grounds of engagements across the broad spectrum of relations with ASEAN nations.

Act East Policy:

India is often viewed as a civilizational state, as its foreign policy is deeply rooted in its traditions and rediscovery of its past, which showcases the best of its rich heritage. This offers a distinctive political and cultural outlook of holding on to its core values and traditions, while steadily adapting to the changed circumstances in international politics. This civilizational identity plays a key role in shaping India's national interests and foreign policy goals. As External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar points out, India's sense of continuity and pride springs from its history, culture, and politics. The country has an optimistic and positive view of the world and takes pride in its diversity, intellectual openness, and democratic spirit, and these qualities that have become powerful assets in its global engagement. Also, Act East Policy (AEP) is a natural progression of India's quest towards multilateralism which is focussed upon ASEAN.²³⁶ The primacy of Southeast Asian countries have been appearing time and again in various deliberations and policy documents of the Ministry of External Affairs, that stresses on millennia-old cultural and civilisational bond and shared neighbourhood. This partnership has evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership grounded in shared values and common goals. ASEAN lies at the heart of India's Act East policy that in turn is the central pillar of its broader Indo-Pacific vision. India was among the earliest signatories to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, signalling a joint commitment to peace, prosperity, and stability in the region.²³⁷

²³⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at Nani Palkhivala Memorial Lecture 'India and the World,' January 18, 2025." Accessed August 9, 2025. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/38925/Remarks+by+External+Affairs+Minister+Dr+S+Jaishankar+at+Nani+Palkhivala+Memorial+Lecture+India+and+the+World>.

²³⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, at the 1st ASEAN Future Forum, April 23, 2024." Accessed August 10, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37784/Remarks_by_EAM_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_1st_ASEAN_Future_Forum.

In 2014, India shifted its approach from the Look East Policy to the more proactive ‘Act East’ Policy, aimed at deepening economic engagement not only with Southeast Asia but also with East Asian countries. This change was officially announced at the 2014 ASEAN-India Summit, where New Delhi outlined its plans to expand partnerships with ASEAN members, as well as with East Timor, Australia, and the Pacific Island nations. While revitalising ties with the littoral states of the Indo-Pacific was a key driver of this policy shift, it was equally shaped by India’s broader Indo-Pacific vision and the need to highlight China’s real strategic intentions to the global community. Under the framework of the Act East Policy, New Delhi prioritises both strategic and economic aspects in its engagement with the region. It has been actively engaged in enhancing strong partnerships, both economically and strategically with all the nations such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Malaysia. In light of the changing power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, India has launched various initiatives and programmes aimed at assisting regional countries while promoting both development and security across the Indo-Pacific.²³⁸ A key focus of this policy has been deepening engagement with ASEAN member states, which has led to a steady rise in trade between India and the ASEAN nation-states. This partnership has produced two major trade agreements, covering both goods and services and positioning the bloc among the largest in the world, with a combined GDP of around US \$3 trillion. Further highlighting its commitment, India appointed a dedicated ambassador to ASEAN, signalling its intent to strengthen the organisation’s role as a strategic partner.²³⁹

Nagda²⁴⁰ analyses that AEP can be classified into three spheres: tangible, procedural, and prospective. The 2016 Project Development Fund (PDF) was aimed to streamline investment procedures and promote the growth of manufacturing hubs. This is a clear example of India’s

²³⁸ K. V. Kesavan, *India’s “Act East” Policy and Regional Cooperation*, Raisina Debates (New Delhi: AAGC, February 14, 2020). Accessed August 10, 2023. <https://aagc.ris.org.in/sites/aagc.ris.org.in/files/2021-08/ORF-14-02-2020-India%20s%20Act%20East%20policy%20and%20regional%20cooperation-AAGC.pdf>.

²³⁹ Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. “Five Years of India’s Act East Policy.” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24268>.

²⁴⁰ Nagda, Ashutosh. “Act East in Practice: Gains, Hurdles, and Competition.” In *Five Years of India’s Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep24268.pdf>.

regional engagement efforts that was established to encourage investments and expand India's manufacturing footprint in the region, with four projects identified in the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam): one each in Cambodia and Vietnam, and two in Myanmar. Three of these focus on setting up hospitals and educational institutions. It can be said that one of the most notable achievements that India has made with the ASEAN members is in procedural engagement. Key milestones include appointing a dedicated Indian ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta and creating a specialised MEA division for ASEAN multilateral affairs. A significant diplomatic gesture was made in 2018 when India invited the heads of all ten ASEAN states to its Republic Day celebrations, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue relations.

Looking back at the first five years of India's Act East Policy, it can be said that it takes a broad view of the region, factoring in the global and regional backdrop. The policy has numerous dimensions and respects the history it draws from, and is very much goal-oriented. It has expanded its scope and includes economics, politics, diplomacy, culture, and strategy. On the economic side, it focuses on boosting trade, investment, and connectivity. It also goes beyond the usual areas of scientific and technological cooperation, factoring in trends from the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the growing role of the Internet. A key turning point for the policy came when India chose not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Ambassador (Rtd.) Rajiv Bhatia analyses that while this decision might seem like a short-term setback, it's not necessarily a deal-breaker, since India believes that some of its major partners, including China, ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand, weren't offering enough in terms of mutual concessions. He also notes that the AEP has been closely tied to India's domestic politics. During the last ten years, there's been a stronger push to reinforce connections with the Northeast, recognising that a weak Northeast could undermine the policy's effectiveness. In essence, as the policy evolved from merely 'looking' to actively 'acting' east, it has become more aware of the local realities it's anchored in, and thereby using those roots to make itself more effective.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Bhatia, Rajiv. "The Multi-faceted Evolution of the Act East Policy." In *Five Years of India's Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep24268.pdf>.

In today's increasingly multipolar world, both India and ASEAN have vital roles to play in Asia which makes deeper cooperation and coordination more important than ever. India supports ASEAN's unity, central role, and ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), recognising that a cohesive ASEAN can contribute meaningfully to the evolving regional security architecture. The convergence between India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), as reflected in the ASEAN-India Leaders' Joint Statement, provides a robust framework for collaboration, including in addressing challenges to comprehensive security. Both of them upholds freedom of navigation, over-flight, and uninterrupted trade. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), often referred to as the 'Constitution of the Seas', serves as the comprehensive legal framework within which all maritime activities must be conducted. India and ASEAN share the commitment to uphold UNCLOS while addressing climate change impacts, and strengthen capacities to deal with disasters, transnational crime, terrorism, cyber threats, human trafficking, and issues of health and food security. India and ASEAN also cooperate through sub-regional frameworks such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, and BIMSTEC. The Quad has consistently reaffirmed its support for ASEAN Centrality and Unity, complementing ASEAN-led mechanisms by advancing people-focused initiatives such as infrastructure development and STEM scholarships. The first ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise was held in 2023, with plans for a second in the future. India's recent operations in the Red Sea have also offered protection, assistance, and evacuation support to ASEAN nationals. Through the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative, India seeks to play its role as a net security provider and first responder, contributing to regional peace and stability.²⁴²

Act East Policy has successfully integrated relations with countries like Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia, which continue to face strategic, economic and maritime pressures from China in the Indo-Pacific. AEP has evolved to become multifaceted and combines all facets of India's engagement with Southeast and East Asia. India, through the Act East Policy wants to become a reliable power through boosting stronger economic, diplomatic, maritime and strategic partnerships with these nations, and working with ASEAN to promote the peace and security

²⁴² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Remarks by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, at the 1st ASEAN Future Forum, April 23, 2024." Accessed August 10, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37784/Remarks_by_EAM_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_1st_ASEAN_Future_Forum.

of the Indo-Pacific region. Vietnam remains a core pillar of India's AEP, with collaboration happening at both bilateral and multilateral levels. The 2015 Joint Vision Statement led to the upgrading of ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016. India has set up regular high-level dialogues, such as joint commissioner meetings under the MEA and annual defence secretary-level talks. Cooperation extends to space technology, including a satellite tracking station in Ho Chi Minh City, training at Mizoram's Jungle Warfare School, and advanced defence collaboration like the BrahMos missile. However, India's muted response to China's 2019 actions in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone, despite ONGC Videsh Ltd's direct stakes which showed a cautious measure to take an overtly interventionist stance. Again, partnership with Indonesia has also gained momentum. Key areas of cooperation include joint aerial maritime surveillance in the Six Degree Channel, research in missile technology and UAVs, space collaboration, and policy exchanges between think tanks. The two countries share common Indo-Pacific priorities, with Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Policy resonating with India's SAGAR vision. India upgraded the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the Prime Minister's 2018 visit to Jakarta, which is expanding in areas of shipping and navigation the shipping agreement.

Myanmar, India's Southeast Asian land neighbour, is central to several connectivity projects under the AEP. These include the Trilateral Highway Project, the Tamu-Kalewa and Kalewa-Yargi roadworks, bridge replacements, and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Transit Project linking Northeast India to the Bay of Bengal.²⁴³ Boosting relationship with Myanmar is significant for India, due to the fragile borders that New Delhi and Naypyidaw share, also in light of address threats to human security and addressing cross-border terrorism. Over the years, China's influence has increased in this region and with projects like the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the dual oil and gas pipelines from Kyaukphyu to Yunnan, can have negative impacts on India security concerns.

Economically, India-ASEAN trade has seen significant growth since the 1990s, with ASEAN becoming India's fourth largest trading partner. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement has played a pivotal role in tripling trade between the two regions since 2009.

²⁴³ Singh, Udai Bhanu. "The Geopolitics of Acting East: Past, Present and Future." In *Five Years of India's Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep24268.pdf>.

ASEAN Centrality: India's Indo-Pacific strategy is emphasizing upon ASEAN Centrality as its core principle. To quote Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "*The ten countries of South East Asia connect the two great oceans in both the geographical and civilizational sense. Inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity, therefore, lie at the heart of the new Indo-Pacific. India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country...*"²⁴⁴ Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018)

In terms of security, ASEAN centrality is crucial for India's Indo-Pacific strategy. India actively participates in various consultative meetings with ASEAN, including the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Bilateral defence discussions are ongoing with key ASEAN nations, reinforcing maritime security cooperation. India's approach to ASEAN combines both bilateral and multilateral engagements to tackle security issues, ranging from traditional to non-traditional security issues, with a strong focus on backing ASEAN members involved in the South China Sea disputes. The broader 'Indo-Pacific' idea, however, has at times created differences between India and certain ASEAN states, as New Delhi places significant weight on security cooperation with the US and its partners to balance China's growing influence. Nevertheless, ASEAN Centrality remains at the core of India's Indo-Pacific strategy, which seeks to deepen economic linkages, strengthen maritime security, and expand digital collaboration with ASEAN nations.

India's recognition of ASEAN's centrality is reflected in the regular participation of Indian leaders at ASEAN-India and East Asia Summits platforms where both strategic and economic issues are discussed. The establishment of a permanent mission to ASEAN and an Embassy in Jakarta is a further reflection of this priority. Relations were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2018, marked by the Delhi Declaration at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi, which also celebrated 25 years of India-ASEAN engagement. Some scholars opine that ASEAN's central role in the region ties is closely to addressing China approach to regionalism. India, for her part, envisions an open, free, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, something that even China could participate if it chooses. There's also a degree of alignment between

²⁴⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue, June 1, 2018." Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>

India, ASEAN, and the US, visible in moves like Washington renaming its Pacific strategy as the Indo-Pacific, India setting up a dedicated Indo-Pacific Division (IPD) within the Ministry of External affairs and ASEAN putting forward its own Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.²⁴⁵

IPOI- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) is a broad-based and sustainable initiative towards Indo-Pacific prosperity that was officially articulated at the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Bangkok on November 4, 2019. Through IPOI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested an inclusive global framework that builds upon regional cooperation structures along with complementing the broader perspectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). IPOI entails cooperation in seven sectors or pillars such as maritime security, maritime ecology, maritime resources, cooperation in trade and maritime transport, enhancing connectivity, maritime capacity building and resource sharing, disaster risk reduction and management, and cooperation in the field of academics including science and technology.²⁴⁶ It is in tandem with SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), which is the most comprehensive enunciation of India's vision for the Indo-Pacific, and other maritime initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. It works towards building a cooperative platform to ensure the shared maritime environment.²⁴⁷ As such covers the entire spectrum of maritime domain and broadens the understanding of Indo-Pacific beyond the traditional security narratives to include the non-traditional security challenges such as environment, disaster management, resource sharing and addresses the issues of development which are common to all stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. The key component of IPOI is its open, inclusive and non-treaty based nature that seeks cooperation for ensuring security of the region. The idea is to create a sense of community by creating partnerships and

²⁴⁵ Singh, Udai Bhanu. "The Geopolitics of Acting East: Past, Present and Future." In *Five Years of India's Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2019. Accessed August 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep24268.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. *Indo-Pacific Division Briefs*. February 7, 2020. Accessed August 11, 2024. https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf.

²⁴⁷ Indian Council of World Affairs. 2022. *IPOI: Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative—Towards a Sustainable and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*. New Delhi: ICWA. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.icwa.in/pdfs/IndoPacificOceansInitiative.pdf>

collaborations with like-minded partners in the region.²⁴⁸ Also, New Delhi's IPOI aims to complement the SAGAR initiative along with aligning with ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

On the other hand, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) puts forward two key points. Firstly, it reflects ASEAN's view of the Indo-Pacific which is essentially the Asia-Pacific region combined with the Indian Ocean region. Secondly, it stresses that these two oceanic regions aren't just neighbouring spaces on the map, but they're deeply linked and interconnected, with ASEAN positioned right at the centre, playing a pivotal and strategic role. Therefore, the AOIP envisages ASEAN's lead role in in shaping the region's economic and security framework, ensuring that these developments continue to foster peace, security, stability, and prosperity for the people of Southeast Asia, as well as for those across the broader Indo-Pacific region.²⁴⁹

Pradeep Chauhan, Prabir De, Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, and Durairaj Kumarasamy²⁵⁰ while discussing the convergences between the IPOI and AOIP looks beyond mere geographical boundaries, and shows a clear alignment between ASEAN and India's aspirations in the Indo-Pacific. This shared thinking runs right through India's own Indo-Pacific vision, the SAGAR approach, and the initiatives planned under the IPOI. Both IPOI and AOIP puts immense significance on connectivity. The IPOI and AOIP have similar perspectives when it comes to over-arching vision and policies towards the Indo-Pacific region. These can be delineated as follows:

- A rules-based order remains an essential pre-condition that is built on international laws, treaties, and conventions.
- Peace and stability are seen as fundamental to achieving prosperity.
- Openness, inclusivity, and transparency are prioritised.

²⁴⁸ Pandey, Pragya. "IORA's Indo-Pacific Outlook and Its Significant Role in the Region." *Issue Brief*, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), November 14, 2023. https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&lid=6492&ls_id=10176

²⁴⁹ ASEAN. *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. Association of Southeast Asian Nations, June 22, 2019. Accessed August 11, 2024. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

²⁵⁰ Chauhan, Pradeep, et. al. *Indo-Pacific Cooperation: AOIP and IPOI*. AIC Working Paper No. 32. New Delhi: ASEAN-India Centre, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), October 2020. Accessed August 11, 2024. https://aseanindiacentre.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/AIC%20Working%20Paper%20October%202020_0.pdf.

- Dialogue and cooperation are preferred over competition.
- Development should be inclusive, benefitting everyone.
- The security of the maritime domain remains critical to the region.
- Respect for national sovereignty is non-negotiable.
- Both believes in working in harmony with ASEAN-led cooperation platforms, such as EAS, ARF, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) among others.

A table has been created by the researcher that shows areas of convergences and divergences between IPOI (Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, India) and AOIP (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific). The issues are placed in one column, and the corresponding approaches under IPOI and AOIP in the other two. It can be said that the commonalities are central to deepening geopolitical and maritime cooperation and building stronger partnerships for promoting sustainable development in region.

Table: 1**Convergences and Divergences between IPOI and AOIP**

Issue/Theme	IPOI (India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative)	AOIP (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific)	Convergence / Divergence
Foundational Principles	Anchored in SAGAR vision (“Security and Growth for All in the Region”); inclusivity, transparency, and a rules-based order as guiding tenets.	Based on ASEAN centrality; emphasises inclusivity, openness, transparency, sovereignty, non-interference, and equality.	Convergence: Shared emphasis on inclusivity, transparency, and rules-based frameworks.
Maritime Security	Maritime security is one of seven pillars; focuses on safe and stable seas, freedom of navigation, and combating non-traditional threats.	Maritime domain seen as critical for peace and prosperity but avoids hard security framing or mention of power rivalry.	Convergence: Shared stress on maritime importance. Divergence: IPOI more explicit on security and threats.
Maritime Ecology & Resources	Strong focus on sustainability: tackling plastic pollution, conserving resources, and resource-sharing.	Links maritime sustainability to SDGs (esp. SDG 14, Life Below Water).	Convergence: Shared stress on sustainability.
Connectivity	Maritime transport, resilient infrastructure, and “connecting the connectivities” as central.	Identifies connectivity (physical, institutional, people-to-people) as a priority theme.	Convergence: Connectivity central to both frameworks.
Disaster Risk Reduction / HADR	Disaster management and humanitarian assistance are explicit pillars; collective response mechanisms encouraged.	Advocates disaster resilience but framed within ASEAN-led cooperation.	Convergence: Overlap in disaster cooperation.
Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation	Identified as a core pillar: academic exchanges, technological collaboration, and innovation.	Acknowledges role of innovation and technology, but less structured.	Convergence: Shared aim, IPOI more defined.
Trade & Economic Cooperation	Promotes open, free, and fair trade, linked to maritime commons.	Focus on sustainable economic development, tied	Convergence: Both seek prosperity through trade and growth.

		closely to UN SDG 2030.	
Sovereignty and Non-Interference	Recognises sovereignty but situates it within broader collective security; more flexible in interpretation.	Strong emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and equality — cautious not to alienate China or other powers.	Partial Divergence: AOIP more cautious on sovereignty/non-interference, IPOI more proactive on security.
ASEAN Centrality	Positions IPOI as complementary to ASEAN-led forums (EAS, ARF, ADMM-Plus).	Explicitly places ASEAN centrality as the cornerstone of Indo-Pacific vision.	Convergence: ASEAN’s centrality acknowledged by both.
Geographic Scope	Wide scope: from Africa’s east coast to the Americas’ west coast.	Mentions “Asia-Pacific” six times and “Indian Ocean” seven times; subtly balancing between Beijing’s preferred terminology and India’s Indo-Pacific orientation.	Partial Divergence: IPOI global and expansive; AOIP hedges with Asia-Pacific terminology, reflecting sensitivity to China.
Approach to Power Politics	Seeks to counterbalance China’s assertiveness while promoting inclusivity; reflects India’s strategic security concerns.	Avoids mentioning great power rivalry, contestation, or brinkmanship; reflects ASEAN’s desire to stay neutral and sensitive to China.	Divergence: IPOI acknowledges contestation, AOIP deliberately avoids it.
India’s Role	India positions itself as a driver of IPOI and SAGAR; aims to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean.	By referring repeatedly to the Indian Ocean, AOIP indirectly legitimises India’s centrality in regional affairs.	Convergence: Both frameworks provide space for India to play a larger role.
China Factor	IPOI implicitly frames itself as balancing China’s rise, particularly in maritime security.	AOIP avoids openly challenging China; some analysts interpret it as appeasement or endorsement of China’s Asia-Pacific framing.	Divergence: IPOI more confrontational in posture, AOIP more accommodating of China.

(Note: table made by the author)

From the table it can be analysed that there remains a strong convergence in matters concerning maritime security, connectivity, disaster risk reduction, sustainability, ASEAN centrality, and economic cooperation. However, IPOI is explicitly strategic and security-focused, and is global in scope, embedding India as a leadership role. AOIP is cautious, consensus-driven, and most importantly careful not to provoke China, often using Asia-Pacific terminology while simultaneously acknowledging the Indian Ocean. It can be said AOIP has a soft underlying acknowledgement and support for India's leadership role in the region.

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR): SAGAR reflects the philosophical core of India's Indo-Pacific Policy. As noted by then President Ram Nath Kovind, India upholds the principle of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region,' emphasising collaborative initiatives for the sustainable management and utilisation of ocean resources.²⁵¹ In 2015, Prime Minister Modi outlined the 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) vision during the commissioning of the Indian-built Offshore Patrol Vessel, MCG Barracuda, for the National Coast Guard of Mauritius at Port Louis. Since then, SAGAR has been the core and has evolved as an all-inclusive comprehensive blueprint for the Indo-Pacific.

Initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mission SAGAR served as a clear demonstration of India's commitment to fostering development-oriented, people-centric partnerships with nations across the Indian Ocean Region. It underscores India's resolve to assist these nations in coping with the difficulties brought on by the pandemic. As part of this initiative, the Indian Navy has deployed vessels to 15 friendly foreign countries, through which India has delivered over 3,000 metric tons of food supplies, 900 oxygen concentrators, more than 300 metric tons of liquid medical oxygen and 20 ISO containers. Along with this, Rapid Assistance Teams of doctors and medical staff were sent to Mauritius, Seychelles, and Comoros to help tackle the health crisis. India also presented 'air evacuation pods,' developed by the Indian Navy, to Mauritius and Seychelles to facilitate safer and more efficient medical evacuations during the pandemic. In this manner, India established herself as the trusted partner and the First

²⁵¹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India. "India Believes in 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' to Focus on Cooperative Measures for Sustainable Use of Oceans: President Kovind." *Press Information Bureau*, February 21, 2022. Release ID 1800028. Accessed August 13, 2024. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1800028>.

Responder whenever the region faces a crisis.²⁵² The deployment spanned over a period of 215 days and the Indian Navy ships played a crucial role in providing rescue operations, medical care, and relief efforts to as many as 3,500 individuals in Mozambique, after the disastrous Cyclone Idai. In a bid to sustain humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations and continue supporting the affected population in Mozambique, another Indian Naval ship, INS MAGAR, transported 250 metric tons of rice and 500 kilograms of epidemic medicines to Beira in April 2019. In addition to this, India deployed the INS Kesari that successfully supplied 500 metric tons of food relief to Mozambique in December 2021.²⁵³ The assistance under Mission SAGAR are depicted in the table below.

Table: 2

Date	Countries	Remarks
May 2020	Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles	Medical teams, medicines and 580 tons of food aid
October 2020	Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan and South Sudan	270 tons of food aid
December 2020	Vietnam and Cambodia	HADR aid, amounting to 15 tons each
March 2021	Comoros and Madagascar	1000 Tons of rice each
August 2021	Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam	Indonesia – 100 MT Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO), 300 Oxygen concentrators. Thailand – 300 Oxygen Cylinders. Vietnam – 100 MT LMO, 05 ISO containers & 300 Oxygen concentrators.
August 2021	Sri Lanka	100 MT LMO & 05 ISO containers
September 2021	Bangladesh	02 Mobile Oxygen Plants
December 2021	Mozambique	500 tons of Food Aid

Source: Ministry of Defence, Government of India, “MISSION SAGAR,” *Press Information Bureau*, February 7, 2022, Release ID 1796165, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1796165>. (This information was given by Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Ajay Bhatt in a written reply to Shri Sanjay Seth in Rajya Sabha on February 07, 2022.)

²⁵² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Unstarred Question No. 1510: ‘Mission Sagar,’ *Lok Sabha*, July 28, 2023, answered July 28, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/36934/question+no1510+mission+sagar>.

²⁵³ Ministry of Defence, Government of India, “MISSION SAGAR,” *Press Information Bureau*, February 7, 2022, Release ID 1796165, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1796165>

Commodore Anil Jai Singh²⁵⁴ notes that while the acronym SAGAR highlighted its maritime orientation and underpins most of India's maritime security efforts, it isn't restricted only to the maritime domain. India's approach to capacity building in the region is rooted in inclusivity, cooperation, and collaboration. Unlike China's often more intrusive methods, India focuses on enabling other nations to strengthen their own capacities and capabilities, allowing them to chart their own developmental path. This distinction lies at the heart of the differing strategies adopted by the two countries in the Indian Ocean Region. It is for this reason that nations such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius have become integral partners in India's regional vision. Also a key example of this approach is the establishment of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) by the Indian Navy, which is conceived as part of India's broader effort to foster a cohesive and credible security architecture in the Indian Ocean, IONS seeks to bring together a region that is otherwise highly fragmented, promoting dialogue, cooperation, and shared security objectives among its diverse members. India has extended her coastal radar network to include our immediate maritime neighbourhood. And this would effectively enhance the maritime situational awareness in the vicinity of India's maritime frontiers.

A decade after the launch of SAGAR, Prime Minister Modi unveiled MAHASAGAR- that stands for *Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions*- in Mauritius in 2015 that encourages collaboration on vital issues of shared regional concern in the Indian Ocean.²⁵⁵ The choice of venue once again highlights India's emphasis on the smaller maritime states of the Indo-Pacific, reflecting an important consistency with this renewed vision. This new vision reflects India's broader strategic intent to pursue multifaceted engagement in the Indian Ocean, encompassing maritime trade, strategic and defence cooperation, and the strengthening of all forms of collaboration to address the security challenges that define the maritime domain. SAGAR and MAHASAGAR are the essential contours of India's maritime diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific.

²⁵⁴ Jai Singh, Anil. Interview by Urbi Das, Personal Interview. New Delhi, February 2, 2025

²⁵⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Special Briefing by MEA on Prime Minister's State Visit to Mauritius (March 12, 2025)," *Media Center, Media Briefings*, March 12, 2025, accessed August 13, 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?39163/Transcript+of+Special+Briefing+by+MEA+on+Prime+Ministers+State+Visit+to+Mauritius+March+12+2025>

Commodore Anil Jai Singh²⁵⁶ sheds light into a significant area of MAHASAGAR where defence exports become a focus area. In order to effectively counter China's strategic encirclement of India, defence diplomacy has become a very important element in India's maritime security construct. India now engages in defence partnerships with the Indo-Pacific littorals and this is intended to bring political and military leverage in favour of India. This will eventually create India's own sphere of influence in the region as the leader of the Global South.

Project Mausam- Spearheaded by the Ministry of Culture and implemented by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi as the main coordinating body, with support from the Archaeological Survey of India and the National Museum, Project Mausam, aims to revive India's historic maritime routes and cultural linkages throughout the Indian Ocean region and seeks to revitalize India's ancient maritime routes and cultural connections across the Indian Ocean region. The innovative concept of Project Mausam, which presents a transnational itinerary encompassing both natural and cultural heritage sites, garnered acclaim during its unveiling by India at the 38th World Heritage Session in Doha, Qatar, on June 20, 2014.²⁵⁷

Named after the monsoon winds crucial to historical navigation, Project Mausam aims to strengthen ties with nations that are connected by the ocean. It is the manifestation of India's cultural influence, translating into soft power projection in the region. This initiative, alongside existing policies like Act East, aim to deepen economic, cultural, and security cooperation with countries spanning from East Africa to Southeast Asia. It seeks to position India as a key hub in the region by drawing on historical ties and advancing trade, diplomacy, and cultural interactions. Additionally, India's Ministry of Culture is initiating efforts to promote mutual understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage among Indian Ocean countries.

²⁵⁶ Jai Singh, Anil. Interview by Urbi Das, Personal Interview. New Delhi, February 2, 2025

²⁵⁷ Ministry of Culture, Government of India, "Project Mausam," *Ministry of Culture*, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.indiaculture.gov.in/project-mausam>

Below of the depiction of Project Mausam as given by Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Figure 4
Map of Project Mausam



Source: Ministry of Culture, Government of India, *Project Mausam* [image], *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://indiaculture.gov.in/sites/all/themes/moc/images/projectmausam.jpg>.

Project Mausam, though framed as a cultural initiative, carries clear strategic intent. This became evident in remarks by External Affairs Minister Jaishankar at the first Indian Ocean Conference in Singapore in September 2016, where he underlined the need to forge a stronger sense of Indian Ocean unity and identity. He argued that greater connectivity, both physical and cultural, was essential to shape a distinct ‘Indian Ocean personality,’ urging the region to draw on its ties of kinship, shared traditions such as Ayurveda and yoga, common faiths like Buddhism and Sufism, and shared heritage symbols like Nalanda and the Ramayana. It can be said that, Project Mausam stresses that any revival of the Indian Ocean must be built on economic rejuvenation, emphasising the importance of both maritime and land connectivity alongside hinterland development. Infrastructure initiatives, including ports, roads, and railways, were presented as central to promoting solidarity and goodwill, aligning with

‘Neighbourhood First’ policy.²⁵⁸ The role of regional cooperation through platforms like the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD), ASEAN, and IORA, as well as the need for collaborative development of the blue economy and the fulfilment of maritime security responsibilities, including addressing non-traditional security threats remains the essential core of the Project. Here, the Indian Ocean is positioned at the core of India’s benign ‘Neighbourhood First’ approach, reimagined not merely as a water body but as a stage for ongoing economic, social, and cultural engagement. This broader vision extended India’s soft power reach beyond heritage projects incorporating outreach to the diaspora, facilitation of religious tourism, reciprocal cultural exchanges with neighbouring leaders, active participation in humanitarian relief, and the symbolic appeal of India’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement and decolonisation, thereby expanding the framework of influence. Project Mausam can be said to mirror China’s Silk Road project in aiming to secure UNESCO recognition for maritime cultural routes. Its focus lies in revitalizing historical connections across the Indian Ocean by commemorating common cultural and economic principles, surpassing contemporary boundaries. This initiative embodies India’s ambition for a positive leadership role, projecting its strategic influence through cultural narratives and highlighting historical continuity without resorting to coercion and therefore can be regarded as a ‘cultural project with real strategic purpose’.²⁵⁹

Sagarmala: India has a coastline of 7,500-kilometre, and has 14,500 kilometres of navigable waterways, and strategic location along major global shipping lanes give it significant scope for port-driven economic expansion. The Sagarmala initiative seeks to boost efficiency in logistics, cut transportation costs, and strengthen the country’s position in international trade by moving away from a purely infrastructure-intensive transport model toward more efficient coastal and inland waterway networks. Its priorities include upgrading ports, stimulating industrial activity, generating employment, and promoting sustainable coastal development, all with the aim of achieving maximum economic returns through minimal additional infrastructure investment. As of March, 2025, 839 projects valued at Rs.5.79 lakh crore have

²⁵⁸ Ministry of Culture, Government of India, “Project ‘Mausam’: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes,” *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*, last updated August 12, 2025, accessed August 13, 2025, <https://ignca.gov.in/project-mausam/>

²⁵⁹ Doyle, Timothy, and Dennis Rumley. *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019

been identified, of which 272 have been completed with an investment of Rs. 1.41 lakh crore.²⁶⁰ The primary objective of the Sagarmala Program is to reduce logistics costs for both EXIM (export-import) and domestic trade, requiring minimal infrastructure investment.

So, Sagarmala is essentially a port development-led infrastructure initiative to augment India's maritime capacity across all sectors associated with the maritime domain. These includes ship building, port development, centres of excellence, setting up maritime clusters, setting up good design capability, inland water navigation, coastal shipping among others. Sagarmala is the quest to India becoming a maritime power. It is in tandem with India's Maritime Vision 2030, the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV), which is an ambitious project that targets to position India among the top five shipbuilding nations by 2047. As Commodore Anil Jai Singh states that India today is a naval power. Sagarmala is one of the vital pillars that aims to making India a maritime power. An encouraging start has been made with three deep water ports- The Vizhinjam international transshipment port, the proposed Vadhvan deep sea-port as a gateway port connecting the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the upcoming Ramayapatnam Port which shall become a major logistics hub.²⁶¹ The below table is a depiction of the projects under Sagarmala.

²⁶⁰ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 to Be a Blueprint for Indian Maritime Sector's Growth in Amrit Kaal," *Press Information Bureau*, February 28, 2024, Release ID 2115878, accessed August 13, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2115878>.

²⁶¹ Jai Singh, Anil. Interview by Urbi Das, Personal Interview. New Delhi, February 2, 2025

Table: 3

Summary of Projects under Sagarmala

S. No	Project Theme	Total		Completed		Under Implementation	
		#	Project Cost (Rs. Cr)	#	Project Cost (Rs. Cr)	#	Project Cost (Rs. Cr)
1	Port Modernization	206	78,611	81	24,113	59	24,288
2	Connectivity Enhancement	201	1,28,786	38	9,416	88	91,157
3	Port Led Industrialization	34	1,42,457	8	45,300	23	96,046
4	Coastal Community Development	59	5,300	16	1,403	20	954
Total		500	3,55,154	143	80,233	190	2,12,445

Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India. "Sagarmala Programme." *Press Information Bureau*. March 12, 2020. RELID 200158. Accessed August 13, 2025. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=200158>

India, though all these measures discussed above enhances its role and significance in the Indo-Pacific. These policies and programmes tend to shape both the economic and security architecture of the region in a manner that is 'free, open and inclusive.' Indo-Pacific nations have vast potential for collaboration across numerous shared areas of interest that also provides for a clear and substantial complementarity in the sustainable utilisation of the region's abundant resources to build upon sustainable development.

India-US Engagements in the Indo-Pacific

The United States continues to endorse India's role as a key leader in the Indo-Pacific through both bilateral and multilateral platforms.²⁶² This partnership is highlighted by regular diplomatic and high-level visits, 2+2 Ministerial dialogue since 2017. The two countries are deepening collaboration across defence and security, climate and renewable energy, outer space, global governance, and people-to-people engagement.

The United States accords India a central role in advancing the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. A major breakthrough in the relation was the recognition of India as a "Major Defense Partner, and this was further elevated to the Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 category in 2018 which allowed for collaboration in sensitive military and dual-use technologies. Bilateral ties also includes logistical sharing in defence sectors such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Industrial Security Agreement (ISA). Statistically, US-India trade in defence sectors saw an enormous rise and was more than the US \$20 billion by 2020. Some of the US defence sales to India includes the MH-60R Seahawk helicopters worth US \$2.8 billion, Apache helicopters valued at US \$796 million, and the Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasure system at US \$189 million. India is also the first non-treaty partner of the United States to be offered a Category-1 Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) under the Missile Technology Control Regime: the Sea Guardian UAS manufactured by General Atomics. Current U.S. advocacy continues around fighter platforms such as Lockheed Martin's F-21 and Boeing's F/A-18 Super Hornet and F-15EX Eagle, all of which dramatically elevates India's air power capability and engages in interoperability with the U.S. forces. The PM Bureau has streamlined processes for both Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS), ensuring benefits not only for security interests but also sustaining defence industries and creating employment opportunities in both countries. Also since 2015, India has secured over US \$3 billion in licensed defence articles, with particular focus on advanced electronics, imaging and guidance systems, and aviation-related equipment. These transfers underscore the growing trust in India's role as a responsible defence partner in the region. India-US security

²⁶² U.S. Department of State, *"The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific: Marking Two Years Since the Release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy,"* February 9, 2024, U.S. Department of State, accessed August 19, 2024, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-marking-two-years-since-the-release-of-the-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>

cooperation is not only limited to hardware. India-US strategic partnership is instrumental in developing peacekeeping cooperation. Between 2016 and 2019, New Delhi and Washington co-hosted UN Peacekeeping training courses for African partners, bringing together officers from more than 20 African countries. With support from the Global Peace Operations Initiative, these programmes strengthened trilateral cooperation among the United States, India, and African officers, therefore binding the African nations into the framework of the Indo-Pacific vision.²⁶³

Minilateralism as Security Frameworks: Quad

Since Indo-Pacific manifests a complex structural framework surrounding the debates and discussions around security, minilateralism reflects an important step towards establishing a stable and cooperative security framework in the region. Minilateralism is a small, function-oriented cooperative framework that lies between bilateralism and multilateralism and is composed of states that share overlapping interests and threat perceptions, and then address them using a pragmatic mix of formal and informal coordination. Here, participation is voluntary and agendas are focussed, allowing fast measures without the legal or political encumbrances of alliances or treaty-level bodies.

Minilateral membership is selective and intentionally small. This is done to maximise consensus, where agendas are narrow and explicitly problem-driven, procedures are informal and adaptive leaving space for the expanding scope to ‘progress into more structured cooperation if the members deem necessary in the long-run. Minilateral initiatives are not exclusive in nature; rather they can complement broader multilateral architectures. In other words, at their best, the minilateral groupings create habits of cooperation that can be scaled up or federated with existing institutions. In the case of Indo-Pacific this is towards the ASEAN. They align policies among the pivotal states, aggregate capabilities and are mission-oriented, without resorting to broad, open-ended commitments among the participants. Since it is function-oriented, the outputs emphasise upon practical deliverables such as joint working groups, coordinated capacity-building, shared standards, interoperability and are not bounded

²⁶³ U.S. Department of State, “*U.S. Security Cooperation with India*,” Fact Sheet, January 20, 2021, U.S. Department of State, accessed August 19, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>

by treaty texts.²⁶⁴ It is a novel way to addressing security issues and trust-building. Its agile security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific such as maritime cooperation and defence technology, domain awareness and crisis response; geo-economic security objectives such as infrastructure and connectivity standard, energy transition projects, critical-technology cooperation, securing supply chains, and coordination on deterrence and resilience. These clubs usually layer on top of dense bilateral ties (for example, U.S.-Japan or India-Australia), which provide the political foundation and interoperability that makes these minilateral formats robust. The exigencies of the Indo-Pacific have made minilateral frameworks such as the Quad all the more effective due to its speed, political manageability, and visible problem-solving.

Jagannath Panda and Daewon Ohn²⁶⁵ writes that the proliferation of minilateral arrangements as a relatively new phenomenon is due to the change in the nature of power politics which has altered equations among nation-states. Post-war multilateralism have exposed a number of functional limitations, especially in the last 15 years. This can be traced since the financial crisis of 2008, domestic upheavals in advanced democracies, surging protectionism in commercial relations, and the assertiveness of revisionist powers that led to eroding of confidence in liberal, rules-based democratic frameworks. This led to a more diffused distribution of power, where nation-states increasingly searched for cooperative formats that is less rigid, and where decision making would be faster than consensus-bound multilateral organizations, giving rise to minilateralism. Unlike formal multilateral bodies that prioritise inclusivity and consensus; minilateral associations stresses on voluntariness, hybridity of engagements, flexibility, informality, and narrow agendas. It is not a temporary coalition, differs from blocs (such as ASEAN or EU), which are comprehensive and broad-based and does not emulate bilateral strategic partnerships. It mitigates coordination costs often associated with universal bodies without questioning their legitimacy. Therefore, minilateral partnerships such as the Quad complements ASEAN and G-20 processes. They are often regional in terms of situating itself in the security framework, selective in membership, and follow a ‘bottom-up,’ enabling them coordinate quickly across formal and informal modes. In

²⁶⁴ Singh, Bhubhindar, and Sarah Teo, eds. *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN*. 1st ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.

²⁶⁵ Panda, Jagannath, and Daewon Ohn. “Minilateralism and the New Indo-Pacific Order: Theoretical Ambitions and Empirical Realities.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 78, no. 6 (2024): 767–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2410411>

practice, these arrangements are generally seen to be ‘leader-led’ and are designed to sidestep the decision-making blockages that beset larger organisations.

To the realists, minilateralism is situated as a means to attain the political goals of power and they emphasize upon balancing and strategic hedging- especially with regard to China. Constructivists question the logic of legitimacy, patterns of inclusion, and norm-building prerogatives. One of the debates concerning minilateral groupings is effectiveness vis-à-vis inclusiveness of minilateralism since it enables faster action but faces the risk of exclusion and narrow perception. Again, there is an issue of fragmentation versus coherence with multiple, overlapping groups duplicating efforts unless they are consciously designed to dovetail with regional architectures. A significant discussion relates to whether the minilateral frameworks form a foundational pillar of a broad alliance or towards cooperative security governance. The outcomes are contingent upon the will of the parties involved and they vary by mandate with defence-focused formats to be more likely to institutionalise with regard to the Indo-Pacific. .

Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific is best understood as small-group cooperation that sits between bilateral ties and large, universal institutions. Its core purpose is to build strategic consensus among a few like-minded states to act on defined problems with speed and adaptability and with low coordination costs. It uses informal bargaining mechanism to bypass decision-making bottlenecks of large institutions and relies on low-barrier entry, flexible enforcement, and voluntary commitments that let a few states act when many cannot. Here the traditional liberal-multilateral mechanisms struggled with representation, great-power rivalry, rapidly evolving security challenges at sea and in the air, and cross-border issues and deadlocks (for example, recurring difficulties in issuing joint communiqués in large forums), giving rise to minilateral experimentation, in order to pursue policy preferences and interests more effectively in a region of dispersed power, where large institutions face overload and gridlock. Minilateral frameworks reduce veto related deadlocks enabling operational feasibility. Panda and Ohn’s empirical situates Indo-Pacific’s minilateral turn within three regional drivers- Firstly, the erosion of the post-Cold War liberal order and the diffusion of power created governance gaps that small clubs are filling. Secondly, intensifying US-China competition has created insecurities among the middle powers, who have then moved towards a network of pragmatic, function-first partnerships that protects supply chains, set technology standards, and manage maritime risk without formal alliance entanglements, bypassing the risk of repercussions from China . Thirdly, the rise of hybrid and China’s grey-zone threats has pushed

states like India, Japan, Australia South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan to adopt minilateral security cooperation aimed at resilience and institutional balancing, that are short of treaty commitments. Therefore, they have become preferred vehicles for timely coordination on defence cooperation, technology standards, and economic connectivity, reinforcing a global turn to ad hoc, task-specific coalitions within the Indo-Pacific security core.

Minilateral formations among states are not without limitations. Since they narrow formats, consensus among the members with regard to common policies remain significant. Their agendas are limited which can sometimes reinforce biased perspectives and marginalize relevant stakeholders, at times appearing exclusionary. They can also produce leadership vacuum and their low level of institutionalization often questions their legitimacy and complicates burden-sharing, with over-lapping of bilateral within minilateral causing duplication unless they are synchronized within regional frameworks.²⁶⁶ Despite these few limitations minilateral appears to be the best framework to ensure cooperation in fragmented and ever-changing political order, where countries are wary of engaging in long-term commitments.

In a contested and diverse Indo-Pacific region, minilateralism offers the greatest utility of operating in the flexible mode, and rather than appearing like a grand design, it prudently addresses matters spread across security, economics and technology.

The Quad in the Indo-Pacific and India-US Security Engagements

The Quadrilateral security cooperation mechanism is a minilateral arrangement among USA, India, Japan and Australia that emerged as a joint initiative to one of the most deadly natural disasters of the present century- the massive earthquake in the Indian Ocean leading to the Tsunami that severely affected the region. The Quad has its roots in the Tsunami Core Group, an alliance among these four countries to effectively provide disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. It was an informal coalition that was announced by US President George W. Bush on December 29th 2004 to deliver coordinated response to the calamity and crisis that ensued following the Tsunami of December 2004. The Core Group eventually joined efforts with the

²⁶⁶ Singh, Bhubhinder, and Sarah Teo, eds. *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN*. 1st ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) to engage in a broad-based relief measure and securing human and maritime livelihood.

A magnificent coordination followed despite the Quad members never having to meet in-person, neither having any secretariat nor a formal charter. They reflected the best alliance-like concerted action providing 24 hours assistance and humanitarian relief for almost nine consecutive days following environmental tragedy. The United States military launched ‘Operation Unified Assistance’ and deployed USS Abraham Lincoln to Sumatra and Indonesian province of Aceh, which was brutally affected by Tsunami, joined by USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) and USNS Mercy (T-AH-19).²⁶⁷ India was the first responder and deployed more than 4000 humanitarian forces who arrived to Colombo, Sri Lanka and the disaster hit parts of India. These were then joined by 12,600 personnel from Washington, including 21 ships and 1000 bed Mercy hospital ship, 14 cargo planes and more than 90 helicopters. The relief mission received huge appreciation in the region. They collaborated with Australia and Japan providing more than 1000 personnel, monetary and material funding to the Tsunami affected regions. The United States, India, Japan, and Australia collectively deployed over 40,000 troops and humanitarian personnel, along with vital physical assets such as transport aircraft, helicopters, and cargo vessels, to conduct relief and rescue operations. Their central objective was to ensure the essential assistance in a timely manner.²⁶⁸

To achieve this effective coordination, the four democratic partners (forming the Quad) relied upon daily conference calls, email exchanges, and video meetings, which enhanced both the speed of decision-making and the coherence of their joint efforts in managing the crisis. Initially conceived as a consultative arrangement, this grouping demonstrated a new form of active diplomacy, referred to as ‘transformed diplomacy’, that is marked by flexibility and close diplomatic cooperation overcoming the rigid traditional barriers that enabled a united response to one of the most devastating disasters of the modern era. Though the Group disbanded itself soon after the successful implementation of post-disaster relief and reconstruction, it displayed one of the most successful prototype of coordination among the

²⁶⁷ U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command. “2004-2005 Thailand Operation Unified Assistance.” Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/humanitarian/21st-century/2000-2009/2004-2005-thailand-operation-unified-assistance.html>.

²⁶⁸ Grossman, Marc. “The Tsunami Core Group: A Step toward a Transformed Diplomacy in Asia and Beyond.” *Security Challenges* 1, no. 1 (2005): 11–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26459016>

four powers leaving behind an admirable illustration for future collaboration that can address the evolving security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad's success fostered the notion of establishing a sustained, function-oriented collaboration among the four democracies- USA, Japan, India, and Australia.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was a visionary and the chief architect of such democratic-minded collaborative set-up and proposed the idea of a 'broader Asia' at the Parliament of the Republic of India in 2007. Shinzo Abe remarked, "*By Japan and India coming together in this way, this "broader Asia" will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely.*"²⁶⁹ - H.E.Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007.

He hinted at building a security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region that would be committed to open and transparent network, securing navigation routes especially the sea lanes of communication which is essential to ensuring the free flow of commodities, capital, people and knowledge, thereby marking the geographical bounds and objectives of the futuristic Quadrilateral Framework.

These ideas resonated in his bureaucracy that focussed upon 'value oriented diplomacy' calling for freedom and prosperity in the region. At the East Asia Summit in India and Japan celebrated the success of their first ever bilateral exercise between the Indian Navy (IN) and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) that had taken place in June 2012 off the Japanese coast. Nothing the breakthrough they agreed to hold such exercises regularly with greater frequency. New Delhi and Tokyo further resolved to create a Joint Working Group (JWG) to examine modalities for cooperation regarding the US-2 amphibious aircraft.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Abe, Shinzo. "Confluence of the Two Seas." Speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

²⁷⁰ Ministry of External Affairs (India). *Joint Statement on the Prime Ministers' Visit to Japan: Strengthening the Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan beyond the 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations*, May 29, 2013. Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/21755/Joint+Statement+on+Prime+Ministers+visit+to+Japan+Strengthening+the+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership+between+India+and+Japan+beyond+the+60th+Anniversary+of+Diplomatic+Relations>

The initiation of a quadrilateral security dialogue received great momentum Washington's political circle, where the United States Vice President Dick Cheney held consultations with then Australian Prime Minister John Howard, eventually drawing in representatives from all four participating states. Their first systematic meeting took place in May 2007 when these leaders met at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila, Philippines focusing largely on shared non-traditional security issues, particularly disaster relief and emergency responses.²⁷¹

The time and place of meeting is of great significance- by holding the first ever dialogue with the ARF meetings, the Quad members tacitly accorded a special place to ASEAN concerning any security matters in the Indo-Pacific. This eventually translated into the position of ASEAN centrality within the Indo-Pacific security framework. Again, the ARF itself is a security dialogue platform concerning the Indo-Pacific. however, its huge membership (27 members: that includes the ten ASEAN member states and the ten Dialogue Partners of ASEAN, namely Australia, Canada, China, the European Union (EU), India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Russia and the United States of America, along with other members such as Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste).²⁷² This complicates decision-making since it difficult to reach consensus on critical matters, along with the presence of China. The converging interests of US, India, Japan and Australia therefore led to the formation of one of the brilliant minilateral experiments in the Indo-Pacific region.

Despite its promising outcome, this initial phase of the Quadrilateral Partnership, often termed Quad 1.0, was short-lived, failing to evolve into a concrete framework during that time. A number of factors curtailed the early momentum of Quad 1.0. This happened mostly at the leadership level and also the lack of convergence among the Quad leaders to deals with issues relating to the security of the region, which undercut the continuity of Quad. Leadership transition happened in Japan that was the philosophical founder of the idea of Quad- in Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stepped down in 2007; in Australia, Prime Minister John Howard

²⁷¹ Chellaney, Brahma. "‘Quad Initiative’: An Inharmonious Concert of Democracies." *The Japan Times*, July 19, 2007. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2007/07/19/commentary/quad-initiative-an-inharmonious-concert-of-democracies/>

²⁷² Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)*. Australian Government, accessed August 30, 2025. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/asean-regional-forum-arf>

lost office to Kevin Rudd, who was unsure of Australia's commitments towards the concept and was reluctant to jeopardise Canberra's economic ties with Beijing. In Washington, President George W. Bush's waning political capital coupled with the diversion of attention and resources to the Af-Pak theatre further diminished the bandwidth for Indo-Pacific minilateralism. India without the assurance and of these three significant partners.

Again, China from the very beginning opposed the formation of Quad which compounded these headwinds leading to a decade of hibernation of Quad. From the outset, China cast the Quad as an 'Asian NATO,' denouncing it as a U.S.-led geopolitical gambit and lobbying vigorously to halt its evolution.²⁷³ China's rise in economic cloth and consequent influence in global politics rose during the 2008-09 financial crisis. As the U.S.-centred economic order faltered, PRC's relative economic weight grew, encouraging Quad members to hedge, keep a low profile, or rely on quiet diplomacy rather than engaging in any visible alignment. With the Obama administration more focused upon Afghanistan reconstruction, the embryonic Indo-Pacific security dialogues lost steam. Taken together, it can be observed that leadership churn, Chinese pushback, the financial crisis, and a dilemma in the White House regarding America's commitments was responsible for the decade-long dormancy of the Quadrilateral framework before its revival in 2017 as a more active quadrilateral security platform.

However, in the between these years, these four countries experimented bilateral and trilateral engagements among themselves that took place at the dialogue level and also through joint maritime exercises. Australia, however, had proposed the formation of a trilateral grouping consisting of Australia-India-U.S. in 2011, which India declined considering Japan position as a key driver in any security arrangements in the Indo-Pacific region. Yet, India intensified engagement with each of the Quad member, launching 2+2 ministerial dialogues with Japan and the United States with Australia joining subsequently. New Delhi and Washington also convened a Dialogue on the Asia-Pacific in September 2011, covering issues from the East Asia Summit to a prospective U.S.-Japan-India trilateral track.²⁷⁴ In parallel, cooperation and logistical sharing continued in maritime domain with the Malabar naval exercises reflecting a

²⁷³ Jaipragas, Bhavan, and Tashny Sukumaran. "Indo-Pacific Nato': China's Wang Yi Slams US-Led 'Quad' as Underlying Security Risk at Malaysia Meeting." *South China Morning Post*, October 13, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3105299/indo-pacific-nato-chinas-wang-yi-slams-us-led-quad-underlying>

²⁷⁴ Madan, Tanvi. "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the 'Quad.'" *War on the Rocks*, November 16, 2017. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>

dedicated mission to securitizing the region and is expanded to include both the Indian and Pacific Oceans and, over time, received great enthusiasm among the regional players and broadened to include Japan, Australia, and Singapore.

The Quad's resurgence and evolving trajectory from an initial Quadrilateral Dialogue to a revitalised security-oriented platform in 2017 is reflective of the shifting strategic calculations across the Indo-Pacific. Originally conceived as a consultative forum, the Quadrilateral revival is best analysed through regional and global security lenses, where the countries emerge united by a common purpose towards shaping and sustaining a favourable, rules-based, and democratic regional order. Leadership changes in all four democracies helped catalyse the resumption. In India, the transition from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought a more forward-looking and activist foreign-policy posture. Also, India's strategic calculus had grown ever more complex with regard to China, with extensive economic interdependence on one hand and persistent frictions in the border frictions and Chinese illegal sovereignty claims over Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. In Australia, a new government endorsed renewed coordination to underpin a rules-based order and wanted the Quad to convey strategic alignment to deter coercion in the region. In Japan, the return of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the concept's chief advocate of the very concept of Quad restored intellectual and political momentum. Prime Minister Abe's call for a 'democratic security diamond' among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States that aimed at safeguarding freedom of navigation and regional stability found its relevance in the tensions looming over the South China Sea and East China Sea, such as Chinese encroachment activities over the Mischief Reef and Scarborough Shoals, sovereignty claims around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands that sharpened Sino-Japanese rivalry, and Beijing's nine-dash line claims in the South China Sea were widely viewed as inconsistent with international law. Finally the United States of America after a prolonged engagement in the affairs of the Middle East and Afghanistan, shifted its focus and renewed commitments toward the vibrant, dynamic and emerging Indo-Pacific.²⁷⁵ Episodes such as the 2013 East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone prompted rapid U.S., Japanese, and South Korean responses to restore order and claims of sovereignty in the region. For Washington, the issues at stake were not only regional but systemic, as China rose to challenge the United States both in the maritime, economic, cultural and political domains. Simultaneously, China's Belt

²⁷⁵ Madan, Tanvi. "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the 'Quad.'" *War on the Rocks*, November 16, 2017. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>

and Road Initiative expanded its economic footprint through large-scale connectivity projects covering sea and land, along with Beijing's growing lending activities raised concerns about debt exposure and strategic leverage for smaller Indo-Pacific economies within its 'charm offensive'.

Against this backdrop, the Quad's 2017 resurgence aimed to provide a flexible, purposeful framework for coordination among four maritime democracies seeking to uphold a rules-based equilibrium. All these incidents played a decisive role in shaping the future character of the Indo-Pacific security order. Most of all, the rebirth owes to the strategic centre of gravity in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quadrilateral Security Framework reflected the shifting strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific and the growing need for collaboration among democracies with shared interests to confront common challenges while safeguarding stability and prosperity. Its transformation from a short-lived consultative arrangement into one of the Indo-Pacific's most consequential multilateral security groupings, is a reinvigorated drive to emphasise respect for peace, stability, and a democratic, rules-based order, positioning themselves in contrast to the increasingly assertive and rule-altering posture of the People's Republic of China.

In 2017, the Quad was revived when its members met in Manila, Philippines, and reaffirmed their commitment to a 'free' and open' Indo-Pacific. They were represented by senior officers from India's Ministry of External Affairs, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the U.S. Department of State. The Quad consulted on shared concerns and outlined a framework to shape the region. Known as the Quad 2.0, they emphasised on cooperation on converging visions and common values, with the overarching aim of advancing peace, stability, and prosperity in an increasingly interconnected yet contested region. A broad range of security matters were toughed-upon such as rule-based order, freedom of navigation, sovereign rights re-affirmed, and over-flight in the global commons, along with terrorism, trafficking, economic rights, data security, climate change and over all securing human lives.

Back home, President Donald Trump who was very enthusiastic about the Quadrilateral framework, committed profound engaged in the region and enacted the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), 2018. This ARIA facilitated America's all-inclusive future driven broad ranging strategic vision towards the region. Also, this Act reinstated Washington's leading role in the affairs of the Indo-Pacific and reassured prosperity, peace and security, and finally

cautioning Beijing's intentions to paralyse and re-draw the global narrative. The pivotal pillar of commitment of all the four members of Quad was 'ASEAN centrality', something that garnered huge popularity and support from all the ASEAN members, who are vital stakeholders in the region.

Also, joint exercises in the maritime domain have been another important pillar. In 2019, the two countries conducted *Tiger Triumph*, the first-ever tri-service exercise involving land, sea, and air forces, focusing on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. The spirit of cooperation was further demonstrated through an expanded version of the bilateral Malabar naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal, traditionally involving the United States and India, but this time joined by Japan, Australia, and Singapore. The exercise, known as Malabar 07-02, featured multi-carrier operations, personnel exchanges, and demonstrated advanced maritime skills, symbolising strong collaboration among these democracies.²⁷⁶ India also takes part in the U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise and the trilateral Malabar exercise with Japan and the United States. Such engagements not only enhance interoperability but also embed India more firmly within the broader security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad countries representatives met about 11 times between 2017- 2023. Since 2021, it operates at the Leaders' level with an explicitly action-oriented agenda across a wide spectrum of issues from health security, climate, critical and emerging technologies, infrastructure and debt sustainability, cyber security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and maritime domain awareness. The Joint Statement termed as 'The Spirit of the Quad' was issued in the first leaders' level summit of the Quad in 2021 to-

"..reaffirm our commitment to quadrilateral cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. We bring diverse perspectives and are united in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific. We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion." and as they *"..pledge to strengthen our cooperation on the defining challenges of our time."*²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Khurana, Gurpreet S. *Joint Naval Exercises: A Post-Malabar-2007 Appraisal for India*. IPCS Issue Brief, no. 52. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, September 2007. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/44702/IPCS-IssueBrief-No52.pdf>

²⁷⁷ The White House. "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: 'The Spirit of the Quad.'" March 12, 2021. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

The Quad meetings remained flexible and need based without having to resort to formal structures. A combination of virtual and in-person meetings followed to securitize the region. The first Leaders' Level Summit took place in a virtual format and established three working groups that sought to be action-oriented to address the challenges in the region. These were vaccine partnership, climate, critical and emerging Technology. The next meeting (September 24, 2021) was an in-person one that added infrastructure, space and cyber working groups; announced 100 STEM fellowships (25 per Quad country) for the purpose of studying in the United States. The third meeting was again a virtual one that deliberated upon the impact of Ukraine crisis on the Indo-Pacific region and also announced the Quad HADR partnership. The fourth meeting took place in Tokyo, Japan on May 24, 2022 and the members launched the Quad Satellite Data Portal; the Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP); and a Quad Debt Management Resource Portal, along with operationalizing the earlier HADR partnership. Each time the Quad members met, they initiated a series of programmes to better understand and deal with the security situation of the region. Though they are mostly in the areas of non-traditional sectors, but these are exercises that have developed into coordination channels of concerted actions, logistical synchronization and seamless engagements in military and non-military domains that can be utilized in the most effective manner in case risks develop in the traditional/ conventional sector. Meeting in Japan in May 20, 2023, the fifth Quad Leaders' Summit (third in-person) issued the 'Quad Leaders' Vision Statement- Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific' that reiterated firm resolution towards building a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.²⁷⁸ At their 2023 Foreign Ministers' meeting, Quad announced the launch of a Working Group on Counterterrorism that underscored cooperation plan of action. Other forms of security challenges were touched upon such as climate change, health security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), clean energy transition, debt sustainability through transparent lending practices, as well as collaboration in cyber security, outer space, and maritime security.

In 2024, the Quad Leaders' Summit Meeting at Delaware adopted 'The Wilmington Declaration' that presented Quad as leader-level coalition that operates as a delivery mechanism for the Indo-Pacific. It linked shared democratic values to a rules-based regional order and casts the four as 'providers of public goods'- mobilising governments, industry, and

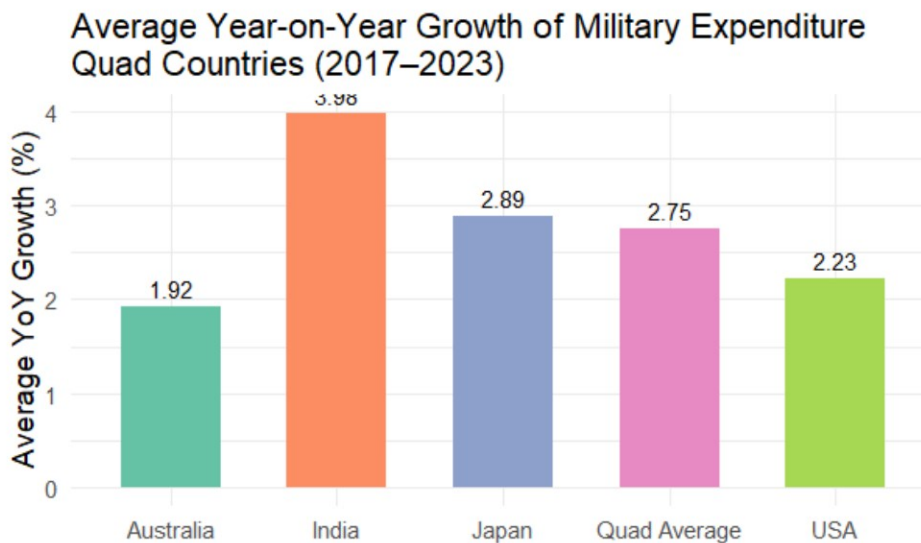
²⁷⁸ Ministry of External Affairs (India). *Unclassified Quad Brief, February 2025*. Government of India, 2025. https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Unclassified_Quad_Brief_Feb_2025.pdf

people-to-people links to produce visible outcomes in health, infrastructure, technology, climate, cyber-security, and maritime security. The political signal is unambiguous as it stated that no state should dominate or be dominated; disputes should be managed peacefully and according to international law. Clear security posture was mentioned as they rejected coercive changes to the status quo, deplored illicit missile activity, and registered serious concern over unsafe behaviour at sea. Normative claims were put forward to enhance the agenda by making maritime law as the backbone again emphasizing upon freedom of navigation and over flight, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the legal frame, recognizing the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award as an important reference point. Beyond Asia, they condemn Russia's war in Ukraine (including nuclear threats), called out Houthi strikes on shipping, push for de-escalation and humanitarian relief in Gaza within a two-state framework, denounce DPRK missile tests and proliferation networks, and urged for a return to an inclusive democratic path in Myanmar. They also reaffirmed obligations in outer space, pledge to counter disinformation, and tighten counter-terrorism cooperation (including reference to 26/11 Mumbai attack).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Ministry of External Affairs (India). "The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States." September 21, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38320>

The Table below shows the aggregate of military expenditure incurred by the Quad members from 2017- 2023.

Figure: 5



(Note: Figures in Figures are in millions of SIPRI trend-indicator values (TIVs).)

(Table has be created by author taking data from this source: <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>>.)

A stock taking of the programmes, working groups and initiatives was done, these are some of the key areas of engagement of Quad which can be elaborated as follows:

Health: The Quad’s effort towards providing vaccine in 2020-2021 had delivered 400+ million doses across the region that amounts to nearly 800 million globally and channelled US \$ 5.6 billion to COVAX. The successful efforts towards combating COVID-19 paved the way for another significant partnership that aims to secure the lives of millions in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad Cancer Moonshot partnership that would initiate with combating cervical cancer and lay the foundation to combating other forms of cancer. The United States has expressed support towards the initiative through navy medical trainings and professional exchanges from 2025, and also U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) openness to finance eligible projects in this regard to diagnose, prevent and treat cervical cancer. Australia pledged to expand its Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer Program (EPICC) to AUD 29.6 million and this amount would be covered by the Australian government in

collaboration with the Minderoo Foundation. This initiative would cover up to 11 countries in the Indo-Pacific region and would complement other initiatives for eliminating cervical cancer. India committed to providing US \$ 7.5 million worth of Human papillomavirus (HPV) sampling/detection kits and vaccines; technical support via its digital public infrastructure, backed by US \$ 10 million to WHO's Global Initiative on Digital Health and technical support for the adoption of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) that helps in screening of cancer and cancer care. Japan resolved US \$ 27 million including medical equipment such as CT and MRI and support to international vaccine coalitions Gavi Vaccine Alliance. The Quad members appreciated participation from non-governmental bodies and research and development institutes that work towards eliminating and treating cancer including the Serum Institute of India, along with Gavi to enable orders of up to 40 million HPV doses (subject to approvals) for the Indo-Pacific. As a whole with a commitment of US \$100 million from the Women's Health and Empowerment Network to address cervical cancer in Southeast Asia, the Quad Cancer Moonshot is an elaborate blue-print that will save thousands of lives over the coming decades.

HADR: The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement emphasizes upon Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Since 2022, the Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the Indo-Pacific and thereafter the signing of the Guidelines for the Quad Partnership on HADR in the Indo-Pacific, reflected common guidelines and statements of purpose that allowed rapid, combined disaster response, including pre-positioned stocks. For instance-in 2024 the four Quad members provided US \$ 5 million after Papua New Guinea's landslide and over US \$ 4 million following the loss of human lives and material wealth after Vietnam's Typhoon Yagi.

Maritime Security: The Quad places significant emphasis upon maritime with members extending support to ASEAN states in law enforcement at sea, maritime domain awareness, safeguarding freedom of navigation, and conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief training and operations. Over time, the Malabar exercise which had previously featured only the United States and India, has expanded in scope and has now emerged a range of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral maritime activity. Within the Malabar framework, India and Australia conduct the biennial AUSINDEX naval drills; India and Japan hold the JIMEX exercise, largely focussed in the North Arabian Sea. Along with these exercises they participate in the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise. In 2023, Japan and India also carried

out their first joint fighter aircraft drills. These exercises collectively strengthen interoperability by enabling navies and armed forces to operate more seamlessly with one another.

In addition to this, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) was announced in 2022, to provide partners with integrated, almost real-time, and cost-effective maritime picture. Working with regional hubs the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency has been partnering with Southeast Asian countries, and the Information Fusion Center- Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram, India. The initiative has since been scaled across the Indo-Pacific to more than two dozen countries now receive ‘dark vessel’ (non-cooperative ship) data to track activity including illicit behaviour inside their EEZs. Australia has also intended to deepen cooperation with the Forum Fisheries Agency to bolster Pacific MDA through satellite feeds, training, and capacity building. New initiatives included establishing the Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), with India hosting the first workshop intended to supporting partners in monitoring and securing their waters, enforcing national laws, and deterring unlawful activity. The Quad is also launching a maritime legal dialogue to reinforce the rules-based order at sea, and will layer additional technologies and datasets onto IPMDA over the next year to keep the platform state-of-the-art. From an operational standpoint, the U.S. Coast Guard, Japan Coast Guard, Australian Border Force, and Indian Coast Guard plan to begin a first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025 to improve interoperability and enhance maritime safety, with further observer missions to follow across the region. In parallel, a Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network pilot will engage upon building airlift capacity and combine logistics strengths so as to respond more efficiently and timely in case of civilian disaster throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Quality Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity: The Quad reiterated its commitment to strengthening regional connectivity by advancing high-quality, resilient infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific and adopted principles for building and deploying digital public infrastructure in the region. In 2024, leaders adopted Quad Principles for Development and Deployment of Digital Public Infrastructure and announced the Ports of the Future Partnership to share best practice and mobilise public-private investment into high-quality ports. As part of this effort, the partners are launching the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership, which will draw on collective expertise to promote sustainable, climate-resilient port development with regional collaborators. New Delhi will host a Quad Regional Ports and Transportation Conference in Mumbai in 2025, and through this partnership, members will coordinate more closely, share

information and good practice, and mobilise public and private finance for priority port projects. Capacity building remains central to this agenda. The Quad Infrastructure Fellowships are expanding to more than 2,200 practitioners (with 1,300+ fellowships already delivered since last year's summit). The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure's workshop in India complements this by helping partners bolster power-sector resilience across the region. Digital connectivity is another pillar. Under the Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience, the four countries are reinforcing undersea cable networks that underpin the region's security and prosperity. Australia has established a Cable Connectivity and Resilience Centre to provide workshops and policy regulatory support on request. Japan will offer technical cooperation to improve public ICT infrastructure management for cables serving Nauru and Kiribati. The United States has already conducted 1,300+ capacity-building trainings for telecom officials from 25 Indo-Pacific countries and plans an additional US \$3.4 million to extend and scale this programme. Since the last leaders' summit, Quad partners have collectively committed more than US \$140 million to undersea cable builds in the Pacific, aiming to ensure primary cable connectivity for all Pacific Island countries by end-2025. In parallel, India has commissioned a feasibility study on expanding regional maintenance and repair capacity for these systems.

The Quad also reaffirms support for the Pacific Quality Infrastructure Principles, recognising them as an expression of Pacific priorities on infrastructure. More broadly, the four underscore a shared commitment to an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe, reliable, and secure digital future for the Indo-Pacific, welcoming the Quad Principles for the Development and Deployment of Digital Public Infrastructure as a guide for practical implementation.

Critical & Emerging Technology: The Quad is significantly broadening its technology cooperation to deliver reliable, secure solutions across the wider Indo-Pacific. This phase moves beyond pilot projects toward scalable programmes that knit together government action, private investment, and research networks. A flagship strand is open telecommunications. After initiating the Pacific's first Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) deployment in Palau last year, the partners have collectively committed roughly \$20 million to that effort and are now looking to extend Open RAN work into Southeast Asia. Support will grow for field trials and the Asia Open RAN Academy (AORA) in the Philippines with an initial US \$8 million pledge from the United States and Japan and again with the United States planning more than US \$7 million to globalise AORA and launch large-scale workforce training in South Asia in

partnership with Indian institutions. The Quad is also exploring cooperation with Tuvalu's telecom operator to prepare the country for nationwide 5G. On semiconductors, the four countries aim to leverage complementary strengths to diversify markets and harden supply-chain resilience. They welcome a new Memorandum of Cooperation establishing a Semiconductor Supply Chains Contingency Network to coordinate responses to shocks and bottlenecks. The innovation agenda extends into agriculture and the life sciences. Through AI-ENGAGE, governments are backing joint research in artificial intelligence, robotics, and sensing to transform farming across the Indo-Pacific. It has received initial funding of US \$7.5 million, and a Memorandum of Cooperation has been done among national science agencies will better connect research communities and align shared principles. In parallel, the forthcoming Quad Bio Explore Initiative will finance collaborative, AI-driven exploration of diverse non-human biological datasets across all four countries. These initiatives will be grounded in new Quad Principles for Research and Development Collaborations in Critical and Emerging Technologies, intended to guide cross-border R&D, standard-setting, and responsible deployment.

Climate and Clean Energy: Recognising the immense significance and impact of economic, social, and environmental toll of climate change in the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific, the Quad is dedicatedly working with other Indo-Pacific partners- channelled in part through the Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP) in order to deepen clean-energy cooperation and strengthen adaptation and resilience. A rapid shift to a clean-energy economy is framed as a triple gain: safeguarding people and the planet while advancing shared prosperity. To that end, the four countries aim to better align policies, incentives, standards, and investment so as to build high-quality, diversified clean-energy supply chains that bolster collective energy security, open new regional market opportunities, and deliver tangible benefits for workers and communities especially the Indo-Pacific. In 2024 they announced an energy-efficiency initiative for climate-vulnerable communities. India, through the International Solar Alliance, is supporting off-grid solar projects in Comoros, Madagascar, Seychelles. Translating this into practice, the partners will use public policy and finance to crowd in complementary, high-standard private investment along allied and partner supply chains. Australia will open applications in November for its Quad Clean Energy Supply Chains Diversification Program, dedicating AUD 50 million to projects in solar panels, hydrogen electrolyzers, and batteries across the Indo-Pacific. India will invest US \$ 2 million in new solar ventures in Fiji, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles. Japan has committed US \$ 122 million

in grants and loans for renewable-energy projects in the region. The United States, via the DFC, will continue mobilising private capital across solar, wind, efficient cooling, battery storage, and critical minerals to expand and diversify supply chains.

The Quad is also launching a targeted push on energy efficiency, centred on scaling the manufacture and deployment of affordable, high-efficiency cooling systems. The goal is twofold: help heat-vulnerable communities adapt to rising temperatures and ease pressure on already stressed electricity grids. In parallel, the partners reaffirm support for resilient, sustainable port infrastructure—drawing on shared experience and working through platforms such as the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)—to ensure maritime gateways can withstand climate impacts while supporting regional growth.

Cyber and Space: The Quad frames cyberspace as an increasingly contested domain and sets out a tighter, more practical partnership to meet shared threats from state actors, cybercriminal groups, and other malicious networks. The four governments commit to hardening collective defences by expanding real-time threat-information sharing, scaling capacity-building, and running coordinated vulnerability identification across national-security and critical-infrastructure systems. They also aim to align policy responses when major incidents strike Quad priorities, so that decision-making and remediation move in lockstep rather than piecemeal. Partners are exchanging Earth-observation data and analytics to support climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and sustainable ocean management; they are also consulting on peaceful, safe and sustainable space use and strengthening commercial-space links. India is building a cloud-enabled, web-based platform using archival satellite data for interactive analysis and capacity-building on extreme weather for Mauritius.

A second strand targets the software layer. Working with industry, standards bodies, and research centres—and drawing on the Quad’s 2023 Secure Software Joint Principles—the partners will push for common development standards and certification. The objective is twofold: make government software procurement and use demonstrably more secure, and lift cyber-resilience across supply chains and digital economies more broadly. Public-facing campaigns under the annual Quad Cyber Challenge will promote safer cyber practices, while a dedicated Action Plan to protect commercial undersea telecommunications cables complements the existing cable-resilience partnership, safeguarding the backbone of connectivity, trade, and future digital growth and runs “Cyber Challenges” for awareness and capacity-building. Beyond cyber, the Quad underscores space as an essential enabler for

resilience. The countries will continue delivering Earth-observation data and related applications to help Indo-Pacific partners strengthen climate early-warning systems and manage extreme weather impacts. In this vein, India's new space-based web portal for Mauritius is welcomed as an open-science tool for monitoring hazards and climate effects.

Finance, Talent and People- to- People Relations: Finally, the statement brings in private capital through the Quad Investors' Network (QUIN). By funnelling investment toward strategic technologies—clean energy, semiconductors, critical minerals, quantum—the QUIN is intended to reinforce supply-chain security, accelerate joint R&D, move innovations to market, and build a skilled workforce aligned with the region's long-term technological needs. QUIN aggregates private capital for strategic tech and supply-chains. The Quad Fellowship admits a second cohort and opens to ASEAN students (with Japanese support); India adds 50 Quad undergraduate engineering scholarships (US \$ 500,000 total).

The Quad is deepening long-term people-to-people links and partner engagement. Through the Quad Fellowship, it is cultivating the next generation of leaders in science, technology, and public policy. Implemented with the Institute of International Education, the fellowship now welcomes its second cohort and—for the first time—opens places to students from ASEAN member states. Japan's government will support fellows studying in Japan, and private partner. In addition, India is launching fifty Quad scholarships for students from across the Indo-Pacific to pursue four-year undergraduate engineering degrees at a Government of India-funded technical institution. All these forms a part of track-two/track-1.5 and is geared towards policy planning mission. Collaboration in think-tanks is another dimension. In February 2024 India hosted the inaugural Raisina Young Leaders' Fellowship which is the Quad Edition and the Quad Think Tank Network, along with convening the third Policy Planners' Dialogue in June 2024.

Working Together to Address Regional and Global Issues: The statement reaffirms that the Quad's regional diplomacy is anchored in ASEAN. The four governments pledge steady support for ASEAN centrality and unity, commit to advancing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and align Quad initiatives with ASEAN-led forums such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Beyond Southeast Asia, they underscore partnership with Pacific island countries through Pacific institutions—especially the Pacific Islands Forum—endorsing the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and prioritising Pacific-defined needs such as climate action, healthy oceans, resilient infrastructure, maritime security,

and financial integrity. In the Indian Ocean, they back IORA as the premier convening body, note India's role in finalising the IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, thank Sri Lanka for its chairmanship, and look ahead to India assuming the chair in 2025.

On maritime order, the leaders frame international law, particularly the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which is the foundation for stability and prosperity. They call for peaceful settlement of disputes, protection of freedom of navigation and over-flight, and unimpeded commerce. They voice serious concern over developments in the East and South China Seas, including the militarisation of disputed features, coercive and unsafe behaviour at sea, and interference with offshore resource activities. It also highlights the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award as an important reference point for peaceful dispute resolution.

At the global level, the Quad reiterates full support for the UN Charter and institutions, and opposes attempts to erode their integrity. The leaders advocate reform of the UN Security Council to make it more representative and effective, including expanding permanent and non-permanent membership with seats for Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. They condemn the war in Ukraine, emphasise respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, reject nuclear threats or use, and note the war's ripple effects on food and energy security, especially for developing states.

The Quad widens the lens to other domains and regions. In outer space, it urges responsible, peaceful, and transparent behaviour consistent with existing treaties, including the obligation not to place weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies. It commits to a healthier information environment by countering foreign information manipulation and disinformation, supporting media freedom, strengthening civil society, and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based abuse.

In dealing effectively with Counter-terrorism a Quad Working Group on Counter-Terrorism was set up in March 2023. The partners condemn terrorism in all forms, denounce the use of proxies, and stress cutting logistical, financial and military support to terrorist groups (including cross-border attacks). They reiterate adherence to global anti-money-laundering/terrorist-financing standards (FATF). Five counter-terrorism Table-Top exercises (TTX) have been conducted to date.

The Quad recommits to the 2030 Agenda and the full slate of Sustainable Development Goals, resisting selective prioritisation and reaffirming the UN’s central coordinating role. The leaders pledge to accelerate balanced progress across economic, social, and environmental dimensions; to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda; and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. They close by stressing partnership with Indo-Pacific countries in shaping a region grounded in law, dignity, and opportunity—“leaving no one behind.”²⁸⁰

Along with the Leaders level Summit meetings, Quad Foreign ministers have met regularly since the first meeting in 2019 on the margins of United National General Assembly (UNGA) at New York with subsequent Foreign Ministers meet in Tokyo (2020), virtual meeting (2021), Melbourne (2022), New York (2022, 2023), Tokyo (2024) and Washington, D.C. (2025). The joint statement reaffirmed rule-of-law principles, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity; prioritised maritime, economic and technology security; and emphasised reliable, resilient supply chains.

Analytically speaking, between 2021 and 2025 the Quad has widened its scope and diversified its nature and activities along with consequential policy recalibration. Its policies have shifted from signalling to delivery focussing upon building shared tools such as satellite and cyber principles, maritime awareness, financing and standards in the domain of infrastructure, fellowships, cable resilience, clean-energy supply chains, DPI principles, and targeted social outcomes through vaccines, cancer screening and treatment focus. The Quad members also underscored the frequency and in-depth coordination that is reflected in six Leaders’ level meetings in four years (two virtual) and eight Foreign-Minister sessions, pledging expanded budget allotment at home and widening legislative and stakeholder engagement to meet the security priorities in the region. Signalling durability, the Quad aims to preserve rule-based security architecture in the Indo-Pacific and complements the existing democratic positions of ASEAN, IORA- aligning with the AOIP and supporting the IPOI. It has served and has a huge potential as a futuristic problem-solving platform that would enable measurable benefits in domains of human security, something that is considered a prerogative of the idea of securitization. Notable areas of joint action that affects all people irrespective of

²⁸⁰ Ministry of External Affairs (India). “The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.” September 21, 2024. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38320>

their national identity have been taken up by Quad states such as vaccines, cancer screening with special on women health, disaster response and maritime awareness, ports, cables, semiconductors, supply chain management, meeting contingencies, cyber security, combating terrorisms and climate adaptation. The organizational design of minilateralism facilitates practical outputs, allows for modular initiatives and pathways for partner nations to join in. Their Joint statements repeatedly affirm these objectives. They help shaping norms and standards by building a liaison between norms and standards. Again, a clear political reassurance is given by Quad to the Southeast Asian countries in particular and the entire Indo-Pacific in general, by setting standards, non-acceptance of unsafe conduct and unified measures against any forms of coercion, attempting to balance inclusivity with the idea of deterrence. Quad is an excellent minilateral drive that seeks legitimacy through outcomes, and not through treaty formalities. The agendas are deliberately non-treaty like that can be modified as per requirements with heavy emphasis on capacity-building exercises, supply resilience, rule-of-law at sea which is wired into the region's critical infrastructures and human capital. Its sustainability and worthiness in the region is anchored in law with regional partners while tightening four-way interoperability in domains that matter most to Indo-Pacific region. .

Quad therefore pertains to securing the Indo-Pacific from all the four layers- political, economic, social and environmental. It also effectively connects together the dimensions of security from individual to state to regional and finally global.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF): A Quest towards Economic Securitization

President Joe Biden's vision for an economic framework can be traced from the report titled 'Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States' published in February 2022. Here, President Biden proposes for a multilateral Indo-Pacific economic framework that would deepen economic integration and help economies of the region to harness technological transformations, and engage in high- standards of trade and investment including digital economy, supply chain management, transparency and information sharing along with guiding the transformation in energy and build environmental sustainability. The entire venture of creating a framework of economic partnership is to securitize the region from any threat or anti-American influences and securing US trade and investments in the region.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework or the IPEF was launched in Tokyo in May 2022 under the aegis of the United States of America to build a connected economy in the Indo-Pacific

region. It is the United States' primary drive to build economic prosperity in the region. The IPEF members include the Quad members, that is, India, Australia, Japan and other Indo-Pacific economies such as Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Fiji and Brunei Darussalam, that represents about 40 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These 13 partners of the United States represent 28 percent of trade in global commodities and therefore are important players in the economic dynamics of surrounding the Indo-Pacific region.

Washington has strong economic ties with these Indo-Pacific Economic Framework member countries. For instance, U.S. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) exceeded US \$ 969 billion in the region in 2020. Trade with the Indo-Pacific is crucial to supporting jobs in the United States and facilitates nearly US \$ 900 billion in FDI into Washington.²⁸¹ The United States is the number-one investment partner of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries- one of the largest stakeholders in the region and Washington invests more than three times the combined figures of Southeast Asia's next three investment partners, and is one of the primary exporter of services in the region, therefore accelerating the growth of the region.

The IPEF is President Joe Biden's comprehensive initiative that endeavours to build fairness and competitiveness in trade, economic growth, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability in the region and America's bid to strengthening ties with its allies and partners in order to tackle the economic challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. It covers four significant dimensions of commercial relations and namely four pillars of cooperation, namely Trade (Pillar I), Supply Chains (Pillar II), Clean Economy (Pillar III) and Fair Economy (Pillar IV). Though the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework covers wide ranging areas of economic transactions, the interesting part remains that IPEF is far from being a rigid framework. It is flexible and non-mandatory for partners to join all the four pillars of the scheme. Since the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework covers wide ranging issues, the member countries are in for negotiations and creating a detailed framework in each of the above-mentioned four areas.²⁸²

²⁸¹ The White House. "Fact Sheet: In Asia, President Biden and a Dozen Indo-Pacific Partners Launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity." May 23, 2022. Accessed July 13, 2024. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-in-asia-president-biden-and-a-dozen-indo-pacific-partners-launch-the-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/>.

²⁸² U.S. Department of Commerce. "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework." Accessed July 13, 2024. <https://www.commerce.gov/ipef>.

In case of Trade which is the first pillar of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the participating countries are trying to forge inclusive, high-standard, free, fair and open trade partnership premised upon the rule-based multilateral trading mechanism and also developing innovative propositions to bring about technological progress in agriculture, labour and also cover areas such as the overall environment of trade, trade facilitation, transparency, competition policy, inclusivity, fair regulatory practises and also cover the futuristic goals towards the digital economy. The Ministerial Text for Trade Pillar of The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity affirms the commitment of IPEF members- the United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam to work together to build a connected and resilient economic community in the Indo-Pacific region that would contribute to global economic stability and sustainable development. The IPEF members affirm their commitment towards high labour standards, simplifying custom procedures and regulatory coherence for smooth flow of trade. It aims to build an inclusive and transparent understanding of trade that gives equal significance to small and medium-sized enterprises and supporting them with technical know-how, capacity building so as to enable the equal opportunity environment in global trading mechanisms. The underlying understanding is that the success of international trade in an inter-connected globalized world is premised upon collaboration based on the mechanism of dialogue, mutual support and shared responsibility to address the common challenges that would lead to environmentally sustainable practices and sustainable resources management thereby promoting green growth in the Indo-Pacific economies. One of the most important futuristic notion discussed by the members was to foster cooperation in digital trade, cyber security and protection against data piracy thereby building the next-generation digital economy.

In the sector of supply chain management, the Joint Ministerial Statement undertaken by the Ministers of Australia, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand and the United States of America committed to develop and enhance strategies that would work towards a transparent, secure and sustainable supply chain taking cognizance of the diversity of the member countries that would also be capable of withstanding any disruptions. The countries affirm their faith in the liberal and rule based multilateral trading mechanism with the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulation and code of conduct at its core. Since the member states are at different stages of economic development and are equipped with differential capabilities, the IPEF calls for expanding the areas of cooperation that will alleviate constraints, and a better coordination

mechanism that would be able to respond with any crisis or vulnerabilities and ensure continuity of business and enhance logistics, more specifically in critical areas. The countries pledged to engage in information sharing and improve labour standards and labour rights based on the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and ensure that the fruits of economic growth are shared among the companies, its workers and the people. Such broad-based cooperative engagements would enable the partnering countries of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to meet their goals of building a resilient supply network among themselves.

The third pillar of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework stresses on clean economy and aims to foster collaboration in the development of clean energy technology since the members affirmed their commitment towards energy sustainability and the need for transition towards a green economy. The need for ensuring clean energy and energy security among the members should be based on reducing the burden on fossil fuel, energy management and reducing the emission of greenhouse gasses, promotion of sustainable agricultural practises and forest use including setting up if monitoring and verification standards. Along with this, sustainable use of land, water and ocean resources are necessary since most of the economies of the Indo-Pacific are ocean-based economies.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework's forth pillar calls for cooperation in critical issues with focus upon tax transparency, capacity building and inclusive collaborations in order to build a fair economy was concluded in November 2023. The members pledged anti-corruption, tax transparency efforts as central to their framework especially those related to digitalization of the economy. Transparency and cooperation should be advocated in all sectors including real estate transactions, frameworks for anti-money laundering, establishment of reporting systems and capacity building, innovation being identified as key components of collaboration. The document therefore makes a comprehensive plan by aligning domestic frameworks with international standards in order to foster a conducive environment of transparent, equitable, rule-based and prosperous economic environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is therefore a new age comprehensive economic security arrangement in the Indo-Pacific region. For all practical and symbolic purposes, it is a realization on the part of the United States of America of the economic potential of the region and its impact on Washington's security and prosperity. It is the manifestation of the idea of shared prosperity across the region and the urge to enhance its economic security by drawing

countries into its framework. In other words, it is Washington's bid to securitizing itself and sustain a US centric liberal world order in the coming decades.

Indo-US Relations and the IPEF

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework holds much significance to India as it does to the United States. India has joined the three pillars of IPEF entailing supply chain resilience, clean energy and fair economy but has maintained an observer status in respect of trade since New Delhi is still assessing the potential benefits and concerns that the trade pillar of IPEF might have on the developing countries. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal highlighted upon the lack of broad-based agreement on critical aspects such as digital trade, environment, and labour among other, along with expressing that India is still working towards enhancing digital laws pertaining to privacy and would withhold its full commitment until the finer details are clear. It can be said that India's stance of withholding from the Trade pillar of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework exemplifies that India's foreign policy has evolved to becoming an independently guided issues and national interest based one as against any pressure or compulsions. India thinks independently and her foreign policy is only a reflection of national interest.²⁸³

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework as a cooperative forum will help the Indian industries especially the micro, small and medium enterprises in investments, concessional funding, technical assistance and capacity building along with integrating the Indian companies in cooperative work programmes and IPEF Catalytic capital Funds. One of the primary areas that Indo-Pacific Economic Framework focuses upon is Cooperative Work Programme (CWP). India intends to build a circular economy by initiating 'e-waste urban mining' that will expedite sustainable e-waste management among the IPEF members and help recycling of critical materials. Along with this more than 30 Indian enterprises had been a part of the Investors Forum of the IPEF partners which is a unique opportunity for the investor community across the continents to interact with more than 100 top global investors. Investments were pushed especially in renewable energy sector and explore opportunities in start-ups and multilateral development banks. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework's fair economy agreement is one of

²⁸³ Business Standard. "Did India Err by Walking Out of IPEF's Trade Pillar?" September 13, 2022. Accessed July 13, 2024. https://www.business-standard.com/podcast/economy-policy/did-india-err-by-walking-out-of-ipef-s-trade-pillar-122091300074_1.html.

the primary focus of India's economic engagement in the region. To reach this New Delhi has highlighted upon training facilities in Digital Forensics and System Driven Risk Analysis. Under the Upskilling initiative of the IPEF India has received 4 million opportunities in the last two years to support sustainable development and opportunities especially to women and girls. Also, the digital economy platform of the IPEF's Connected Economy pillar can bring economic boost by generating nearly 65 million new job opportunities in India by 2025. By making global digital governance a high priority, IPEF enhances interoperability among digital systems and coloration in preventing cyber-attacks can appeal to India's digital business sectors. This will also help attract investors to India and thereby building a resilient Indian economy. The IPEF presents a unique platform and opportunity for India to work with the some of the vital players of the Indo-Pacific and engage in broadening economic cooperation which would guide her own development and the development of the region as a whole. Again, India's foreign policy is closely linked to her south and south-east Asian neighbours and IPEF can evolve as a platform for the economic facet of India's goal to becoming a Vishwabandhu (a benevolent friend).

IPEF is Washington's bid to build a regional economic cooperation based on collective approach. It is a unique economic venture that endorses an economic pact which does not seek to negotiate tariffs or market access. It seeks integration with the member countries on issue-based manner such as decarbonisation, supply chain management, clean energy, building rule-based trading practises, tax and anti-corruption, along with managing crisis such as covid pandemic, disaster relief and infrastructure building among others. Along with this, IPEF is America's economic statecraft to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific economic sphere. The emergence of the People's Republic of China as one of the economic giants which does not hold favourable attitudes towards the US centric world order. While both the countries are each other's largest trade partners, the United States faced a relative decline post 9/11 and the economic depression of the 2007-08 which led Beijing to gain prominence in the region and strengthen its relations with the smaller countries in the region.

Chinese investments over the past decade has been about US \$ 530 billion in 2023 including US \$ 245 billion in construction contracts and US \$ 285 billion in non-financial investments. Renewable energy, mining and related technologies remain the primary focus of Chinese companies in the Asia-Pacific with expansion expected in infrastructure building both roads and waterways, manufacturing and power resources, social sectors such as housing and strategic projects which is in part a reflection of China's Belt and Road Initiative,

Again, India's relation with China has not always been sweet palate. Though both the countries are linked by massive economic relations, they are having to deal with border skirmishes. Coupled with the bitter memories of the 1962 China's India war, Chinese aggressive world-view and unlawful claims over Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh and the issue of Tibet has never made the Beijing India's trusted neighbour. IPEF is an important part of President Biden's strategy to counter growing Chinese clout in the Asian economic sphere. India's benevolent yet regional power and her robust economy makes her a rightful alternative for the neighbouring countries in south and South-east Asia to trust upon. For all these reasons, India is the most favourable and trusted partner of the United States in the IPEF arrangement.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework seeking engagement in the economic realm has further reinforced partnerships among Washington's partners in the Indo-Pacific region. It is democratic, voluntary, flexible and non-intrusive in the internal matters of the member-states. If economic statecraft is the watch-word of the neo-liberal globalized order of the present century, Indo-Pacific is not bereft of this logic of economic securitization. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework seeks to build an inclusive economic cooperative framework that is based on sustainability, fairness, good governance, mutual trust and cooperation, fair competition and a drive towards green growth. It manifests the collective aspiration of the countries to sustain the region as an engine of global growth and the understanding of security in terms of economic prosperity.

Again, it is worth noting that differing interpretation of the Indo-Pacific from different nation-states suggest the emerging trends in the region, linking the idea of economic prosperity with geo-strategic security. Indo-Pacific can thus be said to unfold the emerging of geopolitical realities where the locus is shifting from the obsession of physical security to geo-economic security attracting countries all over. In this sense, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework manifests the current dynamics of economic securitization in the Indo-Pacific and is possibly the best scenario displaying the politics of securitization in this multipolar world order. Here, securitization is linked to understanding the Indo-Pacific power play where there are multiple levels of understanding the region.

A significant hurdle would be to build consensus among the partners since each of the countries' are different in their political arrangements a uniform structure of IPEF might have impact on their internal as well as bilateral economic calculations. However, the Framework seems to understand this and this is why perhaps it has made the structure flexible along with

giving time for members to get on board with their issues and ideas. The IPEF harps on the idea of the cob-web model of international relations and believes in mutual gain as an end and cooperative frameworks as a means. It is unlike a NATO- like arrangement and has no binding and enforcement clauses. It is voluntary, consensual and flexible which allows the members to work according to their advantages and domestic priorities. It can be said that building a mutually agreeable economic framework would require several rounds of negotiations and strong leadership in all the partnering countries and some might have to resist pressures for Beijing.

To make this economic arrangement a success the United States believes in securing friends and allies that would enable Washington to build a robust and comprehensive economic framework thereby securitizing the Indo-Pacific and perpetuating the logic of cobweb model of liberal internationalism. Indo-Pacific is a vast regional expanse where both the democracies – the US and India can collaborate for the benefit of the entire region. India and the United States together can act as harbingers of peace and rule-based order in the region as against the coercive intentions of some nations. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is still in its nascent stage and with strong and positive leadership from the United States of America and India, it has the potential to evolve into one of the most successful economic frameworks in the Indo-Pacific that would be the flag-bearer of Indo-Pacific prosperity.

Analysis

Indo-Pacific underscores the divergent geographical conceptions of each of the players that contribute to the contemporary nature of India- US engagement. India tends to define the Indo-Pacific more narrowly, focusing on the Indian Ocean and its immediate neighbourhood, whereas the US includes the Western Pacific and East Asia in its strategic calculus. These mismatched outlooks and divergent perceptions affect both the expectations and extent of cooperation between the two states. Moreover, it can be seen that despite a fair increase in high-level diplomatic exchanges and joint military exercises, the institutional mechanisms necessary for sustained cooperation remain underdeveloped. The absence of a habitual “strategic dialogue” at operational levels hinders deeper coordination and creates space for misperceptions and inefficiencies.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Ladwig, Walter C., and Anit Mukherjee. “India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership.” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019): 3–18. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26642261>.

Surveying the potential for cooperation in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the broader Indo-Pacific, Constantino Xavier's finds increasing convergence in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, where shared concerns about China's influence have brought India and the US into informal alignment. However, historical baggage and India's sensitivity about external involvement in its neighbourhood still limit the scope of cooperation. In Southeast Asia, New Delhi and Washington's Indo-Pacific policies does find a convergence of diplomatic rhetoric. However, it is less than what is required in terms of substantive policy coordination. India's domestic priorities, its strategic restraint and caution with regard to China, and the institutional limitations of its foreign policy establishment restrict the depth of Indo-US collaboration in the region. Also there remains gaps in defence cooperation between the two countries. While military ties have grown substantially- with agreements like LEMOA and COMCASA facilitating interoperability- the two countries have yet to develop the 'habits of cooperation' characteristic of mature security partners. India's limited experience with deep defence cooperation and the United States' rigid strategic templates are both cited as impediments. Building a stable partnership will therefore require both countries to invest in adapting their bureaucratic systems and strategic cultures to accommodate each other. Presenting a cautiously optimistic assessment of the Indo-US relationship, it can be argued while a formal alliance remains unlikely, the strategic partnership is growing, albeit unevenly and under the pressure of shared challenges, particularly from China. Key policy implications include the need for continuous diplomatic engagement, deeper infrastructural and connectivity initiatives in Asia, and the institutionalisation of bilateral dialogues across different bureaucratic levels. The central contention is that Indo-US cooperation cannot be taken for granted; it must be consciously nurtured, with sensitivity to each country's political traditions, strategic priorities, and regional perceptions. The future of the partnership lies not in dramatic breakthroughs but in the steady development of mutual trust, communication, and procedural interoperability.²⁸⁵

Sumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason²⁸⁶ underlines the strong reluctance in the Indian counterpart to enter into any strategic arrangement that might imply an imbalance in status or

²⁸⁵ Ladwig, Walter C., and Anit Mukherjee. "India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership." *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (2019): 3–18. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26642261>.

²⁸⁶ Šumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason, "Introduction: An Unnatural Partnership? The Future of U.S.–India Strategic Cooperation," in *The Future of U.S.–India Security Cooperation*, ed. Šumit Ganguly and M. Chris Mason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 1–12.

lead to security cooperation perceived as hierarchical- evoking a “big brother, little brother” dynamic. Although Indian expressions of national pride and independence differ in tone from those in other regions, the underlying sentiment is equally powerful. Indian leadership is fundamentally unwilling to accept a subordinate role in any partnership. This sentiment creates a deeply rooted and almost instinctive political resistance to aligning too closely with the United States, emulating behaviours akin to two powerful magnets that inherently repel one another. What can be garnered that the two countries conceptualise the Indo-Pacific differently- India more concerned with her regional security relations while the United States is concerned with the global implications if the rise of China and its threat perception pertaining to US dominance in the region. This at times creates divergences in forging a common powerful strategic agenda in the Indo-Pacific.

However, India and United States will continue to engage with each other using different channels of communication to deepen cooperation where their interests align. Perhaps the most successful outcome of the security convergence is the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Framework. With the Quad members, US is the most important power and it takes the nodal position in articulating threat. Japan conceived the idea of Quad and is central to East Asian security within the broader Indo-Pacific security, India central positioning and its geographical advantages gives Quad a regional legitimacy, and Australia security risks and troubles converge-all this makes it a security convergence and Quad definitely as an important role to play in managing and articulating security matters at all levels. It is likely to endure as a pragmatic problem-solving platform in a contested region and its speed, flexibility and outcome-oriented approach to deliver concrete cooperation as the best outcome of securitization with scope spanning across security, economics, and technology across the Indo-Pacific. Its success and significance lie in its ability to act despite great-power rivalry and institutional fatigue with voluntariness, informality, selective membership, and issue-specific focus as defining features.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Indo-Pacific as a strategic space has moved from being a dormant cartographic area to a geopolitical theatre of 21st-century power politics. The emerging security architecture of the Indo-Pacific is signified by a myriad of complex, tangled relations among nation-states that invoke a layered dynamics of security understandings. Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical entity subsumes all the compartmentalized divisions of mental maps (East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) in one geopolitical whole and thereby reflecting interdependencies among differentially positioned nation-states in terms of politics, economics, and social structures. On one hand, regional cohesion in the Indo-Pacific may address security dynamics as a whole, focusing upon common areas of concerns such as environment, terrorism and trafficking. On the other, the Indo-Pacific also complicates geo-strategic calculations where these threats are differentially perceived and decoded. There is definitely competition, conflict and power struggle in the region. But what differentiates Indo-Pacific from other zones of conflict, are the massive linkages that all the countries in the region have with one another.

Indo-Pacific is established as a vast, integrated yet politically fragmented geopolitical space stretching from the east coast of Africa across the Indian Ocean to the western and central Pacific. It represents connected geography, dense economic ties, shared challenges that bind this security space into a common spatial zone. This study tracks the term's strategic revival from Shinzo Abe's Speech titled 'Confluence of the Two Seas' to the United States' mainstreaming of the term in its narrative through its various strategic articulations since 2017. The Indo-Pacific's geostrategic significance has therefore been observed to rest on three interlocking factors- firstly, it is the world's growth hub. Secondly, it links geo-strategy with geo-economic prosperity and this is the biggest factor that is attracting countries round the world. Thirdly, it is the geopolitical space where the rules and norms of regional order such as freedom of navigation, rule of law, connectivity are constantly tested and negotiated. This is shaping outcomes on land, starting from economic statecraft to the balance of military power. Finally, the region blurs the distinctions between traditional and non-traditional security areas as Indo-Pacific security matters are intertwined and cannot be analysed in isolation. The understanding of security is seen to have been broadened beyond hard military threats to

include challenges such as climate risks, pandemics, cyber intrusions, and illegal fishing. This conceptualisation underpins the assessment regarding a 'suitable' regional architecture in the region.

While the U.S. views the Indo-Pacific through a lens of strategic competition with China, its logic of Indo-Pacific is underlined by freedom of navigation and its continued relevance as a resident power. The US views security through prosperity. India embraces it as inclusive, growth for all and a prosperous order where the focus is upon peace through prosperity. India's Act East policy, coupled with other later initiative such as IPOI and SAGAR has aimed at capacity building of the nations in the Indo-Pacific region. To India, SAGAR is a platform for enhancing regional connectivity, confidence building, and responding to the regional countries in times of crisis where strategic autonomy and multi-alignment are the watchwords. India's rise and reliability in the region has been the best reflection of strategic de-hyphenation, as New Delhi engages in building a cooperative world, encapsulating the essence of India's outreach through strategic, economic and cultural strengths. This outreach is testimony to its global influence and commitments towards building a peaceful, equitable, sustainable and harmonious world order focussing upon mutual prosperity and human development. India's Indo-Pacific policy is a reflection of an enlightened foreign policy whose ideals are premised upon the unity of the universal.

The Southeast Asian nations however, remain cautious regarding their articulation, insisting on 'ASEAN centrality' and inclusivity in regional frameworks to avoid being trapped in any power rivalry. Another important aspect is the normative and discursive function of the Indo-Pacific idea. It serves not just to coordinate actions, but to project a vision of a rules-based order rooted in transparency, sovereignty, and respect for international law, especially the UNCLOS. The framing of the Indo-Pacific can also be regarded as a shared geopolitical space that enables broader participation by regional and extra-regional actors. So diffusion of power is another political reality that occurs in the Indo-Pacific region which reduces the dominance of any single actor. So, it is a geopolitical construct that signifies a strategic realignment in regional geopolitics, responding to PRC's rise while promoting a multipolar, inclusive, and rule-governed regional order. While institutional creations in the Indo-Pacific remain limited because the interests of the key actors are not always aligned, the concept represents a dynamic and evolving geopolitical framework that reflects both strategic imperatives and aspirations of the actors in a rapidly changing international environment.

The research observes that Indo-Pacific power trajectory is not a simple and linear story of replacing one power with another. Having said this, America's power is no longer uncontested in the region, owing to multipolar configuration of power distribution. This does not mean America will lose its stakes in the region. Even if a challenger nation such as China endeavours to become a hegemonic power, the layered security politics that characterise the region, will not allow that to happen, at least in the near future. Unpredictability is an inherent factor in Indo-Pacific power-play as power-equation and strategies are continuously re-drawn across the length and breadth of the region. The United States of America still remains the most consequential military power and security guarantor. However, it now has to work through a thicker web of alliances and partnerships, often in minilateral formats. Diffusion of power in multiple areas such as supply chains, critical and emerging technologies, environmental governance and data flows etc., now shapes the politics of security and therefore in this an emerging security order, unfettered stability cannot be guaranteed. What can be deduced from the study is continued competition across various levels, but these competitions are also simultaneously channelled through institutional guardrails and specific problem-solving mechanisms.

The evolving security architecture is therefore layered, and adaptive. The strategic core of Indo-Pacific is premised upon three domains- the first of which are the bilateral alliances that underwrite the logic of deterrence and deal with specific security matters pertaining to both countries. For example- the US and Japan are treaty partners. These bilateral arrangements are also the domain of hard power manifested through a network of formal security alliances. Then, there are multilateral forums like the ASEAN and ASEAN-centred frameworks such as ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and ADMM-Plus, which provide for agenda-setting, confidence building measures and crisis management. These work like a diplomatic canopy to facilitate communication, diffusion of threats and a platform for norm-building. Finally, the third layer is that of functional cooperation such as the Quad that reflects a novel and pragmatic way of cooperating and dealing with common threats. These are agile, mini-networks of power amalgamation and coalition without formal memberships. Their functions range from maritime domain awareness to critical technology, humanitarian relief and disaster management, ultimately encompassing all dimension of securitization.

Again, Indo-Pacific is that strategic space where multiple issues are securitized determining the power- structure on the land. Author's analysis of India's strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific region, based on multiple expert interviews, reveals a complex narrative shaped by aspirations, limitations, competing powers, and evolving regional dynamics. Across diplomatic, academic, and policy perspectives, India's role as a net security provider emerges as a contested yet significant identity. While India's contributions to maritime security, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations are acknowledged, the limitations in capacity, political inconsistencies, and lack of economic heft are persistent themes that restrict India's ability to be recognised as a comprehensive or net regional security guarantor. Experts like Ambassador Arun Singh, Ambassador Ashok K. Kantha, Prof. Jagannath Panda and Professor Srinivasa Srinivasan describe the net security provider status as aspirational rather than a present reality, with India's reach largely confined to the Indian Ocean and dependent on collaborative mechanisms with other powers such as the United States. Ambassador Shivshankar Menon regards India as a positive and peaceful contributor to the Indo-Pacific security with common interests in the navigation, security, balance of power, security dilemma and power distribution. It can be assessed that India's limited capacity is not merely a question of naval strength but also that of delayed project deliveries, inconsistent diplomatic outreach, and political baggage of the past. India is making steady progress but at the present moment India is a first responder, and an important security shareholder in the Indo-Pacific region

Ambassadors Trigunayat and Ambassador Shivshankar Menon further emphasised that India has deliberately opted for a non-interventionist, soft-security posture under the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) framework. Rather than seeking to militarily dominate the Indo-Pacific, India's unique geopolitical positioning adds to the policy framing and India's contributions have focused on anti-piracy patrols, humanitarian operations, capacity-building exercises, and logistics support for collective security initiatives. This approach is both a strategic choice to avoid entanglement in conflicts and a reflection of current resource constraints. However, while such efforts are well regarded in South Asia and parts of the western Indian Ocean, experts like Le Thu Mach and Lucas Myres note that India's influence diminishes significantly in East Asia and the South China Sea. As a result, regional states increasingly perceive India as a partial stabiliser rather than a comprehensive security provider, and this enables China to manipulate these actors and the United States to set the overarching security agendas. So India has to increase economic strength, defence capabilities and maritime presence in the entire Indian Ocean.

The Quad, comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, is analysed as a crucial strategic tool in this evolving regional order. The research infers that the ambiguity of the Quad is a deliberate strength, enabling cooperation across the entire spectrum of issues influencing the security dynamics of the region, without overtly provoking China or creating rigid alliance commitments, something akin to NATO. Experts like Ambassador Trigunayat and Dr. David Brewster underline that the Quad thrives precisely because it avoids formal institutionalisation, allowing members to collaborate flexibly on issues such as maritime domain awareness, supply chain resilience, cyber security, and health diplomacy. However, criticisms are also evident. Lucas Myres points out that the Quad's record of tangible deliverables remains limited, undermining its credibility as a long-term pillar of Indo-Pacific security. Ambassador Menon and Le Thu Mach further caution against India's over-reliance on the Quad, noting that its evolution is largely dependent on China's actions and the consistency of US engagement. Ambassador Bambawale points out that Quad's success will be tested in the present scenario as the United States under President Trump has started targeting its own friends and allies, the inconsistencies regarding Trump's foreign policy also highlighted by Prof. Kei Koga. All these diminish Quad's strategic weight and impacting upon the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

The role of the United States is described as indispensable but unpredictable. Across interviews, there remained a consensus that the US remains India's most critical partner in defence, technology, and strategic alignment against China's assertiveness. Agreements like LEMOA, BECA, and COMCASA have deepened operational cooperation, while technological collaborations in space, cyber-security, and advanced defence systems showcase a convergence of interests. However, Ambassador Menon, Ambassador Mudgal, Ambassador Singh, and Professor Rajat Ganguly note that Washington's approach has become increasingly transactional, focused on burden-sharing, and prone to abrupt policy reversals due to internal political divisions.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) dominates discussions as the primary structural challenge reshaping the Indo-Pacific order. All interviewees agree that China's rise is inevitable and deeply rooted in historical, economic, and political dynamics. While some argue that BRI has overreached financially, leading to questions about its sustainability, the political success of the initiative is undeniable. China's rapid project delivery, willingness to take high risks, and ability to weave internal security partnerships with host countries (as noted by Myres) grant it significant influence, particularly where India struggles with deliverable delays.

Ambassador Trigunayat observes that even as BRI's credibility wanes, China is shifting towards new soft-power instruments such as the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and Global Development Initiative (GDI), reinforcing its normative leadership in the region. The trust deficit between India and the South Asian neighbours further hampers New Delhi's efforts to counter Chinese influence effectively, as Southeast Asian states remain cautious yet economically tied to Beijing's orbit.

ASEAN's role in this context is viewed as economically central but politically fragmented. The organisation's consensus-based decision-making process and sovereignty-first approach, described by Professor Ganguly, inhibit its ability to take decisive stances on regional security, particularly in balancing China's rise. While ASEAN-led frameworks like the AOIP provide a platform for dialogue, their reluctance to militarise or form collective defence mechanisms leaves individual states vulnerable to Chinese pressure and undermines broader regional stability. Lucas Myres adds that ASEAN's indecisiveness has eroded its relevance as a security actor, even as it remains an indispensable trade and investment partner. India and the US continue to endorse ASEAN centrality rhetorically, but practical engagement remains inconsistent and often overshadowed by bilateral or minilateral arrangements such as the Quad.

Underlying these security dynamics is the persistent underutilisation of India's soft power. Despite its civilisational heritage, shared Buddhist linkages with Southeast Asia, a large and influential diaspora, and democratic values, India lacks a structured cultural diplomacy strategy to shape Indo-Pacific narratives. Le Thu Mach suggests that India could leverage cultural and educational initiatives to build trust and influence, complementing hard security efforts. Dr. Brewster also highlights India's principled commitment to sovereignty and international law as a source of normative power that remains insufficiently projected. This vacuum allows China to advance alternative narratives through its own initiatives, gradually shaping regional perceptions of power and order.

Taken together, these studies illustrate India's current position as a cautious yet increasingly significant actor in the Indo-Pacific. Its strategic identity as a net security provider is a long-term goal, yet India is a credible partner to the Indo-Pacific nation and the first responder and humanitarian contributor. The Quad offers a flexible platform for collaboration, but its future effectiveness affected by China's actions and US consistency. Washington remains a critical but unreliable partner, necessitating diversified hedging strategies. China's structural rise is coercive, with its politically driven BRI continuing to challenge and reshape the region's

economic and security architecture, exploiting India's delivery gaps. ASEAN, while central to economic integration, lacks the coherence to drive collective security responses, leaving regional order fragmented. For India to transform its role from aspirational to credible, it must invest in enhancing its maritime capacity and economic strength, improve project execution, institutionalise its soft power, capitalise on civilizational strength and articulate a clear strategic narrative that resonates with regional partners. India and the United States need to understand that both their policy and outlooks in maximum areas converge in the Indo-Pacific region. Only a robust, comprehensive and mutually agreeable cooperative India-US relations can navigate the volatile geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and contribute meaningfully to a peaceful, inclusive, rules-based regional security order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Quantitative Scoring Table:

The following table represents aggregated responses from the interviewed resource persons on six issues related to the politics of security in the Indo-Pacific region with special emphasis on the geopolitical strategies of India and the US. These issues are;

India's role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific, importance of Quad as a strategic support mechanism from India's point of view, trust in India-US partnership in the Indo-Pacific, threat perception about BRI among ASEAN states, continuing relevance of ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific and effectiveness of India's soft power diplomacy in Indo-Pacific.

The responses received on these issues have been quantified by assigning the responses on an ordinal scale where 1 represents a high or positive response, 2 represents moderate or mixed response and 3 represents a weak response. These quantified responses are presented through a simple table. This table is followed by a bar chart highlighting the responses derived from this table where the x axis represents mean scores of support/trust on the aforementioned six issues on a scale of one to three.

Table: 4**Quantitative Scoring Table Representative of Interview Responses on Select Issues**

Respondent	India's Security Role In Indo-Pacific	Quad Support for India in Indo-Pacific	Level of Trust In India-US Relations hip in Indo-Pacific	Threat perception from China/BRI	Relevance of ASEAN Centrality in Indo-Pacific	India's Soft Power Effectiveness
Amb. Trigunayat	2	1	2	1	2	2
Amb. Arun K. Singh	3	2	2	1	2	2
Amb. Shivshankar Menon	2	2	2	2	2	2
Prof. David Brewster	2	1	2	2	2	2
Prof. Le Thu Mach	3	2	2	1	1	1
Lucas Myres	2	2	2	1	3	2
Prof. Rajat Ganguly	3	2	3	2	1	2

Prof.Sitaraman	2	2	2	1	2	2
Former Ambassador to the Philippines (requested anonymity)	3	2	2	2	3	2
Ambassador Gautam Bambawale	1	3	2	2	1	2

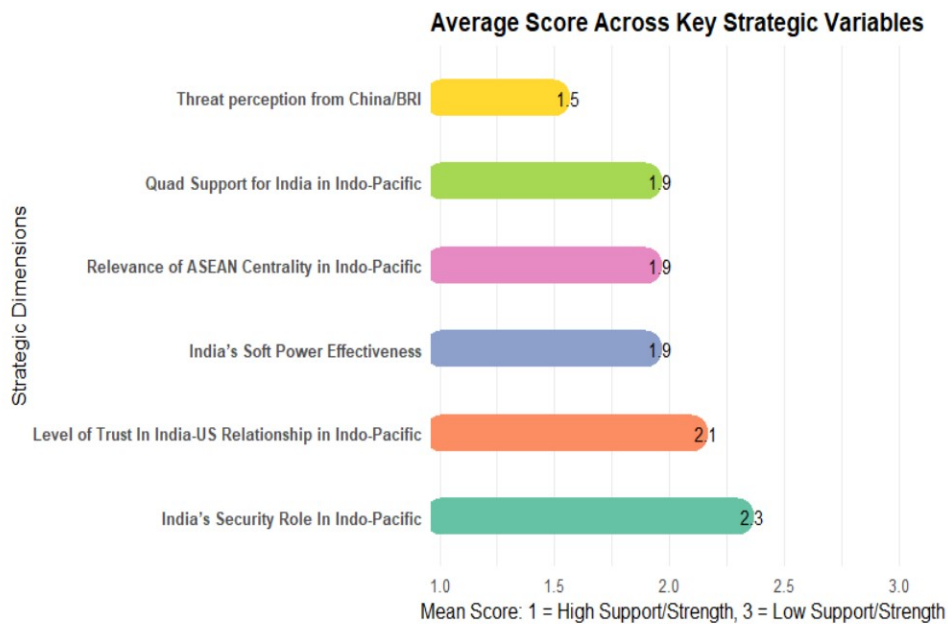
(Scoring Scale):

- 1 = High / Strong / Effective
- 2 = Moderate / Mixed / Underutilized
- 3 = Low / Weak / Marginal

Interpretation:

- Lower scores indicate stronger support or trust (e.g., 1 = high support/strength).
- For instance, Quad support and BRI threat perception score low (closer to 1), indicating strong agreement across experts on their strategic importance.
- India’s soft power and ASEAN centrality receive more mixed evaluations (closer to 2 or 2.5).

Figure: 6



(Note: Chart created by the author in 'R' using data from personal interviews conducted between 2022- 2025. Scale: 1 = High Support/Strength; 3 = Low Support/Strength'.)

The comparative insights from the interviews and the accompanying quantitative data collectively provide a multi-layered understanding of the security issues in the Indo-Pacific. While there is a shared consensus that India is still evolving into the role of a net security provider, the figure illustrates India's perceived security role scores are mostly moderate (value 2) or weak (value 3). This indicates that the India needs to improve on its capacity to play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific region, especially to meet the needs of India's South and Southeast Asian partners.

The analysis of the Quad represents an interesting picture, underscoring its ambiguous nature but also pointing out to its strategic value. It can be inferred from the data of all experts and also from the vast literature studies that Quad informal nature is its greatest advantage in preventing overt confrontation with China. Its uniqueness as a functional cooperative mechanism, fostering cooperation on maritime security, technology, supply chains, and health diplomacy underlines its potential is the politics of Indo-Pacific security. It serves as platform

for all the democratic actors including India and the USA to forge greater and stronger ties and act as a unified voice in articulating the security of the region. The quantitative assessment shows consistently high to moderate support for the Quad (scores of 1 or 2), and this also confirms its relevance as a strategic hedge for India. However, the lack of a strong commitment from USA can be an impediment as the USA is one of the powerful voices in the Quad. This has been observed as several respondents highlighted that future Quad effectiveness depends largely on China's actions which is uncertain and sporadic and the consistency of US commitment to the region. Also for Quad to remain strongly in action, all the four members are required to voice commonality in opinions and outlooks.

India's crucial role and US-India partnership is significant in the region. However, the present scenario is ambiguous as the US lacks consistency in commitment. This is reflected in the quantitative scores (mostly 2, with one 3) reflect moderate levels of trust. This observation is reflective of the US oscillating between assertive engagement and strategic retreat, leading to uncertainty over long-term alignment. Consequently, India is pursuing hedging strategies and diversifying its strategic options and mitigate the risks of overdependence on Washington.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continues to be perceived as a significant geopolitical challenge, scoring predominantly as a high threat (value 1 across most respondents). While some experts argue that BRI's economic viability is diminishing due to overreach, debt sustainability issues and its debt-trap diplomacy, China's ability to deliver projects swiftly and exert influence through already acquired ports, digital infrastructure, economic superiority, and security partnerships keeps its regional leverage intact.

ASEAN's role is evaluated as significant however it is politically fragmented, with scores ranging between 1 and 3. Respondents highlight its consensus-based decision-making and sovereignty-first approach as barriers to collective security action. While ASEAN maintains importance in rhetoric, particularly through mechanisms like the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), its practical effectiveness is seen as mixed or marginal. The result is the limited ability of ASEAN to act as a cohesive counterweight to China. India therefore has engaged in a strategy of strengthening bilateral ties with influential members within ASEAN such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

The underutilisation of India's soft power is another actor, evident from the quantitative scores, which largely rate its effectiveness as 2 (underutilised) despite the potential of cultural, educational, and religious diplomacy. Experts highlight opportunities for India to draw on its

civilizational heritage, diaspora connections, and democratic values to craft a compelling Indo-Pacific narrative that definitely resonates well with regional states. But there is also the lack of a structured cultural diplomacy framework that has created a vacuum that PRC has been filling through initiatives like the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI), further shaping regional perceptions.

It can be said that the findings from the combined method of qualitative and quantitative reveals a picture of India as a power with significant strategic potential but constrained by capacity gaps, inconsistent policy execution, and an underdeveloped narrative strategy. Its identity as a net security provider is a futuristic goal, largely aspirational while India now is and significant security shareholder in the region. The Quad provides a valuable platform for strategic cooperation but requires some inclusion of the hard security framework in order to act as a counterbalance to China.

Indo-Pacific narrates a story of power-contestation and evolving multi-layered and a composite understanding of security dynamics. It eliminates the distinction between traditional and non-traditional security and combines the micro unit of security (the individual) with the macro (state and the global), and its constant interactions in framing the security narratives and geopolitical games played out by the Indo-Pacific countries. The US needs to understand its vitality in the region and the significance of US-India relations in the Indo-Pacific. As China continues to dominate through economic statecraft and political leverage, and ASEAN's remains fragmented in its approach, India-US relations remains significant and has an immense potential for building a cohesive, sovereign and inclusive rule-based order in the region. This has to be understood both in Washington and in New Delhi as both the countries can together cooperate in framing the mutually favourable Indo-Pacific security order.

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ANNEXURE

Questions for Interview

1. How do you perceive the role of the US in shaping the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region?
2. What are the convergences and divergences in India-US relations in the Indo-Pacific? What are the biggest operational challenges in India-US collaborations in the Indo-Pacific?
3. What is your opinion regarding the power trajectory of the region? How significant is the role of ASEAN in the security architecture of the region?
4. How do you evaluate China's role in the Indo-Pacific? With China's presence, what do you think about the evolving security architecture of the region?
5. How effective do you believe the Quad has been in addressing the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific?
6. Do you think President Trump in his second term will be open to engage meaningfully with multilaterals like Quad?
7. What is your assessment regarding India's Indo-Pacific policy? Your opinion regarding strategic hedging?
8. How do you perceive India's role in Quad?
9. How successful has India been in using SAGAR to strengthen naval diplomacy with smaller states in the Indian Ocean, especially in light of China's growing investments in these countries?
10. What is your opinion regarding India's stance of becoming the 'Net Security Provider' in the region?
11. What are the biggest operational challenges in India-US coordination in the Indo-Pacific?
12. Is it possible to frame a stable security architecture in the Indo-Pacific?

Ph.D

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION Statement of the Problem Indo-Pacific has gained prominence in the geopolitical calculations of nation-states in the 21st century. It is the hub of economic, diplomatic, military, environment and cultural activities. This is due to the rising economic significance of Asia and consequently the shift in the epicenter of power from West to the East. It is an expansive maritime region covering the east coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean to the western and central Pacific Ocean. It includes strategic sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, the South China Sea, and the western Pacific, and economically and strategically significant countries such as India, China, Japan, Australia and the presence of the United States of America. It represents an integrated view encompassing the Indian and the Pacific Ocean into a single strategic space. Developments in the region carry huge potential to determine some of the most prominent issues in international relations- such as war and peace, rival military buildups, the power of economic forces, and information, diplomatic manoeuvres including The earliest usage of this term can be traced back to Karl Haushofer, a German geographer in the 1920s, who spoke of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a geopolitical space influenced by maritime dynamics. In contemporary international politics, the re-emergence of the term is often credited to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who in his 2007 speech to the Indian Parliament introduced the idea of a , referring to the Indian and Pacific Oceans as one connected maritime zone. The United States of America has adopted the term in its National Security Strategy (NSS), 2017 under President Donald Trump, and this marked a key geo-strategic shift of US re-positioning itself in the region, replacing the older 'Asia-Pacific' framework with 'Indo-Pacific,' and signalling a greater maritime-focused and India-inclusive regional strategy. The significance of the Indo-Pacific is in the context of great power competition, concerns over maritime security and economic connectivity, and efforts towards regional order building with India playing a central role in shaping the region. For India, the Indo-Pacific is a gateway to securing economic interest and strategic rise, and reinforce its identity as a civilizational and maritime power. One of the primary drivers of security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region is China's rising power, which, combined with increasing anxieties over maritime security that has led to a significant shift and diffusion in the regional balance of power. There is concern over conflicting views and geopolitical narratives regarding the nomenclature and this has led to politicizing Indo-Pacific as a theater of power play in the present century. The security challenges in the Indo-Pacific have led to the emergence of minilateralism, serving as a key indicator of efforts to securitize the region. For India, the growing Chinese presence carries far-reaching implications, especially China's assertive behaviour and expanding influence in India's strategic periphery that could potentially undermine efforts to establish a stable and inclusive regional security framework. It is therefore imperative for India to comprehend and respond to the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the region. As responsible power, India is increasingly seen as capable of taking on a leadership role in shaping the region's future within a rules-based global order. The dissertation investigates the evolution of Indo-Pacific as not just a geographic space but a strategic theatre, a locus of geopolitical contestation; where ideas of minilateralism, inclusiveness, and maritime freedom are being constantly tested, representing the most glaring picture of the politics of