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CHINA & INDIA'S INDO PACIFIC STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE REGION IN GENERAL & PAKISTAN IN PARTICULAR



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ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a key geostrategic arena in recent years due to its economic and military significance, with more than half of the world's population and two-thirds of its economy. The US and its allies, including the EU, India, Canada, France, ASEAN, and South Korea, have recognized the growing challenges posed by China's increasing economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power in the region, as well as its pursuit of a sphere of influence. Each of these actors has developed its own Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS), reflecting their respective interests and priorities. The fundamental objective of the IPS is to prevent China from expanding its influence in the area. India is seen as a counterbalance to China's growing power in the region, hence the US has tried to boost relations with India in recent years. India is improving its relations with major power and became active member of recently alliances (QUAD, I2U2 etc.)

This paper aims to comprehensively explore these strategies and their impact on both the wider region and Pakistan in particular. Currently, Pakistan hasn't formulated any distinct IPS but has emphasized the use of the term "Asia-Pacific region." These strategies may bring about both advantageous opportunities and challenges for Pakistan, particularly concerning economic cooperation and regional security.



1. INTRODUCTION

a. The Indo-Pacific Region, which runs from the Pacific coast to the Indian Ocean region, is crucial to global geopolitics since it is home to more than half of the world's population, over two-thirds of the global economy, and seven of the world's biggest militaries. Every year, this region is the conduit for \$ 3.5 trillion worth of global trade, including two-thirds of China's total marine trade (Shehzad, 2022). Due to its importance in February 2022, the US released its own Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) (Biden, 2022). The EU, India, Canada, France, ASEAN, South Korea and even Bangladesh soon followed. India became a significant player in the US IPS to contain China, and the US continues to support it. India also joined important alliances like QUAD and (India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States) I2U2 and finalized several agreements that were previously only available to the US's closest allies, endangering Pakistan's security.

b. The US considers China as a threat to the Indo-Pacific Region. As it pursues an Indo-Pacific sphere of influence and aims to become the most powerful country in the world, China is combining its economic, political, military, and technological might. China invested \$962 Billion through Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) (Nedopil, 2023), enhancing the infrastructure of these nations, and establishing itself as a powerhouse. Many nations, including the US, are concerned about China's establishment of military bases, and regularly patrolling in the South China Sea, which has caused tension in the region. In the South China Sea, China has created artificial islands and outfitted them with military facilities like runways, radars, and missile batteries. Nearly the entire South China Sea is subject to Chinese sovereignty claims, including territories that Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia also contend with. As other nations contest China's claims and assert its own sovereignty, this has caused conflicts and tensions in the region (Gomez & Aaron, 2022). The establishment of military sites in the South China Sea and the first military base at Djibouti (Indian Ocean) and there are US reports that China is building a military base in the UAE has generated questions regarding China's intentions and capacity to project force beyond its borders. The Chinese navy's exercises and patrols in the Indian and Pacific regions have indeed caused tension and unrest with the US. China has been increasingly assertive in its territorial claims in the South China Sea, which is a vital waterway for global trade and has been accused of militarizing islands and reefs in the region. The US perceived China as a competitor and want to contain China with the help of allies and India. Therefore, Indo-Pacific emerged as a significant development in US Policies.



Figure 3.1: Map of USINDPACOM Area of Responsibility (Aquilino, 2023)

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs qualitative research methodology and has scrutinized the relevant primary and secondary sources of data/ information from books, articles, different websites, online journals, and e-books. The experts, pertinent national and international documents, and academics in peer-reviewed publications were consulted for a variety of pertinent prior assessments and viewpoints. The experts' analysis technique through an in-house session to deduce findings and conclusions and to generate recommendations for practical actions including governance measures proposed for Pakistan.

3. BACKGROUND OF INDO-PACIFIC REGION

a. The Indo-Pacific region is indeed a vast and important region that comprises the Indian Ocean and Western and Central Pacific Ocean (as shown in fig 2). It includes countries such as China, Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and the US etc. The region is home to more than half of the world's population and accounts for a significant share of global economic growth and trade. The historical view of the region is very diverse and enriched with ancient civilizations like China, India, and Japan acquiring enhanced trade and cultural networks. Indo-Pacific Region has also undergone wars, colonization, and political disruption, with many states

achieving independence in the mid-20th century. The region has seen rapid economic growth and technological development in 21st Century. The Indo-Pacific region has also been a center of geopolitical rivalry, with major powers e.g., US, India, and China competing for their dominance and strategic interests and has been marked by conflicts over territorial clashes, military development, and economic contests, as the states pursue to safe and protects their interests and proclaim their power.

b. It is plausible to assert that the Indo-Pacific region is the global center of economic growth. The area is home to some of the nations with the greatest economic growth rates, including China and India, as well as vibrant and forward-thinking nations like Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. Due to its proximity to some of the busiest shipping lanes and ports in the world, the region is also a key hub for international trade and investment.

c. In addition to its economic potential, the Indo-Pacific area is significant from a strategic standpoint. The Strait of Malacca (acting as the main commercial route for the Indo-Pacific region), the South China Sea, Strait of Hormuz, and Strait of Bab el Mandab are just a few of the crucial sea lanes in the area that are essential for international trade and security. Any disruption in these straits will cripple the world economy. A variety of security issues, such as territorial disputes, piracy, and terrorism, are also present in the region and call for regional collaboration and coordination.

d. Two primary factors can be utilized to clarify the emergence of an Indo-Pacific strategic vision. Firstly, the evolving perception of Chinese in the entire region. Secondly, the United States has a vested interest in the area, with a focus on limiting China's ascent as a potential competitor to the U.S.

e. Indo – Pacific Region was first coined by Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Shinzo Abe while addressing the Indian Parliament in 2007, "Later he devised the phrase "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) in 2016. In many ways, Japan successfully expanded its strategic scope, increased diplomatic prominence, and assumed a leading position in influencing the views and narrative of its primary partners in the region. President Obama was the architect of the IPS unveiled its "Pivot to Asia" strategy in 2012, it marked a significant shift in US foreign policy's focus away from the Middle East and European theatre to Asian countries, some of which are close to China. The Trump and Biden administration continued IPS (Saxena, 2022).

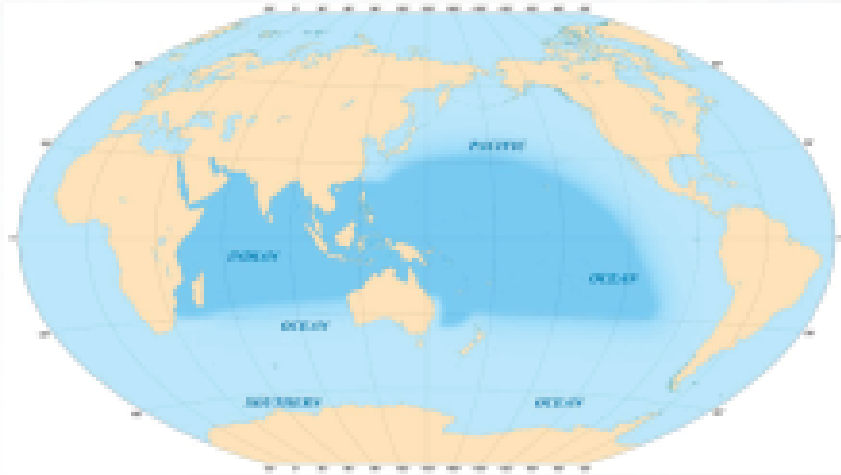


Figure 3.2: Indo Pacific Region (Gaba, 2016)

The Indo-Pacific region is also a house of multilateral institutions and initiatives aimed at promoting collaboration, stability, and solidity despite these challenges. Which includes the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Australia, UK, and the US (AUKUS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), Build Back Better World (B3W), The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Five Power Defense Arrangements, and India-Japan-United States Trilateral etc. The significance of major alliances of Indo-Pacific Region are discussed below:

4. MOJOR STRATEGIC ALLIANCES IN THE INDO – PACIFIC REGION

4.1 QUAD

The US, Japan, India, and Australia have formed a strategic partnership known as the QUAD, its essential objectives are to ensure free routes, a free exchanging framework, and a worldwide request in view of rules. It is regarded as a deliberate grouping with the intention of reducing and eliminating Chinese influence. It aims to contain a "rising China" and combat China's predatory economic and trade policies. The provision of alternative debt financing to nations in the Indo-Pacific region is another goal of QUAD (Grosse & Gamso, 2021). Later, QUAD turn into military alliance and conducting regular naval exercises (Malabar) since 2020 in North Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Philippine Sea, and Sea of Japan (Rajagopalan, 2021).

4.2 AUKUS

The announcement by Australia to buy 8 nuclear submarines for more than \$100 billion in September 2021 by US and UK surprised the entire

world. Australia reneged on its agreement to pay France \$ 66 billion for 12 diesel-electric submarines. Analysts generally view the pact as a US-led effort to use Australia to offset the growing influence of China, even though AUKUS did not explicitly state this. The regional nations responded in a variety of ways, with China being criticized as "highly irresponsible" and warned that it might start a nuclear arms race (Miller & Aamer, 2023) North Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia all spoke out against it. The Philippines and South Korea applauded the action, which is cautiously welcomed by Japan. Possibly, this will strengthen South Korea's argument for future nuclear submarine acquisitions. India has maintained a quiet stance after its previous rejection for nuclear submarines by the U.S. However, there is now a glimmer of optimism that such an acquisition may be possible in the future (Hashmi, 2021).

4.3 ASEAN

Ten nations in Southeast Asia are members of the regional intergovernmental organization known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Economic cooperation, political stability, and cultural exchange are all areas of focus for ASEAN. By adhering to the rule of law and fostering friendly relations among its member states, this organization also seeks to establish and maintain regional peace and stability (Hong et al., 2023).

4.4 APEC

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum is a regional economic forum that brings together 21 nations along the Pacific Rim, including China, Australia, the US, and Japan. The region's free trade and economic integration are the goals of APEC. By removing obstacles to trade, improving inventory network availability across the board, and further developing the business climate. APEC also helps its member economies to build the institutional capacity. They need to put trade and investment reform into action and reap the benefits. APEC's support for the World Trade Organization (WTO) ongoing multilateral trade negotiations adds another dimension to the goals of the G20 (Bellesteros, 2022).

4.5 INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK (IPEF)

In May 2022, the US launched IPEF that includes 14 countries the US, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. These countries possess 40% of the global GDP. The purpose of IPEF is to advance economic growth, resilience, and competitiveness among the members. The action counters BRI and lessens China's expanding influence in the region (Kitamura, 2022).

4.6 BUILD BACK BETTER WORLD (B3W)

This is a brand-new global infrastructure project that the US and its G7 allies announced in June 2021. Developing sustainable infrastructure in low- and middle-income nations in the Indo-Pacific region, Africa, and Latin America is a goal of the program, which seeks to mobilize public and private sector finance. B3W is regarded as a viable substitute for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The success of the B3W program, which is still in its early phases, will depend on the partners' capacity to raise money and carry out efficient infrastructure projects in poor nations (Chaziza, 2021).

4.7 THE REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP)

It is a free trade agreement signed in 2020 by 15 countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. RCEP is aimed at promoting regional trade and economic cooperation in the region. The goal of the RCEP is to encourage trade and economic expansion in the Asia-Pacific region while also strengthening bilateral trade ties (Petri & Plummer, 2020).

4.8 FIVE POWER DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS (FPDA)

Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom formed the defense alliance known as the FPDA. The goal of the FPDA is to boost regional cooperation and security (Huxley, 2017).

4.9 INDIA-JAPAN-UNITED STATES TRILATERAL

a. India, Japan, and US Trilateral is a strategic partnership among the three nations with the goal of fostering economic growth, security, and stability in the region (Bahl, 2020).

b. These alliances and partnerships illustrate the wide range of interests and difficulties that the Indo-Pacific region faces, highlighting the value of international integration. These alliances are a reaction to China's rise in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Chinese and American investment approaches to a country are different from one another. China is willing to collaborate with any country, without any preferences or criteria. Trading and infrastructure expansion are its sole interests. The US is less interested in interacting with any government and keener in pushing its' agenda, overthrowing non-cooperative governments, reselling its outdated military hardware, aiding in exchange for demands, and dealing with other stakeholders. Interaction with China is generally considered to be friendly.

5. THE US INTERESTS IN THE INDO PACIFIC REGION

a. The US, a major player in the Indo-Pacific, released its first Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022 and its National Security Strategy (NSS) in October 2022, both of which reflect the US objective to limit China and the significance

of the Indo-Pacific Region. As more American military personnel are stationed here than anywhere else outside of the US. It generates close to \$ 900 billion in foreign direct investment of US and sustains more than three million American employment (Biden, 2022). The region's impact and importance to the US will only increase in the coming years as it is responsible for up to two-thirds of the global economic growth. The US has long recognized the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to its security and progress. The US is closely monitoring the entire region, from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia through South Asia, Oceania, and the Pacific Islands.

b. To counter China's influence, the US will significantly increase its presence in the region with the addition of four new bases in the Philippines (as shown in figure 3.3). The two naval facilities in the province of Cagayan protect Luzon, the northernmost island of the Philippine archipelago, which is situated in the South China Sea just across from Taiwan and home to the disputed Spratly Islands (Dress, 23). China has expressed concern over the establishment of US military bases in the Philippines, it seriously harms Philippine national interests and endanger regional peace and stability.

5.1 THE US INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY – FEB 2022

The salient points are as under:

a. The US is an Indo-Pacific power, and has five objectives in its Indo-Pacific Strategy:

- (1) Advance a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)
- (2) Build connections within and beyond the region
- (3) Drive regional prosperity
- (4) Bolster Indo-Pacific security
- (5) Build regional resilience to transnational threats

b. Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges, particularly from China. As China is combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world's most influential power

c. The US will build support for rules-based approaches to the maritime domain, including in the South China Sea and the East China Sea

d. The US will deepen five regional treaty alliances i-e. Australia, Japan, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand—and strengthen relationships with leading regional partners, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands

e. The US will continue to strengthen QUAD cooperation on global health, climate change, critical and emerging technology, infrastructure,

cyber, education, and clean energy. As the US works together with other partners towards a free and open Indo-Pacific region

f. The US put forward an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) - a multilateral partnership for the 21st century. This economic framework will help member states economies to harness rapid technological transformation, including in the digital economy, and adapt to the coming energy and climate transition

g. Through the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative with G7 partners, US will equip the emerging economies of the region with the high-standards infrastructure that will enable them to grow and prosper, while creating good jobs on both sides of the Pacific

h. US will renew the focus on innovation to ensure its military to operate in rapidly evolving threat environments, including space, cyberspace, and critical and emerging technology areas

i. US will also work with its partners to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, including supporting Taiwan's self-defense capabilities. They also ensure an environment in which Taiwan's future is determined peacefully in accordance with the wishes and best interests of Taiwan's people

j. As the North Korea continues to develop destabilizing nuclear and missile programs, the US will continue to seek serious and sustained dialogue, with the goal of complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and addressing its ongoing human rights violations and improving the lives and livelihoods of the North Korean people

k. Steadily advance Major Defense Partnership with India and support its role as a *Net Security Provider* and build the defense capacity of partners in South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands (Biden, 2022)

5.2 US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (NSS)- OCT 2022

a. The US released NSS October 2022, primarily focuses on the current decade as a "decisive" one in which the U.S. seeks following:

(1) To maintain its leadership, improve the economy, build on a vast network of alliances and partnerships

(2) The Indo-Pacific fuels much of the world's economic growth and will be the epicenter of 21st century geopolitics

(3) As an Indo-Pacific power, the US has a vital interest in realizing a region that is open, interconnected, prosperous, secure, and resilient

(4) The US will work with other regional states to keep the Indo-Pacific open and accessible and ensure that nations are free to make their own choices, consistent with obligations under international law

(5) Counter China as its strategic competitor and Russia as a disruptor, and boost competitiveness while defending democracy

(6) NSS considers both the long-term and short-term issues that China poses as a threat. In all areas of the economy, technology, development, security, global governance, and diplomacy

(7) Biden administration prioritizes competition with China, which is more global in scope and is especially pronounced in the Indo-Pacific region

(8) China is the only nation that has the desire and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technical might to change the world order

(9) The US will affirm freedom of the seas and build shared regional support for open access to the South China Sea - a thoroughway for nearly two-thirds of global (Biden, 2022)



Figure 3.3: US Bases in Philippine (Wingfield-Hayes, 2023)

b. In addition to Philippine the US also has military base in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore apart from Hawaii and Guam (as shown in Figure 3.4). The presence of these military bases provides the US with a strategic foothold in the region and enables it to project power and protect its interests. Additionally, these bases help to support the

defense and security of these countries against potential threats from China and other regional powers.



Figure 3.4: US Military Presence in Indo-Pacific Region (Samo, 2020)

c. After World War II, the US required an adversary to maintain US forces abroad and grow its defense industry. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) was the main opponent until 1990. The focus then turned to Islamic countries, with strikes on Iraq (under the guise of a WMD), Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia and now China is the main target. These deeds caused the world to become more complicated, and these nations suffered severe economic and physical damage as a result. The US has delivered a clear message to restrain China and will work with allies by issuing the IPS and NSS. Even if it is difficult to restrain China, these initiatives will help to lessen its influence in the area. Chinese rapid economic growth, modernization of its armed forces, construction of ports across the world, BRI will continue to win these nations' support.

5.3 G 20 SUMMIT - NEW COMMERCE ROUTE – TURKIYE

a. The G-20 Summit met in New Delhi from 9-10, September 2023. The establishment of a new trade route linking India to the Middle East and Europe via ports and railroads is one of the most significant outcomes. It consists of two distinct routes: a northern corridor connecting the Gulf Arab States to Europe and an east corridor connecting India to the Gulf Arab States. UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, France, Italy, and Germany are among this.

b. According to some analysts, the Belt and Road Initiative will face a frontal challenge due to this corridor. The ambitious plan demonstrates that the US can rely on its Middle East friends in its

efforts to contain China's rise, but it also demonstrates how the Gulf states seek to strike a balance between old allies like the US and new partners like China in what they perceive as a non-unipolar world order. Transit would be provided by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe for goods and services. In addition, the route will allow for the installation of pipes for the export of clean hydrogen and power (Ebrahim, 2023). It is a very ambitious and non-practical trade route, the topography from Dubai to Haifa port is desert and mountains. The road & rail network will be expensive as compared to trade from Dubai to Haifa by sea.

c. Israel will further penetrate in the Gulf because of this initiative, which is not in Pakistan's best interests. Israel is a member of I2U2, hence its presence in this initiative might impede the progress of CPEC projects. According to certain analysts, I2U2 plus S (Saudi Arabia) is taking place. Israel, which has made it a priority to strengthen ties with Saudi Arabia, lauded the project as well, saying it "changes our global and historical situation" and moves Israel closer to its aim of joining Israel to the world but the entire geo-strategic situation changed when Hamas conducted attack on Israel on 08 Oct 23 by firing more than 5000 shells to Israel. In retaliation, Israel has killed more than 8000 Palestinians including innocent children. The ground attack is also started on Gaza, the whole world in condemning Israel's brutality. Due to this incident, Israel and Saudi Arabia relations are stalled.

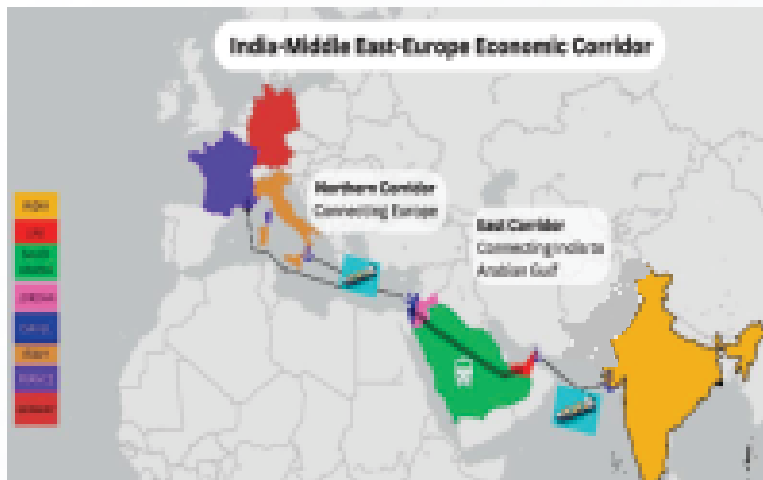


Figure 3.5: India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (Kumar, 2023)

d. Türkiye is unhappy about being cut off from this trade route and insists that the most practical route for vehicles travelling from east to west must go via it. Türkiye, according to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is aiming to build a railway and port corridor that would connect it to Saudi Arabia and the UAE via Iraq. This ambitious plan is expected to cost roughly \$17 billion to invest in, with predicted returns

of \$4 billion annually and the creation of at least 100,000 new employments (Shafaq, 2023). If finished, both trading corridors will benefit the Gulf countries.

6. EU INDO PACIFIC POLICY

- a. On 20 April 2021, the EU published its Indo-Pacific policy, outlining the bloc's vision for the region. The Indo-Pacific policy of the EU seeks to strengthen its position in the region while advancing its principles and interests.
- b. Three key areas of attention are highlighted by the strategy:
 - (1) By fortifying its ties with important regional allies, improving maritime security, and tackling problems like cybercrime and terrorism, the EU hopes to contribute to the stability and security of the region.
 - (2) By financing infrastructure initiatives that are economically, socially, and environmentally viable, the EU hopes to foster sustainable connection in the area.
 - (3) By assisting multilateral organizations like the United Nations and fostering adherence to international law, the EU hopes to strengthen the region's rules-based system of governance.
- c. The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy asks for stronger interaction with important partners, such as Australia, India, Japan, and the US, and acknowledges the region's growing strategic relevance considering its economic importance and the geopolitical changes that are occurring. The plan also emphasizes how crucial it is to discuss topics of common interest with China while also raising problems of concern, like trade practices and violations of human rights (Union, 2021) .

7. INDIA'S INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY

- a. India's Indo-Pacific strategy, known as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), seeks to promote maritime security, connectivity, and sustainable development across the region. In April 2019, India set up an Indo-Pacific Wing in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The division is meant to integrate under one Indo-Pacific umbrella, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and QUAD (Saha & Mishra, 2020). India has sought to deepen its partnerships with countries in the region, including Japan, Australia, and ASEAN members. Its strategy also seeks to address security challenges posed by China, including its territorial claims in the South China Sea and BRI.
- b. India is main beneficiary of other countries' IPS, which are enumerated as follow:

(1) Indian Maritime Interests are huge, Primary Area of Interest including the Indian Ocean, and a secondary area of interest that expands up to the Pacific & Atlantic Oceans (Munir, 2021).

(2) India officially recognized by the US as a Net Security Provider in the US IPS 2022. Which gives the reason to increase its influence in the IOR. India also established military bases in different countries like Madagascar, Seychelles, berthing rights at Duqm port in Muscat. The presence of Indian Naval Ships in Duqm, which is close to Gwadar Port, is a source of concern for Pakistani naval planners.

(3) India has quickly realized the global shift from continental to maritime policymaking, and initiatives like IORA, IONS, and SAGAR indicate Indian interests. Due to close relations between US and India, it also became a member of new alliances like I2U2 & QUAD.

c. India and US relations were improved in a remarkable way after 2010 as US considered India can response Chinese aggression in Indo – Pacific Region. The US has concluded several agreements with India which were only done by NATO/close allies:

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) – 2016

It includes procedures for logistics supplies, support, and services. The agreement includes training, medical services, fuel, spare parts, transportation, food, water, repair & maintenance, clothing, and communication services.

Communication Compatibility & Security Agreement (COMCASA) – 2018

The COMCASA allows the U.S. to transfer data equipment and secure communications to India. Real-time data sharing over secure channels with the Indian military is also possible now.

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) – 2020

The agreement allows for geospatial intelligence sharing with enhanced access to each other maps and satellite imagery. As a result, India now has the capability to access detailed information regarding military installation and troops placement to target attacks with more precision and accuracy. It will enhance the Indian military system and the accuracy of weapons such as ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, drones, etc (Jaffar, 2020).

As part of its IPS, India is pursuing a looking West and acting East policy. India is increasingly relying on the relative superiority of the West in terms of military might and the East in terms of economic vibrancy. Broadly speaking, India has three grand-strategic objectives:

a. To ensure that the Indian economy continues to grow, which is quite admirable

b. To deter serious challenges to its security and territorial integrity from its two powerful and nuclear-armed regional rivals, Pakistan, and China

c. India relies on sea lanes for 68% of the value and 95% of the volume of its trade, making the region between the East China Sea and the Arabian Sea of critical geo-economic importance to New Delhi (Mukherjee, 2019).

Major Countries regarded India as a partner in IPS due to tremendous economic growth in the past twenty years and now India overtook Britain and became the fifth largest economy of the world (Misra, 2022).

The US needs India in containment of China in Indo Pacific Region. In recent years, they both have intensified their strategic alliance, particularly in the fields of security and defense. They are concerned about China's increasing assertiveness and influence in the Indo-Pacific Region. They have been collaborating to support a free and open Indo-Pacific that abides by international law and norms. To offset China's rise, the US has also been working to fortify its regional ties and partnerships. India has been regarded as a trusted partner in this situation because of its strategic location, economic potential, and military prowess. Notably, India has a complicated relationship with China and has followed a strategy of strategic autonomy to uphold cordial ties with both China and the US.

8. INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY OF MAJOR COUNTRIES

a. In recent years, several major countries have been developing their own IPS, as a response to China's growing economic and military influence in the region like France, Canada, South Korea, ASEAN, Japan, and UK.

(1) France revealed Indo-Pacific Policy in 2018, which aims to strengthen connections with nations in the region on the economic, security fronts and advance a rules-based global order(France's Indo-Pacific Strategy, 2018).

(2) Canada unveiled Indo-Pacific Policy in 2022 with the intention of fostering regional security and stability while developing closer economic relations in the region (Canada's Indo Pacific Strategy, 2022).

(3) In December 2022, South Korea released IPS, affirming its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This initiative is driven by South Korea's growing engagement with Southeast Asia, owing to the region's economic prospects and the United States' shift towards the Indo-Pacific (South Korean Foreign Policy In The Indo-Pacific Era, 2022).

(4) Ten Southeast Asian nations collectively known as ASEAN have been advocating their own vision for the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing inclusivity and respect for international law.

(5) Japan has worked with other nations of Indo-Pacific to improve connectivity, economic cooperation, and security. As Japan is a vital ally

of the US in advocating a free and open Indo-Pacific (Japan, 2023). In alignment with the US strategy for bolstering security measures, Japan has raised its defense budget by 26.3% to reach \$51.4 billion for the fiscal year 2023. This increase is a response to what Japan describes as "the most challenging and intricate security landscape since World War II" (Kosuke, 2022).

(6) In 2021, the UK released Indo-Pacific Policy, which aims to strengthen business ties and advance regional security and stability (HM Government, 2021). The significance of the South China Sea region, coupled with China's regular warship patrols, has led Britain to deploy two warships to Singapore for an extended five-year period starting in 2022. This deployment signifies Britain's keen interest in the area and marks its inaugural establishment of a permanent naval presence in the region since the British military withdrew from east of the Suez Canal in 1971 (Kai, 2022)

b. The Indo-Pacific strategies of these countries mirror their shared concerns regarding China's escalating assertiveness in the region. They are resolute in their commitment to preserving a rules-based international order and ensuring a stable and economically prosperous Indo-Pacific, with economic considerations playing a crucial role as well.

9. CHINESE PERSPECTIVE ON INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY

a. China didn't issue any Indo-Pacific strategy. In the ensuing paragraph, Chinese perspective for Indo-Pacific Region will be highlighted. It seems the US dominance is under threat from China's recent economic and military expansion. Chinese predominance will be at the center of the new Asian order that China is steadily establishing. The BRI, a huge infrastructure and investment project that intends to connect Asia with Europe and Africa through a network of land and maritime connections, is the centerpiece of China's IPS. It seeks to strengthen economic ties between China and other nations in the area, but it has also sparked worries about China's growing power and potential debt-trap diplomacy.

b. Like most Asian countries, China is heavily dependent on hydrocarbon imports. Apart from its main supplier and partner, Russia, other significant sellers are in the Middle East or Africa. Consequently, more than 70% of the China petroleum and LNG exports is shipped through the Strait of Malacca, which makes it a crucial route from the standpoint of the China's energy security policy. However, its importance is not limited to the transport of raw materials. According to calculations by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), about 20% of global maritime trade and 60% of China's trade flows are moved through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, making it the most important Sea Lanes of Communication for the Chinese economy (Dress, 23). China is afraid that if the Strait of Malacca is closed, its economy will suffer a lot. Their officials are trying to lessen the Malacca Dilemma by decreasing their reliance on Middle Eastern energy imports. Beijing is attempting to forge alternative land connections and energy partnerships with Pakistan, Myanmar, Central Asia, and Russia. The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and CPEC will help to alleviate some of the Chinese trade issues.

c. The East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean are three of the maritime regions in the Indo-Pacific that have been the subject of the most disputes. Even though there has never been a direct military battle there, such regions are the origin of increasing security problems in the area. The competing security needs of the regional nations are the fundamental reason for the conflict in those locations. There has been a complicated issue in Indo-Pacific maritime security because those areas also have important geostrategic relevance.

d. The South China Sea is currently embroiled in regional maritime disputes, with several strategically positioned islands being contested by both China and other neighboring countries. Fig. 6 illustrates the conflicting claims over EEZ between China and Japan. China's extensive nine-dash line, covering a significant portion of the area, is a primary source of worry for neighboring nations. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have separately lodged complaints with the UN regarding China's unilateral territorial claims. The heightened risk faced by these nations stems from the lack of clarity surrounding sea territory ownership in the South China Sea, potentially leading to conflicts (Yuniar, 2022).

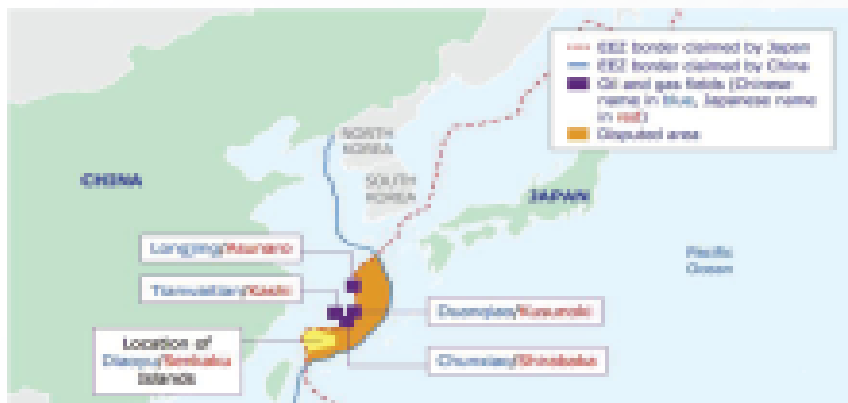


Figure 3.6: Location of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, potential oil, and gas reserves and interrelated EEZ disputed area (Lee & Ming, 2012)

e. Satellite images have recently revealed China's stepped-up efforts to physically enlarge existing islands or forge brand-new ones in the South China Sea to recover land. Aside from adding sand to existing reefs, China has built ports, military outposts, and airports—particularly in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, where it has twenty and seven outposts, respectively. Fighter jets, cruise missiles, and a radar system have all been deployed by China on Woody Island to militarize it. Because China has become a military and economic powerhouse and has been acquiring territory, the other nations in the region are terrified (Flemming, 2023). The presence of US military in the Indo-Pacific region as shown in Figure 3.4 above gives the countries in the region a sense of security and puts more pressure on China. As China has criticized the US for supporting the IPS because it sees it as a means of slowing China's rise to global power. Additionally, China has expressed concerns regarding the potential presence of

US military personnel in the region, which it regards as a threat to its safety. China also views the QUAD as an attempt to contain its rise and has been wary of it. US and its allies have been accused of interfering in the affairs of the region, and China has described the QUAD as a "mini-NATO" (Rasheed, 2020). At the same time, there is recognition that China could be isolated regionally if ASEAN countries join the Indo-Pacific framework.

f. According to the US, China has established the "String of Pearl" (Figure 3.7) program to ensure the survival of its SLOCs, which are safeguarded by a network of Chinese military and commercial infrastructure that extends from China to Port Sudan. The sea lines pass via several significant marine straits, including the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab ul Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Lombok, as well as other vital maritime hubs in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Somalia. Hainan Island in South China is where the First Pearl is located. The port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka is known as the Second Pearl, and it will be used for an LNG refinery as well as a fuel storage facility for aircraft and naval ships. The third pearl is at the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh; the fourth is Woody Island, which is 300 miles east of the Paracel Archipelago; the fifth pearl is at the port of Gwadar in Pakistan; the Maldives; and the sixth pearl is at the ports of Sittwe in Myanmar (Samo, 2020).



Figure 3.7: String of Pearl (ALL ABOUT STRING OF PEARLS, 2022)

10. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION

The US, EU, and India's IPS have several implications for the region, both in terms of security and economic cooperation. Some of the key implications are:

10.1 SECURITY

The US, EU, and India's IPS aims to advance security, stability, and peace in the Indo-Pacific region. This covers actions taken to thwart China's escalating military assertiveness in the area, especially its activities in the South China Sea. The IPS also entails initiatives to improve military coordination and collaboration with other regional

allies as well as the US, EU, and India. It will be difficult for the US to restrict China given how it is building up its military capabilities. China is also supplying weapons to several countries of the region, like supplied/under process submarines to Pakistan (8), Bangladesh (2), Myanmar (2) (Sutton, 2021).

10.2 ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The IPS also aims to promote economic cooperation and integration in the region, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and infrastructure development. This includes efforts to support regional connectivity through initiatives like the US-led Build Back Better World (B3W), IPEF and the EU's Connectivity Strategy for Asia. Though B3W is being labelled as an alternate to BRI but so far has not created any impact in Indo Pacific region. China has also established several economic partnerships and investment agreements with countries in the region to counter US efforts of economic activities, such as the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement and the China-Japan-Korea Free Trade Agreement.

10.3 DIPLOMACY

The IPS of the US, EU, and India involves increased engagement and diplomacy in the region, particularly with key partners like Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries. This includes efforts to strengthen partnerships through dialogues, exchanges, and other initiatives. China has also engaged in a range of diplomatic activities in the region, including hosting high-level summits and conferences, participating in multilateral organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and establishing bilateral relationships with key countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Gulf states etc.

11. IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD FOR PAKISTAN

- a. The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a center of activity for global politics, with many major powers formulating their own IPS. Pakistan's Indo-Pacific strategy is not very well defined and has not been officially articulated so far and still use Asia Pacific. However, the growing role of India in Indian and Pacific Oceans under US Indo-Pacific Strategy is cause of concern for both regional stakeholders and Pakistan.
- b. Relations between Pakistan and India are not friendly, particularly after Mr. Modi came into power in India in 2014 and especially after Indian abolishment of Article 370 & 35 A, changing the status of Indian Occupied Kashmir, in contravention to UN resolutions.

c. It is also observed that India has been assigned the dominant position as “Net Security Provider” in the Indian Ocean. The US military establishment in Washington, DC, is further defining Indian role in regional politics as “policeman” to guard US interests especially against China. These developments have far reaching consequences for regional states including Pakistan.

d. According to US diplomatic and political analysis, Pakistan has legitimate concerns thus can challenge Indian maritime power to have total dominance in IOR. Pakistan interests includes the protection of North Arabian Sea (Khalid, 2022) and ensuring free flow of maritime trade to & from Pakistani ports and international SLOCs passing through it. On the other hand, India is developing its navy to become a global maritime power. Furthermore, India is also establishing military bases/listening posts and signing pacts with regional states of IOR for stationing of its navy throughout the Indian Ocean.

e. US policymakers are thinking to involve Pakistan in US IPS to lessen China's influence in the region. This will improve U.S overall position in Indian and Pacific Ocean while limiting Beijing's ability to expand (Kurtenbach, 2020).

f. China and Pakistan have an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership. They have political trust and collaboration in many sectors. On all significant regional and global issues, both countries have the same opinions & strategies and complement each other. This friendship has further been cemented because of CPEC, a flagship project of BRI. Their relationships continued to improve and Chinese investment in Pakistan has reached US \$ 65 billion (Shahzad, 2023). CPEC has resolved many of Pakistani power generation, connectivity, infrastructure, and financial issues. CPEC is also destined to provide regional connectivity and facilitate Afghanistan, CARs and even Russia to use Pakistani ports for their imports and exports.

g. Pakistan's interactions with the Indo-Pacific region are essential to the country's economic and geopolitical interests. As a regional power, it has mainly ignored South Asia and East Asia in its past foreign policy formulations, aligning itself more with the Middle East, particularly the Gulf region. To strengthen ties with Southeast Asian nations on an economic and political level, the "Look East" program was first introduced in 1990. Pakistan has, however, only occasionally interacted with the region for several reasons (Rid, 2006). Although, Pakistan has major trading partners in the area. Recently Pakistan has demonstrated a renewed interest in deepening its involvement with the Indo-Pacific region and has been working to improve its' relations with nations like Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Its efforts to interact with the area can have several advantages, including more chances for trade & commerce, investment, regional stability, and a bigger voice in regional affairs.

h. Pakistan is currently facing critical financial stability issues. Additionally, domestic political unrest created significant obstacles that had a

negative impact on Pakistan's commoners' quality of life. The nation is battling issues like corruption, inflation, internal strife, rising terrorism and a widening trade deficit. Thus, dependent on International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for monetary support and meeting budget deficits. This dependence limits the ability of Pakistani government for independent foreign policy options as US/ West are using financial support to Pakistan as tool of statecraft to align Pakistani interests with US. Pakistan must strike a balance in its relations with the major world powers and protect its own interests to maintain peace and development. Pakistan's future depends on how it handles relations with China, the US, and other countries. By deepening its economic links with China and perhaps enhancing relations with other countries, the completion of CPEC projects could help Pakistan attain this balance.

i. For Pakistan, India's Indo-Pacific strategy could increase security concerns, particularly given the two countries' ongoing tensions over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

j. The opportunities, challenges and way forward are discussed below:

12. OPPORTUNITIES

a. Pakistan views the Indo-Pacific area as a prospective market for its exports, and the country's participation in the region may present major economic opportunities.

b. Pakistan's participation in the IPS may serve to advance regional security and stability by fostering closer security ties with other nations in the area.

c. Pakistan is an important player in the Indo-Pacific region and occupies a strategic location at the nexus of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia, which might potentially expand its geopolitical prominence.

13. CHALLENGES

a. The India-US relationship will influence Islamabad's relations with Washington. Pakistan will be impacted by the fact that the plan commits the US to collaborating with nations like India to challenge China. When Washington commits to maintaining its commitment to ensuring that the Indo-Pacific region remains free and open, Pakistan, one of the important participants in China's BRI, cannot remain unaffected.

b. The long-standing hostilities between India and Pakistan could make it more difficult for Pakistan to participate in the IPS because India is a major player in US policies for the region and it has its own strategic objectives also.

c. Pakistan provides blanket support to China against regional claims in South China Sea conflict. This sometime creates negative impact on bilateral

relations for Pakistan with ASEAN countries. It is thus imperative for Pakistan to keep friendly communication channels intact.

d. The historical relationship between the US and Pakistan is a sine wave. When the US needs Pakistan for services, the relationship improves, but when it doesn't, Pakistan must endure various sanctions for one reason or another. Maintaining Pakistan's relations with the US in present geo strategic environment is a major foreign policy challenge especially in view of Pakistan's support to China on global issues and CPEC.

e. The US has been increasingly focused on the Indo-Pacific region due to its economic and security interests. As a result, Pakistan's strategic importance to the US has somewhat diminished. The US has been strengthening its partnerships with ASEAN countries like, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia, which could potentially sideline Pakistan in the regional dynamics.

f. The growing strategic partnership between India and the US is a significant challenge for Pakistan. The US has been strengthening its ties with India, particularly in defense cooperation, and considers India as a strategic partner in its IPS. This alignment between the U.S. and India poses a challenge to Pakistan's security interests in the region.

g. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal adds another layer of complexity to its relationship with the US. The US has concerns about nuclear ability and its missile program. However, Pakistan maintains a policy of minimum deterrence and claims to be India centric. Pakistan has repeatedly declared its nuclear policy in this regard.

h. The US perceives a threat to its own regional interests from China's growing influence in the region. In addition, US has serious concerns with the CPEC, which provides an alternate short land route to Chinese western provinces to North Arabian Sea. Furthermore, Chinese efforts in economic domain may change the dynamics of the region and bring Pakistan, China, CARs, Russia, Afghanistan, and Iran even further close.

14. WAY FORWARD

a. Pakistan should focus to bring in political stability which is essential for its balanced economic outlook.

b. Pakistan needs to invest in developing communication infrastructure and port facilities, to harness the true potentials of CPEC.

c. Pakistan should focus its energies on developing partnership to promote economic integration with other nations in IOR. Furthermore, Pakistan may consider integrating friendly countries in economic alliances for mutual benefits as no single nation / state can progress without this support of regional stakeholders.

d. Pakistan should improve its relations with countries of Indian and Pacific oceans to ally their concern of Pakistan – China Friendship. It is therefore necessary to keep friendly communication channels with especially ASEAN countries intact.

e. Pakistan should implement a multifaceted approach that comprises diversifying diplomatic activities, enhancing economic and regional integration, taming counter-terrorism cooperation, balancing relations with major powers, participating in regional forums, tackling human rights issues, and focusing on maritime security. By implementing these measures, Pakistan can foster stronger regional alliances, promote peace and stability, and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Indo-Pacific region as an active and credible player.

15. CONCLUSION

a. The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly being viewed as a global center of gravity, both for its economic and demographic potential, and the security challenges that could frustrate those possibilities. Pakistan IPS should reflect the country's growing interest in the region and its desire to play a more constructive role in shaping its future.

b. The strategy is focused on engaging with regional partners to promote economic development, enhance security cooperation, and safeguard regional stability. Pakistan must clarify its intention as regard to issues pertaining to South China Sea conflict which must be resolved bilaterally between China and concerned states as per international laws, conventions, and procedures. Pakistan doesn't support any military or hostile activity in this regard as Pakistan also discourages and disapproves use of force by regional / extra-regional states in Indian and Pacific oceans to resolve conflicts. Pakistan believes in collaboration and cooperation between all states for an overall benefit of the global community.

c. The strategy which faces significant challenges, including tensions with India, China's influence in the region, and strained relations with the US needs to be adopted to safeguard Pakistan's interests. Pakistan must, therefore, craft a regional approach and work together with regional / extra – regional stakeholders towards meeting these challenges.

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