

**INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A
STUDY OF THE EMERGENT MULTILATERAL COOPERATION**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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**INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A STUDY OF
THE EMERGENT MULTILATERAL COOPERATION**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify the thesis entitled, “INDIA’S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A STUDY OF THE EMERGENT MULTILATERAL COOPERATION”, submitted by LALHMING SANGI for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, is a research work, done under my supervision and guidance. The thesis, submitted by her has not formed the basis of the award to the scholar for any degree or any other similar title and it has not yet been submitted as a dissertation or thesis in any university. I also certify that the thesis represents objective study and independent work of the scholar.

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DECLARATION
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I **LALHMING SANGI**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the Degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science**.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAGC	: Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
ACD	: Asia Cooperation Dialogue
ACHTP	: Australian Clean Hydrogen Trade Program
ACSA	: Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement
ADMM	: ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AEP	: Act East Policy
AIFTA	: ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement
AIIB	: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.
AITIGA	: ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement
AMO	: ASEAN Maritime Outlook
ANI	: Andaman and Nicobar Islands
ANZUS	: Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty
AOIP	: ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	: ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATACMS	: Army Tactical Missile System
AUKUS	: Australia-United Kingdom-United States
B3W	: Build Back Better World initiative
BIMSTEC	: Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	: Belt and Road Initiative

CCUS	: Carbon Capture and Storage
CECA	: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
CECPA	: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement
CENTO	: Central Treaty Organization
CEPA	: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
CMLV	: Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam
CPEC	: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPTPP	: Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSP	: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
EAC	: East Asian Community
EAS	: East Asia Summit
ECO	: Economic Cooperation Organisation
EEZ	: Exclusive Economic Zone
EHS	: India Thailand Free Trade Agreement
EPICC	: Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer
EPQI	: Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure
EU	: European Union
FDI	: Foreign Direct Investment
FEP	: Foreign and Economic Partnership
FIPIC	: Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation
FOIP	: Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FTA	: the Free Trade Agreement
GDP	: Gross Domestic product

HADR	: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
HIV	: Human immunodeficiency virus
HPV	: Human Papillomavirus.
IBM	: International Business Machines
IISS	: International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMAC	: Information Management and Analysis Centre
IMD	: Indian Maritime Doctrine
INDUS-X	: India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem
INF	: Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
IOC	: Indian Ocean Commission
IONS	: Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IORA	: Indian Ocean Rim Association
IORARC	: Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation
IPCOM	: Indo-Pacific Command
IPCOS	: Indo-Pacific Carbon Offset Scheme
IPEC	: Indo-Pacific Economic Cooperation
IPEF	: Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IPKF	: Indian Peace Keeping Force
IPMDA	: Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness
IPOI	: Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
JBIC	: Japan Bank for International Cooperation
JCM	: Joint Crediting Mechanism
JICA	: Japan International Cooperation Agency

JIMEX	: Japan India Maritime Exercise
JPMRC	: Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Centre
LEP	: Long-Term Economic Partnership
LEP	: Look East Policy
LPG	: Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization
LRHW	: Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon
LTTE	: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MAITRI	: Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific
MGC	: Mekong Ganga Cooperation
MICECA	: India Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
MILAN	: Missile d'infanterielégerantichar
MOOTW	: Military Operations Other Than War
MoU	: Memorandums of Understanding
MSME	:Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises\
MSP	: Minerals Security Partnership
NAFTA	: North American Free Trade Agreement
NAM	: Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCI	: National Cancer Institute
NDS	: National Defence Strategy
NEXI	: Nippon Export Investment Insurance
NSS	: National Security Strategy
OBOR	: One Belt, One Road

ODA	: Official Development Assistance
Open RAN	: Open Radio Access Network
OSA	: Official Security Assistance
PACOM	: Pacific Command
PALM	: Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting
PEMSEA	: Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Sea of East Asia
PIC	: Pacific Island Countries
PLA	: People's Liberation Army
PLAN	: People's Liberation Army Navy
PMJAY	: PradhanMantri Jan ArogyaYojana
PPML	: Privacy-Preserving Machine Learning Techniques
PQI	: Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure
PRC	: Republic of China
PrSM	: Precision Strike Missile
QCCP	: Quad Climate Change Partnership
Q-CHAMP	: Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package
Q-ISCN	: Quad International Standards Cooperation Network
QIF	: Quad Infrastructure Fellowship
QUAD	: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
QUIN	: Quad Investors Network
RAN	: Radio Access Network
RCEP	: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RIMPAC	: Rim of the Pacific

ROK	: Republic of Korea
SAGAR	: Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCO	: Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SCRI	: Supply Chain Resilience Initiative
SEATO	: Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SLOC	: Sea lanes of Communication:
SME	: Small and Medium Enterprises
SOSUS	: Sound Surveillance Sensors
TPP	: Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRIPS	: Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN	: United Nations
UNCLOS	: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNESCAP	: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFCCC	: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VIA	: Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid

CHAPTER I

1.1. INTRODUCTION

A country's foreign policy helps to pursue the national interests and securities with other nations. The increasing complication of global power has made India in search of peaceful co-existence and lessening of international strains and promotion of cooperative relationships among nations. India's foreign policy strives for stability and counterbalancing other powers. India has always been known as a peace-loving country. So, India's foreign policymakers have always given top priority to building good and friendly relations with our immediate neighbouring countries.¹

India, after independence, fought against colonialism and imperialism, promoting community harmony. Post-independence leaders prioritized international peace and security, advancing the Indo-Pacific concept. However, India's lack of national power and defence capability limits its aspirations to become a major power, particularly in the South Asian region. Until the 1990s, India's economic activities were largely confined to its immediate neighbourhood, the West Asian region, Russia, and the European countries to a certain extent. The surge of regionalism at the turn of this century and the imperatives of regional trade agreements motivated India to comprehensively engage with the ASEAN bloc. This engagement has been both at bilateral and multilateral levels. While geopolitical and geostrategic aspects have visibly been one of the major aspects of India's engagement with ASEAN, it is beyond doubt that economic cooperation forms the very core of India-ASEAN engagement. The years between 1989 and 1991 formed the watershed in the history of the 20th century. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War gave way to a new global order characterized by the positional shifts among the participating actors. The post-Cold War world heralded the era of globalization, or economic integration, in the absence of the Cold War between capitalism and communism.

¹V.N Khanna. (2001). "Foreign Policy of India." New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House.p.144.

The breakdown of the USSR and the introduction of LPG forced India to restructure cooperation with neighbouring countries. When I.K. Gujral became Prime Minister, he eliminated the reciprocal approach by introducing a non-reciprocal strategy in organizing relations with neighbouring countries. This period shows India's increasing power at the international level. The launch of India's 'Look East Policy' in 1992 took a step forward in the direction of improving India's relations with ASEAN countries. Since then, the policy has formed the cornerstone of India's Southeast Asian foreign economic policy. In the post-Cold War era, there has been increasing economic competition among the leading capitalist countries.

India and ASEAN have established significant bilateral institutional ties since the Look East Policy was unveiled. This is consistent with India's goal of establishing new trade and economic ties, drawing in foreign investment, and looking for fresh supplies in the aftermath of the Cold War. Also, India has fostered sub-regional cooperation with some of the ASEAN nations. The aim of these initiatives was to enable collaboration among certain ASEAN member countries that had been recognized as having similar economic and security concerns with India. Among them are the BIMSTEC and MGC. It was evident that India had done more in establishing trade and business ties.²

In the 21st century, the growing economic interdependence amongst the countries, coupled with freer movement of people and commodities has altered the very nature of global politics. And that the world is increasingly getting more interconnected and interdependent than ever is evident from the growing scale and intensity of international trade, the rise in remittances, and foreign direct investments in countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. In this regard, India has been one of the most striking examples of a beneficiary of globalization and regionalism. India's policy towards Southeast Asia was her priority for the intensification of economic cooperation, besides other aspects of overall cooperation. For India, the strategic environment in the neighbouring Southeast Asian region has always been of

²Arjit Mazumdar. "From Look East to Act East: India's Evolving Engagement with the Asia-Pacific Region". Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group. Asian Affairs.(5 May, 2021). Vol.52(2), pp.357-374. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2021.1912467>

great importance. The changes that have taken place in the international field in the early nineties have created a new political and economic context for India's regional diplomacy. The Southeast Asian countries form an integral part of the most dynamic Asia-Pacific region of the global economy. Thus, new economic complementarities have emerged between the Indian economy and the economies of the Southeast Asian countries in the fast-changing global, regional, and national markets since the 1990's.

India has been expanding its economic and strategic profile steadily since 2001, with its growing trade with Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific regions. The expanding trade profile had also witnessed the growth of its strategic capabilities, specifically its naval expansion that has come with modernization and expanding operations. India's expansion in its "Look East Policy" has, however, gone through two stages.³In the late 1990s, India's policy shifted towards Southeast Asia, leading to increased economic ties and ASEAN engagement. This period also saw growth in economic interdependence, trade, and defense diplomacy. India's Look East Policy expanded eastward with Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the US, while maintaining strategic bilateral and multilateral exchanges. India's growing ties with Australia and its maritime footprint further solidified its eastward focus. In 2007, India participated in Malabar Exercises with several countries. India's Look East Policy is intensifying beyond Southeast Asia, establishing strategic engagements with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Economic exchanges and trade with these powers have increased significantly, and India's naval footprint has led to bilateral exercises with these powers.

India's mid-2000s engagement with Southeast and Northeast Asia extended, focusing on security, and extending from the Indian Ocean to the Western and Southern Pacific, as China's influence expanded. This in turn required India to imagine a larger neighbourhood. The important features of the "Look East Policy" with a greater focus, larger scope, and strong deliverables led to a new name, the

³SD Muni, "India's Look East Policy: The Strategic Dimension". Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies. 2011. ISAS Working Paper. No: 121. Retrieved from https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas_papers/ISAS%20Working%20Paper%20162%20-%20Northeast%20India-Southeast%20Asia.pdf

“Act East Policy”. “Act East policy” represents the rebranding of the earlier “Look East Policy” and is rather specific about its ends, ways, and means. It consequently represents the securitization of India’s eastward engagement and thus reflects a wider scope that encompasses the Indo-Pacific region. It is meant to preserve a favourable balance of power by ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. The transition from “Look East to Act East” has a wider strategic scope, and the term Indo-Pacific began to be used in several official statements. The Indo-Pacific highlights a wider geography, the centrality of the maritime realm, and importance of India in the regional balance of power. It elevates the maritime element of strategic thinking about the region.

The major powers are implementing innovative rules to strengthen Indo-Pacific ties, responding to China’s economic, governmental, and services development. Regional transformations are driving world political changes, resulting in new forms of cooperation and conflicting behaviour. International politics are shifting towards Asia, particularly the Indo-Pacific, with countries like India, China, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia experiencing economic growth, with India's growth being heavily reliant on this region. Approximately 95 percent of the country’s trade by volume, and 68 percent by value, is moved through the seas and oceans. India’s cumulative “sea dependence” for oil is estimated at 93 percent.

The Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean states are among the most dynamic in the global world as well as centres of economic growth for many years. These areas retain to revel in geopolitical and geostrategic shifts. These shifts open possibilities in addition to demanding situations. On the other hand, the economic growth of the region opens up prospects of cooperation to recover from poverty and raise the living standards of millions of people.⁴In recent years, the regions have been advocated for by various countries at a number of points in time. The political leaders held talks several times concerning the Indo-Pacific region. As such deviations in the geopolitical circumstances, the Asia-Pacific region is the ultimate foundation encouraging the establishment of the Indo-Pacific strategy.

⁴ASEAN. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.(23 June, 2019).Retrieved from www.asean.org

India's security engagement in the Indo-Pacific context involves clear maritime vision, economic and strategic engagement with the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and trade with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Russia, and the US. India's Indo-Pacific perspective challenges China's claim of intrusiveness in the South China Sea.⁵ India's significant Indian diaspora in the Indo-Pacific region necessitates expanding its economic ties with Australia and New Zealand, thereby extending its eastward focus and opening up strategic partnerships for a system-shaping role in the region. Since 2007, India's maritime strategy has shifted towards an eastward focus, based on the release of its capstone doctrine, Indian Maritime Doctrine INBR 8.⁶ The Freedom to Use the Seas document sparked India's new vision, emphasizing its eastward focus. India is increasing its eastern fleet with fleet exercises with Southeast Asian navies and Pacific powers like South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Russia.⁷

India is increasing its naval engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, alongside Japan and South Korea, as a major power in economic and strategic terms. India sees strategic engagement in its ties with Southeast Asian navies as a counter-bulwark to the PLAN expansion in the region. As India expands its naval engagements with the US, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and Australia in the Eastern Pacific and Indian Ocean region, its role in the region enhance its credibility. India's increasing size and sophistication of warship dispatches, naval exercises with Pacific powers like Japan and South Korea, participation in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, and expansion of the Malabar series in Indian and Pacific waters solidify its credibility and power status.⁸

⁵ Brian Stoddart. "India and the South China Sea." Global Policy. (July 1, 2014). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gundre_Jayachandra_Reddy/publication/301294515_India_and_China_Relations_Historical_cultural_and_Security_Issues/links/5710724f08ae19b186938e92/India-and-China-Relations-Historical-cultural-and-Security-Issues.pdf

⁶ Ministry of Defence. "Indian Navy, Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy". New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters. (2007). Retrieved from <https://mod.gov.in/>

⁷ Abhijit Singh. "The Indian Navy's New 'Expeditionary' Outlook." New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation. Occasional. (4 October, 2012). Paper # 37. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4252541/Indian_Navys_new_expeditionary_outlook

⁸ David Scott. "India and the 'Allure of the Indo-Pacific'". International Studies. (July-October 2012). Vol. 49, Nos. 3&4. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020881714534038>

1.2. Indo-Pacific: Scope and Significance

India's focus on the Asia-Pacific region has evolved from its "Look East Policy". Under the second phase of India's "Look East Policy", India's regional engagement with ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific countries developed rapidly. There has been a renewed emphasis on Asia-Pacific region in India's foreign policy. Under the "Act East Policy", India has intensified its engagement in the Asia Pacific region. It is related to its role of transformation in the region. India and the Asia-Pacific region have come to have a more strategic importance in the international society in part because of China's rise and the US rebalances to Asia. The Asia-Pacific relates to that part of Asia that lies in the Pacific Ocean. The Asia-Pacific has three major constituents; the Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. The region has become a popular zone of economic conception, experiencing rapid economic growth.

The term Indo-Pacific has entered the geo-strategic discourse for a more established term, 'Asia-Pacific'. The "Indo" in Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian Ocean and not India; it is impossible to think about the Indo-Pacific without considering the role of India. Its status as the littoral's largest economy, its long coastline, and its blue water naval capabilities made India the geopolitical keystone of the Indian Ocean. It implicitly acknowledged India's role in regional security and commercial dynamics.⁹ The term Indo-Pacific has been used in geopolitical circles for quite some time. From the Indian perspective, it could be looked upon as India's modern form of the "Look East Policy". India's rebranded "Act East Policy" has contributed to expanding its relations with the Southeast and East Asian countries and extended beyond the Malacca Strait. Lowy Institute analyst Rory Medcalf defines the region as an 'emerging Asian strategic system that encompasses both the Pacific and Indian Oceans defined in part by the geographically expanding interests and reach of China and India and the continued strategic role and presence of the

⁹Peter Varghese. "The Indo-Pacific and Its Strategic Challenges: An Australian Perspective". Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.(2019). p.2. Retrieved from <https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/search?limit=40&sort=DD&subject=22&page=2>

United States in both'.¹⁰ The Indo-Pacific is the new dimension and framework of the maritime convergence of India, China, and the United States as the key powers. In constructive terms, it represents the idea of the two oceanic regions of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans that comprise the 'institutional frameworks and inter-state operations that mesh the two oceans together'.¹¹ The region's economic growth and population escalation are driving increased demand for education, health services, food, agriculture, fisheries, natural resources, energy, financial services, advanced manufacturing, and green infrastructure.¹²

The Indo-Pacific region is a relatively new geopolitical space in the foreign policy terminology of India and the world. Indo-Pacific has been tossed around as a maritime strategy by colonialists and explorers in the past without ever using the terminology directly. In the contemporary era, the region gained dominance with the change in American leadership and rise of China. India has been ignorant in the past of the strategic importance of Indo-Pacific region and this has remained outside of India's strategic interests, security architecture, and foreign policy engagement.

The basis of coining the origins of this new Indo-Pacific terminology, though, has been primarily credited to the economic imperatives and necessities. However, the consequences of this convergence are immensely strategic, and the management of the implications correspondingly complex. This new integrated space cannot be treated as an ordinary geographic region but happens to be a super-region in which the sub-regions cannot be neglected. The region is a super flux of a number of countries/regions thereby necessitating requirements of bilateral/trilateral/multilateral initiatives pegged at various levels to ensure effective cooperation to address its security and other corresponding and complex issues.

¹⁰ Rory Medcalf. "Pivoting the Map: Australia's Indo-Pacific System". Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Series Paper 1. (November, 2012). p.3 Retrieved from <https://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au> Accessed on 9.1.2021

¹¹ Peter Katzenstein elucidates that regions are the social constructions of politics and are cognitive constructs rooted in political perception and practice. See Peter Katzenstein. (2002) "Regionalism and Asia", in Shaun Breslin (ed). New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy. London: Routledge. p.105

¹² Government of Canada. (2022). "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy". Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Retrieved from <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/indo-pacific-indo-pacifique/index.aspx?lang=eng>

The Indo-Pacific region has become a significant arena for interstate competition and cooperation in the 20th century, with key stakeholders like the United States, Japan, Australia, and India defining it as a combination of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and surrounding countries.¹³ The region, primarily viewed as an interconnected space between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, has a diverse geographic extent.¹⁴ The ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept aims to counter China’s growing strategic and economic influence in the region, but differing interpretations among stakeholders make a coherent vision elusive. While a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ is advocated by Japan, the US, Australia, and India, their stance on China’s role in the region remains ambiguous, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive understanding.¹⁵

India believes the Indo-Pacific region should be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and international law-based dispute settlement. It plans to work with other Indo-Pacific countries to prevent a single power from dominating the region or its waterways. For India, the evolving geopolitics in the Indo Pacific not only provide collaborative solutions to shared concerns but are also a theatre of opportunity to showcase itself as a leading power in the region that is willing to step up. India is now leading global conversations and initiatives from their inception.

India starts with exceptional benefits of history and geography, and strong relations with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and also with most of the external powers who are present in the region. As the largest economy in the region, with arguably the strongest navy, India could lead the way and set the agenda through multilateral forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Such agenda can cover various issues,

¹³ Wada Haruko. “The Indo-Pacific Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications,” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. (16 March, 2020).Singapore Working Paper 326. Retrieved from <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/the-indo-pacific-concept/>

¹⁴Udayan Das. “What is the Indo-Pacific?”.The Diplomat.(July 13, 2019). Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/what-is-the-indo-pacific/>

¹⁵Ambar Kumar Ghosh (et.al).“Security, Economy, and Ecology: Setting Priorities for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”. Observer Research Foundation.(2022). Special Report No. 184.Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358890967_Security_Economy_and_Ecology_Setting_Priorities_for_Cooperation_in_the_Indo-Pacific

including conventional maritime security, non-traditional security, geographic research, and environmental protection. PM Modi has highlighted India's role as a "net security provider" for the region at the UN Security Council, referring to India's anti-piracy patrolling, boosting maritime security capability, and enhancing maritime domain awareness with partner countries, and even dealing with natural disasters in the region. While India can derive direct benefits from environmental protection, anti-piracy activities, and naval exercises in the Indian Ocean, the country could also use these opportunities to burnish its credentials as a key contributor to the rules-based international order.

India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse with the ASEAN connecting the two great oceans. And India's "Act East Policy" is similarly geared towards deepening economic engagement with Southeast Asian countries and broader cooperation with the East Asia and the Pacific Island countries. They share strategic concern in the Indo-Pacific and wish to cooperatively manage a rule based multipolar regional order to prevent a single power from dominating the region or the waterways. The Indo-Pacific has become the centre of global attention, thus multiple visions and strategies for the region have come up. One of the key factors that have influenced the geopolitical churn in the region has been the rise and increasing assertiveness of China, about which there is a certain degree of concern in India and Southeast Asian countries. The expansive, non-transparent, and unsustainable nature of Beijing's extensive projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean have in particular caused apprehension among the regional countries. Upon this, the Indian Ocean has become a key strategic arena, surpassing the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as the world's busiest trade corridor.

In this regard, India and Australia are more open to international cooperation. India participates actively in the regional multilateral platforms, including the ASEAN, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which provide opportunities for cooperation with key regional partners on regional and global issues. India along with US, Japan and Australia is part of the Quad revived in 2017 that is seeking to work for peace and prosperity in the Indo-

Pacific. As India's economic growth has picked up momentum, India's relations with the major powers have improved. Thus, cooperation in multilateral forums is at the very top of political engagement between India and the major powers.

The Indo-Pacific region, with its strategic flux and multilateral ties, presents an opportunity for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to effectively anchor the region and promote peace, stability, and prosperity through cooperation. Hence, a deeper trilateral cooperation, and more robust strategic conversations between India and Australia could boost regional stability and benefit. On the other hand, the US is more open to the Indo-Pacific concerns, and the Biden administration sees Quad as the ultimate grounds to build US foreign policy on the Indo-Pacific. India's approaches to multilateralism oscillated between adapting to the new requirements and holding on to past positions.

The Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 provides the framework and a peek into Indian strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. At the core of the speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the role of partnership as the central pillar of India's policy. This was the watershed moment in India's attitude towards island states and approach in the region, a shift from an isolationist and reactive strategy to active engagement. Simultaneously, it was important for New Delhi to maintain that it was not part of any containment strategy, specifically directed at China, and led by the West, and that it valued strategic partnerships with the focus on the sovereignty of states as crucial to maintaining the sustainability of partnerships in the region. India acknowledged the existence of new security architecture in the region and that there was a shift in global power dynamics. It signalled that while it accepts a new and regional order, it will support one that is based on rules and respects the sovereignty of the states. India recognized the value of Indo-Pacific maritime security and diplomacy in pursuing its own global strategic ambitions.

Australia, Japan, and the U.S. became India's natural partners in its Indo-Pacific strategy because of shared interest and common value for democracy and respect for sovereignty. ASEAN became the central pillar of its maritime strategy and Indo-Pacific partnerships. India recognized the importance of partnerships in the Western Indian Ocean and Africa by forming new partnerships and multilateral agreements. It has stepped up its engagement with Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates with regard to making these partnerships the key areas of interest in maritime security.

The acceptance of the Indo-Pacific region as a single geographical construct in international relations closely aligns with the shift in global power dynamics and the emergence of a multipolar world. This has also coincided with the emergence of China as a global economic power and its aggressive and ambitious expansion policies. This has challenged the established status quo of the region and the image of India as the net security provider and guardian of the region.

The Indo-Pacific has structurally altered India's foreign policy approach and priorities. India's current initiatives and renewed interests in the region are in response to the growing threat from China and a challenge to its unilateral dominance in the region. As such, the Indo-Pacific region is now a theatre of opportunities for India to explore and implement its foreign policy initiatives. For instance, the United States and China through their geo-economic strategies-Indo-Pacific strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative are already turning the Indo-Pacific into a competing economic as well as strategic landscape. Moreover, other major actors are also engaging in the Indo-Pacific with connectivity initiatives such as SAGAR. Nonetheless, it is in the interest of the littoral and non-littoral states of the Indo-Pacific to prevent miscalculations, and misperceptions especially when it comes to nuclear powers, in order to ensure a free, open, and prosperous international environment.

The foremost challenge the nations of the Indo-Pacific region face today is the emergence of China as a dominant military power and its efforts to continue to control Taiwan, the South China Sea, and Senkaku Islands (Japan). There is also a threat that Beijing will continue to subvert the political systems of countries in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the countries that can play a significant role in this region besides the US are Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia.

The Indo-Pacific region has become a significant geostrategic area, with China's growing presence attracting multilateral and minilateral platforms for cooperation and dialogue. These include the Quadrilateral security dialogue, India-Australia-Japan, India-Indonesia-Australia trilaterals, and the newly formed AUKUS alliance, which includes Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.¹⁶ India, a rising regional power, actively participates in various platforms like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), and India-Pacific Islands Cooperation.¹⁷ India's growing naval cooperation with Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia can promote shared prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, despite strained geopolitical relations with China and the historically promising India-Russia relationship.¹⁸

¹⁶Harsh V. Pant and Rahul Kamath. "AUKUS and the Indo-Pacific: Stakeholders Weigh their Wins and Losses." Observer Research Foundation. (10 December, 2021). Special Report, No. 173. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/aukus-and-the-indo-pacific-stakeholders-weigh-their-wins-and-losses>

¹⁷"East Asia Summit. "India expresses concern over actions that erode trust in South China Sea. The Hindu. (14 November , 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/east-asia-summit-2020-india-expresses-concern-over-actions-that-erode-trust-in-south-china-sea/article33100778.ece>

¹⁸Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto. (2016). "A sea of opportunities: South East Asia's growing naval cooperation with India," in India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security, (eds) Anit Mukherjee & C. Raja Mohan. pp.192-214. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358890967_Security_Economy_and_Ecology_Setting_Priorities_for_Cooperation_in_the_Indo-Pacific

1.3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is necessary for deeper understanding of the problem being studied. A review of some of the relevant literature is presented here.

Prasad (2012) in his book, *“Foundation of India’s Foreign Policy: Imperial era-1882-1914”* states that the essential purpose of the foreign policy of a nation is to achieve the best possible position for itself by peaceful means or by means short of war. The author opens the book by discussing the initial emergence of the ideas of India’s foreign policy among the first Indian leaders under the colonial rule. It then highlights the different steps and links that form the future structure of India’s foreign policy today. Therefore, to understand India’s policy towards its neighbours the above mentioned works cannot be missed out. Even then, the empirical dimensions of bilateral relations are the area needing more focus.

Ghosh, Kothari, and Yamamoto (2013) in their book, *“US Policy towards China, India and Japan”* discuss the rise of China and India as economic powers and the centre of gravity of global politics. The rise of Asia is a profound geopolitical trend that is shaping our world today, though the United States is in a stronger position in Asia than at any other time. The book contains nine articles from various persons. It highlights the historical relation between the US and China that has not been consistent in the post-Cold War years. The US-Japan alliance significantly defines the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific. It has been suggested that the United States would promote an ‘alliance of Asian democracies’ in order to realize its broad foreign policy goals in Asia. The US-India relations in the post-cold war were freed from the constraints of bipolarity as both countries accelerated towards the pace of improving relations with each other.

Bhatia and Sakhuja (2014) in their book, *“Indo-Pacific Region: Political and Strategic Prospects”* analyse on strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific as a spatial concept in contemporary foreign policy. The book contains seventeen articles written by eminent persons. It highlights the rise of the term Indo-Pacific and its significance in Asian politics. It also describes the framework of the maritime junction of India, China, and the United States as the crucial powers in the world’s largest maritime

area. It also covered the perspectives of the Indo-Pacific from different countries such as Australia, Russia and Southeast Asian countries. It also examines prospects for economic integration in the region and the possibilities for expanding geopolitical and geo-economic significance of India. It also discusses the importance of sea power in global politics as sea power being an indicator of the relative standing amongst the comity of nations in geo-strategic salience. The book includes a wide range of ASEAN perspectives on the concept of Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. It also seeks to examine the capacity of ASEAN, an embattled regional organization whose institutional cohesion and political relevance have been established with the Indian Ocean.

Sawhney, Davies and Nishida (2015) in their book, *“The Quad Plus towards a Shared Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific”* highlights the importance of the Quad Plus in the global crisis and its role towards a shared vision for the Indo-Pacific. The book is divided into nine chapters. It gives a general outline of the Quad and its significance in the Indo-Pacific region. The rise of China and its implications for Asian security was the driving reason for proposing the Quad arrangements. It also highlights the value of the Quad Plus as a useful platform to exchange views on the Asian security issues. The multilateral cooperation in Asia expanded to build track two consultations among Japan, the US, and South Korea. It also focuses on the national strategy for the South China Sea. India is keeping a wary eye on China’s rapid global ascent. India is responding to the Chinese moves and is seeking to reinforce its own claims in the disputed border areas by augmenting forces and constructing road and rail links along the shared frontiers.

Michael (2018) in his book, *“India’s Foreign Policy and Regional Multilateralism”* highlights a constructivist exploration of how India engages with regional institutions—from SAARC and BIMSTEC to IORA—through the lens of ideas, norms, and historical influence. It introduces the concept of “Panchsheel multilateralism” and examines India’s preference for consensus-based, minimally institutionalized mechanisms.

Panda (2018) in his book, *“Scaling India-Japan Cooperation in Indo-Pacific and Beyond 2025: Corridors, Connectivity and Contours”* examines the competing power dynamics on Indo-Pacific infrastructure development that exist between China, India, and Japan, the three major Asian nations. It looks at major Asian nations conflicting views and practices regarding infrastructure development projects, as well as the similarities and differences that influence their beliefs and goals. It also examines, in brief, the strategic competition between China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI; formerly known as “One Belt, One Road” - OBOR) and Japan’s “Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure” (PQI) and initiatives such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). It also positions India’s geostrategic and geo-economic interests between these two competing powers and their massive infrastructure initiatives.

Muni and Mishra (2019) in their book, *“India’s Eastward Engagement from Antiquity to Act East Policy”* highlights the significance of Southeast Asia as India and Southeast Asia share a long historical trait which eventually connects them in terms of culture, religion, trade and administration. The author discusses the civilizational period of India where religion serves as an important connection between India and Southeast Asia and East Asia through the propagation of Hinduism and Buddhism. India could not pursue its eastward engagement with the vigour of Nehru’s first decade. It did not remain completely detached from its eastern neighbours, it tried to intervene in and react to most of the important developments in the Indo-Pacific region.

De (2020) in his book, *“Act East to Act Indo-Pacific”* discusses the long-standing historical, cultural, religious, and commercial relations between the countries of the East and the Southeast Asian countries. The book is divided into chapters under which the emerging institutions and their importance were discussed briefly by the author. It deals mainly with the South Asian regional connectivity particularly focusing on Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal as the ultimate building connectivity in the region for trade. It highlights the Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as unique regional cooperation in the region and as a resource of powerhouse. It also covers the intra-

regional trade, investment, and connectivity projects. The chapter also describes Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India's resilient economic relationship since the launch of its "Look East Policy". ASEAN-India is a dynamic region. India's economic growth is imperative for ASEAN. In this chapter the on-going projects under the "Act East Policy" such as the Trilateral Highway or the Kaladan project and its partnership with Japan in implementing mega corridors have been highlighted. Thus, India-Japan-ASEAN trilateral could help build railway connectivity from India's Northeast to ASEAN and beyond. Lastly, it focuses on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its aim to better connect China in both economic and strategic terms.

Medcalf (2020) in his book, *"Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future"* provides a wide-ranging discussion of what the Indo-Pacific amounts to as a 'region'. The author discusses the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' focusing on maritime Asia and the connections between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. China's rise in the Maritime Silk Road of the Belt and Road Initiative has influenced this focus. The book provides an introduction to the Indo-Pacific region and connects it to Indian Ocean studies, a field influenced by a 'world history' or 'global history' approach. Medcalf's book explores contemporary geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on major powers like China, India, and the US, as well as other actors like Japan, Australia, Indonesia, ASEAN, Korea, Russia, European countries, small island states, South Asian countries, Gulf states, and Islam. The book suggests intense confrontations and high-level coercion, with Medcalf advocating for an Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China's rise.

Pant (2021) in his book, *"Politics and Geopolitics Decoding India's Neighbourhood Challenge"* consists of nine chapters written by various scholars, policymakers, and experts. The book explores the present situation and outlines the roadmap of India's relationship with its neighbour. It contains an in-depth analysis of India's neighbours that helps in understanding changes in the geopolitics and geo-economic conditions within the region. The chapter revolves around the underlying issue of how India's neighbours have been able to use the rise of China to bolster their economic interests, which has led to an upsurge in destabilization in the region.

In order to promote their economic interests, the smaller countries seek assistance from China, while maintaining their security interests by remaining in alignment with India. Also, another major cause for concern is India's incapacity to compete with Chinese economic investment.

Panda and Rockwell (2022) in their book, *"Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific: The Changing Profile of International Relations"* examine the Quad Plus mechanism's potential to transform global economic and security cooperation between Quad partner countries and the global community. The book explores Quad Plus significance and implications for the post-COVID Indo-Pacific and Asian order, considering deteriorating ties with China among Quad partners Australia, India, Japan, and the US. The study explores Quad Plus's growth and synergy with national and multilateral Indo-Pacific initiatives, analysing its active approach of including countries like South Korea, Israel, Brazil, New Zealand, ASEAN and Vietnam in their successful pandemic crisis management.

Sudo and Yamahata (2023) in their book, *"ASEAN and Regional Actors in Indo-Pacific"* explore the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the region and the reorganization of relationships between ASEAN and non-ASEAN parties. It also focuses on the important discussion that encompasses the Indo-Pacific area, highlighting its relevance, problems, and on-going evolution. It also emphasizes the expanding power of regional players including the US, Thailand, Japan, and India, especially in light of the urgent need to collaborate or contain China's ascent. Through the lenses of ASEAN centrality and the Indo-Pacific strategy, the book explores a number of subjects, including geopolitical tension, economic strength, foreign policy, international relations, development, and security promotion in South and Southeast Asia.

Choudhury (2023) in her book, *"Japan and its Partners in the Indo-Pacific Engagements and Alignment"* studies the evolution of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy. Japan's concentration on the Indo-Pacific area is prompted by the growing strategic competition, the lessons learned from the epidemic, the growing Sino-US rivalry, and the US's loss of influence over the current global

strategic landscape. Choudhury analyses Japan's foreign policy by looking at its soft power policies, economic planning, maritime security concerns, and strategic agenda. Within the framework of Japan's bilateral and multilateral agreements, it examines Japan's relations with the US, Australia, India, Vietnam, Africa, South Korea, Indonesia, and the US.

Singh (et.al) (2023) in their book, *"New Great Game in the Indo-Pacific"* examine the emerging power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on India's interests within the geostrategic framework. It analyses the challenges India faces due to new alliances, counter-alliances, and great power equations formed after the Cold War. Key issues include China's strategic forays in the Indian Ocean, the balance of power, India's Act East opportunities, Russia's re-engagement, the South China Sea dispute, India's maritime strategy, and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Mate (2025) in his book, *"Quad Dynamics: India's Strategic Leap in the Indo-Pacific"* explores India's participation in the Quad is a strategic 'leap' that enhances its Indo-Pacific presence by fostering maritime security, counterbalancing China's growing influence, promoting a rules-based order, and facilitating economic and infrastructure collaboration. The QUAD allows India to pursue regional cooperation without formal military alliance constraints, aligning with its goals for strategic autonomy while addressing security and economic challenges in a dynamic Indo-Pacific region

Upadhyay (2014) in her article, *"The Indo-Pacific and the Indo-US Relations Geopolitics of Cooperation"* examines the Indo-Pacific as a new region. It also discusses how the term Indo-Pacific has been different from the earlier concept of the Asia-Pacific. It also highlights India's "Look East Policy" and its blue water ambitions are drawing towards the Western Pacific. The Indian Ocean too has become a centre of attention among the major powers in Asia. At this point, the US being a global power is also trying to cooperate with the Asian economies. The Trans-Pacific Partnership has become an important factor in the region that seeks to bring together economies across the region and further aims to bring barrier free

trade. Thus, promoting deeper cooperation has become the key features of the TPP. Thus, maritime cooperation has become one of the key features among global powers in the region. India is also working with the South Asian states for closer cooperation in terms of trade. It actively engaged with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

Scott (2018) in his article, *“The Indo-Pacific in US Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts”* briefly discusses the power transition and the balance of threat theory. The author highlights the emergence of the term Indo-Pacific in US in 2010 under Obama administration and soon became a key driver for US official statement. It examines the geo-economic shift and the rise of China in the region. It also covers the role of the US Indo-Pacific Command (IPCOM). The US has been the leading power in the region since 1945. The US is a member of various regional organizations from the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The US actively participated in the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting. It also covers China as a major power in Asia and its increasing role in the region. It also examines the significance of the Indo-Pacific among rising powers in Asia which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States. The free and open Indo-Pacific can be pursued in a sovereign manner. The quadrilateral arrangement between US, India, Australia and Japan attempts to promote stability and order in the region. It also analyses US foreign policy towards the major power in Asia therefore US has been co-opting its policy on one rising power and helping restrain another rising power.

Parameswaran (September, 2018) in his article, *“ASEAN’s Role in a U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy”* discusses how U.S. officials have done well to clearly articulate a vision for the Indo-Pacific in general and to recognize Southeast Asia’s role within it in particular. The Southeast Asian states centrality to U.S. Asia policy has often not been matched by the level of attention given to it. Under the Bush and Obama administrations, the US policymakers displayed a growing recognition of the importance of the region on its own merits. On the other hand, a major driver of the Trump administrations emphasis on Southeast Asian countries as the sub-region’s importance within the broader Indo-Pacific, a region of great importance to US

interests. Within the Indo-Pacific, the Southeast Asian states are home to two of the United States five treaty allies-Thailand and the Philippines as well as several other key strategic partners such as Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam. It also examines Southeast Asia as a key battleground in the Indo-Pacific where the freeness and openness of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy will be tested.

Mishra and Das (March, 2019) in their article, *“India’s understanding of the Quad & Indo-Pacific: Distinct narrative or a flawed one”* examine India’s interests in the Indo-Pacific region and its distinctive inclusiveness in the region. India has been comprehensively carved a space on the principle of freedom of navigation and respect for the laws of the sea. India has involved with the Quad countries since the revival of the group in 2017 and subsequently focuses on maintaining regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region. India’s stands for a positive vision of the Indo-Pacific that harps on ASEAN centrality. It emphasises wide ranging cooperation with the Southeast Asian countries. The Quad rejuvenated against the growing assertiveness of China and emphasises balancing Chinese aggression by maintaining a rules-based order. The Quad provides India the opportunity to use its geographic centrality in the region to connect with the strategic ends on either side of the peninsula to enhance its security vision in the Indo-Pacific region extending from the Gulf to the other side of the Strait of Malacca. India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific and its distinctive inclusiveness in the region is against the premise of minilateralism that the Quad presupposes.

Hanada (April, 2019) in his article, *“ASEAN’s Role in the Indo-Pacific: Rules-Based Order and Regional Integrity”* focuses on the significance of Southeast Asian countries as the centre of the Indo-Pacific. It lies at the intersection of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and no other region faces greater challenges of the rule of law and freedom of navigation. It explores ASEAN’s views on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific in politics, security, and economics. It also addresses the complexity of the grouping’s concern over its marginalization in regional security cooperation and its potential entrapment into a binary choice between the United States and China. It also describes the comparability of the FOIP and ASEAN’s basic principles and interests. ASEAN also extended its role as a broker for confidence building beyond

Southeast Asia. It has provided regular opportunities for critical dialogues with non-member states through the expansion of the signatories of its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India and even extended to the United States and Russia. It also highlights ASEAN's inclusive approach and the mutual distrust among regional powers induced a multi-layered regional security architecture consisting of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus. With regard to the security dimensions, ASEAN's centrality was severely challenged by China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea. China's military power already overwhelms that of the Southeast Asian states.

Tay and Wau (April, 2020) in their article, "*The Indo-Pacific Outlook: A new lens for ASEAN*" discuss the rising contention between great powers as well as a lens for ASEAN's future priorities. The US and its allies – Japan, Australia and India made multiple versions of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) took another step in the region, which caused apprehension among the major powers in the region. It also highlights that ASEAN's external partners have expressed their support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The AOIP targets openness, inclusivity, and ASEAN centrality. The AOIP also acts as a common reference point, allowing ASEAN member states to engage with other countries to ensure that rules and principles are upheld. It also has a functional influence on how ASEAN's agenda will develop and the potential to provide a new perspective on regional connectivity and infrastructure. Thus, the national-bilateral framework can push a country to bend towards the will of a greater power.

Suzuki (October, 2020) in his article, "*Japan's Leadership Role in a Multipolar Indo-Pacific*" highlights the geopolitical dynamics and underlying U.S-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on countries in the ASEAN. It then describes the U.S Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, which was inspired by Japan. The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are integral parts of the region from the perspective of improving military and economic connectivity including large regional sea lanes. As China promotes the Belt and Road Initiative its global infrastructure development strategy for the entire Eurasian continent and

beyond the South China Sea to the Indian and the Western Pacific Oceans is becoming increasingly important to construct a security strategy that encompasses not only the Pacific Ocean but also focuses on the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan to the East of Africa. On the other hand, Australia is also working to strengthen its relationship with ASEAN. It also concluded a free trade agreement with Indonesia and it also increased its engagement with ASEAN for other middle power countries to promote the multipolarity of the Indo-Pacific region.

Saha and Mishra (December, 2020) in their article, *“The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India”* discuss on the Indo-Pacific as an increasingly global centre. It highlights the recommendations for India to play a more active and concrete role in the region. The vast maritime zone has been a global centre of many players such as India, Japan, France, United States, Australia, Indonesia and South Africa. It covers India’s strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific which is meant to cooperate under one umbrella- the Indian Ocean Rim (IORA), the ASEAN region, and the Quadrilateral of the US, Japan, Australia and India. This region is the place where China has been trying to exert its power and seeking to expand its dominance in the region. Security cooperation among major powers is most needed in the region. To promote dialogue, freedom of navigation, common rules, and sustainable connectivity is one of the most important factors that are needed in the region. India’s visions of the Indo-Pacific primarily focus on the region extending towards the eastward with ASEAN as the main focus.

Thu (2020) in her article, *“Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific Concepts: From Resistance to Reticence to Reaction”* expresses ASEAN perspectives on the Indo-Pacific of some long-term trends. ASEAN leaders have embarked on the process of developing their own version of the Indo-Pacific which is said to converge with the Japanese FOIP strategy. ASEAN leaders formally adopted ‘The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’ (AOIP). The Outlook reaffirmed long-standing norms present in the diplomatic life of this regional institution, the value of dialogue and cooperation for the sake of development and prosperity.

Pant and Saha (January, 2021) in their article, *“India, China and the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi’s recalibration is underway”* highlight the increasing attention of the Indian and Pacific Oceans that is rapidly evolving in the geopolitical discourse. India maintained cordial relations with most of the countries in the region. It developed bilateral cooperation as multilateral platforms with its partners in the Indo-Pacific. ‘Act East Policy’ has become the cornerstone of India’s foreign policy. However, China’s growing and increasingly aggressive policies have evoked disconcerted feelings in India, forcing India to focus its energies and establish itself as a leading role in the Indo-Pacific. China’s expansive policies and assertive action in the Indo-Pacific region brought the global powers to embark on a more proactive role in the region.

Manhas (2022) in his article, *“China’s Rise in the Indo-Pacific: A Quad countries perspective”* emphasizes how China has emerged over the past 20 years as a superpower in the fields of technology, economics, and military. The Quad has actually risen mostly as a result of China’s development and its numerous regional manifestations. China’s increasing assertiveness as a major national power will make the Quad more and more relevant. The development of a “Sino-centric” Indo-Pacific region would not be without security setbacks, as current geopolitical realities make clear. To counteract growing hegemonic tendencies, it is necessary for new regional balance of power systems to emerge, like the Quad.

Gill (February, 2024) in his article, *“ASEAN’s evolving dilemma in the Indo-Pacific”* asserts how ASEAN’s influence on Indo-Pacific security shifts is being questioned due to its increasing vulnerability to power politics. The escalation of power struggles and rising degrees of economic interconnection are two factors contributing to the growth of the Indo-Pacific concept. The turbulent dynamics in the region have forced the medium and small powers to exert greater effort in their pursuit of increased political autonomy and agency. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the central player in this strategic predicament among the regional players.

Shoji (2024) in his article, *“Japan’s Security Cooperation with ASEAN: Pursuit of a Status as a “Relevant” Partner”* examined that Japan is focusing on strengthening security cooperation with ASEAN through a multi-layered approach, focusing on forging security ties alongside economic and political cooperation. The country is also addressing China’s growing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas through joint cooperation. Japan’s active participation in the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM-Plus) is evident in its consecutive EWG co-chairmanship. It further highlights that Japan is expanding its security cooperation with ASEAN, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to maintain relevance as a partner and to enhance its security. This multilateral and bilateral cooperation includes activities such as multilateral dialogues and capacity building assistance for maritime security.

Smith (2024) in her article, *“Japan, the Quad and the Indo-Pacific”* outlined Japan’s approach to Indo-Pacific diplomacy. Japan’s diplomatic outreach to the Quad nations is a fresh attempt at regional strategic networking. The Quad agenda is based on the growing desires of the Indo-Pacific countries themselves for increased investment and development, even though fears about unwelcome Chinese influence in some governments may play a major role. However, strengthening cooperation in maritime security continues to be a crucial part of the Quad relationship. Japan, Australia, and the US have started to combine their resources for development. Building and funding infrastructure are in high demand, and these Quad powers are in a good position to meet Asia’s expanding needs. Questions concerning how to reconcile worries about Chinese dominance with the notion that cooperating with China could benefit the area have been raised by China’s institution-building efforts.

Takahara (2024) in his article, *“How do smaller countries in the Indo-Pacific region proactively interact with China? An introduction”* describes the ways in which China’s ascent impacts the global order. It explains how a national leader ought to manage their ties with China in order to endure and thrive in an evolving global landscape. The article looks into the various variables that have influenced the development of bilateral relations between China and the smaller states in the Indo-Pacific area. Geopolitical concerns have reappeared, such as the growing strategic

rivalry between China and the United States, which few nations can avoid becoming embroiled in.

1.4. Research Gap

India's relation with the Southeast Asian and the Far East countries has its root in ancient times. India's commitment towards the Southeast and its engagement as a regional organization in the Indo-Pacific has been growing steadily. The Indo-Pacific which connects these Southeast Asian countries as well as the far east countries like Australia, Japan, and even the US has become the centre of global attention as more than half of the world GDP and population reside in this region. The emergence of multilateral institutions and initiatives provides peace and stability in the region. The literature review reveals extensive research and studies on Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, covering economic and security perspectives at the global level, indicating a significant volume of research in this area. There is however lack of significant literature and available readings in areas related to triangular relations between India-Japan-ASEAN, India-Australia-ASEAN and United States. Particularly an In-depth analysis of the role played by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific is lacking or inadequate in the existing literature or the literatures are either one-dimensional or local perspective. The study provides knowledge on the mentioned areas and aims to fill the existing gap in literature.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

India's "Look East Policy" began in the early 1990's when the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao initiated the significance of enhancing ties with the Southeast Asian countries. It was elevated to the "Act East Policy" in 2014 by the new Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the initial stage of the "Look East Policy", the Southeast Asian countries were the main focus of India's foreign policy.

India has found interest in regional multilateralism, and these multilateral initiatives have paved the way for India to develop new dimensions with the East Asian countries like Japan, China, South Korea, and Australia. Along with this, the bilateral relations with ASEAN have been progressing fast since India has

cooperated in economic, political and defence activities with the Southeast and East Asian countries. Though mistrust and suspicions have been the main factors between India and China, its relationship has been improved and grown by the late 2000.

India's shift in policy towards the East has also been expanded through Australia and India's possibility of engagement with East Asia has also been proved. Thus, political, economic, and cultural relations between India and Australia have developed at a higher pace through LEP and the growing realization on both sides to step up economic cooperation. From the stage of non-threatening, the two countries have reached the stage of realization of the potential. India's ties with Southeast and Northeast Asia started to become more comprehensive with a more pronounced security focus. India's rebranded "Act East Policy" focuses more on extending neighbourhood in the Pacific Region. India's eastward engagement got widened, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Western and the Southern Pacific. As China's own influence expanded in the region and its Belt and Road Initiative attempted to form a more Sino-centric world system, it required India to imagine a larger neighbourhood. The arrival of the Indo-Pacific strategic focus among the major powers in Asia, including the US may well be in redesigning a more comprehensive method to prevent any single power from dominating the region. In this regard, India-ASEAN maritime cooperation is one of the important aspects in the region. India-ASEAN is witnessing increasing commercial activities at sea relating to trade. Thus, greater maritime connectivity between India and her trade partners is imperative in the Indo-Pacific connectivity. Therefore, maritime connectivity through higher trade and investment and enhancing regional connectivity is imperative to form a greater market.

The region is a multipolar region that is contributing more than half of the world GDP and population. It has gained significant attention globally and is advancing rapidly. On the economic potential, in the Indo-Pacific region, a number of countries are investing their enormous financial, technological, and human capital to develop maritime economies. The main catalyst for the Indo-Pacific was the growing convergence between India and Japan on many regional and global issues. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 clearly

indicates the geographical swath of India's conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific to stretch from Africa to the Americas thereby covering the entire Indian and the Pacific Oceans in tandem with that of Japan.

Indo-Pacific being the centre of global attention has influenced the geopolitical churn in the region. On the other hand, multilateral cooperation is needed in the region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, comes against the backdrop of the Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and has taken a significant turn in the Indo-Pacific region. This clearly indicates the significance of India, the US, Japan and Australia in the region. They share common concern in terms of security in shaping broader Asia. The strategic flux of the Indo-Pacific combined with the overwhelming effects of bilateral or multilateral ties create an opportunity for the Quad to work together more effectively in anchoring the region and promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. Therefore, the focus of the study is on the role of the emerging institutions in the Indo-Pacific region and its initiatives taken by the emerging group, such as ASEAN and the QUAD, in maintaining regional stability and order in reshaping the Indo-Pacific cooperation against the backdrop of China's complex and its increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The proposed study analyses the general outline of India's relations with the littoral countries in the Indo-Pacific region, as this region had become an important maritime convergence in international trade and security development. In this context, the study traces the development and growth of India and ASEAN relations as a background for the further expansion of India's foreign policy towards the Far East, including Japan, Australia, and the U.S. vis-à-vis its 'Act East Policy'. The crux of the study depends on the growing development of ASEAN as a regional cooperation in Asia and its significant role played in the Indo-Pacific region against the rise of China's assertiveness in the region. Simultaneously, the significant role played by India in the Indo-Pacific region and its multilateral engagement with emerging regional cooperation have been discussed. It also studied the increasing

trilateral cooperation between India, United States, Japan, and Australia in the context of Indo-ASEAN relations. Thereby, the emerging role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Indo-Pacific region is analysed in the final chapter.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The economic and cultural relations between India and Southeast Asia are deep rooted. The oceans have held an important place between India and ASEAN since ancient times. India shares land boundaries and maritime boundaries with the Southeast countries. India's relation with ASEAN increased drastically since the launch of its "Look East Policy". Its key principles and objectives of the "Act East Policy" are to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. In this India elevated its strategic partnership with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, Singapore and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and maintained closer relations with all countries in the Indo-Pacific region. India is involved in regional cooperation initiative such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC). Hence, an India-ASEAN relation has taken on a new dimension in relation to the economies of the Indo-Pacific.

The coming together of India, Australia, Japan and the United States or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue holds an important perspective in the region. The region has become a centre of global attention and other Southeast Asian countries Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore have also become enmeshed with the maritime security mechanisms. The study analyses the need and possibilities in maintaining peace and stability, maritime security in the region. The study presents a valuable source of knowledge for a comprehensive examination of India's evolving engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. The study provides a broad analysis of India's relationship with ASEAN and the Far East countries, generating data for a detailed analysis of the evolving situation and potential interventions and assistance.

1.8. Objectives

1. To analyse the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in international politics.
2. To trace the historical root of India's relations with the Indo-Pacific countries.
3. To analyse the triangular relations of India, ASEAN and the Far-East countries.
4. To analyse the role of the emergent Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in the Indo-Pacific.

1.9. Research Questions

1. What is the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in international politics?
2. What is the historical root of India and the Indo-Pacific countries?
3. What are the triangular relations between India, ASEAN, and the Far East countries?
4. What is the role played by the emergent Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in the Indo-Pacific?

1.10. Methodology

The study is qualitative and quantitative in nature. It is descriptive, comparative, and analytical. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The study employs a quantitative research approach to analyse the trends in ASEAN exports to India, bilateral trade between India and Japan, and bilateral trade between Australia and India between 2003 and 2022. A longitudinal study design is used to examine trade patterns over the given period, utilizing secondary data from UN COMTRADE.

A. Primary data: Primary data was obtained from qualitative and quantitative sources which are as follows:

1. Official reports and records were obtained from electronic governmental channels, non-government and international channels.
2. Interview with people who had prior or current experiences in the areas pertaining to international affairs and area studies such as India's involvement with ASEAN countries, experts in the field of Indo-Pacific and East Asian affairs were conducted. On the basis of the parameters highlighted above, an interview with 18 people was conducted.

i. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Antara Ghoshal Singh. Research Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Commodore Abhay Kumar Singh. Research Fellow, Maritime Affairs Centre. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. New Delhi on 19th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Dr Pragya Pandey. Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (11:30 AM IST).

Dr Sanjeev, Kumar. Senior Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (12:30 PM IST).

Prof SD. Muni. Emeritus Professor. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 7th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

Shubhamitra, Das. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (12:00 PM IST).

Venkataraman Manickam. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan. Director General. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 7th November 2024(10:AM IST).

ii. TELEPHONE CALLS

Harsh V. Pant. Vice President. Studies and Foreign Policy. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 11th of November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Laldinkima Sailo. Senior Manager, International Affairs, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES) on 20th December, 2023 (3:00 PM IST).

Vivek Mishra. Deputy Director. Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 26th of October 2024 (6:00 PM IST).

Yoga Jyotsna. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

iii. EMAILS

Abhijit Singh. Visiting Fellow. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 23rd October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Debosmita Sarkar. Associate Fellow, Centre for New Economic Diplomacy. Observer Research Foundation. Kolkata on 28th October 2024. (2:00 PM IST).

Dr GVC. Naidu. Senior Fellow. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. New Delhi on 30th October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar. Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Mahadevan Shankar. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (6: 00 PM IST).

Rear Admiral K Raja Menon.(Retd). Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November (3:00 PM IST).

B. Secondary data: Secondary data was obtained from books, magazines, newspaper articles, journals, and websites related to the study.

C. Tools for Analysis: In order to analyse the consistent annual growth of trade over a period of time, and also to smooth out fluctuations to present a long-term trend, the study employs a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) which takes the following form:

$$CAGR = \left(\frac{V_f}{V_i} \right)^{1/n} - 1$$

Where, V_f = Final value at the end of the period

V_i = Initial value at the start of the period

n = Number of years in the period

1.11. CHAPTERIZATION

The study is divided into six chapters which are as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter consists of an introduction to India's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region in the context of India's growing relations with ASEAN. A brief historiographical study of the Indo-Pacific is undertaken. The review of relevant literature, the statement of the problem, the objectives and research questions, the scope and significance of the study, research gaps, methodology, and chapterization for the study are also included in this chapter.

Chapter II: The Indo-Pacific: A Geo-Strategic Analysis

This chapter contains the historical background of the concept of Indo-Pacific and its various connotations in the field of international relations. The study analyses the strategic significance of the region globally, considering the diverse views of major powers and examining emerging trends that have made it general and significant in 21st-century international politics.

Chapter III: Historical Relations of India and the Indo-Pacific Countries

This chapter explores India's foreign policy both during and post-Cold War era, its bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region and the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region.

Chapter IV: India and the Indo-Pacific: Triangular Relations of India, ASEAN and the Far-East

This chapter discusses India's triangular relations with the Far East countries vis-à-vis its intense engagement with ASEAN. It also studies the triangular relations between India-Japan, Australia, and the United States in the context of the ASEAN cooperative paradigm in the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter V: India and the Indo-Pacific: A Case Study of the Quad

This chapter examines the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as an emerging institution in the Indo-Pacific. It examined the Quad agenda and economic and political aspects that can facilitate successful cooperation between Indo-Pacific countries.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This chapter includes the obtained findings and the conclusions.

CHAPTER II

The Indo-Pacific: A Geo-Strategic Analysis

The focus of this chapter is to trace the significance of the Indo-Pacific region in international politics. The main objective is to provide the broad context of the Indo-Pacific that is now built into 21st century geopolitics. This chapter includes the significance of the region as a centre of economic gravity and its geopolitical analysis in the present context.

2.1. Introduction

The early 1990s was a turning point in international politics. The economic crisis in India in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, had created a need for strengthening its economic linkages with other countries. Some of the Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, were doing well in terms of economic growth. In this regard, India decided to open its economy initially to these countries. The end of the Cold War led to drastic changes in India's foreign policy. India opened its economy in 1991 and further expanded its economic cooperation in international affairs. Since then, ASEAN has become an important regional bloc for India in building its image at the international level.

India's 'Look East Policy' in 1992 improved relations with ASEAN countries and shaped Southeast Asian foreign policy, with Singapore playing a crucial role. India's economic reforms have led to high growth and potential global power status. However, India's foreign policy is currently at a crossroads in dealing with inherent security threats in its region. The end of the Cold War and India's lack of foreign reserves led to economic reforms and increased international engagement. The Asia-Pacific region, including India, China, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia, has become a dynamic global economic hub.

2.2. What is Indo-Pacific?

The Indo-Pacific term emerged due to geopolitical conflict over interests and influence, aiming to promote a more robust and securitized Asia, promoting political goals and good intentions. States are seeking to counter or punish China for its perceived negative influence on the international system due to feelings of insecurity. As a result of this, the Indo-Pacific region emerged as a response to China's challenge to the American unipolar order, focusing on states survival based on free and open trading routes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.¹⁹ The Indo-Pacific region, the fastest-growing globally, offers numerous opportunities in trade, research, manufacturing, and education, ensuring global economic stability and playing a pivotal role in the 21st century. The region's emergence is characterized by new tensions and systemic contradictions, driven by the rise of assertive authoritarianism, which poses a significant challenge. The region's geopolitical and security dynamics are influenced by a dual hierarchy, with the US dominating security and China dominating economics, causing friction and complex trade-offs among regional countries and global stakeholders.

Karl Haushofer, a geographer, used it to define the environmental conditions of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in terms of colonial distinctions between Western and Japanese countries.²⁰ Haushofer used a quasi-scientific 'Geopolitik' framework to describe the 'Indo-Pacific Region', a uniquely interconnected space with strong economic, transportation, hinterland, and maritime connections.²¹ Haushofer's vision aimed to challenge Western colonial powers regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific

¹⁹S.G,Brooks. and W.C. Wohlforth. 2016. "America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century". United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319192611_America_Abroad_The_United_States'_Global_Role_in_the_21st_Century_By_Stephen_G_Brooks_and_William_C_Wohlforth_New_York_Oxford_University_Press_2016_288p_2995

²⁰ H Li. "The "Indo-Pacific": intellectual origins and international visions in global contexts". *Manual Intellectual History* (September 2022). Volume19, Issue 3. pp. 807-833 Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000214>

²¹Raghavendra Mishra."India and 'Indo-Pacific': Involvement rather than Entanglement". *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*. (April, 2014). Vol.9 (2).pp. 108-114. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283731504_India_and_'Indo-Pacific'_Involvement_rather_than_Entanglement

region through an alliance system comprising Japan, China, Russia, and India.²² The ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept has evolved, creating new mental maps of how countries view the world. There are also political and security consequences between contesting definitions of this geostrategic area: ‘Asia-Pacific’ or ‘Indo-Pacific’. The former gained popularity in the second half of the 1980s in the era of globalization and the rapid expansion of free trade agreements at the regional level and beyond. The term ‘Asia-Pacific’ primarily refers to an economic construct, while ‘Indo-Pacific’ encompasses a more geopolitical and security context.²³ The primary goal of using the ‘Indo-Pacific’ term is to resist or contain China by including India within its definition.²⁴

The ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept highlights the significance of the Indian Ocean Region in Asia’s geopolitical and security framework, providing a more comprehensive understanding and analysis compared to the term ‘Asia-Pacific’. As D. Gnanagurunathan writes,

*“In the 1970s and 1980s, Japan and Australia used the term ‘Asia Pacific’ to connect with the US and East Asia, while India remained geographically and politically distant”.*²⁵

The term ‘Indo’ in Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian Ocean and not India, it is impossible to think about the Indo-Pacific without considering the role of India. Its status as the littoral’s largest economy, its lengthy coastline and its blue water naval capabilities made India the geopolitical keystone of the Indian Ocean. It implicitly stated India’s share in regional security and viable dynamics.²⁶ In this regard, Lowy Institute analyst Rory Metcalf defines the region as an evolving Asian strategic

²²N Kaushiki. “Revisiting Security Cooperation in the Geopolitical Construct of the Indo-Pacific”. The Diplomatist. (6 July, 2020). Retrieved from <https://diplomatist.com/category/regions/indo-pacific/>

²³Patrick Kollner, et al. (2022). “From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Diplomacy in a Contested Region.” Global Political Transitions. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 9-10. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356564103_From_Asia-Pacific_to_Indo-Pacific_Diplomacy_in_a_Contested_Region

²⁴*Ibid.*, Kollner.

²⁵ D. Gnanagurunathan. “India and the Idea of the ‘Indo-Pacific’”. East Asia Forum. (20 October, 2012). Retrieved from <https://eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/20/india-and-the-idea-of-the-indo-pacific/>

²⁶ Peter Varghese. (2019). “The Indo-Pacific and Its Strategic Challenges: An Australian Perspective”. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. p.2. Retrieved from https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/TRS4_19.pdf

system that encompasses both the Pacific and Indian Oceans defined in part by the geographically expanding interests and reach of China and India, and the continued strategic role and presence of the United States in both.²⁷ The Indo-Pacific concept is crucial in understanding China's power and assertiveness. It defines an Asia-centric strategic and economic system, replacing the late-twentieth-century Asia-Pacific, and serves as a foundation for incorporating and diluting Chinese power within a multipolar order promoting rules and equal sovereignty.²⁸ The region is a result of economic and strategic factors, driven by China and India's resurgence as trading powers. The region includes four major powers (China, India, Japan, and the United States), as well as many middle players like Australia, South Korea, Southeast Asian countries, and European stakeholders. The power narrative is not solely about China and India.

The term has gained currency amongst observers and practitioners of foreign policy. Shinzo Abe referred to the integration of the Indian and Pacific Seas in his 2007 "Confluence of the Two Seas" address to the Parliament of India, and his 2016 "Toward a Free and Open Indo-Pacific" speech in Kenya. Two years later, the United States responded by renaming its "Pacific Command" the "Indo-Pacific Command."²⁹ Prime Minister Abe discusses the historical connection between Japanese and Indian societies, highlighting the friendship of Swami Vivekananda and Tenshin Okakura, anti-colonial intellectuals who viewed their cultures as superior.³⁰ Abe quotes Vivekanda to emphasize the unifying factor of the Pacific Ocean, stating that different streams, with different sources, all merge their water in

²⁷ Rory Medcalf. "Pivoting the Map: Australia's Indo-Pacific System". Strategic & Defence Studies Centre. November 2022. Series Paper 1. p.3 Retrieved from <https://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au>

²⁸ These definitions are expanded elsewhere by the author, notably in Rory Medcalf, "Pivoting the Map: Australia's Indo-Pacific System", The Centre of Gravity Series 1 (Canberra: ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2012); Rory Medcalf, "The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?" The American Interest 9 no. 2 (2013): 58–66; and Rory Medcalf, "Mapping Our Indo-Pacific Future: Towards an Indo-Pacific Strategy for Australia", speech at the National Security College, Australian National University, (21 May, 2018). Retrieved from <https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/12677/mapping-our-indo-pacific-future-rory-medcalfs-public-lecture>

²⁹ The term has gained currency amongst observers and practitioners of foreign policy. Shinzo Abe referred to the integration of the Indian and Pacific Seas in his 2007 "Confluence of the Two Seas" address to the Parliament of India, and his 2016 "Toward a Free and Open Indo-Pacific" speech in Kenya. Two years later, the United States responded by renaming its "Pacific Command" the "Indo-Pacific United States responded by renaming its "Pacific Command" the "Indo-Pacific Command."

³⁰ D Gordan. (2014). Vivekanda and Okakura on What East offers West. East Asian Studies 19 (3): 48–51.

the sea.³¹ Abe emphasizes the shared destiny and identity of India and Japan by emphasizing the significance of a navigable and free ocean. The region has enjoyed a reputation and attractiveness for over ten years. It has increased importance as a geographic and strategic paradigm in the foreign and security policy treatise among the major powers such as Japan, the United States, Australia, India, France and some Southeast Asian states. Moreover, the region is presented as a geopolitical and geo-economic space that is vital to protecting the global interests of the United States. It spreads through the entire Indian Ocean from U.S. overseas regions such as Guam and American Samoa in the West Pacific to U.S. such as Hawaii and California and includes all nations bordering the two oceans.³²

The region has grown into an area of resilient contestation amongst the established and the growing powers. The natural by-product of global power and wealth shifting from the Atlantic zone eastward has been imagined. It subsequently provoked a concept around which a strategic response to China's rise can be organized in the region. Moreover, smaller states are one of the first to enjoy the primary geopolitical shifts and might play an inconsistent action in producing most crises among great powers. The flow of geopolitics and geo-economics from Europe to Asia and the notion of the Indo-Pacific have assumed a new rallying point for major stakeholders such as the US, China, Japan, India, Australia, and ASEAN. The emerging strategic articulations are important as the region has emerged as the hub of global trade of the world that passes through this region. The region, home to over 50% of the global population, is the hub of two-thirds of the world's container trade and is abundant in mineral and marine resources.

³¹Shinzo Abe. "Confluence of the Two Seas".Foreign Affairs of Japan.(2007). Retrieved from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

³²The Department of Defense."Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting a Networked Region".Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Washington DC. (1 June, 2019). Retrieved from <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019>.

The Pacific is expected to become the world's nerve centre, with India utilizing its power in the region and influencing economic and political activity in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has emerged as a strategic centre for geo-political competition in Asia, leveraging the sea realm for global trade and security convergence. The Indo-Pacific is a multipolar system where regional order is determined by the interests and choices of other powers, including the United States and China. It is also a maritime system where maritime interests often overshadow continental, land-based relations. The Indo-Pacific is a crucial maritime region, but its strategic importance lies in its connection to land. It complements Eurasia's continental conceptions of connectivity, as the sea outweighs land for power projection and transportation affordability. The Indo-Pacific is regional and global, serving as the main highway for commerce and energy between Asia, Africa, Europe Oceania, and the Americas.

The Indo-Pacific region, encompassing countries in the Indian and Pacific Ocean, is rapidly progressing globally and has gained extensive courtesy. The region, primarily centred on the oceans, is home to maritime nations like India, Singapore, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. The country is highly heterogeneous in terms of economic size and growth level, generating trade and investment opportunities with all necessary ingredients.³³ The region, comprising China and India, the world's two most populous nations, the world's second and third largest economies, India's leading democracy, and two major Muslim inhabitants, accounts for nearly half of inclusive monetary output.³⁴

The region is home to the world's fastest-rising economies and the fastest-growing military expenditure and capabilities. In this regard, the key driver of this shift has been China. Therefore, China has been working to push its borders far out into international waters by building artificial islands in the South China Sea.

³³Prabir De.(2020). "Act East to Act Indo Pacific India's Expanding Neighbourhood". New Delhi: KW Publishers. pp. 305- 307.

³⁴ The region now accounts for close to half of inclusive monetary output and more than half the world's population: it comprises the world's two most populous nations, China and India; the world's second and third largest economies, China and Japan; the world's leading democracy, India; and two of the world's major Muslim inhabitants, in India and Indonesia. Its sea lanes are the "world's most critical" including the Malacca Strait connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea.

Subsequently, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, which expropriated its main port from a Dubai-based corporation. It has transformed the region's strategic setting in five years. Thus, establishing a regional framework that emphasizes the rule of law is obligatory for overcoming challenges in the region. What China accomplished in the South China Sea has significantly more far-reaching and longer-term strategic implications?³⁵ As the US 'National Security Strategy Report' put it, 'A geopolitical competition within free and suppressive images of world order is captivating room in the Indo-Pacific region,' yet the major countries in the region all come to an agreement that an open, rules-based order is immensely desirable to Chinese hegemony. Strong multilateral cooperation with a free and open based order is necessary in the Indo-Pacific region so that no single power would dominate the region.

The Indo-Pacific region has a comprehensive regional economic cooperation mechanism, facilitated by multilateral cooperation mechanisms like APEC meetings, ASEAN summits, and regional leader's summits. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy has gradually implemented the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), which have become the main mechanisms for managing Asia-Pacific affairs and promoting cooperation in the region.

³⁵Brahma Chellaney, "A Challenging time for the Indo-Pacific". Livemint. (14 March, 2018). Retrieved from www.livemint.com

Figure 2.1: Map reflecting Indo-Pacific Region



Source: Journal of International Affairs.

2.3. Historical Profile of Indo-Pacific

Geography plays a crucial role in international system construction, with the twenty-first century's international politics characterized by the interplay of the Indo-Pacific maritime system, Eurasian landmass, and the Arctic Ocean.³⁶ The Indo-Pacific region has been a vital hub for centuries, encompassing ancient empires, trade networks, and diverse cultures, showcasing its rich history and cultural diversity. The post-Cold War era saw significant political and economic rebalancing, the weakening of the U.S.-led alliance system, and China's rise as a geo-economic superpower. The Indo-Pacific region became a hub for geopolitical contestation, cooperation, and international relations growth.³⁷

Asia, the birthplace of numerous civilizations and the centre of world political and economic affairs, and the neglected other side of the world during the Cold War period have increasingly assumed centre stage in global political discourse. The economic growth and continued development of Asia as a whole are contingent upon security and stability. Consequently, Asia's security is shaped primarily by American perceptions of what is required to protect their interests. Over the past decade, the liberal optimism of Asia-Pacific regional integration³⁸ has been replaced by a sense of Indo-Pacific realpolitik fear and anxiety over China's rise.³⁹ The term Indo-Pacific is increasingly being used to describe the growing geopolitical turbulence in Asia and its waters. The Asia-Pacific region, once a regional order framework in the late 20th century, is being replaced by the Indo-Pacific, a concept that has been reimagined and is reshaping the map of Asia.⁴⁰

³⁶S. Tharoor&S. Saran (2020). "The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative". New Delhi, India: Aleph Book Company. p.78.

³⁷Ministry of External Affairs, India."EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar at Munich Security Council Discussions".(14 February, 2020). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/0In57pOK1Pk>

³⁸J Ravenhill. (2001). "APEC and the Construction of Pacific Rim Regionalism". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p. 56.

³⁹Chengxin Pan."The "Indo-Pacific" and geopolitical anxieties about China's rise in the Asian regional order".Australian Journal of International Affairs.(2014). Vol. 68(4). pp. 453-469. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10357718.2014.884054>

⁴⁰Rory Medcalf. "Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific". In G. Rozman& J. ChinyongLiow (Eds.), International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India (Asian-Palgrave Macmillan Series, pp. 9-28).(2018). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3171-7_2

The concept of the Asia Pacific, first introduced by Japanese Foreign Minister Miki in 1963, saw an exponential increase in literature published over the next four decades.⁴¹ The Pacific region includes Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and smaller Pacific Island States, with smaller populations compared to Indonesia and the Philippines. The United States is included due to Hawaii, the Philippines, and its Pacific territories, as well as its historical relations with East and Southeast Asian countries. Pike also discusses the expansion of the United States westwards in the mid-19th century, including Hawaii and the Philippines, and its projection into Asia.⁴² The region has also been referred to as the Eastern Pacific Rim, North, and South American Pacific countries, and the entire former Soviet Union. The definition identifies events occurring in regions beyond the Pacific Rim, such as Quebec or former Soviet Baltic and Central Asian States, as Asia Pacific issues.⁴³ UNESCAP identifies five major sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific, including East and North Asia, North and Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and South and South West Asia and the Pacific.⁴⁴ The Asia Pacific region encompasses a significant portion of the global land mass and population, with its boundaries largely determined by scholar's imaginations and ground-based facts, similar to the Pacific Rim.⁴⁵

The term Asia Pacific, commonly used in media and academia, is often vague and has evolved with global political economy changes over time.⁴⁶ The post-war literature primarily focused on war-ridden regions, including Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam, where Americans and their allies were involved.⁴⁷ Over the past decade, the Asia Pacific has evolved, becoming more flexible and resembling an

⁴¹J. S. Eades. "New Dimensions in Asia Pacific Studies: A Summary." *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*. (2001). Vol. 7. pp. 116–146. Retrieved from <https://en.apu.ac.jp/iaaps/uploads/fckeditor/apw/vol1/1-1-1-Intro.pdf>

⁴²F Pike. (2010). "Empires at War". London: I.B. Tauris. p.45.

⁴³ Grahame Thompson. (1998). *Economic Dynamism in the Asia Pacific*. London: Routledge. p. 65.

⁴⁴Unescap, 2020.

⁴⁵Dirlik, A. (1998). *What's in a Rim?* Lanham MD: Rowman& Littlefield.

⁴⁶B. Job.(2009). "Grappling with an Elusive Concept." in *Security Politics in the Asia-Pacific* ed. W. Tow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.pp. 31–48

⁴⁷J.Eades, R. Goodman and Y. Hada, eds. (2005).*The 'Big Bang' in Japanese Higher Education*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press. p.70.

earthbound amoeba with a constant motion around its nucleus.⁴⁸ And the post-war literature focused on war-ridden regions like Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam, with economic development in Asia seen as more challenging.⁴⁹ The ECO Asia Project has defined the Asia-Pacific region as a huge area enlarging northward to Mongolia, southward to New Zealand, eastward to the island states of Oceania, and westward to Pakistan. The region combines vast variants of climate and topography from tropical to arctic and from the Himalayas to coral reefs.⁵⁰ Over the last 20 years, the Asia-Pacific surroundings have persisted to maintain excessive financial boom prices exceeding the ones in different areas and have therefore emerged as the ‘development hub’ of the comprehensive economy. The countries and territories of the region are at various levels of economic growth, ranging from highly industrialized countries to low-income countries.⁵¹ The Indo-Pacific concept is an applied replication and alteration of the Asia-Pacific that is a captivating place as a consequence of the inclusion of the Indian Ocean countries in the path of the economic development taking place in East Asia.⁵²

As a geopolitical notion, the Indo-Pacific mainly refers to a wider Asia-Pacific which includes East Asia and the West Pacific. Apart from the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific also includes the Indian Ocean and India (usually also Bangladesh, Maldives and other Indian Ocean countries). As a geostrategic model, the Indo-Pacific stands for a strategic system ‘taking the West Pacific and the Indian Ocean as a strategy arc’. According to traditional thinking, the Pacific and Indian Oceans have been viewed as self-contained worlds but new developments have begun to compel a more integrated view. The anachronistic Asia-Pacific concept, which previously referred to a group of nation-states including Northeast and Southeast Asia, has

⁴⁸Kijoshi Kojima.(2000). “The ‘Flying Geese’ Model of Asian Economic Development: Origin, Theoretical Extensions, and Regional Policy Implications.” *Journal of Asian Economics*. Vol. 11(4) pp. 305-401. Retrieved from <https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/asieco/v11y2000i4p375-401.html>

⁴⁹G Myrdal.(1968). “Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations”. London: Penguin. p.54.

⁵⁰Ministry of Environment, Japan.“A Long-term Perspective on Environment and Development in the Asia-Pacific Region”. Retrieved from <https://www.env.go.jp>

⁵¹*Ibid.*, Japan.

⁵²Igor Denisov and Oleg Paramonov.“Russia, China and the concept of Indo-Pacific.”*Journal of Eurasian Studies*.(15 March, 2021). Retrieved from

evolved to focus on Indo-Pacific Asia in a post-Cold War era, shifting the focus of international affairs from Europe and America towards the region.⁵³

The Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean states have been among the most dynamic in the global world as well as centres of economic growth for many years. These areas continue to revel in geopolitical and geostrategic shifts. On the other hand, the economic growth of the region opens up prospects of cooperation to recover poverty and raise the living standards of millions of people.⁵⁴ The region has varied implications from a country's global strategic outlook to a wide-ranging area stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The Asia-Pacific framework, a precursor to the Indo-Pacific, appears out-dated and insufficient in addressing contemporary political trends and economic engagements, as it lacks the necessary scope and adaptability to emerging geopolitical requirements.⁵⁵ Since the 1990s, Asia-Pacific has gained prominence, but it lacks a clear geographical boundary acceptable to all international community members.

The term 'Asia Pacific' has come to be replaced by the concept of the Indo-Pacific. In a globalized and cyber-related world, the financial and economic apparatus is the Indo-Pacific. The region is the new feature and outline of the maritime convergence of India, China, and the United States as the vital powers. In constructive terms, it denotes the sign of the two oceanic regions of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans that comprise the 'established structures and inter-state procedures that mesh the two oceans together'.⁵⁶ Indo-Pacific commons is an alternative outline that defines the maritime commons that are made on the bonds of the countries. It encompasses the regions of Northeast, Southeast, and Southern Asia and the waterways of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, Straits of Malacca, the

⁵³World Economic Forum.“The Indo-Pacific Push” [video]. (4 October, 2019). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/wB8xjQVrye0>

⁵⁴ASEAN.“ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.(23 June, 2019). Retrieved from www.asean.org

⁵⁵TCA Raghavan. “The changing seas: antecedents of the Indo-Pacific”. The Telegraph. (17 July, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/the-changing-seas-antecedents-of-the-indo-pacific/cid/1694598>

⁵⁶ Peter Katzenstein elucidates that regions are the social constructions of politics and are cognitive constructs rooted in political perception and practice. See Peter Katzenstein.(2002) “Regionalism and Asia”, in Shaun Breslin (ed). New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy. London: Routledge. p. 105

South China Sea, the Taiwan Straits, and the Pacific expanse. It includes thousands of miles of coastline in the Indo-Pacific region. The framework has two triangles of nations that are concentric and have critical interests in terms of security and stability, tranquil transit and trade among them. Also, an inner triangle of countries in Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines) encloses the South China Sea and an outer triangle of India, South Korea, Japan, and Australia has critical interests in the stability of the region.⁵⁷

2.3.1. Ancient period

The Indo-Pacific region, home to ancient civilizations like India, China, and Southeast Asia, has shaped its cultural and economic landscape through the maritime Silk Road, which connected the Indian subcontinent with Southeast Asia and China, facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and technologies. Thus, genetic research reveals human migrations from Africa to the Indian subcontinent and beyond over 75,000 years ago, when Southeast Asia was still Sunda.⁵⁸ The earliest Papuan settlements in New Guinea date back 50-60 years, and genetic evidence of probable Indic populations in Australia emerged 5000 years ago.⁵⁹ And the Pacific Islands were inhabited by migrants from Southeast Asia, starting in Melanesia and expanding into eastern Micronesia and Polynesia. The Polynesians long-range seagoing voyages, beginning 3,000-4,000 years ago, lasted until 1,000 years ago when the Maori settled New Zealand. The longest voyages involved Hawaii's settlement.⁶⁰ European arrival in the 16th century transformed Pacific Islands cultures,

⁵⁷ Michael Auslin. "Security in the Indo-Pacific Commons Towards a Regional Strategy". Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute. (December, 2010). Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/284038885/IMJ-International-Multi-disciplinary-Journal>

⁵⁸ The continent of Sunda was gradually submerged by the rise in sea levels from about 19000 to 5000 years ago when only the higher lands that form Indonesia and peninsular Malaysia remained above the water. Bellwood, P (2007) Prehistory of the Indo-Malayan Archipelago, Rosen (Ed). ANU Press.

⁵⁹ Some genomic findings led ethno-geneticists to posit the arrival of settlers from India in Australia around 5 or 4 000 years before the present. A more definitive and recent study has concluded that Aborigines were in Australia at least 50 000 years ago but that females of 'Indian origin' (closely related to certain populations in Tamil South India) may have mingled with the earlier settlers a few thousand years back. Many mysteries remain about the routes and dates of migrations across the Indo-Pacific. Retrieved from <https://www.vijayvaani.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?aid=5599>

⁶⁰ Joseph R. Morgan and John E Bardach. "Study and exploration in Pacific Ocean". Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pacific-Ocean/Study-and-exploration>

populations, and economies through contact with explorers and permanent visitors from the late 18th century.

Ocean-farers from south-eastern China and Taiwan migrated to the Pacific Islands, where they are collectively known as Austronesians. Thor Heyerdahl's 1947 Kon Tiki expedition demonstrated a crisscrossing maritime migration between Asia and South America. The descendants of these diverse oceanic nomads are called Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians. Theories about Japan's Jomon people visiting Peru and influencing local culture are not proven but have not been convincingly exposed. Chinese annals suggest mariners from the Middle Kingdom landed on the western coast of North and Middle America during the European Middle Ages.⁶¹

Whereas Chinese annals mention Xu Fu's 219 BCE expeditions to the eastern seas, older Pacific contacts can be ruled out. Other oceanic voyages include crossing the Chamorros from the Philippines to the Marianas, transferring the Merinas from Borneo to Madagascar, Indian seamen travelling to Africa, China, Japan, and Korea, and traders from Oman, Yemen, and Gulf states to Indonesia, China, and the Philippines. Chinese junks have been sailing into the Indian Ocean for centuries, even before Admiral Zheng He's 15th-century expeditions. Some scholars suspect that Indian sailors ventured east beyond their identified ports in the Malayan archipelago and the Philippines, landing on the South Pacific Islands, tracing their passage and cultural influence.⁶²

Architectural and sculptural similarities between ancient Hindu-Buddhist monuments in Java and Bali and landmarks in Mayan, Olmec, and Pre-Incan Meso-America are concerning. While some theories suggest religious and cultural contacts with ancient India, historians and archaeologists now reject these theories.⁶³ However, evidence of Indian navigators extensive reach is found in the arrival of

⁶¹Archeologists inferred this maritime connection from similarities between the styles of pottery found in Japan from the Jomon era which lasted from about 14000 until about 300 BCE and those of the Valdivia coastal culture of Peru (3000-2700 BCE).

⁶²Come Carpentier de Gourdon. (January 5, 2021). 'Indo-Pacific: Through the lens of history'. India Foundation

⁶³Miles Poindexter. "The Ayar-Incas". Vol I and Asiatic Origins Vol II. New York

Buddhist missionaries on China's coast⁶⁴ and the rule of Rajas and Sultans in lands under the flags of Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines.⁶⁵

2.3.2. Colonial period

Colonial-era history suggests that the Indian subcontinent was a self-contained world with diverse religions, philosophies, and social systems until the arrival of the British. European colonial powers like the British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese established colonies in the Indo-Pacific region, exploiting resources, establishing trade routes, and imposing political and cultural influence on indigenous populations. The Indo-Pacific region, once under European rule, fell to US control in the 20th century. The US and its allies conducted nuclear tests in their possessions, making it a virtual lake. Only Russia could challenge the western condominium in the North West Pacific, while India has some control over the Indian Ocean, backed by US bases in Diego Garcia and the Persian Gulf.

Between 1842 and the end of the century, most of Oceania was under European and US control, except for Tonga. Britain replicated a crown colony government in the islands, with a governor representing the king, an executive council, and a legislative council. Governor Arthur Gordon established a system of native administration, incorporating chiefs. British New Guinea, renamed Papua, followed the British pattern, with Australian governor Sir Hubert Murray introducing native development measures. During the 19th and 20th centuries, settlers, labourers, and European administrators arrived, forming significant populations on the islands, although European governments have largely withdrawn. Historical documents in the Pacific Island region are primarily European-influenced, potentially resulting in inaccurate depictions of different cultures. While social anthropology and oral traditions can correct this, they serve contemporary purposes and do not accurately

⁶⁴ Regarding ancient trade routes across Indian Ocean and South China Sea Retrieved from <https://www.booksfact.com/history/ancient-maritime-route-india-egypt-africa-china-350->

⁶⁵ The western direction in many of the local Malayan languages is still known as Barat and so it is in Madagascar's national medium because of the South Asian roots of many of the malagasy peoples (even though India lies to the east of Africa).

represent the past. The region's diverse cultures and experiences make generalizations challenging.

World War I altered Oceania's colonial rule pattern, with Australian forces occupying German New Guinea, New Zealand taking Samoa, and Japan taking the Carolines, Marshalls, Palau, and Marianas. After the war, these territories were retained under the League of Nations. The international standard for Oceanian interests was established through government control and law, with colonial governments focusing on opening the interior for settlement. The Great Depression of the 1930s impacted the Pacific Islands, leading to improvements in medical care and a balance between European and indigenous interests. However, World War II interrupted welfare policies and island administration, with Japan establishing control over most of Oceania. The Trusteeship Council of the United Nations replaced mandates, and colonial powers accepted independence or self-government as their aim. The Pacific Islanders horizons widened, prompting colonial powers to promote development and provide resources. Despite UN support for self-determination after 1945, the Pacific has not been completely decolonized due to strategic and economic reasons. France granted citizenship in 1946, but nationalist leaders were jailed. The US consolidated military positions in the North Pacific territories after WWII. Most Pacific Islands achieved independence by 1980, adding to the ranks of microstates.

China has increased its sea power in the past two decades, thus challenging Euro-American hegemony. The US-led 'Five Eyes' strategy aims to maintain supremacy by sharing some of its influence with Japan, Australia, India, and Indonesia. To maintain regional maritime dominance, China works with France, Russia, and other Quad associates, as well as ASEAN members Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. India's strategy to protect its influence in the Indian Ocean involves partnerships with littoral nations like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Oman, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) connect seven offshore hubs, aiming to

gradually eclipse Euro-American supremacy in the Asian seas.⁶⁶ This shift from the western to the eastern hemisphere is expected to continue. French navigator Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville classified islanders as Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian, interpreting differences as evidence of distinct ethnic waves from Southeast Asia. Recent research suggests that the differences in the islands originated from the intermixture of non-Austronesian-language speakers from Southeast Asia and a later wave of Austronesian speakers.

2.3.3. Cold War period

The Indo-Pacific represents India's organic evolution, rediscovering its historical role for over 1,700 years. During the Cold War, the Indo-Pacific region became a strategic battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to the establishment of military alliances like SEATO and CENTO to counter Soviet influence, escalating regional conflicts like Vietnam and Korea. Post-World War II, many Indo-Pacific countries, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, gained independence from colonial rule and began nation-building efforts. The Indo-Pacific concept has been a more accurate representation of Asia's geography than the late 20th century division of East and South Asia. In colonial times, European maps showed that Asia encompassed an arc from the Indian Ocean rim through Southeast Asia to China, Korea, and Japan.

By the 19th century, this breadth was reflected in British imperial practice as the Indian strategist Raja Mohan had shown the trade arteries and military sinews of that Indian empire reached China and Australia via Singapore and went west to Africa and Suez. The ideas about the Indo-Pacific retained a quiet currency even as the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions became estranged in the late 1940s. The Australian defence documents still assessed the nation's security outlook in terms of risks and challenges across the Indo-Pacific basin well into the 1960s. The Asia-Pacific was encouraged by Japan and Australia to reflect the significance of the United States strategic and economic role across the water. With the establishment of

⁶⁶One fourth of the territory of the United States was gradually taken from Spain and another fourth was acquired from France through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Asia-Pacific notion seemed to stay here. Subsequently, with the engagement of China in Asian multilateralism in the 1990s, the game was distinctly Asia-Pacific along with the ASEAN and its security dialogue. In this regard, the Asia-Pacific enterprise was becoming clear.

The ASEAN Regional Forum came to include India and other South Asian players. Thus, the process of Asian institution building took a decisive turn. So, the contemporary Indo-Pacific era began with a few notices at the time. The Indo-Pacific is back in name as well as in substance. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization, established in the 1990s, aimed to unite Pacific nations for integration, but its size and economic development make it insufficient for world leaders to meet and discuss common issues bi- or multilaterally. ASEAN, a regional bloc, is the most advanced in discussions of economic integration and free trade, with Singapore as a developing major financial hub.⁶⁷

The region's politics primarily revolve around the effectiveness of government policies in promoting economic growth. Japan's democratic political system, based on a post-World War II constitution, is characterized by a powerful bureaucracy that remains independent of government, despite frequent cabinet changes, directing the economy. Scholars argue that the tiger economies of East Asia, including South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, were organized similarly, but later noted differences.⁶⁸ China's authoritarian developmental state is seen as an alternative to or competitor for the liberal democratic capitalist model of economic development.⁶⁹ The state controls the political system, allowing the economy to thrive under central government parameters, appealing to Asian leaders like Lee Kuan Yew, who advocate for discipline over democracy.⁷⁰

⁶⁷CM Dent.(2006). "New Free Trade Agreements in the Asia-Pacific: Towards Lattice Regionalism?" New York: Palgrave-Macmillan. p. 19

⁶⁸M Wolf. "Why China's Exchange Rate Policy Concerns Us". Financial Times.(8 December, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/afac7ada-e448-11de-bed0-00144feab49a.html>.

⁶⁹R Kagan.2008. The Return of History and the End of Dreams. New York: Atlantic

⁷⁰*Opcit.*, Pike

In the twenty-first century, China began to pursue a significant position in Oceania. As its economy grew to become the world's second largest (behind the United States), China used trade and vast investment to make economic and political inroads around the world, and it aimed to establish similar influence in Oceania. In diplomatic terms, the Chinese action was noteworthy because a number of Pacific Island governments continued to officially recognize Taiwan. China also appeared to be looking to broaden the reach of its newly expanded navy and enter the market for securing naval sites. China's actions prompted Australia and New Zealand to take a renewed interest in their Pacific neighbours.

2.4. The Indo-Pacific: Strategic Significance

The Indo-Pacific region, now focusing on the Pacific Indian Ocean, is becoming a significant global politics theatre, characterized as a super region where sub-regions equally matter. China's 'Maritime Silk Road' and Japan's 'confluence of the two seas' are major players in the region's geostrategic equations, indicating increasing importance.⁷¹ During the Cold War, the region experienced limited bilateral security arrangements; traditional multilateral and cooperative security arrangements were unable to establish roots. India's shift from the 'Look East to Act East Policy', the United States rebalance to Asia's strategy, and Australia's policy establishment further define the Indo-Pacific region. Also, the small regional and sub-regional players are exploring and responding to common 'Indo-Pacific' ideas, despite potential variations in strategic and demographic equations. The region's influence is primarily attributed to its significant energy demands, economic interests, international law, lawful commerce, and freedom of navigation. The region has become one of the busiest and most insecure sea lanes globally due to the surge in regional trade and commerce in recent decades.⁷²

⁷¹ Rory Medcalf. "The Indo-Pacific: Whats in a Name". The American Interest. (10 October, 2013). Retrieved from <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/10/10/the-indo-pacific-whats-in-a-name/>

⁷² Pradeep Kaushiva and Abhijit Singh (eds). 2014. "GeoPolitics of the Indo-Pacific". New Delhi: Knowledge World. p. 30.

The Asia-Pacific region, characterized by historical rivalries and animosities, continues to exhibit significant differences and contradictions, affecting regional security even after the end of the Cold War. The regional security in the area has expanded even further with the shift in strategic culture and geopolitical rhetoric from 'Asia-Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific'. The Asia-Pacific region's cooperation primarily stems from sub-regional groups like ASEAN, SAARC, ECO, and the Pacific Islands Forum. The region has emerged as a strategic landscape, with nation states prioritizing regional security as a structural concept. It has emerged as a distinct geostrategic arena for Asia, with different countries defining a new security order differently. The region's evolving geo-economic and geostrategic discourse has led to the dominance of regionalism and regional security arrangements as a dominant feature. The end of the Cold War marked the end of the bipolar world, and regionalism gained prominence among strategic thinkers and policy makers. Currently, there is no definite regional security arrangement, but multiple regional arrangements at different scales shape the region's strategic architecture.

Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific is probably the new core of geopolitical and economic power since it is a multipolar region that is significant both strategically and economically. The economic and military balance of the region has been significantly altered in recent decades by China's presence as a prominent power, and this trend is expected to continue. The region aims to ensure safe maritime space through inclusive, multilateral, ASEAN-centrality, and rules-based international order and promoting regional stability. In this regard, India's vision for the Indo-Pacific focuses on securing supply chains, reducing dependence on single countries, and promoting prosperity for all stakeholders, aiming for sustainable recovery from the crisis.

Figure 2.2: China's Port Development and Shipping Competition in East Asia



Source: Nazery Khalid, Asia Pacific Journal

Seven out of the largest 10 container ports in the world are in China. Some of the major ASEAN ports, such as Singapore Port, Port Klang, and Tanjung Pelepas in Malaysia; Laem Chabang, Ho Chi Minh City Port, Vietnam and Thailand are within 35 ranks globally. Several Indo-Pacific participating countries are currently building new port facilities and some are either under construction or in the planning stage. India has taken on an ambitious port development project called Sagarmala. This project offers important lessons on developing new ports that are environmentally friendly (green ports), financing models, and multimodal transportation.

The post-Cold War Pacific region is rapidly evolving in strategic importance, with the US and its allies fearing China may challenge their dominance in the sea lanes, a perception that has been previously under US influence. Whereas, the USA assures China's rivals that it will provide security in times of need. Major stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region include the USA, China, Australia, ASEAN

countries, Japan, and South Korea. The region is crucial for energy, maritime, and trade security, with ASEAN and APEC playing significant roles. But China and Japan are in maritime disputes over several islands in the East China Sea, including Diaoyu and Senkaku's islands. Littoral states like Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and South Korea are modernizing their navies to counter China's ambitions to surpass the USA in GDP and naval power. China is also concerned about India's role as a US proxy in the Indo-Pacific region and sees the arc from the Bay of Bengal to East China Sea as a hotspot of rivalry. Due to this, the Indo-Pacific region holds an essential place in global politics due to its multifaceted relevance encompassing economic, geopolitical, strategic, and environmental aspects.

The Indo-Pacific countries are exhibiting new equations and deeper regional and extra-regional convergence. The Indo-Pacific's strategic landscape is shaped by regional mechanisms such as the revival of the Quad, ADMM Plus, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC, BIMSTEC, IORA, SCO, and ANZUS. A bilateral economic relationship between significant stakeholders emerged as a result of the region's rapid economic expansion. Since they are viewed as drivers of stability and change, different countries are working together on biannual meetings and cooperative military drills to improve maritime security, especially in light of China's rise.

India, liberated from Cold War constraints, is a significant player in Asia and the IOR, capable of challenging Beijing. Despite not becoming a true global power, India's concern for China's intentions has kept Washington and Delhi close, particularly on security. Relations between the US and India improved under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, with India aiming to provide the balance of power in the Asian region.⁷³ The U.S.-India relations grew during Obama's Asia-Pacific pivot, with the 'Indo-Pacific' discourse circulating in 2009-2010. The Obama administration recognized India and the IOR's growing importance in containing

⁷³ Mohan Malik. "Balancing Act: The China-India-US Triangle". *World Affairs*. Vol. 179. No. 1. (2016). pp. 46–57. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/e26369487>

China.⁷⁴ The Obama administration adopted a ‘rebalance’ strategy, emphasizing the roles of its allies and aiming for a constructive relationship with China, influenced by geo-economic and geopolitical factors.⁷⁵ The rebalance strategy envisioned a liberal relationship with China, which was challenged. India, a democratic country, was seen as a partner in securing a liberal order, but this partnership was unclear. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi initially leaned towards the U.S., and the U.S. aimed to elevate India’s strategic profile in the Asia Pacific and the IOR.⁷⁶ US-India relations grew under Modi and Obama, with the US encouraging India to take on regional responsibilities. Obama’s foreign policy emphasized India’s role in achieving strong bilateral security and defence cooperation and a US market, ensuring regional order, and protecting Asian allies.

India and the U.S. have seen significant growth in defence cooperation over the past decade, with India conducting more military exercises and becoming a major arms market.⁷⁷ From Obama’s departure to Trump’s presidency, China’s Xi Jinping became the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, militarizing the South China Sea Island and ending its ‘hide and bide’ period, demonstrating its growing global influence.⁷⁸ The Trump administration has adopted a more aggressive Asia-Pacific strategy, keeping India close but expecting India to take on regional responsibilities. They endorse the Indo-Pacific Strategy and pledge to defend Asia from Chinese ambitions. The 2017 National Security Strategy describes a geopolitical competition between free and repressive world order visions, with China using economic

⁷⁴ Hillary R. Clinton. “America’s Engagement in the Asia-Pacific”. US Department of State, last modified (28 October, 2010). Retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/10/150141.htm>,

⁷⁵ The White House. “FACT SHEET: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific”. (16 November, 2015) Retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/fact-sheet-advancing-rebalance-asia-and-pacific>.

⁷⁶ Sobia Hanif and Muhammad Khan. “US Security Strategy for Asia Pacific and India’s Role.” *Strategic Studies* 38, No. 1 (Spring 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/e48502045>

⁷⁷ Shivaji Kumar. “How Obama Revived US-Indian Relations.” *The National Interest*. (6 June, 2016). Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-obama-revived-us-indian-relations-16473>.

⁷⁸ Tom Phillips. “Xi Jinping Becomes Most Powerful Leader Since Mao with China’s Change to Constitution.” *The Guardian*. (27 October, 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/xi-jinping-mao-thought-on-socialism-china-constitution>.

inducements and military threats.⁷⁹ To ensure a favourable balance of power in the region for a free and open Indo-Pacific, the strategy emphasized a strong commitment and close cooperation with allies and partners, particularly the quadrilateral alliance (QUAD) of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia.

The Asia-Pacific region has been a top priority for the United States administrations, providing security, geo-political predictability, and market access to Asian countries, while also gaining strategic partners.⁸⁰ The balance of power in the region has shifted, though, as China's economic might now surpasses that of the United States. Beijing uses influence to strengthen regional and global ties, causing Asian countries to focus on China as their primary export market.⁸¹ The Western-oriented world order may come to an end with China's economic and military rise, according to some, and be replaced by an East-dominated one.⁸² In this context, the Indo-Pacific region is emerging as a new geopolitical arena due to Asia's economic growth and increased state interaction. This forecast is a return to its glorious past, despite Asia's vast landmass divided into five sub-regions.

The Indo-Pacific concept is a variation of an old idea.⁸³ Robert D. Kaplan predicts that the United States will prioritize the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions as substantial in the late 2010s and beyond.⁸⁴ The Indian Ocean, once a hub of geo-economic power struggle, is emerging as a new centre for geo-strategic and geopolitical competition, with China increasing military budgets and India and Japan

⁷⁹ Donald J. Trump. "National Security Strategy of the United States of America". Washington DC: Executive Office of The President.(December, 2017). Retrieved from <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Gilford J. Ikenberry. "American Hegemony and East Asian Order". Australian Journal of International Affairs. Vol. 58. No. 3. (2004) 353–367.

⁸⁰ Jeffery A. Bader. "China's Role in East.: Now and the Future". Brookings Institute. (6 September, 2005). Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/chinas-role-in-east-asia-now-and-the-future/>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Bader.

⁸² Gilford J Ikenberry. "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive". Foreign Affairs Vol. 87, No. 1 (2008). pp 23–37. Retrieved from <https://internationalrelations-publishing.org/articles/3-6>

⁸³ A Santa-Cruz. "Constitutional Structures, Sovereignty, and the Emergence of Norms: The Case of International Election Monitoring". International Organization. (July, 2005). Vol.59(3). No.663-693. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830505023X>

⁸⁴ Abhinav Goyal and Niharika. "India and China in the Indian Ocean Region," in Bimal N. Patel, Aruna Kumar Malik, and William Nunes, Indian Ocean and Maritime Security: Competition, Cooperation and Threat. London: Taylor & Francis.(2016). p. 53

purchasing modern weaponry. The Indo-Pacific region, renowned for its strategic importance and economic potential, is increasingly significant due to geopolitical dynamics, economic interdependence, and security concerns. Major Powers rely on sea routes for energy and commercial goods transportation. The Western Pacific and Indian Ocean regions are forming a single strategic system, with China, India, and Japan relying on trade, investment, and energy links with the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. As China heavily relies on oil imports, with 80% coming from the Indo-Pacific, the maritime domain has historically influenced regional dynamics and security architecture. So, India's role is crucial for countries like Australia, Japan, and the US, representing the 21st-century strategic reality. India has been central to the re-imagining of the Indo-Pacific discourse, particularly focusing on China as a significant security challenge. On the other hand, the United States and India's current alliances are perceived to be more aligned due to their engagement across multiple sectors. A brief review of India's assigned work in the region lends credence to this viewpoint.

Whereas the United States vision emphasizes economic prosperity by endorsing free and fair trade, good governance by empowering citizens and civil societies, anti-corruption, transparency, democracy, protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights, addressing transnational crime and environmental challenges, protecting the maritime domain, and responding to emerging threats to ensure security in the region. The USA proposes to invest about US\$ 113 million along with Australia and Japan to establish an investment fund to deliver infrastructure projects that would bring potential contributions to the Indo-Pacific region. The three countries have also intended to mobilize and support the deployment of private sector investment capital to deliver major new infrastructure projects, enhance digital connectivity and energy infrastructure, and achieve common development goals in the Indo-Pacific.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Refer Clayton Utz (2018).

The end of the Cold War resulted in the Pacific becoming a strategic backwater. New Zealand, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and French Polynesia have successfully navigated strategic trends in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸⁶ New Zealand, a self-identified Pacific state with strong cultural ties, has witnessed a changing scenario in the South Pacific region, despite being a small global power. The increasing relevance in the Pacific Islands has led to heightened interest on the part of the US and European Union in dealing with New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand are economically integrated, and the two have had numerous occasions both at the regional level.

The international politics are shifting towards Asia, particularly the Indo-Pacific, due to the economic growth of countries like India, China, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Upon this instance, the European Union too is feeling the need to play a bigger role in Asia, to bear greater responsibility, and to have an impact on the affairs in the region. Europe has mostly engaged in the Indo-Pacific region in the trading realm; the security of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC's) and the safe passage of commercial vessels is an important concern for the European Union. For the EU, like the other major power China is also one of the primary reasons to devise its Indo-Pacific strategy while many see China as a potential market.⁸⁷ As mentioned, the EU is set to play a closer relationship and stronger presence in the Pacific region. The European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said

*“If Europe is to become a more active global player, it also needs to focus on the next generation of partnerships”*⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Dr Patrick Kollner. “Beyond ‘Indo-Pacific’: Understanding Small Pacific Powers on their own terms”. Giga Focus Asia. No 5. (November, 2021). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356144246_Beyond_Indo-Pacific_Understanding_Small_Pacific_Powers_on_Their_Own_Terms GIGA Focus Asia 52021

⁸⁷ Premesha Saha. “What does an EU Indo-Pacific Strategy entail?”. Observer Research Foundation. (17 September, 2021). Retrieved www.orfonline.

⁸⁸ European Commission. “State of the Union Address by President Von der Leyen”. 2021. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_21_4701

The Indo-Pacific region has become the centre of the global economic hub. Also, the EU is seeking new digital partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, which would enhance cooperation and interoperability on emerging technologies. It further aims to finalise EU trade negotiations and resume trade negotiations. Its primary objective and engagement with the Indo-Pacific partners is likely to build more resilient and sustainable global value chains.⁸⁹ Within the EU, Germany has followed France. It has shared a policy guideline to participate with nation states of the Indo-Pacific. Unlike France, Germany does not have any renowned region or territorial claim in the Indo-Pacific region. However, both these European nations have mutual interests in determining and shoring up the Indo-Pacific region that is introduced upon a consensually derived rules-based order that upholds unity and mutual benefits between all countries through international support. Germany has presented significant attention in forming partnerships for economic cooperation and to boost its assistance in combating marine pollution, justifying and adjusting to climate change, cumulative connectivity, spreading culture, extensive-based education, advancing science, and technology, and broadening the opportunities resident in cyberspace.⁹⁰

The region comprehends the emergent complexities of a multipolar balance such as the US, China, India, Japan, and Australia. The United States is the leading and resident power in the region and China is the evolving economic and strategic power. Thus, the power changes between the two and the other major powers in the region are seen as responses to China's rise in power. Also, the US rebalancing in the region and the creation of the Asian Pivot are seen as a strategic reaction to China's military assertiveness and the spiralling of crises and conflicts in the East and the South China Seas⁹¹. The region's rapidly growing economies and significant trading partners have attracted global investments, fostering increased competition and collaboration across various sectors. America's strategic vision in the Indo-Pacific

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, Saha.

⁹⁰Federal Foreign Office. (2020) . Retrieved from <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en>

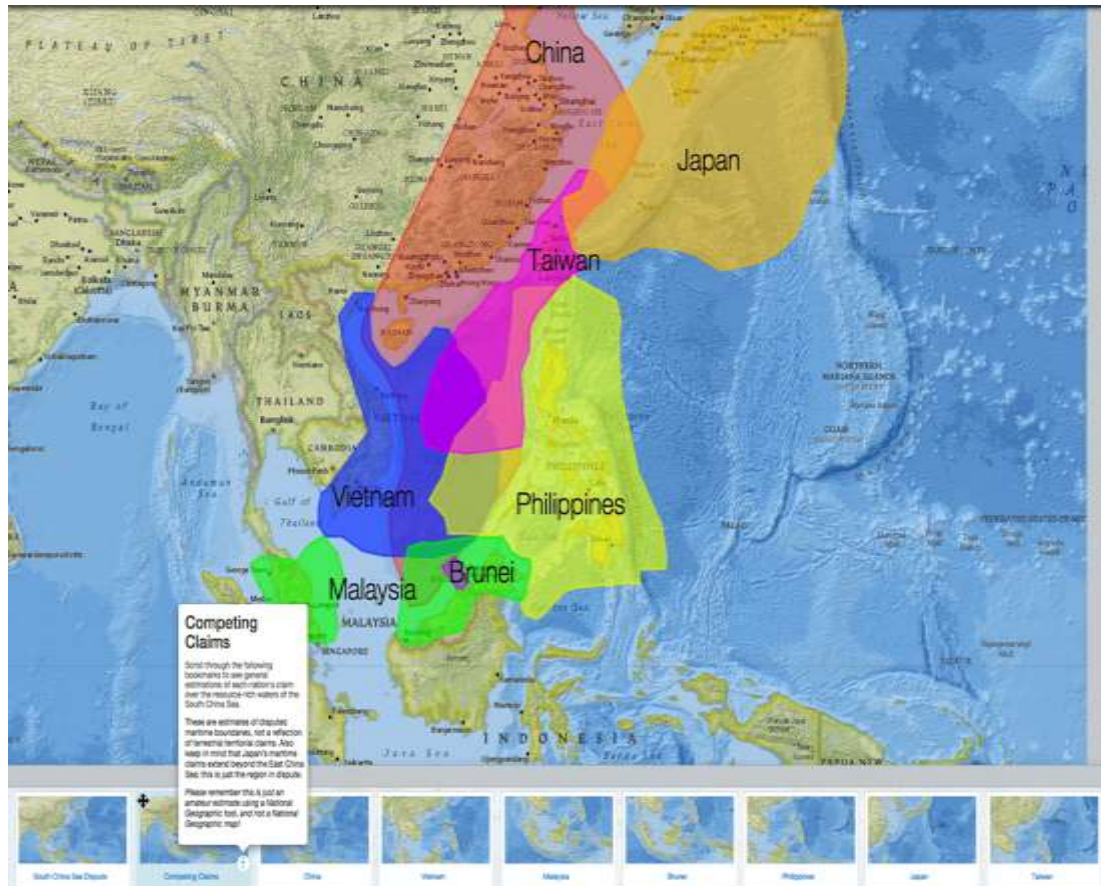
⁹¹ John Bradford. "The Maritime Strategy of the United States: Implications for Indo-Pacific Sealandes". *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Vol.33 No.2 (August 2011). pp. 186-208. Retrieved from <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2012/04/the-maritime-strategy-of-the-united-states-implications-for-indo-pacific-sea-lanes/>

aims to counter China's rise and geopolitical expansion; with India playing a crucial role as it has become more assertive towards regional players. Washington's strategic vision is expected to be expanded by other state actors like Japan and Australia, with the military component playing a crucial role. The Indo-Pacific strategic concept includes an infrastructural and trade dimension to monitor China's growth at both commercial and infrastructural levels.

In the present situation, the entire Indo-Pacific rim of island states and its larger countries, like Vietnam and South Korea, India, and the Chinese giants, have become economically interrelated. The region characterizes the world's biggest trade marketplaces. The rise of China has extended its economic power in the region in the Indian Ocean. In this instance, Beijing is also strengthening its defence capabilities through military exercises in areas such as the Taiwan Strait, the Spratly Islands, the Paracel Islands, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.⁹² The South China Sea is central to the notion of the Indo-Pacific, as it involves the geopolitical interests of all players. It is a strategic waterway for Japan, the US, and India, which depend on the sea lanes that run through it for their trade. Indeed, China's behaviour in this area has brought the various players together in support of the Indo-Pacific notion. China's growing economic, political, and military power has caused concern among countries like Japan, prompting them to invite other major external powers to engage in the Asia-Pacific region. The US aims to regain dominance by building new partnerships with India, Japan, and Australia to counter China's decline in power. China's dominance and refusal to share space with its neighbours have significantly impacted the peace and stability of the maritime region and Asia as a whole.

⁹²Firstpost. "With AUKUS alliance, focus on strategic importance of Indo-Pacific region gains". (16 September, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.firstpost.com>

Figure 2.3: South China Sea Dispute



Source: National Geographic

On the other hand, the relationship between China and Australia is deteriorating due to China's aggression in the South China Sea, growing Pacific Island Nations engagements, and security concerns. Australia's Defence Strategic Review 2023 suggests pursuing national interests through coercive power and investing in the defence force to improve border security, law enforcement, and intelligence. Countries in the region, despite seeking China's support for economic engagement, are wary of China's claims over the South China Sea, leading to an increase in military capabilities.

The Indo-Pacific world is now fully engaged in geopolitical thinking and policy development. This acceptance is shaping the distribution of power and the pattern of relationships in this region. Over the last decades or so, the realization has emerged that the interests of Asia's rapidly developing economies intersect in the maritime domain. From a maritime perspective, Asia Pacific Rim is inseparable from its Indian Ocean rim. The maritime domain connects sources of energy in West Asia as well as Asian Russia with their primary markets in India, China, Japan, and South Korea. It connects Asia's and Africa's primary resource providers with the consuming countries. It connects Asia's industrial producers, including China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India, with their markets in Asia and Africa. Thus, the flow of trade is predominantly over the seas; trade over land entails higher costs and is subject to greater uncertainties. The Indo-Pacific is the world's busiest trade corridor, taking up more than 60% of global oil flows with over a third of all bulk traffic and half of all container traffic. Considering the present situation, there is a pressing need for regional infrastructure to deal with security matters in the region. So, the Indo-Pacific region is of great interest globally. The region is an area where a lot of things are happening and will continue to happen.

The Pacific Islands Forum, once overlooked by Western governments, has gained significant importance due to competition among the world's largest governments for influence, resources, and power in the region of tropical islands and atoll nations. China is courting leaders of small Pacific nations with bilateral sweeteners such as infrastructure money, export markets, and security assistance, prompting Australia and New Zealand to advocate for the forum's Pacific-style consensus diplomacy.

China's geopolitical importance in the Indo-Pacific region, bordering 14 Asian countries, raises concerns about potential subversion or military containment efforts. China's unresolved territorial claims in Asia, including the Spratly and Paracel islands, disputed maritime boundary with Japan, and disputed land border with India, are a concern for the country, and its strategists are sensitive to potential U.S. alliances. The region has been witnessing a significant arms race over the past decade, with Southeast Asian nations increasing their defence budgets by 1/3 over

the past 20 years. The Indo-Pacific arms race persists, with concerns over nuclear proliferation. Global military expenditure increased to \$2 trillion in 2021, reaching record levels despite the economic recovery and COVID-19 pandemic impacts.⁹³ China's withdrawal from the First Island Chain is seen as a strategic move to avoid repeating the Century of Humiliation dynamics. China's 'peaceful rise' rhetoric is being contested by many states, leading to great power competition involving NATO and EU members. This polarization has led to a significant military build-up, with the Indo-Pacific's share of global military spending increasing from 20% in 2009 to 28% in 2019.⁹⁴

China's increasing assertiveness is attributed to its commitment to safeguarding its core interests and territorial integrity, with domestic stability being a top priority for its leaders. Since Tiananmen Square, China's leadership has consistently responded to unrest with repression, censorship, and limited accommodation focusing on core security interests like Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.⁹⁵ The Indo-Pacific region faces internal and external pressures, with the pandemic accelerating global trends and China exploiting economic relations for geostrategic interests.⁹⁶ Chinese actions in contested territories and maritime zones have heightened tensions and increased the risk of conflict or miscalculation.⁹⁷ China, a major economic and military power, has developed its regional order concepts and launched strategic plans like the Belt and Road Initiative, Maritime Silk Road, and Polar Silk Road⁹⁸ which are driven by Beijing's strategy, rooted in Chinese strategic culture, emphasize deception, surprise, and an indirect approach,

⁹³SIPRI. "World Military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time". (5 April, 2022). Retrieved from <https://sipri.org/media/pressrelease/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>

⁹⁴European Commission. "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". (21 February, 2022).

⁹⁵NATO Headquarters. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49284.htm

⁹⁶U.S. Department of Defense. "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report". Retrieved from <https://media.defense.gov/2019/jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/departement-of-defense-indo-pacific-strategy-report-2019.pdf>

⁹⁷European Commission. "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". Retrieved from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-indo-pacific-strategy-topic_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20prioritizes%20upholding%20a,shared%20prosperity%20in%20the%20region.

⁹⁸Reuters. "China Pledges to Build Polar Silk Road over 2021-2025." (March 4, 2021). <https://www.reuters.com/article/uschina-parliament-polar/china-pledges-to-build-polar-silk-road-over-2021-2025-idUSKBN2AX09F>.

aiming to shape regional and global order according to its interests.⁹⁹ China's political and diplomatic framework in the Indo-Pacific region involves looser relationships with major neighbours and regular participation in multilateral forums like ASEAN + 3.

China invests in soft power to attract preferred outcomes through cultural exchanges and BRI aid projects, while economic success strengthens its soft power. However, territorial conflicts and tight CCP control limit China's appeal and civil society benefits.¹⁰⁰ China's soft power moves in Africa are achieving political, economic, and security objectives. Since 2013, China has provided 27% of sub-Saharan Africa's weapons, surpassing the United States by 11%. Over the past decade, China has increased its weapons sales by 55%, leading 53 African states to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan.¹⁰¹ China aims to become Asia's most powerful nation, imposing acceptable behaviour on neighbouring countries by increasing its power gap. As a more powerful China, it may push the US out of Asia and refuse American military presence in its neighbourhood. China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific region will create an increasingly complex and contested region. Despite China's direct competition with the US, the US will maintain its global lead in military and soft power as the world's wealthiest, technology-leading, and financial market leader.

China considers the Indo-Pacific region crucial for economic, security, and political interests, particularly during the Cold War and post-Cold War, as it actively engages with neighbouring countries. The region's economic role includes supplying raw materials, technology, and management expertise for China's production networks and a market for finished Chinese products. China's growing role in world trade and future growth since the 1990s made it an attractive market, enabling negotiation of regional and bilateral FTAs.

⁹⁹ Andrew. F.Krepinevich. "Preserving the Balance: A. U.S. Eurasia Defense Strategy."Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.(2017).Retrieved from <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/regional-perspectives-2022-07-v2-2.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Joseph S.Nye. "A Strategy for China."In "Domestic and International Disorder, A Strategic Response."The Aspen Institute.(2020). p 42.

¹⁰¹ Pieter,Wezemen. (et al). "Trends in International Arms Transfers.2017".SIPRI.(2018).Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/about/bios/pieter-d-wezeman>

Thus, diverse perceptions of the Indo-Pacific region have gained prominence among global powers, and they worked together to form a cooperative framework for peace and rules-based order in the region. It is relevant here to discuss the significance of the Indo-Pacific with respect to the littoral states of its adjoining areas.

2.4.1. United States

As the Indo-Pacific's strategic importance rises, nations all over the world are developing innovative rules to strengthen their place in the region. There is a comprehensive record of global initiatives in the Indo-Pacific while countless ventures in the region are in reaction to China's economic, governmental, and services development. The United States has been an extensive portion of the Indo-Pacific nation-state. Its strong emphasis in the region has formed prospects for revived and restructured economic and deliberate organizations in the region. Thus, 'Asia Pacific' has moulded the appearance of community security between the United States and East Asia. The region has been a prime account discerning in US policy since the 1980s. It has been the prominent authority in the Pacific since 1945 and the central power in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰²

The Obama administration has also used the term Indo-Pacific in rebalancing its policy to Asia. However, there was no strong and logical geographical clarification of the Indo-Pacific under the administration. The geographical attention of the 'Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor' initiatives was presented at the US-India Strategic Dialogue in June 2013.¹⁰³ The Obama administration is enhancing its regional leadership by forming stronger partnerships with Asia-Pacific countries, focusing on increasing American political strength, strategic power, and economic

¹⁰² David Scott. "The Indo-Pacific in US Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts". *Rising Powers Quarterly*. Vol3, Issue 2. (August, 2018). pp19-43. Retrieved from <https://rpquarterly.kureselcalismalar.com/quarterly/the-indo-pacific-in-us-strategy-responding-to-power-shifts/>

¹⁰³ US Department of State, Remarks by John Kerry, Secretary of State on 'The US-India Strategic Partnership'. (23 June, 2013). Retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/06/211013.htm>.

engagement to strengthen its regional influence.¹⁰⁴ In 2011, President Obama emphasized the US's commitment to reshaping the Asia-Pacific region for its future and coordinating regional countries to formulate rules and norms, stating a long-standing role in the region.¹⁰⁵ The Obama administration implemented the 'Rebalancing to Asia' strategy to boost the US's economic and strategic presence in Asia, including joint military exercises with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and ASEAN countries, and providing legal and diplomatic support for China's regional competitors. The U.S. incorporated East Asia into a broader 'Pacific community' after the Asian financial crisis, aiming to expand its economy and structure the region according to its own economic and political logic.

US President Donald Trump used the term 'Indo-Pacific' during his visit to Asia in 2017, highlighting the growing geopolitical turbulence in Asia and its waters. Trump's focus on the Indo-Pacific highlights India's rise, China's assertiveness, and Washington's strategic partnership with New Delhi. The Indo-Pacific concept, promoted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, dates back to 2005 when India was invited to the East Asia Summit by ASEAN. The durability of this dynamic depends on New Delhi's willingness to work with the US and its allies in the region. Despite its economic and security influence in Asia, the United States faced challenges since the 2008 financial crisis, including China's regional power and pan-Asianist sentiments. Thus, Washington expanded governance to the Indo-Pacific, linking East Asia and the Indian Ocean, to promote like-minded democracies to prevent hegemony.

However, as soon as Donald Trump entered his political office, he criticized Obama's 'Rebalancing to Asia' strategy, including the TPP, during the presidential campaign and announced the US withdrawal from the TPP shortly after taking office. The White House issued its first National Security Strategy Report under Trump, welcoming India's rise as a global power and strengthening its strategic and defence

¹⁰⁴Vivek Mishra. "Indo-US Security Cooperation: Implications for the Indian Ocean" .Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2017), pp. 1–9. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09733159.2017.1315890>

¹⁰⁵The White House. "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament." (17 November, 2011). Retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/>

partnership, and aiming to enhance quadrilateral cooperation.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the United States Indo-Pacific policy has established new guidelines for its future actions throughout the wide Indo-Pacific area. During this time, the mismanagement of U.S.-China relations raises Indo-Pacific region anxieties, with U.S. allies like the Philippines favouring Beijing for economic benefits. China's BRI efforts and the South China Sea issue cooling increase appeal. China is enhancing cooperation and interconnectivity in the Asia-Pacific region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the CPEC pilot project in Pakistan. Despite growing regional collaboration and European interest, the US faces geopolitical challenges from China, particularly by engaging India in the conflict.

The U.S. Department of Defence released its first Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2019, identifying China as a revisionist power aiming to erode rules-based order in the region. The U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific lists preventing China from establishing new illiberal spheres of influence as a top national security challenge. The U.S.'s focus on China in the Indo-Pacific region reveals ignorance of its complexity and historical dynamics. U.S. strategies fail to account for strong social, economic, political, and civilizational ties and fail to acknowledge the region's transformation since the end of the Cold War.

In recent years, the regions have been advocated for by various countries at a number of points in time. The political leaders held talks several times concerning the Indo-Pacific region. As such deviations in the geopolitical circumstances, the Asia-Pacific region is the ultimate foundation encouraging the establishment of the Indo-Pacific strategy. The US undertakings in the Asia-Pacific are about building or filling a non-violent, constant, and well-off region. The US's main position and the growing shift of geopolitical and economic severity to the Indo-Pacific are to reform its associations and partnerships to respond to China's enlargement. The view that reflected China as the main peer of the realm competitor perplexing the US was pinned down in the Quadrennial Defence Review-

¹⁰⁶The White House. "National Security Strategy of the United States" .Washington, D.C.: White House.(December, 2017). p. 46. Retrieved from <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/n/needs-opportunities-modern-history-us-navy/us-navy-role-national-strategy/usnavy-role-nat-strategy-bibliography.html>

Of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S military advantages absent US counter strategy”¹⁰⁷

Apart from China, US welcomes India’s increasing insertion in the Indo-Pacific area as the rise of India as a substantial global power provides an increasingly balancing counterweight to China’s rise. The Indo-Pacific scope had been explicitly recognized by the then PACOM Commander, Admiral Samuel Locklear in his speech on America’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific-

“We will put our most capable forces forward in the Indo-Pacific...Through the tumultuous years of the last century, America’s served as a key stabilizing factor in the Indo-Pacific security environment-this will continue”. This was further enunciated on US bilateral relationships with the Indo-Pacific partners “Our alliance with Australia (and Japan) will continue to underpin US security objectives in the Indo-Pacific for decades to come. We are also developing and expanding our bilateral partnerships with nations throughout the Indo-Pacific with whom we have shared security interests. Nations such as Indonesia are a critical partner to a successful rebalances to the Indo-Pacific. And we will pursue a long term partnership with India.”¹⁰⁸

2.4.2. Japan

As a trading island nation, Japan’s maritime emphasis did not vanish after the Second World War. After the war, the nation established itself as a world-foremost commercial shipbuilding industry and fisheries zone. China’s maritime expansion has shifted Japan’s position in the region, and its economic and technological development has significantly reshaped global perceptions.

¹⁰⁷*Opcit.*, Scott.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, Scott.

Geographically, along with ASEAN, participants frequently said that Oceania was a main priority for Japan. Within Oceania, Japan's prime attention is Palau, followed by Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Tonga (the three countries in Oceania with militaries).¹⁰⁹The major driver of Japan's increased commitment to Oceania is China's rapid expansion in the region. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated the Indian Ocean and the Pacific as one common space i.e. 'confluence of the two seas'. He declares "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" to be the core of Japan's foreign policy doctrine. From this time on, the term appears in Japan's official strategy papers.

Initially espousing the Indo-Pacific as a strategy, Japan has revised it to embrace the idea of the region building as well. After Shinzo Abe visited Beijing in October 2018 to remove tensions with China, Japan played down the deterrent role of the Indo-Pacific idea. Japan dropped the term Indo-Pacific strategy and introduced the idea of an Indo-Pacific vision while emphasizing its region-building and accommodative intentions. Toshiya Takahashi notes that Japan's region building theme has roots in past Japanese policies toward the region. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in November 2019 published its own vision of the Indo-Pacific that embedded maritime security in a multidimensional framework including development, human security, and quality infrastructure projects.

Japan is one of the main Asian nations with a varied presence and strong partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. India has unitarily endorsed Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) paradigm as a first phase towards representing maritime security and adjusting it to the growth in the region. Japan discovers itself at the controls of the eastern part of the Indo-Pacific with both westward and eastward presence from its islands. ASEAN's geographical location at the very centre of the Indo-Pacific accelerates its direct and clear attention to the region. ASEAN and

¹⁰⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Foreign Minister Kono's Attendance at ASEAN-related Foreign Ministers' Meetings and Visits Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pacific Islands". (8 August 2019). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page3e_001051.html

Japan are the prominent players within the Indo-Pacific region with variable points of power and perspective.¹¹⁰

Japan wants to expand its strategic direction with its neighbouring security partners- the United States, Australia, and India through the Quad. It also wants to make sure of the contribution of a full number of countries in its Free and Open Indo-Pacific enterprise. Coping with the rise of China has been the strategic priority of Japan since the 2000s. Indeed, China's maritime expansion openly threatens Japan's interests in the East China Sea with repetitive interruptions into Japan's territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands. Upon this instance, Japan's outlook in the Indo-Pacific eventually wishes at guaranteeing its strategic autonomy by determining constructive regional surroundings and increasing its diplomatic and security approach. Japan's strategy in the Indo-Pacific is multifaceted, from "minilateral" cooperation to emphasis on more multilateral and comprehensive initiatives. Its mixed Indo-Pacific approach thus articulates the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quadrilateral Dialogue with support for mega trade deals and regional organizations led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹¹¹

Japan, being a major economic power, has to play its role in maintaining stability in the region to influence the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Japan's PM Shinzo Abe stated the significance of the dynamism that is played by joining the two continents and the two oceans in developing a free and open Indo-Pacific. Japan has been an energetic participant in world affairs through its cost-effective commitment. As already mentioned, the rise of China has been a leading motive in the push that Japan gives to its Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Thus, Tokyo has been building extensive steps in hedging against China in its area of influence, particularly in the Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asian nations.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Jay Maniyar. "Cooperation between the European Union, India, ASEAN, and Japan in the Indo-Pacific".The Diplomatist. (4 October, 2021). Retrieved from www.diplomatist.com

¹¹¹CekinePajon. "Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Shaping a Hybrid Regional Order". 918 December, 2019). Retrieved from www.warontherocks.com

¹¹²UtkarshVerma. "Role of Japan in the Indo-Pacific".Retrieved from <https://www.thekookineet.com>(1 February, 2021). Retrieved from <https://thekootneeti.in/2021/02/01/role-of-japan-in-the-indo-pacific/>

2.4.3. Australia

The history of Australia after the first European settlement in 1788 can be divided into three phases. The first phase saw six British colonies as outposts of the Empire, with limited contact with the immediate neighbourhood. However, these colonies were already part of an Indo-Pacific world, as indicated by a pivoted map from 1848.¹¹³ From federation to World War II, Australia held dominion status in 1924, becoming a key independent member of the British Empire. The fall of Singapore in 1942 marked a turning point, with Australia turning to the United States for security. Australia's post-war phase was symbolized by the ANZUS alliance and its status with Japan. From the early 1970s, Australia's security relations and economic and trade relations diverged, with Japan and China replacing Britain and the EU as the country's largest trading partners. This led to the creation of new institutions reflecting Australia's new geopolitical status, culminating in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in 1989.¹¹⁴ Australia now situates itself in the Asia-Pacific region, with the Labour government defining itself within a new hemisphere.¹¹⁵ In the 1990s, Australia shifted its international policy focus to the Asia-Pacific region, which remained its strategic geography for approximately two decades.

After the 1994 APEC Summit, faith in the geo-economic enterprise waned. However, Obama's 2011 support for the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) seemed to promise APEC's aims. Trump's withdrawal from TPP negotiations marked a downgrade of the Asia-Pacific construct in the US. Australia signed a Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Trade Partnership under Japanese leadership, hoping a new US administration would join. However, President Biden has shown no intention to do so or any other free trade agreement. Australia's Indo-Pacific approach has been driven by a fear of abandonment and the need for a

¹¹³PardesiManjeet. (2019). "The Indo-Pacific: a 'new' region or the return of history?".Australian Journal of International Affairs.Vol. 74 (2) pp.124-126. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/observatory-indo-pacific/sources/>

¹¹⁴Andrew Carr. 2(015). "Winning the Peace: Australia's Campaign to Change the Asia-Pacific". Carlton VIC.: Melbourne University Press.

¹¹⁵ MichaelWesley.(2011). "There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the Rise of Asia". Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

powerful friend, the United States, since 1942. Australia has been the only country to have fought in every war the US has been involved in since 1914, despite questionable national interest in such involvement. This philosophy is reflected in its foreign and security policy. Australia, a self-conscious middle power, has invested in maintaining a rules-based international order, but its security policy focuses on maintaining a bilateral relationship with the US. The country is a founding member of regional fora, including the South Pacific Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which focuses on maritime security, fisheries, and disaster risk management. Australia participates in two types of fora in the Indo-Pacific region: security-building meetings like ASEAN +1 and the ASEAN Regional Forum, and economic bodies like APEC and AIIB.

Australia, a central Indo-Pacific state, is bordered by the Indian and Pacific Oceans and ASEAN members. Since 2012, the Indo-Pacific concept has been used by Australian governments to define their foreign and security policy interests. It has primarily met its security needs through its mutual defence pact with the US, the 1951 Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty, and the ‘Five Eyes’ signals intelligence sharing agreement with the US, UK, Canada, and New Zealand, supported by the 1946 UK-United States of America Agreement. As China’s assertiveness intensifies, Australia faces challenges in separating its commercial interests from regional geopolitical tensions. The ‘AUKUS’ security and technology partnership with the US and UK reflects this change and the US’s centrality to Australia’s defence strategy. Australia’s government has reassessed its security strategy and defence procurement arrangements, potentially impacting its diplomatic relations.¹¹⁶ The US has consistently provided security guarantees for its allies in Asia and the Pacific since the post-war period, particularly for Australia, due to declining British power, the trauma of wartime imperial Japan, and Australia’s proximity to crucial Southeast Asia, a source of raw materials, trade routes, and arena of great power competition.

¹¹⁶ Matthew Parry, “Australia’s strategic view of the Indo Pacific”. Graphics: Lucille Killmayer. European Parliament Briefing, February 2022. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698917/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698917_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698917/EPRS_BRI(2022)698917_EN.pdf)

Australia was among the very first countries to employ the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ as a keyword in strategic documents. It represented the region as a new foundation for the Asian region, pointing out that the Western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean would come to be considered as one strategic arc.¹¹⁷ Thus, the Australian official documents constantly mention the central point of maritime Southeast Asia as a connection and link between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans thus reassuring the ASEAN countries as the central power in the new paradigm.

Australia has been the most active in advocating the Indo-Pacific idea due to its diplomatic influence, unique two-ocean geography, advanced surveillance of sea lanes connecting the Indian Ocean and Pacific, and its status as a state diversifying and deepening economic, societal, and security relations with multiple Asian powers, despite being a close U.S. ally. Australia, a unique Asian and Western power, has been actively involved in promoting an Indo-Pacific understanding of the region, as reflected in its 2016 and 2017 defence and foreign policy White Papers. This unique perspective has contributed to its strategic engagement.¹¹⁸ The Australian version of the Indo-Pacific is more pragmatic and objective than the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ promoted by Japan and the US. It allows for cooperation with diverse partners with distinct interests and priorities. Australia, like Japan and the US, uses the Indo-Pacific as a strategy to balance China, recognizing it as the most logical and objective geographic basis for a coherent worldview. This approach aligns with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, each with their own two-ocean geography.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Australian Government. “Australia in the Asian Century White Paper”. (28 October 2012). Retrieved from <https://content.webarchive.nla.gov.au/gov/way/back/20130328232210/http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/white-paper/australia-in-the-asian-century-white-paper.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Australian Government, Defence White Paper 2013 <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/> Australian Government, Defence White Paper 2016 <<http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>> Australian Government, Foreign Policy White Paper 2017 <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

¹¹⁹ Rory Medcalf. “An Australian vision of the Indo-Pacific and What it means for Southeast Asia”. Southeast Asian Affairs. (2019). p. 55. Retrieved from <https://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/component/get/20589>

Australia has exposed its image in the region and it facilitated the free flow of trade and investment, the work for economic cooperation that is inclusive and open to all the regional economies, and supports the freedom of navigation and the rule of law. Australia is improving its collaboration with regional players such as Japan, Indonesia, Korea, and India to safeguard security, economic partnerships, and people-to-people linkages. It has enlarged its assignment with member-States of ASEAN through strategic partnerships in areas such as security, trade and investment, regional infrastructural development and the environment.

2.4.4. India

During the Cold War, India's foreign policy goals largely overlooked the Indo-Pacific region due to factors such as colonial ties, Western orientation, and economic underdevelopment. The region was considered economically underdeveloped, preventing economic and commercial engagements. In the post-Cold War, significant changes in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape have prompted Indian foreign policymakers to reorient their foreign policy, particularly in this region. India's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific was reorganized due to the China factor, despite the end of the Cold War and economic reforms. India's involvement in regional architectures like ASEAN, BIMSTEC, MGC, ASEM, and EAS highlights the Indo-Pacific region's geostrategic importance, enhancing its standing through various fora.¹²⁰ There are several dynamics determining the contours of the restoration of India's policy to the Asia-Pacific. India's Act East Policy reflects India's growing influence in the world, and India's regulation has been slowly known since the economic reforms. As Hillary Clinton put it, "India is taking its rightful place in the meeting rooms and session halls where the world's most far-reaching questions are discussed and decided."¹²¹

¹²⁰ D.Zhang and H. Shivakumar. Dragon versus Elephant: A Comparative study of Chinese and Indian Aid the Pacific. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*.(2017). Vol. 4 (2). pp.260-271. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/app5.179>

¹²¹ Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Remarks on India and the United States: A Vision for the 21st Century." U.S. Department of State, July 20, 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/07/168840.htm>

India is intensifying its engagement with Asia Pacific countries, securing support from the United States and some regional countries, aiming to expand its presence in the region, despite its relatively low attention in recent years. India is shifting its role in the Asia-Pacific region, aiming to play a greater strategic role in the Indo-Pacific, building partnerships with the US, Japan, and Vietnam. It is also attempting to provide security, closely monitoring developments in the South China Sea. This shift is driven by China's rising influence and Beijing's growing awareness of India's Act East policy.¹²²

The Indo-Pacific region has recurred and reoccupied its prominent place at the centre of the world's economy. It is an unsettled region and there is an exceptional period of significant alterations. Certainly, the region will grow into centre of global geopolitics. Though India was far away from East Asia for decades, its economic stance of 1991 and the 'Look East Policy' consequently arranged the process of India returning into the field to the important space in which India had intricate civilization. India's attention in the Indo-Pacific primarily includes peace and security in the Indian Ocean. It strives to keep up its role as a net security provider. Its objective is to heighten its trade and venture cooperation by keeping sustainable expansion.¹²³

India has developed its theoretical constructs built upon national interests. The end of the Cold War began to come up with new geopolitical ideas that reflected the intensely reformed global setting. It is an effort to cultivate economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia in a strong shift in India's global outlook following the Cold War. It was also seen as a crucial aspect of India's decree to expose its economy and take advantage of the dynamic East Asian region.¹²⁴ The second dynamic for India to pursue a more active Asia-Pacific policy is its prolonged perception of China's intensification and increasing assertiveness. India-China relations reached low ebb and India's strategic cooperatives are still anxious about

¹²²Gautam Sen. "Strategic Relevance of the Indo-Pacific: An Assessment". CLAWS Journal 1 winter 2. pp. 107-108.

¹²³*Ibid.*, Sen.

¹²⁴Manoj Joashi. "What's in a Name? Role in the Indo-Pacific". 22 July, 2021. Observer Research Foundation. Retrieved from www.orfonline.org

Beijing's unforeseen adventurism. The Indian strategist C. Raja Mohan once claimed that India has been balancing against China since the day the Chinese invaded Tibet in the early 1950s.¹²⁵ China's growing population pressure and energy needs have led to an increase in its presence in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to counter India's expansion. China's naval modernization program, including offshore naval bases and infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, has increased its footprint and created threats for India. The simultaneous competition and conflict between India and China have transformed the region into a potential conflict arena.

India's restored interest in Indo-Pacific theatre focuses more on a responsive strategy in the direction of the increased occurrence of China in the Indian Ocean. There has been a profound variation in India's close neighbourhood, and its character as the net security provider in the region is threatened by China's overwhelming economic manifestation. Maldives and Sri Lanka have seen India as the dominant power in the region that overlooks their concerns and challenges while unilaterally directing the narrative of the region on the global stage. Thus, the lack of strategic competition in the immediate neighbourhood helped India maintain its status quo for decades without ever changing its outlook or geopolitical strategy. This furthermore allowed India to grow complacent in its maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean.¹²⁶

India is retaliating against China's expansion in the Indian Ocean by offering alternatives to China's infrastructure projects, such as economic support and port development. This includes investments in ports in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Iran, and access to an Omani port. India has also been a key contributor to humanitarian and disaster relief operations in its neighbouring countries, demonstrating its readiness to intervene in China. Additionally, India has expanded bilateral maritime-security and defence cooperation with island and littoral states, including the

¹²⁵Cited in Daniel Twining. "The New Game: Why the Bush Administration has Embraced India." The German Marshall Fund of the United States, December 20, 2006 Retrieved from <http://www.gmfus.org/commentary/new-great-game-why-bush-administration-has-embraced-india>.

¹²⁶Ankit Raj. "Emerging Opportunities and Challenges in India's Foreign Policy Strategy in the Indo-Pacific". Oxford Political Review. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordpoliticalreview.com> 14 November 2020.

provision of defence-related lines of credit and the launch of a coastal surveillance radar project.¹²⁷

Hence, in the struggle between great powers, unreceptive governments in these island states can complicate and challenge India's maritime strategy and security in the Indian-Pacific region. While smaller island states avoided choosing sides in the Sino-Indian or China-US competition in the region, India also grew suspicious of being recognized as a portion of China's repressive method by the US. For instance, India re-examined its opportunities and role in a strongly transformed neighbourhood. India had to balance its role as the net security provider of the region with the aims of a suitable global power. Also, it was only in 2018 at the Shangri-La Dialogue that India announced a clear Indo-Pacific visualization and accepted regional partnerships as the main approach in comprehending this vision.¹²⁸

2.4.5. ASEAN

Southeast Asia is located strategically at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Its history has been shaped by the stimulus of great civilizations with the influence of great powers. Traditionally, trade, politics, and culture in Southeast Asia were well-defined or focused by maritime links across the Indian Ocean rather than the Asia-Pacific. ASEAN is emerging as a central pivot in the Indian view of Asia and its future is essential to the construction of a security order in the Indo-Pacific region. Because ASEAN is seen as potentially sharing a range of common military and non-military threats and concerns, including those related to issues as diverse as energy, economics, and sustainable development.

The growth of the Indo-Pacific concept coincides with the intensity of power rivalries on the one hand, and increased economic interdependence on the other. Such volatile dynamics have driven the region's medium and small powers to work harder for increased agency and political autonomy. Among regional players, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is key to this geopolitical

¹²⁷Rahul Roy-Chaudhury. "Debate: India's 'Inclusive' Indo-Pacific Policy Seeks to Balance US, China", *The Wire*. (5 July, 2018). Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/indias-inclusive-indo-pacific-policy-seeks-to-balance-relations-with-the-us-and-china>

¹²⁸*Opcit.*, Raj.

challenge. ASEAN's creation in 1967 was driven by survival and resilience during the Cold War and communism spread. After the Soviet Union's dissolution, ASEAN expanded its membership, promoting consensus decision-making, informal diplomacy, non-interference, sovereignty respect, and centrality preservation. The US-China power competition is significantly impacting ASEAN-led mechanisms due to the competitive nature of contemporary Indo-Pacific geopolitics, affecting member countries security and stability. Southeast Asia situated between US and Chinese influence, has been facing increasing Chinese expansionist interests in the South China Sea since 2008. The country is assertively altering the power and geography of the disputed maritime territory, at the expense of its less powerful neighbours, thereby challenging the stability of the Indo-Pacific rules-based order. The US response to Beijing's growing regional interests has led to the proliferation of security arrangements among democracies like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States trilateral, focusing on Southeast Asia as a potential shooting war area within the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN countries must adopt a strategy of denial to prevent immediate great powers from monopolizing regional affairs. This involves forming strategic buffers with other major powers, prioritizing partner diversification, and leveraging emerging powers as independent forces. Positive trends include strengthened economic and defence cooperation between Southeast Asian countries and Indo-Pacific powers like India, France, and Japan.

The deliberations on the need for the ASEAN involved unified vision and strategy for the Indo-Pacific began after US President Trump proposed the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy during the Asia tour in 2017 and at the 2017 APEC Summit in Vietnam. Thus, countries like Australia, France, India, and Japan had also come up with their own individual visions and strategies for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific countries. Hence, some countries in the ASEAN like Indonesia and Thailand did not want the Southeast region to be sidelined and left out of this new geopolitical game.¹²⁹ With Beijing's increasing activities, ASEAN countries need to formulate a coherent strategy towards the Indo-Pacific that goes beyond norm-setting

¹²⁹Premesha Saha. "ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook: An Analysis". Observer Research Foundation. (28 June, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org>

to actual implementation. At the same time, there have also been political manoeuvres in the region from other major Western partners.

It is in the interest of ASEAN to lead the shaping of their economic and security building and certify that such dynamics will continue to transmit peace, security, stability, and prosperity for the people in the Southeast Asia as well as in the broader Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean or the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN has been engaging in the development of a wide-ranging regional architecture and the leaders of ASEAN have agreed to further discuss an initiative that reinforces the ASEAN-centred regional architecture namely the ASEAN Outlook.¹³⁰ ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, aligned with its decades-long role in shaping regional architectures in Southeast Asia and beyond, consists of key elements, based on ASEAN's norms and principles such as the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions are viewed as interconnected, with ASEAN playing a central role. This region promotes dialogue, cooperation, development, and prosperity for all, emphasizing the importance of the maritime domain in the evolving regional architecture.¹³¹ Among the ASEAN members, Indonesia adopts a constructivist ASEAN-led manner converging on maritime connectivity and marine resources. And ASEAN has been rational in upholding different components with diverse Dialogue Partners who grasp divergent views on the Indo-Pacific.

Within ASEAN, Indonesia and Vietnam are perhaps the most advanced in taking up the Indo-Pacific construct. Indonesia also keenly upheld support for the AOIP at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and with ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Through the AOIP, Jakarta aims to help a non-aligned Indo-Pacific that is led neither by America nor China but is ASEAN-centred. ASEAN supremacy is both an end and a means in Indonesia's Indo-Pacific vision which becomes the role that Indonesia appreciates for itself as ASEAN's leader and as a global middle power.¹³² Moreover, the ASEAN countries are also recalibrating their policy priorities especially within the Indo-Pacific rubric. The implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-

¹³⁰*Opcit.*, ASEAN

¹³¹*Opcit.*, Saha

¹³²Hoang Thi Ha. "ASEAN Navigates between Indo-Pacific Polemics and Potentials". (20 April, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.iseas.edu.sg>

Pacific is a restatement of how the divided group like the ASEAN also desires to be part of the Indo-Pacific discourse. The Outlook puts out the principal areas where ASEAN is observing to join forces with other participants of the region.¹³³ ASEAN's Indo-Pacific strategic inclusion is beneficial, but operationalizing the AOIP remains a challenge. The long-term success of ASEAN-led Indo-Pacific mechanisms relies on bloc cohesion and dialogue partner facilitation. ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit are important for Indo-Pacific cooperation, but power dynamics in the region may pose credibility issues in the long term. ASEAN faces internal constraints hindering unified a position on regional security issues, especially in Myanmar and the South China Sea, with stakes higher to maintain regional influence. Whereas ASEAN's influence in Indo-Pacific affairs is questioned due to power politics vulnerabilities and member needs for cohesion. To maintain credibility, ASEAN should consider structural and cultural reforms, while pursuing a diversification-driven foreign policy.

However, the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) was launched at the 13th ASEAN Maritime Forum in Bali to understand regional maritime trends and challenges, aiming to streamline the work of various ASEAN institutions. The East Asian Summit, ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting, ADMM Plus, ARF, ASEAN Maritime Forum, and AMME are among the institutional mechanisms. The ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum is aimed at strengthening cooperation and collaboration between ASEAN member states and Indo-Pacific partners, fostering growth, and fostering constructive discussions and project cooperation.¹³⁴ The AIPF emphasized the importance of green infrastructure, resilient supply chains, digital transformation, creative economy, and sustainable financing in promoting Indo-Pacific region integration and collaboration. ASEAN nations push for Indo-Pacific cooperation, but the South China Sea dispute and Myanmar situation dominate agendas at the ASEAN Summit, polarizing nations and causing polarization.

¹³³*Opcit.*, ASEAN

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, ASEAN

2.4.6. New Zealand

The Asia-Pacific's economic-security nexus has been challenged by a shifting power balance and geo-political competition, leading to the rise of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a new ordering framework. The Quad grouping of India, the US, Japan, and Australia is a prominent manifestation of this concept. New Zealand's strategic focus has traditionally been on Australia and the South Pacific, with Deputy Secretary for Americas and Asia, Ben King, stating that the term Indo-Pacific may not resonate yet. Over the past three decades, New Zealand has collaborated with other countries to establish a more integrated Asia-Pacific region, benefiting from economic growth from China and military stabilization from American power. However, the changing geo-political dynamics and the contested Indo-Pacific reconceptualization have presented significant challenges, necessitating closer collaboration with like-minded partners like Korea.

In the 1990s, New Zealand became a key Asia-Pacific state, establishing a profitable relationship with China and revitalizing its relationship with the US after disagreements over nuclear issues in the 1980s led to the suspension of the American security guarantee under the ANZUS pact. New Zealand, a key player in Asia-Pacific multilateralism, maintained strong ties with Australia and South Pacific partners while also actively supporting regional engagement in economic, political, and security spheres. Its evolving demographic mix, combining Maori, Pacific Island, European, and Asian migrant communities, allowed for seamless Asia-Pacific engagement. New Zealand's Strategic Defence Policy Statement in 2018 identified Australia, India, Japan, and the United States as its 'Indo-Pacific partners reinforcing the rules-based order'. The statement detailed China's threat, including its Maritime Silk Road push into the Indian Ocean, South China Sea militarization, and Pacific islands. New Zealand seeks cooperation with these partners over shared concerns about China. On August 1, 2019, New Zealand officially adopted 'Indo-Pacific' foreign policy, affirming its plan to engage with regional partners on challenges facing the Indo-Pacific and discuss cooperation ways.

The Indo-Pacific will become the most significant international arena in the 21st century due to global and country-scale power conflagration, competition between great powers, and a shift towards a complex multipolar system. New Zealand's size and isolation in the Indo-Pacific make it a relatively benign entity in the region, with no immediate neighbours or territorial disputes, making it a less significant economic or military power.

2.4.7. China

China's rapid growth has sparked new geopolitical alignments, with major stakeholders forming flexible partnerships, mobilizing support when interests collide, and competing and colluding when objectives coincide. China's goal of achieving 'comprehensive national power' is to prevent any other country from compromising its core national interests. China's global influence extends to trade, investment, markets, natural resources, and bases, demanding acceptance of its ambiguous positions on territorial, maritime, and resource disputes.¹³⁵ The Indo-Pacific rise is attributed to China's increasing presence in the region, as well as the decline of the US alliance system. China's aggressive postures in the South China Sea, building ports, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) contribute to its influence. The United States strategies have benefited China and harmed its allies.¹³⁶ China's rises in terms of political and economic ambitions are posing a threat to regional established powers, causing a shift in power balance. However, there are no effective security structures or conflict containment mechanisms, and geopolitical rivalries, border disputes, and domestic and cross-border conflicts pose a risk of instability.

The Chinese's Indo-Pacific strategy can be analyzed through its defence and naval strategies, as well as its maritime ambitions and 'two-ocean strategy' to achieve its objectives. Since the 1980s, the Chinese Navy has shifted its focus to offshore defensive operations, increasing friendship visits, joint military drills, and international humanitarian missions. In 1985, a Chinese flotilla visited Pakistan, Sri

¹³⁵ Mohan Malik. "China in the Asia-Pacific in 2040: Alternative Futures". Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies. (2012). Retrieved from <https://dkiapcss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/APCSS-FEFU-10Aug12.pdf>

¹³⁶ *Opcit.*, Udayan Das

Lanka, and Bangladesh, marking the first foreign visit. From May to September 2002, another flotilla completed the PLAN's first global navigation journey, visiting 10 countries.¹³⁷ China aimed to improve its strategic control and protect its facilities along the Indian Ocean to secure its sea line of communication. In 2004, Hu Jintao's 'Historic Missions' speech to the Central Military Commission provided the PLA with new missions to fulfil, including military support for continued Chinese Communist Party rule, defence of China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, and protection of expanding national interests. Beijing also desired a military capable of conducting military operations other than war (MOOTW), and the PLA should actively participate in these operations both domestically and internationally.¹³⁸ China is focusing on a 'two-ocean strategy' to avoid control challenges in Southeast Asia and maintain a strong two-ocean layout. This involves establishing a communication line to connect southwest China with ports like Gwadar, Hambantota, Chittagong, and Kyaukpyu.¹³⁹ The strategy also emphasizes synergy between land and sea and the importance of countries like Pakistan, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

China became the world's largest net importer of crude oil in 2013 and has since become a net importer since 1993. This race for supply security is partly attributed to the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative and various pipeline deals, as noted by CSIS in 2017. China's Indo-Pacific strategy combines economic, diplomatic, and military factors at international and regional levels. It invests in 'strong points' near its borders and neighbouring countries like India. The strategy

¹³⁷Embassy of the People of Republic of China in the Kingdom of Bahrain. "Chinese Navy Sails onto World Stage". (25 September, 2009). Retrieved from http://bh.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/200909/t20090930_1036817.htm

¹³⁸U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. "China's Military and Security Activities Abroad". Washington, DC, (4 March 2009). Retrieved from <https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/hearing-chinas-military-and-security-activities-abroad>

¹³⁹Island Chain Strategy was formulated in 1951 by John Foster Dulles. The First Island Chain comprises the Kuril Islands, the Japanese Archipelago, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, northwest Philippines and ending at Borneo. The Second Island Chain consists of the Bonin Islands, Volcano Islands, Mariana Islands, western Caroline Islands and Western New Guinea. The Third Island Chain refers to the Aleutian Islands running through the centre of the Pacific Ocean through the Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, and Fiji culminating at New Zealand. (Lt Col JS Sodhi, Island chain strategy: Steps to checkmate China, Financial Express. (19 June, 2022) Retrieved from <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-island-chain-strategy-steps-to-checkmate-china-2565232/>

referred to as the ‘String of Pearls’, aims to expand its naval presence through civilian dual-use maritime infrastructure. China has achieved its strategic goal through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which involves investments in ports across the Indian Ocean to create naval bases and encircle neighbouring countries. This has allowed China to be closer to strategic choke points in the Indo-Pacific. China currently operates 58 submarines in the Indian Ocean, but the number of these is unclear. The shallow Strait of Malacca makes it difficult for conventional and nuclear submarine fleets to pass undetected, making it a major challenge for Chinese submarines entering the Indian Ocean.¹⁴⁰ China’s advantage in the region lies in its proximity to the Indian Ocean and control over most of the East China Sea coastline, which is crucial for rapid force deployment and higher success rates in operations. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides China with a stronger foothold in the region, as it seeks ports capable of hosting PLA and PLAN operations. These ports must have built-in ramps for offloading heavy cargo and deep-water ports for docking large vessels. China’s 2015 white paper advocates civilian-military integration, which President Xi Jinping believes is vital for a strong PLA. However, Chinese officials deny the dual use of BRI ventures, as the infrastructure is concealed in commercial environments.

China’s economic and military power has significantly impacted the Indo-Pacific’s geopolitical landscape, particularly in terms of energy security. The country’s rapid industrialization has transformed it from an oil exporter to a significant energy importer, with imports flowing through the Indian Ocean, Strait of Malacca, and South China Sea. To protect its energy interests, China has been conducting anti-piracy deployments in the Gulf of Aden since 2009, showcasing its maritime capabilities.¹⁴¹ China’s primary objective is to gain control over key maritime areas like the South China Sea and East China Sea, subsequently expanding

¹⁴⁰Ulrich Jochheim with Rita Barbosa Lobo.” Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major player’s strategic perspectives”. Briefing European Parliament. July 2023). Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751398/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751398_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751398/EPRS_BRI(2023)751398_EN.pdf)

¹⁴¹PremeshaSahaand Abhishek Mishra.“The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India”.Observer Research Foundation.(23 September, 2020).Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-indo-pacific-oceans-initiative-towards-a-coherent-indo-pacific-policy-for-india>

its influence into the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. China's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and expansion of its presence in the Indian Ocean are driven by geopolitical concerns, Taiwan-related issues, and access to deep-sea resources. China's engagement with Pacific island countries through forums like the China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum has raised concerns among traditional allies like the US and Australia. The Indian Ocean, considered external to China, has become a focal point for its maritime ambitions, with China's involvement with the Indian Ocean Regional Association and the Maritime Silk Road initiative.¹⁴² China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific presents both opportunities and challenges, prompting countries to balance economic cooperation with China and strengthen security ties for regional stability.

2.5. Emerging Trends in the Indo-Pacific

When the Cold War was coming to an end, Asia-Pacific state and non-state actors began to contemplate opportunities and prospects to build a scheme of multilateral cooperation to give a strong impetus to their economic development and invent qualitatively new apparatuses of regional orders. Regardless of the globalization tendencies, the contemporary world is far from being uniform. The key drivers of world political changes seem to increasingly initiate regional transformations that produce new forms of cooperation, various regional integration patterns, and also new types of contradictions and conflicting behaviour. The world has been witnessing the emergence of new regional centres of power. For instance, a growing net of interactions, primarily in the economic sphere and the rise of China made many experts claim that Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia are getting closer.

In the pre-modern era, the Indian Ocean was the main highway of commerce from the East to the West. The advent of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the rise of the United States from 1800 AD onward led to the dominance of other waterways- the Atlantic Ocean and then the Pacific Ocean thereby eclipsing the Indian Ocean's significance in maritime trade and international commerce. Asia's

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, Saha and Mishra.

economic powerhouses belong mostly to the Pacific Ocean with their linkages extending to the Indian Ocean with the United States and combined with Australia and New Zealand. The Asia-Pacific region takes on an important implication with both economic and strategic considerations of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific intertwined a strategic geographic construct that has been dubbed the 'Indo-Pacific' region. This vast expanse from the Horn of Africa stretching through the Arabian Sea, the Iranian plateau, the Indian subcontinent, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Bay of Bengal and the Indonesian archipelago is home to some of the busiest trade arteries or SLOCs in the world. Thus, the Indo-Pacific expanse has acquired a strategic connotation and is seen as the region of the new great game with great power rivalry among the United States, China, Japan, and India in the cards.

The region is undergoing a strategic high tide, with countries working towards a common baseline for cooperation and an equitable rule-based order. As China increases its global leadership stakes, leading powers in the region are expected to show political will and capability. Emerging geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific show trends of rebalancing security, and economic cooperation with militarization, functional cooperation, and reimagining security. These efforts aim to build cooperation among like-minded countries, developing parallel tracks and focusing on human security. Three trends in Indo-Pacific cooperation include issue-based coalitions, like-minded countries working together in overlapping formats, and focusing on building capacity of countries to provide viable alternatives beyond ideological and political contestation, ensuring flexibility and institutionalization of global initiatives.¹⁴³

The Indo-Pacific region, a unique and interconnected region formed by the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, has historically been primarily viewed as a bio-geographical or natural science concept. The region experienced regional transformation due to Japanese economic diplomacy, China's economic rise, and regional actors adapting to China's trade with Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN,

¹⁴³ShrutiPandalai. "Emerging trends in Indo-Pacific Geopolitics: Navigating the 'India Way'". Observer Research Foundation.(December 14, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/emerging-trends-in-indo-pacific-geopolitics-navigating-the-india-way>

leading to increased regional integration. The Indo-Pacific region, spanning the Indian and Pacific oceans, is focusing on maritime connectivity for international trade competitiveness and economic growth, with improved transport efficacy potentially boosting these outcomes. The region, once isolated, now has significant economic ties, with the six largest economies sharing over 50% of global GDP.¹⁴⁴

Since the Indo-Pacific Strategy's release in February 2022, the United States has made significant progress towards a free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific region. This leadership demonstrates the region's capacity to tackle 21st-century challenges and opportunities, fostering a better future together. The United States leadership in the Indo-Pacific benefits both the region and the United States, as it strengthens economic ties between American businesses and international markets, creates jobs, and collaborates on public health crises. This work helps secure a safer and more prosperous world for generations to come, both in the region and at home.¹⁴⁵ Biden's strategy for the Indo-Pacific is not a complete return to Obama's standards, with Trump's stamp evident in some elements. The term Indo-Pacific is a handover from Trump's years, and both Biden's and Trump's strategies prioritize China. Trump's strategy lists China's influence as the first national security challenge, while Biden's strategy highlights repression, media control, civil society suppression, and ethnic minority mistreatment as undermining stability and prosperity in the region.¹⁴⁶ Biden emphasizes China's priority in the administration's strategy, citing mounting challenges in the Indo-Pacific region as the primary reason for increased interest.

¹⁴⁴ World Bank Group. "GDP (current US\$)" Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.Cd>

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Republic of Korea. The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific: Marking Two Years Since the Release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy. (9 February, 2024). Retrieved from <https://kr.usembassy.gov/021324-the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-marking-two-years-since-the-release-of-the-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Defense. "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision". (4 November, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy emphasizes the region's centrality to U.S. interests and China's challenges. It differs from the Trump administration by focusing on cooperation with regional allies and partners, and announcing plans for an 'Indo-Pacific Economic Framework' with high labour and environmental standards. It also supports India's growth and regional leadership, similar to previous administrations. Washington has shown interest in new partnerships and initiatives, including the Quad and AUKUS, as well as a new trilateral with Japan, South Korea, and India. It has also deepened its partnership with Vietnam, upgraded alliances with the Philippines and Thailand, and expanded its engagement with ASEAN into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. President Biden has held summits with Pacific Island leaders to address climate change and illegal fishing threats. The administration launched Partners in the Blue Pacific and a new U.S.-Mekong Partnership.¹⁴⁷ The Biden administration views U.S. allies and partners as crucial strategic assets in the Indo-Pacific strategy, contrasting with the Trump administration's view of them as expendable free riders. This perspective emphasizes the importance of considering interests and voices in strategic competition.

It also emphasized the importance of U.S. allies and partners in his first foreign policy address, stating that leading with diplomacy requires standing shoulder-to-shoulder.¹⁴⁸ The Biden administration is negotiating the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to signal China's engagement in the region despite the United States withdrawal from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. His administration is focusing on a strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to strengthen alliances with traditional partners like Japan, South Korea, and Australia, as well as Southeast Asia and India. It has increased military presence and cooperation in the region, conducting joint exercises and bolstering defence commitments. The administration recognizes the impact of

¹⁴⁷ Carla Freeman, Daniel Markey, Vikram J Singh. "Two Years Later, What Has the Indo-Pacific Strategy Achieved?". World Scientific Publishing.(February 15, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.danielmarkey.org/publications/>

¹⁴⁸ U.S Embassy in Senegal. "Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World."(4 February, 2021). Retrieved from <https://sn.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

climate change on the Indo-Pacific and promotes initiatives to enhance resilience and sustainable development. Its strategy aims to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, balancing competition with China.

The Biden presidency has released its Indo-Pacific strategy, announcing its focus on the region as a potential platform for advancing United States objectives and strategy. This follows the Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting in Melbourne, Australia, which has been a focus of various US Presidents, including Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' and Trump's 'Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific'. The policy highlights the importance of a sustained regional strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to restore US support to allies during the Trump presidency and ensure that US focus on one flank doesn't compromise the other. The document highlights the China threat as a primary reason for Washington's intensifying focus in the region. It discusses the US's great power competition with Beijing in economic, diplomatic, military, and technological areas. The document emphasizes respect for human rights and international law, while also highlighting the need to work with China on issues like climate change and non-proliferation. While most US allies recognize China's rise and seek cooperation, countries like Thailand, South Korea, New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the EU still adopt a hedging approach, requiring a mix of competition and cooperation.¹⁴⁹

Biden's Indo-Pacific policy aims to address internal conflicts and prevent future bilateral discord between nations, prioritizing transnational issues over bilateral differences. The Quad member's cooperation on global health, climate change, technology, infrastructure, cyber, education, and clean energy is crucial for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Biden's Indo-Pacific policy integrates the Quad into US Indo-Pacific policy, aiming to bridge the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. The goal is to strengthen the economic framework and close the infrastructure gap in the region, with the Build Back Better World initiative (B3W) focusing on secured global telecommunication, 5G vendor diversification, and Open Radio Access

¹⁴⁹PremeshaSaha and Vivek Mishra. "Decoding the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy". Observer Research Foundation. (19 February, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/decoding-the-biden-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy>

Network technology to maintain a competitive environment. The United States Indo-Pacific strategy is bolstered by its network of security alliances and partnerships, aiming for interoperability with allies and partners. Key security objectives include Taiwan Strait security, Korean Peninsula denuclearization, AUKUS, ASEAN investment, countering terrorism, biological threats, and cyber security. The strategy integrates domestic and international objectives.

The region's major power competition is dominated by the US and China, with their combined GDP accounting for 42% of the world's total GDP and nearly half of defence spending. Despite globalization increasing connectivity and interdependence, it has created numerous fronts for great power rivalry and failed to lift these relations out of the zero sum mentality.¹⁵⁰ The US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific is evident in government documents and statements. The United States National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2022 prioritizes the region and identifies China as a significant geopolitical challenge. The strategy acknowledges Russia as a threat to a free international system but identifies China as a long-term competitor with the potential to reshape the international order to America's disadvantage.¹⁵¹ The Biden administration in the US has not completely stifled China's influence, unlike the Trump administration's nationalistic approach, and has allowed for potential cooperation if necessary.¹⁵² The United States faces a significant obstacle to potential US-China cooperation due to growing media and policymaker pushback against China. This could lead to political costs for US presidents. The American Indo-Pacific strategy aims to create a more connected, secure, prosperous, and resilient Indo-Pacific through strengthening the US's role and building collective capacity with allies and regional institutions.

¹⁵⁰The White House. "Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy". (2022). Retrieved from <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/10/12/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-administrations-national-security-strategy/>

¹⁵¹ Lyle J Morris. "Cooperate, Compete, Confront, or Conflict: Comparing the China Components of the National Security Strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations". Asia Society. (2023). Retrieved from <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/cooperate-compete-confront-or-conflict-comparing-china-components-national-security-strategies-trump>

¹⁵²U.S. Department of State. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States". (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/indo-pacific-strategy/>

Shinzô Abe, Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister, was a strong advocate for the Indo-Pacific concept, which gained popularity in Asia and beyond. He envisioned the emergence of this new geography in 2007, pushing for closer cooperation with the US, Australia, and India. In 2016, Abe introduced the term 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FIOP), which was endorsed by the Trump administration and continued by the Biden administration. With Abe's support, Japan successfully extended its strategic horizon, gained diplomatic visibility, and played a leading role in shaping the perceptions and narrative of its main partners in the region. In 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Abe's address to the Indian Parliament, titled Confluence of the Two Seas, envisioned the merging of the Indian and Pacific oceans into a single strategic space. He predicted the emergence of a 'broader Asia' that broke geographical boundaries, promoting freedom and prosperity as seas of freedom and prosperity.

In mid-2016, Japan's external policy shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, incorporating the terms Free and Open under Prime Minister Abe. Abe presented the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FIOP) at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference for African Development in Kenya, aiming to create a prosperous region valuing freedom, rule of law, and market economy.¹⁵³ Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific has evolved over time, with Prime Minister Abe initially focusing on political values during his first term. He promoted an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' and value-based diplomacy, promoting universal values like freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and market economy. After Abe's return, his approach shifted to rules, norms, and standards.¹⁵⁴ Japan's Foreign Policy Office aims to promote a rules-based order, strengthening existing rules, and creating new ones to ensure stability and prosperity. Its focus is on the maritime domain, focusing on sovereignty, freedom of navigation, and UNCLOS. Japan has proactively promoted a rules-based

¹⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development". (27 August, 2016). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html

¹⁵⁴ H. Yoshimatsu (2018), "Japan's role conception in multilateral initiatives: the evolution from Hatoyama to Abe", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 72:2, pp. 129-144; Hosoya Y. (2019), "FOIP 2.0: The Evolution of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy", *Asia-Pacific Review*, 26:1, pp. 18-28; Koga K. (2020), "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' question: countering China or shaping a new regional order?", *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no 1, January, pp. 49-73

maritime order, aiming to constrain China's attempts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China Seas.

Japan aims to maintain a rules-based order in international trade and finance, focusing on free trade and expanding a free and fair economic area. After the US withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in 2017, Japan successfully concluded the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018. Japan has promoted the CPTPP as a rule-setting mechanism and has also concluded an Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU and helped finalize the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiation with China in 2020. Japan has been concerned about China's growing influence and assertiveness in its surrounding environment, particularly on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and Taiwan. The FIOP has provided a global platform for Japan's response to the China challenge. Japan has engaged China, encouraged it to abide by international norms, and built a network of partnerships to push back against China on diplomatic, ideological, economic, and security fronts. This has allowed Japan to combine cooperative and competitive policies to deal with China and adjust the mix of competitive/cooperative elements according to the circumstances.

Japan's new Foreign and Economic Partnership (FEP) plan, titled 'The Future of the Indo-Pacific', aims to shape worldviews and the world's future by partnering with India. Prime Minister Kishida emphasized the plan's purpose, India's role, and a refined approach to the Global South. The plan aims to propose a guiding perspective for a world on the verge of division and confrontation, addressing the lack of common understanding and indifference to fundamental norms in the fractured world. The plan aims to fill this gap and foster a collective spirit of collaboration. Tokyo has pledged US\$75 billion for infrastructure assistance and investment in the Indo-Pacific region by 2030, complementing the Group of Seven's 'Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment'. The plan includes four new pillars of cooperation: Principles for Peace and Rules for Prosperity, Addressing Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way, Multi-layered Connectivity, and Extending Efforts for Security and Safe Use of the Sea to the Air. Tokyo remains committed to the international

order based on the rule of law.¹⁵⁵ Tokyo's view on the Indo-Pacific emphasizes classical geopolitics but also emphasizes normativity and the fight against revisionism. Japan, along with India, is a critical stakeholder in a stable rules-based order, defending freedom and the rule of law. Its Indo-Pacific programs aim to safeguard the rules-based international order from systemic challenges, calling for agreement on fundamental principles of international law.

Australia, a central Indo-Pacific state, has used the Indo-Pacific concept since 2012 to define its foreign and security policy interests, surrounded by ASEAN members and the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Australia was the first to adopt the Indo-Pacific framework as a national strategy, as it helped Canberra centre itself between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Australia, a self-conscious middle power, maintains a rules-based international order and maintains a bilateral relationship with the United States. It is a founding member of regional fora, including the South Pacific Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which deal with maritime security, fisheries, and disaster risk management.

Australia is pursuing 'strategic equilibrium' in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on building deterrence capabilities, and resetting its relationship with Beijing. This concept, introduced by Foreign Minister Penny Wong, involves securing a regional order with countries having agency in strategic partnerships and military capability¹⁵⁶. It has shifted its defence priorities from deterring attacks to a more proactive approach, focusing on conflict prevention. This shift signals a shift towards a stronger warning signal to China, aimed at preventing attempted coercion or incursion, rather than merely responding to threats. Australia's defence strategy aims to maintain a favourable regional security balance, strengthen the international order, and protect its economic ties. It is particularly focused on contributing to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific region. Defence Minister Richard Marles

¹⁵⁵ Kei Hakata, Brendon J Cannon. "Japan's new Indo-Pacific: A guiding perspective to shape worldviews". Observer Research Foundation. (3 May, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/japans-new-indo-pacific-a-guiding-perspective-to-shape-worldviews?amp=>

¹⁵⁶ Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs. "Transcript of National Press Club Address: Australian Interests in a Regional Balance of Power", Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, (17 April, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-press-club-address-australian-interests-regional-balance-power>

emphasizes that the defence of Australia is crucial for the region's security. As security dynamics change, Australia is prioritizing defence for homeland security and the future stability of the Indo-Pacific.¹⁵⁷

Australia, in its 2012 white paper 'Australia in the Asian Century', highlighted the growing importance of Asia in global economic activity and opportunities for exporters. The country was also negotiating a free trade agreement with China, which led to the conclusion of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement in 2014. Australia has been building strategic partnerships since 2014, including comprehensive, special, enhanced, and strategic ones with various countries. These partnerships include Japan and China, Singapore, France, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Malaysia, ASEAN, and Germany. Two new strategic groupings have been established: the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue and the AUKUS partnership.

The Australia-United Kingdom-United States Security Arrangement, announced in September 2021, is the second partnership with an Indo-Pacific agenda, enabling Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, indicating its strength and adherence to the US Indo-Pacific containment vision. The National Defence Strategy (NDS) highlights Australia's AUKUS agreement, which includes a twenty-year plan for the Royal Navy to train, purchase, and build nuclear-powered submarines. This technology is crucial for deterring Chinese aggression in the Pacific. However, Australia's shipbuilding capacity could hinder the effort, and some experts argue the United States should prioritize its own navy. AUKUS, a key Indo-Pacific arrangement, is partnering with Australia, the US, and Japan to develop a networked air defence architecture. The United States is also scaling back export control requirements for Australia and the United Kingdom, reducing licensing burdens on trade by up to 80%. This license-free environment supports industry, research, and lowers trade costs.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Natalie Cacola. "Australia's Growing Defense and Security Role in the Indo-Pacific". Council on Foreign Relations. (1 August, 2024).

¹⁵⁸ "AUKUS Partners Relax More Export Licensing, Trade and Tech Transfer Regulation". (23 April 2024).

Australia participates in two types of fora in the Indo-Pacific region: security-building meetings like ASEAN +1 and the ASEAN Regional Forum, and economic agenda bodies like APEC, AIIB, and RCEP. It also participates in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for a Trans Pacific Partnership, a Free Trade Agreement announced in 2020. Australia is part of the United States Indo-Pacific alliance, a network of countries working to strengthen bilateral ties and foster relationships. One such group is the Quad, a security-focused partnership with the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. In 2023, Australia participated in military drills with the US, Japan, and the Philippines to counter China's intimidation of the Philippines in the South China Sea. This move signals support for a vulnerable U.S. ally and demonstrates Canberra's growing willingness to assume leadership roles in the region.¹⁵⁹

Canberra is maintaining dialogue with China, aiming to reset its relationship with Beijing. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was welcomed by Australian counterpart Wong, marking the first sign of a thaw in relations since 2017.¹⁶⁰ Whereas, Canberra's tight-knit approach to managing expectations in the Pacific has led to Beijing expressing concerns about the 'AUKUS' security pact, threatening division and nuclear proliferation in the South Pacific, and expressing dissatisfaction with possible military technology cooperation with Japan.¹⁶¹

Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized India's vision for the 'Indo-Pacific region' in a foreign policy speech, citing its 7.3% economic growth in four years, making it the fastest-growing large economy globally. Modi renamed India's 'Look East' policy to 'Act East', focusing on ASEAN states and strengthening political and security relationships. This policy has expanded to the Indo-Pacific region. India has firmly placed the Indo-Pacific region at the heart of its engagement with the world, citing its geographical, historical, and cultural links, as well as its importance for India's prosperity and security. He used the term eleven times in his

¹⁵⁹Ibid.,Cacola.

¹⁶⁰ Phillip Coorey, "China Hails 'New Starting Point' , Albanese, Xi Stabilise Relations", Financial Review, 6 November 2023.

¹⁶¹“South Pacific Shouldn't Become Arena for Great Power Competition’: China Attacks AUKUS”, The Times of India, 21 April 2024.

speech, encompassing the Arabian Sea/Gulf region and Indian Ocean Island states. India announced its ‘free, open, inclusive’ Indo-Pacific policy, a result of its strategic partnership with the US. The United States renamed its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command, and Modi held a bilateral with US Defence Secretary James Mattis at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. India’s FOIP policy differs from the Trump administration’s FOIP policy in several ways. It emphasizes inclusiveness in pursuit of progress and prosperity, including all nations in the region and those beyond. He did not mention the ‘Quad’, a security-based grouping of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, which concerns China. Modi emphasized the importance of shared values and interests in partnerships, introducing the term ‘rules-based international order’ for the region. He emphasized freedom of navigation, over flights, and peaceful dispute settlement in accordance with international law.

India’s Prime Minister Modi criticised China’s Belt & Road Initiative and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, citing their opposition. He emphasized the importance of stable Sino-Indian relations for global peace and progress, referencing his recent summit with Chinese President Xi. Modi did not mention concerns over Chinese assertiveness towards India or the South China Sea. He emphasized ASEAN as the core of the Indo-Pacific region, reassurance to ASEAN states concerned about potential US or China alignment. He also outlined India’s engagement based on five S’s in Hindi: respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace, and prosperity. Modi, highlighted the importance of naval diplomacy and the Indian Navy’s role in building regional partnerships. However, he raised complex issues for India’s foreign and security policy, such as implementing Modi’s 2015 Indian Ocean vision of Sagar, leveraging India’s naval strength in the Indian Ocean, and promoting collective security through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. These issues highlight the need for India to leverage its naval strength and counter China’s advantages in the South China Sea.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Rahul Roy Choudhury. “Modi spells out free, open, inclusive Indo-Pacific policy”.The International Institute of Strategic Studies. 7 August 2018.

In recent years, every world power has planned its own ‘vision’ for the Indo-Pacific. India pictures the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic region with ASEAN joining the two great oceans. To promote its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, India launched the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision. Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed an “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative” at the ASEAN Summit for the safety, security, and stability of the maritime realm. The Biden administration supports India’s rise and regional leadership in the Indo-Pacific strategy, highlighting China’s challenges and the effectiveness of the Quad, aiming for a free and open region. India’s geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific have shaped its policy, as it recognizes the potential dangers of Beijing’s expanding military might and has a scripted role in the region.

That India has its reasons to compete with Beijing has brought the interest of the United States, Japan and some ASEAN countries. Like China, India’s presence in the Indo-Pacific region can act as an opportunity for many countries. For some ASEAN states, India can be a counterbalance against China. Likewise, the majority of the Indo-Pacific region has been at the receiving end of China’s intrusion and expansionist policies. Australia has accused China of creating an effect in the Pacific by currying favour with the region’s smaller nations. The rise of China and the re-convergence of US influence in the region have forced the global community to re-assess their long-term strategic position in the shifting regional diplomatic geometry. The main emphasis of Indo-Pacific is centred on the ocean where India lives in a significant strategic position in the Indian Ocean. Thus, better maritime connectivity between India and her trade partners is vital in the Indo-Pacific connectivity. In this regard, improving regional connectivity and trade over direct short sea and shipping expeditions would build up marine connectivity between India and ASEAN. It would lead to strengthened financial integration through advanced trade and outlay, an upgrade of tourism, and the construction of seaports and shipping linkages.

Historically, India as a non-aligned country is now shifting its policy by shedding its wariness of irking Chinese sentiments and entering into “issue-based alignments” with other players in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, like-minded countries of the Indo-Pacific region are working together in various minilateral and plurilateral platforms to continue a diplomatic global order. The world is also witnessing the rise of middle-power coalitions among those of India, Australia and Indonesia as well as France. China’s presence in the Indian Ocean appears as an anti-piracy patrol ship. However, even after the clampdown on piracy activity, China continues to sail in the Indian Ocean region. China’s interest in the Indian Ocean is growing because eighty per cent of China’s oil transport passes through Malacca Strait the busiest checkpoint of the Ocean.

China is implementing a ‘blue dragon’ strategy to compete with the United States and undermine President Biden’s Indo-Pacific policy. This strategy targets three water bodies in the Indo-Pacific region and major river systems in Southeast and South Asia, primarily anchored between Sri Lanka and Taiwan. The plan aims to undermine Biden’s Indo-Pacific policy. Whereas, the United States has continued global spy operations and increased its defensive military posture in the Indo-Pacific, despite Washington’s public denial of a containment policy against China. The Biden administration’s recent re-engagement with Beijing follows a tense diplomatic hiatus following the Sino-Russian ‘no limits’ pact and the downing of a Chinese spy balloon.

China’s strategy involves escalating its territorial claims over Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands, demonstrating its strength to Taiwan while also expressing its commitment to reunification. With two aircraft carriers and a fleet of modern ships, China’s unyielding pressure on Taiwan is tied to President Xi Jinping’s dedication to the ‘breakaway province’. China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy and Air Force exercises mark an escalation of grey-zone warfare in the Taiwan Strait and the Senkaku Islands, and even near US military bases in Okinawa and Guam. China’s second frontier is linked to its militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea, which was reinforced by the release of China’s ‘new standard’ map, causing anger

among neighbouring countries.¹⁶³ Beijing has become a key trading partner and investment source for Indo-Pacific nations over the past 20 years, contributing to connectivity and trade. While Beijing may help Indo-Pacific nations by selling surveillance technology and defence equipment, achieving a free and open Indo-Pacific with democratic institutions, free media, transparent governance, and shared standards is only possible with support from the United States and its democratic partners like Australia, India, and Japan.

2.6. Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region is experiencing significant transformation and flux, with shifts that are far from reaching a settling point. The region holds immense geo-economic potential, making it an attractive region for integrating the two oceans into a single and cooperative geographical space. The stability, growth, and success of the Indo-Pacific region are crucial for all major and smaller players, making containment economically unfeasible over cooperation. The perception of a country as a partner or competitor is dynamic and can change over time.

The Indo-Pacific concept focuses on creating a shared identity to facilitate alliance formation. The above discussion indicates that the Indo-Pacific has a significant role to play in building both the economic and security architecture of the region. It has all the components required to help trade and investments. The region has become highly diverse in terms of economic dimensions with significant differences in security. The Indo-Pacific label captures a huge and contested strategic space affected by a host of geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics.

The geopolitical activities in the Indo-Pacific have become more prominent. The main aspect behind this is exponential economic development ranging from India to China and Japan. Therefore, the major power bloc has shifted its focus towards the region under the dynamic global power. The main centre of attention has been on trade. No country can act as an independent nation and they need each other to stabilise the trade and economic cooperation. But they all highlight important and

¹⁶³Patrick Mendis and AntoninaLuszczykiewicz.“China’s ‘blue dragon’ strategy in the Indo-Pacific”. The Strategist. 9 Oct 2023

growing economic and security-related connections between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. All the major powers have common is the idea that the Indo-Pacific should not be dominated by China but rather a diverse multipolar space. As already noted, although the roots of the Indo-Pacific are economic and its consequences are about security. The Pacific powers now have deep equities in the security of the Indian Ocean and India increasingly so in the Pacific.

CHAPTER III

Historical Relations of India and the Indo-Pacific Countries

This chapter examines the historical relations of India and the Indo-Pacific countries including the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Rim countries. The chapter delves into India's foreign policy during the Cold War and post-Cold War, highlighting its significant role in shaping contemporary politics. The main objective is to analyze the emergence of India's relations with the Indo-Pacific countries such as the United States, Japan and Australia. As the Indo-Pacific has gained prominence in international affairs, the centre of attention in the study of international politics has been shifted to Asian region. So, the Indian Ocean and its littoral states are emerging as a crucial centre in the 21st-century geopolitics.

3.1. Basic Determinants of Indian Foreign Policy

Foreign policy has a rich history dating back to ancient times, when civilizations and empires emerged and interacted. It has evolved and changed with the international system and its actors, incorporating forms like alliances, treaties, and wars. Foreign policy evolved and diversified during medieval and modern times due to the rise and fall of states, the spread of religions, and the discovery and colonization of different regions. Factors influencing foreign policy choices of states include geography, population, history, economic resources, ideology, government efficiency, diplomacy quality, crisis, technological advancements, and international law. Determinants of Indian foreign policy include geography, economy, polity, domestic environment, military capability, leadership, and international environment.¹⁶⁴ Foreign policy is influenced by history, geography, and capability, with identity being a significant factor. India's national identity is shaped by Enlightenment values, such as human rights, democracy, constitutional government, and public reason. Although democracy is still a work in progress, it is deeply embedded in the country's identity. As such, India's foreign policy is largely influenced by its commitment to democracy, but it has not prioritized its promotion

¹⁶⁴O.P.Jindal Global University. 'What is Foreign Policy? Definition, Scope, Importance & More'. (23 February, 2024). Retrieved from <https://jgu.edu.in/blog/2024/02/23/what-is-foreign-policy/>

due to its unstable environment and the need to deal with regimes that may not meet democratic standards, ensuring stability and coping with threats. India's foreign policy has consistently focused on fostering friendship and cooperation with other nations, regardless of their economic and political systems, since its independence.

India's foreign policy has been influenced by history, not only during the post-independence period but also today. Despite being fragmented into smaller polities, the subcontinent experienced the rise and decline of powerful empires under the Maurya, Gupta, and Mughal dynasties, covering most of present-day South Asia. India, under the British Raj, became a unified territorial entity due to its strategic location at Asia's crossroads and peninsular projection into the Indian Ocean, making it a natural transit point and destination for international trade. India's history and archaeological evidence show a constant connection with the world, with influence flowing from the west and cultural influence mainly originating from the east. This was evident through the spread of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Indian trading communities, leaving significant remains in countries as far as modern-day Indonesia. India's history and archaeological evidence show a constant connection with the world, with influence flowing from the west and cultural influence mainly originating from the east. This was evident through the spread of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Indian trading communities, leaving significant remains in countries as far as modern-day Indonesia.

The Raj left a unique legacy for India, instilling a political liberal elite under Nehru. This elite built one of the earliest successful democracies outside the West. Independent India incorporated many imperial institutions, including the armed forces and bureaucracy, which included a diplomatic corps, much like the Mughal Empire. India, an ancient civilization, has maintained an independent foreign policy since ancient times. During the colonial period, the British influenced India's foreign policy, benefiting them. Post-independence, India's foreign policy now aligns with its interests, utilizing factors such as military field, space, and religious culture. India's foreign policy, influenced by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, aimed to preserve world peace, independence for Asia and Africa, and disarmament, as

these objectives were crucial to India's independence, influencing various aspects of the nation's economy, geography, history, and culture.

Culture plays a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy, with principles like imperialism, colonialism, and opposition to armaments derived from its history. The country's civil-civilian religious relationship is well-established, with Hindu, Islam, Christian, and Buddhist majorities. Regional events, such as the 1971 alliance between China, the US, and Pakistan, have also influenced India's foreign policy. The increasing dominance of China has intensified India-US relations and increased India's capacity and power through Look East to Act East policies and China's rise in ASEAN. Global factors, such as India's opposition to withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on environmental issues and the need for a democratic government in Afghanistan, also play an important role in determining India's foreign policy. The world order has changed since the Second World War, and India is working to reform the UN Security Council.

3.2. Indian Foreign Policy: Cold War Era

Historians often use non-alignment to describe India's foreign policy during the Cold War era, focusing on idealistic leaders like Nehru and Menon.¹⁶⁵ India, with its diverse attributes and geopolitical position, has the potential to become a major power, but its economic and defense capabilities were deficient during the Cold War, making it a distant dream.¹⁶⁶ India has had a responsible foreign policy since independence, supporting de-colonisation, advocating for developing countries, and promoting international peace and regional stability. India was a key member of the Non-Alignment Movement, balancing between the two camps during the Cold War. As a leader and sensible voice for developing countries, India has been a key player in the Cold War. Despite being a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement

¹⁶⁵Wilson Centre. Indian Foreign Policy during the Early Cold War: Realist or Idealist?.(26 June, 2019). Retrieved from [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/indian-foreign-policy-during-the-early-cold-war-realist-or-idealist#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20India%20\(as%20well,%2C%20and%20staunchly%20anti%2Dcommunist](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/indian-foreign-policy-during-the-early-cold-war-realist-or-idealist#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20India%20(as%20well,%2C%20and%20staunchly%20anti%2Dcommunist).

¹⁶⁶Takenori Horimoto. Explaining India's Foreign Policy: From Dream to Realization of Major Power. International Relations of the Asia-Pacific.(5 September 2017). Volume 17, Issue 3. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/irap/article/17/3/463/4104432>

(NAM) and avoiding superpower struggle, India informally aligned with the Soviet Union due to historical necessity and inevitability. The Soviet Union supported India's freedom movement during its freedom struggle and provided valuable technical assistance and aids for industrialization, modernization, and infrastructure after independence. India also received financial and technical assistance from the Soviet Union, despite suffering from ruthless imperialism and extreme poverty.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, faced a dilemma between aligning with the Marxist bloc and maintaining independence. He chose to avoid both power blocs and maintain an independent foreign policy, known as the policy of non-alignment, to maintain India's newly gained independence in decision-making. Nehru's decision to avoid aligning with military blocs was an intellectual coup, learning from history.

After India's independence, it sought to establish a new role in the Asian continent, particularly in Southeast Asia, where colonialism had persisted. Prime Minister Nehru's vision of a resurgent Asia was based on three assumptions: India's geo-strategic centrality, its historical and cultural roots, and the desire of decolonized Asian countries to avoid great power rivalries and conflict. He believed that if India worked on Asian solidarity through regionalism, institutionalization of cooperation, and mutual understanding, Asia could have a legitimate weight in world politics. Southeast Asian states also viewed India as a valuable friend in their struggle against colonial masters. These assumptions influenced contemporary policies and shaped India's approach to Asia.

During the Cold War, India's international relations shifted between idealist ideals, influenced by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-64), and realism, favoured by his daughter Indira Gandhi (1966-77 and 1980-4). India's international profile was characterized by non-alignment, solidarity with colonized or newly decolonized countries, and addressing the plight of developing nations. India was underdeveloped, and its leaders saw imperialists and landowners exploiting the masses. Socialism appealed to the poor, and Indian leaders were drawn to the transformation in the Soviet Union. Although India did not approve of Soviet-style, it

cherished the values of social justice. India's pragmatism ruled international politics, and it received high material assistance from the Soviet Union. As the United States and Pakistan became closer, India sought military aid from the Soviet Union. In the Indo-China and Indo-Pakistan wars, India suffered due to inferior weapon systems. To upgrade its war machinery, India decided to upgrade its military, and the Soviet Union emerged as a reliable ally, providing advanced military and strategic support in case of foreign invasions. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship 1971, signed by Leonid Brezhnev and Indira Gandhi, solidified India's relationship with the Soviet Union. During the 1971 War with Pakistan, India saw the United States threatening India and ordered its Seventh Fleet of Navy. Despite this, the Soviet Union supported India, vetoing resolutions in the UN Security Council against India, and putting nuclear missiles and submarines on high alert.¹⁶⁷

The first phase (1947-62) of the Optimistic Non-Alignment era saw India resist dilution of sovereignty, rebuild its economy, and consolidate its integrity. As one of the first countries to be decolonized, India led Asia and Africa in a quest for a more equitable world order. India played a critical role in establishing the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in 1961, marking the peak of Third World solidarity. However, the 1962 conflict with China ended this period and significantly damaged India's standing on NAM. After the 1962 war, India made pragmatic choices on security and political challenges, concluding a defense agreement with the United States in 1964. However, India faced external pressures on Kashmir through the Tashkent agreement in 1965. Both India and Pakistan agreed to withdraw armed forces, restore diplomatic relations, and discuss economic, refugee, and other issues. However, the agreement did not contain a no-war pact or renunciation of Pakistan's aggression in Kashmir, leading India to tilt towards the USSR.

From the beginning, India has expressed interest in issues related to international peace, security, economic development, and independence. After independence, India played a leadership role in colonialism, imperialism, and

¹⁶⁷ Rahul Mohanty. 'Indian Foreign Policy: Emerging Challenges and the Road Ahead'. Odisha Review. (January – 2013). Retrieved from <https://magazines.odisha.gov.in/Orissareview/2013/Jan/engpdf/january-2013.pdf>

the sovereignty of new nations. India also addressed issues of casteism and apartheid in African and Asian countries. Nehru's political approach focused on developing an alternative regional philosophy of interstate relations to mitigate security dilemmas in Asia and India's immediate vicinity. Although the policy of non-alignment was followed post-independence, it was not the only unified foreign affairs policy. Nehru's vision was global, and he aimed to create an exemplary model of Indian polity. His approach was shaped by three main beliefs: Asia-centric internationalism, rejection of traditional BoP imagery, and an alternative concept of security called 'the area of peace'. He believed security was an inseparable process that could not be achieved through a balance of power idea, and incidents like the partition of the subcontinent or the Cold War did not change his beliefs or vision of India and Asia at large.

However, Indira Gandhi's approach to world politics was not globalist, focusing on developing an India-centric sub-regional order. Her understanding of India's role was shaped by three core beliefs: a narrow definition of national interests, a divisible conception of security, and an inclination to use coercive means to solve disputes or pursue geopolitical ends in South Asia.¹⁶⁸ The focus on non-alignment in Indian foreign policy has led to overlooking other aspects, including changes during the Cold War. India maintained its distance from power conflicts and economic relations with superpowers through non-alignment policies at the international level. At the regional level, it followed Panchsheel principles for peaceful co-existence. Despite initial support, India struggled to establish cordial relations with neighbours.

Since the 1970s, India has grown increasingly reliant on Moscow for diplomatic, economic, and military assistance. It has established formal diplomatic relations with Israel and South Africa and reformed its relationships with China, Pakistan, and other South Asian members through cooperation. The country's desire to attract foreign investments and secure oil and natural gas led to increased

¹⁶⁸Zorawar Daulet Singh. "Power and Diplomacy: India's Foreign Policies during the Cold War". New Delhi: Oxford University Press. (2019). p. 13. Retrieved from https://idsa.in/system/files/jds/9_br_nazir-a-mir.pdf

international engagement with Asian and African countries, which it had previously ignored. The rise of the United States in the post-Cold War era prompted India to reconsider the relevance of ideology in foreign policy and the option of nonalignment. The country faced an unprecedented balance of payment crisis due to the 1991 Gulf War, leading to significant changes in domestic and international economic policies, including the adherence to the Washington Consensus.

India's focus on self-sufficiency and socialism led to a lack of foreign direct investment, with multinationals perceived as exploitative and part of a larger foreign effort to weaken India and make it dependent on the West. The government viewed the expulsion of IBM and Coca-Cola in the late 1970s as a progressive step towards economic self-sufficiency. India's foreign policy has undergone significant changes in the past decade, challenging two fundamental premises: a focus on a centrally directed economy for defence and development goals with minimal foreign investment and self-reliance, and a desire to maintain a nonaligned policy with the USSR, which has evolved into a close relationship. India's foreign policy focuses on maintaining its international reputation and aiming to be the lead in international politics.

India's foreign policy focuses on economic development, with three levels of activity: not much importance to foreign trade (1947-65), export promotion policy (1965-85), and policy of liberalization and globalization (1985-2011). These policies include foreign trade, foreign economic aid, private capital investment, and joint enterprise establishment. India's foreign policy has evolved through various stages, initially adopting a mixed economy to benefit from both capitalistic and socialistic systems. Economic aid was the main basis. However, by the mid-1980s, India's economic condition deteriorated due to internal and external factors. International changes included the adoption of economic reforms by socialistic countries, connection with capitalistic countries, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In 1991, India began economic reforms, liberalization, and globalization, connecting itself to the capitalistic system. India has faced economic development challenges, including self-reliance during the Cold War, using capitalism as a foreign policy. External powers provided economic help and technology for basic structure

preparation. India's economic policies have been influenced by maintaining a favourable international environment, which has influenced the development of international problems.

3.3. Indian Foreign Policy: Post-Cold War Era

Indian foreign policy faces a challenge in questioning its doctrinal foundation due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the rise of the USA as the sole superpower. India is tasked with developing a foreign policy that effectively addresses the demands of the post-Cold War world and the evolving political realities within the country. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR have significantly impacted India's international security, making it more secure and innovative in its foreign policy. India's foreign policy has been shaped by security concerns from Pakistan and China, but since the end of the Cold War, relations with China have improved, overcoming a chill in mid-1998 when Indian officials justified nuclear tests. The United States and the Soviet Union experienced a fierce Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, leading to a policy of non-alignment. However, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw significant changes, including the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the unification of East and West Germany, and the collapse of East European Communist states. These developments influenced India's foreign policy, leading to new contexts and significant transformations. The fundamental change in attitudes may have transcended nuclear morality, non-aligned third worldism, and anti-West paranoia.

India's foreign policy has been reshaped by changing international conditions, driven by economic self-interest. As socioeconomic groups became more politicized, governments were forced to respond to their demands for better opportunities. Sluggish growth limited these responses to either removing privileged groups or doing nothing. Both options led to violent social protests, with the V.P. Singh government's proposal for job and educational reservations in the early 1990s sparking protests among high-caste students. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi attempted economic reform in the mid-1980s to achieve faster annual GDP growth in India. However, bureaucracy and political establishments resisted his efforts. Rob

Jenkins suggests that Gandhi's efforts laid the groundwork for Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's economic reform measures six years later.¹⁶⁹ India felt isolated in the mid to late 1980s, lacking regional and global influence due to its policy in Indo-China and facing issues with its neighbours in Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁰

After the Congress Party's narrow electoral victory in 1991, Rao reoriented the country's economy and reshaped foreign policy to boost his chances at home. He appointed veteran bureaucrat Manmohan Singh as finance minister and created an economic package to jump-start the economy and alleviate balance of payments issues. Rao devalued the rupee, dismantled a license system, and lowered tariffs to encourage high technology imports. He also encouraged foreign investment, particularly in infrastructure, to dilute the doctrine of self-reliance.

C. Raja Mohan highlights five major shifts in India's foreign policy orientation: consensus to transform socialist society into a modern capitalist one, emphasis on politics to economics, promotion of self interests, rejection of anti-West mode, and pragmatism. India's foreign policy underwent significant changes during its adjustment to the new international order, aiming to enhance its relations with the United States and Western countries to counterbalance its weakened international standing following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

India, largely unaware of Southeast Asia's states during the Cold War, embarked on a 'Look East Policy' after 1991, focusing on foreign investment and the development of a viable export sector, aiming to engage in economic and strategic arenas in the region. After the end of the Cold War, Indian foreign policy underwent a significant shift, with the country focusing on globalization and opening up. This led to a more aggressive and engaging foreign policy, with many foreign relations being elevated to strategic partnerships. Key policies include the 'Look East Policy'

¹⁶⁹ Rob Jenkins. "Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India". U.K.: Cambridge University Press. (2000). pp. 28–41. Retrieved from <https://assets.cambridge.org/97805216/50168/sample/9780521650168wsc00.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ A series of developments in that period had considerably raised tensions with Pakistan and China on the borders; the Indian military adventure in Sri Lanka was a disaster; its policy towards Nepal was widely perceived to be strong arm tactics when restrictions were imposed on entry points; and Bangladesh was sore because of what it considered New Delhi's obstinacy over sharing of Ganges waters.

‘Connect Central Asia Policy’ and ‘African Policy’ which aim to engage with more countries and foster strategic partnerships. India’s ‘Look East Policy’ in the 1990s aimed to engage with ASEAN countries, as India aimed to increase its influence, diplomatic clout, and permanent seat in the UN Security Council. As India’s industry grows, it needs more markets and investment opportunities.

After the Cold War ended in 1990, Asia saw new opportunities to revive ancient ties and contribute to global economic growth. This led to a rediscovery of regional solidarity and a united approach to facing challenges. LEP played a role in India’s response to these new challenges and opportunities. Indian foreign policy prioritizes soft nationalism, fostering close ties with Asian countries, and designing a market-oriented economy for strategic partnerships. Modi’s foreign policy has emphasized the importance of new Asianism, soft nationalism, and a market-oriented economy in the contemporary global world.¹⁷¹ Under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi, India’s foreign policy has undergone significant strategic changes towards the world order. Modi has actively engaged with global investors, strengthened bilateral relations with South Asian countries, and advocated for regional integration.

3.3.1. Look East Policy- 1

India capitalized on the post-Cold War scenario to establish new ties with Southeast Asia, mend strained ties with China, and view Japan differently. India has been actively involved in the fight for a world order free from exploitation and based on mutual respect for each other’s interests and benefits. This move aimed to establish a more just world order than the post-World War II institutions offered. India’s Look East Policy began in the early 1990s, marking a significant shift in global relations after the end of the Cold War. This period also marked the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century and the second to the third millennium of the Christian era. It was launched in 1991 by India’s then-Narasimha Rao government, aims to renew political contacts, increase economic integration, and forge security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries to strengthen political

¹⁷¹Brahma Chellaney. “From a nonaligned to multialigned India?”. Nikkei Asian Review. (29 December, 2014). Retrieved from <https://chellaney.net/2014/04/>

understanding. The policy aims to make India an inalienable part of Asia-Pacific's strategic discourse and marks the beginning of a vibrant relationship on economic, political, and strategic fronts. The policy is aimed at linking India's economic interests to the economic interests of the North-eastern region as a whole. The early 1990s saw a transformation in the international political economy due to the end of the Cold War and the spread of globalisation. India faced internal challenges, including social unrest, political instability, and poor economic performance. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India lost a major economic partner and strategic ally, West Asia and Africa. As a result, India was attracted to the high-performing economies of East Asia. Forced by the economic crisis and the need for FDIs for rapid economic development, India enunciated the Look East policy in 1991, aiming to work with the spirit of regional economic cooperation with its Eastern neighbours.

India's Look East policy, initially centred on ASEAN, has evolved into a more comprehensive approach, covering Australia to East Asia. This phase shifts focus from trade to economic and security cooperation, political partnerships, and physical connectivity. The Northeastern region, with its proximity to Southeast Asia and China, is now seen as a significant area for India's economic relationship. The policy aims to develop the Northeast by increasing its connectivity to the outside world, rather than attempting to isolate it. The Look East Policy was initiated with fanfare, leading to India becoming a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1995. In July 1996, I.K. Gujral, then Minister of External Affairs, attended an ASEAN conference in Indonesia, expressing India's approval of the new relationship and stating that it signified their Look East destiny and aimed to fulfill the prophecy of the 'Asian century'.¹⁷² India's engagement with Southeast Asia is largely attributed to its participation in various regional multilateral frameworks. Initially joining the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996, India's institutionalization of ASEAN-India relations began with the first India-ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh in 2002. This event recognized India's growth as a key player in the Asia Pacific Region.

¹⁷² I.K Gujral, Speech, cited in The Times of India. (25 July, 1996).

India-ASEAN relations improved between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000. In 1998, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee aimed to accelerate India's Look East Policy, popularized by leaders like I.K. Gujral and Jaswant Sinha. The policy expanded to countries other than ASEAN members, like Australia, Japan, and South Korea. In 2003, Foreign Minister Jaswant Sinha announced the second phase of the Look East Policy, which shifted from trade to economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect sea lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities. The policy also included an arrangement for a Free Trade Agreement and institutional economic linkage between the region and India.¹⁷³ India aimed to connect with its Southeast and East Asia neighbours through various official visits and political exchanges. It aimed to demonstrate its modern, peace-loving, practical, and cooperative nature to these eastern neighbours. India also sought to enhance political understanding, identify mutual interests, and initiate actions to harness these interests.¹⁷⁴ India has made significant progress in its 'Look East Policy' over the past decade, focusing on engaging with ASEAN and its members. India differentiates between new ASEAN members like Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, who have a different strategic background and perspective. This approach allows India to extend its influence in these countries. The Ministry of External Affairs has created a separate administrative unit, the CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) desk, to deal with these new ASEAN countries, initiating special assistance and cooperation programs in diverse fields.¹⁷⁵

India is enhancing its defense ties with Southeast Asian countries, participating in the ASEAN Regional Forum and hosting the biennial MILAN naval gathering at Port Blair since 1995. These exercises aim to balance China's influence, highlight India's emergence as a major player in the Asia-Pacific region, and

¹⁷³Yashwant, Sing., Speech at Harvard University, Cambridge, (29 September, 2003) at www.meaindi.nic.in

¹⁷⁴Amit Singh. "India – Malaysia Strategic Relations". Maritime Affairs. (2011). Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 85-105. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09733159.2011.605302?tab=permissions&scroll=top&role=tab>

¹⁷⁵SD Muni. "India's Look east Policy: The Strategic Dimension". (February, 2011). Institute of South Asian Studies). Paper No. 121. Retrieved from <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/121-indiaococ-ocylook-eastco-policy-the-strategic-dimension/>

demonstrate the Navy's ability to operate far from home. The exercises also aim to stem the flow of arms across the Bay of Bengal to insurgents in the Northeast and demonstrate India's ability to operate far from home.¹⁷⁶ India's military contacts with ASEAN states have expanded into full-fledged defense cooperation, with the country now focusing on security cooperation, joint operations to protect sea lanes, and pooling resources in the war against terrorism. India has also begun regular access to parts of Southeast Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and China, marking the first time India has engaged in such multi-directional defence diplomacy in Asia.

Singapore, despite New Delhi's efforts, has been the most enthusiastic partner of India, actively harnessing the country's economic growth potential. Singapore supported India's case for Dialogue Partnership, membership in the ARF, and the ASEAN +1 Summit meeting. India's growing and liberalizing economy has led to close relations with Singapore in the region since the adoption of its Look East Policy.¹⁷⁷ India's relations with ASEAN countries Malaysia and Thailand have gained momentum in the second phase of the Look East Policy, with strategic partnership agreements signed with both countries and comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements signed with Malaysia and Indonesia during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visits in October 2010 and January 2011.

3.3.2. Look East Policy- 2

India's rise from a bleak global position, combined with its size, population, geopolitical location, military strength, and economic growth, has prompted Southeast Asian nations to establish collaborative ties with India. Since the 1990s, India has been implementing its Look-East Policy, which is being consolidated over time. As India's Look East Policy has entered into its second phase, its 'Look East Policy' has led to close bilateral understanding and cooperation with Japan, South Korea, and China. Despite mistrust, India-China relations have been expanding and maturing in recent years. This has been evident in regular political exchanges,

¹⁷⁶Subhash 2012. "The Evolution of India's Look East Policy". Dynamics of Public Administration, vol. 29, No. Shukla 1 pp. 1-20.

¹⁷⁷VoXuanVinh. "Vietnam – India Relation in the light of India's Look East Policy". ICWA. New Delhi. (2012). pp. 19-21. <https://www.icwa.in/WriteReadData/RTF1984/1498124363.pdf>

burgeoning trade ties, strategic dialogue, and cooperation on regional and international issues. The visit of President Pratibha Patil in May 2010 provided an opportunity for India and China to upgrade and deepen their engagement, enhancing bilateral ties.¹⁷⁸

India's relations with major powers and neighbouring nations have been shaped by the changing international environment and military and domestic political needs. The relationship between India and South East Asia has followed a non-linear course, initially fostering solidarity in the early 20th century due to colonialism. However, the Cold War era led to divergent political, security, and economic interests. Post-Cold War geo-strategic and economic realities have propelled India and Southeast Asia to forge strong economic and security ties. While the potential of these relations is yet to be fully exploited, consistent initiatives, such as ASEAN and the Indian government's Look East policy (Phases 1 and 2), have been crucial in fostering cooperation.

3.3.3. Act East Policy

India's Look East policy has evolved into a proactive Act East policy, aiming to accelerate engagement between Asia's two growth poles, particularly with the ASEAN grouping. The strategy aims to adapt to the rapid and complex developments in the region, particularly changes in economic and security dynamics, while also focusing on its own strategic evolution. India's eagerness to play a proactive role in its East has been largely attributed to official statements from Prime Minister Modi, who has frequently alluded to Act East. Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's new 'Act East Policy' during his first trip to Myanmar in November 2014, demonstrating his commitment to enhancing ties with Southeast Asia. This shift aligns with India's growing relations with the ASEAN grouping. India's Act East Policy emphasizes the strategic convergence between India and ASEAN, focusing on ASEAN centrality, unity, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). This has strengthened the strategic partnership and increased bilateral high-level visits,

¹⁷⁸Ravindranatha C Reddy. "India's Look East Policy: Problems and Prospects". World Focus. (October,2010). pp.437-39.

fostering deeper ties with the region. ASEAN aligns with India on trade, connectivity, defense, and security issues, ensuring the Indo-Pacific region upholds an international rules-based order and remains the hub for global economic growth.¹⁷⁹

India's institutional integration with Southeast Asia extends beyond ASEAN, embracing regional and subregional groups. India has participated in the establishment of new sub-regional groups like IOR, BIMSTEC, MGC, and the SCO. It also observes in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and has shown potential in regional cooperation. India's Act East Policy has enhanced its relationship with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific through connectivity, defense, and cultural initiatives over the past decade.

The AEP has significantly expanded India's diplomatic and geostrategic outreach, focusing on strategic dimensions in the Indo-Pacific region. This approach was prompted by the growing geopolitical importance of the region and the challenges posed by China's assertions. India has taken a proactive role in ensuring freedom of navigation, supporting maritime domain awareness capabilities, and tackling non-traditional security threats like piracy. This has made India a reliable partner in regional security frameworks, including the Quad and multilateral platforms. India's diplomacy has focused on strengthening policy synergies, such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the AOIP. It has also been a strong voice in the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting, ensuring India's relevance in Southeast Asia. India's defence diplomacy with strategic partners has intensified, as seen in the first India-ASEAN maritime exercises in 2023. As the policy matured, its scope expanded beyond ASEAN, with deepening strategic ties with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Japan has become one of India's closest partners under AEP, with bilateral defence cooperation becoming a cornerstone.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Abhishek Sharma and Pratinashree Basu. "Ten years of India's Act East Policy". Observer Research Foundation. Oct 10, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/english/expert-speak/ten-years-of-india-s-act-east-policy>

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Sharma and Basu.

India's Act East Policy is central to its eastward orientation and aligns with the broader Indo-Pacific approach. Over time, India's approach has evolved into strategic engagement with ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Pacific islands. Collaboration has accelerated in areas such as trade, investment, connectivity, energy, culture, people-to-people contacts, and maritime security. In 2014, PM Modi agreed on a joint vision of the Indo-Pacific with President Obama, highlighting the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific oceans in terms of security and economics.¹⁸¹ India's 10-year AEP has significantly improved trade, connectivity, technology, defense, and security ties with Southeast Asia. As the region becomes more vulnerable to climate change and non-traditional security threats, India's role in disaster management, climate diplomacy, and maritime domain awareness is set to grow. PM Modi's 2023 proposal emphasizes strengthening and expanding ties in new domains, including global challenges like food security and climate change. India is also working with ASEAN on global issues and should expand its strategic partnerships with middle powers in the Indo-Pacific, such as South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand.

India is enhancing regional maritime security by strengthening the skills and logistics of its Indo-Pacific neighbours, particularly those in Southeast Asia. It has agreed with Asean to prevent accidents and manage maritime search and rescue and has signed white shipping agreements with several countries. India also assists its maritime neighbours in setting up coastal surveillance networks for shared maritime domain awareness. Hydrographic support and training capacity building efforts are also being implemented to ensure navigation safety. In 2008, India launched the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to provide a platform for littoral nations to cooperate for enhanced regional security. India also played a leading role in developing the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 1997, which focuses on traditional and nontraditional security challenges such as piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking, drug smuggling, weapon trafficking, maritime pollution, disaster management, and climate change.

¹⁸¹Anil Wadhwa. "India's Act East Policy". Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (9 August, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?840>

India is enhancing cultural cooperation with ASEAN countries, focusing on exchanges among diplomats, youth, media, and intellectuals. The ASEAN India vision document emphasizes preserving traditions and heritage. India should align with the ASEAN Integration Plan 2025 and strengthen cooperation in areas like food, agriculture, education, clean energy, tourism, health, and SMEs. Terrorism remains a challenge, and institutional linkages must be strengthened. Indian centres of excellence in English language, IT, and software development should be expanded. The Asean India fund, with an additional US\$ 50 million, will help with these activities. Asean and India aim to promote stable growth in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through technology transfer, diffusion, adoption, adaptation, capacity building, technical assistance, and integration into global and regional value chains.¹⁸²

India's exit from the ASEAN-led RCEP in 2019 has impacted its regional FTA, and it needs to update the 2009 AITIGA and 2005 CECA with Singapore. India's commitment to ASEAN centrality on strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific has been warmly received, but it needs to coordinate more closely on geopolitical issues like Myanmar, the South China Sea, and Quad engagement. India's historical ties with the region date back over a millennium, but modern ties need periodic resets, as seen with the Look East policy (1992) and the Modi government's Act East policy (2014).¹⁸³ The Act East strategy is expanding beyond Southeast Asia, extending beyond the region. India recognizes that a strategic vision for Southeast Asia is not exclusive to East Asia and the Asia-Pacific. India believes it is essential to have a holistic strategic vision of the Asia-Pacific, rather than relying on limited parcel views. The Act East approach, despite its expansive geography, reveals India's seriousness in aiming to become a major regional actor. This ambition has significant implications for regional dynamics, particularly on the political and economic balance of power in the region.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Wadhwa.

¹⁸³ The Hindu. "Periodic reset: On India-ASEAN ties, 'Act East' policy". (9 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/%E2%80%8Bperiodic-reset-on-india-asean-ties-act-east-policy/article68618719.ece>

The Modi government's 'Neighbourhood First' approach aims to promote regional stability and prosperity, focusing on a secure and cooperative neighbourhood for India's development and security. The prime minister's outreach aims to resolve issues and foster economic and cultural ties with neighbouring countries. India also seeks to counter China's influence in the region through the Act East policy, which deepens engagement with Southeast Asian nations. The focus of New Delhi's South Asia policy has shifted from Pakistan to the Bay of Bengal maritime geography.¹⁸⁴

3.4. Indian Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific

India's foreign policy is a strategic autonomy approach, guided by 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The Indo-Pacific region has a rich history of international relations, fostering a common identity before colonialism. It has experienced a diffusion of skills and knowledge, influenced by cultural, civilizational, economic, linguistic, and religious interactions. British colonial rule renewed maritime trade links, enhancing the region's strategic and economic significance. The centrality of India in the Asian strategic space can be attributed to the historical linkages of the Indo-Pacific conception with Indian nationalism, necessitating geo-historical narratives about the perception of the Indo-Pacific as a new regional entity.¹⁸⁵

In 1942, Sir Olaf Caroe, the British foreign secretary to India, founded a study group to examine India's role in a British-led Commonwealth system. The group emphasized India's centrality in an Asiatic system, ensuring the continuation of the Great Game.¹⁸⁶ Geopolitical thinker Sardar K.M. Panikkar also contributed to

¹⁸⁴ Harsh, V Pant. "A Decade of Modi's Foreign Policy: India Shows the Way". Observer Research Foundation. (31 May, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/a-decade-of-modi-s-foreign-policy-india-shows-the-way>

¹⁸⁵ N.Kaushiki. "Revisiting Security Cooperation in the Geopolitical Construct of the Indo-Pacific". The Diplomatist. (6 July, 2021). Retrieved from <https://diplomatist.com/2021/07/06/revisiting-security-cooperation-in-the-geopolitical-construct-of-the-indo-pacific>

¹⁸⁶ R.Panda. "The Quad Concept: What Promise does it hold for the Future?". Vivekananda International Foundation. (25 February, 2021). Retrieved from

the Indo-Pacific ideational underpinnings, advocating for India to form a “steel ring” by controlling the farthest stretches of the Indian Ocean. Both figures contributed to the understanding of the Indo-Pacific.

India’s historical interactions with Pacific Asia were mostly mercantilist, but the Cholas in the 9th and 10th centuries used naval power to strengthen their imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia. Mackinder’s Heartland concept suggests the Eurasian heartland is surrounded by four marginal areas, including the spheres of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, and two southern regions, the ‘Eastern Inner Crescent’, connected to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Karl Haushofer’s geopolitik framework identifies the Indo-Pacific region as a strategically significant area due to its robust economy, transportation networks, maritime connectivity, and potential hinterland.

India’s historic diaspora communities, dating back to early medieval merchant settlements, hold significant soft power in the Indo-Pacific region. These communities pass on Indian culture, faith, language, and traditions to their host nations, enriching their new homelands. Indian culture is deeply entrenched in the architectural, social, and cultural landscapes of Indo-Pacific nations, such as Banda Aceh in Indonesia. India’s influence extends beyond ancient times, influencing soft power and political stability. For example, the peaceful Islam introduced by Indian traders in South and Southeast Asia is more moderate than in West Asia.¹⁸⁷ India’s East has changed in terms of its strategic importance. As India’s conception of the East is being expanded to include the Pacific, recent changes are reshaping its geopolitics. India holds significant international influence in the Indo-Pacific region through its historic ethnic communities, the majority of which date back to early medieval Indian merchant settlements. Although these inhabitants of Indian ethnicity are citizens of the countries in which they reside, they have handed down to

<https://www.vifindia.org/article/2021/february/25/the-quad-concept-what-promise-does-it-hold-for-the-future>

¹⁸⁷Darshana M. Baruah. “India’s maritime moment has arrived”.The Hindustan Times. (30 September 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>

succeeding generations their religion, language, writing system, food, social institutions, and Indian culture.

India's Indo-Pacific, originating from the British Raj's management of Southeast Asia, has been a topic of discussion since the 1950s and 1960s. The Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative aims to enhance maritime security, promote sustainable development, and foster cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states. India, despite being a key player in Indo-Pacific strategies, has been slow to adopt the concept due to geopolitical, strategic, and regional factors. India's priorities for the Indo-Pacific differ from early adopters like Australia, Japan, and the US, who prioritized the Pacific over the Indian Ocean. India's main focus is to strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean and ensure its interests are not challenged.¹⁸⁸ India's rising power in the Indo-Pacific is becoming increasingly recognized, potentially contributing to regional stability and development. The future of regional economic and security depends on the policies of great powers like India, China, and Japan.

India's shifting policy towards the East has also been expanded through Australia and India's possibility of engagement with the East Asia has been proven. Thus, political, economic, and cultural relations between India and Australia have developed at a higher pace through LEP and the growing realization on both sides to step up economic cooperation. From the stage of 'benign neglect', the two countries have reached the stage of realization of the potential.¹⁸⁹ India's regularized presence in the Asia-Pacific is a projection of its ability to act as a "trans-regional" power, if not a global one. With its increasing presence in the region, India is becoming a "Pacific player."¹⁹⁰ India and Australia are emerging powers in the region and they are following their own strategic priorities and cooperating in many of them. While geographically ASEAN is central to the Indo-Pacific, its member states are divided

¹⁸⁸ Walter Ludwig. "The Indo-Pacific in Indian Foreign Policy". Royal United Services Institute. (30 April, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Walter-Ladwig>

¹⁸⁹ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Retrieved from www.dfact.gov.au.

¹⁹⁰ David Scott. "Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia". International Studies. (2007). Vol. 44, No. 2. pp. 123–40. Retrieved from <https://d-scott.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/india-asiapacific.pdf>

over the Indo-Pacific paradigm, and also their strategies towards the United States and China are evolving, wherein they are not taking sides and reaping the benefits of a good relationship with both. In the current strategic environment, critical technology, supply chain resilience, energy security/transition, and pandemic response have emerged as key non-traditional security issues.

India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region is driven by economic, security, and regional stability factors. The region provides vital sea lanes for India's trade and energy flows with Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania. As a major trading nation, India relies heavily on seaborne trade, and ensuring the security and stability of these maritime routes is crucial for its growth and development. India's steps toward joining an Indo-Pacific world were very much a result of its strategic location. There was a change in its immediate neighbourhood and its security environment. The Indo-Pacific region is facing a complex geopolitical landscape, with India's immediate neighbourhood affecting its security environment. India aims to protect its interests and territorial integrity by promoting rules-based order, freedom of navigation, and peaceful dispute resolution. It also aims to counter non-traditional security threats like piracy, terrorism, and smuggling. India is actively fostering strategic partnerships and strengthening defence cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries. India has initiated military exercises, joint patrols, and naval cooperation to enhance regional security and interoperability among nations, demonstrating its commitment to Southeast Asia through its AEP, aiming to enhance engagement with the region.¹⁹¹

However China imposed its initiatives and collaborations in India's neighbourhood. China was able to increase its presence in South Asia and across the Indian Ocean because other countries in the region welcomed it. Many of India's neighbours such as Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka viewed India's presence as dominant while overlooking their concerns and challenges. The lack of strategic competition in the region helped India establish itself as the primary security provider for many of these countries. China's initiatives offered an

¹⁹¹RishavShukla and Rupesh Kumar.“Charting India's Course: Unravelling Maritime Geo-Strategic Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region”.World Focus.(February, 2024) p. 83.

alternative to New Delhi's role as the dominant security player in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

India's own approach toward the Indo-Pacific is shaped by a new strategic environment coinciding with the rise of China, particularly in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. While priorities and capabilities remain different, Beijing's expanding presence across the Indo-Pacific presents a common strategic challenge for Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington. As India began to face these challenges in the Indian Ocean and South Asia, it adopted an Indo-Pacific strategy to manage a rising China in the region while strengthening partnerships to address a new security environment. In doing so, India had to find a balance between its emerging geopolitical competition with China and its renewed partnerships with the West. India's Indo-Pacific therefore emerged as an opportunity to expand its presence while leveraging partnerships to address its capacity constraints in securing its strategic interests.

As the Indo-Pacific concept increasingly became a strategic asset and India began to respond to its new security environment, it continued to struggle to present a clear vision for the future. In both the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, smaller nations and littorals wanted to avoid choosing sides in the Sino-Indian or China-U.S. competitions that were brewing. Many of these nations, and India's long-term partners, viewed the Indo-Pacific as a challenge to China's rise. For India's neighbours, the rise of China brought new opportunities, projects, and economic initiatives. While this provided a fresh alternative to countries from Maldives to Nepal, it threatened to undermine India's strategic interests. If India had the potential to be the balancing power in Southeast Asia against an assertive China, then China was already emerging as the balancing power in the Indian Ocean against a dominant India. India now had the difficult task of competing with Beijing to maintain its role in the Indian Ocean while reinvesting and strengthening its ties with the island states.

3.5. Bilateral relations with Indo-Pacific countries (Pacific Rim states)

The Indo-Pacific region's strategic importance has increased in recent years, significantly impacting foreign policy, ensuring no country remains away. The Pacific region's current situation has significantly impacted its littoral states. Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S. are promoting cooperation in various fields to achieve a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and emphasize the importance of positive contributions to the region. Quad countries involvement in Indo-Pacific region affairs and their bilateral relations have significantly enhanced their role in the region, such as-

3.5.1. India-United States

India-US ties have entered a pivotal stage in the post-Cold War global realignment and globalization period. India is increasingly allowing engagement terms with the US to precede the policy of non-alignment, which was previously a source of discord between the two nations. India-U.S. bilateral relations have evolved into a global strategic partnership, based on shared democratic values and convergence of interests on regional and global issues. India's emphasis on development and good governance has boosted cooperation under mottos 'Chalein Saath Saath: Forward Together We Go' and 'Sanjha Prayas, Sab ka Vikas' (Shared Effort, Progress for All). The relationship was referred to as 'Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century'.¹⁹²

India and the United States have a robust global strategic partnership, characterized by shared democratic values, convergence of interests, and active people-to-people contacts. Regular dialogue between leaders is crucial for expanding bilateral ties, and the outcomes of these visits have strengthened multifaceted ties. India's largest trading partner is the USA, with bilateral trade in goods and services reaching \$191 billion in 2022. In 2022, bilateral merchandise trade reached \$133 billion, while services trade reached \$58 billion. The US was the third largest source of FDI into India, accounting for 9% of total equity inflows. Indian companies have

¹⁹²Consulate General of India, Atlanta. "India - USA Relations". Retrieved from <https://www.indiainatlanta.gov.in/>

invested over \$40 billion in the United States, creating over 425,000 direct jobs, according to a CII study.¹⁹³

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's takeover in May 2014, India and the United States have found more similarities in their approaches to the Indo-Pacific region, with bilateral cooperation now extended to the region. India-US bilateral ties are influenced by four key elements: introducing Indo-Pacific coordination and cooperation, favouring minilateral cooperation channels like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, supporting ASEAN-centred regional institutions like the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, addressing India's strategic distrust and US competition with China, and engaging in regional economic initiatives, including overlaps on the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.¹⁹⁴

India and the United States are participating in new regional economic initiatives, such as the Biden administration's IPEF, which includes supply chain, clean economy, and fair economy. India is an observer for the fourth pillar of trade,¹⁹⁵ while the United States is not involved in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership.¹⁹⁶ India and the US have shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region for the past decade, with a growing alignment in policy, China, and commercial initiatives. Since Modi's 'Act East' policy and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, India-US ties have grown steadily in the region, as individual nations, with each other, and with close allies via the Quad. The Indo-Pacific is not the end or sum of a global partnership between the US and India, which has been forged over the past

¹⁹³Ministry of External Affairs."India-US Bilateral Relations".(13 October, 2023).Retrieved from https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral_Brief_as_on_09.10.2023.pdf

¹⁹⁴SatuLimaye and Lei Nishiuwatoko."India-U.S. Convergence in the Indo-Pacific".Observer Research Foundation. (October, 2024). Issue Brief No.740. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/english/research/india-u-s-convergence-in-the-indo-pacific>

¹⁹⁵White House."FACT SHEET: In Asia, President Biden and a Dozen Indo-Pacific Partners Launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity". (May, 2023). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-in-asiapresident-biden-and-a-dozen-indo-pacific-partners-launch-the-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/>

¹⁹⁶Congressional Research Service."Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership". (17 October, 2022)<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11891>

decade. Despite multiple intersections, the Indo-Pacific is a critical element in expanding and enhancing the relationship.

3.5.2. India-Japan

India and Japan have a long-standing friendship rooted in spirituality and strong cultural and civilizational ties, which have resulted in a Special Strategic and Global Partnership. In the first decade after diplomatic ties were established, high-level exchanges occurred between India and Japan, with visits from Japanese Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, Crown Prince Akihito, Crown Princess Michiko, and Japanese Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. India-Japan relations were elevated to ‘Global Partnership’ in 2000, ‘Strategic and Global Partnership’ in 2006, and ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’ in 2014. Regular annual summits have been held since 2006, with the last summit in March 2021. President Ram Nath Kovind visited Japan in October 2019 to attend the Emperor’s Enthronement Ceremony.¹⁹⁷

The Asia-Pacific region has seen a shift in power dynamics, with India and Japan enhancing their collaboration in the region. The Pax Americana framework, where the US dominated, was replaced by China’s rise as the world’s largest economy and its ambitious initiatives like the Belt and Road. This shift has led to the recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach to regional security. India and Japan have identified common responses to emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific through strategies like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), recognizing the importance of a strategic partnership beyond traditional security concerns. India and Japan are enhancing their security roles and defence capabilities, highlighting their complementary strengths. Japan sees India as an essential partner in the region’s security architecture, contributing to economic assistance and advanced technological capabilities. The declaration of a new FOIP plan by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the importance of the Special Strategic and Global Partnership by India’s External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, at the

¹⁹⁷Ministry of External Affairs. “India-Japan Bilateral Relations”. (16 October, 2023). Retrieved from [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Japan -
Bilateral Brief MEA Website Oct 2023.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Japan_-_Bilateral_Brief_MEA_Website_Oct_2023.pdf)

sixth India-Japan Indo-Pacific Forum in November 2023, reinforce the geo-economic and geostrategic interests of the two nations.¹⁹⁸

India and Japan's 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' relationship, upgraded in 2014, has been strengthened due to the alignment of geo-economic and geo-strategic interests. The multifaceted relationship emphasizes their pivotal roles in the Indo-Pacific, including infrastructure development, economic cooperation, and defence collaboration. India's Act-East Policy, SAGAR, has been aligned with Japan's FOIP. Japan's large-scale projects in India support its economic growth, enhance its diplomatic presence, and protect regional interests. India's economic and military potential, combined with Japan's ability, encourages strategic collaboration against Indo-Pacific threats.¹⁹⁹

3.5.3. India-Australia

India-Australia's bilateral relationship is based on shared values of pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, economic engagement, and high-level interaction. In recent years, the relationship has seen transformational growth, expanding cooperation across new areas and opening up new possibilities at both bilateral and global levels. India's relations with Australia reached a new high with the first-ever visit of President H.E. Shri Ram Nath Kovind to Australia on 21-24 November 2018. Kovind unveiled the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Parramatta, New South Wales, as part of the 150th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi. Five Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were exchanged during the visit. The relationship between Australia and India upgraded from 'Strategic Partnership' in 2009 to 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)' in 2020. Over the years, various institutional mechanisms have been put in place to promote bilateral cooperation, including high-level visits, annual meetings of Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, 2+2 Defence and Foreign Ministers Dialogue, Joint Trade & Commerce Ministerial Commission, Defence Policy Talks,

¹⁹⁸ S.B. Girisanter. "India-Japan Strategic Partnership and the Indo-Pacific". Manohar Parikkar, Institute for Defence Studies And Analyses. (21 February, 2024). <https://www.idsa.in/publisher/issuebrief/india-japan-strategic-partnership-and-the-indo-pacific/>

¹⁹⁹ *Opcit.*, MEA

Australia-India Education Council, Defence Services Staff Talks, Energy Dialogue, and Joint Working Groups on various issues.²⁰⁰

Australia and India have transitioned from being recipients of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept in the US policy of rebalance to Asia to active participants in shaping the vision. Both countries value the Indian Ocean as a trade route, have economic interdependence with China, and emphasize rule-based order. However, they differ on the decline of US power, with Australia concerned about the US’s declining presence and India considering it an opportunity to maintain order.²⁰¹ India-Australia bilateral relations have significantly improved in the last five years due to strong political will and shared concerns for a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region. Both countries have recognized the importance of working together to maintain a stable regional order in the larger Indo-Pacific. The growing China challenge has also influenced their China policy, with both countries diversifying their partnerships in economics, defence, clean energy, and supply chains. India’s deepening relations with Australia have influenced its ambitions and policies in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries are part of the Quad, a regional minilateral grouping comprising India, Japan, Australia, and the US, and are shaping the agenda of this grouping. India’s position as a significant player in the Quad has been accepted by Australia, allowing it to have a varied position on global issues.²⁰²

²⁰⁰Ministry of External Affairs.“India-Australia Bilateral Relations”. (9 October, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Aus-brief-2023.pdf>

²⁰¹ Marie Izuyama. “Australia, India and the Indo-Pacific Concept”. Ministry of Defense, Government of Japan. (12 March, 2015). Retrieved from https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2019/east-asian_e2019_01.pdf

²⁰²Premesha Saha. “The growing centrality of India in Australia’s Indo-Pacific policy”. Observer Research Foundation. (13 March, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-growing-centrality-of-india-in-australias-indo-pacific-policy>

3.6. Engagement with Indian Ocean Littoral states

India's growing presence and strategic rivalries are influencing its engagement with Indian Ocean island states, resulting in its rise as an economic, military, and naval power, and it is becoming a net security provider in the region. India is regarded as the ideal security partner by the Indian Ocean states.²⁰³ India has shown support to smaller island states in the Indian Ocean, viewing them as part of its sphere of influence.²⁰⁴ Island States, known as 'large ocean states', heavily rely on marine resources like fishing and tourism, aiming to develop into hubs for higher education, healthcare, shipping, air-services, banking, and finance. The Indian Ocean has 36 littoral regions, categorized into four sub-regions: South Asian, West Asian, East African, and South East Asian and Australian. There are 36 littoral in the Indian Ocean which have been geographically grouped into the following four sub-regions-

1. South Asian Littorals: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and United Kingdom (British Indian Ocean Territory).
2. West Asian Littorals: Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
3. East African Littorals: France (Reunion), Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania.
4. South East Asian and Australian Littorals: Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Timor-Leste.

Observers: China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, the Netherlands, Russia and Spain.²⁰⁵

Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles are strategic Indian Ocean islands crucial for naval presence along key sea lines of communication (SLOCs). They allow navy patrols, secure SLOCs during peacetime, and interdict adversary

²⁰³Kaushik, K. "Binaries of peace and conflict becoming less relevant". Navy Chief: The Indian Express. (28 August, 2021). Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/binaries-of-peace-and-conflict-becoming-less-relevant-navy-chief-7474622/>

²⁰⁴David Brewster. "An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?". Security Challenges. (2010). 6 (3). pp. 1-20. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26459796>

²⁰⁵Vajiram & Ravi. "Indian Ocean Naval Symposium". (25 December, 2023). Retrieved from <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/prelims-pointers/ions/>

communications during conflict. Among the South Asian littorals, India has a strong cooperation with Sri Lanka and Maldives. It also has a deep historical connection with Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar. India's perceived threat to its interests in the Indian Ocean Region due to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) led to strengthening relations with regional countries like Seychelles, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, and Maldives, who have seen a surge in Chinese investments.

3.6.1. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, located in the North-Central Indian Ocean along the maritime lanes that connect West Asia and East Asia, are the island republics closest to the Indian mainland in terms of geography. India and other South Asian states are members of the SAARC, a regional cooperative institution, and are part of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and the Indian Ocean strategy of SAGAR. India's intense engagement with Sri Lanka along with its significant developmental assistance has made it a key player in Sri Lanka's domestic politics due to its geographic and cultural proximity, making it a significant contributor to the region.

In the 1980s, India's security engagement with Sri Lanka was robust. Sri Lanka was grappling with the Tamil insurgency led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). India's 1987-1989 military missions in Sri Lanka involved combating Tamil insurgents and navigating the complex dynamics between the Tamil and Sinhalese communities. The actions in Sri Lanka were interpreted as the readjustment of India's position as a dominant regional force.²⁰⁶

India's military and economic power surged in the 1990s and 2000s, forming a steadfast security partner for the Maldives, providing weapons, training, and naval support. India, balancing domestic needs and foreign priorities, signed a Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka in 1998, providing diplomatic and developmental support.²⁰⁷ The politics in Sri Lanka underwent significant changes in the late 2000s. China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region has significantly

²⁰⁶J.R.Holmes and T. Yoshihara. "India's Monroe Doctrine and Asia's Maritime Future". *Strategic Analysis*. (2008). 32 (6). pp. 997-1011. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700160802404539>

²⁰⁷S.Menon. (2016). "Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy". Gurgaon: Penguin.

influenced the geopolitics of the region, challenging India's influence and fostering increased engagement. Sri Lanka's economic and infrastructure ties with China increased significantly after escaping insurgency pressures. Despite Prime Minister Mahipala Sirisena's efforts, the island nation struggled to untangle its strong economic and infrastructure presence. Between 2006 and 2009, Sri Lanka received approximately US\$12 billion in Chinese investments.²⁰⁸ Sri Lanka's renewed push for a proactive role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) under President Ranil Wickremesinghe's government has been fuelled by new domestic and external complexities and evolving security dynamics in the Indian Ocean, as highlighted by the Senior National Security Advisor in September 2023. Sri Lanka's strategic and security environment is rapidly evolving due to the Indian Ocean becoming a contested geography, with India contesting against China and other major powers. The US, France, and Russia are increasing their presence in Sri Lanka, putting its non-aligned foreign policy under stress. The country has imposed a year-long ban on foreign research vessels, highlighting the increasing pressure on its non-aligned foreign policy. To avoid excessive pressure, Sri Lanka is focusing on strengthening and enhancing its maritime capabilities with India and France, receiving two Dornier aircraft, establishing a maritime rescue coordination centre, and joining India's Information Fusion Centre. It is also building a regional maritime safety and security training school.²⁰⁹ Sri Lanka, following the civil war, collaborated with India and the Maldives for the trilateral coastguard exercise 'Dosti' to address maritime challenges and threats. Sri Lanka is proactively addressing maritime security and establishing a strategic presence in the Indian Ocean, despite a mismatch between ambitions and resources, marking a first for a post-war government.

Over the years, many of India's neighbours such Sri Lanka have seen her as the dominant power in the region that overlooks their concerns and challenges while unilaterally directing the narrative of the region on the global stage. The lack of strategic competition in the immediate neighbourhood helped India maintain its

²⁰⁸ G. Wignaraja, DP. Panditaratne and D. Hundalani.(2020). "Chinese Investment and the BRI in Sri Lanka". London: Chatham House.

²⁰⁹ AdityaGowdaraShivamurthy. 'SL's evolving role in the Indian Ocean'. Observer Research Foundation.(24, Janaury, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/contributors/aditya-gowdara-shivamurthy>

status quo for decades without changing its outlook or geopolitical strategy. This allowed India to grow complacent in its maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean region. Island nations such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka play a critical role in maritime strategy and naval warfare. Yet unlike the colonial era, island nations have greater sovereignty and can significantly alter their foreign policy choices while keeping their domestic concerns in the centre. Therefore in the tussle between great powers, hostile governments in these island states can complicate and challenge India's maritime strategy and security in the Indian-Pacific region.

3.6.2. Maldives

The India-Maldives relationship, influenced by political change, cultural ties, and strategic needs, has experienced a diplomatic reset, rekindling the relationship and resuming a delicate dance between neighbouring nations. The Maldives relationship with India deteriorated when presidential candidate Muizzu launched an anti-India campaign, targeting Indian military personnel stationed in the archipelago. This campaign resonated with a segment of the Maldivian population, causing a tense atmosphere between the two nations.²¹⁰ Dr S. Jaishankar, India's Minister of External Affairs, successfully visited the Maldives to deepen bilateral relations. He met with President Muizzu and signed Memorandums of Understanding, paving the way for renewed cooperation in areas like infrastructure, health, and education.

India's strategic patience during strained relations with the Maldives was remarkable. Despite provocative rhetoric and the expulsion of troops, India refrained from retaliating with economic sanctions. Instead, it chose to wait and watch, valuing the people-to-people relationship over political disputes. Indian officials repeatedly emphasized this approach. The strained relations between India and the Maldives significantly impacted the Maldivian economy, particularly in the tourism sector. India was the top source of inbound tourists in 2023, but by August 2024, it dropped to 5%, with China surpassing India. The Maldives foreign relations are shifting, impacting regional security, especially in the maritime domain. Its strategic location

²¹⁰Surinder Singh Oberoi. "Rebuilding Bridges: The Restoration of India-Maldives Relations". Greater Kashmir. (18 August, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/opinion/rebuilding-bridges-the-restoration-of-india-maldives-relations/>

in the Indian Ocean is crucial for ensuring maritime security, a concern as China expands its geopolitical influence. India's 'neighbourhood first' policy, influenced by China's ties with its neighbours, is also influenced by the Maldives importance.

The Maldives growing debt, particularly to Chinese lenders, is exacerbated by strained relations with India. The country has borrowed around \$1.5 billion from China, making up 20% of its public debt. As repayment deadlines approach, concerns about the Maldives ability to service this debt have grown. The IMF and World Bank have called for immediate policy adjustments to support sustained growth. The Maldives foreign relations are shifting, with India reviewing its defence cooperation agreement, causing uncertainty about joint patrols and maritime domain awareness initiatives. China proposes enhanced maritime security cooperation, potentially disrupting the region's power balance, including joint naval exercises and a maritime research station. The restoration of India-Maldives relations is a positive step forward, but the path ahead is fraught with challenges. Both India and Maldives must navigate these turbulent waters with caution, ensuring that their foreign policy decisions do not compromise their long-term stability and prosperity. For India, the relationship with the Maldives remains a critical component of its regional strategy and cultural ties, one that will require on-going engagement and support to ensure that the bonds of friendship remain strong. Meanwhile, the Maldives needs to have a clear-eyed assessment while safeguarding its sovereignty, security, and economic stability.

India signed a bilateral pact with the Maldives in 2009 to enhance its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean Region. The agreement involved setting up a network of 26 radars across the Maldives 26 atolls, linked to the Indian coastal command. The agreement between India, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar aims to address maritime security concerns in the South Asian sphere and establish a strong strategic relationship with other littoral/island nations in the broader Indian Ocean Region. India and Maldives have been fostering defence cooperation since 1988, involving training, infrastructure, dialogue, information sharing, and joint exercises. A comprehensive Action Plan for Defence was signed in April 2016. India has been training Maldivian security personnel for decades, meeting 70% of their defence

training requirements. New Delhi strengthens local training facilities, including the Maldivian National Defence Force's CTC and Maldives Defence headquarters.

3.6.3. Mauritius

Mauritius, a British colony, relied on India for labour until 1910, when indentured labourers were brought in. Policies influenced the island's dependencies, including Rodrigues and the Chagos Archipelago. The Cold War led to significant changes in the Indian Ocean, including the exclusion of the Chagos archipelago from Mauritius territory and the island's independence on 12 March 1968. Despite colonial scepticism, Mauritius managed to overcome its dependence on a mono crop industry and develop other economic pillars. Political actors and diplomats aimed to establish connections with various countries to help the island emerge from isolation.

The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) was established in 1982, shaping the policy for the Indian Ocean as a young independent nation. Mauritius was a founding member of the Indian Ocean Commission, which regrouped small islands in the South-Western Indian Ocean, including Seychelles, Madagascar, Comoros Islands, and Reunion Island. Mauritius had to align its national strategy with regional organizations like the IOC, IORA, and African Union regarding the Indian Ocean. Mauritius has been actively establishing relations with various countries and regional organizations since independence, despite its internal affairs, including transitioning from a mono crop economy and political instability.

India is a crucial strategic partner of Mauritius, providing technical and financial assistance in various fields over the years. Mauritius, India's largest trading partner since 2007, has signed several cooperation agreements, including the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) to strengthen commercial ties between the two nations. India signed the first trade agreement with Mauritius, CECPA, in April 2021. The agreement includes General Economic Cooperation and Auto-Trigger Safeguard Mechanism provisions. India's exports to Mauritius increased from USD 1.1 million in 2021 to USD 3 million in

2023.²¹¹ India is a top trading partner with Mauritius, generating \$554.19 million in bilateral trade from 2022-2023 and investing over \$200 million in Indian enterprises over the past five years.²¹² India's neighbourhood policy, involving Mauritius, is crucial to its security and defence. As China's influence grows, India's partnership with Mauritius will remain crucial as it aims to strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean Region and maintain its Navy's dominance. The Indian Ocean faces geopolitical challenges in the 21st century, with Mauritius not participating in the Belt and Road Initiative but financing and delivering projects.

3.6.4. Seychelles and Madagascar

The Republic of Seychelles, a small Island developing state in the Western Indian Ocean, has a population of 100,000 and an Exclusive Economic Zone, aiming to rebrand as large ocean state through its Blue Economy model. India's relationship with Seychelles is marked by its historical connections and continuous support for the region's security. Seychelles-India relations are characterized by close friendship, understanding, and assistance, facilitating trade and facilitating Indian community migration post-independence. Regular high-level visits have been held between the two countries.

India is exploring a trilateral cooperation with France and Seychelles, as per the Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, signed during President Macron's visit. The partnership aims to promote greater coordination in regional and international arenas, focusing on freedom of navigation. The Indian Ocean's geopolitical and strategic importance is crucial for both countries. India has implemented anti-piracy measures in Somali waters and is exploring new ways to strengthen bilateral relations, focusing on political enhancement and democratic bond building.²¹³ India's strategic importance in the

²¹¹ India Mauritius Bilateral Brief .High Commission of India, Port LouisMauritius. Retrieved from <https://hcimauritius.gov.in/pages?id=9avme&subid=yb8md&nextid=RdG7d>

²¹² Harsh V. Pant and SamirBhattarcharya. Mauritius deepens India's naval reach. Business Standard.(8 March, 2024). Retrieved from https://www.business-standard.com/opinion/columns/mauritius-deepens-india-s-naval-reach-124030701243_1.html

²¹³ Dr. Vinita Singh Chhetri. "Bilateral Relations Between Seychelles and India". (31 August, 2022). Diplomacy & Beyond. Retrieved from <https://diplomacybeyond.com/bilateral-relation-between-seychelles-and-india/>

Indian Ocean region is bolstered by the installation of an Indian listening post off Madagascar's coast in 2007 and the islands of Agalega and Assumption Island in the Seychelles. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs is implementing the Assumption Island project to help Seychelles secure its extensive Exclusive Economic Zone, including the Mozambique Channel, over a thousand kilometers away from Mahe. S. Jaishankar signed a revised agreement in 2018 to resolve political concerns over ownership and use of Assumption Island in Seychelles, a facility India plans to develop in the Indian Ocean.²¹⁴ In 2018, India adopted the 'Seychelles Blue Economy Strategic Framework & Roadmap', integrating economy, environment, and society to support Seychelles and other SIDS in achieving their Sustainable Development Goals.

The Ministry of External Affairs states that Seychelles is a key component of India's SAGAR vision. It aims to promote peace, strengthen maritime capacities and secure the mainland and islands in the Indian Ocean region. Seychelles is a strategic destination for major powers, with India's image and visibility being highly prominent compared to others in the region.²¹⁵ China and India are competing Asian powers for military strength in the south-western Indian Ocean, drawn to the strategic importance of the Mozambique Channel. China is reportedly planning to establish a military base in the south-western Indian Ocean, aiming to balance its military capacity in the south-western Indian Ocean with its existing base in Djibouti.²¹⁶

²¹⁴Sapna Nair. "Exploring India-Seychelles Bilateral Relationship: Defence & Economic Cooperation". Sputnik India. (24 November, 2023). Retrieved from <https://sputniknews.in/20231124/exploring-india-seychelles-bilateral-relationship-defence--economic-cooperation-5555993.html>

²¹⁵Press Information Bureau. "Vice President of Seychelles calls on the President". (10 June, 2024). Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1811841>

²¹⁶Dennis Hardy. "Will India Try Again for a Military Base in Seychelles?". (26 July, 2022). The Diplomat. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/will-india-try-again-for-a-military-base-in-seychelles/>

The Indian Ocean is a strategically contested region, encompassing 29 states from South Africa to Australia, including the east coast of Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Gulf States, South and South-East Asia, and various international markets. The stability of the International Ocean Road (IOR) is crucial for ensuring the supply of main international markets and ensuring economic stability, despite its strategic location and rich seabed resources. The involvement of neighbouring and extra-regional states is crucial for promoting peace, stability, and resolving conflicts that may affect the zone.

Madagascar is a strategic location for operations in the western Indian Ocean or Africa's eastern coast, bordering the Mozambique Channel, a former trading route.²¹⁷ Malagasy foreign policy is expanding beyond traditional diplomacy and historical partners to explore new opportunities in the Indo-Pacific space, including India, emerging as a strategic power in the region. The Indo-Pacific's significance is prompting states like Madagascar to reconsider their actions and make strategic decisions amid regional competition. Madagascar has recently shifted towards India, a country known for its diplomatic activism and active navy.²¹⁸ Madagascar, among the South-Western Indian Ocean islands, holds significant natural resources, making it a significant interest for regional and extra-regional powers. Madagascar's strategic importance is evident in its naval base in Antsiranana, which controls the sea route through the Mozambique Channel, attracting significant regional powers interest. To offset China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean, the Maritime Silk Road initiative was implemented. India has expanded its footprint in several sectors, including maritime governance to demonstrate its leadership in the Indian Ocean region. India is implementing strategies to gain closer proximity to South-West

²¹⁷Darshana, Baruah. "Islands as Game Changers in the Indian Ocean".(20 April, 2018). Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.Retrieved from <https://amti.csis.org/islands-game-changers-indian-ocean/>

²¹⁸DarshanaBaruah. "Maritime Competition in the Indian Ocean, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace". (2022). Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/12/maritime-competition-in-indian-ocean-pub-87093>

Indian Ocean islands, positioning itself as a political and military power in this region, recognizing its natural zone of influence.

Indian President Kovind's first visit to Madagascar in March 2018 underscores the importance of strategic islands in the Indian Ocean region, highlighting Delhi's historical disregard for island nations. Historically, rising nations controlled strategic islands for global power projection. In the Post-Cold War, international order reduced islands geopolitical importance, reducing their global significance. India is seen as a security shield for South-West Indian Ocean islands, while Madagascar is seen as a crucial regional development and anchor.²¹⁹ In this regard, a sequence strategic activities have been introduced by India contained by the basis of the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR program), which establishes the foundation for the regeneration of Indo-Malagasy relations. Indian foreign policy towards Madagascar combines soft power and military cooperation, with a listening station installed in the north since 2007. This strategic location, near the Mozambique Channel, is a key aspect of Indian presence.²²⁰ India and Madagascar signed an agreement in 2021 to strengthen security cooperation in the maritime field, focusing on experience sharing and expertise transfer to the Malagasy Navy, as part of Indian naval diplomacy. Madagascar's strategic positioning in the IOR and Indo-Pacific competition requires it to assert its interests, including economic and social development, without serving as a transit state for IOR control or a missing piece.

India's vast maritime areas, positioned in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), significantly influence the integration of maritime dynamics in the region. Madagascar, Comoros, and Seychelles, with their unique maritime dynamics, are crucial for India's growth and prosperity. India can play a significant role in economic development, blue economy, education, and technology, serving as a

²¹⁹ R. Eddmond. 2022 "Coopération : « Madagascar, un pôle vital de l'Océan Indien en matière de développement régional », selon l'ambassadeur de l'Inde Abhay Kumar. », Midi Madagasikara, 14 juin 2022, <https://midi-madagasikara.mg/2022/06/14/cooperation-madagascar-un-pole-vital-de-locean-indien-en-matiere-de-developpement-regional-selon-lambassadeur-delinde-abhay-kumar/>

²²⁰ M. Pubby. "India activates first listening post on foreign soil: Radars in Madagascar". Indian Express. (18 July, 2007). Retrieved from <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/india-activates-first-listening-post-on-foreign-soil-radars-in-madagascar/205416/>

benevolent partner. India is effectively collaborating with smaller island nations in the region, aligning with the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam concept, which posits the world as a single family. China's active engagement with islands in the IOR is referred to as 'string of pearls' or encirclement. India, on the other hand, prefers to engage with smaller neighbours based on historical and cultural relations. India is enhancing its maritime engagement with smaller island nations, leveraging historical and cultural ties to strengthen its maritime relations.

India also has growing security relationships with Madagascar, Mozambique and the Seychelles, the littoral states in and around the crucial Mozambique Channel, the SLOC used by shipping transiting the Cape of Good Hope. The security of the Seychelles was highly contested during the latter half of the Cold War as the US and the Soviet Union competed to maintain or establish a security presence in the islands. At the same time, India was seen by the Seychelles as a benign regional protector. In the early 1980s, Seychelles leftist former President Albert René sought commitments from then-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to intervene in case of an attempted coup. Although Gandhi declined to provide any public assurances, India did contribute two helicopters and training for the Seychelles security forces. Perhaps the most critical challenge lies in framing the narrative for bureaucrats sitting in capitals thousands of miles from the Indo-Pacific islands. There appears to be a tendency to see the region through the singular lens of competition with China.

3.7. Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean

The geopolitical link between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific became more apparent in the 21st century due to China's assertiveness and the US think tank's 2005 'String of Pearls' strategy, causing regional anxieties in India and Japan. Since 2010, India's political leaders have seen potential in the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on geo-economics, sea order, and freedom of navigation. The revitalized 'Act East Policy' has expanded India's maritime interests to the entire Western and South Western Pacific Ocean, bolstering the Indo-Pacific concept.

During the Cold War period, there is a great need at the political level to pursue these countries not to provide such bases or naval facilities to big powers for

security. Some smaller littoral states apprehend the naval domination by major littoral nations.²²¹ While in the earlier period, failures in establishing Afro-Asian unity were due to the imaginary fears of domination by powerful littoral countries over the smaller Indian Ocean countries²²² which discouraged India from playing a leading role in the formation of the Indian Ocean Community for economic, scientific, and technological cooperation. Since multilateralism in the region was not making any progress, India had to follow her policies based on bilateralism to promote her economic, political, social and security interests in the region on the principles of mutual understanding and respect. India has vital economic stakes in the Indian Ocean and its adjoining region, as the Ocean provides her necessary links with other countries of the world which is essential for her trade and commerce.

According to India's Maritime Strategy, India is committed to developing a sustainable economic front in the Indian Ocean, ensuring stability and security, enhancing cooperation with regional partners through increased surveillance, implementing a multilateral maritime security initiative, and strengthening cultural linkages with like-minded countries.²²³ The Indian government prioritizes national security for mainland and island territories, maritime interests, and ensuring safety and stability across the Indian Ocean for all IOR states.²²⁴ India's economic ties with Indian Ocean states have expanded, with joint ventures promoting exports and generating foreign exchange earnings through plant, machinery, and technical expertise. Its main agenda focuses on enhancing economic and security cooperation with friendly littoral states and their maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean region.²²⁵ India's role as a regional power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) involves

²²¹ See Neelam Tiruchelvam. (1974). "An Ocean Community". Seminar, No.181, pp. 32-33.

²²² Such fears have been expressed by a leading Ceylonese Lawyer Sh. Neelam Tiruchelvam in his paper "Ocean Community", See Seminar, No. 181, September 1974, pp. 32-33

²²³ Ocean Policy Statement, Government of India. Retrieved from <https://www.indiascienceandtechnology.gov.in/listingpage/ocean-initiatives#:~:text=The%20policy%20document%20aims%20to,of%20marine%20areas%20and%20re sources.>

²²⁴ S. Upadhyaya. (2019). "India's Maritime Strategy: Balancing Regional Ambitions and China". New York: Routledge.

²²⁵ Upadhyaya, Shishir, Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region: Assessment of India's Maritime Strategy to be the Regional "Net Security Provider", Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security, University of Wollongong, 2018. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1/297>

collective action and cooperation to promote peace and security, with a focus on the development of the blue economy, sustainable fisheries, and marine protection.²²⁶

India has been actively involved in establishing maritime frameworks in the Indian Ocean, modernizing its naval forces, and enhancing diplomatic engagement with the region's nation-states. In 2014, India established a trilateral maritime cooperation arrangement with Sri Lanka and the Maldives, aided Mauritius and Seychelles in bolstering coastal security, and secured active cooperation with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles for improving maritime logistics. India also constructed the Chabahar port in Iran to strengthen connectivity with Central Asia and Afghanistan, introduced robust cooperation dialogues with France and Thailand, provided drinking water provisions and humanitarian assistance to the Maldives, conducted anti-piracy operations, and conducted evacuation and naval rescue operations.²²⁷ India aims to be seen as a strategic player in the Indian Ocean, capable of balancing against China. The Cape of Good Hope has become a vital sea route, and India's dependence on Gulf States for fossil fuel imports drives its naval strategy. It maintains friendly relations with Iran and is developing the port of Chabahar to gain a foothold at the Persian Gulf's mouth. The United States and India share interests in the Gulf region, with India maintaining relations with the Maldives islands, which are central to SLOC and IOR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the significant impact of Indo-Pacific region developments on the world's destiny in the 21st century. He outlined India's strategic approach towards the region, stating that its engagement will be inclusive, promote a democratic, rules-based international order, and work with others to maintain freedom in seas, space, airways, nations, and cyberspace. The Indian Ocean's trade significantly impacts the economies of major global powers, prompting them to maintain a presence in the region.

²²⁶*Opcit.*, Upadhyaya.

²²⁷A, Gupta. (2018). *How India Manages Its National Security*. Gurgaon, India: Penguin Random House India.

The region's geo-strategic value is evident from the presence of extra regional powers, including nuclear-capable ones, seeking bases or deploying their forces to support national interests, such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, and China. China's rise and assertive political and military behaviour in the Western Pacific and expansion into the IOR have significantly impacted the region's security angle. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been regularly entering the IOR for over two decades, despite primarily defending their economic interests and aiding in anti-piracy patrols. The 'String of Pearls' plan involves bases and diplomatic ties across Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia are all part of China's strategy to develop itself as a powerful force in the Indian Ocean region.

India prioritizes security and development in the Indian Ocean region, acknowledging the responsibility of littoral states and the interests of extra-regional powers. It values a free Indo-Pacific region, ensuring economic and political stability through various initiatives and treaties. The region's vast maritime zone is crucial for India's national security, and its long-term commitment by superpowers like the United States makes it integral to international relations. China's growing power in Asia has led to more cooperative initiatives. ASEAN countries and the Quad's cooperation is crucial for balancing China's influence in the region, while India's bilateral relations with Sri Lanka and the Maldives are vital for cooperative economic initiatives, focusing on the Blue Economy and FOIP.²²⁸ India's maritime strategy, influenced by its strategic culture and on-going competition with China in the IOR, focuses on vital regions like the Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf, and Straits of Malacca, while its Southeast Strategy includes Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Seychelles.

²²⁸PremeshaSaha and Abhishek Mishra.“The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India”.(23 Decemebr, 2020).Observer Research Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indo-pacific-oceans-initiative-towards-coherent-indo-pacific-policyindia/?amp>

India's increased engagement and multilateral relations are crucial for maritime development in the region, with the Ministry of External Affairs establishing an Oceanic division in 2020.²²⁹ The 2015 SAGAR vision is a crucial aspect of India's Oceanic policy, aimed at advancing its strategic interests.²³⁰ India's oceanic policy aims to build relations with ASEAN, Persian Gulf, and African continents to address non-traditional security threats like climate change, human trafficking, and illegal fishing.²³¹ India's maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region is crucial due to its strategic location, powerful naval force, and access to oceanic resources.²³² India plans to manage China's growing influence through security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, but is actively contesting and reconfiguring the liberal narratives, impacting the future order transition. China and India's growing competition in the Indian Ocean and US response adds geopolitical significance, with China focusing on energy and trade flow, while India monitors its activities.

India aims for peaceful coexistence in the region and is committed to fostering relations with neighbouring countries and ASEAN. China's Belt and Road Initiative hinders India's efforts to strengthen Indo-Pacific cooperation, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region, and in 2013, India signed a trilateral security accord with Sri Lanka and Maldives.²³³ The Indian Ocean has become a political battleground, with countries aiming to increase influence and control. The 'Trilateral in Maritime Cooperation' between India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives began in 2011, with only three meetings. India's NSA level talks demonstrate its commitment to sub-regional diplomacy, a part of its foreign policy. The Modi government has actively sought to increase cooperation in South Asia, with small agreements like the

²²⁹Ministry of External affairs. External Affairs Minister's address at International Conference on "India and Indian Ocean: Renewing the Maritime Trade and Civilizational Linkages" in Bhubaneswar. (20 March, 2015). Retrieved from https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/24994/External_Affairs_Ministers_address_at_International_Conference_on_India_and_Indian_Ocean_Renewing_the_Maritime_Trade_and_Civilizational_Linkages_in_Bhubaneswar

²³⁰Indian Navy."Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy".Retrieved from <http://indiannavy.nic.in/>.

²³¹India, The Ocean Policy Research Institute-Projects. The Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.spf.org/opri/en/projects/ocean-policy~india.html>

²³²*Opcit.*,Saha and Mishra.

²³³Indian Ocean Rim Association."Blue Economy".Retrieved from www.iora.net.

Indo-Lanka and Maldives trilateral maritime security dialogue. The talks focus on issues like illegal drug and arms trade, anti-piracy, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. India's re-invigoration of Trilateral Cooperation aims to enhance maritime security in the region. Top officials from the three countries show seriousness in the agreement. However, friendly relations with neighbours are crucial, as India's relationship with Male deteriorated under Maldivian President Yameen. India has strategically included Seychelles and Mauritius in the trilateral meeting as observers, enhancing connectivity and economic profits. This coalition is significant as India has increased investment in infrastructural projects. Recent agreements include developing a military base in Assumption Land and a Supreme Court in Port Louis.²³⁴

India's security and development are closely linked to its strategic unity, which was inherited from the British, who considered possession of Sri Lanka and Maldives essential for India's defence. New Delhi is cautious of extra-regional powers that could harm Indian interests in the Indian Ocean region, and supports the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.²³⁵ Non-traditional security threats, such as piracy, armed robberies at sea, violent radicalization, terrorism, militancy, arms and drug trafficking, illegal migration, and human trafficking, pose a significant threat to the region. These threats are transnational and often involve non-state actors, often collusion with state actors. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is crucial for India's economic growth and maritime security, contributing significantly to the global GDP. India is committed to sustainable development and using oceanic resources sustainably to improve livelihoods and the ocean ecosystem. The maritime economy, based on coast industrial activities and natural resource extraction, is a part of economic growth. The Indian government aims for a blue economy that benefits both the country and its environment. The Indian Ocean (IOR) region holds significant natural resources, including rare earth elements, which can significantly benefit the Indian economy. Sea mining technologies are needed to extract these

²³⁴KrupaVaisani. "India, Maldives and Sri Lanka: Trilateral Cooperation on Maritime Security". Centre for Security and Strategic Studies. (2 October, 202). <https://cescube.com>

²³⁵United Nations General Assembly. "Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace: resolution". (15 December 1972). Retrieved from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191429?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>

resources, and India can advocate for sustainable growth and strategic exploration in the IOR. With an estimated 500 million tonnes of mineral resources in the IOR, India can tap into these resources.²³⁶ India's interest in the IOR is based on infrastructural development, economic and trade relations, and cultural relations with regional powers. A blue economy framework is needed for climate change and rising sea levels, requiring coordination with regional powers. Therefore, India's proactive foreign policy under the NDA government has shifted its approach to the Indian Ocean region, reflecting its security concerns and motives. India is promoting free and fair maritime navigation in the Indian Ocean, highlighting the need to adhere to international standards, as the region faces significant security challenges, and gaining the confidence of littoral states is crucial for its dominance.

The Indian Ocean Island states are attaining increasing strategic importance due to the geopolitical rivalries that are being played out in the region. These rivalries are generating new opportunities as well as pressures for these smaller states. India being a resident naval power is a major player in the Indian Ocean. The impacts of India's growing economic and military power are felt across the region. These island states looked up to India for security and developmental assistance. However, they try to balance the Indian presence by engaging with other powers like China. India's engagement with Indian Ocean Island states is being reshaped in the context of India-China rivalry. China's growing presence in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean has prompted India to address non-traditional security threats like terrorism and piracy, despite criticism of its maritime policy in the Indian Ocean.

Globalization has significantly increased the political and economic significance of the Indian Ocean in recent times. The Indian Ocean has become a crucial global economic hub due to the increasing globalized world's economic activity. The Indian Ocean's importance in national strategic calculus is crucial due to energy dependency, economic linkages with Africa, and communication security. The United States staying power is questioned due to energy sufficiency, military

²³⁶ H. Maini and L. Budhraj. "Ocean based Blue Economy: An Insight into the SAGAR as the Last Growth Frontier". NITI Aayog. (2017). Retrieved from <https://archive.pib.gov.in/ndagov/FeatureBlog/f5.pdf>

operations, fiscal constraints, and China's assertiveness. Beijing's involvement in the Indian Ocean is inevitable due to long sea lines. India's strategic importance in the Indian Ocean region, which transports 80% of its crude oil and 95% of trade, has been heightened by Chinese infrastructure investments, ports, and military installations, highlighting the connection between security and economic interests in maritime trade routes. The Indian Ocean realm, alongside the Eurasian Continental World, is a third crucial geo-strategic region globally influencing features such as location, movement, trade orientation, and cultural or ideological bonds.²³⁷

3.7.1. Power competition in the Indian Ocean

Ocean is so called the rise of India, the most important of the coastal states. As this power evolves, the region has got numerous interests among major powers in the affairs of the ocean and its surroundings. Those states with a presence or an interest in the Indian Ocean are diverse in every way- size, politics, economics, culture, religion. This large region has a long, rich, and complex history, whether of trade, cooperation and shared human creativity or conflict and suffering. The Indian Ocean has enduringly been associated with commerce. It is a connection that goes back many centuries, long before the colonial era. From the 18th century onwards, the Indian Ocean became a global trading economy. Thus, the nature of trade becomes clearer through a few bilateral relations – India, South Africa, Iran, and Sri Lanka. Seaborne trade is vital to the economic growth and stability of the Indian Ocean region just as it is to the Asia-Pacific. In the Indian Ocean as in the Asia-Pacific, there is a growing dependence on imported energy supplies, transported by sea to sustain economic growth.

Michel Foucault's concept of power pervasiveness, particularly in China and its Asian neighbours, has significantly influenced the political landscape, leading to varying accommodation and adjustment strategies.²³⁸ The strategic competition between India and China in the Indian Ocean has the potential to significantly impact

²³⁷Dowdy, W. L and R.B. Trood. The Indian Ocean: An emerging geostrategic region. Center for National Maritime Security. (1983). Vol. 38(3). pp. 432-458. Retrieved from <https://cimsec.org/tag/indian-ocean/>

²³⁸Hijam Liza DalloRahimo. "China's Pervasive Power: An Overview on Indo-Pacific Power Equation". Review of Research.(2018). Vo.7.No. 12.Retrieved from<https://www.academia.edu/>.

the region's stability and security. China prioritizes protecting its sea lines of communication across the Indian Ocean, fearing potential threats from state and non-state actors, and fears adversaries may use these vulnerabilities for bargaining. China's growing national population and increased investment in the IOR are among the developing interests of the country. Whereas, India views itself as the leading Indian Ocean state, leading the region and deems extra-regional naval powers, particularly China, as illegitimate. The Sino-Indian relationship in the Indian Ocean is viewed by many Indian analysts as directed against India, rather than reflecting China's interests, highlighting its dynamics and potential for conflict. China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean has raised concerns for India's navy and regional leadership. India's growing security relations with the United States and other countries are driven by China's growing presence. India's options are limited, and it is uncertain how to respond to China's presence.

Chinese analysts perceive India as lacking comprehensive national power, ranking it significantly below major Asian powers like Japan and Russia. This asymmetry is reflected in India's perception of China as a significant threat, but may be changing due to India's military capabilities near the Malacca Strait and its defence relationships. Beijing opposes India's right to restrict China's security relationships in the IOR, stating that while India has a unique role in stabilizing the region, using the term 'backyard' for international areas of sea could lead to clashes.²³⁹

For China, a key consideration is the one-third of its GDP attributable to foreign trade and the importance of the Indian Ocean to that trade. All Chinese commerce with Europe and petroleum imports from the Middle East traverses the Indian Ocean. China is also concerned that India has a geostrategic advantage in the Indian Ocean and could try to compensate for continental power inadequacies in any border conflict by taking action against Chinese interests in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, Chinese security officials believe Beijing needs ocean access because in

²³⁹ Ananth Krishnan. "PLA Plays Down Indian Ocean Visits, but Says Ocean Not India's Backyard". India Today. (1 July, 2015). Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/india-china-indian-ocean-backyard-navies-279920-2015-07-01>

the event of a confrontation with the United States or Japan in East Asia, a strong presence in the Indian Ocean would help secure one of China's backdoors. Chinese strength in the Indian Ocean would also make it more difficult to sever its lines of communications – an element in Beijing's so called 'Southern Strategy'.

These Chinese concerns mirror one of the key motives of the United States in raising its profile in this region in recent years. For the United States, China's increased presence in the Indian Ocean provokes the normal set of concerns of any existing power as it reacts to the challenge posed by a rising state. Since the mid-1990s, the United States has been acting to contain China through a series of security initiatives and bilateral arrangements in East and Southeast Asia. The Indian Ocean's great power politics are causing new vulnerabilities for island states, as major powers seek to establish footholds and are now paying closer attention to their domestic politics. China, a new player in the Indian Ocean, has established strong political and diplomatic ties with numerous littorals across the region. And China is the only country with an embassy in each of the six Indian Ocean islands: Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.²⁴⁰

The United States is enhancing its security posture in South Asia and the Indian Ocean to counter China and strengthen its security network. This is reflected in the strengthening of US-Indian relations and Secretary of State Colin Powell's statement that India can help maintain peace in the Indian Ocean region. The American strategic posture has shifted from the Atlantic and Pacific to the Indian Ocean region due to economic and strategic reasons, shifting the global politics centre of gravity. China's global rise has significantly impacted the Indian Ocean region, not only at regional and sub-regional levels but also at the global level. Beijing's presence in the Indian Ocean coastal particularly in India's southern region has grown significantly following its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is enhancing its influence in the Indian Ocean region through investments, aid, grants, trade, and military assistance, primarily focused on infrastructure projects like roads,

²⁴⁰Darshana, M Baruah. "Surrounding the Ocean: PRC Influence in the Indian Ocean". House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific on (18 April, 2023). Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/04/surrounding-the-ocean-prc-influence-in-the-indian-ocean?lang=ejn>

ports, and power plants. Experts refer to the South Asian strategy as the “String of Pearls”, with Sri Lanka and Maldives being considered significant “pearls” by China. The Indo-Pacific geo-political concept has significantly impacted the Indian southern neighbourhood. The region’s geopolitical, economic, and strategic shift has led to the increasing involvement of mid-level players such as Australia, Japan, France, United Kingdom, Indonesia, and South Korea. The new structure reflects India’s growing prominence and regional aspirations.²⁴¹ Thus, the Indian Ocean Region is experiencing a rise in new regionalism through multilateral and plurilateral arrangements like the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Commission, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. China and India are increasingly competing in the Indian Ocean, focusing on deep-water port development and military patrols. While the likelihood of military conflict remains low, these activities could threaten global trade flow stability. However, the region also presents potential collaboration opportunities.

²⁴¹ Clubbing with Pacific as Indo-Pacific frame, External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar remarked: “Separation of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as distinct compartments looks less and less tenable. We are quite visibly in each other’s proximity and to pretend otherwise is really not realistic.

Figure 3.1: Strategic Competition in the Indian Ocean



Source: Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

India also is no longer geopolitically contained in South Asia, as it was in the Cold War, when its alignment with the Soviet Union caused the United States and China, with the help of Pakistan, to contain India. Finally, the sea change in Indian-U.S. relations, especially since 9/11, has made it easier for India to enter into close political and security cooperation with America's friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific.²⁴² The reality is that while India is a "continental" power, it occupies a central position in the Indian Ocean, a fact that will exercise an increasingly profound

²⁴² Analyses by the Central Intelligence Agency indicate that when countries are ranked by composite measures of national power—the weighted combinations of gross domestic product, defense spending, population, and technology growth—India is projected to possess the fourth most capable concentration of power by 2015 (after the United States, the European Union, and China) and to be the most important "swing state" in the international system. See Ashley J. Tellis, *India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), p. 30.

influence on and indeed almost determine India's security environment. Writing in the 1940s, K. M. Pannikar argued that while to other countries the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas, to India it is a vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in that area, her freedom is dependent on the freedom of that water surface. No industrial development, no commercial growth, and no stable political structure are possible for her unless her shores are protected.²⁴³ This was also emphasized in the most recent Annual Report of India's Defence Ministry, which noted that "India is strategically located vis-à-vis both continental Asia as well as the Indian Ocean Region."²⁴⁴ The Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has led to nuclearization, altering regional security dynamics. China and India have initiated one of the largest naval build ups during peacetime, focusing on nuclear submarines for second-strike capabilities to gain dominance.

As the Indian Ocean's geopolitical importance rises, island nations in the region must prioritize non-traditional threats like illegal fishing, natural disasters, and drug smuggling. Countries seeking to engage these nations should offer assistance that mitigates these concerns, as they are expected to play a critical role in securing their strategic interests. Traditional powers can maximize the utility of their island territories in the Indian Ocean, such as Cocos Keeling (Australia), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (India), Diego Garcia (United States/United Kingdom), and La Réunion (France), and are urged to focus on partnering with like-minded countries in the sub-region. India and France are considering the strategic potential of La Réunion, expanding Delhi's presence in the Western Indian Ocean and allowing Paris to establish a friendly partner. They are considering deploying Indian P-8i maritime reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft to La Réunion, Cocos Keeling, and

²⁴³ K. M. Pannikar.(1945). "India and the Indian Ocean". London: Allen and Unwin. p. 84.

²⁴⁴ Ministry of Defence, Annual Report 2004–2005.Retrieved from https://mod.gov.in/sites/default/files/MOD-English2005_0.pdf

Diego Garcia, aiming to maintain a favourable strategic environment in a changing geopolitical landscape.²⁴⁵

The multipolar liberal international order is characterized by diffused power equations, fractured geopolitical lines, and tectonic shifts. The Indian and Pacific Oceans are interconnected due to trade growth and China's territorial expansionist designs. The South China Sea and East China Sea, near the Straits of Malacca, are experiencing geopolitical turbulence due to China's military modernization, geo-economic capabilities, and naval outreach, contributing to a volatile security environment.²⁴⁶ Mastering a cogent Indo-Pacific approach requires perfecting a coherent Indian Ocean strategy, focusing on maritime neighbours, securing relationship-building through political transparency, increased cooperation, trust, and confidence, advocating an integrated view of trade, infrastructure, tourism, environment, blue economy, and security imperatives, and promoting capability-building through radars, vessels, and maritime infrastructure.²⁴⁷

In this instance, the Indo-Pacific region is fostering diplomatic and security cooperation through minilateral formations like India-Japan-U.S.A. and India-Japan-Australia. Forums like BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, and EAS bridge sub-regions. India's dialogues with Japan, Australia, and the U.S.A. reflect institutionalization among liberal democratic nation-states. The Quad nations, India, Japan, and Australia, have teamed up for the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), promoting economic cooperation for mutual benefit. This reflects the normative quotient of the Indo-Pacific region.²⁴⁸ The Indian Ocean is vital in combating terrorism and Islam control efforts, and its strategic importance is

²⁴⁵Darshana, Baruah. "The Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean's Islands". (6 April, 2020).

9Dashline. Retrieved from <https://www.9dashline.com/article/the-strategic-importance-of-the-indian-ocean-islands>

²⁴⁶A Gupta.(2018). How India Manages Its National Security. Gurgaon, India: Penguin Random House India.

²⁴⁷Opcit.,Jaishankar.

²⁴⁸S. Pulipaka and M, Musaddi. "In Defence of the 'Indo-Pacific' Concept".Observer Research Foundation. (21 September, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/in-defence-of-the-indo-pacific-concept>

heightened by increased trade, investment, and cultural interaction between Europe and Asia-Pacific.

3.8. Multilateral Relations in the Indo-Pacific

Major Powers in the Indo-Pacific are adopting a new paradigm of multilateralism in their foreign policy. However, the Indo-Pacific region has seen a shift in focus, with external powers increasingly focusing on regional actors for security or strategic reasons. This has led to tightened partnerships and a bypass of deliberation platforms, dispersion of means, and overlapping processes, ultimately weakening the coordinated pursuit of global security objectives in the region. The Indo-Pacific, a region encompassing the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is significant due to the active participation of global powers like China, USA, West European countries, Japan, Australia, India, and ASEAN countries, and it faces significant geopolitical and economic significance.

The post-Cold War international relations in the Asia-Pacific region have seen a significant increase in multilateralism, with the inauguration of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the ASEAN Regional Forum.²⁴⁹ This has led to a rapid proliferation of multilateral dialogues, particularly on political and security issues, with over sixty channels for discussion by 1995.²⁵⁰ The Asia-Pacific region's demand for multilateral institutions is driven by economic liberalism, interdependence, and security multilateralism. This has fuelled APEC and encouraged security multilateralism, as interdependent states prioritize reducing war risks. Multilateralism is also seen as a problem-solving exercise to prevent regional disorder and cushion the region against global economic and security climate fluctuations. Economic concerns include the future of the world trading system,

²⁴⁹ ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was formed in 1967 to encourage Cooperation among five anti-communists Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). The ASEAN Regional Forum also includes ASEAN's newer members, Brunei and Vietnam, along with their dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, the United States, and the European Community), and other key regional states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea).

²⁵⁰ Daljit Singh. "Evolution of the security Dialogue Process in the Asia-Pacific Region". from 2nd ASEAN READER Book. (2019). ISEAS: Singapore. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812305299-067>

discriminating regional trade blocs, and trade tensions between the United States and Japan.²⁵¹

The Indo-Pacific region has become a significant power tussle due to China's increasing assertiveness, India's rise, and the growing significance of the region's littoral, resulting in a shift in the regional balance of power. India uses the Quad to strengthen its bilateral relationship with the U.S. and counter Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific, crucial to its diplomatic, security, and economic strategies. India's strategic and conventional relationship with Washington provides a balance against China, despite Beijing's increased investments in both, ensuring a two-front war against the Chinese. India's geopolitical heft is enhanced by a US partnership, as it relies on the US military presence to reduce defence spending and access to the US market, thereby increasing its citizen's affluence.²⁵² Multilateralism is seen as a necessary framework to engage China and integrate it into regional order, reducing the need for containment strategies. However, it increases the costs of aggressive action by potential regional hegemony like China. China finds institutionalizing rules through the ASEAN Regional Forum more difficult to resist.

The Asia-Pacific/East Asia region's traditional architecture consists of three layers: U.S. bilateral alliances, ad-hoc cooperative frameworks, and ASEAN-led multilateralism. The U.S. alliance network, ad-hoc cooperative frameworks, and ASEAN-led multilateralism have all contributed to the region's stability since the end of the Cold War. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the

²⁵¹ Marc L. Mush and Hellen V. Milner, "The Future of the Trading System," in Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey Underhill, eds., *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994, p. 274. As Mush and Milner argue, fears that the world economy is being fragmented into regional trade blocs are exaggerated. Recent evidence suggests that growth of intraregional trade is not occurring at the expense of inter-regional trade, but that the two are growing together. For example, while the volume of trade between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico has increased since the advent of NAFTA, so has trade between NAFTA countries and East Asia. Similarly, rising intra-EU trade has been accompanied by growth in the EU's trade with non-EU European Free Trade Area countries.

²⁵² James Jay Carafano. "The Quad eyeing Indo-Pacific security". GIS Reports. (20 May, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/quad-indo-pacific-security/>

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership are significant regional institutions.²⁵³

The US-China geo-strategic competition, particularly in economics and technology, has rekindled American commitment to the Indo-Pacific, despite exposing it to new challenges and pressures. The United States has reaffirmed its commitment to friends and allies due to China's belligerence, leading to President Biden holding the first multilateral Summit with Quad leaders. Quad has grown vertically and is set to expand horizontally by adding new aspirant states. The Indo-Pacific region's expansion and inclusivity have been enhanced by institutions like ARF, APEC, IORA, Quad, RCEP, and AUKUS. The formal expositions of Indo-Pacific vision documents by European nations, ASEAN, and India, along with future expositions, have further broadened its acceptance.²⁵⁴ The Indo-Pacific region faces growing strategic challenges due to contested geographical boundaries and is home to three of the world's largest economies (China, India, and Japan) and seven of the world's largest military forces. The United States has expressed concern due to China's rise as a military power, and India, as one of the largest growing economies and second largest military expenditures is crucial in countering China's rise.

The Quad, a group of four countries, regained momentum in 2017 due to concerns about China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region and the need for cooperation and strategic consultations. The group focused on policy coordination and public goods provision in the region. The United States, India, Japan, and Australia held the second Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting in Tokyo on 6 October 2020, marking the first high-level meeting since the 2019 meeting. The meeting, held in-person amid the pandemic, defied the new norm of virtual meetings. The meeting was significant due to rising concerns over Beijing's aggressive behaviour and China's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan. Therefore, the attendees

²⁵³Kei Koga, Mie Oba, Ken Jimbo, and Zack Cooper.“U.S.- Japan Cooperation on Indo-Pacific Regional Architecture”. Sasakawa Peace Foundation.Policy Memorandum 3. Retrieved from <https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-asia-initiative/spf-asia-initiative004.html>

²⁵⁴Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah.“Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific Conceptual and Operational Challenges”.Routledge. (27 May, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-on-Think-Asia/book-series/TA?srsId=AfmBOorkPbGD6CyLpwaiU8m-OTglmQet7lj4oEd03SBOpTCXI3MKm7xg>

called for increased coordination to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific, targeting China's exploitation, corruption, and coercion of smaller states. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo emphasized the importance of institutionalizing the four nation's efforts for a true security framework²⁵⁵

The United States, Japan, Australia, and India have been collaborating in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite good diplomatic, security, and economic relations, Japan is now taking a competitive strategy towards China, while Southeast Asian states maintain good relations with all Indo-Pacific great powers. Japan's 'New Plan for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific' emphasizes the Global South. Japan has consistently supported ASEAN as a regional institution in the Indo-Pacific since 2019 and has emphasized the importance of synthesizing the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) and AOIP from 2020-2021. Japan focuses on implementing FOIP and AOIP, prioritizing maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN sustainable development goals, and economic cooperation.

China has been adopting the Great Power Rivalry policy and pursuing its political and economic interests through Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), often leading to conflicts with QUAD and Asian countries like India. Some analysts believe that BRI under maritime initiatives could potentially overturn the Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States and some West European countries are actively participating in the Indo-Pacific region to contain and counter China's influence. The region has been a scene of the Great Game, and the US aims to bring like-minded powers together to balance power in this region. China's growing power projection is crucial for Indian security interests, particularly in the Taiwan issue, where China claims Taiwan is part of it and opposes political and defence support from the USA and Western countries. China's economic and military power has significantly influenced the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical landscape, with energy security being a key driver of its engagement. China's maritime presence and ambitions in the region have shifted due to the Belt and Road Initiative, renewed

²⁵⁵Dr. Amrita Jash. "The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India". Journal of the Indo-Pacific Affairs.(8 March, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2528182/the-quad-factor-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-role-of-india/>

tensions with Taiwan, and China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. India has expressed concern about China's increased presence in the Indian Ocean and bolstered relations with Pakistan, leading to increased participation in the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. The United States has expressed concerns at both bilateral and international levels through NATO's Strategic Concept.

China currently has the world's largest navy, with 355 vessels, with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) expected to grow to 420 by 2025 and 460 by 2030. The 355 vessels include major surface combatants, submarines, aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, and mine warfare ships, and fleet auxiliaries. China also funds maritime militias in the South China Sea to support its territorial ambitions, with 120 identified vessels. The Tanmen Maritime Militia, operating from the island of Hainan, is considered the model maritime militia. In this regard, multilateral cooperation is a crucial task for the Quad member. Beijing's Indo-Pacific strategy combines economic, diplomatic, and military factors, with a regional-level approach investing in strong points near borders and neighbouring countries like India. In light of these, India is prioritizing maritime security in its Indo-Pacific strategy due to China's growing maritime presence. Modi has made addressing new security dynamics a key part of his agenda, focusing on strengthening partnerships to compensate for India's smaller and less capable navy. India has adopted the 'necklace of diamonds strategy' to counter China's 'string of pearls' strategy. This strategy aims to establish strong naval cooperation among major Indian Ocean powers.²⁵⁶

Also, AUKUS is a United States-led initiative enhancing security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to counter China's growing influence, alongside other initiatives like ASEAN and the Quad. Australia has increased its defence spending and military upgrades, leading to the launch of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) alliance. The alliance aims to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered

²⁵⁶Ulrich Jochheim with Rita Barbosa Lobo. "Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major players strategic perspectives". European Parliament. (5 June, 2023). Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751398](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)751398)

submarines in Adelaide, cancelling the French-Australian submarine deal. This has increased power competition within the region. On the other hand, the AUKUS, a group of nations, has signed a deal to supply Australia with eight nuclear attack submarines, bringing significant changes to the Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape. Beijing has criticized the pact as containment, threatening regional stability and the arms race. Some speculate that AUKUS could side-line the Quad initiative.²⁵⁷ The AUKUS program continues to hold significant potential for the participating countries.

Whereas the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy aims to build connections, drive prosperity, bolster security, and build regional resilience. It supports India's regional leadership, promotes stronger cooperation within the QUAD and the AUKUS, and strengthens the United States bilateral security relations with Japan and South Korea. The United States has a strong focus on the Indo-Pacific, focusing on the Pacific deterrence initiative to counter China's growing military power. Therefore, the United States plans to mobilize 60% of its surface ships to the Indo-Pacific, ensuring territorial and trade route safety. The US naval fleet in the Indo-Pacific consists of around 200 ships and 1,500 aircraft. The US also seeks to ensure Taiwan's safety, despite the US staffers insisting on a traditional policy of strategic ambiguity on Taiwan's territorial integrity. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 mandates the US to provide defence articles and services to Taiwan. The US's extensive presence in the Indo-Pacific region has given it a significant advantage in resolving any tensions or conflicts.

India is employing a comprehensive strategy to counter China's String of Pearls, including building ports, implementing Coastal Surveillance Radar systems, importing surveillance planes, operating airports in neighbouring countries, strengthening defense ties, expanding bilateral relations with South Asian countries, and conducting regular military exercises with US, Japan, and Australia navies. India is developing Chabahar port in Iran, a strategic location near the Gulf of Oman, to

²⁵⁷Soumyodeep Deb and Nathan Wilson. "The Coming of Quad and the Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific". Air University. (13 Decemebr, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2870653/the-coming-of-quad-and-the-balance-of-power-in-the-indo-pacific/>

open a new land-sea route to Central Asian countries. It is also building a deep-sea port in Indonesia, Sabang, near the Strait of Malacca and India's Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In 2016, India built a deep water port in Sittwe, Myanmar. India is also helping Bangladesh modernize its Sea Port in Mongla and using the Chittagong port in Bangladesh. India has signed agreements to access naval facilities in Oman, Singapore, and Myanmar for upgrading and training its navy. India has also made military cooperation agreements with Japan, Australia, and the USA, known as the 'Quad'. India has signed an agreement with Bangladesh to install 20 Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems along the country's coastline to monitor Chinese Warships frequently visiting the Bay of Bengal.

India's Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) is being built in two phases. Phase 1 was executed by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and included remote static sensors at 46 locations across India. Phase 2 will add 38 stations to the radar network to strengthen coverage and make it leak-proof. The CSN also includes two mobile surveillance stations integrated with vessel traffic management systems in Kutch and Khambhat, Gujarat. The Indian Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) is the nodal agency for maritime data fusion. India also monitors military warships and merchant shipping in the Indian Ocean Region through the 'Sindhu Netra' microsatellite.

India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar, visited the Maldives to hand over the extended Coastal Radar System, consisting of 10 radar stations, built with a \$15.8 million Indian grant. CSS is not the only example of SAGAR. India being a part of the Fishhook or the SOSUS (Sound Surveillance Sensors) network also benefits the countries in the Indian Ocean region that share Intel with India. The SOSUS network adds to China's Malacca dilemma; it ensures that each time China's submarines cross the Malacca Strait they come on India's radar. India provided a Dornier maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Sri Lanka, enabling the country to counter organized crime in its coastal waters. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is responsible for 75% of the world's maritime trade and is home to around 12,000 ships and 300 fishing vessels. The Indian Navy and Coast Guard face a significant

task in safeguarding Indian shores and those of friendly countries in the region. To address this, the Indian Navy has established the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, where all data collected by CSS will be fed.

The Indo-Pacific is centred on China's rise, which has led to the formation of the Indo-Pacific construct and the revival of the Quad. This initiative aims to maintain the current balance of power in the region, but is not a formal military alliance. The United States increased engagement in the Indo-Pacific region has boosted Australia's interests in this region. The alliance is well-positioned to maintain a significant presence in the dynamic and volatile region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the US, a multilateral leadership dialogue, was a natural extension of these four major nations' aspirations.

3.9. Conclusion

India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since the Cold War, expanding its focus from Look East to Act East and now encompassing the Indo-Pacific region. Its foreign policy has been restructured to be multi-aligned. India is adopting a multilateral approach in response to the evolving and dynamic nature of global cooperation policies. India has enhanced its cooperation with the US, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN amid geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region. This chapter discusses India's significant cooperation with ASEAN and emphasizes the importance of its littoral states in the Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific region is a key arena for global competition, with China's increasing power and uncertainties over the U.S.-India Partnership posing challenges to U.S. strategy and the stability of the U.S.-India Partnership. India has demonstrated its role as a security provider in the IOR, primarily focusing on anti-piracy activities in the Western Indian Ocean region. Indo-Pacific nations are collaborating on emerging security architecture, with islands shaping the new framework. The Indo-Pacific region, connecting major water bodies, is a hub for geo-economic ties, strategic competition, and geopolitical schemata, with states recognizing multi-polarity as the new regional order. Strategic advantages over islands will influence competitor's responses, determining power balance in the region. China's maritime expansion

intensifies competition, affecting India's maritime strategies in the Indian Ocean region, with the islands security architecture shaping the region's security architecture. India's military strength lies in the northern and eastern Indian Ocean, but its western presence is limited. To dominate the region, India needs to increase its presence in the Gulf, western Indian Ocean, and Africa. Strengthening logistical support facilities in the Gulf and western Indian Ocean is crucial for effective mission-based deployment. The Indian Ocean's importance in national strategic calculus is greater than the Pacific pole due to Middle East energy dependency, economic linkages with Africa, and security of major communication lines. India's multilateral cooperation in the region underscores the importance of Quad in its foreign policy. The Indo-Pacific faces a long shadow due to strategic competition between China and the US, which has significantly reshaped global economics, technology, and politics.

CHAPTER IV

India and the Indo-Pacific: Triangular Relations of India, ASEAN and the Far-East

This chapter examines India's relationship with ASEAN and the Far East countries. It shows ASEAN's significant role in India's foreign policy. ASEAN remains the primary representation of India's relations with the Far East countries. It also studies the triangular relations between India-Japan, Australia, and the United States in the context of the ASEAN cooperative paradigm in the Indo-Pacific.

4.1. Locating India-ASEAN relations through LEP

India developed a policy framework towards ASEAN after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War, recognizing the potential for building relations with Singapore and ASEAN. India seeks a reliable partner for economic expansion and inclusive exposure. India's liberalization of its economy after the end of the Cold War has facilitated constructive relationships with Southeast Asian countries. Thus, India's ability to stabilize regional affairs and balance its economic approach has made its position more valuable. Since their post-independence era, India has become a dialogue partner of ASEAN, fostering crosswise area collaborations. The end of the Cold War greatly impacted India and Southeast Asian countries, leading to new initiatives and programs.

Rao's LEP restructuring aimed to reform India's relationship with ASEAN, focusing on economic growth, trade, and FDI. The government sought more trade and FDI from Japan, Korea, and ASEAN members. The Vajpayee government added security aspects to India's LEP, and under Manmohan Singh, economic cooperation and technology were further integrated. In 2005, India was accepted as a founding member of the East Asian Summit along with Australia and New Zealand. India also joined the ADMM+8 forums, aiming for practical collaboration in maritime security, humanitarian aid, counter-terrorism, and peacekeeping.

India has signed several Regional Trade Agreements, including Free Trade Agreements, Preferential Trade Agreements, Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements, and Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements, which have significantly facilitated trade between India and the world. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) is a significant trade agreement in Asia, addressing the complex relationship between India and ASEAN, which was strained during the Cold War Era. The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 impacted dialogues between India and ASEAN. India joined ASEAN in December 2005 and signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with 11 other countries in 2008. This transition from the 'Look East to the Act East policy' is considered a milestone in Asia. With AIFTA, India committed to reducing or eliminating tariffs for over 89% of its agriculture, marine, and manufactured goods by 2016.²⁵⁸ The implementation of AIFTA has improved trade between ASEAN and India, making ASEAN the third largest exporter to India and the fifth largest importer in 2021-22, following Northeast Asia and West Asia-GCC.²⁵⁹

India-ASEAN trade relations have been growing steadily, with ASEAN being India's 4th largest trading partner. And Indo-ASEAN bilateral trade grew by almost 14% to reach US \$ 81.33 billion in the financial year 2017-18. India's import and export items have also increased but its import items from ASEAN are higher than its export products. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement boosts the economic relations between India and ASEAN. But India's export items remain relatively low as India's goods and products are still not supplied sufficiently among the ASEAN members. The developed countries of ASEAN are contributing enough to the marketing forum they create their own space for themselves too. So, in this growing India-ASEAN relation, India needs to improve and strengthen its economic position in the changing economic environment.

²⁵⁸ S, Francis. (2011). "A Sectoral Impact Analysis of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement". *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol XLVI, No.2

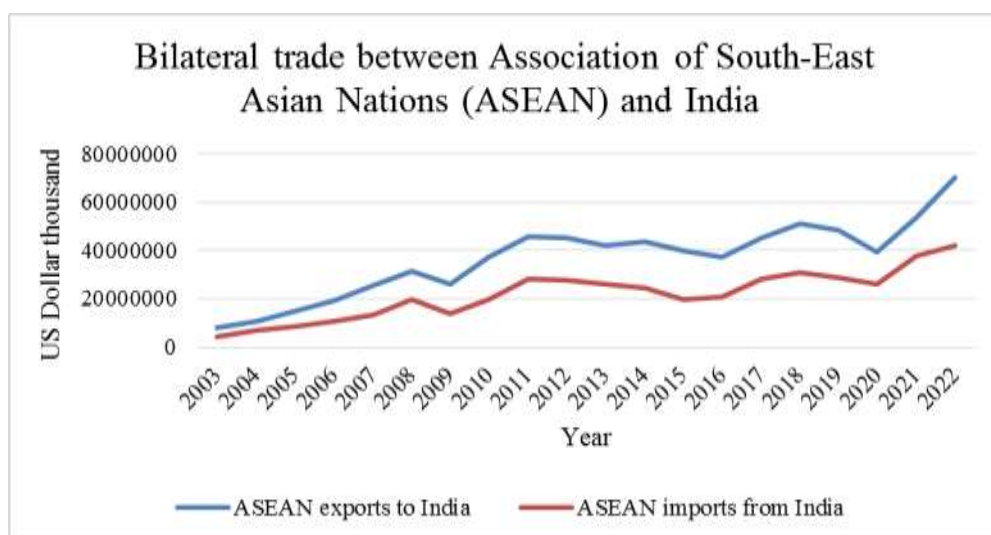
²⁵⁹ Ministry of Commerce, Government of India (2021-22). Retrieved from <https://www.commerce.gov.in/>

Table 4.1: Bilateral Trade between India and Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Year	ASEAN exports to India	ASEAN imports from India	Difference
	Unit : US Dollar thousand		
2003	8225496	4468339	3757157
2004	10727106	7165343	3561763
2005	14694020	8520290	6173730
2006	18955070	10590934	8364136
2007	25443413	13558056	11885357
2008	31381335	19974924	11406411
2009	26089181	14031053	12058128
2010	37098234	19834017	17264217
2011	45939586	28268918	17670668
2012	45325671	27605682	17719989
2013	42162239	25928579	16233660
2014	43721632	24343734	19377898
2015	40108749	19602081	20506668
2016	37352293	20877328	16474965
2017	45317903	28266106	17051797
2018	50965946	30887898	20078048
2019	48258006	28793820	19464186
2020	39217837	26165588	13052249
2021	53822032	37581905	16240127
2022	70267970	42335466	27932504
CAGR	11.95%	12.56%	11.14%

Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics

Figure 4.1: Bilateral trade between India and Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)



Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics

Table 4.1 highlights the 20 years of bilateral trade between ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and India specifically showing ASEAN exports to and imports from India. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) is also employed in this analysis to show the consistent annual growth rates of ASEAN exports to India and ASEAN imports from India over the years.

It can be seen from the table that ASEAN exports to India shows significant growth trends from 8.2 billion USD in 2003 to 70.2 billion USD. Despite growing more slower than exports, ASEAN imports from India increased from 4.4 billion USD in 2003 to 42.3 billion USD in 2022 showing a consistent trade surplus with India throughout the years. Moreover, mention may also be made here that due to structural imbalances, ASEAN gains more from the trading agreement as shown by the growing trade surplus of the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 11.14%. The persistent trade surplus in favour of ASEAN not only reflects India's high dependence on ASEAN goods but also its slower export growth to ASEAN.

It is also evident from the table that the trade growth was stimulated by the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and ASEAN in 2009. The total bilateral trade between ASEAN and India grew significantly post-FTA, with both exports and imports benefiting. ASEAN exports to India increased significantly from \$37.09 billion in 2010 to \$45.33 billion in 2012, with a CAGR of 10.55%. While ASEAN imports from India rose from \$19.83 billion in 2010 to \$27.61 billion in 2012, with a CAGR of 18.12%. Hence, it can be concluded that the bilateral ties have strengthened as reflected by the significantly faster growth in trade with India.

ASEAN-India trade is a positive trend, with significant growth in exports and imports. Major ASEAN economies like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam are likely to be significant contributors. Indonesia's strong trade ties with India are primarily in palm oil, coal, and textiles. Malaysia, known for its exports of palm oil, electronics, and rubber, has expanded the trade relationship over the years, particularly in electronics and automotive parts. Thailand exports machinery, electronics, and agricultural products to India, while it imports machinery and automobiles. Vietnam has been increasing its exports to India, particularly in textiles, electronics, and agricultural products, reflecting the growth of its manufacturing sector. Over 50% of India's imports constitute coal, palm oil, and other raw materials from the ASEAN, while exporting refined petroleum products, commercial vehicles, telecommunication equipment, and agriculture products. India's trade with ASEAN is concentrated in five countries: Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEAN allows each member country to set its own tariffs under Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), unlike the European Union. India has offered a single tariff schedule for all ASEAN members.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰Dhirendra Kumar and Rhik Kundu. "India, ASEAN to review trade agreement; finalize changes by year-end". Livemint.Retrieved from <https://www.livemint.com>

4.2. India's path towards Multilateral Architecture

The Indo-Pacific region's regional security landscape is dynamic and capricious, influenced by the United States military security hub and spokes alliances. This was designed to counter the strategic challenge of a concentrated, maritime peripheral great power like the Soviet Union, which was a strategic challenge in the past. China's rise was not an ideologically dogmatic power or a marginal entity in the Asia-Pacific maritime dynamics. Its strategy in the Indo-Pacific aimed to make the 20th century Chinese-centric and the Indo-Pacific as a Chinese lake through regime endeavours and omnipresent influence of national power instruments.²⁶¹

India's Prime Minister Modi's calls for reforming multilateralism, coupled with its established alliances with both developing and developed nation states. India's foreign policy has been criticized for its shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment and its engagements with various groups. India's approach to geopolitical realities is a balance between engagement and autonomy, with greater strategic coordination under Modi. However, this should not be seen as a dilution of Indian foreign policy values. India aims for multipolarity and great power identity, engaging with major players like the United States and China to ensure regional peace and stability. EAM Jaishankar emphasizes seeking resources and technology from global partners to modernize and set a positive agenda with other major powers.²⁶²

Multilateral forums in the Indo-Pacific, such as ASEAN, APEC, ARF, APT, and EAS, were established. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) platform and ARF were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s to address post-Cold War conditions. The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus were introduced in the late 2000s to meet defence diplomacy needs. Mega-free trade agreements like RCEP and CPTPP have been signed, along with

²⁶¹ Dattesh, D. Parulekar. "Decoding 'Sovereign Strategic Networks in the Indo-Pacific: Contesting China's Ascendant Rise'" in Swaran Singh & Reena Marwah Book 'China and the Indo-Pacific'. 2023. Palgrave: Macmillan

²⁶² S. Jaishankar. "India, the United States and China." Asia Society

targeted minilateral initiatives like the Malacca Straits Patrol and Trilateral Cooperative Agreement.²⁶³

In the post-Cold War era, geo-political game in the Indo-Pacific is becoming more a strategy of containment and encirclement rather than accommodation. It represents a picture of instability and conflict heightening tensions in the region. As a result, there emerged not only the driving power of global economy but also a change about the balance of power in the region. In this regard, ASEAN remained a place for the major power contestation between great powers, which now represents the United States and China in the region. ASEAN serves as a platform for issue discussion and an umbrella organization for Southeast and the broader region, promoting peace, stability, and development. The post-Cold War era has seen a growth in regional forums, leading to an increasingly crowded Indo-Pacific landscape. New arrangements emerge to address multilateralism gaps and complement existing platforms.

Thus ASEAN centrality is found in the 2007 ASEAN document, describing it as the ‘primary driver for the wider region’ encompassing the Asia-Pacific regionalism. ASEAN centrality can be related to similar concepts as the leader, architect, institutional hub, driving the institutional building process in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁶⁴ ASEAN has been at the centre of multilateral architecture in the Indo-Pacific region since the end of the Cold War. Its centrality encourages regional cooperation and adherence to ASEAN norms. This has led to the adoption of the ASEAN model of inclusive, big-tent engagement, as demonstrated by the ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus membership compositions.

Nevertheless, ‘ASEAN centrality’ has always formed a core pillar of the LEP, even as the geographic scope of the policy has expanded over time from Southeast Asia to East Asia and now the Indo-Pacific. Reflecting this, in a speech in 2018, Prime Minister Modi noted that ‘ASEAN centrality and unity’ is ‘at the heart

²⁶³ Sarah Teo. “ASEAN and Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: Past, Present, and Future”. Observer Research Foundation. March 04, 2023

²⁶⁴ A, Acharya. (2017). “The Myth of ASEAN’s Centrality: Project Muse”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*. Vol.39 (2). Available at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/667776/pdf>.

of the new Indo-Pacific’ and will be central to its future for India; its support for the ASEAN-led process of regionalism is rooted in efforts to dilute an alternative regional architecture dominated by major powers (most notably China). Then Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj noted this in a speech in 2017: the ‘centrality of ASEAN serves as a counter balance to the various great power contests and rivalries that get played out in the region’.²⁶⁵

India, the United States, and other Indo-Pacific countries are concerned about China’s assertiveness and military posturing, which has infuriated them. India is seen as a counterbalance and a natural partner in the United States ‘pivot to Asia policy’. ASEAN countries want like-minded powers to be proactive in maintaining stability and preventing China from turning Southeast Asia into its backyard.²⁶⁶ The Look East Policy in India is driven by concerns over China’s unpredictable and aggressive behaviour, leading to a growing relationship between India and Japan.²⁶⁷ India is progressing towards a more multi-aligned approach with major powers. India is intensifying cooperation with ASEAN and regional initiatives, focusing more on East Asian countries and beyond. Under its AEP, India extends engagement with Far East countries, presenting a more challenging global political task.

4.3. Tracing India-Far East Relations

India is prioritizing bilateral relations with its neighbours as a foreign policy priority, but has recognized the need to expand its neighbourhood engagement beyond South Asia. This expansion is rooted in the external linkages that India has maintained since the colonial interregnum, primarily for trade.²⁶⁸ During the colonial period, the British dominated India’s regional linkages, focusing on land-based perceptions and the Indian Army primarily on the northwest as part of the Great Game. Post-independence, India’s terms of reference were influenced by partition

²⁶⁵Ministry of External Affairs. 2017. Retrieved from <https://mea.gov.in>

²⁶⁶Gurudas Das and C.Joshua Thomas. (2016). “Look East to Act East Policy Implications for India’s Northeast Book ‘Rethinking India’s Look East Policy Why to engage China?’ by Yang Xiaoping.Routledge. p. 45

²⁶⁷Amar Nath Ram. (2015). “India’s Asia-Pacific Engagement Impulses And Imperatives”. Manohar Publishers: New Delhi. p. 279

²⁶⁸Leela K Ponappa. “India and East Asia: Opportunities Ahead” on ManmohiniKaul, AnushreeChakraborty. India’s Look East To Act East Tracking the Opportunities and Challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Pentagon Press: New Delhi. p. 21

consequences and colonial economic legacy, with limited engagement with East and Southeast Asia, contrasting with the focus on western relations.²⁶⁹

India's foreign policy began in the 1980s through SAARC, but gradually expanded towards eastern Asia. The LEP led to full-fledged engagement with ASEAN, restoring historical links and crafting contemporary relationships incorporating political, economic, and security interests. India's strategic perspective has always emphasized East Asia, influenced by its civilizational roots and long history of commercial engagement with East Asian countries.²⁷⁰ The East Asia Summit (EAS) has expanded cooperative regionalism in Southeast Asia, redefining the old Nehruvian concept of 'Eastern Federalism'. India's engagement with East Asia, particularly ASEAN, is part of its strategic imperatives in Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, enhancing the scope of cooperative regionalism in the region.

The term 'Far East' typically refers to the countries located in the eastern most part of Asia. Historically, this term originated in Europe to describe the countries in that region from a geographical and geopolitical perspective. China, being the largest and most populous country in the region, plays a significant role both culturally and politically. It has a rich history that dates back thousands of years and has influenced neighbouring countries in various aspects such as language, philosophy, and religion. Japan known for its technological advancements is another key player in the Far East. It has a unique culture with deep rooted traditions that have captivated the world.

The Far East is a term used to describe the geographical, economic, and cultural area that encompasses Eastern Russia (Siberia in particular), East Asia, and Southeast Asia. In some instances, Pacific island nations are also included as part of the Far East. The use of this phrase dates back to 12th century Europe, when the ruling class, explorers, traders, and travellers took an eastern route to reach this area. It became common practice to call this region the Far East because it is the farthest of the 3 Eastern Asian regions, which are the: Near East, the Middle East, and the Far

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p 22

²⁷⁰SD Muni and See ChakMun. "ASEAN-India Relations: Future Directions". ISAS Special Reports 25 May 2012. p 1

East. During the reign of the British Empire, the term became popular and was used to refer to any area east of British India.²⁷¹ The economy of the Far East sometimes referred to as simply East Asia, is considered one of the fastest growing in the world. This region has a wealth of natural resources and low-cost labour that have allowed the economies here to flourish. Additionally, recent political changes have created a friendlier environment for private investors and business owners. These policies have increased foreign trade, government revenue, and public education. The following countries are considered to be located in the Far East: China, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, Siberia, Taiwan, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Malaysia, Laos, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.²⁷²

Among the Far East countries, the focus of the study has been on Japan and Australia. Since 2014, India's engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island countries, regional and sub-regional organizations thereof has been included within the ambit of the AEP. The emerging concept of the Indo-Pacific has further widened the canvas of the AEP with the USA and Japan actively supporting and encouraging India to play a larger and more active role as a powerful stakeholder in the region. Likewise, India has never closed its eyes on the countries of the region beyond ASEAN, especially China, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Even Fiji and the Pacific Islands were included in the canvass of India's engagements with the Indo-Pacific region.

4.3.1. India's relations with Japan

Under the evolving relations between India and ASEAN, India has been establishing subtle endeavours with the East Asian countries. India's open market has reassured Japan in opening new trade routes and economic cooperation became the main pivotal point so as to establish diplomatic relations. On the other hand,

²⁷¹Ash Rossiter and Brendon J. Cannon.(2020). "Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific New Geopolitical Realities". New York: Routledge. p. 15

²⁷²Global Banking.List of countries in the Far East Region". Finance Review. Retrieved from <https://www.globalbankingandfinance.com/list-of-countries-in-the-far-east-region>

India-Japan economic relations could not move faster as Japan was not in favour of India's controlled economy and this was a questionable practice which has been troubling the relations. However, by the late 90s, India had strengthened its trade flow with the ASEAN countries through its 'Look East Policy' and had sharpened its position in Asian affairs as the Indo-ASEAN economic relation had forged towards a deeper phase through its import and export items, reaching 8.3 billion total trades in 2000.²⁷³

The pragmatic friendship between India and Japan today is a result of the evolutions in their bilateral engagement taking place over decades. The liberalized India post-1991 witnessed its changing developmental priorities, which compelled its strategic thinkers to upgrade its relations with Japan and forge 'complementary' ties.²⁷⁴ Although the relations between both nations were still restrictively economic, Japan envisaged India's developing markets as a great opportunity for its investors. The relationship saw a new height with the signing and implementation of the 'Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement' which enabled both the countries to cooperate on issues of trade, investments, infrastructure, and energy.²⁷⁵ In PM Singh's view, "India's buoyant economy, young population, and large market combine well with Japan's technological prowess, manufacturing skills, and financial sources to create a win-win situation for both the countries."²⁷⁶

²⁷³Rahul Mishra. "From Look East to Act East: Transitions in India's Eastward Engagement". The Asian Forum. (1 December, 2014). Retrieved from <https://theasianforum.org/from-look-east-to-act-east-transitions-in-indias-eastward-engagement/>

²⁷⁴ Takahiro Sato. "Economic Relations between India and Japan. Eurasian Geography and Economic". 53(4), May 15, 2013 pp. 460-67, DOI : <https://dx.doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.53.4.457>

²⁷⁵Ministry of Commerce and Industry Government of India. "Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between Republic of India and Japan". (1 August , 2011). Retrieved from https://commerce.gov.in/writeraddata/pdf_download/IJCEPA_Basic_Agreement.pdf

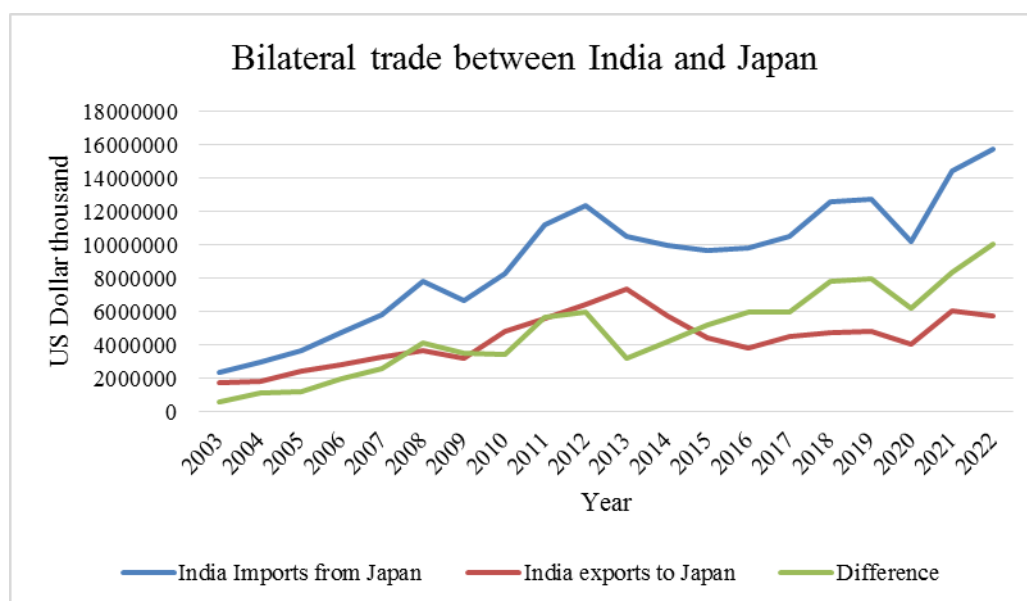
²⁷⁶P. VaidyanathanIyer. "India Japan concludes CEPA talks". Indian Express. (26 October, 2010) http://archive.indian_express.com/news/india-japan-conclude-cepa-talks/702475/ Accessed on 12 April, 2023

Table 4.2: Bilateral trade between India and Japan (in USD thousand)

Year	India Imports from Japan	India exports to Japan	Difference
2003	2333143	1709802	623341
2004	2962042	1847648	1114394
2005	3678528	2455239	1223289
2006	4743469	2804220	1939249
2007	5832826	3263389	2569437
2008	7784411	3624209	4160202
2009	6688836	3215709	3473127
2010	8265086	4805077	3460009
2011	11218263	5592608	5625655
2012	12362967	6415550	5947417
2013	10489824	7325476	3164348
2014	9963998	5756879	4207119
2015	9628315	4453754	5174561
2016	9808025	3826808	5981217
2017	10464507	4499205	5965302
2018	12577590	4750985	7826605
2019	12744472	4815593	7928879
2020	10206851	4043285	6163566
2021	14412239	6077163	8335076
2022	15749466	5699962	10049504
CAGR	10.57%	6.54%	15.76%

Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics

Figure 4.2: Bilateral trade between India and Japan



Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics

India and Japan share a long history of cooperation, not only in economic terms but also in strategic, cultural, and political spheres. As two of Asia's largest democracies, both nations have recently placed a greater emphasis on enhancing their bilateral ties. With India being one of Japan's most significant regional economic partners, trade and economic cooperation have been at the heart of this developing relationship. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and Japan, which came into effect in 2011, marked a significant turning point in the bilateral economic relationship.

The table 4.2 shows the trade data of the two nations from 2003 to 2022. It can be seen from the table that the period before CEPA (2003-2010) and after CEPA (2011-2022) exhibit clear differences in the trade relationship between India and Japan. India and Japan's trade increased steadily prior to the CEPA, although Japan continued to benefit from the trade gap. Between 2003 and 2010, the trade deficit between India and Japan increased from USD 623 million to USD 3.46 billion. While India's exports to Japan were comparatively small, this disparity reflected India's rising demand for high-tech items, machinery, and industrial products.

However, in the post-CEPA, both imports and exports have increased significantly. It is also noteworthy that although the rate of deficit expansion has adjusted, the trade imbalance still benefits Japan. As seen from the table, India's exports to Japan increased from USD 4.80 billion in 2010 to USD 5.70 billion in 2022, indicating a more modest but still significant growth rate as compared to the years before CEPA. On the other hand, India's imports from Japan grew from USD 8.27 billion in 2010 to USD 15.75 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 10.57%. This indicates that Japan remains a critical supplier of advanced machinery, technology, and automobiles.

It is also evident that, even if there is still a trade imbalance, the deficit's growth rate after CEPA (15.76% CAGR) is remarkably higher than the export growth rate (6.54% CAGR). This shows that although exports to Japan have increased, Japan imports remain the main driver of bilateral trade.

4.3.2. India's relations with Australia

The arrival of the term Indo-Pacific has provided crucial impetus to the bilateral relationship between India and Australia. The relationship between India and Australia can be considered very unique and singular in all aspects of bilateralism. Both countries have been off from each other's horizon for a long period of time and had rarely considered each other from a strategic partner point of view. Though off and on in the past some attempts were made by both of them to work out a relationship but the relationship did not sustain itself. Thus, the occasional warmth in their relationship in the past has always been overwhelmed by their differing perspectives on a variety of issues, leading to the cold shouldering of the relationship by the various governments in the past.²⁷⁷

The arrival of Indo-Pacific has improved upon the existing Asia-Pacific and has distinctly brought the centrality of India into the forefront, whereas at the geographic level it attempts to bring in the Indian Ocean, while at the state level it

²⁷⁷Dr Tejinder Hundal.(2021).“India and Australia in Indo-Pacific”. Tamil Nadu: Notion Press. pp. 22-23

brings in India.²⁷⁸ Both India and Australia are central to the emerging strategic landscape and geopolitical connotations of the Indo-Pacific and the existing and futuristic contours of their bilateral relationship will augur very well for the region. In contemporary times, the enthusiasm about India's phenomenal rise both as an economic and military power coupled with the firming up of the concept of Indo-Pacific has found resonance and traction in Australia. The centrality of India in the IOR and now Indo-Pacific has also been duly acknowledged. The report of the Senate Foreign Affairs Australia has endorsed the centrality of India in the region. "On a regional basis, the countries of the Indian Ocean region can be understood to include established and readily understood sub-regions (the gulf), geographic areas (African) or key countries (India).²⁷⁹ On the other side, the economic and military rise along with the necessary changes in foreign policy is catering to confidence for India to take additional responsibilities in the Indian Ocean security and also a greater interest in the erstwhile Asia-Pacific and contemporary Indo-Pacific order. The post-Cold War realities have also forced Australia to concentrate on the region and evolve bilateral and multilateral engagements in the region. Rory Medcalf stated that Australia needs to engage, economically, societally and strategically, is no longer limited to Southeast Asia, Japan and Korea of the 1970s and 90s or the China of the 90s and early 2000s. It is also South Asia but especially India now a major trading partner substantial investor growing military power and diplomatic player, the source of one of our largest skilled migrant communities and a major relationship with vast potential for further growth.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸David Scott. "Australia's Embrace of the Indo-Pacific': New Term, New Region, New Strategy?" International Relations of the Asia-Pacific. (26 June, 2013). <https://irap.oxfordjournals.org> Accessed on 4 June, 2023

²⁷⁹Government of Australia. Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee. The Importance of the Indian Ocean Rim for Australia's Foreign, Trade And Defence Policy, 2013, Canberra, Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House.

²⁸⁰Rory Medcalf. "Pivoting the Map: Australia's Indo-Pacific System". Strategic & Defence Studies Centre. ANU College of Asia & the Pacific. The Australian National University. p. 4

Table 4.3: Bilateral trade between India and Australia (in USD thousand)

Year	India's exports to Australia	India's imports from Australia	Difference
2003	557989	2036946	1478957
2004	661602	3549558	2887956
2005	826648	4899710	4073062
2006	886643	6502159	5615516
2007	1083038	7680940	6597902
2008	1347332	9568971	8221639
2009	1410197	12017053	10606856
2010	1650874	12061235	10410361
2011	2096204	13416619	11320415
2012	2633035	12928894	10295859
2013	2397713	10871894	8474181
2014	2593585	9934691	7341106
2015	3254066	9405568	6151502
2016	2949543	8730208	5780665
2017	3876854	14345897	10469043
2018	3741893	14126314	10384421
2019	2973868	10569385	7595517
2020	3471127	7263296	3792169
2021	6917333	15103006	8185673
2022	8207843	19623303	11415460
CAGR	15.20%	12.66%	11.36%

Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics.

Figure 4.3: Bilateral trade between India and Australia



Source: Own calculation based on UN COMTRADE statistics

With the Indo-Pacific region at the centre of its global goals, Australia's foreign policy and strategic discourse have undergone significant change in recent years. The bilateral trade data between Australia and India, spanning from 2003 to 2022 in table 4.3 provides valuable insights into the growing economic partnership between the two nations.

It can be seen from the table that the trade relationship between Australia and India has seen impressive growth both in terms of exports and imports. India's exports to Australia increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15.20%, from USD 557.99 million in 2003 to USD 8.21 billion in 2022 while India's imports from Australia increased from USD 2.04 billion in 2003 to USD 19.62 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 12.66%. This clearly indicates that Australia has consistently benefited from the trade balance, which has been growing over time showing Australia's supremacy in the trade relationship.

The significant CAGR of Australia-India trade (15.20% for exports to Australia and 12.66% for imports from Australia) demonstrates the increasing economic interdependence between the two nations. However, it is important to note that while trade is booming, India's trade deficit with Australia remains consistently large, reflecting Australia's dominance in key resource sectors. The export items to Australia primarily consist of textiles, chemicals, machinery, and jewellery. India's exports to Australia have become more varied as its industrial and manufacturing sectors have grown. On the other hand, the major items Australia exports to India include mineral resources (coal, iron ore), education services, and agricultural products.

India and Australia have a strong trade relationship, with India exporting generic medicines, textiles, gems, jewellery, engineering goods, and agricultural products. India's exports to Australia include pharmaceuticals, textiles, apparel, minerals, resources, agricultural products, and education services. Australia is a leading exporter of minerals, particularly coal, and iron ore, which are vital for India's energy and manufacturing sectors. India imports various agricultural goods from Australia, including wheat and beef, contributing to its food security and dietary diversity. In conclusion, the trade relationship between India and Australia is characterized by significant growth and diversification. Key exports from India include pharmaceuticals, textiles, and agricultural products, while imports from Australia are heavily centred on minerals, resources, and machinery. Addressing the trade deficit and enhancing collaboration across various sectors will be crucial for both countries to maximize their economic potential in the coming years.

4.4. United States Pivot in Indo-Pacific

The United States is a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region, home to over half of the world's population, economy, and military. The United States has long recognized the Indo-Pacific region's importance for its security and prosperity. Historically, ties were formed two centuries ago by Americans seeking commercial opportunities and growing with Asian immigrants. Post-World War II, the United States solidified ties with the region through treaty alliances with countries like

Australia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. The United States supported ASEAN, developed close trade and investment relationships, and upheld international law and norms, including human rights and freedom of navigation.

In 2011, President Barack Obama introduced the U.S. Pivot to Asia, focusing on geopolitical and economic aspects. He aimed to increase the U.S. military presence in Asia and establish the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), aiming to establish the rules of the road in the region and the global economy. Negotiations for the TPP were delayed until 2015, despite Obama's initial goal of achieving it by December 2012.²⁸¹ However, in 2016, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump opposed the TPP due to anti-globalization sentiments in the United States. Trump subsequently torpedoed the TPP in 2017, leading to a lopsided United States Indo-Pacific policy characterized more by geopolitical formations like the Quad and AUKUS than economic initiatives and trade pacts.

The Biden Administration released the US Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022, outlining the country's strategic interests, objectives, and lines of effort in the region. The report emphasized the United States role as an 'Indo-Pacific power' and the region's importance for US security and prosperity, stating that the US has security commitments to allies and strategic interests in preventing near-peer competitors. The Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy focuses on five objectives: political, economic, security, regional governance, and alliance relations. It aims to promote American democracy and counter China's authoritarianism, ensure US access to the region's domains, safeguard economic interests through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, and strengthen its military presence through integrated deterrence to maintain US military superiority in the region.²⁸²

²⁸¹MohammadbagherForough. "America's Pivot to Asia 2.0: The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework". The Diplomat. (26 May, 2022)

²⁸²Zongyou Wei. "The Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy and its Impacts on Asia-Pacific Order". East Asian Affairs Vol. 2, No. 2 (2022). p. 3

Thus, Washington has shown interest in new partnerships and initiatives, including the Quad and AUKUS, as well as new trilaterals with Japan, South Korea, and India. It has also deepened its partnership with Vietnam, upgraded alliances with the Philippines and Thailand, and expanded its engagement with ASEAN into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. President Biden has held summits with Pacific Island leaders to address climate change and illegal fishing threats. The administration launched Partners in the Blue Pacific and a new U.S.-Mekong Partnership.²⁸³ The strategy prioritizes U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to address challenges and goals for U.S. policy. It emphasizes the need for a free and open Indo-Pacific, requiring adaptation of existing alliances, organizations, and rules. The strategy emphasizes the importance of strong, mutually reinforcing coalitions for this goal. It also underlines the significance of strengthening ties between U.S. allies and regional actors, encouraging the development of a 'latticework' in multilateral groupings like the Quad, and non-U.S. relationships like the European Union.²⁸⁴

The United States Indo-Pacific policy, despite its geopolitical development through the Quad and AUKUS, lacks significant geo-economic traction. The White House aims to address this gap through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. The IPEF is not an FTA like RCEP and CPTPP, and has not engaged in negotiations to remove tariffs or increase market access. Instead, it is a vision, signal, or statement of purpose by the United States to adapt to the evolving history, geography, and geo-economics of the Indo-Pacific. IPEF aims to re-establish US economic leadership in the Indo-Pacific region, enabling the US to rewrite the rules for the Indo-Pacific and global economy, as Obama and Biden have envisioned. The White House claims that the flexibility provided by the IPEF is a feature rather than a bug, as it allows participants to act on completed components without waiting for the entire framework to be completed. However, there are no historical precedents for such a loosely defined framework. The United States geopolitical objectives have likely shaped IPEF's trajectory, with excluded countries like China and ASEAN partners.

²⁸³ Carla Freeman (et.al). "Two Years Later, What Has the Indo-Pacific Strategy Achieved?". United States Institutes of Peace. (15 February, 2024)

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,

The challenge for the US is persuading IPEF members to disentangle their economies from China's, as they have already signed binding FTAs with China.

4.5. The China Factor

One of the most important trends in world affairs is the growth of China. The rise of China has also reshaped the global economy and world politics. China's economy rapidly transformed from a low-cost 'factory to the world' to a global leader in innovative technology, integrating into the World Trade Organization in December 2001. After slowing down under Mao Zedong in the years 1960 and 1970, China opened up to the rest of the world in the 1980s, and then took off in the following decades. Its part of the world economy grew over tenfold, from less than 2 per cent in 1990 to 18.4 per cent in 2021. No country had ever risen so far or so quickly.²⁸⁵ By using its success to become the main marketable and development partner for rising economies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, it has changed not only global supply chains but also international diplomacy.²⁸⁶ China's "quiet rise" gave way to increasing open statements of its global ambitions and a more proactive geopolitical perspective notably in relation to its maritime disputes in the South China Sea.²⁸⁷ Yet, tensions have also been brought about by its rise to prominence in the world.

Economically, China has emerged as a prominent actor in global trade and investment. Its focused on production and exports has spurred economic growth and allowed it to become a vital trading partner for many other countries across the world. Its BRI, which intends to improve infrastructure links while promoting trade between China and other nations, has strengthened its economic position on the world stage. Meanwhile China's foreign policy has been marked by a more assertive and at times hostile alignment on a wide range of subjects such as border disputes, trade negotiations, and human rights.

²⁸⁵ Ruchir Sharma. "China's rise is reversing". Financial Times. (19 November, 2023)

²⁸⁶ "How a Rising China Has Remade Global Politics". (13 November, 2023). The Editor. World Politics Review.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*,

China, under Xi Jinping, has been developing its own ideas for reorganizing the Asia-Pacific region's security system since 2014, including militarisation of the South China Sea, rearmament of the People's Liberation Army, expansion of bilateral security partnerships, and the establishment of its own multilateral security forums. The Asian security architecture, unlike Europe's NATO, has been based on bilateral, United States-led alliances and security partnerships for decades, unlike Europe's multilateral system.²⁸⁸ In this regard, Washington's central strategy in the Indo-Pacific is to maintain United States hegemony against China's assertiveness and balance China. The concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) replaces the long-dominant Asia-Pacific construct, countering Chinese-dominated reorganization. The Indo-Pacific's regional security architecture is crucial due to its host to maritime disputes, the Taiwan conflict, and the India-China border conflict, which could negatively impact German and European interests by disrupting trade routes. Along with this, the Indo-Pacific concept, supported by regional actors like India, ASEAN, Australia, and the European Union, is viewed by China as a containment strategy under the United States leadership.

²⁸⁸ There are three competing explanations for the lack of a multilateral defence system. According to the first approach, the enormous asymmetry of power between the USA and its Asian partners in the 1950s and 1960s thwarted such a system, because the USA had to shoulder most of the burden alone. The second approach emphasises that, unlike among NATO countries, there was no common identity, and different norms and values between the US and its Asian partners. Washington's perception at the time was characterised by racist stereotypes of "the Asians" and the supposed superiority of Anglo-Saxon-European culture. According to the third approach, the reasons lay not in Washington but in the region itself. An "Asian NATO" had failed due to the resistance of Asian elites. Regional leaders such as Nehru in India and Sukarno in Indonesia saw a US-dominated regional security system as a new form of foreign domination and therefore prevented the creation of a US-led collective security system. Currently, the third approach predominates in research. See Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia", *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009): 158–96; Donald Crone, "Does Hegemony Matter? The Re-organization of the Pacific Political Economy," *World Politics* 45, no. 4 (1993): 501–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950707>; Galia Press-Barnathan, *Organizing the World. The United States and Regional Cooperation in Asia and Europe* (London: Routledge, 2003); Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism," *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 575–607; Arthur A. Stein, "Recalcitrance and Initiative: US Hegemony and Regional Powers in Asia and Europe after World War II," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 1 (2014): 147–77; Yasuhiro Izumikawa, "Network Connections and the Emergence of the Hub-and-Spokes Alliance System in East Asia," *International Security* 45, no. 2 (2020): 7–50, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00389; Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism", *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239–75.

The strategic goals of China and India in the Indo-Pacific area have drawn greater interest in recent years because of their geopolitical importance and the shifting dynamics of the global power struggle. China's growing footprint through the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as its expanding naval capabilities, reflects its desire for increased influence and economic connectedness in the Indo-Pacific region. China's impact in the Indo-Pacific area is multidimensional, with profound consequences for regional dynamics. Its BRI has been spreading its economic footprint by establishing infrastructure projects throughout Asia and beyond, with the goal of improving connectivity and promoting linkages. Its rising naval powers and influence over the Indian Ocean have spurred controversy over Beijing's strategic objectives and the effects for regional security. Many countries are now looking to increase their own presence in the Indo-Pacific to counter China's influence and maintain regional stability.

Figure 4.4: The One Belt One Road-China



Source: National Maritime Foundation

From the 1980s until 2000, China took care to reassure the world that its rising economic and military power would not pose a danger to global peace and security. Today, China can hardly maintain that its rising had been peaceful, especially given the current global conditions surrounding the Taiwan Strait, the two China Seas, and its Himalayan boundaries, which are marked by power projection and hostile military posturing.²⁸⁹

The Indo-Pacific region, with its numerous geopolitical hotspots, emerging powers, and overlapping political and economic partnerships, is expected to play a crucial role in global peace and prosperity. While Southeast Asia is an engine of regional and global economic growth, border disputes in the South China Sea likewise threaten regional stability. The expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also increases the geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca as a sea lane for natural resources. Among the middle power countries, there are high expectations for Japan to assume a comprehensive leadership role in the region, especially as it has multi-layered relationships in terms of economic, security and cultural ties with the countries of Southeast Asia. Also the subject of India's opportunities in East and Southeast Asia is of direct and current relevance to India's foreign policy encompassing its political, economic, strategic, and cultural interests.

In light of the rise of both China and India, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are integral parts of the region from the perspective of improving military and economic connectivity, including securing large regional sea lanes. However, as China promotes the BRI, its global infrastructure development strategy for the entire Eurasian continent, and expands its military activities beyond the South China Sea to the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans, it is becoming increasingly important to construct a security strategy that encompasses not only the Pacific Ocean focused on the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and the South China Sea but also the Indian Ocean, to include the east coast of Africa. In this context, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept has

²⁸⁹Neeraj Singh Manhas. "China's rise in the Indo-Pacific: A Quad countries perspective". Issue Brief November 3, 2022 Institute for Security & Development Policy.

emerged as a counter-concept to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its growing military presence in the region.²⁹⁰

But President Xi Jinping pushed for "Asian-led" regional security architecture as the PRC rose to prominence in 2014, challenging the hub-and-spokes model²⁹¹, deeming United States-led military alliances obsolete.²⁹² Beijing's South China Sea territorial claims, threats towards Taiwan, and Sino-Indian border conflict pose threats to United States allies and Indo-Pacific stability and prosperity.²⁹³ The United States-led regional security architecture aims to maintain a free, open Indo-Pacific, allowing states to act freely politically and economically without external coercion, as long as it aligns with US interests. Washington initially reacted negatively to a security agreement with China.²⁹⁴ After the Cold War, multilateral forums like APEC, EAS, and ARF were established to build regional security by involving major regional players and conducting regular security dialogues.²⁹⁵ Beijing has expanded its bilateral partnerships in the region and established multilateral security forums and dialogue formats, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), China-Africa Cooperation Forum, China-Arab States

²⁹⁰ Hiroyuki Suzuki. "Japan's Leadership Role in a Multipolar Indo-Pacific". Center for Strategic and International Studies. (23 October, 2020)

²⁹¹ Xi Jinping, "Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia", Shanghai, (21 May 2014) https://www.china.org.cn/world/2014-05/28/content_32511846.htm

²⁹² In May 2022, Xi Jinping also published ideas for a (China-dominated) reorganisation of the global security order ("Global Security Initiative"), which at least indirectly contradicts the ideas of order of the Indo-Pacific concepts.

²⁹³ The White House. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States". (Washington, D.C., February 2022), 5.

²⁹⁴ Kate Lyons. "US Won't Rule Out Military Action if China Establishes Base in Solomon Islands", The Guardian, (26 April 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/us-wont-rule-out-military-action-if-china-establishes-base-in-solomon-islands>.

²⁹⁵ Amitav Acharya. "Constructing a Security Community in South-east Asia. ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order". (London: Routledge, 2000); Jürgen Rüland, "Southeast Asian Regionalism and Global Governance: 'Multilateral Utility' or 'Hedging Utility'?" Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs 33, no. 1 (2011): 83–112; Alice Ba, "Institutional Divergence and Convergence in the Asia-Pacific? ASEAN in Practice and in Theory," Cambridge Review of International Affairs 27, no. 2 (2014): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2014.889082>.

Cooperation Forum, CICA, and Xiangshan Forum, alongside its bilateral partnerships.²⁹⁶

The Indo-Pacific region is drawn to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) due to its vast infrastructure needs, but is cautious of the 'debt trap'. In this context, Japan's experience in private sector investment and financing positions it well to lead in establishing concrete, well-coordinated projects. Japan's policy-based financial institutions and aid agencies, including JBIC, JICA, and NEXI, are managing initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region and promoting third-country market cooperation with China, requiring global standards. Although not formally recognizing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Japan uses cooperation platforms to engage China at various levels.

Figure 4.5: China's BRI and its Initiatives



Source: National Maritime Foundation

²⁹⁶ Patricia M. Kim. "China's Search for Allies", *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-11-15/chinas-search-allies>; Julia C. Morse/Robert O. Keohane, "Contested Multilateralism", *The Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 4 (2014): 385–412, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-014-9188-2>; Kai He, ed., *Contested Multilateralism 2.0 and Asian Security Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://www.routledge.com/Contested-Multilateralism-20-and-Asian-Security-Dynamics/He/p/book/9780367893385>.

4.5.1. The South China Sea

Since World War II, the South China Sea has been a territorial conflict between its claimants in the Indo-Pacific area. China, a strong claimant in the South China Sea, has been engaged in a tug of war since 1954, with Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam joining the issue. The South China Sea is crucial for the economic growth of the Indo-Pacific region, as the Indian and other member countries have become more complementary due to the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dissolution. The South China Sea dispute has sparked significant concerns among Indian officials and other members of the Indo-Pacific region.²⁹⁷ The South China Sea's strategic importance lies in its abundant natural resources, strategic location, critical passage, and territorial claims, making it one of the world's most economically and politically significant areas, making the Indo-Pacific a flash-point.²⁹⁸ The South China Sea, with its vast oil reserves, holds significant geo-economic importance for regional and extra-regional countries due to its significant economic potential. Therefore, six countries have claimed the South China Sea due to its geo-economic and geostrategic importance. The large fishing area has led to economic benefits for the contiguous countries.²⁹⁹

The South China Sea is home to 30% of the world's tuna fish productivity and marine biodiversity, and has been the site of \$5.3 trillion worth of global maritime trade in the past decade. The United States Energy Information Administration estimates that there are approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The world's population growth has heightened energy demand, leading to the search for new energy sources, particularly in India and China, for economic growth and development.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷Bawa Singh (et.al). (2023). "New Great Game in the Indo-Pacific". New York: Routledge. p. 113

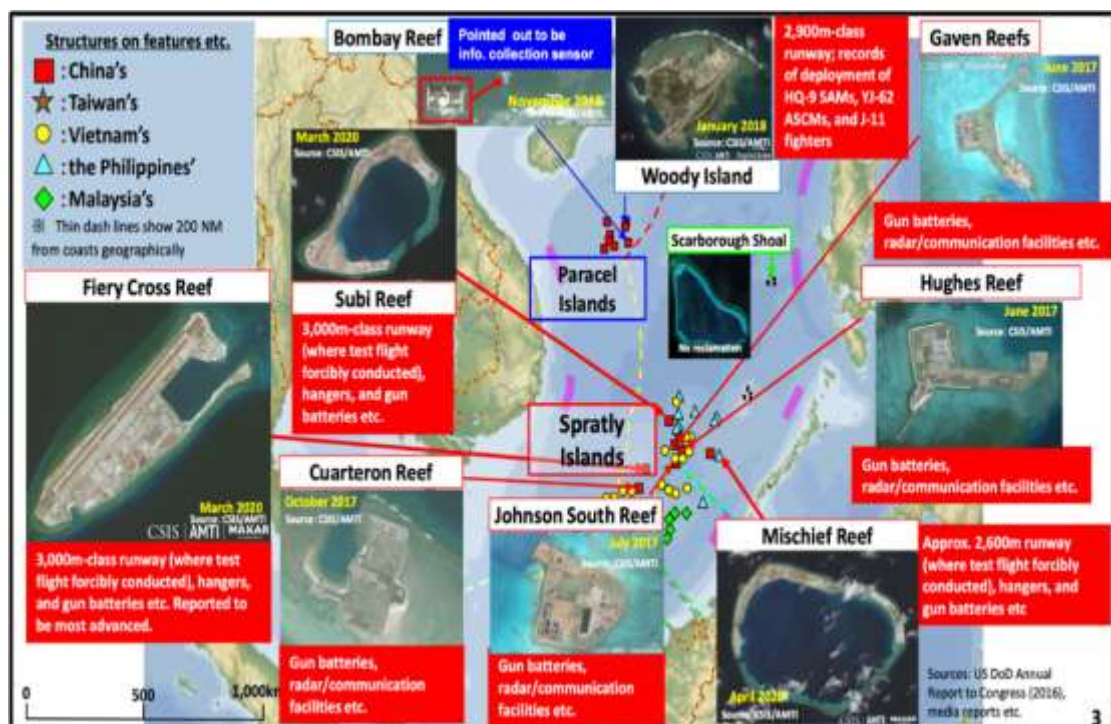
²⁹⁸B. Hayton. (2014). "The South China Sea: The Struggle for power in Asia". New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 55-60

²⁹⁹*Opcit.*, Singh

³⁰⁰V. Wang. (2012). "The Rise of China, The Rise of India and the changing geopolitics of Asia: Contending perspectives on India-China relations". Richmond: The University of Richmond. pp.90

Growing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea has caused frustration in recent years, especially for Taiwan and the other Southeast Asian nations with which China has long-standing territorial sovereignty disputes and related maritime claims. India, for its part, has a lot in common with these nations about its long-standing and unwavering stance on the ‘freedom, openness and inclusivity’ of the Indo-Pacific, of which the South China Sea is an essential sub region. India, a major player and a party that may be impacted by any disruption to its commercial lifeline via the South China Sea and other related waterways, needs to re-evaluate the marine aspects of its ‘Look East’ policy. As a result, India is working to improve its generally pessimistic view of the outside world by encouraging interaction with the South China Sea littoral regions, which are also likely to be impacted by the tendency of a revisionist nation to alter the status quo unilaterally in a kind of ‘zero-sum’ situation. Thus, certain recent foreign policy moves in the region do, in fact, demonstrate India’s sophisticated ‘change of tack’.

Figure 4.6: China’s Occupation in the South China Sea after Reclamation



Source: Japan Ministry of Defence

The long-standing dispute between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea involves conflicting claims over various islands, islets, reefs, and shoals, which lie within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Philippines, but also fall inside the ‘unilaterally declared’ Chinese ‘nine-dash line’. China particularly chose to adopt an increasingly confrontationist posture around the Scarborough and Second Thomas shoals, with the Chinese fishing fleet, maritime militia vessels, and coast guard ships, systematically blocking, obstructing and harassing the legitimate activities of the Philippines’ maritime community.³⁰¹ India also has a vibrant set of on-going interaction with other Southeast Asian nations, all of which are affected to varying degrees by the Chinese aggressiveness in the South China Sea such as Vietnam which, like India, shares a land border with China but has managed to delineate its maritime boundary in the Beibu Gulf, is nevertheless locked in overlapping territorial sovereignty and associated maritime zones claims in the Paracel and Spratly chains of islands. Subsequently, India and Vietnam have a strong maritime cooperative engagement as part of their comprehensive political, military, and economic relations. And these are of course, built upon their mutual national interests. This relationship has become stronger, particularly after the increased assertiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific, in the new millennium.

Territorial sovereignty issues and excessive maritime zone claims in South China Sea are not limited to China and Southeast Asian disputants only. Taiwan has its own share of territorial claims vis-à-vis China, in that it claims all the islands and features that China occupies and claims. However, these issues have been pushed into background, as Taiwan contends with a far greater challenge that of a possible reunification push from an increasingly belligerent China. India’s interactions with Taiwan have been quite constrained, owing to its recognition of the ‘One China Policy’. However, this inhibition is slowly but surely waning. In recent years, India has adopted a more proactively open posture while engaging with Taiwan. India’s trade with Taiwan has expanded substantially in recent years. In 2022, the overall

³⁰¹ Captain Kamlesh K Agnihotri (Retd.) and Nirmal Shankar M. “India’s Outlook towards Southeast Asia and Beyond: Changing Tack in Contemporary Environment? National Maritime Foundation. (22 August 2023)

bilateral value of commerce was \$12.5 billion, up from \$10.5 billion in 2021 and \$8.5 billion in 2020.³⁰²

Thus, growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea has been a source of increasing discomfiture, particularly, for those Southeast Asian countries that have a long-standing dispute over territorial sovereignty and associated maritime claims in the region. Taiwan also grapples with an existential threat on account of increasingly tenuous situation in the Taiwan Strait. India, on its part, finds great commonality of interest with these countries over its long-held and consistent position on the ‘freedom, openness and inclusivity’ of the Indo-Pacific of which the South China Sea forms a vital sub-region. Peace and stability in the area, as also in the Taiwan Strait, is essential for the unimpeded flow of seaborne energy and commerce, which in turn are so essential for the economic wellbeing of the world. Upon dropping a series of Chinese led infrastructure projects due to sustainability and geopolitical concerns, the Philippines is now redirecting its attention to Japan and India as alternative sources of development and security.

On the economic side, the two nations are considering a preferential trade agreement, similar to what India is discussing with Vietnam and the Philippines. Other plans include enhancing links between Indonesia’s Aceh province and India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These parts of the two countries are separated by just over 500 miles of sea, and Jakarta and New Delhi have been cooperating to boost trade and travel between them. India and Indonesia are also cooperating on developing infrastructure, such as a port at Sabang in Aceh, which could be viewed as India’s rival to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The South China Sea’s importance in the Indo-Pacific stems from its strategic location. It serves as a vital corridor for maritime trade and energy transportation with around one-third of global trade passing through these waters. In Indo-Pacific, the South China Sea serves as a geopolitical flashpoint where major powers like China, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia are involved. The disputes in the SCS have implications for regional stability, freedom of navigation, adherence to

³⁰² Invest India. “India-Taiwan Relations”. <https://www.investindia.gov.in/country/taiwan-plus>.

international law and the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, efforts to manage the disputes and maintain peace and stability in the SCS have involve multilateral mechanisms such as the ASEAN and ASEAN led initiatives like the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS. In a nutshell, the South China Sea holds significant strategic importance within the broader Indo-Pacific region due to its location and role as a major trade route. The disputes and tensions in the South China Sea have far reaching implications for regional security dynamics and the relationships between the countries involved in the Indo-Pacific region.

4.6. Situating Triangularity in the Indo-Pacific Region

Although the pace of India's integration has been slow, it has slowly but certainly begun to change the geopolitical conceptions of Asia and erase the differences between East Asia and South Asia. Meanwhile, India's trade and economic relations with East Asia are acquiring greater weight with more than 50 per cent of its trade flows heading towards the east. Also the economic growth in East Asia in the 1980s generated the concept of the 'Pacific Rim'. The expansion of this growth to Southeast Asia led to the construction of the term 'Asia-Pacific'. However, China's increasing reliance on the Indian Ocean and the acceleration of India's economic growth and strategic interests in the Pacific have now led to the increasing use of the term 'Indo-Pacific'. Thus, the intersection of the maritime interests of a rising China and an emerging India with those of the United States which has long provided security in the two oceans has begun to give the 'Indo-Pacific' a distinctive geopolitical character.³⁰³

The Indo-Pacific construct has influenced global geopolitics, leading countries like the USA, India, Australia, Japan, and ASEAN to align their foreign policies with national, regional, and international interests. As the US and China engage in economic competition, middle and smaller powers in the Indo-Pacific have formed trilateral/quadrilateral/plurilateral arrangements to benefit from geostrategic rivalries. India's AEP has benefited the country at various levels in the Indo-Pacific,

³⁰³For a discussion of the emergence of the concept see, David Scott, "The Indo-Pacific: New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US-India Strategic Convergence". *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 19, no. 2, November 2012, pp. 85-109

complementing initiatives like SAGAR.³⁰⁴ ASEAN members are divided over their economic ties to China, with some concerned about becoming over-dependent on China and apprehensive about ASEAN's engagement with the global economic governance context. ASEAN has taken the lead in forming a larger economic grouping in the Asia Pacific region, with India-ASEAN growing relations enhancing cooperation with East Asian countries, particularly Japan. This has allowed India to expand its footprint in the Asia-Pacific region, while China's increasing assertiveness has forced India, Japan, and ASEAN members to play a role as peacemakers. India, along with its littoral states, has become a dominant player in the Indian Ocean region and the Indo-Pacific region, while Australia is a key player in the region.

4.6.1. India-ASEAN-Japan

The India-Japan relationship is a crucial part of the strategic triangle of India, China, and Japan in Asia. Its long history is rooted in spiritual affinity and strong civilizational ties. Both nations continue to strengthen this relationship through shared values like democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law. India and Japan are strong advocates for ASEAN centrality, recognizing its importance in the Indo-Pacific region. They advocate for ASEAN unity and centrality in various forums and bilateral statements, demonstrating significant progress in fostering cooperation with ASEAN and emphasizing its centrality and unity. ASEAN centrality ensures the ASEAN bloc remains at the centre of Asia's provincial establishments, secured through mechanisms like the ASEAN plus Three, ASEAN Regional Forum, and East Asian Summit, serving as the central node in a network of regional institutions.

Japan and ASEAN have a long-standing partnership for peace, stability, development, and prosperity in the Southeast Asian region. Japan also maintains close business ties with ASEAN. Japan believes a more integrated ASEAN as a hub of regional cooperation is crucial for Japan, ASEAN, and East Asia's stability and prosperity, supporting ASEAN's efforts to enhance connectivity.³⁰⁵ Japan is

³⁰⁴Prabir De. (2023). "Thirty Years of Asean-India Relations Towards Indo-Pacific". New Delhi: KW Publishers. pp. 28

³⁰⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. "Japan-ASEAN Cooperation". (December 25, 2023)

improving its security cooperation with ASEAN through a diverse approach to bilateral and multilateral activities. Since the Abe administration's re-launch in December 2012, Japan's security approach towards ASEAN has improved significantly. Tokyo is engaging in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and capacity-building activities as part of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus.³⁰⁶ Japan's gradual involvement in regional security, particularly in political-security matters, significantly contributed to the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).³⁰⁷ But, Japan's influence in ASEAN's external relations has been diminished due to the rise of emerging powers like China and India. Beijing's diplomatic offensive, including a free trade agreement with ASEAN and accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, forged economic and political ties between China and ASEAN. Tokyo now aims to expand and diversify its role in Southeast Asia.³⁰⁸

However, Japan is grappling with a security challenge due to China's assertiveness in the East China Sea, particularly in the South China Sea, as tensions between the two countries escalate over territorial disputes and maritime rights. The Japanese government is addressing tensions in the East China Sea by addressing the South China Sea alongside the East China Sea, pursuing cooperation with ASEAN in multilateral fora, and fostering bilateral cooperation with ASEAN claimants.³⁰⁹ The maritime disputes and China's assertiveness challenge the regional order. Here, Tokyo aims to protect and strengthen the United States-led liberal order in East Asia, reinforcing its strategic interest in ASEAN. Under the Abe administration, the Japanese government is cooperating with ASEAN to check China's military rise and strengthen maritime law enforcement agencies.³¹⁰ Japan actively participates in the

³⁰⁶Tomotaka Shoji. "Japan's Security Cooperation with ASEAN: Pursuit of a Status as a "Relevant" Partner". *Journal of Defense and Security*. (16 December, 2015)

³⁰⁷Jusuf Wanandi. "ASEAN-Japan Relations: The Underpinning of East Asian Peace and Stability" *ASEAN-Japan Cooperation: A Foundation for East Asian Community*, Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2003, p. 4.

³⁰⁸Tomotaka Shoji. "Pursuing a Multi-dimensional Relationship". *Rising China and Japan's Southeast Asia policy* in J. Tsunekawa (ed.) *The Rise of China*. pp. 175-176

³⁰⁹Tomotaka Shoji, "The South China Sea: A View from Japan". *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, No. 15 (December 2014). p. 128

³¹⁰John Lee. "Strategic Possibilities and Limitations for Abe's Japan in Southeast Asia". *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*. 2015. ISSN 0219-3213. p. 4

ADMM-Plus framework, promoting security and defence cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministry of Defence and Self-Defence Force support the framework's development as a major pillar of security cooperation to address common security concerns.³¹¹ Japan's involvement in the ADMM-Plus is driven by strengthening ASEAN's centrality in multilateralism, forging security ties with the region, and enhancing relations with Southeast Asia. Also, Japan's interest lies in maintaining contact with regional countries, including China, through this channel to build confidence.³¹²

Japan proposed establishing a maritime security forum for East Asia at the 6th East Asia Summit in November 2011, aiming to discuss basic rules such as international laws and freedom of navigation, based on existing regional frameworks, and collaborating with member countries. The Yomiuri Shimbun, a Japanese daily newspaper, suggested that Tokyo's goal was to assess China's assertiveness in the South and East China Seas.³¹³ Japan's proposal for regional security was not widely supported by EAS members, including ASEAN countries, who agreed to discuss maritime issues within the ASEAN Maritime Forum. ASEAN countries are generally positive about Japan's active role in strengthening security ties, particularly in defence equipment and technology. Japan has pledged to provide patrol vessels to Vietnam and the Philippines and has sought cooperation with Indonesia and Malaysia. Furthermore, the "Fukuda Doctrine" speech, announcing Japan's commitment to peace and prosperity, emphasized its commitment to building mutual trust with ASEAN, and its role as an equal partner, promoting cooperation in their efforts.³¹⁴ Japan, the world's second-largest economy, pledged to continue engaging with ASEAN amidst the threat of communism, a move that could have fostered trust and encouragement for ASEAN.

³¹¹ Defense of Japan. Annual White Paper Archive. 2014. p. 268 <https://www.mod.go.jp>>

³¹² Bhubhindar Singh. "Japan's Perspectives of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus". RSIS Policy Brief. (December 2012). p. 4

³¹³ Yomiuri Shimbun. "Dai-6-kai Higashi-Ajia Shuno Kaigi (Gaiyo)". Sixth East Asia Summit (Overview) http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/eas/shuno_6th.html (September 28, 2011)

³¹⁴ Sukegawa Seiya. "A New Era of Japan-ASEAN Relations 'Trust' and 'Mutual Benefit' are the watchwords". The Diplomat. (December 15, 2023)

India and Japan have made joint efforts to reframe the strategic geography of the region as the expanded ‘Indo-Pacific,’ has bound Japan and India within the same strategic space centred on Southeast Asia. Substantive actions include Japan’s infrastructure investment, which has strengthened connectivity between India and Southeast Asia, as well as growing strategic cooperation in the maritime domain. The role of the Japan factor in India’s relations with Southeast Asia is not new. One can even trace the origins of India’s LEP to Japan with claims that the policy was initially targeted at Japan rather than ASEAN, but when Tokyo did not reciprocate New Delhi’s overtures, the policy was reoriented towards Southeast Asia. As academic Christophe Jaffrelot notes, Prime Minister Rao’s visit to Japan in 1992 proved to be largely fruitless, as this was one of the main reasons for India’s increased interest in Southeast Asia.³¹⁵

Following the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Japan excluded India from ASEAN+3, but this changed in the second decade due to improved bilateral relations with Japan. This improvement began following Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori’s visit to India in 2000 when both countries established a ‘Global Partnership’ and it continued to gain momentum as the Indo-Japan relationship was upgraded to a ‘Strategic and global Partnership’ in 2014. The bilateral relations have improved to the point that Japan is the only country with which India maintains an annual summit as well as a 2+2 (foreign and defence) ministerial dialogue since 2019.

Simultaneously, Tokyo’s role changed from being a barrier to becoming a facilitator of India’s deepening interaction with Southeast Asia. This notably coincided with the second phase of India’s LEP when New Delhi’s eastward engagement gained further substance and momentum amid deepening political/institutional interactions, economic integration, and security cooperation. Both countries also increased interactions through several ASEAN-centric forums such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, as well as several Indo-Japanese-led regional initiatives

including the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor and Supply Chain Resilience Initiative. While the rapprochement in the bilateral relationship has been driven by broader structural factors a strong relationship between Indian and Japanese leaders also played a prominent role in defining the contours of the relationship.³¹⁶ Under the leadership of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, a mutual emphasis on soft power gained momentum including both countries common democratic credentials and Buddhist heritage.

About this, Japan and ASEAN have also built an unshakable cooperative relationship for peace, stability, prosperity, and development in the Asian region, with numerous achievements in this respect. Building on this, both parties must continue to bring together their strengths to drive the world economy and resolve social issues as one of the key players in the Asian region. Furthermore, ASEAN occupies a pivotal position as the cornerstone of the international community's stability and prosperity in the context of Japan's concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). ASEAN also advocates its vision for the Indo-Pacific, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific"(AOIP).³¹⁷ The Japan-ASEAN Summit of November 2020 issued the "Joint Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-Japan Summit Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" which confirmed that the AOIP and FOIP share common basic principles and announced the strengthening of initiatives for AOIP cooperation.³¹⁸ Therefore, it has become even more important for the Japanese business sector to further reinforce its cooperation with ASEAN, which will remain an important partner under the free trade and investment regime³¹⁹ to co-create new values toward the realization of a sustainable society and jointly open up a new era.

³¹⁶Gabriel Dominguez."Kishida vows to strengthen ties with ASEAN amid China's rise".The Japan Times. (27 October, 2021)

³¹⁷ The Japan-ASEAN Summit of November 2020 announced the promotion of cooperation in the AOIP's priority areas: maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDGs, and economy.

³¹⁸ The ASEAN Summit of June 2019 adopted "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (AOIP) as the regional group's vision for the Indo-Pacific.

³¹⁹ It is necessary to promote the early implementation of the reform of the WTO, which forms the core of the multilateral free trade regime, and rulemaking in various areas, including regulations to ensure fair competition among member states. It is also important to promote the conclusion of economic partnership agreements, investment agreements, social security agreements, and other pacts to supplement the WTO.

Japan is constructing a 15-megawatt diesel power plant on the South Andaman Islands to house tri-service bases for monitoring and countering Chinese maritime activity. Japan's engagement with India has increased since the civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2017. The latest India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue agreed to expand defence cooperation to space and cyber security, adding new dimensions to their strategic partnership. Japan's expansion of development aid to include defensive military equipment could further expand their engagement. India and Japan are proposing projects in the Bay of Bengal region to create minilateral arrangements within the Quad, aiming to provide development finance for connectivity infrastructure in the Global South. This could be incorporated into the Quad as a template for future initiatives. The collaboration boosts India's diplomatic and institutional arrangements, such as BIMSTEC, which converges with JICA projects in the region. It also enhances India's Act East policy and gateway to Southeast Asia, offering a credible avenue to counter China's growing footprint in South Asia. The outcome of this cooperation model will influence India and Quad's ability to counter China in South and Southeast Asia, as well as Africa, where the India-Japan-led Asia-Africa Growth Corridor could present an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Japan's ODA is not just limited to projects in India's Northeast. Tokyo has undertaken several high-profile projects across cities in India like Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, and Mumbai; financing and building metro rails, power transmission systems, water management systems and other public sector infrastructure. According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan has provided India with 3,600 billion yen as ODA loans for such projects. Going forward, public diplomacy efforts ought to emphasize Japan's involvement in India's public sector infrastructure as well as undertake smaller scale cultural projects that raise Japan's public profile in India. Greater promotion of Japan's efforts in India also highlights the sustainable and transparent approach to development financing that characterizes Japan's involvement in the Global South, a stark contrast to China's approach. JICA projects are carried out after extensive consultations with the public, and project feasibility and sustainability reports are publicly available as well. Highlighting these

differences not just in India, but across the Indo-Pacific would position Japan as a credible provider of development finance and connectivity infrastructure in the Global South. Japan is supporting India's development of transportation hubs and network infrastructure to address infrastructure challenges hindering investment and growth. This includes projects in railways, national highways, expressways, and electricity networks. This initiative aims to enhance connectivity among major industrial cities and economic zones, particularly in India's Northeast, through initiatives like the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.

It is here that ASEAN depends to a great extent on its dialogue partners, India and Japan, which rank as stalwarts of the Asian economic and security landscape as well as powers with close ties to the United States and an economic balance arc with China to build forwards its importance. As a result, a key area of ASEAN cooperation for both India and Japan has been the response to China's BRI. Here, connectivity promotion has taken centre stage with India's AEP, Bharatmala, SAGAR and Sagarmala as well as Japan's Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI) via its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). So, such national initiatives have sought to bridge gaps in the ASEAN-India-Japan connection with a view to limiting the spread of BRI. Therefore, ASEAN's own "Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025" has greatly shaped this momentum, with India and Japan partnering with the organization under its aegis via their own initiatives. For instance, Japan has sought to provide support to ASEAN in core areas of the development of the land corridors (East-West and Southern Economic Corridors), maritime corridors (Maritime ASEAN Economic Corridor), and miscellaneous connectivity corridors (such as soft infrastructure projects throughout the ASEAN region).³²⁰

³²⁰Yasuyuki Ishida . "Japan and ASEAN partnership: From Fukuda to Abe Doctrine". Jindal Journal of International Affairs.(December 2018).Volume 2.Issue 2.

Considering Japan's increasingly pivotal role in sustaining regional maritime security not the least as the chief architect of the Indo-Pacific strategic concept makes it a natural and necessary partner in such an India-ASEAN maritime security ambit. Japan under Kishida's administration has already vowed to bolster Japan's cooperation with ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific in light of China's increasingly assertive territorial claims and its rapid military build-up in the maritime domain.³²¹ The fact that Japan shares a maritime territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea while several of the ASEAN states are also embroiled in their own contentions with China over fixtures and maritime boundaries in the South China Sea gives both actors a unique alignment when it comes to coordinating and collaborating on maritime security interests. Here, the notion of ASEAN centrality emerges as a vital, indispensable, and strategic ideological principle that can bind together Asian states, allowing China the option of blending in, or standing separate.

By drawing on common heritage, geography, and culture, 'ASEAN centrality' still provides greater leeway for balancing China's ambitions than democratic ideals which communist Beijing has never espoused. As climate change becomes an increasingly urgent trans-boundary problem requiring multilateral solution cooperation between littoral and coastal powers at both the regional and sub-regional levels, blue economy has become exceedingly critical. Here, the coordination between India, ASEAN, and Japan alongside other key regional partners like Australia can be a way to better manage marine resources. Notably, such a blue economy focus is already emerging in India-ASEAN ties. On the other hand, the blue economy has also been an area of focus under the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Sea of East Asia (PEMSEA) that was created to bring together East and Southeast Asian powers in fostering healthy and resilient coasts and oceans through integrated management solutions and partnerships across the region.³²² In this regard a more focused connection in this arena spanning the Indo-Pacific with India's position in the Indian Ocean, Japan's in the Pacific and

³²¹*Opcit.*, Dominguez

³²²PEMSEA. "About PEMSEA". <http://pemsea.org?about-PEMSEA>. Accessed on 20 July 2023

ASEAN's at the confluence of the two can serve as an effective way of realizing shared goals.

The triangular relations between India, ASEAN, and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region have gained significant impetus in recent years. These three nations have been actively engaging in various economic, political and security cooperation initiatives to strengthen their ties and promote stability in the region. Japan also shares a strong relationship with both India and ASEAN. Japan has been a key partner for ASEAN providing economic assistance and investment in various sectors. The trilateral cooperation between India, ASEAN, and Japan often referred to as the 'India-ASEAN-Japan Partnership,' aims to promote connectivity, economic integration, maritime security, and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific region. This partnership provides a platform for the three nations to collaborate on various issues of mutual interest including infrastructure development, capacity building, etc. This trilateral partnership also serves as a bulwark against any potential threats to regional stability and allows for greater cooperation in facing challenges such as territorial disputes and non-traditional security threats.

ASEAN has significantly bolstered India's relationship with Japan by organizing regular multilateral dialogues and summits, such as the ASEAN-India Summit and the East Asia Summit. These events bring together leaders from India, ASEAN member countries, and Japan to discuss regional issues, engage in strategic discussions, and explore collaboration opportunities. ASEAN's centrality has fostered inclusive regionalism and cooperative security in the Indo-Pacific, fostering closer cooperation between India and ASEAN member countries and Japan in areas like maritime security, counter terrorism, and disaster management. Initiatives like AIFTA and RCEP have enhanced India's economic ties with ASEAN and Japan, promoting trade liberalization and facilitating a seamless flow of goods, services, and investments, opening new opportunities for Indian businesses to expand their presence in Japan through ASEAN's value chains.

ASEAN's role as a mediator in regional disputes has contributed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. It has enabled India and Japan to manage potential conflicts and find peaceful resolutions, fostering a more secure environment. However, the success of these relations depends on India and Japan's active engagement with ASEAN and contribution to the region's goals. They have strengthened their defence cooperation through joint military exercises and information-sharing mechanisms, driven by shared concerns about maritime security, freedom of navigation, and international law.

4.6.2. India-ASEAN-Australia

In its reinvigorated avatar of LEP, India has actively sought to engage with the South Pacific region in general and Australia in particular. The invocation of India's AEP has imparted necessary impetus and greater dynamism in its relations with countries to its east. It remains a significant initiative that is contributing towards the development of mutual contacts and greater understanding of each other in the region. This policy has provided great dividends and greater relevance to India in the global geostrategic space in general and IOR in particular. As a result of this, India's relations with Pacific countries have expanded, thereby providing India with an opportunity to play its rightful role in the emerging construct of Indo-Pacific.³²³

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is another forum where the bilateral relationship between India and Australia is playing an important role. Complementing the various bilateral alliances and dialogues, ARF provides a key forum for security dialogue in Asia and offers a setting in which members can discuss current regional security issues and develop cooperative measures to enhance peace and security in the region.³²⁴ India and Australia have maintained an excellent track record of coordination and cooperation in the multilateral mechanism of ARF. Continuous and fruitful interaction at the multilateral level has supported the efforts to foster the spirit of cooperation so essential at the bilateral level. The ARF has been instrumental in providing a forum for constructive dialogue on political and security

³²³ *Opcit.*, Hundal

³²⁴ Available at : <https://dfat.gov.au/international>. Accessed on 2 September, 2023

cooperation between the two countries while operating in a multilateral setting. The structured mechanism mandated for the functioning of ARF has provided an ideal opportunity for both countries to enhance their bilateral cooperation.

The geopolitical developments in the Indo-Pacific have brought India and Australia to the centre stage of a new strategic paradigm. Overcoming the minor irritants of the past, the two countries today are well poised to play a significant role in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. The most critical and impelling factor in the bilateral and multilateral relations has been the strategic imperative of balancing a hegemonic and belligerent China. The relations between the two countries have been elevated to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership. The surge in improved diplomatic relations is manifesting in visits of heads of state, official engagements and the spate of agreements signed between the two countries. The rise and traction of the geo political construct of the Indo-Pacific along with the growing realisation of the mutual complementarities and similarities between each other on the aspects of freedom and openness of sea lanes of communication, rules based international order and opposition to arbitrariness in the handling of international affairs, has brought both countries closer and supportive of each other.

ASEAN holds significant economic and strategic importance for India, as it has served as a springboard for India's outreach to Australia. It is therefore natural for India to consider ASEAN as such "Southeast is our neighbour by land and sea. With each Southeast Asian country, we have growing political, economic and defence ties. With ASEAN as dialogue partners, we have become strategic partners over the course of 25 years. We pursue our relations through annual summits and 30 dialogue mechanisms but even more through a shared vision for the region and the comfort and familiarity of our old links."³²⁵ Both share a significant presence in the Indo-Pacific region and both countries emerged as key players in this region due to their geopolitical and economic interests. Thus, strategic cooperation between India and Australia has gained momentum in recent years, driven by their shared vision of maintaining a free, open, and rules-based order in the region. They recognize the

³²⁵Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Prime Ministers Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue". 1 June 2018.<https://www.mea.gov.in>

importance of secure sea lanes, peaceful resolution of disputes and upholding international norms and principles. It is worth noting that while India and Australia have been strengthening their ties, they also maintain relationships with other countries in the Indo-Pacific. This emphasis on multilateralism highlights their commitment to promoting an inclusive and cooperative approach to regional affairs.

India and Australia, the largest maritime powers among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, constitute the region's geopolitical poles. This position gives them particular responsibility for the security of the region, and relations between India and Australia have long been characterized by mutual indifference, in part because neither country is central to the security of the other. For decades, they operated in separate strategic spheres. But that situation may be changing as their strategic interests are becoming more and more convergent. Trade between the two countries is growing and along with it, shared strategic interests. Given both countries increasing power projection capacities and the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean region to their strategic calculations, their spheres of action and influence are beginning to overlap, making an enhanced dialogue necessary. Moreover, the two countries' perceptions of their strategic landscapes especially regarding the role of China align more closely than ever before. Both share a common apprehension about China's rise, although for different reasons.

The two countries' relative military weakness vis-à-vis China could have reinforced their political cooperation in Asia-Pacific regional forums, including the East Asia Summit, an annual meeting of regional leaders, and bodies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. These organizations represent the closest thing to regional security architecture. Despite the increase in the two nations' common concerns, the development of their strategic relationship remains slow. Paradoxically, the fact that India and Australia share a common, or at least convergent, perception of China as a threat is, in fact, a disincentive for their operational cooperation. Both countries want to prevent the emergence of a China-dominated regional order. As David Brewster, an Australian defence analyst, put it,

“The relationship is unlikely to be substantially defined by any perceived China threat.”³²⁶

The growing convergence between India and Australia in the Southeast Asian region and the subsequent amalgamation of the Indian and Pacific Oceans into the Indo-Pacific have also facilitated both countries to work in parallel terms if not necessarily together, to promote the development of open, inclusive and balanced regional groupings in East Asia and also to secure their respective national core interests. Both countries reaffirmed that building cooperative maritime partnerships should be a priority area for East Asian engagement.³²⁷ Both India and Australia have been cooperating on the issues of protection of marine resources, prevention of environmental degradation and tapping the potential of the blue economy under the EAS framework.

However, middle power countries are making their own strategic moves as the United States and China compete for influence in the Indo-Pacific. Australia, which has generally emphasized economic cooperation with China is doing its best not to bend to China’s economic coercion despite an economic deterioration caused by Covid-19 attracting a great deal of interest from ASEAN countries that have succumbed to intimidation in the past. Australia is dealing with the situation strategically, emphasizing its alliance with the United States, promoting information sharing with New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom under the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing agreement, and coordinating with Japan, India, and the United States under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad).

³²⁶ David Brewster. “The Australia-India Security Declaration: The Quadrilateral Redux?” *Security Challenges* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 2010): 1 Retrieved from www.securitychallenges.org.

³²⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India . “India-Australia Joint Statement during the State visit of Prime Minister of Australia to India”. 10 April 2017. Media Centre. Accessed on 23 September, 2023

ASEAN provides a forum where India, Australia and other countries in the region can engage with each other on a multilateral level. ASEAN-led initiatives such as the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership and the ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Partnership have provided frameworks for bilateral discussions and cooperation between India and Australia. These platforms allow both countries to explore areas of mutual interest such as trade, security, connectivity, and maritime cooperation. On the other hand, ASEAN's efforts towards regional economic integration such as ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) have created a conducive environment for India and Australia to deepen their economic ties. This integration has facilitated enhanced trade and investment between the countries thereby promoting economic growth and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific. It is important to note that while ASEAN has provided a conducive platform for India and Australia to enhance their relations, the bilateral commitment and efforts of both countries have been instrumental in deepening their ties. ASEAN serves as a facilitator and catalyst, enabling India and Australia to engage in constructive dialogue and collaborate on various fronts in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner in 1974 and one of ASEAN's first Comprehensive Strategic Partners in 2021. ASEAN-Australia dialogue relations have evolved since Australia became ASEAN's first partner, focusing on cooperation across community pillars. At the 40th anniversary commemoration, leaders announced a strategic partnership for mutual benefit, elevating dialogue relations. Australia actively engages with ASEAN in political-security through participation in various forums and consultations, including the twelve SOMTC + Australia Consultation, and actively participates in the East Asia Summit.

ASEAN plays a crucial role in managing the region's changing strategic dynamics, including relationships among major players. Australia supports ASEAN centrality, which helps balance these dynamics. ASEAN and ASEAN-led fora can utilize this centrality to manage sensitive issues, such as the on-going tensions in the South China Sea, which affect claimants and non-claimants due to its role as a major

international trade route. Around 60% of Australian exports and 40% of imports pass through these waters.³²⁸ Australia, a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, has been actively participating for 20 years, focusing on functional cooperation across various areas such as disaster management, maritime security, and cyber. This commitment to ASEAN-led mechanisms for security and strategic issues is crucial for the region's security agenda. Australia sees the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) as an opportunity to foster military-to-military cooperation in the region, enhancing regional security.

Australia is dedicated to promoting ASEAN connectivity, as evidenced by the first bridge over the Mekong 20 years ago and numerous subsequent projects. ASEAN upholds international laws, including UNCLOS, aligning with Australia's interests in freedom of navigation and maritime security, particularly in the South China Sea. ASEAN's collective influence helps de-escalate tensions and ensure regional stability. ASEAN enhances Australia's economic reach through trade agreements like AANZFTA and RCEP, enhancing market access and strengthening supply chain resilience. ASEAN, a key trade and economic partner for Australia, has been supporting regional security and prosperity for over 50 years. The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) was established in 2010 and is the central pillar of Australia's trade and investment relationship with ASEAN. In 2022, ASEAN was Australia's second largest trading partner, accounting for \$178 billion in two-way trade.³²⁹ ASEAN offers Australia alternative trade markets, reducing reliance on China amid geopolitical tensions, with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia emerging as key economic partners.

³²⁸ Simon Merrifield. "Australia and ASEAN: Past, Present and Future". Australian Mission to ASEAN.(9 December 2014). Retrieved from https://asean.mission.gov.au/aesn/HOMSpeech14_02.html

³²⁹ Australian Government. "ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement - Benefits for Australia". 23 September, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/in-force/aanzfta/news/aanzfta-news/aanzfta-benefits-australia>

ASEAN countries, including Indonesia and Australia, frequently engage in bilateral military exercises KerisWoomera such as joint combat drills in the Java Sea, to enhance regional security and interoperability. Exercise Keris Woomera showcased Australia-Indonesia's close military cooperation, bolstered by the signing of the Australia-Indonesia Defence Cooperation Agreement, the most significant defence agreement in the bilateral relationship's history.³³⁰ India-ASEAN-Australia supports a rules-based order, promoting freedom of navigation, over-flight, and UNCLOS. The enhanced maritime security cooperation, including trilateral naval exercises like AUSINDEX and SIMBEX, has seen ASEAN nations participating as observers or partners. ASEAN-India Connectivity Initiative and ASEAN-Australia Infrastructure Cooperation promote joint investment in infrastructure projects, enhancing connectivity through ports, highways, and digital infrastructure, benefiting trade routes.

Australia values ASEAN's centrality in a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region, recognizing its sovereignty and strategic balance, and is committed to supporting its leadership. Australia actively participates in ASEAN-led events like the East Asia Summit and supports the principles of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The Aus4ASEAN Futures Initiative supports projects addressing regional challenges and the implementation of the AOIP. The initiative has focused on ASEAN's transition to a green economy, strengthening its digital economy, and advancing regional economic integration. The CSP has announced 100 Aus4ASEAN Scholarships, with an additional 75 announced at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit and 57 at the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with Australia in July 2024. The Aus4ASEAN Digital Transformation and Futures Skills initiative supports the region's futures skill needs and long-term economic development.³³¹ ASEAN sends students to Australian universities, deepens cross-cultural understanding

³³⁰ Australian Embassy Indonesia. "Australia-Indonesia Military Exercise KerisWoomera Wraps Up in East Java". 16 November, 2024. Retrieved from https://indonesia.embassy.gov.au/jakt/MR24_109.html#:~:text=Exercise%20Keris%20Woomera%20demonstrated%20the,history%20of%20the%20bilateral%20relationship.

³³¹ Australian Government. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "ASEAN and Australia". Retrieved from <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/southeast-asia/asean-and-australia>

through the New Colombo Plan, and boosts business, tourism, and people-to-people connections through migration.

ASEAN serves as a regional buffer against China's unilateral dominance, supporting Australia's strategy of economic and security cooperation with multiple partners, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean Region is balanced by trilateral cooperation, maintaining regional order and opposing unilateral actions. The India-ASEAN-Australia trilateral partnership is a key force in the Indo-Pacific, driving collective security, economic growth, and sustainable development, enhancing global strategic balance and resilience. Hence, India, ASEAN, and Australia are enhancing ties to counter China's economic and military influence, thereby ensuring regional stability.

4.6.3. India-ASEAN-United States

The United States, India, and ASEAN are working together to promote a rules-based, free, and inclusive Indo-Pacific order, ensuring ASEAN's centrality in regional security and diplomacy. The U.S. and India collaborate in forums like ASEAN, G20, and the United Nations to address Indo-Pacific challenges, viewing India as a crucial counterbalance to China. India and the U.S. are collaborating with ASEAN through the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) to enhance regional security. The U.S.-India strategic partnership is based on shared values, promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity. U.S. goods and services trade with India totalled an estimated \$191.8 billion in 2022. Exports were \$73.0 billion, imports were \$118.8 billion. The U.S. goods and services trade deficit with India was \$45.7 billion in 2022. India exports \$78 billion in textiles, pharmaceuticals, gems, and engineering goods to the U.S., while imports of \$58 billion include crude oil, LNG, aircraft,

machinery, and electronics. India benefited from strong export performance in goods and IT-enabled services, leading to a significant trade surplus with the U.S.³³²

The United States is committed to ASEAN centrality and supports the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which shares fundamental principles with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, as affirmed by leaders at the 2023 ASEAN Summits. The United States is a key contributor to inclusive and sustainable economic growth in Southeast Asia through its commercial and trade ties with ASEAN. It remains the number one source of foreign direct investment in the region and has supported Southeast Asia's post-pandemic recovery and stability. Since 2002, the US has provided over \$14.1 billion in economic, health, and security assistance to allies and partners, including ASEAN member states. Additionally, the US has provided over \$1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance, including disaster assistance, emergency food aid, and support to refugees.³³³ The US is supporting Southeast Asia's digital economy, promoting up-skilling and training for entrepreneurs, workers, and students. It is intensifying cooperation with ASEAN on artificial intelligence, cyber-security, and combating online scams. The US is also developing the ASEAN Single Window, promoting clean and sustainable growth, and supporting ASEAN's energy security through the U.S.-ASEAN Energy Cooperation Work Plan and USAID Southeast Asia Smart Power Program.

India, ASEAN, and the United States are collaborating to promote stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, addressing growing challenges, particularly from China, to maintain a rules-based international order. India's role in the Indo-Pacific is crucial for its security and economic future, shaped by its geographical location, naval power, economic clout, and democratic values. India has developed strategic partnerships with the US, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries, enhancing maritime security, and defence engagement. It has also become a major player in regional economic development, participating in initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and strengthening economic ties with ASEAN. India is

³³²United States Trade Representative. 'India Trade and Investment Summary'. Retrieved from <https://ustr.gov>

³³³U.S. Embassy Burma. 'The United States-ASEAN Relationship'. 27 July, 2024 <https://mm.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-asean-relationship/>

also focused on countering China's rising influence in the region, advocating for freedom of navigation and adherence to international law.

The US has shifted its strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific, focusing on military presence, economic partnerships, and diplomatic initiatives. It has maintained a significant military presence in the region, conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations to challenge China's territorial claims. The United States strengthens security cooperation with ASEAN countries through the U.S.-ASEAN Defence Forum and other regional security mechanisms. The US is also a major trade partner for ASEAN countries, supporting infrastructure development, and countering China's influence through the Indo-Pacific Strategy and regional alliances with Japan, India, Australia, and other ASEAN nations.

ASEAN plays a crucial role in shaping the economic and security environment of the Indo-Pacific. Its strategic location, economic dynamism, and historical role in regional diplomacy make it a central player in the Indo-Pacific architecture. ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) emphasizes its centrality in regional diplomacy, promoting regional stability through dialogue, economic cooperation, and non-interference. The organization promotes inclusive regional security architecture, involving all powers, including the U.S. and China, on issues like maritime security, trade, and disaster management. ASEAN also works to integrate its economies with the rest of the world, making it a vital partner for the U.S. and India in terms of trade and investment. ASEAN is a key player in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest trade agreement, which includes China, Japan, and other regional partners. ASEAN faces security concerns and challenges, including the South China Sea, which requires a rules-based approach to dispute resolution and upholding international maritime law. Balancing great power competition is a priority for ASEAN members, aiming to maintain autonomy and regional peace. ASEAN maintains neutrality, avoiding full alignment with U.S.-China tensions. Economic competition reduces U.S. influence, while China remains ASEAN's largest trading partner, limiting U.S. leverage.

The U.S.-India-ASEAN trilateral engagement is crucial for the Indo-Pacific's security and economic stability. The US and India have strengthened defence ties, focusing on maritime security, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance. India's trade with ASEAN has grown rapidly, with the US being a major partner. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and initiatives to promote digital trade and infrastructure development are central to trilateral economic diplomacy. The collaboration emphasizes a rules-based order, particularly in the South China Sea, freedom of navigation, and peace promotion. The trilateral partners are committed to building infrastructure and sustainable development projects in ASEAN countries, with initiatives like the Blue Dot Network and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. They are also exploring free trade agreements and climate change initiatives. They are also fostering people-to-people connections through academic exchanges and cultural exchange programs. Additionally, they are promoting greater connectivity through modern transportation and communication infrastructures.

4.7. Conclusion

India's centrality in the Indo-Pacific is the centrepiece to maintaining peace, stability, and rule-based democratic order in the region. It believes in regional cooperation and rejuvenating multilateral and regional forums to build a network of strong alliances based on the sovereign equality of all nations in the Indo-Pacific. Driven by their common motivation to protect their interests in the Indo-Pacific, India, the United States, Japan, and Australia seemed to have developed closer relations than before. India, a mature and the world's largest and most diverse democracy, has gained the reputation of being a peaceful and benevolent power in the Indo-Pacific, as reflected in its active and positive role in regional organizations like the East Asia Summit and the Quad.

ASEAN aims to prevent dominance by any single power and balance relations with major players through multilateral platforms. ASEAN maintains its centrality through key regional frameworks like ARF, EAS, ADMM-Plus, and RCEP, focusing on security, political, economic, military cooperation, and economic

influence. ASEAN Regional Forum has become the centre point of India's engagement with ASEAN, a key player in the Indo-Pacific states, has become a vital platform for India, the US, Japan, and Australia to enhance their regional cooperation. The triangular relations between India, Japan, Australia, and the US vis-à-vis ASEAN have significantly influenced Indo-Pacific politics, serving as binding forces for India to stabilize its affairs against Chinese assertiveness.

CHAPTER V

India and the Indo-Pacific: A Case study of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

This chapter examines the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as an emerging institution in the Indo-Pacific and its cooperation vis-à-vis the Far East countries, including the United States, Japan, and Australia. India's involvement in the Quad is driven by strategic imperatives such as countering China's regional dominance, enhancing economic growth and connectivity, ensuring maritime security, and maintaining strategic autonomy.

5.1. Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Historical Background and Evolution

The Quad, a controversial Asia strategy, has been a topic of debate and speculation. It has been compared to a U.S.-led project, an alliance, a security diamond, or a way to contain China. However, the labels given to the Quad, which made it more expansive than intended, ultimately executed the initiative, and prevented a revival. The Quad's fabled proportions have been a topic of deliberation and conjecture in various political contexts. Its rapid growth is attributed to the unique behaviour of all four governments, which has made it a creative, flexible, responsive, and open-minded enterprise, a testament to the efforts of those who have shepherded it. The Quad, despite not being a formal alliance, boasts a flexible structure and strong bilateral and multilateral ties, allowing for experimentation and agility in collective efforts.

The Indo-Pacific has become a ubiquitous term in recent years, with it being heard or read daily. The region is now a widely accepted concept, aiming to achieve a peaceful and prosperous region based on shared principles, transcending geographical boundaries.³³⁴ The regions geopolitics remain a global concern, and the success of diplomatic coordination offers hope for a potential grouping of the four

³³⁴ This is based on the keynote address delivered by Toshihide Ando at the International Conference titled "Japan's Grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region: Debates, Dialogues and Deliberations" organized by the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Japan Foundation, New Delhi on February 23, 2021.

democracies to address regional challenges and work together to address these issues. It has become a widely accepted concept in recent years, encompassing not just geographical terms but also a commitment to a peaceful and proper region based on shared principles. The region is increasingly being viewed through various lenses, indicating a growing trend of countries presenting similar visions. In relation to this, India's Prime Minister Modi announced a vision for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.³³⁵

The Quadrilateral, comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, has evolved significantly from its early iterations, becoming a key component of the Indo-Pacific regional architecture. Since 2017, the Quad has evolved into a leader-level dialogue, initiating joint statements and establishing a new working-group structure. Its program now encompasses vaccines, climate change, critical technologies, infrastructure, cyber security, and space. The Quad's future trajectory is uncertain due to changes in its structure, including the drivers of engagement, domestic support, and bureaucratic capacity in the four countries. The new working-group functionality, agenda evolution, and potential cooperation with additional countries raise questions about its future direction. Its development is driven by balancing China's power, promoting cooperation, and shaping regional order. The Quad, characterized by anti-China rhetoric, has impacted political, economic, and security in the region. While not planning to become an Asian NATO, it aims to strengthen cooperation, policy coordination, and strategic consultations to balance and compete with China.

³³⁵Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 1, 2018) <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>. In his keynote address, Prime Minister Modi articulated his vision for the Indo-Pacific with the following key elements among others: free, open and inclusive: ASEAN at its center; a common rules-based order; sovereignty and territorial integrity; the rule of law; freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law; rules-based, open, balanced and stable trade environment; and connectivity initiatives based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability.

The Quad was established in 2004 to coordinate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.³³⁶ In 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe transformed the four-nation tsunami response into a formal, quadrilateral security dialogue, aiming to improve maritime security along the ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’ and foster cooperation among democratic nations. In May 2007, the Quad meeting, involving four countries, took place during the ASEAN Regional Forum. They conducted joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal with Singapore. However, the Quad’s formation was halted by China’s disapproval.³³⁷ The Quad’s initial failure was largely due to China’s criticism, differing concerns among the four countries, and domestic pressures and politics causing them to reconsider their involvement.³³⁸ After Abe’s departure in 2007, Japan became hesitant, the United States became more interested in other forums, and Australia’s new government objected to the Quad. A lack of cooperation among countries, particularly India, was a significant challenge, particularly in the non-US treaty ally group. The revival of Quad’s significance is heightened by China’s growing power projection capabilities, which are crucial for Indian security interests. The Quad, partnership focused on rules-based international order, democratic values, and shared challenges like cyber security, climate change, and public health crisis, emerged amid China’s assertive Indo-Pacific behaviour.

The Quad has evolved from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific region due to the changing global relations. It aims to reduce China’s growing presence in the region, which is a growing concern for the United States. The United States is also attempting to curb China’s policy to secure the Indo-Pacific. India, driven by China’s strategic clout in the Indian Ocean Region, has been actively participating in Quad to counter China’s rise in the Indo-Pacific region. This counterbalance is driven by

³³⁶Harsh V.Pant.“India and the Quad: Chinese belligerence and Indian resilience”. Observer Research Foundation. (30 March, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-and-the-quad/>.

³³⁷Patrick Gerard Buchan and Benjamin Rimland.“Defining the diamond: The past, present, and future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue”.Centre for Strategic & International Studies. (16 March, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-diamond-past-present-and-future-quadrilateral-security-dialogue>

³³⁸ Rory Medcalf.“Chinese Ghost Story.”The Diplomat.(14 February,2008).Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2008/02/chinese-ghost-story/>

India's long security concerns with China, which have led to China building port facilities in neighbouring countries. India's strong bond with the United States and Japan is also necessary to counter China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region.³³⁹ It aims for a free and open Indo-Pacific and rule-based maritime order in the East and South China Sea to counter Chinese maritime claims. China's increasing maritime order necessitates the Quad's involvement to maintain the Indo-Pacific's integrity. The Quad in the Indo-Pacific coordinates security activities among its four members and is supported by a network of interlinked bilateral and trilateral groups.

The Quad countries formed a security grouping to address China's territorial and political demands. The informality of the Quad allows for flexibility and adaptability, allowing participating countries to pursue their foreign policy interests while collaborating with their Quad partners. This informality has reshaped security dynamics across the Indo-Pacific and global power distributions, shaping regional norms and values. While its ultimate utility and deterrence remain questioned, the Quad has played a significant role in addressing China's challenges.

The Quad, a minilateralism group in the Indo-Pacific, has gained prominence in the foreign policy and strategic areas of India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Its revival has led to efforts to make it a normalized and institutional part of diplomacy in the region, with the Quad 2.0's elevation and expansion over the past year demonstrating its institutionalization. Japan's rebirth of the Quad is driven by uniting its Quad partners around its vision for the Indo-Pacific, a significant success for its diplomatic agenda and a proactive contribution to international peace.³⁴⁰ Japan aims to entrap the United States under the Trump administration's America First banner and act as a leader in setting a regional agenda for its national interests in an

³³⁹Priya Das. "Evolution of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) In Changing The Dynamics of India-China Relations". International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research. E-ISSN: 2582-2160 Retrieved from <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2023/3/4122.pdf>

³⁴⁰ Wilkins Thomas. "Advancing Japanese diplomacy through the Quad: Why it matters for Tokyo". Australian Strategic Policy Institute: The Strategist. (23 May, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/advancing-japanese-diplomacy-through-the-quad-why-it-matters-for-tokyo/>

uncertain world. By leveraging its technological prowess, military potential and economic power, Japan consolidates its leading role in the Quad's cooperation.³⁴¹

5.1.1. Quad 2.0

In 2016, Japan's Prime Minister Abe proposed a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' strategy, stating that Japan is responsible for promoting freedom, rule of law, and a market economy in the Pacific, Indian Oceans, Asia, and Africa, ensuring prosperity and avoiding force or coercion.³⁴² Abe's 'free and open Indo-Pacific' strategy focuses on strengthening democratic values, promoting infrastructure development, and deepening security cooperation with the US, India, and Australia to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative.³⁴³ The Abe administration convinced Trump to embrace Japan's 'free and open Indo-Pacific' concept as a strategic framework to unite partners, protect the United States values, and defend against China.³⁴⁴ In November 2017, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia resumed the Quad at the 31st ASEAN Summit, discussing maritime security, North Korea, connectivity, and the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' concept.³⁴⁵ During Trump's 4-year administration, the Quad resurfaced, expanding and enhancing institutional consultations. Members discussed maritime security, counterterrorism, and humanitarian aid, infrastructure, and ASEAN centrality. In 2021, Biden upgraded the Quad to a leader-level summit, holding a virtual and in-person summit. The four countries established expert working groups to address challenges and provide a positive vision in the Indo-Pacific.³⁴⁶ The Biden administration plans to transform the Quad into a strategic consultation platform, enhancing competition with China

³⁴¹Japan aims to entrap the US under the Trump administration's America First banner and act as a leader in setting a regional agenda for its national interests in an uncertain world. By leveraging its technological prowess, military potential and economic power, Japan consolidates its leading role in the Quad's cooperation.

³⁴²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the opening session of the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development". Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html.

³⁴³HarukataTakenaka. "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision: Strategic vision and domestic political institutions". Project for Peaceful Competition.(21 February, 2022) Retrieved from <https://www.peaceful-competition.org/pub/4dh4z909/release/1?readingCollection=0998716e>.

³⁴⁴ Hu Weixing, MengWeizhan. "The US Indo-Pacific strategy and China's response". China Review. 2020;20(3):146–149.

³⁴⁵*Opcit.*, Buchan

³⁴⁶White House. Quad leaders' Joint Statement: "The spirit of the Quad". (15 March, 2021). Retrieved from <https://au.usembassy.gov/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

and providing ‘public goods’ to shape the emerging regional order, by upgrading the summit to a leader-level summit.

The Quad, a security dialogue since 2007, aims to balance China’s growing power and economic influence. Japan’s economic status in Asia has been overshadowed by China’s growing influence. Diplomatic and political relations between China and Japan have cooled due to historical issues and territorial disputes. Japan views China as a rival to its economic influence and a security challenge, particularly after Shinzo Abe’s rise.³⁴⁷ In order to create a China-balancing alliance among the four democracies based on shared values, the Abe administration officially established the Quad.³⁴⁸ Since the first Quad dialogue in 2017, maritime security has been a top concern due to natural disasters, humanitarian risks, and disputes in the East and South China Seas. The United States faces challenges due to China’s claims in the South China Sea, which contradict its ‘freedom of navigation and over flight’ and could negatively impact its Navy operations and power projection in the Indo-Pacific.³⁴⁹

The Quad, a series of strategic alliances was largely influenced by China, leading to the formation of Quad2.0 in 2017. Washington viewed the Quad as a tool to counter Beijing’s assertiveness during the Trump administration. Japan and India have unresolved territorial disputes with China over the Sen-kakus/Diaoyu Islands and the Himalayas. India has also felt threatened by China’s infrastructure investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through disputed territory and controls Pakistan’s Gwadar port. The Belt and Road Initiative’s extension to smaller Indian Ocean states like Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka is also a geostrategic concern. Sino-Australian relations were also strained by allegations that Beijing attempted to influence Australian domestic politics through the Chinese business diaspora.

³⁴⁷ Michael JGreen. “Line of advantage: Japan’s grand strategy in the era of Abe Shinzo”. New York: Colombia University Press; 2022. pp. 106

³⁴⁸ Chen, Qing. “The U.S., Japan, India, and Australia Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Progress and prospects”. Contemporary International Relations. (2020)

³⁴⁹ U.S. Congress. “U.S.–China strategic competition in South and East China Seas: Background and issues for congress”. Congressional Research Service Report. (2020)

5.1.2. Quad 3.0

In September 2021, the Quad Leader's Summit in Washington announced new infrastructure partnerships, technical assistance, and sustainable development efforts under Biden's supervision.³⁵⁰ Quad's cooperation on infrastructure has evolved from doubting China's BRI to tentatively providing an alternative to meet growing regional needs.³⁵¹ Its members aim to discredit China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)³⁵² by leveraging their comparative advantages and providing an alternative, winning the 'fleet of heart' in the region.³⁵³ The Quad's history is marked by a delicate balance between regional stability and managing relationships with China, playing a pivotal role in shaping the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, reflecting the complex interplay of strategic considerations and shared values among its member countries.

India, a key player in global affairs, has aspired to become a leading force, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging diplomats to leverage this opportunity to position the country as a leading power.³⁵⁴ Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar viewed the Quad grouping as a reflection of Asia's rise and the repositioning of big powers. He emphasized India's place within the Quad due to its growth, confidence, and worldview, highlighting its establishment as a major diplomatic accomplishment.³⁵⁵ Japan's rebirth of the Quad is driven by uniting its Quad partners around its vision for the Indo-Pacific, a significant success for its diplomatic agenda and a proactive contribution to international peace.³⁵⁶ The Quad, a key player in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, has resurged due to its adaptability to regional priorities and challenges. As China's strategic competition continues, the Quad must

³⁵⁰ *Opcit.*, White House

³⁵¹ Jacob J. Lew and GrayRoughead. "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States". Council on Foreign Relations. Independent Task Force Report No. 79. pp. 5–6. 2021 Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/findings>

³⁵² Liu Feitao. "The U.S. strategy of competitive infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific region". China International Studies. 2019. pp.111–118.

³⁵³ Zhai, Fusheng. "The 'quadrilateral mechanism' of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia and China's peripheral security". Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review. (2022). p. 83

³⁵⁴ Prime Minister's Office. Government of India. "PM to heads of Indian missions". Indian Press Information Bureau. (2015)

³⁵⁵ PiaKrishnankutty. "Quad meant not giving other nations a veto on India's choices" The Print. (2022) Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/author/pia-krishnankutty/page/60/>

³⁵⁶ *Opcit.*, Thomas

balance this with its broader agenda of providing public goods and fostering regional cooperation. The grouping's future will likely be shaped by delivering tangible benefits and navigating complex bilateral and multilateral relationships.

5.2. Administrative Structure: Members, Headquarter & Secretariat

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue aims to address regional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Its core membership includes the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, each with unique capabilities, strengths, and perspectives. The Quad's strategic influence, technological advancements, and geographical location contribute to its effectiveness. India, along with four other countries, is forming the Quad, a strategic alliance aiming to foster a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad, a strategic operation works through diplomatic channels, official meetings, and consultations between member countries governments. Quad partners engage regularly through Leaders, Foreign Ministers, senior officials, and experts. Quad Leaders Summits and Foreign Ministers Meetings are held on an annual basis. It holds meetings and discussions at national capitals, embassies, and multilateral forums to exchange views, coordinate policies, and enhance collaboration on key security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. It emerged as a flexible organization with no traditional headquarters, coordinating activities through diplomatic channels and high-level engagements among participating countries, enabling it to adapt to regional security challenges and shared objectives.

Member countries show minimal interest in institutionalizing the Quad by establishing a secretariat or adopting a charter for internal goals. All four individuals view the flexibility of the grouping as an asset. However, the Quad partners have enhanced their alignment on strategic issues and plan to continue this by strengthening ties within the grouping in the near future. It emerged as a loose grouping rather than a formal alliance. It does not have a decision making body or a secretariat or a formal structure like NATO or the United Nations. The alliance is maintained through summits, meetings, information exchanges and military drills. It

does not have a rigid framework and nations are free to unlink themselves from specific QUAD initiatives.

It emerged as a highly informal platform for participating countries to coordinate on regional security issues and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region and has gained significant influence since its revival. It serves as a dialogue mechanism for self-described ‘like-minded countries’ and is formalized through regular meetings with no set plans, announcements, or locations. Its structure involves regular meetings at various levels, including summits of heads of state, foreign ministers, and defence ministers, to discuss and coordinate on security issues like maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber security, and disaster relief. The Quad has not yet allocated budgets, signed agreements, or issued joint statements. Its format is highly informal, and its activities are largely non-controversial.³⁵⁷ The Quad’s informality reflects the increasing trend of informal intergovernmental organizations in international politics.

The member’s distinct perspectives and capacities provide a holistic approach to regional security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific area through cooperative efforts and strategic alliances. The Indo-Pacific region’s like-minded nations rely on the Quad as a vital tool for strengthening security cooperation, encouraging regional stability, and preserving common values. An exclusive club of four countries has a sense of equality due to its unbound unit relations. Since 2017, meetings have been held from Manila to Bangkok, Tokyo to Washington, D.C., and online. Japan, the incubator of Quad 1.0 and pusher of Quad 2.0, handles the heavy diplomatic lifting and agenda-setting. Despite the initial scepticism, the United States has become a firm believer in the Quad’s utility as a foreign policy tool to protect American interests in East and South Asia since its inception in 2007.

In 2017, formal discussions about a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue began as China expanded its security exercises in the Indian Ocean. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kano proposed the revitalization in an interview with The Nikkei. The first

³⁵⁷ B. J. Cannon, and A. Rossiter. “Locating the Quad: informality, institutional flexibility, and future alignment in the Indo-Pacific”.*International Politics*.pp.1-22. (12 March, 2022). Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-022-00383-y>

Quad meeting on November 12, 2017, focused on seven key themes: rules-based order in Asia, maritime commons freedom, international law respect, connectivity enhancement, maritime security, North Korean threat, and terrorism.³⁵⁸ Quad partners collaborate to enhance engagement in the Indo-Pacific, supporting ASEAN centrality, regional architecture, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. They respect Pacific Islands Forum leadership and align with Pacific priorities, including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. They are strengthening cooperation with Indian Ocean partners to address the region's challenges.³⁵⁹

5.3. Agenda

The Quad has broadened its agenda to encompass a wider range of public goods and initiatives, showcasing its versatility. The Quad's focus has shifted to China's increasing strategic role, with shared concerns about its assertiveness becoming key factors in recent activities. This alignment among the four partners has strengthened the group's cohesion and strengthened its overall strategic alignment. The Quad, a lightly institutionalized group, aims to provide tangible benefits to the Indo-Pacific region, strengthen people-to-people ties, and thwart China's growing regional influence. It also focuses on shared interests in strengthening economic resilience and reducing autocracies, with no security or trade group structure. Australia, Japan, India, and the US have made progress on their virtual summit commitments and expanded cooperation, with infrastructure now on the Quad's agenda.

The motive behind the Quad is to keep the strategic sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any military or political influence. It is basically seen as a strategic grouping to reduce Chinese domination. The core objective of the group is to secure a rules-based global order, freedom of navigation and a liberal trading system. The coalition also aims to offer alternative debt financing for nations in the Indo-Pacific region. The leaders exchange views on contemporary global issues such as critical

³⁵⁸Jesse Barker Gale. "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative". Centre for Strategic and International Studies. (12 April, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/quadrilateral-security-dialogue-and-maritime-silk-road-initiative>

³⁵⁹Australian Government. Department of Foreign Affairs. "The Quad". Retrieved from <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad>

and emerging technologies, connectivity and infrastructure, cyber security, maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, climate change, pandemics and education.

It also addresses regional security, economic cooperation, climate change, COVID-19 response, technological collaboration, capacity building, infrastructure development, and multilateral cooperation. It discusses security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, including maritime security and countering coercive behaviours. The dialogue also focuses on trade partnerships, economic resilience, and supply chain security among member nations. It also promotes innovation, cyber security, and responsible technology use. It also supports smaller nations with security and development needs, fosters quality infrastructure projects, and strengthens multilateral cooperation for a rules-based international order.

The Indo-Pacific region is considering multilateral mechanisms like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM Plus, and IORA as potential platforms for dialogue. The Quad aims to establish regional security architecture for rules-based order, while the ARF and ADMM Plus address political and security concerns. ASEAN countries recognize the importance of maritime cooperation for security, peace, and stability, including freedom of navigation and over flight, under the mandate of the ASEAN Maritime Forum and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.³⁶⁰ Since the first Quad dialogue in 2017, maritime security has been a significant concern due to natural disasters, humanitarian risks, and disputes in the East and South China Seas. The United States faces challenges due to China's claims in the South China Sea, which contradict the United States 'freedom of navigation and over flight' style. If China's claims prevail, it could negatively impact its Navy operations and power projection in the Indo-Pacific. A report by the U.S.

³⁶⁰PremeshaSaha. "The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Why ASEAN remains cautious". (20 August, 2023). Observer Research Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-quad-in-the-indo-pacific-why-asean-remains-cautious>

Congressional Research Service warns that significant changes in military strategy, foreign policy goals, and grand strategy may be required.³⁶¹

The Quad nations are quietly pursuing habits of cooperation to build resilience through deterrence in niche capacities. While they may not have an explicit security mandate, dismissing this incremental build-up as political signalling is disingenuous. These efforts are seemingly non-threatening but effective in case of escalation, demonstrating the importance of cooperation in addressing global security challenges. The Quad's focus on joint training programs and capacity-building initiatives aligns with growing bilateral partnerships and agendas of separate '2+2' foreign and security dialogues within the four nations. These dialogues aim to enhance interoperability and readiness through joint exercises, personnel exchanges, training, and intelligence sharing. Initiatives like the India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), logistical agreements, refuelling arrangements, and expanded joint military exercises have helped align and synergize ecosystems.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue agenda is a comprehensive strategy that combines diplomatic, military, economic, and cooperative initiatives. It aims to enhance stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region by focusing on military cooperation, economic resilience, regional partnerships, and addressing global challenges. Joint exercises, such as the Malabar exercise, enhance interoperability among the armed forces of the Quad nations, while defence agreements facilitate smoother logistics and operational capabilities. It has initiated discussions to create resilient supply chains for critical technologies and pharmaceuticals, diversifying sources and enhancing production capabilities. Infrastructure projects, like the 'Quad Infrastructure Partnership' promote quality infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad actively engages with ASEAN countries through dialogues and partnerships, focusing on maritime security, counter-terrorism, and disaster relief.

³⁶¹U.S. Congress. "U.S.–China strategic competition in South and East China Seas: Background and issues for congress". Congressional Research Service Report.(2020). Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R42784>

Health and climate cooperation are also key areas of focus. It has committed to distributing vaccines and enhancing health infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, aiming to improve global health security. It also collaborates on climate-related initiatives, including disaster response, renewable energy projects, and technology sharing to combat climate change. Technological collaboration is another area of focus, with the Quad focusing on enhancing cyber security cooperation to protect critical infrastructure and counter cyber threats. Cooperation on innovation and R&D fosters research partnerships among member countries. Diplomatic engagement is also essential, with regular summits and ministerial meetings to assess progress and discuss emerging threats. Global forums, such as the G20 and UN, help advocate for the Quad's agenda and strengthen multilateral cooperation. Public diplomacy and soft power are also crucial, with cultural exchanges and public statements shaping regional narratives in support of the Quad's agenda.

The Quad is a strategic coalition aiming for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. It addresses security concerns and promotes regional cooperation, but faces challenges from perceptions, internal dynamics, and geopolitical rivalries. The Quad's effectiveness depends on its ability to navigate these complexities. The Quad's agenda is multifaceted, addressing immediate security concerns while promoting long-term stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. By focusing on group effort across various sectors, the Quad aims to create a balanced approach that enhances resilience against emerging challenges while fostering regional partnerships.

The Quad faces challenges and opportunities in its future. It must balance securitization and regional public goods, considering potential leadership changes through democratic elections. The group's future depends on institutionalization decisions, such as establishing a formal secretariat or maintaining a flexible structure. Additionally, its integration with regional organizations and government agencies presents both challenges and opportunities for enhanced cooperation.

5.4. Role of Quad in the Indo-Pacific

The United States 'Pivot policy', India's 'Act East policy', Free and Open Indo-Pacific, and ASEAN's East Asia policy have created a new international security framework and institutional mechanism in the Indo-Pacific. The region is a hub of global power competition, with China's assertive expansion policy complicating the power structure. China's strategy extends geopolitical dogma and provides regulation equipment, covering the Near Seas, Intermediate Seas, and Far Seas. This SLOC line in the region reaches the Indian Ocean.³⁶² China's aggressive regional expansion policy has shifted the power structure in the Indo-Pacific from unipolar to bipolar. The country is implementing a deep, economically driven geopolitical expansion through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which consists of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This ambitious plan aims to recover China's historical global power as a continent and maritime power from the South Pacific to the Indian Ocean.³⁶³ Hereafter, the United States is balancing its strategy against China by forming alliances with other middle powers in the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' region. Adm. Philip S. Davidson, the US commander in the Indo-Pacific, stated that the region is in a geo-strategic race, with the power structure divided between a China-centric order and a free and open Indo-Pacific led by the United States and its alliances.³⁶⁴

China's territorial extensions policy, primarily based on the continent, has evolved since 1980. It has restructured its geostrategic policy, aiming to create a powerful PLAN navy and control the sea by 2050.³⁶⁵ China's blue naval strategy consists of a three-island chain in the Indo-Pacific, centred on Taiwan. The first chain includes the Ruckus Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, while

³⁶²Y, You Ji.(2018). "India & China At Sea Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean". Edited by David Brewster. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 108

³⁶³Yasuyuki Ishida.(2018). "China-India-Japan in the Indo-Pacific Ideas, Interests and Infrastructure". Edited by Jagannath P. Panda and Titli Basu. New Delhi.: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. pp. 115-120

³⁶⁴The Economic Times. "US admiral says Indo-Pacific is standing up against China". (3 February, 2020). Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-admiral-says-indo-pacific-is-standingup-against-china/articleshow/74111966.cms>.

³⁶⁵Ji You.(2008). "The Indian Ocean and China's Naval Build-up. China and the Indian Ocean Region". Edited by Ravi Vohra and P.K. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation. p. 56

the second chain extends from Japan to the Malaysian Islands and Indonesia. The third chain runs from Hawaii to Alaska. Experts suggest the fourth and fifth island chains could better define emerging PLAN naval strategy.³⁶⁶ The fourth island chain spans from Pakistan's Gwader port to India's western coasts and Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, passing Diego Garcia. The fifth chain, passing through Aden's Gulf, covers China's influence in Africa and the Indian Ocean.³⁶⁷ At this point, China is implementing a geo-strategic strategy to dominate the Indo-Pacific region, dividing its maritime rotation into the South China Sea, Indian Oceans, and Pacific Oceans. Its approach includes maritime expansionism, trap diplomacy, and assertive policies in the Pacific Ocean. The Maritime Silk Road is a key component of China's plan to establish influence in the Indo-Pacific, with the South China Sea serving as a crucial sea route and a bridge between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.³⁶⁸

The Quad countries concerns with China are increasingly aligned due to their regional behaviour and ambitions. India's alignment with the Quad is driven by repeated confrontations with the People's Liberation Army along the disputed Sino-Indian border and China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. Japan is targeted by China's gray-zone operations, particularly in the East China Sea, and Australia is concerned about China's growing influence in the South Pacific. The United States shares these concerns and has pursued improved alliances with Japan and Australia, strengthening its partnership with India. China's malign behaviour towards these allies has revitalized the Quad in recent years.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ James Stavridis. "China seeks new islands to conquer as the US wavers". Taipei Times. (1 March, 2019) Retrieved from <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2019/03/01/2003710605>

³⁶⁷ Vorndick Wison. "China's Reach has grown; so should the Island China". Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. (1 March, 2019) Retrieved from <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-reach-grown-islandchains>.

³⁶⁸ David Scott. "China's Indo- Pacific Strategy: The Problems of Success". The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies. 2019. 6 (2): 94-113.

³⁶⁹ Jonathan W, Greenert. "Foreword: Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". The National Bureau of Asian Research. (30 October, 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.nbr.org/publication/foreword-quad-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/>

Against the backdrop of China's assertive behaviour in the region, the concept of a 'free and open' Indo-Pacific, facilitated by quadrilateral cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, is central to Japanese geostrategic thinking in the 21st century. Abe advocated for closer strategic relations with new partners and reimagined maritime security dynamics. The FOIP concept links to previous trends in Japanese strategic thinking and has become institutionalized via the Quad.

The Quad, a leader-level format, has become more strategically aligned and has a positive impact on the Indo-Pacific. Over four years, Quad countries have built a vital regional grouping, ensuring the Indo-Pacific's stability for decades to come. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and other leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and US President Joe Biden, have emphasized the importance of a region where sovereignty is respected and all countries benefit from a regional balance, promoting a free from coercion and agency to determine their futures.³⁷⁰ Against this outline, the roles of Quad in the Indo-Pacific are as follows:

5.4.1. Economic Dimension

The QUAD nations, comprising a quarter of the world's population and over \$30 trillion in GDP, have numerous reasons to boost economic engagement. The QUAD can enhance its commitment to regional infrastructure development by integrating India into the existing 'Australia-Japan-US Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership' and expanding its reach into the Indo-Pacific region. The economic dimensions are as follows:

i. Supply Chain Resilience

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is prioritizing supply chain resilience amid geopolitical tensions, economic disruptions, and natural disasters. Quad's supply chain resilience efforts focus on diversifying supply chains, promoting

³⁷⁰Forum Staff. "Quad leaders highlight priorities, infrastructure plans". Indo-Pacific Defense Forum. (11 June, 2023) Retrieved from <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2023/06/quad-leaders-highlight-priorities-infrastructure-plans/>

sustainable and technology-enabled supply chains, and collaborating on secure critical technologies. It has established working groups to address supply chain risks, and has invested in infrastructure to facilitate smoother trade flows. Collaborative mechanisms include early warning systems, resilient partnerships, and strengthening multilateral engagements. The Quad countries are focusing on diversifying their supply chains to reduce dependence on China, particularly in critical sectors like technology, electronics, and pharmaceuticals. They are also establishing alternative production bases in the Indo-Pacific region, leveraging India's manufacturing capabilities, Japan's technology, and Australia's natural resources to prevent over-reliance on a single country or region.

The group is set to collaborate on creating resilient supply chains to reduce their dependence on China. They are working to strengthen their defence production and renewable energy technologies by working in partnership. China currently leads in the production and processing of critical minerals, posing strategic risks. To achieve meaningful cooperation, the nations must identify the differences and overlaps in their critical minerals. Intra-Quad cooperation is needed for securing unique minerals, while strengthening supply chains for all critical minerals requires partnerships with other countries.³⁷¹ The Quad countries are collaborating to establish resilient and non-coercive technology supply chains, despite the United States unilateral measures to restrict Chinese access. Each Quad member's critical and emerging technology industries should be tailored to their individual strengths, considering their development levels and areas of focus. The Covid-19 pandemic and US-China technology competition have emphasized the need for secure and resilient technology supply chains. Quad nations have experienced negative consequences from China's aggressive industrial policies, aiming to establish economic and technological dominance in the Indo-Pacific.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Akshat Singh. "Building Resilient Critical Minerals Supply Chains for the Quad". The Diplomat. (24 July, 2024). Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/building-resilient-critical-minerals-supply-chains-for-the-quad/>

³⁷² Lisa Curtis. "The Quad's role in shifting to resilient technology supply chains and energy security". Australian National University. (28 November, 2023) Retrieved from <https://nsc.anu.edu.au/national-security-college/content-centre/research/quads-role-shifting-resilient-technology-supply>

The Paulson Institute analysis reveals a high concentration and interdependence in supply chains for lithium-ion batteries, chips, and displays between Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the US, and China. China leads in fabrication and assembly, providing crucial raw materials. India can develop its own rare-earths base and collaborate on less-reliant technologies.³⁷³ Australia has allocated A\$ 50 million to the Quad Clean Energy Supply Chain Diversification Program, aiming to develop and diversify clean energy supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically targeting solar photovoltaic, hydrogen electrolyser, and battery supply chains.³⁷⁴

India has a unique opportunity to attract global value chains by leveraging its foreign trade policy design to address vulnerabilities, manage disruptions, and reduce concentration, particularly by exploring partnerships with strategically aligned nations like the Quad members. India's supply chain resilience agenda can be guided by three principles within the Quad: financing resilience, attracting technology multinationals, and addressing raw-material dependencies. Challenges to Quad's supply chain resilience include geopolitical tensions, infrastructure gaps, and policy alignment. However, the focus on supply chain resilience is expected to grow due to global uncertainties and the need for reliable access to strategic goods. Enhanced cooperation, technology sharing, and regional integration will likely form the backbone of Quad's supply chain strategies in the Indo-Pacific.

ii. Infrastructure Development and Capacity Building

The Quad has prioritized infrastructure, establishing a new dedicated coordination group. The Quad leaders prioritize infrastructure, focusing on high-standard solutions to collective challenges, contrasting China's Belt and Road initiative. This strategic move strengthens the Quad's reputation and resonates with

³⁷³ Akshay Mathur. "A Supply Chain Resilience Agenda for the Quad". Observer Research Foundation. (24 September, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/hindi/research/a-supply-chain-resilience-agenda-for-the-quad>

³⁷⁴ Australia Government. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and the Water. "Quad Clean Energy Supply Chain Diversification Program". (15 November, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.dcccew.gov.au/energy/international-activity/quad-clean-energy-supply-chain-diversification-program>

developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Its mission and momentum can overcome challenges in developing quality infrastructure projects by focusing on practicality over perfection, emphasizing India's inclusion and emphasizing the urgency felt by developing economies.

A senior Quad infrastructure coordination group regularly meets to assess regional infrastructure needs, coordinate approaches to deliver transparent, high-standard infrastructure, and coordinate technical assistance and capacity-building efforts with regional partners to meet significant Indo-Pacific infrastructure demand. Quad partners, a leading provider of high-standard infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, have provided over \$48 billion in official finance since 2015. Their partnerships support thousands of projects across 30 countries, including rural development, health infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, renewable power generation, telecommunications, and road transportation. The partnership aims to further catalyse private-sector investment in the region.³⁷⁵ Infrastructure projects involving direct involvement from all four countries, sharing information, providing technical assistance, and building partner capacity, can advance the Quad's common goals.

Quad's Infrastructure Development Strategy prioritizes sustainability, transparency, and inclusion in projects, focusing on connectivity, energy, digital, and disaster-resilient infrastructure. Funding mechanisms include public-private partnerships, development financing, and multilateral cooperation. Collaborative projects include Pacific Island nations, ASEAN engagement, and strengthening India's connectivity with Southeast Asia. The Quad's vision is to promote open investments, renewable energy, digital connectivity, and disaster-resilient infrastructure. Moreover, a Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program aims to empower more than 1,800 of the region's infrastructure practitioners to design, build and manage quality infrastructure in their home countries, and a Quad Partnership for

³⁷⁵ Jonathan E. Hillman. "The Quad's Strategic Infrastructure Play". CenterFor Strategic and International Studies.(27 September, 2021). Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/quads-strategic-infrastructure-play>

Cable Connectivity and Resilience is directed towards strengthening cable systems in the Indo-Pacific.³⁷⁶

The Quad countries are collaborating to build regional capacity and meet critical needs in the Indo-Pacific region. They signed a Memorandum of Cooperation supporting supply chain resilience, emerging technologies, and renewable energy projects. The Quad ECAs are strengthening communication, providing financing and promoting joint business. They also released Principles for Digital Public Infrastructure, promoting an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe, reliable, and secure digital future. The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure organized a workshop in India to strengthen power sector resilience.³⁷⁷ It also emphasized the development and deployment of digital public infrastructure. Its principles cover inclusivity, interoperability, modularity, scalability, security, privacy, collaboration, governance for public benefit, trust, transparency, grievance redress, sustainability, human rights, intellectual property protection, and sustainable development. It emphasizes the need to eliminate barriers, build on open standards, and ensure a technology-neutral approach. The system should be flexible, scalable, and embedded with privacy-enhancing technologies. It encourages community participation in planning, designing, building, and operating, promoting a culture of openness and collaboration. The system should also ensure transparency, ensure public benefit, and respect human rights at every stage.

They are also working on digital infrastructure principles, resilient port infrastructure development, and undersea cable projects. They aim to enhance regional connectivity and support resilient port infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia has launched the Cable Connectivity and Resilience Centre to support these projects. The Quad Infrastructure Fellowship aims to improve capacity

³⁷⁶Melissa Conley Tyler. “The future of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific”.Observer Research Foundation. (2 February, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-future-of-the-quad-in-the-indo-pacific>

³⁷⁷PIB Delhi.“Fact Sheet: 2024 Quad Leaders’ Summit”. (22 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2057460#:~:text=On%20September%2021%2C%202024%2C%20President,the%20fourth%20Quad%20Leaders'%20Summit.>

and professional networks for infrastructure projects in the region.³⁷⁸ India plans to offer 500 in-people training opportunities for government professionals from Indo-Pacific countries under the Quad Infrastructure Fellowship (QIF) program from 2023-2027, with over 100 scholarships from these countries utilized in the first call.³⁷⁹ The Quad Infrastructure Fellowship India course offers Infrastructure Project Management & PPP- a comprehensive executive training program for managing large-scale projects in India, evaluating financial viability, and assessing economic and social impacts through Public-Private Partnerships. Urban mobility- the program provides executives with the skills to develop and implement innovative urban mobility solutions, suitable for urban planners, policymakers, public transportation officials, private sector leaders, technology professionals, and investors. Leadership Competencies in Logistics and SCM- this program aims to equip mid-level logistics and SCM professionals with leadership competencies, strategies, communication skills, decision-making, data analysis, risk management, and a culture of continuous improvement. Multimodal Logistics- this program offers a comprehensive understanding of multimodal logistics in India, covering various transportation modes, regulations, and best practices for logistics professionals.³⁸⁰

iii. Digital Economy and technological cooperation

The Quad countries are focusing on the digital economy and technological cooperation, aiming to strengthen digital infrastructure, promote affordable connectivity, develop secure 5G networks, and enhance cyber resilience, and support e-commerce and digital trade. They are also fostering innovation through regional start-ups and creating technology incubation hubs. Data governance is a key focus, with common standards ensuring secure and transparent data sharing. Capacity building and inclusion are also key areas, with digital skills training programs enhancing digital literacy and technical skills. The Quad is also addressing

³⁷⁸Drishti IAS. “6th Quad Summit”.(24 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/6th-quad-summit-2024>

³⁷⁹ ITEC: Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation. “Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific Quad Infrastructure Fellowships”. (20 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.itecgoi.in/Quad>

³⁸⁰*Ibid.*,

disinformation and developing joint research on digital platforms impact on information dissemination.

The Quad is committed to technology innovation in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the Open Radio Access Network (RAN) and 5G. In 2023, the Quad deployed the first Open RAN in Palau, committing \$20 million. It plans to expand Open RAN collaboration, support field trials, and expand the Asia Open RAN Academy (AORA) in the Philippines. The US plans to invest over \$7 million in AORA's global expansion.³⁸¹ This development represents a significant commitment to modernizing telecommunications infrastructure in the region. It has produced an Open RAN security report, demonstrating how Open RAN technology can be constructed as securely as traditional RAN networks. An online workshop was conducted to discuss Open RAN test lab frameworks, promoting supplier diversification. Subsequently, the Quad Investors Network (QUIN) was launched to foster private sector investment in critical and emerging technologies in Quad countries and the Indo-Pacific. The Quad Technology Business and Investment Forum were convened in Sydney in partnership with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute to align private capital with the Quad's strategic technology interests. They also published a joint statement of Principles on Critical and Emerging Technology Standards, outlining a common vision for international technology standards based on values like transparency, openness, security, and interoperability. The Quad International Standards Cooperation Network (Q-ISCN) is being launched to increase situational awareness, coordination, and influence in international standards development. It also recognizes the importance of synthetic biology in promoting bio-manufacturing through horizon scanning and exploring opportunities to expand cooperation through Track 1.0 and 1.5 dialogues.³⁸²

³⁸¹ *Opcit.*, PIB

³⁸² Australian Government. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. "Quad Principles on Critical and Emerging Technology Standards". Retrieved from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/quad-principles-critical-and-emerging-technology-standards>

AI has taken centre stage for the Quad. In the last five years, all four countries have announced national AI strategies aiming to leverage the technology for societal development, economic prosperity, and military power. Beyond national agendas and investments, the Quad countries also see multinational technology collaboration with like-minded democracies as key to responsible AI development. Promising to promote an accessible and secure technology ecosystem, Quad-led AI collaboration could also help counter China's disruptive behaviour in the region, particularly the country's malicious use of AI for surveillance, censorship, and misinformation.³⁸³

Quad governments are collaborating on AI-ENGAGE to enhance next-generation agriculture through the Bio Explore Initiative, which uses AI to study biological ecosystems for disease diagnosis, crop resilience, and clean energy solutions. The Quad leaders have also finalized a Memorandum of Cooperation to address semiconductor supply chain risks. The Quad Investors Network (QUIN) has highlighted the potential of Quad countries Quantum ecosystems to collectively leverage capital and expertise.³⁸⁴ India and the US launched the U.S.-India Artificial Intelligence Initiative in 2021 to foster bilateral R&D collaboration through networking and workshops. Monitoring these initiatives will inform policymakers about gaps and opportunities for collaboration among Quad countries.

The Quad agenda on technology cooperation is evolving, with potential for collaboration on privacy-preserving machine learning techniques (PPML). The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council are working on common projects using privacy-enhancing technologies. The Quad can co-fund joint research or coordinate investments in PPML and other techniques, such as synthetic data and advanced simulations, to reduce cyber security risks and make personal data less relevant for AI systems. The White House Indo-Pacific Strategy emphasizes the importance of strengthening ties between U.S. allies, particularly Australia, India, and Japan, to re-

³⁸³NgorLuong and HusanjotChahal. "The Future of the Quad's Technology Cooperation Hangs in the Balance". Council on Foreign Relations. (14 June, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/future-quads-technology-cooperation-hangs-balance>

³⁸⁴*Opcit.*, Drishti

establish the Quad as a stability pillar in the Indo-Pacific region and achieve strategic objectives.³⁸⁵

iv. Trade and Investment

The Quad mechanism aims to balance China's rise in the Indo-Pacific region through economic cooperation. India emphasizes that the mechanism is not meant to counter China but to build sustainable cooperation. It is considering a connectivity partnership and task forces on supply chain resilience, climate change, and emerging technologies. The success of these initiatives depends on active commitment within the Quad states. The Quad promotes open and rules-based trade, promoting fair competition and opposing economic coercion. It supports regional trade connectivity and private sector investment in infrastructure and innovation in the Indo-Pacific region. It is considering transforming into a trade bloc, reducing trade barriers and increasing economic integration among its four countries. This would lead to increased trade and investment, countering China's economic influence in the region and offering an alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative.

India, a signatory to the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) agreement, has not yet agreed to participate in the IPEF Trade Pillar. Other Quad partners have encouraged India to join the Trade Pillar to contribute to the region's economic prosperity. IPEF, which comprises 40% of global trade and 60% of the world population, could help balance the Chinese-dominated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). India could also use its leadership of the G20 to gauge global convergence on global economic issues of interest to the Quad, such as facilitating trade and global value chains and enhancing technical collaboration in emerging areas.³⁸⁶ It enables member states to establish strategic and security partnerships, leading to long-term cooperation and economic benefits. For example, India's defence sector could attract American investments in domestic manufacturing. A facilitating regulatory regime could boost short-term investment

³⁸⁵*Ibid.*,

³⁸⁶NishaRajan. "India's Growing Economic Partnership in the Quad". US India Strategic Partnership Forum.(June 2023). Retrieved from <https://usispf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Indias-Growing-Economic-Partnership-in-the-Quad.pdf>

and promote India as a freer market. A Free Trade Agreement would enhance global value chain participation and serve geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

According to Moody's, the greater economic focus of Quad members will drive some trade shifts along alliance lines, although stopping short of changing China's centrality to regional trade. These shifts include greater Australian commodity exports toward India, and a spur in demand for US and Japanese technology and equipment.³⁸⁷ The US launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) at the Tokyo meeting, highlighting its potential to be the largest contributor to global growth. However, the US has excluded itself from other regional economic arrangements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), as the IPEF does not address market access and appears to overlap with existing negotiations. The Quad has made economic strides in infrastructure investment, standard cooperation, and supply chains in emerging technologies like semiconductors and energy. It has pledged to aid countries in tackling debt issues, but no further efforts are being made to enhance regional supply chain connectivity beyond these critical technologies.

India's economic policy positions differ from other countries, as evident in its behaviour at the World Trade Organisation. At the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva, India reiterated its 'developing country status' and right to special and differential treatment. It took different positions on key trade issues, such as the waiver exempting developing countries from intellectual property protection obligations under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for Covid-19 vaccines. India opposed an extension of customs duties on electronic transmissions and a permanent solution on public stockholdings, insisting on protecting and nurturing vulnerable domestic industries. The Quad joint statements do not emphasize trade, despite the four countries concern about economic dependence on China and the promotion of economic cooperation among partners. Despite several working groups established under the Quad, there is no working group on trade and investment. India's participation as an 'observer' to

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Rajan.

IPEF raises speculation about reluctance to commit to the new economic principles proposed by the United States. Bilateral free trade agreements exist between Quad partners; Japan and Australia are members of regional trade deals, CPTPP and RCEP. A missing link is a trade arrangement between the US and India. However, the Biden administration has been hesitant to push new agreements due to domestic politics and India's focus on non-tariff barriers.

5.4.2. Political Dimension

The Quad members, who have held regular meetings on regional and global security issues, have made progress in institutionalizing their shared values, including democracy, human rights, and rule of law. The political dimensions are as follows:

i. Leaders Meeting

The Quad Leaders Meetings have been held six times since 2021. Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S. are promoting cooperation in various fields to achieve a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and emphasize the importance of positive contributions to the region. The Quad, a global force for good, is executing projects in the Indo-Pacific region to address pandemics, disasters, maritime security, infrastructure development, critical technologies, climate change, cyber security, and cultivate technology leaders, working together at unprecedented scale to deliver on Indo-Pacific partners priorities.

The Quad has conducted both in-person and virtual summits. In September 2021, Japan's Prime Minister, Suga Yoshihide, held a video conference with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and US President Joseph R. Biden Jr., resulting in a Joint Statement and Fact Sheet. The leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation and support principles like rule of law, freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute settlement, democratic values, and territorial integrity. They expressed concerns about Myanmar's deteriorating situation, opposition to unilateral changes in the East and South China Seas, and human rights

issues.³⁸⁸ The Japan-Australia-India-U.S. summit meeting in September 2021(in person meeting) emphasized the four countries commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, reaffirming their ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ for security and prosperity. They agreed to strengthen quadrilateral cooperation, support principles like rule of law, freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute settlement, democratic values, and territorial integrity, and acknowledged their role in ensuring equitable access to safe, effective, and quality-assured vaccines.

The leaders confirmed progress in critical technologies and climate change working groups, announced Japan’s participation in the Global Methane Pledge, and agreed to launch working groups on space and cyber security. They emphasized safe departure, coordination, and cooperation in Afghanistan, North Korea, and Myanmar. They agreed to maintain cooperation and convene annual summits.³⁸⁹ On March 3 2022, Japan’s Prime Minister, Kishida Fumio, held a video conference with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and US President Joseph R. Biden. The leaders discussed the tense situation in Ukraine, stating that Russia’s aggression is an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force. They condemned Russia and emphasized Japan’s swift implementation of tough measures. Japan has also offered \$100 million in emergency humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, along with a \$100 million loan. The leaders agreed to work closely together to respond to the situation in Ukraine and emphasized the importance of promoting efforts towards a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’. They agreed to advance practical cooperation in health security, COVID-19 response measures, infrastructure, climate change, and emerging technologies. They also agreed to continue positively contributing to the region as the Quad and establish a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.“Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Leaders’ Video Conference”.(13 March, 2021). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000310.html

³⁸⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.“The Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Summit Meeting”. (24 September, 2021) Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_001178.html

³⁹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. “Japan-Australia-India-U.S.(Quad) Leaders’ Video Conference”. (4 March, 2022). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000379.html

The Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders Meeting (in person) on May 24 2022 emphasized the importance of no unilateral change in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the East and South China Seas. The leaders condemned North Korea's destabilizing ballistic missile development and reaffirmed their commitment to denuclearization. They called for an immediate end to violence, the release of political detainees, humanitarian access, and swift restoration of democracy. They welcomed progress on COVID-19, announced plans to extend over 50 billion USD of infrastructure assistance and investment in the Indo-Pacific, and launched the 'Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package' and 'Quad Satellite Data Portal'.³⁹¹

Japan's Prime Minister, H.E. Kishida Fumio, met with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and US President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., at the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders Meeting (May, 2023). The meeting aimed to uphold the free and open international order based on the rule of law and reiterate the Quad's solidarity and commitment to a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP). The leaders expressed concern about unilateral changes in the Indo-Pacific, including the East and South China Seas, condemned North Korea's nuclear weapons development, and called for cooperation in resolving the issue of Japanese abductees. They also discussed the impacts of Ukraine on the Indo-Pacific and emphasized the importance of developing practical cooperation that benefits the region.³⁹²

Mr. Kishida Fumio, Prime Minister of Japan, attended the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders Meeting (September, 2024) in Wilmington, Delaware, hosted by the United States. The four leaders expressed their commitment to upholding the international order based on the rule of law and supporting human rights, freedom, the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful dispute settlement, and prohibition on the threat or use of force in

³⁹¹Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. "Japan-Australia-India-U.S.(Quad) Leaders' Meeting". (24 May, 2022). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000402.html#:~:text=The%20four%20leaders%20candidly%20discussed,be%20upheld%20in%20any%20region.

³⁹²Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan. "Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders' Meeting". (20 May, 2023). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000691_00001.html

accordance with international law. They confirmed that the Quad is transparent and will continue to respect regional institutions like ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. The leaders discussed the situation in the Indo-Pacific, expressing strong opposition to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East and South China Seas. They also emphasized the importance of adherence to international law, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and condemned the militarization of disputed features and coercive manoeuvres in the South China Sea.³⁹³

ii. Foreign Ministers Meetings

On September 26, 2019 Japan-Australia-India-U.S., Minister Toshimitsu Motegi held a meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Australian Minister Marise Payne, and Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. The four countries discussed advancing a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, reaffirming cooperation on maritime security, infrastructure, and connectivity. They also discussed initiatives like counter-terrorism, cyber security, and regional disaster response.³⁹⁴ On 6 October 2020, the second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers Meeting and dinner were held in Japan. The meeting was the first ministerial-level international conference in Japan since the Covid-19 outbreak. The four Ministers discussed the response to Covid-19 challenges, cooperation in health and hygiene, and new international rules in the digital economy. They emphasized the importance of broadening cooperation for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ and supported ASEAN’s unity and regional architecture. They agreed on developing practical cooperation in areas like infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, humanitarian assistance, education, and human resource

³⁹³Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan. “Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Leaders’ Meeting”. (21 September, 2024). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000691_00001.html

³⁹⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. “Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Ministerial”. (26 September, 2019). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000691_00001.html

development. They also discussed regional affairs like North Korea and the East and South China Seas.³⁹⁵

On February 18 2021, Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a telephone meeting. The four ministers welcomed the progress in cooperation and recognition of the challenges faced by the international order. They emphasized the importance of promoting a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and emphasized the need for further engagement with ASEAN, the Pacific Island, and European countries. They agreed to further advance cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, humanitarian assistance, education, and human resource development. They expressed concern for Myanmar's deteriorating situation and opposed China's Coast Guard Law. They also discussed regional issues like North Korea and global challenges like Covid-19 and climate change. The ministers agreed to meet annually and coordinate closely at the working level.³⁹⁶

On February 11 2022, Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hayashi Yoshimasa, attended the Fourth Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Melbourne. The meeting aimed to coordinate with each other to ensure the success of the next Quad Summit Meeting in Japan. The four Ministers reaffirmed the recognition of challenges in the existing international order, including unilateral attempts to change the status quo and economic coercion. They welcomed the vision of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' promoted by the four countries and expressed their support for ASEAN's centrality and the ASEAN-led architecture.

³⁹⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.The Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting.(6 October, 2020). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000691_00001.html

³⁹⁶Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan."Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Telephone Meeting".(18 February, 2021). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press3e_000172.html

On 23 September 2022, the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers Meeting was held in New York. The meeting involved Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong, and Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. The meeting emphasized the importance of a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ with a rules-based international order and respect for freedom, rule of law, democratic values, peaceful dispute settlement, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The Quad’s vision is for a region where rules-based international order, freedom, rule of law, democratic values, peaceful dispute settlement, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are respected. The meeting also discussed the importance of UN Charter support and cooperation with ASEAN. The Quad’s cooperation aims to advance practical initiatives for the benefit of the people of the Indo-Pacific.³⁹⁷

Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers Meeting took place on 22 September 2023, with Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Antony Blinken, and Secretary of State of the United States, Senator Penny Wong, and India’s External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, attending. The meeting focused on regional issues in the Indo-Pacific, adherence to international law, and opposing unilateral changes. The ministers condemned North Korea’s destabilizing missile launches and reaffirmed their commitment to denuclearization. They also emphasized the importance of strengthening the United Nations functions, including Security Council reform. They supported ASEAN unity and the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The ministers agreed to promote cooperation in areas such as climate change, infrastructure, cyber security, health security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counterterrorism.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. “Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers Meeting”. (23 September, 2022). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/shin4e_000047.html

³⁹⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. “Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting”. (22 September, 2023). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/shin4e_000047.html

On 29 July 2024, the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers Meeting and luncheon meeting were held with visiting ministers from Australia, India, and the U.S. The meeting focused on the Indo-Pacific region, reaffirming their commitment to a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP). The ministers also emphasized the importance of adherence to international law for rules-based maritime order and opposed unilateral attempts to change the status quo. They condemned North Korea's destabilizing launches and urged for cooperation in resolving the abductions issue. The ministers also reaffirmed their support for ASEAN unity, the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and Pacific Island countries in line with the Pacific Islands Forum's '2050 Strategy'. They also emphasized the need for concrete efforts in maritime security, women, peace and security, critical technologies, cyber security, counter-terrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. They also emphasized their commitment to the UN Charter and concurred on working on UN reforms, including Security Council reforms. The meeting also discussed the situations in Ukraine and the Middle East.³⁹⁹

India, Canada, Australia, and Japan support the Quad meeting, recognizing its democratic unity and potential for cooperation in economics, technology, climate, and security.⁴⁰⁰ The Quad, a global organization, is addressing the threat of climate change to the Indo-Pacific region, particularly island nations in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region. The Quad plans to expand its Early Warning Systems and Climate Information Services Initiative to improve access to high-quality climate data and services for Pacific Island countries. The US plans to provide 3D-printed automatic weather stations to the Pacific in 2025, while Australia is strengthening Early Warning Systems through Weather Ready Pacific. Japan is enhancing cooperation with Pacific Island countries under its 'Pacific Climate Resilience Initiative' by strengthening disaster risk reduction and preparedness through satellite technology and promoting clean energy through capacity building and renewable energy

³⁹⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. "Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers' Meeting". (29 July, 2024). Retrieved from https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/shin4e_000047.html

⁴⁰⁰Ministry of External Affairs, India. "First Quad Leaders Virtual Summit". (9 March, 2021). Retrieved from https://mea.gov.in/press_releases.htm?dtl/33601/First+Quad+Leaders+Virtual+Summit

installation. The Quad plans to train experts in Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu to better monitor and forecast flash floods, reducing human and economic losses.

5.4.3. Strategic Dimension

The strategic dimensions of Quad are as follows:

i. Health Security

Quad leaders recognize that the most immediate threat to lives and livelihoods in the four countries and the world is the Covid-19 pandemic. They expanded manufacturing capacity, donated vaccines, and collaborated to assist the region in response. The Quad Vaccine Experts Group coordinates the collective response, including piloting the Quad Partnership Covid-19 Dashboard. The Quad is committed to better preparing countries and the world for the next pandemic. They focus on building coordination in their Covid-19 response and health-security efforts in the Indo-Pacific, conduct at least one pandemic preparedness table top or exercise in 2022, and strengthen science and technology cooperation to support the 100-Day Mission. This includes collaboration on clinical trials, launching additional sites for international Accelerating Covid-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines (ACTIV) trials, and supporting the call for a ‘global pandemic radar’ and improved viral genomic surveillance.⁴⁰¹

The Quad’s health cooperation has been hindered by its tendency to escalate when perceived threats from China are perceived, a behaviour that has been replicated in health cooperation. Despite this, health-related cooperation offers a crucial institution and norm-building agenda for enduring partnerships among the four countries. The Quad countries are committed to supporting health security and resiliency efforts in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Pandemic Fund. In 2024, the Quad Health Security Partnership advanced regional resilience through pandemic

⁴⁰¹Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India. “Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders’ Summit”. (24 September, 2021). Retrieved from https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34319/Fact_Sheet_Quad_Leaders_Summit#:~:text=On%20September%2024%2C%20President%20Biden,Leaders'%20Summit%20of%20the%20Quad.

preparedness exercises, enhancing prevention, early detection, and response to potential disease outbreaks. The Quad is also exploring developing Standard Operating Procedures for Pandemic Response. Australia is increasing its pool of public health specialists for disease outbreak response. The United States is pledging over \$84.5 million to strengthen Indo-Pacific health capacity.

The Quad Vaccine Partnership, announced by Quad Leaders at their first Summit in March 2021, has delivered 325,000 doses of Made in India Covid vaccines to Cambodia. The vaccines were gifted by India as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to donate 500,000 doses to the Indo-Pacific under the Quad vaccine initiative. The Quad countries have agreed to provide over 1.2 billion doses of Covid vaccines globally under this initiative. The Cambodian government has expressed appreciation for the vaccines received from Quad through India and for its collective assistance. The Australia and Japan have provided cold storage equipment, freezers, temperature monitors, and safety equipment for healthcare workers. The United States has provided assistance with surveillance, contact tracing, case investigation, training healthcare workers, and data management. The Cambodian government has expressed its desire to extend all possible support to combat the pandemic.⁴⁰² India was to be the manufacturing hub of the initiative, with the US and Japan providing financial support, while Japan and Australia would utilize Southeast Asia's development cooperation network for last-mile delivery. The Quad partnership, aiming to deliver one billion vaccine doses by 2022, faced production issues and Indian export bans, resulting in the Quad's first doses to Southeast Asia in April 2022.

The security dialogue must move beyond centralised vaccine manufacturing and exports and develop a long-term plan for improving pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity in the Indo-Pacific, especially Southeast Asia. Technology transfer is the key to maintaining favourable power dynamics and health security in the region. Through the facilitation of technology transfer, investment, and

⁴⁰²Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Inaugural delivery of Covid Vaccines under the Quad's Vaccine Partnership". (12 April, 2022). Retrieved from [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35188/Inaugural delivery of Covid Vaccines under the Quads Vaccine Partners hip](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35188/Inaugural%20delivery%20of%20Covid%20Vaccines%20under%20the%20Quads%20Vaccine%20Partnership)

knowledge sharing, the Quad has the potential to upscale existing health manufacturing capacity in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand. This strategy not only improves health security among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states but also reduces dependency and promotes adaptability in the face of future health crises.

Subsequently, the United States, Australia, India, and Japan are launching a groundbreaking initiative to end cervical cancer in the Indo-Pacific, a major health crisis, as part of a broader Quad Leaders' Summit announcement. Quad countries are launching a cancer moon-shot initiative to decrease the burden of cancer in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad Cancer Moon-shot aims to strengthen the Indo-Pacific cancer care ecosystem by improving health infrastructure, expanding research collaborations, building data systems, and providing support for cancer prevention, detection, treatment, and care. Cervical cancer remains the third leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the region, with fewer than 10% having completed HPV vaccinations and recent screenings. Quad countries will promote HPV vaccination, increase screening access, and expand treatment options in underserved areas. The initiative builds on the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to ending cancer and aims to implement innovative strategies to prevent, detect, treat, and alleviate the impact of cancer on patients and their families.⁴⁰³ Quad countries pledge \$1.58 billion over five years to Gavi, including HPV vaccines in Indo-Pacific. They will collaborate with UN agencies on bulk purchasing and improve medical imaging and radiation therapy access.

The U.S. Navy and Department of Defence plan to facilitate HPV vaccine expert exchanges with Indo-Pacific partners starting in 2025. This collaboration will provide training, capacity building, and strengthening healthcare systems, focusing on preventive health services like HPV vaccination, thereby enhancing regional cancer cooperation and health security. The FDA Oncology Centre of Excellence

⁴⁰³Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Fact Sheet: Quad Countries Launch Cancer Moonshot Initiative to Reduce the Burden of Cancer in the Indo-Pacific". (21 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?38326/Fact+Sheet+Quad+Countries+Launch+Cancer+Moonshot+Initiative+to+Reduce+the+Burden+of+Cancer+in+the+IndoPacific#:~:text=The%20Quad%20Cancer%20Moonshot%20will,detection%2C%20treatment%2C%20and%20care>.

plans to visit India to establish collaborations under the ‘Project Asha’ initiative. The partnership will focus on capacity-building, including clinical trial design, management, and international standards promotion. The U.S. National Cancer Institute (NCI) will expand its support for global cancer research and training in the Indo-Pacific region, including investments in cervical cancer vaccination, screening, and treatment strategies. The NCI will also provide evidence-based cancer information to health professionals and patients in the region. The CDC will support HPV vaccination programs, improve vaccine distribution, and strengthen cancer surveillance and prevention systems in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Australian Government and philanthropic contributions have increased the total funding commitments to the Elimination Partnership in the Indo-Pacific for Cervical Cancer (EPICC) consortium to AUD \$29.6 million. The program aims to advance the elimination of cervical cancer across the Indo-Pacific by improving HPV-related policies, planning, and readiness in any country in the region. EPICC is piloting HPV programs for future scale-up in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands, expanding sub-national vaccination programs to support country readiness in Malaysia, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea, and supporting the establishment of national sustained HPV elimination programs in Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Nauru. Minderoo’s EPICC project is expanding to include more women in the Indo-Pacific region, with a further AUD13.1 million contribution from Dr. Andrew Forrester and Nicola Forrester. The program will screen 140,000 women over four years, establish national elimination programs, and empower governments.

India is committing \$10 million to support the World Health Organization’s Global Initiative on Digital Health in the Indo-Pacific region. The country will provide technical assistance for the National Non-Communicable Disease portal, HPV sampling kits, detection tools, and cervical cancer vaccines worth \$7.5 million. India is also scaling up population-based screening for oral, breast, and cervical cancers, using the Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) method. The government is expanding access to specialized cancer treatment centres and providing affordable cancer treatments through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya

Yojana (PMJAY). The Indian Council of Medical Research is also enhancing cervical cancer screening, early diagnosis, and treatment initiation.

Japan is providing medical equipment and assistance worth \$27 million to countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including Cambodia, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste. It has committed \$75 million to combat cancer, including cervical cancer, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency and other organizations. Japan is also promoting women's health and improving vaccine access through Global Health Initiatives and partnering with cancer-related institutions in the region.

ii. Climate Change

The Indo-Pacific region is facing global warming challenges, requiring leadership and action. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a key international forum, has shifted its focus from security to climate change and environmental issues, reflecting growing minilateral cooperation among nations. The Quad has been providing strategic support and unified policy matters since its inaugural leader-level summit in March 2021. Its mission is to strengthen the implementation of the Paris Agreement and foster cooperation on climate mitigation, adaptation, and finance.

Quad countries prioritized climate change due to shared threats and increased political prominence in the Indo-Pacific region, requiring coordination and cooperation.⁴⁰⁴ The group is committed to addressing climate change as a major security threat. They have focused on supporting low-carbon technologies, accelerating climate action, and providing support to vulnerable nations in the Indo-Pacific region. It has actively engaged in initiatives promoting clean energy transitions, resilience and disaster management, green hydrogen, financial and technological support, and the Indo-Pacific region's focus on climate adaptation. The Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP) was launched in May 2022, but has yet to generate a climate narrative. The group also

⁴⁰⁴ Kristi Govella. (2022). "Introduction". In Building a Quad-South Korea Partnership for Climate Action, German Marshall Fund of the United States, pp. 3-5. Retrieved from <https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Building%20a%20Quad-South%20Korea%20Partnership%20for%20Climate%20Action.pdf>.

convened to address the region's infrastructure-financing gap.⁴⁰⁵ The Quad Climate Working Group announced a Clean Energy Supply Chains Initiative and a shipping task force at the 2023 leaders' summit to accelerate the Indo-Pacific region's transition to clean energy, aiming to establish low-emission or zero-emission shipping corridors by 2030.

The Quad countries are home to many regions suffering from cascading climate crises. As a significant group with a quarter of the world's population and 35 per cent of the world's GDP, it can serve as a torchbearer for the global climate agenda, focusing on addressing climate change and addressing the global dangers of climate change.⁴⁰⁶ Its climate agenda aligns with broader international initiatives like the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They have also discussed the possibility of creating a more formalized Quad Climate Change Partnership (QCCP) to facilitate direct collaboration on climate-related research, policy development, and international cooperation. The Quad's potential in addressing climate change includes leadership in climate diplomacy, technology transfer, and geopolitical influence. By aligning their policies, the Quad can bring greater momentum to international climate talks and promote action in the Indo-Pacific. Their technological expertise can make a difference in nations lacking resources for a green transition.

The United States is working with Indo-Pacific partners to enhance climate and clean energy cooperation, promoting adaptation and resilience. The Q-CHAMP aims to align policies, incentives, standards, and investments to create high-quality, diversified clean energy supply chains. Australia is likely to open applications for the Quad Clean Energy Supply Chains Diversification Program, providing AUD 50 million to support projects in the Indo-Pacific. India also plans to invest \$2 million in new solar projects in Fiji, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles. Japan has committed \$122 million in renewable energy projects in Indo-Pacific countries. The United States will continue to mobilize private capital for solar, wind, cooling,

⁴⁰⁵J Mehra. (2022). "An evolving agenda for the Quad".Stimson Centre Policy Memo. Retrieved from <https://www.stimson.org/2022/an-evolving-agenda-for-the-quad/>

⁴⁰⁶Aparna Roy. "Climate Action and the Quad".Observer Research Foundation. September 24, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/climate-action-and-the-quad>

batteries, and critical minerals to expand and diversify supply chains. The Quad initiative focuses on boosting energy efficiency, including the deployment and manufacturing of high-efficiency affordable cooling systems to enable climate-vulnerable communities to adapt to rising temperatures while reducing strain on the electricity grid. The United States is committed to addressing climate change challenges and ensuring the resilience and sustainability of port infrastructure.⁴⁰⁷

The Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), a multilateral alliance comprising the US, Canada, Australia, Korea, Japan, and Europe, aims to build robust critical minerals supply chains for global climate objectives. India joined the group in June 2023, recognizing its importance for national security. The MSP's mandate is to encourage public and private investment in the critical minerals supply chain, benefiting the Indian industry.

China's economic growth has prompted a need for a strategy to challenge its dominance, with member countries like Japan, Australia, and the US concerned about China's aggression in the East China Sea and South China Sea. China's rise was facilitated by global reliance on China for critical minerals like lithium, nickel, and graphite, global green supply chains, and technology licenses.⁴⁰⁸ India supports the Quad's development as a comprehensive forum for regional security and stability, focusing on climate action and investing in regional energy architectures and a resilient green technology supply chain to counter China's Indo-Pacific expansion. India's strategy within the Quad aims to strengthen ties with countries and regions through non-military means, including climate change mitigation, supply chain strengthening, and infrastructure support. This multi-dimensional approach covers environmental, economic, and security aspects.

⁴⁰⁷PIB. Delhi. "Fact Sheet: 2024 Quad Leaders' Summit". (22 September, 2024). Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2057460>

⁴⁰⁸R Chatterji. "China's relationship with ASEAN: An explainer". Observer Research Foundation.(15 April, 2021). Issue Brief, 459. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/china-relationship-asean-explainer/>

Quad countries are focusing on de-carbonization efforts in shipping and port sectors, with four ambitious ports in Los Angeles, Mumbai Port Trust, Sydney, and Yokohama. They plan to exchange knowledge and best practices, discuss a shared framework for ‘green shipping corridors’ by 2025-2030, and provide actionable policy recommendations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are promoting clean hydrogen and ammonia supply chains under the expanded ‘Clean Hydrogen and Ammonia Partnership’

Quad countries, both individually and collectively, are delivering programs, initiatives, and measures in the Indo-Pacific that are advancing mitigation and adaptation. These include cooperation on clean energy innovation and deployment under various governmental arrangements and policy dialogues. Examples include the Letter of Intent between India and Australia on New and Renewable Energy Technology, the Japan-Australia Partnership on De-carbonization through Technology, the Australia-Japan Memorandum of Cooperation on Carbon Recycling, the India-Japan Clean Energy Partnership, the Japan-United States Clean Energy and Energy Security Initiative, and the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan and The Department of Energy of The United States of America.

They are working on various projects, including establishing a clean fuel ammonia supply chain, carbon recycling, hydrogen energy supply chain pilot projects, and hydrogen technology dissemination in India. Australia’s Indo-Pacific Carbon Offset Scheme committed \$104 million in 2021 to boost climate action investment. Japan’s Joint Crediting Mechanism evaluates its contributions to GHG emission reductions and removals, contributing to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. In conclusion, the Quad’s engagement with climate change is an example of how regional security dialogue frameworks can expand beyond traditional defence concerns to address global challenges like climate change. By leveraging their collective capabilities and shared values, the Quad countries are working to promote a sustainable, climate-resilient future for the Indo-Pacific region while contributing to broader global efforts to combat climate change.

iii. Cyber-Space Security

Quad countries are enhancing their cyber security partnership to address common threats from state-sponsored actors, cybercriminals, and non-state malicious actors. They plan to increase collective network defence and advance technical capabilities through greater threat information sharing and capacity building. They will coordinate joint efforts to identify vulnerabilities, protect national security networks, and coordinate policy responses to significant cyber security incidents. Quad countries are also partnering with software manufacturers, industry trade groups, and research centres to pursue secure software development standards and certification, as endorsed in the Quad's 2023 Secure Software Joint Principles. This will ensure the development, procurement, and end-use of software for government networks are more secure and improve the cyber resilience of supply chains, digital economies, and societies.

They are also engaging on the Quad Action Plan to Protect Commercial Undersea Telecommunications Cables advancing their shared vision for future digital connectivity, global commerce, and prosperity. The Indo-Pacific region is leveraging space-related applications and technologies to enhance climate early warning systems and manage extreme weather impacts. Four countries plan to continue providing Earth Observation data and other space-related applications. India's establishment of a space-based web portal for Mauritius supports open science for monitoring extreme weather events and climate impact.

The Quad nations are working together to address increasing cyber threats, focusing on securing critical infrastructure, countering cyber-attacks, and advancing digital technologies. The Indo-Pacific cyber resilience initiative focuses on infrastructure protection, supply chain security, and incident response coordination, utilizing joint threat assessments to identify cyber risks from China, North Korea, and cybercriminal networks. The initiative promotes secure 5G and 6G networks, reduces Chinese tech reliance on Huawei, enhances AI, quantum computing, and semiconductor security collaboration, and develops trusted digital infrastructure supply chains.

iv. Strategic role

The Quad member's long-term partnership focuses on strategic cooperation and regional security, ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea, and focusing on maritime security, defence cooperation, and countering coercion in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad has consistently endorsed the centrality and unity of ASEAN. The platform facilitates military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises aimed at preserving maritime security and upholding the rule of law.

The Quad's focus has been on maritime security. China's persistent threats to Taiwan and the SCS prompt urgent maritime security measures, such as freedom of navigation, to legitimize the Quad against aggression and strengthen its regional influence. The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and the Quad Partnership for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) was launched in 2022 to provide real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain awareness information to partners in the region. The program has been successfully scaled across the region, helping over two dozen countries access dark vessel maritime domain awareness data. The leaders expressed concern over China's maritime actions and aimed for a stable international system, supporting human rights, freedom, rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful dispute settlement, and prohibition on force. They emphasized monitoring waters, enhancing maritime capabilities, and promoting joint training and collaborative initiatives to secure sea routes and promote a free Indo-Pacific. Australia is committed to enhancing regional maritime domain awareness through satellite data, training, and capacity building.

A Quad maritime legal dialogue is also being launched to support efforts to uphold rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. Coast Guard, Japan Coast Guard, Australian Border Force, and Indian Coast Guard plan to launch a first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025 to improve interoperability and advance maritime safety. The 2024 Quad summit announced several significant initiatives, including the scaling up of the IPMDA, the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer

Mission, and the launch of a Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network to enhance air-lift capacities during natural disasters, and the collaboration between PIFFA and IFC-IOR.

The Malabar exercise series, initially a tentative opening of maritime contacts between India and the US off the Malabar Coast, has evolved into a strategic convergence between India and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. Driven by PACOM, it aims to maintain a favourable balance of power in the larger Pacific region. The exercise shifts from the Malabar Coast to the Bay of Bengal and varies between Japan, Singapore, Australia, and other South China Sea littorals. Although India's relations with China improved, the growth of these relations is seen as a strategic factor in the region's balance of power. The Quad countries have expanded military cooperation through joint naval exercises, such as the annual Malabar joint naval exercises. These exercises initially bilateral between the United States and India have also included Japan and Australia. United States Defence officials believe these exercises can strengthen trust and interoperability among the four militaries, as they operate compatible anti-submarine warfare systems. Quad countries are enhancing their integrated capabilities through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral exercises, such as the India-Australia biennial AUSINDEX naval exercise, Japan-India JIMEX exercise, and the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) maritime exercise. In 2023, Japan and India held their first-ever joint fighter air drills. Australia and Japan, as U.S. treaty allies, regularly hold large-scale exercises with the U.S. military.

Figure 5.1: Glimpse of Malabar Naval Exercise 2020



Source: India Defence Network

The Quad and Malabar Exercise is a multilateral war-gaming exercise aimed at enhancing security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The exercise, which includes Japan and Australia, was expanded in 2007. The Regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) was launched to maximize tools provided through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA). Other military exercises include La Perouse, SALVEX, Sea Dragon, Ex Veer Guardian, and Exercise Kakadu, hosted by the Australian Navy.⁴⁰⁹

The Malabar Exercise demonstrates the growing unity among Quad countries in promoting a favourable maritime security environment in the Indo-Pacific. The Malabar Exercise, held annually since 2020, demonstrates the growing synergy among Quad countries due to the geopolitical changes. China's maritime overtures in the Indo-Pacific have made the region vulnerable, prompting the emergence of various configurations like the AUKUS, Squad, and Quad. However, the Quad has remained cautious in positioning itself as an 'anti-China club', attracting criticism for

⁴⁰⁹Drishti IAS. "Malabar Exercise 2024". (24 October, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/malabar-exercise-2024#:~:text=Recently%2C%20the%20sea%20Phase%20of,surface%2C%20and%20air%20warfare%20exercises.>

being short on strategic assertiveness. The Quad is focusing on shared opportunities in the Indo-Pacific, while strengthening cooperation and interoperability among member-state navies through the Malabar Exercise, which takes place annually in various geographies across the Indo-Pacific, highlighting the need to expand their synergy.⁴¹⁰ It aims to deter China's growing belligerence in the Indo-Pacific region, addressing geopolitical and maritime security issues. The exercise has improved cooperation among Quad countries in maritime security efforts, indicating growing synergy while maintaining the group's positive agenda.

The Quad partners are focusing on anti-submarine warfare and undersea domain awareness due to concerns over the Chinese Navy's rapid expansion and increasing forays into the Indian Ocean Region. Units participated in advanced exercises in surface, sub-surface, and air warfare domains, including surface weapon firings, anti-air shoots, air defence, anti-submarine warfare, ship-borne helicopter operations, and seamanship evolutions. The sea phase concluded with a closing ceremony reviewing operational aspects. Australia, Japan, and the United States participated in a naval exercise involving Special Forces from all four nations. Australia's HMAS Stuart, Japan's JS Ariake, and the U.S. Navy's USS Dewey were deployed, each with their own helicopters and P8 MPA.⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰SayantanHaldar. "Malabar Exercise: Strengthening synergy among Quad nations". Observer Research Foundation. (23 October, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/index.php/search?q=malabar%20exercise%202024>

⁴¹¹DinakarPeri. "Quad partners take part in back-to-back naval war games". The Hindu. (20 October, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/quad-partners-take-part-in-back-to-back-naval-war-games/article68775941.ece#:~:text=The%20Quad%20group%20of%20countries,their%20anti%20submarine%20warfare%20skills>.

Figure 5.2: US Navy carrier strike group, led by USS Nimitz and Indian Navy conducted PASSEX the maritime drills in mid-July 2020 close to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.



Source: Indian Military Review

US Pacific Command (PACOM) is participating in exercises in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific area, close to Japan and the South China Sea. China is closely monitoring these exercises, hoping it is not directed at any third party. Indian Navy reports show a surge in Chinese ships and submarines for Indian Ocean deployments. The United States is investing in regional security by enhancing force posture and expanding multinational military operations in the Indo-Pacific region. This includes announcing four new Enhanced Defense Cooperation sites in the Philippines to address natural and humanitarian disasters, and collaborating with allies on exercises like the first U.S.-EU joint naval exercise off Oman, Rim of the Pacific Cobra Gold, Super Garuda Shield, and MALABAR. The United States has invested \$393 million in foreign military financing and over \$34 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET) in the Indo-Pacific region. This has bolstered maritime security, maritime domain awareness, military professionalization, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief capabilities, and training and equipment needs. The US has also supported Sri Lanka in completing smuggling

busts and maritime exercises. The Pacific Security Maritime Exchange (PSMX) expanded in 2023 to track and deter UN sanctions evasion activities supporting the DPRK regimes unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs. It now includes the United States, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, and the United Kingdom.⁴¹²

The U.S. provides military equipment to its regional allies, including fighter jets, missile defense systems, and surveillance technology. It has also provided advanced F-35 fighter jets to Japan and South Korea, and significant arms packages to Taiwan for self-defense. Additionally, the U.S. shares advanced military technology and intelligence with key partners, helping counter potential security threats, especially those related to China's military advancements.⁴¹³ The US has approved a \$385 million deal to sell spare parts for fighter jets, radar systems, and communications equipment to Taiwan. The deal, valued at \$320 million, is part of existing US military stocks and is expected to begin deliveries in 2025, despite the lack of official diplomatic relations between the two countries. Taiwan is enhancing its defenses amid China's military pressure and 'grey zone harassment' using tactics that don't resemble war, as China has increased its military presence with daily deployments of fighter jets and warships.⁴¹⁴

The U.S. Army faces a formidable adversary in the Indo-Pacific, China, who has a home field advantage due to its proximity to potential conflict zones, protected interior supply lines, and numerical superiority in equipment and munitions in the theatre. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty limited the US's ability to build ground-based missiles with a range of 300-3,000 miles until 2019. China, not a party to this treaty, has been building missile capabilities for decades. In

⁴¹²US.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”. (9 February, 2024). Retrieved from <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/>

⁴¹³ Andrew Thornebrooke. “US Approves \$428 Million in Arms Sales to Taiwan”.The Epoch Times. (12, September, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.theepochtimes.com/china/us-approves-428-million-in-arms-sales-to-taiwan-4909186>

⁴¹⁴“U.S. approves \$385 million arms sales to Taiwan”.The Hindu. (30 November, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-approves-385-million-arms-sales-to-taiwan/article68932147.ece>

its latest national security white paper, China emphasizes strengthening its intermediate and long-range precision strike forces to build a modernized rocket force.⁴¹⁵ China now has missiles capable of reaching targets as far as Guam, along with various missiles for both conventional and nuclear missions.⁴¹⁶

Since the INF Treaty ended in 2019, the U.S. Army has been allowed to develop and deploy ground-based intermediate-range missiles, which could make it difficult for China to operate in contested straits, including the waters between the Philippines and Taiwan. The US Army is developing new weapons and systems to replace the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). The Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) is a next-generation surface-to-surface missile with a range of up to 310 miles. Launched from the mobile HIMARS launch system, the PrSM⁴¹⁷ is capable of carrying two missiles. The Strategic Mid-Range Fires System, also known as the ‘Typhon’ missile system, is mobile and difficult for enemy forces to target. The Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) is the US military’s first long-range hypersonic missile with a range of at least 1,700 miles.⁴¹⁸

The Army is focusing on enhancing allied and partner capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region to deter China from launching a war of aggression. The stronger the country, the more constrained China is in its ability to solve political issues by force. This campaigning strategy demonstrates joint technical, procedural, and human level operations. The Army opened its first regional training complex in 50 years, the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Centre (JPMRC), to train U.S. and allied forces in a Pacific environment. The centre has two permanent campuses in

⁴¹⁵Li Jiayao. “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Chinese Ministry of National Defense.(24 July 24, 2019) Retrieved from <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/Publications/WhitePapers/4846452.html>

⁴¹⁶VeerleNouwens (et.al). “Long-Range Strike Capabilities in the Asia-Pacific: Implications for Regional Stability”. International Institute for Strategic Studies.(January 2024). Retrieved from https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/research-papers/2024/01/iiss_long-range-strike-capabilities-in-the-asia-pacific_implications-for-regional-stability_012024.pdf

⁴¹⁷Lockheed Martin Corporation. “Precision Strike Missile (PrSM), United States of America”. Retrieved from <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/precision-strike-missile.html>

⁴¹⁸ Andrew Feickert. “The Army’s Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)”. Congressional Research Service In Focus. (26 December, 2023) Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11797>

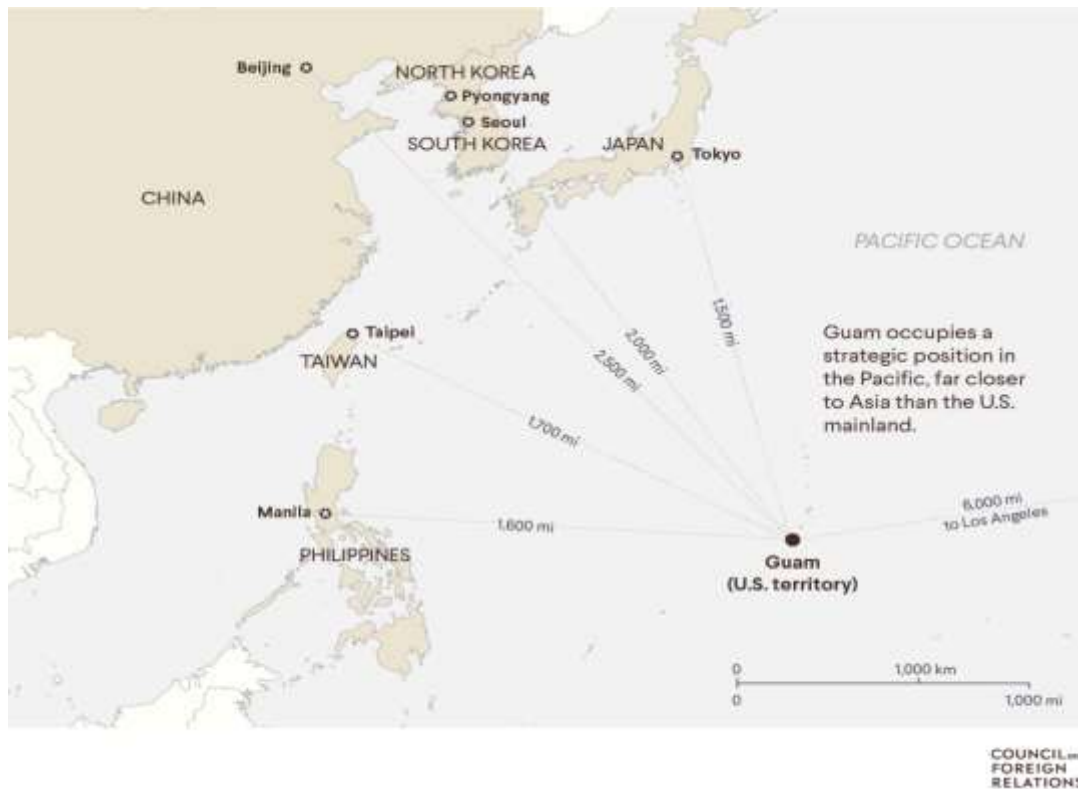
Hawaii and Alaska and a mobile campus that cycle between allied countries for joint training purposes.

Other initiatives taken by the U.S such as Guam, the westernmost U.S. territory in the Indo-Pacific, host a growing American military presence due to its proximity to Beijing. This presence has sparked debates about Washington's influence on Guam's economy, government, and environment.⁴¹⁹ Guam, strategically located near China, Japan, the Philippines, and North Korea, is a key element of the United States military power in the tumultuous Indo-Pacific region. Guam's importance in U.S.-China relations is heightened due to rising tensions and concerns over Beijing's South China Sea aggression and potential Taiwan attack. The Department of Defence has announced a five-year, \$7.3 billion military construction plan for Guam, with an additional \$1.7 billion for an integrated missile defence system. The 2022 National Defence Strategy emphasizes Guam's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹Clara Fong and Diana Roy. "Guam's Strategic Importance in the Indo-Pacific". Council on Foreign Relations. 6 September, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/guams-strategic-importance-indo-pacific>

⁴²⁰*Ibid.*, Fong.

Figure 5.3: Guam at a Glance



Source: Council on Foreign Relations

India's Defence Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh, emphasized the country's commitment to a rule-based international order, respect for international law, and adherence to UN Convention on the Law of the Sea principles as cornerstones of foreign policy. He also emphasized India's commitment to ensuring maritime safety and security through joint exercises and information-sharing initiatives. The Indian Armed Forces, particularly the Navy, have been actively involved in regional maritime cooperation, continuously enhancing their capabilities. The Indian Navy's interests are not in conflict with any other country, and the interests of any other nation should not conflict with India.⁴²¹ India is employing a comprehensive strategy to counter China's String of Pearls, including building ports, implementing Coastal

⁴²¹PIB. Delhi. "India's vision for Indo-Pacific is based on fostering partnerships through sustainable development, economic growth, & mutual security: RakshaMantri at Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2024". Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2062068#:~:text=India's%20vision%20for%20Indo%20DPacific,Indo%20DPacific%20Regional%20Dialogue%202024>

Surveillance Radar systems, importing surveillance planes, operating airports in neighbouring countries, strengthening defence ties, expanding bilateral relations with South Asian countries, and conducting regular military exercises with US, Japan, and Australia navies.

India delivered the first batch of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines, marking the first export customer for the joint venture missile between India and Russia.⁴²² The delivery will significantly enhance the Philippines armed forces defensive posture once operationalized. India's increased engagement with Southeast Asian states is partly due to growing competition between the two nations. The 2020 border clashes widened trust deficits and increased geopolitical polarization in South and Southeast Asia. India is concerned that China-dominated Southeast Asia could pose a greater challenge, leading to a wary response to Beijing's growing regional presence and influence, including its activities in the South China Sea. As a result, India is less willing to cater to China's sensitivities in engaging its neighbours.⁴²³ India is increasing arms exports in Southeast Asia, focusing on the Philippines, and increasing defence engagement with ASEAN, sending a defence attaché to its embassy in the Philippines.⁴²⁴ India's defence policy has increased engagement with ASEAN since 2020, with the first ASEAN-India Defence Ministers Informal Meeting in Cambodia in November 2022. India and ASEAN held their inaugural maritime exercise in the South China Sea in May 2023, marking India's fourth joint exercise with ASEAN.

Since 2020, India has held bilateral naval exercises with Thailand, Philippine navies, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam to strengthen its presence in Southeast Asia. It also held a bilateral exercise with the Myanmar Navy, its first since 2019, but it was not announced due to concerns over Myanmar's on-going

⁴²²DinakarPeri. "India delivers first batch of BrahMos to Philippines".The Hindu. (20 April, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-delivers-first-batch-of-brahmos-to-philippines/article68084161.ece>

⁴²³VirajSolanki. "India's increased defence and security engagement with Southeast Asia".The International Institute for Strategic Studies. (1 May, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/04/indias-increased-defence-and-security-engagement-with-southeast-asia/>

⁴²⁴*Ibid.*,Solanki

conflict. India has also increased its sensitive defence engagements, such as submarine visits, with the first Indian submarine visiting Indonesia in February 2023. The Indian Navy established a trilateral exercise with Australia and Indonesia in the same year. India's army and air force have participated in a few bilateral exercises since 2020, but there is potential for increased engagement between India and Southeast Asian states. To make its presence known in Southeast Asia, India plans to hold regular defence ministerial meetings with ASEAN and increase the number of bilateral exercises with regional countries. This could enhance trust, increase regional influence, and enable more ambitious cooperation on defence and security issues.⁴²⁵

India's defence cooperation with Southeast Asia is not new, with some countries having more advanced ties. In 2023, India and Singapore held joint battle exercises in the South China Sea. India has become more vocal about freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, where China is involved in territorial disputes with the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Defence has become a key area of cooperation with Vietnam.⁴²⁶ India is enhancing regional military and security ties with China's neighbours following June 2020 border hostilities to counter Beijing's influence.

India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands are undergoing a military infrastructure upgrade, aiming to transform them into a maritime stronghold and facilitate military forces deployment, as part of China's efforts to expand its influence in the region.⁴²⁷ The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) are strategically located at the Strait of Malacca, connecting one of the world's most crucial trade chokepoints. This allows India to monitor traffic flow from the South China Sea to the Andaman Sea. The ANI also commands a position over one of the world's most frequented sea lanes.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, Solanki

⁴²⁶ Nirmala Ganapathy. "India seeks to push pace of defence cooperation with South-east Asia". The Strait Times. (6 February, 2025). Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-seeks-to-push-pace-of-defence-cooperation-with-south-east-asia>

⁴²⁷ Arun Prakash. "Why the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are key to Indo-Pacific Security". The Indian Express. (9 April, 2024). Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/andaman-nicobar-islands-indo-pacific-security-9264661/>

India's strategic position allows it to manage the movement of goods from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Strait of Malacca. India's 'SAGARMALA' initiative and 'Act East Policy' can counterbalance China's growing influence in littoral states through the 'string of pearls' strategy. So, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands situated at the intersection of the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and Pacific Ocean, is a crucial strategic fulcrum in the Indo-Pacific region.

India's approach towards the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) has evolved over the years due to geopolitical, economic, and strategic factors. The Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) was created in 2014, including 14 island countries. India is a committed development partner for PICs and aims to establish itself as a "Vishwamitra" and representative of the Global South. The role of FIPIC as a multilateral platform is significant, as China's strategic manoeuvres and growing ambitions in the South China Sea have led to renewed focus on the region.⁴²⁸ India's "Act East Policy" through FIPIC has primarily focused on the Pacific Islands, highlighting their pivotal role in global geopolitical scenarios. These nations, strategically located in the Pacific Ocean, have large Economic Zones (EEZs) and valuable natural resources, serving as critical transit points for international trade and having nine of the world's ten busiest seaports.⁴²⁹

Japan is actively promoting international security and defence cooperation, launching a new program to provide security aid to developing countries. Japan has launched a new military grant aid program for developing Indo-Pacific nations, initially limited to a few nations. The program, initially small, is expected to increase annually due to Japan's commitment to increasing its defence budget over the next five years, with a small part supporting OSA. This move marks a new direction in Japan's policy against foreign military aid.⁴³⁰ Japan has also been building closer security ties with Australia and India, establishing a Reciprocal Access Agreement

⁴²⁸Raisina House. "The India-Pacific Connection: Exploring FIPIC's Potential". (29 April, 2024). Retrieved from <https://raisinahouse.org/publications/f/the-india-pacific-connection-exploring-fipics-potential>

⁴²⁹*Ibid.*, Raisina House

⁴³⁰Purnendra Jain. "Japan's new security assistance to the Indo-Pacific region". Observer Research Foundation. (8 January, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/japan-s-new-security-assistance-to-the-indo-pacific-region>

and an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement. Bilateral exercises with these countries have grown in number and sophistication. In late 2022, Japan released updated security documents that could transform its approach to security and enhance its deterrent capabilities. Japan is also deepening its defence relationships with other like-minded countries in the region, particularly those in the Quad.⁴³¹ Japan has adopted a new policy direction due to the evolving global strategic environment and shifting military balance in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad supports a free and open region, and Australia is updating its national security posture due to concerns over China's increasing power. The Australian government is focusing on the AUKUS agreement, which will provide access to nuclear propulsion technology and other military capabilities. AUKUS aims to enhance government support for security and defence interests through deeper information and technology sharing, fostering the integration of security-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains.⁴³²

Australia is concerned about China's recent security pact with the Solomon Islands, which may lead to a PRC military presence in the South Pacific. To address this, Australia has passed foreign interference legislation, expanded diplomatic ties, and increased its defence budget. Additionally, Australia and Japan have solidified security and economic ties through bilateral agreements. Australia-Japan-United States trilateral partnership is committed to policy co-ordination and consultation on regional security issues and contingencies. The 'Trilateral Defence Consultations' aim to align the policy and operational objectives of Japan Self-Defence Forces, Australian Defence Force, and United States forces from peacetime to contingency.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Emma Chanlett-Avery (et.al). "The Quad: Cooperation among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia". Congressional Research Service. (30 January, 2023). Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11678>

⁴³² U.S. Department of Defense. "AUKUS: The Trilateral Security Partnership Between Australia, U.K. and U.S. (13 March, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/AUKUS/>

⁴³³ U.S. Department of Defense. "Australia-Japan-United States Trilateral Defense Ministers Meeting". (16 November, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3967118/australia-japan-united-states-trilateral-defense-ministers-meeting-november-202/>

India and Japan have signed a key agreement for reciprocal provision of supplies and services between their defence forces, aiming to drive closer military cooperation and contribute to Indo-Pacific security. Japan plans to permit exports of lethal military equipment to India and 11 other nations, potentially enhancing cooperation between New Delhi and Tokyo in defence manufacturing. Japan signed the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with India in September 2020, aiming to enhance military cooperation and security in the Indo-Pacific region. The Japanese government plans to enhance deterrence against China by collaborating with countries with individual security agreements with Tokyo, including Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, the US, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy. India and Japan are fostering robust security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, primarily due to shared concerns about China's aggressive stance in the region.⁴³⁴

The Quad, a group of Pacific Island countries, has been working to align with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, a long-term roadmap for addressing regional issues. Australia, a PIF member, has been the most engaged in the region, maintaining a comprehensive diplomatic footprint and being the single largest aid donor. India, a relatively new player, has increased its engagement in the Pacific Islands due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to enhance its global footprint. Japan, the region's second-largest provider of overseas development assistance, has been a leading voice for increasing regional cooperation through mechanisms like the Quad. The US, with its regional ties, has increased development aid and opened new embassies, but questions remain about its long-term reliability and staying power.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴Hindustan Times. "Japan to allow lethal defence equipment exports to India, 11 countries: Report". (27, May, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/japan-move-to-allow-exports-of-defence-equipment-to-benefit-india-101653658179105.html>

⁴³⁵Parker Novak and Kyoko Imai. "Bolstering cooperation among Quad and Pacific Island countries".Atlantic Council. (29 March, 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/bolstering-cooperation-among-quad-and-pacific-island-countries/>

Australia, India, Japan, and the United States have increased their engagement with the Pacific Islands. The Quad in the Pacific Islands is aligning with the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy, a long-term plan to address regional issues agreed upon by PIF members in 2022. This commitment to supporting the strategy is seen as a sign of respect for regional institutions. Australia, a PIF member, has a significant diplomatic presence in all sixteen Pacific Island countries and is the largest aid donor, despite tensions in its long-standing bilateral relationship. India, a relatively new player in the Pacific Islands region, has increased its engagement with Fiji due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to enhance its global footprint, including a strategic action plan to expand cooperation with Pacific Island countries during his 2023 visit to Papua New Guinea. Japan, the second-largest provider of overseas development assistance in the Indo-Pacific region, initiated the Japan-Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) mechanism in 1997. It is known for its focus on infrastructure and fisheries. Japan has been a leading voice for regional cooperation through mechanisms like the Quad. The United States, with deep regional roots, scaled back its regional presence in the early 1990s and only returned to previous levels in the late 2010s due to geopolitical competition.⁴³⁶

As the Quad expands its engagement with Pacific Island countries, it is crucial to consider how regional actors define and view key international challenges, especially when their definitions and views may differ from those espoused by Quad members. Climate change is central to their definition of security, and the desire to maintain peace, stability, and positive relations with external parties is exemplified by Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's Zone of Peace concept. The development and economic challenges faced by Pacific Island countries are exacerbated by their vast maritime nature and climate change. The Quad is confident in its future and is firmly established in the Pacific Islands.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, Novak and Imai

5.6. Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region is a battleground for global powers, with major powers engaging in counter and anti-counter strategies to build new security frameworks. Quad's mission is to ensure the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region, which is crucial for global security and economic stability. The group's resurgence is driven by China's increasing assertiveness in the region, particularly in maritime disputes and economic influence. Quad's actions aim to counterbalance Beijing's influence and maintain a rules-based order in the region. China is asserting its national security through territorial expenses and debt trap policies, while other major powers, including India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and ASEAN, use alliance strategies.

The Quad, has transformed from a reactive ad hoc group to a significant diplomatic initiative, expanding its activities and strategic alignment and playing a key role in regional diplomacy to promote security and prosperity. The Quad, expanding cooperation, aims to promote strategic balance and sustainably respond to regional demands. Challenges include democracy, defence, trade, and nuclear stability. China's expansion in the Indian and Pacific oceans poses significant threats. The Quad's mission focuses on stability, sustainability, resilience, and growth to mitigate conflict. The Quad, characterized by informality and institutional flexibility, is expected to remain flexible in responding to regional challenges. However, its ambiguity may not be enough to address aggressive actions by China. If China's actions become more aggressive, a formal alliance arrangement could emerge. Consolidating this alignment depends on countries willingness to tolerate and support each other's unshared interests, such as India and Japan's territorial disputes with China.

CHAPTER VI

Findings and Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region, encompassing ancient empires, trade networks, and diverse cultures, is a hub for geopolitical contestation, cooperation, and international relations growth in the 21st century. American perceptions shape Asia's security, with the term 'Indo-Pacific' increasingly used to describe growing geopolitical turbulence in Asia and its waters. The region has become a crucial financial and economic apparatus in a globalized and cyber-related world. It encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Taiwan Straits, and Pacific expanse. The Indo-Pacific commons include two triangles of nations with critical interests in security, stability, transit, and trade, with Southeast Asia's inner triangle enclosing the South China Sea and India, Japan, and Australia focusing on the region's stability.

The research questions i.e. the conceptual proportions of the study and findings are as follows:

I. Strategic and Economic Significance of Indo-Pacific

1. Strategic significance

a. The analytical study on the Indo-Pacific as a geo-strategic space proved that the region has become a more complex, congested, and multipolar space. The Indo-Pacific region's diverse and large size renders overarching security architecture unlikely and unworkable. The strategic changes in the Indo-Pacific are driven by factors such as the decline of the United States power, the rise of Chinese power, and the emergence of India as a major regional power.

b. Middle and small states in Asia have played crucial roles in the security world, with ASEAN serving as a balancer for peace and stability through cooperation in various fields, promoting regional peace and stability through respect for justice, rule of law, and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. The US is embracing the Indo-Pacific concept and implementing initiatives to highlight its

priorities in this vast geographic space. However, the existing coordination framework faced challenges, and the US must consider the existing platforms, issues, and future plans for this work in progress. The USA is considering including only democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific project to prevent China's participation, as the process opens up new opportunities and creates new threats.

c. The study indicates that securing maritime connectivity has become a crucial aspect of major powers foreign policy, with sea routes becoming a central point. The Indian Ocean and South China Sea have become interconnected due to the passing of one-third of containers through this region. It also underlines the significance of sea power strategy. As a result of this, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia have enhanced their presence in the Indo-Pacific region and expanded their ties with ASEAN member states. The Indo-Pacific's emerging geopolitics are undergoing a shift towards rebalancing security, promoting economic cooperation, militarization, functional cooperation, and reinventing security.

d. It is unclear what these opportunities or threats will be. India's inclusion in the Asia Pacific post-Cold War era has been limited due to its lack of membership in APEC. Despite joining the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996 and the EAS in 2005, its role in regional security remains limited. However, the Indo-Pacific concept presents a strategic opportunity for India to counter China's increasing influence.

2. Economic Significance

a. The Indo-Pacific concept aims to establish a shared identity for alliance formation, playing a crucial role in shaping the economic and security architecture of the region. The region's geopolitical activities are gaining prominence due to exponential economic development from India, China, and Japan, prompting major power blocs to shift their focus.

b. The focus has been on trade and economic cooperation between the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, with major powers aiming for a diverse, multipolar space. The Indo-Pacific's roots are economic, but its consequences are security, with Pacific powers equities in Indian Ocean and Pacific security.

c. The study has shown that India's Act East Policy and strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region have strengthened relations with ASEAN, contributing to regional stability. However, challenges like geopolitical competition, infrastructure gaps, and economic rivalry persist. To strengthen relations, India must maintain a balanced approach, leverage strategic partnerships, enhance regional connectivity, and promote collaborative solutions.

d. India's Act East Policy has made significant progress, but implementation challenges persist, necessitating further work to enhance economic and security ties with East Asian nations. 'Act East Policy' is a work in progress, requiring strategic partnerships with ASEAN and China, addressing connectivity issues, and navigating relationships. India's long-term goals in Southeast Asia require continued engagement, strategic cooperation, and patience, as China's economic ties limit its ability to consolidate influence in smaller countries. Notwithstanding India's progress in economic, strategic, and cultural engagement with East Asia, faces challenges such as China's dominance, geopolitical complexities, and regional instability. Despite these obstacles, India's diplomatic and security presence in the region has improved.

II. Dynamics of India's relation with Indo-Pacific countries

1. Cold War era

a. India has implemented a responsible foreign policy, promoting de-colonization, advocating for developing nations, and fostering international peace and regional stability. It prioritized non-alignment and maintaining independence during the Cold War era.

b. The study reveals India's long-standing cultural, economic, and strategic ties with Indo-Pacific countries, a region crucial in both historical and modern geopolitics, particularly for India, China, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN nations. India's post-independence foreign policy was largely influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru, who advocated for non-alignment and distance from Western and Soviet blocs.

c. India also aimed to establish ties with Southeast Asian and Oceania nations through the Non-Aligned Movement, promoting economic cooperation and mutual development. India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean have been significantly bolstered by its participation in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and its cooperation with countries like Australia and Sri Lanka on maritime security and counter-piracy.

2. Post-Cold War Era

a. The 1991 economic crisis, triggered by the collapse of the USSR and the Gulf War, necessitated India to re-evaluate its foreign and domestic policies. India's desire for foreign investments and oil security led to increased international engagement with Asian and African countries, prompting a reconsideration of ideology in foreign policy.

b. India has strengthened its Indo-Pacific relationships through initiatives like the Act East Policy and the Indo-Pacific Oceans initiatives. China's rise in the Indian Ocean presents opportunities but also poses threats to India's strategic interests, as its military strength lies in the Northern and Eastern Indian Ocean but its Western presence is limited. Strengthening logistical support facilities in the Gulf and Western Indian Ocean is crucial for effective mission based employment.

c. The region's geo-strategic value is heightened by extra regional powers, including nuclear-capable ones, supporting national interests, with China's rise and assertive behaviour impacting the region's security. The Indian Ocean Island states are gaining strategic importance due to geopolitical rivalries, generating opportunities and pressures. India, a major naval power, impacts these states for security and assistance. They balance India's presence with China, reshaping India's engagement with these states.

d. India's strategic alliances with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar enable naval presence along key communication lines, securing Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) during peacetime and excluding adversary communications during conflict. However, its maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean

lacks strategic competition, with island nations like the Maldives and Sri Lanka potentially challenging its foreign policy choices due to their sovereignty.

e. The Indo-Pacific region's need for multilateral institutions is driven by economic liberalism, interdependence, and security multilateralism. This has fuelled APEC and encouraged security multilateralism, aiming to reduce war risks and prevent regional disorder. Economic concerns include the world trading system and trade blocs. Multilateralism is seen as a necessary framework to engage China and integrate it into the regional order, but it increases costs and makes resisting rules more difficult.

f. The increasing focus on island nations has led to a significant need for multilateral cooperation to counter China's assertiveness. China's investments in the Indo-Pacific region are destabilizing the region's security and economy, making formalized security architecture unsuitable due to geographic, political, economic, cultural, and historical divergence. Excluding minor countries from security architecture is unsustainable.

III. Triangular inter-relations between India, ASEAN, and Far-East

The study has shown that India's Act East Policy and strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region have strengthened relations with ASEAN. At the same time the United States, Japan and Australia are integrating their Indo-Pacific approaches with ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, prioritizing inclusivity, connectivity, and sovereignty respectively, thereby, representing a triangular relationship between India, ASEAN and the Far East as well as the United States. Subsequently, India-ASEAN-Japan-Australia and the United States partnership foster economic growth, security and global challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing its resilience and shared vision for a rules-based order. The triangular inter-relations can be highlighted into 4 parameters-

1. India-ASEAN Trade Relations

a. Trade Relations: India's trade relations with ASEAN have seen significant growth over the years, with ASEAN exports to India increasing significantly from \$8.2 billion in 2003 to nearly \$70.3 billion in 2022. This growth reflects India's increasing reliance on ASEAN goods and services. In contrast, imports from India to ASEAN have also grown, from about \$4.4 billion in 2003 to approximately \$42.3 billion in 2022. ASEAN benefits more from the trading agreement due to structural imbalances, resulting in a 11.14% trade surplus, despite India's high dependence on ASEAN goods and slower export growth.

The signing of the Free Trade Agreement between India and ASEAN in 2009 significantly stimulated trade growth, with both exports and imports benefiting. ASEAN exports to India increased by 10.55%, while imports from India rose by 18.12%, indicating strengthened bilateral ties.

b. Strategic Relations: ASEAN provides India a strategic platform for engaging with Southeast Asian nations through mechanisms like ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus. It maintains centrality in Asia's provincial establishments, serving as the primary local gathering and initiating regional discussions on provincial participation.

2. India-ASEAN-Japan

a. Bilateral Relations: The trade data between India and Japan from 2003 to 2022 shows significant differences in their trade relationship. Prior to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), trade increased steadily, but Japan still benefited from the trade gap. The trade deficit between the two countries increased from USD 623 million to USD 3.46 billion, reflecting India's increasing demand for high-tech items and machinery.

Post-CEPA, India's exports to Japan increased from USD 4.80 billion in 2010 to USD 5.70 billion in 2022, while India's imports from Japan grew from USD 8.27 billion in 2010 to USD 15.75 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 10.57%, indicating Japan's continued importance as a supplier of advanced machinery, technology, and automobiles.

b. Trilateral Relations: India and Japan strongly support ASEAN centrality, recognizing its importance in the Indo-Pacific region. They have made significant progress in fostering cooperation and emphasizing its centrality. ASEAN centrality ensures the ASEAN bloc remains at the centre of Asia's provincial establishments, secured through mechanisms like the ASEAN plus Three. The study advocates that ASEAN's centrality has promoted regional inclusivity and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, fostering closer collaboration between India, ASEAN member countries, and Japan in maritime security, counter terrorism, and disaster management. India and Japan have strengthened their defence cooperation with ASEAN, focusing on maritime security, freedom of navigation, and international law, fostering a more secure environment and managing potential conflicts.

ASEAN's influence on Japan's partnership led to the rebranding of the region as the 'Indo-Pacific', integrating Japan, and India. Japan and India collaborate on infrastructure development, security, and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific region, aligning with ASEAN's 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' for freedom of navigation and international law respect. ASEAN relies heavily on India and Japan, two key Asian economic and security powers, to strengthen its importance. They have responded to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by promoting connectivity through initiatives like AEP, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, and Japan's EPQI via FOIP.

3. India-ASEAN-Australia

a. Bilateral Relations: The trade relationship between Australia and India has seen impressive growth both in terms of exports and imports. India's exports to Australia increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15.20%, from USD 557.99 million in 2003 to USD 8.21 billion in 2022 while India's imports from Australia increased from USD 2.04 billion in 2003 to USD 19.62 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 12.66%. This clearly indicates that Australia has consistently benefited from the trade balance, which has been growing over time showing Australia's supremacy in the trade relationship.

India and Australia have a robust trade relationship, with India exporting medicines, textiles, and agricultural products, and Australia exporting minerals, particularly coal, and iron ore. India imports agricultural goods from Australia, contributing to food security and dietary diversity. Addressing trade deficits and enhancing collaboration are crucial for both countries economic potential.

b. Trilateral Relations: The India-ASEAN-Australia triangle promotes open regional groups and national interests, with ASEAN providing a multilateral platform for bilateral discussions through initiatives like the ASEAN-India and ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Partnership. India and Australia prioritize the Indo-Pacific region, collaborating on trade, connectivity, and maritime security through ASEAN-India Strategic Partnerships and AOIP frameworks, focusing on regional stability, trade security, and countering coercive actions.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a forum where the bilateral relationship between India and Australia is significantly enhancing. India and Australia have successfully facilitated cooperation through the ARF multilateral mechanism, fostering a spirit of cooperation at the bilateral level. The ARF provides a platform for constructive dialogue on political and security cooperation, enhancing bilateral cooperation. ASEAN holds significant economic and strategic importance for India, as it serves as a platform for India's engagement with Australia.

ASEAN, a key trade and economic partner for Australia, enhances its economic reach through trade agreements like AANZFTA and RCEP, improving market access and supply chain resilience. ASEAN offers Australia alternative trade markets, reducing reliance on China amid geopolitical tensions, with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia emerging as key economic partners. Australia values ASEAN's sovereignty and strategic balance, actively participating in events like the East Asia Summit and supporting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

The India-Australia-ASEAN triangular relationship is primarily influenced by the Indo-Pacific region, with all partners vested in maintaining peace, stability, and openness. Both India and Australia view ASEAN as crucial for peace and security, advocating for a rules-based order and supporting regional stability, maritime security, and economic connectivity.

4. India-ASEAN-United States

a. Bilateral Relations: The assessed value of goods and services between India and the United States was \$191.8 billion. India exports \$78 billion in textiles, pharmaceuticals, gems, and engineering goods to the U.S., while imports \$58 billion include crude oil, LNG, aircraft, machinery, and electronics. India benefited from strong export performance in goods and IT-enabled services, leading to a significant trade surplus with the U.S.

b. Trilateral Relations: India, the US, and ASEAN countries are concerned about maintaining freedom of navigation and over flight rights, while India's growing defence ties with ASEAN countries have been a stabilizing factor. India and the US are committed to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, with ASEAN at the centre, as highlighted in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The United States significantly contributes to Southeast Asia's economic growth through its commercial and trade ties with ASEAN.

The US supports ASEAN centrality, supports the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and has provided over \$14.1 billion in economic, health, and security assistance since 2002 to ASEAN member states. ASEAN is actively fostering economic integration with the global community, serving as a crucial trade and investment partner for the U.S. and India. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and initiatives promoting digital trade and infrastructure development are crucial components of trilateral economic diplomacy.

The US is actively involved in the ASEAN Regional Forum, addressing non-traditional security issues like counterterrorism, disaster response, and weapons proliferation. They advocate for peaceful territorial dispute resolution and support ASEAN countries in ensuring freedom of navigation and rule of law. Despite concerns about China's rise, ASEAN maintains strong economic and diplomatic ties with China. The triangulations prospects are optimistic due to globalization convergence and cooperation networks in maritime land-based trade and security.

IV. Quad and the Indo-Pacific

1. Economic Significance

- a. The study reveals that the Quad countries are investing in resilient infrastructure, focusing on green and digital technologies. They are collaborating on projects to ensure access to clean energy, digital connectivity, supply chain resilience, and advanced technologies. The Quad partners are also participating in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, addressing trade, clean energy, de-carbonization, digital economy, and anti-corruption efforts.
- b. Quad partners, a leading Indo-Pacific infrastructure provider, has provided over \$48 billion in official finance since 2015, supporting thousands of projects across 30 countries, including rural development, health infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, and telecommunications.
- c. It has pledged to aid countries in tackling debt issues, but no further efforts are being made to enhance regional supply chain connectivity beyond these critical technologies. Quad joint statements overlook trade, despite China's economic dependence and India's participation in IPEF, causing speculation on US economic principles and lack of US-India trade arrangement.

2. Political and Strategic Significance

a. The study indicates that the Quad holds both meetings of Head of States and foreign ministers at regular intervals hosted by the member countries. The Quad's political motive is to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific regions with regard to regional security and stability among its members. Its objective is to maintain sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific region.

b. The Quad member's long-term partnership focuses on strategic cooperation and regional security, ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. It supports ASEAN's centrality and unity, facilitating military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises. It is focusing on security cooperation, with joint military exercises strengthening defence ties among member countries. These exercises enhance the Quad force's ability to operate effectively, making them crucial in any regional security scenario.

c. Quad has been actively promoting maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region since 2020, participating in the Malabar Exercise. This demonstrates their growing unity in addressing geopolitical challenges like China's maritime overtures, leading to the emergence of configurations like AUKUS and Squad. The United States has significantly contributed to regional security by enhancing force posture and expanding multinational military operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

d. It is evident that the Quad partners are focusing on anti-submarine warfare and undersea domain awareness due to concerns over the Chinese Navy's expansion. Units participated in advanced exercises in surface, sub-surface, and air warfare domains. Australia, Japan, and the United States also participated in a naval exercise involving Special Forces.

e. The U.S. Army faces China in the Indo-Pacific due to its proximity to conflict zones, protected supply lines, and numerical superiority in equipment and munitions. As a result, the United States is keenly developing new weapons and systems to replace the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS).

The study indicates that global powers are increasingly recognizing the political and economic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in meeting the needs of its states and beyond. The Indo-Pacific region plays a crucial role in global strategic outlook, as countries respond to emerging challenges and existing threats while reviving great power rivalries. The US primarily targets Indo-Pacific sub regions, while India primarily interests the Indian Ocean, including the Western Indian Ocean, and Australia is expanding its focus under the Indo-Pacific rubric, focusing on the Indian Ocean. Japan has a wider focus on the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.

India, Japan, and Australia have developed closer relations due to their shared desire to safeguard their interests in the Indo-Pacific region. India, a mature and the world's largest and most diverse democracy, has gained the reputation of being a peaceful and benevolent power in the Indo-Pacific, as reflected in its active and positive role in regional organizations like the East Asia Summit and the Quad. To conclude, the Indo-Pacific region's geopolitical flashpoint, characterized by rising tensions, territorial disputes, and China's influence, has seen diverse cooperation between India and its partners, involving diverse maritime spaces and diverse interests, which will shape future stability, prosperity, and security.

Appendix-1

India's Engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region: A study of the Emergent Multilateral Cooperation

Interview Questionnaire

This interview schedule is a partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, Mizoram University. The information collected through this interview will be used solely for academic and research purposes.

India and the Indo-Pacific Region

1. How significant is India's role in the Indo-Pacific region?
2. Which areas should India focus on to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific?
3. How do you perceive India's strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific (e.g., Quad with USA, Japan, Australia)?
4. How well do you think India balances its relationships with the US and China in the Indo-Pacific?
5. How important is the Indo-Pacific region to India's trade and economic interests?
6. What should be India's top priority in the Indo-Pacific?

India–ASEAN–Japan Triangular Relations

1. How important is the India–ASEAN–Japan triangle for maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific?
2. In your view, what is the primary strategic role of this triangular cooperation?
3. How effective are the current India–Japan infrastructure projects in ASEAN (e.g., connectivity corridors, smart cities)?
4. Are you familiar with the concept of triangular cooperation between India, Japan and ASEAN?

India-ASEAN- Australia Triangular Relations

1. How important is the India-ASEAN-Australia trilateral for ensuring a free open and inclusive Indo-Pacific?
2. What should be the primary strategic focus of this trilateral partnership?
3. How well do India, ASEAN, and Australia coordinate in regional trade agreements (e.g., RCEP, IPEF)?
4. What are the main obstacles to stronger trilateral cooperation?

India-ASEAN- United States Triangular

1. What do you think is the primary purpose of India–ASEAN–US cooperation?
2. How important is this trilateral relationship in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific?
3. Which areas of economic cooperation are most relevant for the trilateral partnership?
4. Should India, ASEAN, and the US collaborate more on building alternative regional supply chains?

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Indo-Pacific

1. How important is the Quad for ensuring peace and security in the Indo-Pacific?
2. What security areas should the Quad prioritize?
3. Which areas of economic or technological cooperation should be prioritized?
4. How well does the Quad promote multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific?
5. What should be India's top priorities within the Quad framework?
6. How important is India's role in shaping the Quad's agenda?
7. Any recommendations or thoughts on improving the effectiveness of the Quad?

Appendix-2: Agreement on trade in goods between India and ASEAN



**AGREEMENT ON TRADE IN GOODS UNDER THE
FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON COMPREHENSIVE
ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC
OF INDIA AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST
ASIAN NATIONS**

PREAMBLE

The Government of the Republic of India (India) and the Governments of Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia (Cambodia), the Republic of Indonesia (Indonesia), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Malaysia, the Union of Myanmar (Myanmar), the Republic of the Philippines (the Philippines), the Republic of Singapore (Singapore), the Kingdom of Thailand (Thailand) and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (Viet Nam), Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (collectively, "ASEAN" or "ASEAN Member States", or individually, "ASEAN Member State"),

RECALLING the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, signed by the Heads of Government/State of India and the ASEAN Member States in Bali, Indonesia on 8 October 2003 and the Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, signed in [venue] on [date];

RECALLING FURTHER Articles 2 and 4 of the Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations which reflect the commitment of India and ASEAN to establish the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area covering trade in goods by 2013 for Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and India; by 2018 for the Philippines and India; and by 2013 for India and by 2018 for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam;

REITERATING the importance of special and differential treatment to ensure the increasing participation of the new ASEAN Member States in economic integration and cooperation activities between India and ASEAN;

REAFFIRMING the Parties' commitment to establish the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area while allowing flexibility to Parties to address their sensitive areas as provided in the Framework Agreement;

HAVE AGREED as follows:

ARTICLE 1 **Definitions**

For the purposes of this Agreement, the term:

- (a) **AIFTA** means the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area under the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations;
- (b) **applied MFN tariff rates** shall include in-quota rates, and shall:
 - (i) in the case of ASEAN Member States (which are WTO Members as of 1 July 2007) and India, refer to their respective applied rate as of 1 July 2007, except for products identified as Special Products in the Schedules of Tariff Commitments set out in Annex 1; and

- (ii) in the case of ASEAN Member States (which are non-WTO Members as of 1 July 2007), refer to the rates as applied to India as of 1 July 2007, except for products identified as Special Products in the Schedules of Tariff Commitments set out in Annex 1;
- (c) **ASEAN** means the Association of Southeast Asian Nations which comprises Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and whose members are referred to in this Agreement collectively as the ASEAN Member States and individually as an ASEAN Member State;
- (d) **Framework Agreement** means the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, signed in Bali, Indonesia on 8 October 2003, as amended;
- (e) **GATT 1994** means the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 in Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement, including its Notes and Supplementary Provisions;
- (f) **goods** means materials and/or products;
- (g) **originating good** means a good that qualifies as originating under Article 7;
- (h) **new ASEAN Member States** refers to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam;
- (i) **Parties** means India and ASEAN Member States collectively;

- (j) **Party** means India or an ASEAN Member State;
- (k) **WTO** means the World Trade Organization; and
- (l) **WTO Agreement** means the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, done on 15 April 1994.

ARTICLE 2

Scope

This Agreement shall apply to trade in goods and all other matters relating thereto as envisaged in the Framework Agreement.

ARTICLE 3

National Treatment on Internal Taxation and Regulations

Each Party shall accord national treatment to the goods of the other Parties in accordance with Article III of GATT 1994, which shall apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to this Agreement.

ARTICLE 4

Tariff Reduction and Elimination

1. Except as otherwise provided for in this Agreement, each Party shall gradually liberalise, where applicable, applied MFN tariff rates on originating goods of the other Parties in accordance with its schedule of tariff commitments as set out in Annex 1.

2. Nothing in this Agreement shall preclude any Party from unilaterally accelerating the reduction and/or elimination of the applied MFN tariff rates on originating goods of the other Parties as set out in its tariff reduction/elimination schedule in Annex 1.

3. Except otherwise provided in paragraph 1, all commitments undertaken by each Party under this Article shall be applied to all the other Parties.

ARTICLE 5
Transparency

Article X of GATT 1994 shall be incorporated, *mutatis mutandis*, into and form an integral part of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 6
Administrative Fees and Formalities

Each Party reaffirms its commitments under Article VIII.1 of GATT 1994.

ARTICLE 7
Rules of Origin

The Rules of Origin and Operational Certification Procedures applicable to the goods covered under this Agreement are set out in Annex 2 and its Appendices.

ARTICLE 8
Non-Tariff Measures

1. Each Party shall:
 - (a) not institute or maintain any non-tariff measure on the importation of goods from the other Parties or on the exportation or sale for export of goods destined for the territory of the other Parties, except in accordance with its WTO rights and obligations or other provisions in this Agreement; and
 - (b) ensure the transparency of its non-tariff measures allowed under subparagraph (a) and their full compliance with its obligations under the

WTO Agreement with a view to minimising possible distortions to trade to the maximum extent possible.

2. The Parties reaffirm their rights and obligations under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade in Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement and the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures in Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement, including notification procedures on the preparation of relevant regulations to reduce their negative effect on trade as well as to protect human, animal or plant life or health.

3. Each Party shall designate its contact point for the purpose of responding to queries related to this Article.

ARTICLE 9

Modification of Concessions

1. The Parties shall not nullify or impair any of the concessions made by them under this Agreement, except as provided in this Agreement.

2. Any Party may, by negotiation and agreement with any other Party to which it has made a concession, modify or withdraw such concession made under this Agreement. In such negotiations and agreement, which may include provision for compensatory adjustment with respect to other goods, the Parties concerned shall maintain a general level of reciprocal and mutually advantageous concessions not less favourable to trade than that provided in this Agreement prior to such agreement.

ARTICLE 10

Safeguard Measures

1. Each Party, which is a WTO Member, retains its rights and obligations under Article XIX of GATT 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards in Annex 1A to the WTO

Agreement (Agreement on Safeguards) and Article 5 of the Agreement on Agriculture in Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement (Agreement on Agriculture). Any action taken pursuant to Article XIX of GATT 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards or Article 5 of the Agreement on Agriculture shall not be subject to the Agreement on Dispute Settlement Mechanism under the Framework Agreement (ASEAN-India DSM Agreement).

2. A Party shall have the right to initiate a safeguard measure under this Article (an AFTA safeguard measure) on a good within the transition period for that good. The transition period for a good shall begin from the date of entry into force of this Agreement and end five (5) years from the date of completion of tariff reduction/elimination for that good.

3. A Party shall be free to take an AFTA safeguard measure if, as an effect of the obligations incurred by that Party under this Agreement, a good is being imported from the other Parties to which tariff concession was made for that good in such increased quantities, absolute or relative to domestic production, and under such conditions so as to substantially cause or threaten to cause serious injury to the domestic industry of the importing Party that produces like or directly competitive goods in its territory.

4. If an AFTA safeguard measure is taken, a Party taking such a measure may:

- (a) suspend the further reduction of any tariff rate under this Agreement for the good; or
- (b) increase the tariff rate on the good concerned to a level not to exceed the lesser of:
 - (i) the applied MFN tariff rate on the good in effect at the time the action is taken; or

- (ii) the applied MFN tariff rate on the good in effect on the day immediately preceding the date of entry into force of this Agreement.

5. An AIFTA safeguard measure may be maintained for an initial period of up to three (3) years and may be extended for a period not exceeding one (1) year if it is determined pursuant to the procedures referred to in paragraph 6 that the measure continues to be necessary to prevent or remedy serious injury and to facilitate adjustment and that there is evidence that the domestic industry is adjusting. Notwithstanding the duration of an AIFTA safeguard measure on the good, such a measure shall terminate at the end of the transition period for that good.

6. In applying an AIFTA safeguard measure, the Parties shall adopt and apply, *mutatis mutandis*, the rules for the application of safeguard measures, including provisional measures, as provided under the Agreement on Safeguards, with the exception of the quantitative restriction measures set out in Articles 5 and 7, and also, Articles 9, 13, and 14 of the Agreement on Safeguards.

7. An AIFTA safeguard measure shall not be applied against a good originating in the territory of a Party so long as its share of imports of the good concerned in the importing Party does not exceed three (3) per cent of the total imports of that good from the other Parties.

8. In seeking compensation under Article 8 of the Agreement on Safeguards for an AIFTA safeguard measure, the Parties concerned shall seek the good offices of the Joint Committee established under Article 17 to determine the substantially equivalent level of concessions to that existing under this Agreement between the Party taking the safeguard measure and the exporting Parties which would be affected by such a measure prior to any suspension of equivalent concessions. Any proceedings arising from such

good offices shall be completed within 90 days from the date on which the AIFTA safeguard measure was applied.

9. If no agreement on the compensation is reached within the timeframe specified in paragraph 8, the Parties concerned shall be free to suspend the application of tariff concessions under this Agreement, which is substantially equivalent to the AIFTA safeguard measure on originating goods of the Party applying the AIFTA safeguard measure.

10. On a Party's termination of an AIFTA safeguard measure on a good, the tariff rate for that good shall be the rate that, according to that Party's schedule of tariff reduction and elimination as set out in Annex 1 would have been in effect had the measure not been applied.

11. Notwithstanding the provisions of this Article, no Party may impose an AIFTA safeguard measure on a good to which actions are being applied pursuant to Article XIX of GATT 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards or Article 5 of the Agreement on Agriculture. When a Party intends to apply, pursuant to Article XIX of GATT 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards or Article 5 of the Agreement on Agriculture, an action on a good to which an AIFTA safeguard measure is being applied, it shall terminate the AIFTA safeguard measure prior to the imposition of the action to be applied pursuant to Article XIX of GATT 1994 and the Agreement on Safeguards or Article 5 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

12. All official communications and documentations exchanged among the Parties and with the Joint Committee relating to an AIFTA safeguard measure shall be in writing and shall be in the English language.

ARTICLE 11
Measures to Safeguard the Balance of Payments

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to prevent a Party from taking any measure for balance of payments purposes. A Party taking such measure shall do so in accordance with the conditions established under Article XII of GATT 1994 and the Understanding on Balance of Payments Provisions of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 in Annex 1A to the WTO Agreement.

ARTICLE 12
General Exceptions

Each Party retains its rights and obligations under Article XX of GATT 1994, which shall be incorporated, *mutatis mutandis*, into and form an integral part of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 13
Security Exceptions

Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed:

- (a) to require any Party to furnish any information the disclosure of which it considers contrary to its essential security interests;
- (b) to prevent any Party from taking any action which it considers necessary for the protection of its essential security interests, including:
 - (i) action relating to fissionable materials or the materials from which they are derived;
 - (ii) action relating to the traffic in arms, ammunition and implements of war and to such traffic on other goods and materials as is carried on directly or indirectly for the purpose of supplying

a military establishment;

- (iii) action taken so as to protect critical communications infrastructure from deliberate attempts intended to disable or degrade such infrastructure;
 - (iv) action taken in time of war or other emergency in international relations; or
- (c) to prevent any Party from taking any action in pursuance of its obligations under the United Nations Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security.

ARTICLE 14

Customs Procedures

1. Each Party shall endeavour to apply its customs procedures in a predictable, consistent and transparent manner.

2. Recognising the importance of improving transparency in the area of customs procedures, each Party, at the request of an interested person, shall endeavour to provide, as expeditiously and accurately as possible, information relating to its customs procedures to the interested person concerned. Each Party shall endeavour to supply not only the information specifically requested but also any other pertinent information which it considers the interested person should be made aware of.

3. For prompt customs clearance of goods traded among the Parties, each Party, recognising the significant role of customs authorities and the importance of customs procedures in promoting trade facilitation, shall endeavour to:

- (a) simplify its customs procedures; and

- (b) harmonise its customs procedures, to the extent possible, with relevant international standards and recommended practices such as those made under the auspices of the World Customs Organization.

ARTICLE 15
Regional and Local Governments

In fulfilling its obligations and commitments under this Agreement, each Party shall, in accordance with the provisions of Article XXIV.12 of GATT 1994 and the Understanding on the Interpretation of Article XXIV of GATT 1994, take such reasonable measures as may be available to it to ensure observance by state, regional and local governments and authorities within its territories.

ARTICLE 16
Relation to Other Agreements

1. Each Party reaffirms its rights and obligations vis-à-vis another Party under the WTO Agreement and other agreements to which these Parties are party. A Party, which is not a party to the WTO Agreement, shall abide by the provisions of the said Agreement in accordance with its accession commitments to the WTO.
2. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to derogate from any right or obligation of a Party under the WTO Agreement and other agreements to which these Parties are party.
3. In the event of any inconsistency between this Agreement and any other agreement to which two or more Parties are party, such Parties shall immediately consult with a view to finding a mutually satisfactory solution.
4. This Agreement shall not apply to any agreement among ASEAN Member States or to any agreement between

India and any ASEAN Member State unless otherwise agreed by the parties to that agreement.

ARTICLE 17
Joint Committee

1. A Joint Committee shall be established under this Agreement.
2. The functions of the Joint Committee shall be to:
 - (a) review the implementation and operation of this Agreement;
 - (b) submit a report to the Parties on the implementation and operation of this Agreement;
 - (c) consider and recommend to the Parties any amendments to this Agreement;
 - (d) supervise and coordinate the work of all Sub-Committees established under this Agreement; and
 - (e) carry out other functions as may be agreed by the Parties.
3. The Joint Committee:
 - (a) shall be composed of representatives of the Parties; and
 - (b) may establish Sub-Committees and delegate its responsibilities thereto.
4. The Joint Committee shall meet at such venues and times as may be mutually agreed by the Parties.

ARTICLE 18
Dispute Settlement

Unless otherwise provided in this Agreement, any dispute concerning the interpretation, implementation or application of this Agreement shall be resolved through the procedures and mechanisms as set out in the ASEAN-India DSM Agreement.

ARTICLE 19
Review

The Joint Committee shall meet within one (1) year from the date of entry into force of this Agreement and then biennially or otherwise as appropriate to review this Agreement for the purpose of considering additional measures to further enhance the AIFTA as well as develop disciplines and negotiate agreements on relevant matters as may be agreed.

ARTICLE 20
Annexes and Future Legal Instruments

1. The Annexes and Appendices shall form an integral part of this Agreement.
2. The Parties may adopt legal instruments in the future pursuant to the provisions of this Agreement, including those proposed to them by the Joint Committee. Upon their respective entry into force, such instruments shall form an integral part of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 21
Amendments

1. This Agreement may be modified through amendments mutually agreed upon in writing by the Parties. Any amendment shall enter into force after all Parties have notified all the other Parties in writing of the completion of

their internal procedures for the entry into force of such amendment.

2. Notwithstanding paragraph 1, amendments relating to:
 - (a) Annex 1, provided that the amendments are made in accordance with the amendment of the Harmonized System and include no change on tariff rates applied to the originating goods of the other Parties in accordance with Annex 1; and
 - (b) Annex 2,

may be made by mutual agreement in writing by all Parties.

ARTICLE 22 Depositary

For the ASEAN Member States, this Agreement shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of ASEAN, who shall promptly furnish a certified copy thereof to each ASEAN Member State.

ARTICLE 23 Entry into Force

1. Each Party shall notify all the other Parties in writing upon completion of its internal requirements¹ necessary for the entry into force of this Agreement. This Agreement shall enter into force on 1 January 2010 or the date, by which such notifications have been made, by the Governments of India and at least one (1) ASEAN Member State.

2. Where a Party is unable to complete its internal requirements for the entry into force of this Agreement by 1 January 2010, this Agreement shall enter into force for that Party on 1 June 2010 or upon the date by which that Party

¹ For greater certainty, the term "internal requirements" may include obtaining governmental approval or parliamentary approval in accordance with domestic law.

notifies the completion of its internal requirements, whichever is earlier. In exceptional circumstances, where a Party is unable to complete its internal requirements for the entry into force of this Agreement by 1 June 2010, this Agreement shall enter into force for that Party on a mutually agreed date after that Party has informed all Parties of the completion of its internal requirements.

3. In relation to Parties making the notification referred to in paragraph 2, those Parties shall be bound by the same terms and conditions of this Agreement, including any further commitments that may have been undertaken by the other Parties under this Agreement by the time of such notification, as if it had notified all the other Parties in writing of the completion of its internal requirements before the date of entry into force of this Agreement.

ARTICLE 24 **Termination**

This Agreement shall remain in force until either India or ASEAN Member States collectively give written notice to the other of their intention to terminate it, in which case this Agreement shall terminate 12 months after the date of the notice of termination.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned being duly authorised by their respective Governments, have signed this Agreement.

DONE at Bangkok, Thailand this thirteenth day of August 2009 and at Ha Noi, Viet Nam on the day of 2009, in two (2) originals in the English language.

For the Government of the
Republic of India:



ANAND SHARMA
Minister of Commerce and
Industry

For the Government of
Brunei Darussalam:



LIM JOCK SENG
Second Minister for Foreign
Affairs and Trade

For the Royal Government of
Cambodia:



CHAM PRASIDH
Senior Minister and Minister
of Commerce

For the Government of the
Republic of Indonesia:



MARI ELKA PANGESTU
Minister of Trade

For the Government of the
Lao People's Democratic
Republic:



NAM VIYAKETH
Minister of Industry and
Commerce

For the Government of
Malaysia:



MUSTAPA MOHAMED
Minister of International
Trade and Industry

For the Government of the
Union of Myanmar:



U SOE THA
Minister for National Planning
and Economic Development

For the Government of the
Republic of the Philippines:



PETER B. FAVILA
Secretary of Trade and
Industry

For the Government of the
Republic of Singapore:



LIM HNG KIANG
Minister for Trade and
Industry

For the Government of the
Kingdom of Thailand:



PORNTIVA NAKASAI
Minister of Commerce

For the Government of the
Socialist Republic of Viet
Nam:



VU HUY HOANG
Minister of Industry and
Trade

Appendix 3: Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between India and Japan

**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN
JAPAN AND THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

Preamble

Japan and the Republic of India (hereinafter referred to as “India”),

RECOGNISING that a dynamic and rapidly changing global environment brought about by globalisation and technological progress presents various economic and strategic challenges and opportunities to the Parties;

CONSCIOUS of their longstanding friendship and strong economic and political ties that have developed through many years of fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Parties;

BELIEVING that such bilateral relationship will be enhanced by forging mutually beneficial economic partnership through liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment, and cooperation;

REAFFIRMING that the economic partnership will provide a useful framework for enhanced cooperation and serve the common interests of the Parties in various fields as agreed in this Agreement and lead to the improvement of economic efficiency and the development of trade, investment, and human resources;

RECOGNISING that the economic partnership will create larger and new market, enhance the attractiveness and vibrancy of their markets, and contribute to improving efficiency and competitiveness of their manufacturing and service industries;

FURTHER RECOGNISING that the economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development and that the economic partnership can play an important role in promoting sustainable development;

RECALLING Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 and Article V of the General Agreement on Trade in Services in Annex 1A and Annex 1B, respectively, to the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, done at Marrakesh, April 15, 1994;

Chapter 1

General Provisions

Article 1

Objectives

The objectives of this Agreement are to:

- (a) liberalise and facilitate trade in goods and services between the Parties;
- (b) increase investment opportunities and strengthen protection for investments and investment activities in the Parties;
- (c) ensure protection of intellectual property and promote cooperation in the field thereof;
- (d) promote cooperation for the effective enforcement of competition laws in each Party;
- (e) improve business environment in each Party;
- (f) establish a framework to enhance closer cooperation in the fields agreed in this Agreement; and
- (g) create effective procedures for the implementation and application of this Agreement and for the resolution of disputes.

Article 2

Geographical Scope of Application

Unless otherwise specified, this Agreement shall apply to “the Area” of each Party, which consists of the territory of the Party, including its territorial sea, airspace above such territory; and all the area beyond its territorial sea, including the sea-bed and subsoil thereof, over which the Party has sovereign rights or jurisdiction in accordance with its laws and regulations and international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, done at Montego Bay, December 10, 1982.

Article 146

Entry into Force

This Agreement shall enter into force on the first day of the second month following the month in which the Governments of the Parties exchange diplomatic notes informing each other that their respective legal procedures necessary for entry into force of this Agreement have been completed. It shall remain in force unless terminated as provided for in Article 147.

Article 147

Termination

Either Party may terminate this Agreement by giving one year's advance notice in writing to the other Party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, being duly authorised by their respective Governments, have signed this Agreement.

DONE at Tokyo on this sixteenth day of February in the year 2011 in duplicate in the English language.

For Japan:

前原誠司

For the Republic of India

Anand Sharma

Appendix 4: Memorandum of Cooperation between India and Japan

**MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION
BETWEEN
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY,
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AND
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, TRADE AND INDUSTRY OF JAPAN,
ON
INDIA-JAPAN DIGITAL PARTNERSHIP**

This Memorandum of Cooperation is made on 29th October, 2018 between Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI), along with common understandings by relevant Ministries from both sides such as Ministry of Communication (MoC); Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP, Ministry of Commerce & Industry) and NITI Aayog from India side and Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) from Japan side, in order to promote wide-ranging collaborations in digital area to develop India-Japan economic relationship.

General Overview

Towards the next generation technologies era, when integration of hardware and software will be increasingly required to develop IoT and AI solutions for societal benefits and to explore joint collaboration in emerging technologies, India and Japan would be able to build a distinguished partnership by leveraging advantages of each other. India-Japan economic relationship is being strengthened in terms of investment, but there also remains areas for expansion so that Japanese companies regard India not just as a "Big Market" but as a "Strategic Development Center for Global Market".

Both sides, taking into account the strengths and advantages of each side intend to further support and coordinate efforts in mutually beneficial fields, such as startup and corporate partnership, electronics ecosystem, digital talents, R&D cooperation, security for future network;

To diversify cooperative activities and expand the sphere of collaborations, "India-Japan Digital Partnership" is launched by both sides.

Scope of Collaboration

1. Japan India Startup Initiative

"Japan-India Startup Initiative" was agreed between METI, GoJ and Ministry of Commerce and Industry, GoI on May 1st, 2018, which includes establishment of Japan-India Startup Hub in Bengaluru, as mentioned in the Summit meeting between two Prime Ministers in September 2017.

- Establish Japan-India Startup Hub in Bengaluru
- Japan side will consider holding a Startup competition in Bengaluru and will subsequently invite 5 startup winners to Japan and support their business plan making.
- Japan side will consider inviting approximately 10 selected startups for CEATEC exhibition in Japan and provide pitching and business matchmaking opportunities with Japanese companies
- India side will consider establishing and managing an online platform for Japan-India Startup Hub, which could function as information board on related policies, organizing events, registration and matchmaking
- Both sides will consider sending missions consisting of respective companies, startups, investors and venture capitals to the other side.
- Japan side will consider supporting Indian startups.
- India side will consider supporting Japanese startups.
- Both sides will encourage and support the creation of funds to invest in startups in India with participation by Japanese players.

2. Digital Corporate Partnership

- Both sides will hold matchmaking events between Japanese and Indian firms. The first matchmaking event was held in Japan in October 2018.
- Both sides will make all possible efforts to promote B2B cooperation and curate "Co-create" culture in their respective ecosystems - leveraging respective strengths in hardware and software in the new Digital era.
- Both sides will strive to create / support platforms, fora and anchor points that will promote B2B match-making to co-develop innovative products and solutions for the global markets.

- Both sides will explore possibilities of collaborating in emerging technologies by way of R&D networking. In this connection, Japan side will leverage and encourage their companies to the Indian initiatives of opening Centre of Excellences (COE's) for IoT, AI and Data Sciences and explore possibility of opening joint COE with mutual consent.
- India side will support Japanese investment in Electronics and IT sectors to India with supporting measures including incentive schemes. JETRO will provide support for Japanese IT sector companies and electronic manufacturing companies considering investment in India.
- Japan will support Indian investment to Japan. JETRO will provide services through the India Desk, which is dedicated to one-to-one support to qualified Indian firms investing in Japan.

3. Electronics Ecosystem

- Both sides will establish partnership mechanism between both sides on Electronics Manufacturing.
- Indian & Japanese companies will collaborate in Electronics System Design, related Software technologies and electronics manufacturing for long tail market.

4. Digital talent

- Both sides decide to expand the provision of JEC (Japanese Endowed Courses) to IT and electronics firms.
- Japan side will hold Job Fairs (Japan Career Fairs) to recruit Indian students for Japanese firms.
- Japan side will hold Job Fairs in India to recruit Indian excellent IT talent for Japanese firms including startups. To start with, Job Fair will be held in Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad (IIT-H) in 2018 and in Pune in early next year.
- Both sides will facilitate and promote internship program to send Indian students to work at Japanese firms as interns.
- Japan side will seek the possibilities of sending missions consisting of Japanese startups which have interests in recruiting Indian excellent IT talent.
- Japan will invite high school students from India to study in Japan for more than six months over the next five years under their program of inviting 1,000 high school students in Asia.

- India side will explore to launch a web portal for exchange of talents and jobs in Japan.
- Japan side will issue Japanese "Green Card" and Highly Skilled Professional VISA for highly skilled Indian professionals.

5. R&D cooperation

- Both sides are willing to share expertise and experiences in various synergies between the priorities of Japan's idea of Society 5.0' and India's efforts to enable AI and emerging technology ecosystem for societal benefits.
- METI and NITI Aayog will sign a Statement of Intent (Sol) to support collaboration between the two countries in the area of AI and work under this Memorandum of Cooperation.
- To promote collaboration in the AI area under this Memorandum of Cooperation, the Indian institutions such as IIT Hyderabad will sign a MoU with the AI Research Center of National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology of Japan.

6. Security for future network

- Both sides will cooperate in framework for cyber security, security for digital infrastructure for future network, capacity building and training in cyber-security.
- Both sides welcome the construction of the submarine cable connecting Chennai and the Andaman Islands which will be conducted by Japanese firms and will further cooperate in the development of submarine cable projects in view of the strategic importance of submarine cables.

Implementation:

The MeitY and METI will be nodal agencies to coordinate the implementation of Memorandum of Cooperation through appropriate mechanism

To intensify the exchange, both sides intend to hold regular consultations on "Digital Partnership" by physical meetings and video conferences.

The organizations under this Memorandum of Cooperation will interact and coordinate, as appropriate, with other commitments between entities in Japan and India.

Funding:

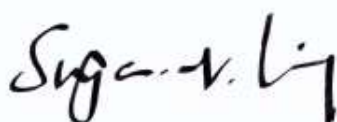
The conduct of cooperative activities as set out in this Memorandum of Cooperation is subject to the availability of funding, personnel and other resources. Each side is expected to cover the costs incurred in participating in cooperative activities under this Memorandum of Cooperation, unless otherwise agreed in writing by both Sides.

Duration and Termination:

1. This Memorandum of Cooperation will commence from the date of its signing by both sides and will continue for the period of three (3) years.
2. The Memorandum of Cooperation may be renewed by mutual written consent from both sides.
3. Either side may terminate this Memorandum of Cooperation by giving a written notice of its intention to terminate to the other side thirty (30) days in advance.
4. The Memorandum of Cooperation may be modified at any time by mutual written consent from both sides. Such modifications will commence on the date determined by both sides.
5. Any dispute arising out of the interpretation or implementation of this Memorandum of Cooperation will be settled amicably through consultation and negotiations between both sides.

This Memorandum of Cooperation does not create any legal obligations or rights.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, duly authorized thereto by the representative sides, have signed this Memorandum of Cooperation



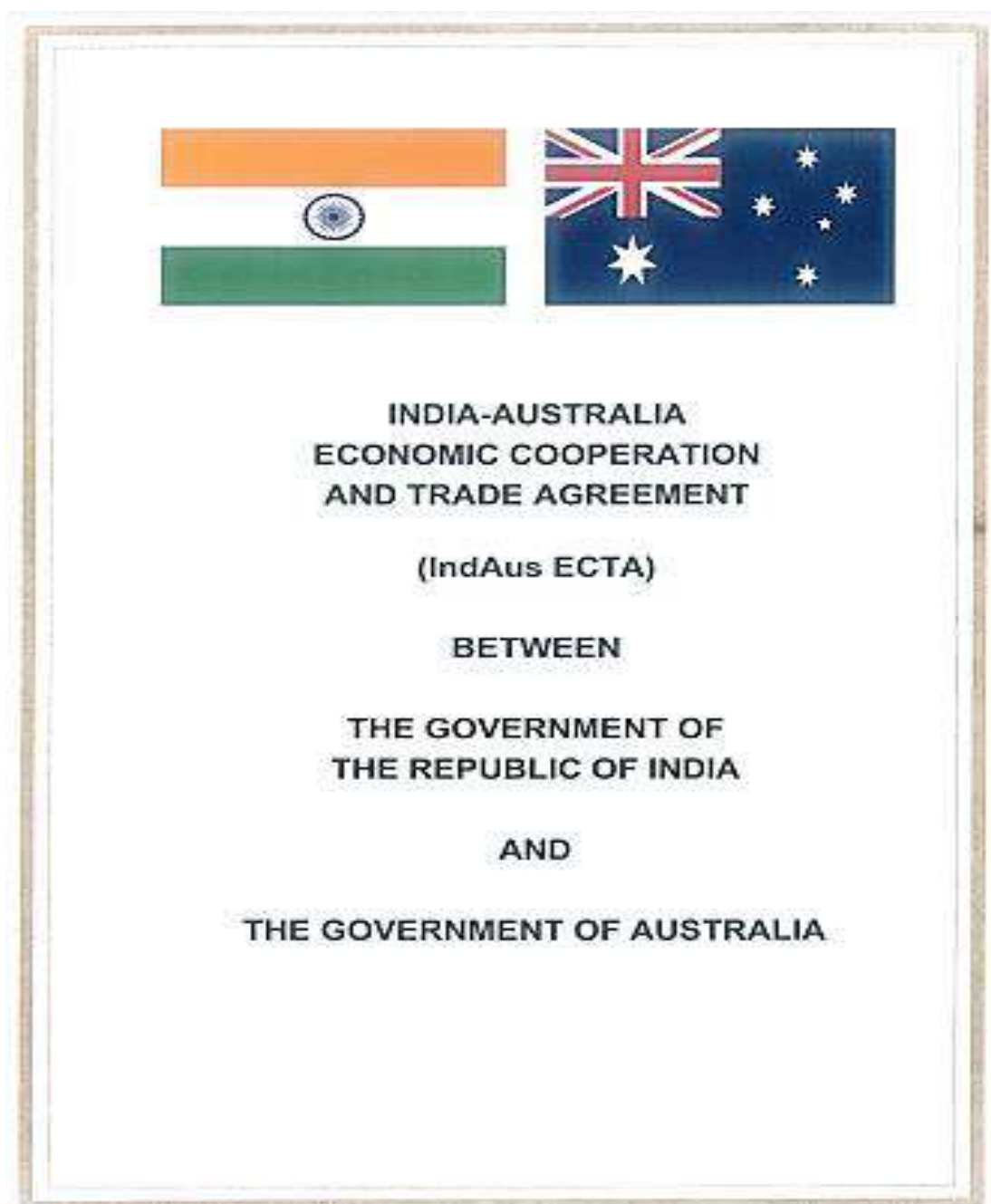
Sujan R. Chinoy,
Ambassador of India to Japan



Hiroshige Seko,
Minister of Economy, Trade and
Industry, Government of Japan

Signed on the 29th day of October 2018 in two originals in English.

Appendix 5 : India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement



PREAMBLE

The Government of the Republic of India (“India”) and the Government of Australia (“Australia”), hereinafter referred to individually as a “Party” and collectively as “the Parties”:

BUILDING upon the historic ties and friendship between the Parties, and progress made by both the Parties during their previous bilateral negotiations;

RESOLVING to strengthen their economic relations, further liberalise and expand trade and investment, enhance economic growth, create opportunities for workers and business, improving living standards, and promote sustainable growth;

RECALLING the Parties’ commitment under the Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Australia made in June 2020 and at the 17th India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission in September 2021;

DECIDING to establish an agreement that will ultimately lead to the conclusion of a fuller Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement;

FURTHER RESOLVING that the fuller Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement will aim to promote further economic integration to liberalise trade and investment;

RECOGNISING the need for a balanced trade agreement that encourages trade and investment flows that will benefit the economies of both the Parties;

MINDFUL of their commitments in international and regional organisations, especially aware of the increasing importance of trade for the future prosperity of the economies of the Asia-Pacific region;

ACKNOWLEDGING the important role and contribution of business in expanding trade between the Parties, and the need to further promote and facilitate cooperation and utilisation of the greater business opportunities provided by this Agreement;

DESIRING to explore new areas of economic cooperation and develop appropriate measures for closer economic cooperation between the Parties;

RECOGNISING their right to regulate in order to meet national policy objectives, and determining to preserve their flexibility in setting legislative and regulatory priorities to protect legitimate public welfare objectives; and

REAFFIRM their commitment to work together, protect, shape, and strengthen the rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, and inclusive multilateral trading system embodied by the WTO;

HAVE AGREED, AS FOLLOWS:

CHAPTER 1

INITIAL PROVISIONS AND GENERAL DEFINITIONS

Article 1.1

Establishment of a Free Trade Area

The Parties, consistent with Article XXIV of GATT 1994 and Article V of GATS, hereby establish a free trade area in accordance with the provisions of this India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement.

Article 1.2

Objectives

1. The objectives of this Agreement are to:
 - (a) establish a framework for strengthening and enhancing the economic,

trade and investment relationship between the Parties;

(b) liberalise and promote trade in goods in accordance with Article XXIV of the GATT 1994;

(c) liberalise and promote trade in services in accordance with Article V of GATS;

(d) improve the efficiency and competitiveness of their manufacturing and services sectors and to expand trade and investment between the Parties; and

(e) facilitate, enhance and explore new areas of economic cooperation and develop appropriate measures for closer economic cooperation between the Parties.

CHAPTER 14

FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 14.1

Annexes, Appendices and Footnotes

The Annexes, Appendices and footnotes to this Agreement shall constitute an integral part of this Agreement. Where a side letter to this Agreement explicitly provides that it is an integral part of this Agreement, it shall constitute an integral part of this Agreement.

Article 14.2

Amendments to International Agreements

If any international agreement, or a provision therein, that has been referred to in this Agreement or incorporated into this Agreement is amended, the Parties shall, at the request of either Party, consult on whether to amend this Agreement.

Article 14.3

Amendments

The Parties may agree, in writing, to amend this Agreement. Such amendments shall enter into force 60 days after the date on which the Parties exchange written notifications confirming that they have completed their respective domestic requirements, including internal legal procedures, necessary for entry into force of the amendments, or on such other date as the Parties agree.

Article 14.4

General Reviews

1. The Parties, through the Joint Committee, shall undertake a general review of this Agreement at ministerial level within one year of the date of entry into force of this Agreement and thereafter every two years, or at such times as may be agreed by the Parties.

2. Any review pursuant to paragraph 1 shall take into account:

- (a) facilitating trade and investment through further liberalisation of market access for goods and services;
- (b) that balanced outcomes flow from the implementation and overall operation of this Agreement;
- (c) that the disciplines contained in this Agreement remain relevant to the trade issues and challenges confronting the Parties;
- (d) the work of relevant subcommittees, subsidiary bodies or working groups established under this Agreement, including reviews under relevant Chapters;
- (e) relevant developments in international fora; and
- (f) any other matters as may be agreed by the Parties.

3. After 15 years from the date of entry into force of the Agreement, upon request of a Party, the Parties shall undertake a review of Chapter 4 (Rules of Origin), Annex 4A (Minimum Information Requirements), Annex 4B(Product Specific Rules of Origin), Chapter 2 (Trade in Goods) and Annex2A (Tariff Commitments). The review shall:

(a) be jointly undertaken by the Subcommittee on Trade in Goods and the Joint Technical Subcommittee on Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation established under Article 4.32

(Joint Technical Subcommittee on Rules of Origin and Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation – Rules of Origin);

(b) make recommendations to the Joint Committee; and

(c) conclude within 6 months of the date of request.

4. Should a Party not agree to meet to undertake the review pursuant to paragraph 3 within 60 days of the receipt of the request, or no mutually satisfactory conclusion of the review is reached within 6 months of initiation of the review undertaken pursuant to paragraph 3, the other Party may seek to implement the proposal concerning the specific review through a written notice to the other Party with the details of the proposed changes. The notice shall take effect as soon as the Parties have agreed a mutually satisfactory solution within 6 months after the date of receipt of the notice and have affected the changes through the procedure for amendments set out in

Article 14.3 (Amendments).

Article 14.5

Negotiation of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement The Parties hereby establish a Negotiation Subcommittee which shall be composed of government representatives of the Parties. Within 75 days after the date of signature of this Agreement, the Negotiation Subcommittee shall commence negotiations on amendments to this Agreement, on a without prejudice basis, on areas including inter alia market access for goods and services, a complete Product Specific Rules

Schedule, a Digital Trade Chapter, and a Government Procurement Chapter, to transform this Agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. Following such negotiations, the Parties may make amendments to this Agreement in accordance with Article 14.3 (Amendments), to transform this Agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.

Article 14.6

Termination

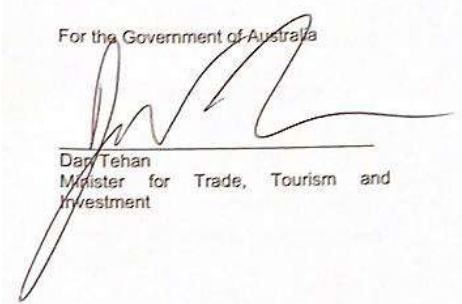
A Party may terminate this Agreement by giving the other Party notice in writing. Such termination shall take effect 6 months after the date of the notification, or on such other date as the Parties may agree.

Article 14.7

Entry into Force

This Agreement shall enter into force 30 days after an exchange of written notifications, certifying completion of the necessary domestic requirements, including internal legal procedures, of each Party or on such other date as the Parties may agree.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, being duly authorised by their respective Governments, have signed this Agreement. DONE in two originals at New Delhi, India and Melbourne, Australia on this 2nd day of April in 2022.



For the Government of Australia

Day Tehan
Minister for Trade, Tourism and
Investment

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Kumar, Dr Sanjeev. Senior Research Fellow. *Indian Council of World Affairs*. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (12:30 PM IST).

Manickam, Venkataraman. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. *Jawaharlal Nehru University*. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

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Singh, Antara Ghoshal. Research Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme. *Observer Research Foundation*. New Delhi on the 5th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Singh, Commodore Abhay Kumar. Research Fellow, Maritime Affairs Centre. *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, New Delhi on 19th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

ii. TELEPHONE CALLS

Jyotsna, Yoga. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. *National Maritime Foundation*. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Mishra.Vivek. Deputy Director. Strategic Studies Programme. *Observer Research Foundation*. New Delhi on 26th October 2024 (6:00 PM IST).

Pant, Harsh V. Vice President. Studies and Foreign Policy. *Observer Research Foundation*. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Sailo, Laldinkima. Senior Manager. International Affairs, *Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES)* on 20th December, 2023 (3:00 PM IST).

iii. EMAILS

Bhaskar, Commodore C. Uday. Honorary Fellow. *National Maritime Foundation*. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Menon, Rear Admiral K Raja (Retd). Honorary Fellow. *National Maritime Foundation*. New Delhi on 4th November (3:00 PM IST).

Naidu, Dr GVC. Senior Fellow. *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*. New Delhi on 30th October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Sarkar, Debosmita. Associate Fellow, Centre for New Economic Diplomacy. *Observer Research Foundation*. Kolkata on 28th October 2024. (2:00 PM IST).

Shankar, Mahadevan. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. *National Maritime Foundation*. New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (6: 00 PM IST).

Singh, Abhijit. Visiting Fellow. *Observer Research Foundation*. New Delhi on 23rd October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

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The Telegraph (Guwahati)

The Times of India (Mumbai)

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Publications

1. Lalhming Sangi. *India's Act East Policy towards Japan*. Mizoram University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (A National Referred Bi-Annual Journal) Vol. VI, Issue 2. December, 2020. pp. 137-144.
2. Lalhming Sangi. *Towards Indo-Pacific Region: Perspective from India*. Mizoram University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (A National Referred Bi-Annual Journal) Vol. VIII, Issue 2. December, 2022. pp. 55-63.

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1. Lalhming Sangi. *India's Expanding Neighbourhood: Reflections of Indo-Pacific Region*. ICWA Sponsored National Seminar on "The Kalaldan Multimodal Transit Transport Project: Prospects and Problems". Organized by Department of Political Science, Mizoram University. 24-25 November, 2022.
2. Lalhming Sangi. *India's Blue Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region*. "International Seminar on Recent Trends in Public Administration: G20 Perspectives". Organized by Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University. 23-24 May, 2023.

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ABSTRACT

INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A STUDY OF THE EMERGENT MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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**INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A STUDY OF
THE EMERGENT MULTILATERAL COOPERATION**

BY

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region is gaining global attention due to its geopolitical, economic, and security significance. It controls crucial trade routes, such as the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, which handle a significant portion of global trade, including energy supplies. Ensuring the security and openness of these sea lanes is a top priority for many nations, as global trade networks are heavily dependent on them. The region historically used as a maritime strategy by colonialists and explorers, gained prominence with the rise of China and the change in American leadership. India has been unaware of its strategic importance in the past, leaving it outside its interests, security architecture, and foreign policy engagement. Thus, the region's dominance has shaped India's foreign policy engagement.

The Indo-Pacific terminology originated due to economic needs, but its strategic implications are complex. The region is a super-region with multiple sub-regions, necessitating bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral initiatives to address security and other complex issues. This integrated space cannot be treated as an ordinary geographic region, but rather as a super flux of countries/regions, necessitating effective cooperation at various levels. The Indo-Pacific region, a blend of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and surrounding countries, is a hub for inter-state competition and cooperation, dominated by key stakeholders like the US, Japan, Australia, and India. Since then, nations have implemented their own Indo-Pacific policy and strategy.

Major power's like China, India, and Japan rely on sea routes for energy and commercial goods transportation, with the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean regions forming a single strategic system. China heavily relies on oil imports, with 80% coming from the Indo-Pacific, influencing regional dynamics and security architecture. China, the world's second-largest economy, has been actively pursuing a significant position in the Indo-Pacific, using trade and investment to establish global economic and political influence, aiming to replicate its global expansion in the 21st century. The major Pacific powers share the belief that the Indo-Pacific

should not be dominated by China but rather a diverse multipolar space. The region's roots are economic, but its consequences are security. Pacific powers now have deep equities in Indian Ocean security, with India increasingly influencing the Pacific. The study offers a detailed analysis of India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia.

RESEARCH GAP

India's relation with the Southeast Asian and the Far East countries has its root in ancient times. India's commitment towards the Southeast and its engagement as a regional organization in the Indo-Pacific has been growing steadily. The Indo-Pacific which connects these Southeast Asian countries as well as the far east countries like Australia, Japan, and even the US has become the centre of global attention as more than half of the world GDP and population reside in this region. The emergence of multilateral institutions and initiatives provides peace and stability in the region. The literature review reveals extensive research and studies on Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, covering economic and security perspectives at the global level, indicating a significant volume of research in this area. There is however lack of significant literature and available readings in areas related to triangular relations between India-ASEAN-Japan, India-ASEAN-Australia and United States. Particularly an In-depth analysis of the role played by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific is lacking or inadequate in the existing literature or the literatures are either one-dimensional or local perspective. The study provides knowledge on the mentioned areas and aims to fill the existing gap in literature.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India's "Look East Policy" began in the early 1990's when the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao initiated the significance of enhancing ties with the Southeast Asian countries. It was elevated to the "Act East Policy" in 2014 by the new Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the initial stage of the "Look East Policy", the Southeast Asian countries were the main focus of India's foreign policy.

India has found interest in regional multilateralism, and these multilateral initiatives have paved the way for India to develop new dimensions with the East Asian countries like Japan, China, South Korea, and Australia. Along with this, the bilateral relations with ASEAN have been progressing fast since India has cooperated in economic, political and defence activities with the Southeast and East Asian countries. Though mistrust and suspicions have been the main factors between India and China, its relationship has been improved and grown by the late 2000.

India's shift in policy towards the East has also been expanded through Australia and India's possibility of engagement with East Asia has also been proved. Thus, political, economic, and cultural relations between India and Australia have developed at a higher pace through LEP and the growing realization on both sides to step up economic cooperation. From the stage of non-threatening, the two countries have reached the stage of realization of the potential. India's ties with Southeast and Northeast Asia started to become more comprehensive with a more pronounced security focus. India's rebranded "Act East Policy" focuses more on extending neighbourhood in the Pacific Region. India's eastward engagement got widened, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Western and the Southern Pacific. As China's own influence expanded in the region and its Belt and Road Initiative attempted to form a more Sino-centric world system, it required India to imagine a larger neighbourhood. The arrival of the Indo-Pacific strategic focus among the major powers in Asia, including the US may well be in redesigning a more comprehensive method to prevent any single power from dominating the region. In this regard, India-ASEAN maritime cooperation is one of the important aspects in the region. India-ASEAN is witnessing increasing commercial activities at sea relating to trade. Thus, greater maritime connectivity between India and her trade partners is imperative in the Indo-Pacific connectivity. Therefore, maritime connectivity through higher trade and investment and enhancing regional connectivity is imperative to form a greater market.

The region is a multipolar region that is contributing more than half of the world GDP and population. It has gained significant attention globally and is advancing rapidly. On the economic potential, in the Indo-Pacific region, a number of countries are investing their enormous financial, technological, and human capital to develop maritime economies. The main catalyst for the Indo-Pacific was the growing convergence between India and Japan on many regional and global issues. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 clearly indicates the geographical swath of India's conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific to stretch from Africa to the Americas thereby covering the entire Indian and the Pacific Oceans in tandem with that of Japan.

Indo-Pacific being the centre of global attention has influenced the geopolitical churn in the region. On the other hand, multilateral cooperation is needed in the region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, comes against the backdrop of the Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and has taken a significant turn in the Indo-Pacific region. This clearly indicates the significance of India, the US, Japan and Australia in the region. They share common concern in terms of security in shaping broader Asia. The strategic flux of the Indo-Pacific combined with the overwhelming effects of bilateral or multilateral ties create an opportunity for the Quad to work together more effectively in anchoring the region and promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. Therefore, the focus of the study is on the role of the emerging institutions in the Indo-Pacific region and its initiatives taken by the emerging group, such as ASEAN and the QUAD, in maintaining regional stability and order in reshaping the Indo-Pacific cooperation against the backdrop of China's complex and its increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyse the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in international politics.
2. To trace the historical root of India's relations with the Indo-Pacific countries.
3. To analyse the triangular relations of India, ASEAN and the Far-East countries.
4. To analyse the role of the emergent Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in the Indo-Pacific.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in international politics?
2. What is the historical root of India and the Indo-Pacific countries?
3. What are the triangular relations between India, ASEAN and the Far-East countries?
4. What is the role played by the emergent Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in the Indo-Pacific?

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and quantitative in nature. It is descriptive, comparative, and analytical. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The study employs a quantitative research approach to analyse the trends in ASEAN exports to India, bilateral trade between India and Japan, and bilateral trade between Australia and India between 2003 and 2022. A longitudinal study design is used to examine trade patterns over the given period, utilizing secondary data from UN COMTRADE.

A. Primary data: Primary data was obtained from qualitative and quantitative sources which are as follows:

1. Official reports and records were obtained from electronic governmental channels, non-government and international channels.

2. Interview with people who had prior or current experiences in the areas pertaining to international affairs and area studies such as India's involvement with ASEAN countries, experts in the field of Indo-Pacific and East Asian affairs were conducted. On the basis of the parameters highlighted above, an interview with 18 people was conducted.

i. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Antara Ghoshal Singh. Research Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Commodore Abhay Kumar Singh. Research Fellow, Maritime Affairs Centre. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi on 19th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Dr Pragya Pandey. Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (11:30 AM IST).

Dr Sanjeev, Kumar. Senior Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (12:30 PM IST).

Prof SD. Muni. Emeritus Professor. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 7th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

Shubhamitra, Das. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (12:00 PM IST).

Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan. Director General. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 7th November 2024 (10:AM IST).

Venkataraman Manickam. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

ii. TELEPHONE CALLS

Harsh V. Pant. Vice President. Studies and Foreign Policy. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Laldinkima Sailo. Senior Manager, International Affairs, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES) on 20th December, 2023 (3:00 PM IST).

Vivek Mishra. Deputy Director. Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 26th October 2024 (6:00 PM IST).

Yoga Jyotsna. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

iii. EMAILS

Abhijit Singh. Visiting Fellow. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 23rd October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Debosmita Sarkar. Associate Fellow, Centre for New Economic Diplomacy. Observer Research Foundation. Kolkata on 28th October 2024. (2:00 PM IST).

Dr GVC. Naidu. Senior Fellow. ManoharParrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. New Delhi on 30th October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar. Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Mahadevan Shankar. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (6: 00 PM IST).

Rear Admiral K Raja Menon. (Retd). Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November (3:00 PM IST).

B. Secondary data: Secondary data was obtained from books, magazines, newspaper articles, journals, and websites related to the study.

C. Tools for Analysis: In order to analyse the consistent annual growth of trade over a period of time, and also to smooth out fluctuations to present a long-term trend, the study employs a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) which takes the following form:

$$CAGR = \left(\frac{V_f}{V_i} \right)^{1/n} - 1$$

Where, V_f = Final value at the end of the period

V_i = Initial value at the start of the period

n = Number of years in the period

CHAPTERIZATION

The study is divided into six chapters which are as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter consists of an introduction to India's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region in the context of India's growing relations with ASEAN. A brief historiographical study of the Indo-Pacific is undertaken. The review of relevant literature, the statement of the problem, the objectives, and research questions, the scope and significance of the study, research gaps, methodology, and chapterization for the study are also included in this chapter.

Chapter II: The Indo-Pacific: A Geo-Strategic Analysis

This chapter contains the historical background of the concept of Indo-Pacific and its various connotations in the field of international relations. The study analyses the strategic significance of the region globally, considering the diverse views of major powers and examining emerging trends that have made it general and significant in 21st-century international politics.

Chapter III: Historical Relations of India and the Indo-Pacific Countries

This chapter explores India's foreign policy both during and post-Cold War era, its bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region and the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region.

Chapter IV: India and the Indo-Pacific: Triangular Relations of India, ASEAN and the Far-East

This chapter discusses India's triangular relations with the Far East countries including the United States, Japan, Australia and its intense engagement with ASEAN. It also studies the triangular relations between India-Japan, Australia, and the United States in the context of the ASEAN cooperative paradigm in the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter V: India and the Indo-Pacific: A Case Study of the Quad

This chapter examines the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as an emerging institution in the Indo-Pacific. It examined the Quad agenda, economic and political aspects that can facilitate successful cooperation between Indo-Pacific countries.

Chapter VI: Findings and Conclusion

This chapter includes the obtained findings and the conclusions.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The Indo-Pacific region, encompassing ancient empires, trade networks, and diverse cultures, is a hub for geopolitical contestation, cooperation, and international relations growth in the 21st century. American perceptions shape Asia's security, with the term 'Indo-Pacific' increasingly used to describe growing geopolitical turbulence in Asia and its waters. The region has become a crucial financial and economic apparatus in a globalized and cyber-related world. It encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Taiwan Straits, and Pacific expanse. The Indo-Pacific commons include two triangles of nations with critical interests in security, stability, transit, and trade, with Southeast Asia's inner triangle enclosing the South China Sea and India, Japan, and Australia focusing on the region's stability.

The research questions i.e. the conceptual proportions of the study and findings are as follows:

I. Strategic and Economic Significance of Indo-Pacific

1. Strategic significance

a. The analytical study on the Indo-Pacific as a geo-strategic space proved that the region has become a more complex, congested, and multipolar space. The Indo-Pacific region's diverse and large size renders overarching security architecture unlikely and unworkable. The strategic changes in the Indo-Pacific are driven by factors such as the decline of the United States power, the rise of Chinese power, and the emergence of India as a major regional power.

b. Middle and small states in Asia have played crucial roles in the security world, with ASEAN serving as a balancer for peace and stability through cooperation in various fields, promoting regional peace and stability through respect for justice, rule of law, and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. The US is embracing the Indo-Pacific concept and implementing initiatives to highlight its priorities in this vast geographic space. However, the existing coordination framework faced challenges, and the US must consider the existing platforms, issues,

and future plans for this work in progress. The USA is considering including only democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific project to prevent China's participation, as the process opens up new opportunities and creates new threats.

c. The study indicates that securing maritime connectivity has become a crucial aspect of major powers foreign policy, with sea routes becoming a central point. The Indian Ocean and South China Sea have become interconnected due to the passing of one-third of containers through this region. It also underlines the significance of sea power strategy. As a result of this, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia have enhanced their presence in the Indo-Pacific region and expanded their ties with ASEAN member states. The Indo-Pacific's emerging geopolitics are undergoing a shift towards rebalancing security, promoting economic cooperation, militarization, functional cooperation, and reinventing security.

d. It is unclear what these opportunities or threats will be. India's inclusion in the Asia Pacific post-Cold War era has been limited due to its lack of membership in APEC. Despite joining the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1996 and the EAS in 2005, its role in regional security remains limited. However, the Indo-Pacific concept presents a strategic opportunity for India to counter China's increasing influence.

2. Economic Significance

a. The Indo-Pacific concept aims to establish a shared identity for alliance formation, playing a crucial role in shaping the economic and security architecture of the region. The region's geopolitical activities are gaining prominence due to exponential economic development from India, China, and Japan, prompting major power blocs to shift their focus.

b. The focus has been on trade and economic cooperation between the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, with major powers aiming for a diverse, multipolar space. The Indo-Pacific's roots are economic, but its consequences are security, with Pacific powers equities in Indian Ocean and Pacific security.

c. The study has shown that India's Act East Policy and strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region have strengthened relations with ASEAN, contributing to regional stability. However, challenges like geopolitical competition, infrastructure gaps, and economic rivalry persist. To strengthen relations, India must maintain a balanced approach, leverage strategic partnerships, enhance regional connectivity, and promote collaborative solutions.

d. India's Act East Policy has made significant progress, but implementation challenges persist, necessitating further work to enhance economic and security ties with East Asian nations. 'Act East Policy' is a work in progress, requiring strategic partnerships with ASEAN and China, addressing connectivity issues, and navigating relationships. India's long-term goals in Southeast Asia require continued engagement, strategic cooperation, and patience, as China's economic ties limit its ability to consolidate influence in smaller countries. Notwithstanding India's progress in economic, strategic, and cultural engagement with East Asia, faces challenges such as China's dominance, geopolitical complexities, and regional instability. Despite these obstacles, India's diplomatic and security presence in the region has improved.

II. Dynamics of India's relation with Indo-Pacific countries

1. Cold War era

a. India has implemented a responsible foreign policy, promoting de-colonization, advocating for developing nations, and fostering international peace and regional stability. It prioritized non-alignment and maintaining independence during the Cold War era.

b. The study reveals India's long-standing cultural, economic, and strategic ties with Indo-Pacific countries, a region crucial in both historical and modern geopolitics, particularly for India, China, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN nations. India's post-independence foreign policy was largely influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru, who advocated for non-alignment and distance from Western and Soviet blocs.

c. India also aimed to establish ties with Southeast Asian and Oceania nations through the Non-Aligned Movement, promoting economic cooperation and mutual development. India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean have been significantly bolstered by its participation in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and its cooperation with countries like Australia and Sri Lanka on maritime security and counter-piracy.

2. Post-Cold War Era

a. The 1991 economic crisis, triggered by the collapse of the USSR and the Gulf War, necessitated India to re-evaluate its foreign and domestic policies. India's desire for foreign investments and oil security led to increased international engagement with Asian and African countries, prompting a reconsideration of ideology in foreign policy.

b. India has strengthened its Indo-Pacific relationships through initiatives like the Act East Policy and the Indo-Pacific Oceans initiatives. China's rise in the Indian Ocean presents opportunities but also poses threats to India's strategic interests, as its military strength lies in the Northern and Eastern Indian Ocean but its Western presence is limited. Strengthening logistical support facilities in the Gulf and Western Indian Ocean is crucial for effective mission based employment.

c. The region's geo-strategic value is heightened by extra regional powers, including nuclear-capable ones, supporting national interests, with China's rise and assertive behaviour impacting the region's security. The Indian Ocean Island states are gaining strategic importance due to geopolitical rivalries, generating opportunities and pressures. India, a major naval power, impacts these states for security and assistance. They balance India's presence with China, reshaping India's engagement with these states.

d. India's strategic alliances with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar enable naval presence along key communication lines, securing Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) during peacetime and excluding adversary communications during conflict. However, its maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean

lacks strategic competition, with island nations like the Maldives and Sri Lanka potentially challenging its foreign policy choices due to their sovereignty.

e. The Indo-Pacific region's need for multilateral institutions is driven by economic liberalism, interdependence, and security multilateralism. This has fuelled APEC and encouraged security multilateralism, aiming to reduce war risks and prevent regional disorder. Economic concerns include the world trading system and trade blocs. Multilateralism is seen as a necessary framework to engage China and integrate it into the regional order, but it increases costs and makes resisting rules more difficult.

f. The increasing focus on island nations has led to a significant need for multilateral cooperation to counter China's assertiveness. China's investments in the Indo-Pacific region are destabilizing the region's security and economy, making formalized security architecture unsuitable due to geographic, political, economic, cultural, and historical divergence. Excluding minor countries from security architecture is unsustainable.

III. Triangular inter-relations between India, ASEAN, and Far-East

The study has shown that India's Act East Policy and strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region have strengthened relations with ASEAN. At the same time the United States, Japan and Australia are integrating their Indo-Pacific approaches with ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, prioritizing inclusivity, connectivity, and sovereignty respectively, thereby, representing a triangular relationship between India, ASEAN and the Far East as well as the United States. Subsequently, India-ASEAN-Japan-Australia and the United States partnership foster economic growth, security and global challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing its resilience and shared vision for a rules-based order. The triangular inter-relations can be highlighted into 4 parameters-

1. India-ASEAN Trade Relations

a. Trade Relations: India's trade relations with ASEAN have seen significant growth over the years, with ASEAN exports to India increasing significantly from \$8.2 billion in 2003 to nearly \$70.3 billion in 2022. This growth reflects India's increasing

reliance on ASEAN goods and services. In contrast, imports from India to ASEAN have also grown, from about \$4.4 billion in 2003 to approximately \$42.3 billion in 2022. ASEAN benefits more from the trading agreement due to structural imbalances, resulting in a 11.14% trade surplus, despite India's high dependence on ASEAN goods and slower export growth.

The signing of the Free Trade Agreement between India and ASEAN in 2009 significantly stimulated trade growth, with both exports and imports benefiting. ASEAN exports to India increased by 10.55%, while imports from India rose by 18.12%, indicating strengthened bilateral ties.

b. Strategic Relations: ASEAN provides India a strategic platform for engaging with Southeast Asian nations through mechanisms like ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus. It maintains centrality in Asia's provincial establishments, serving as the primary local gathering and initiating regional discussions on provincial participation.

2. India-ASEAN-Japan

a. Bilateral Relations: The trade data between India and Japan from 2003 to 2022 shows significant differences in their trade relationship. Prior to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), trade increased steadily, but Japan still benefited from the trade gap. The trade deficit between the two countries increased from USD 623 million to USD 3.46 billion, reflecting India's increasing demand for high-tech items and machinery.

Post-CEPA, India's exports to Japan increased from USD 4.80 billion in 2010 to USD 5.70 billion in 2022, while India's imports from Japan grew from USD 8.27 billion in 2010 to USD 15.75 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 10.57%, indicating Japan's continued importance as a supplier of advanced machinery, technology, and automobiles.

b. Trilateral Relations: India and Japan strongly support ASEAN centrality, recognizing its importance in the Indo-Pacific region. They have made significant progress in fostering cooperation and emphasizing its centrality. ASEAN centrality ensures the ASEAN bloc remains at the centre of Asia's provincial establishments,

secured through mechanisms like the ASEAN plus Three. The study advocates that ASEAN's centrality has promoted regional inclusivity and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, fostering closer collaboration between India, ASEAN member countries, and Japan in maritime security, counter terrorism, and disaster management. India and Japan have strengthened their defence cooperation with ASEAN, focusing on maritime security, freedom of navigation, and international law, fostering a more secure environment and managing potential conflicts.

ASEAN's influence on Japan's partnership led to the rebranding of the region as the 'Indo-Pacific', integrating Japan, and India. Japan and India collaborate on infrastructure development, security, and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific region, aligning with ASEAN's 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' for freedom of navigation and international law respect. ASEAN relies heavily on India and Japan, two key Asian economic and security powers, to strengthen its importance. They have responded to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by promoting connectivity through initiatives like AEP, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, and Japan's EPQI via FOIP.

3. India-ASEAN-Australia

a. Bilateral Relations: The trade relationship between Australia and India has seen impressive growth both in terms of exports and imports. India's exports to Australia increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15.20%, from USD 557.99 million in 2003 to USD 8.21 billion in 2022 while India's imports from Australia increased from USD 2.04 billion in 2003 to USD 19.62 billion in 2022, with a CAGR of 12.66%. This clearly indicates that Australia has consistently benefited from the trade balance, which has been growing over time showing Australia's supremacy in the trade relationship.

India and Australia have a robust trade relationship, with India exporting medicines, textiles, and agricultural products, and Australia exporting minerals, particularly coal, and iron ore. India imports agricultural goods from Australia, contributing to food security and dietary diversity. Addressing trade deficits and enhancing collaboration are crucial for both countries economic potential.

b. Trilateral Relations: The India-ASEAN-Australia triangle promotes open regional groups and national interests, with ASEAN providing a multilateral platform for bilateral discussions through initiatives like the ASEAN-India and ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Partnership. India and Australia prioritize the Indo-Pacific region, collaborating on trade, connectivity, and maritime security through ASEAN-India Strategic Partnerships and AOIP frameworks, focusing on regional stability, trade security, and countering coercive actions.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a forum where the bilateral relationship between India and Australia is significantly enhancing. India and Australia have successfully facilitated cooperation through the ARF multilateral mechanism, fostering a spirit of cooperation at the bilateral level. The ARF provides a platform for constructive dialogue on political and security cooperation, enhancing bilateral cooperation. ASEAN holds significant economic and strategic importance for India, as it serves as a platform for India's engagement with Australia.

ASEAN, a key trade and economic partner for Australia, enhances its economic reach through trade agreements like AANZFTA and RCEP, improving market access and supply chain resilience. ASEAN offers Australia alternative trade markets, reducing reliance on China amid geopolitical tensions, with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia emerging as key economic partners. Australia values ASEAN's sovereignty and strategic balance, actively participating in events like the East Asia Summit and supporting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

The India-Australia-ASEAN triangular relationship is primarily influenced by the Indo-Pacific region, with all partners vested in maintaining peace, stability, and openness. Both India and Australia view ASEAN as crucial for peace and security, advocating for a rules-based order and supporting regional stability, maritime security, and economic connectivity.

4. India-ASEAN-United States

a. Bilateral Relations: The assessed value of goods and services between India and the United States was \$191.8 billion. India exports \$78 billion in textiles, pharmaceuticals, gems, and engineering goods to the U.S., while imports \$58 billion

include crude oil, LNG, aircraft, machinery, and electronics. India benefited from strong export performance in goods and IT-enabled services, leading to a significant trade surplus with the U.S.

b. Trilateral Relations: India, the US, and ASEAN countries are concerned about maintaining freedom of navigation and over flight rights, while India's growing defence ties with ASEAN countries have been a stabilizing factor. India and the US are committed to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, with ASEAN at the centre, as highlighted in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The United States significantly contributes to Southeast Asia's economic growth through its commercial and trade ties with ASEAN.

The US supports ASEAN centrality, supports the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and has provided over \$14.1 billion in economic, health, and security assistance since 2002 to ASEAN member states. ASEAN is actively fostering economic integration with the global community, serving as a crucial trade and investment partner for the U.S. and India. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and initiatives promoting digital trade and infrastructure development are crucial components of trilateral economic diplomacy.

The US is actively involved in the ASEAN Regional Forum, addressing non-traditional security issues like counterterrorism, disaster response, and weapons proliferation. They advocate for peaceful territorial dispute resolution and support ASEAN countries in ensuring freedom of navigation and rule of law. Despite concerns about China's rise, ASEAN maintains strong economic and diplomatic ties with China. The triangulations prospects are optimistic due to globalization convergence and cooperation networks in maritime land-based trade and security.

IV. Quad and the Indo-Pacific

1. Economic Significance

a. The study reveals that the Quad countries are investing in resilient infrastructure, focusing on green and digital technologies. They are collaborating on projects to ensure access to clean energy, digital connectivity, supply chain resilience, and

advanced technologies. The Quad partners are also participating in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, addressing trade, clean energy, de-carbonization, digital economy, and anti-corruption efforts.

b. Quad partners, a leading Indo-Pacific infrastructure provider, has provided over \$48 billion in official finance since 2015, supporting thousands of projects across 30 countries, including rural development, health infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, and telecommunications.

c. It has pledged to aid countries in tackling debt issues, but no further efforts are being made to enhance regional supply chain connectivity beyond these critical technologies. Quad joint statements overlook trade, despite China's economic dependence and India's participation in IPEF, causing speculation on US economic principles and lack of US-India trade arrangement.

2. Political and Strategic Significance

a. The study indicates that the Quad holds both meetings of Head of States and foreign ministers at regular intervals hosted by the member countries. The Quad's political motive is to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific regions with regard to regional security and stability among its members. Its objective is to maintain sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific region.

b. The Quad member's long-term partnership focuses on strategic cooperation and regional security, ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. It supports ASEAN's centrality and unity, facilitating military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises. It is focusing on security cooperation, with joint military exercises strengthening defence ties among member countries. These exercises enhance the Quad force's ability to operate effectively, making them crucial in any regional security scenario.

c. Quad has been actively promoting maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region since 2020, participating in the Malabar Exercise. This demonstrates their growing unity in addressing geopolitical challenges like China's maritime overtures, leading to the emergence of configurations like AUKUS and Squad. The United States has

significantly contributed to regional security by enhancing force posture and expanding multinational military operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

d. It is evident that the Quad partners are focusing on anti-submarine warfare and undersea domain awareness due to concerns over the Chinese Navy's expansion. Units participated in advanced exercises in surface, sub-surface, and air warfare domains. Australia, Japan, and the United States also participated in a naval exercise involving Special Forces.

e. The U.S. Army faces China in the Indo-Pacific due to its proximity to conflict zones, protected supply lines, and numerical superiority in equipment and munitions. As a result, the United States is keenly developing new weapons and systems to replace the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS).

The study indicates that global powers are increasingly recognizing the political and economic significance of the Indo-Pacific region in meeting the needs of its states and beyond. The Indo-Pacific region plays a crucial role in global strategic outlook, as countries respond to emerging challenges and existing threats while reviving great power rivalries. The US primarily targets Indo-Pacific sub regions, while India primarily interests the Indian Ocean, including the Western Indian Ocean, and Australia is expanding its focus under the Indo-Pacific rubric, focusing on the Indian Ocean. Japan has a wider focus on the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.

India, Japan, and Australia have developed closer relations due to their shared desire to safeguard their interests in the Indo-Pacific region. India, a mature and the world's largest and most diverse democracy, has gained the reputation of being a peaceful and benevolent power in the Indo-Pacific, as reflected in its active and positive role in regional organizations like the East Asia Summit and the Quad. To conclude, the Indo-Pacific region's geopolitical flashpoint, characterized by rising tensions, territorial disputes, and China's influence, has seen diverse cooperation between India and its partners, involving diverse maritime spaces and diverse interests, which will shape future stability, prosperity, and security.

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Tong, Liew Chin. COVID-19, ASEAN and the future of multilateralism. FES Asia Podcast Series. (18 December, 2020). Retrieved from <https://creators.spotify.com/pod/show/fes-asia/episodes/S1E5---Disrupted-Asia---COVID-19--ASEAN-and-the-future-of-multilateralism-ents6o>

G. PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

i. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Chauhan, Vice Admiral Pradeep. Director General. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 7th November 2024 (10:AM IST).

Das, Shubhamitra. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (12:00 PM IST).

Kumar, Dr Sanjeev. Senior Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (12:30 PM IST).

Manickam, Venkataraman. Associate Professor. School of International Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 6th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

Muni, Prof SD. Emeritus Professor. Jawaharlal Nehru University. New Delhi on 7th November 2024 (11:00 AM IST).

Pandey, Dr Pragya. Research Fellow. Indian Council of World Affairs. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (11:30 AM IST).

Singh, Antara Ghoshal. Research Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on the 5th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Singh, Commodore Abhay Kumar. Research Fellow, Maritime Affairs Centre. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi on 19th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

ii. TELEPHONE CALLS

Jyotsna, Yoga. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Mishra, Vivek. Deputy Director. Strategic Studies Programme. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 26th October 2024 (6:00 PM IST).

Pant, Harsh V. Vice President. Studies and Foreign Policy. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 11th November 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Sailo, Laldinkima. Senior Manager. International Affairs, Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES) on 20th December, 2023 (3:00 PM IST).

iii. EMAILS

Bhaskar, Commodore C. Uday. Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November 2024 (1:00 PM IST).

Menon, Rear Admiral K Raja (Retd). Honorary Fellow. National Maritime Foundation. New Delhi on 4th November (3:00 PM IST).

Naidu, Dr GVC. Senior Fellow. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. New Delhi on 30th October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

Sarkar, Debosmita. Associate Fellow, Centre for New Economic Diplomacy. Observer Research Foundation. Kolkata on 28th October 2024. (2:00 PM IST).

Shankar, Mahadevan. Honorary Adjunct Fellow. National Maritime Foundation.
New Delhi on 5th November 2024 (6: 00 PM IST).

Singh, Abhijit. Visiting Fellow. Observer Research Foundation. New Delhi on 23rd
October 2024 (3:00 PM IST).

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I. NEWSPAPER

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The South China Sea Morning Post (Hong Kong)

The Telegraph (Guwahati)

The Times of India (Mumbai)

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