

The Indo-Pacific: Political, Security and Economic Dimensions

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Dynamism is a constant factor in international relations and geopolitics and is primarily motivated by shifting power relations between nation-states. The eastward shift in the locus of global geopolitics and world economic power with the turn of the 21st century is not new. In the recent past, the idea of the 'Indo-Pacific' has gained immense importance in international politics and has evolved in various instances. The primary origin of the idea dates back to the writings of Kalidas Nag ('India and the Pacific World') who was one of the foremost to propose the concept.ⁱ Subsequently, Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe was the first to provide a concrete definition and articulate the Indo-Pacific concept in his speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007, wherein he referred to the coming together of the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.ⁱⁱ At the recently held Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi outlined seven elements as India's vision for the Indo-Pacific regionⁱⁱⁱ, which are highlighted as follows:

- 1) Indo-Pacific as a free, open and inclusive region;
- 2) ASEAN/Southeast Asia as the centre;
- 3) Common rules-based order;
- 4) Equal access to the use of shared maritime and air spaces;
- 5) Connectivity;
- 6) Globalisation; and
- 7) Cooperation as opposed to competition

Since the end of the Second World War, the power structure in the Asia-Pacific region has been primarily dominated by the United States (US) through a 'hub and spoke' alliance security network. Hillary Clinton, former Secretary of State of the United States, had mentioned the Indo-Pacific, which is home to almost half of the world's population as "a key driver of global politics" in an article for the Foreign Policy magazine.^{iv} The US has continually rebalanced and adjusted its engagement in the region, thereby maintaining status-quo, in order to preserve its strategic pre-eminence in the Asia-Pacific.^v The current US administration under the leadership of President Donald Trump has reinvigorated its focus on the Indo-Pacific region with the notion of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP)'.^{vi} Recently in May 2018, the United States Pacific Command (PACOM) was renamed as the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).^{vii}

The modern debate on the 'Indo-Pacific' is nothing but a modified extension of the Asia-Pacific model that was prevalent earlier. In simpler words, the Indo-Pacific can be said to be the new route to explore maritime Asia, with "the area starting from the East Coast of Africa, through the Indian Ocean till the West Pacific Ocean" as its geographical expanse.^{viii}

In the recent years, China's exponential rise, both in economic and military terms, has been influencing the Indo-Pacific order. China's growing clout, evident in terms of its ambitious "Maritime Silk Road" initiative, has brought about a new form of balance of power in the region. In 2011, China superseded Japan to become the world's second-largest economy^{ix} and soon after became the second-largest military spender.^x In addition to the economic component, China's military assertiveness vis-a-vis the territorial and maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas has also critically altered the security network of the region. However, there have been trends of a slowdown in the Chinese economy in the recent times. The economic growth rate in China has steadily declined from the highest of 14% in 2007 to 6.7% in 2016.^{xi} Although the economy expanded by 6.9 % in 2017 and grew 6.8% in the first quarter of 2018, according to experts, China's economy has shown signs of uncertainty amidst recent economic data pointing towards an impending slowdown/decline.^{xii}

Countries in the region are taking the Indo-Pacific as a prominent platform to "operationalise their political, security and economic schemes". As an extension of the "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan has been stressing on a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy". Japan has been consistently working towards this vision that focuses on the creation and development of new connectivity corridors (primarily for economic and transportation purposes) from the Pacific Ocean up till the African shores, passing through the Indian Ocean in between. The Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIGB) and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) can be indicated as tangible outcomes of the Japanese vision.^{xiii} India has also been registering a steady rise in world politics, has devoted immense importance to its "Act East" (earlier "Look East") policy. The Australian government in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper has articulated an agenda for stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific.^{xiv} There has been a stress about Australia boosting its diplomatic partnership between Indonesia, India and Japan, which would strengthen its Indo-Pacific strategy.^{xv}

In spite of the existence of several regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), the East Asia Summit (EAS) forum, as well as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), there is an absence of an overall regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. The varying security situation in the region seems to have propelled the countries to explore new frameworks of cooperation. In such a scenario, nation-states in the Indo-Pacific region are developing strategic partnerships to respond to security challenges. The idea of the quadrilateral partnership among the like-minded democracies, viz., Japan, India, the US, and Australia could not manage to gather ample support when it was articulated a couple of years earlier. But the quadrilateral framework received immense impetus in the recent consultations among the officials of the four countries on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Manila in November 2017. The actions of the four countries of the Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral in future would be largely altering the power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. This grouping of the four democracies in the region has the potential to develop into a strong collaboration, whereby the

countries can make sure that a rules-based order is prevailing in the Indo-Pacific. The India-Japan-United States Trilateral, as well as the India-Japan-Australia Trilateral, have gained substantial momentum. The US, Australia and Japan have recently announced a Trilateral Partnership on Infrastructure Investment in the Indo-Pacific.^{xvi} Additionally, the annual Malabar Exercise between the American, Indian, Japanese naval and armed forces is seen as an exercise aimed to restate the strong relationship between these Asian giants, primarily in the domain of maritime security operations. Although the participation of Australia in these maritime drills is still contested, nevertheless the Malabar occupies significant importance given the security situation in the region.

The Indo-Pacific is not just home to three of the top ten economies of the globe; it is one of the world's fastest growing economic regions. According to a report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), countries in the Indo-Pacific produce over 60% of global GDP, making the region the largest single contributor to global growth.^{xvii} More than half of the world's trade passes through the Indo-Pacific region.^{xviii} According to the World Bank, the GDP of the East Asia and Pacific region is approximately US \$ 23.999 trillion^{xix} out of the total world GDP of around US \$ 80.684 trillion in 2017.^{xx} Moreover, the Indo-Pacific has now emerged as one of the most dynamic areas for entrepreneurship and economic development. This is evident in the higher growth rates of India, Singapore, Indonesia and others.

Today economic interactions among the countries of the Indo-Pacific region have been enhanced. Contrary to the common anticipation, there is no peaceful regional order. The regional security dynamic of the Indo-Pacific is also changing at a much higher pace than estimated. Territorial and maritime disputes seem to have intensified too. Additionally, the Indo-Pacific region is marked with ethnic/identity-based conflicts. The dispute in the South China Sea still continues to loom large. Off late, hostilities between the US and China have been escalating, as a result of the deployment of missiles and advanced military equipment by China in the Spratly Islands.^{xxi} In addition to the sovereignty claims, the Indo-Pacific expanse is dotted with the spread of incidents of terrorism and other non-traditional security challenges across the region.

The continental and the maritime components of the Indo-Pacific region are dotted with contestations over territory. China has unresolved contestations over territory with Japan as well as India. Despite the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), the South China Sea dispute remains unresolved, thereby resulting in intense anxiety for some of the Southeast Asian economies (or 'tigers', as known popularly). Therefore, there are two contradictory trajectories in the regional dynamic: first, growing economic opportunities; and secondly, expanding strategic challenges marked by maritime/territorial conflicts.

The US stance on the Indo-Pacific under Donald Trump till now have been slightly puzzling, according to some experts.^{xxii} On the one hand, they withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); contrarily in recent times President Trump's twelve-days' visit to the East Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines) in November 2017, the conscious deployment of the "Indo-Pacific" phrase in US foreign policy rhetoric, freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) of the US Navy in the South China Sea, the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, etc. have demonstrated US commitment towards its strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

In such a scenario, there is a need for a more inclusive regional framework in the Indo-Pacific towards building a stable regional balance of power, intensified regional economic interactions, as well as addressing the non-traditional security challenges. Countries like India and Japan, whose bilateral relationship has steadily improved over the years, need to collaborate with higher intensity in developing networks to facilitate peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. These two Asian powers should have a coordinated approach to developing friendly relations with other countries in the region. Emphasis should be laid on greater dialogue for the creation of pan-Indo-Pacific multilateral frameworks, for an expanded and tangible regional cooperation which will go a long way in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

It is in the light of these developments mentioned above, the proposed conference titled, “*The Indo-Pacific: Political, Security and Economic Dimensions*”, will examine the following themes:

- **Spaces and Geopolitics – Examining the Indo-Pacific**
- **The Rise of Geo-economics**
 - ✓ *Contestation or Collaboration: Connectivity Corridors*
 - ✓ *Economic Dimensions and Regional Frameworks*
- **Shifting Geopolitical Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Scenario**
 - ✓ *Mapping a historical trajectory*
 - ✓ *Politico-Security issues in the Indo-Pacific*
 - ✓ *Non-traditional security threats in the region*
- **Regional Security Architecture and Partnerships**
 - ✓ *Trilaterals and Quadrilaterals*
 - ✓ *Role of Regional Organizations in Promoting Regional Security in the Indo-Pacific*
- **Maritime Component: Emerging Security Challenges and Opportunities in the Waters**
 - ✓ *Oceans and Seas: Contested Spaces or Zones of Collaboration*
- **India-Japan Collaboration Opportunities**
 - ✓ *Strategic partnerships and Balance of Power*
 - ✓ *Continental Connectivity*
 - ✓ *Maritime Connectivity*
 - ✓ *Engagement with Africa: East African littoral states*
 - ✓ *Engaging Southeast Asia*
- **The Way Forward - Steps Ahead for the Future**
 - ✓ *Possible Security Frameworks in the Future*
 - ✓ *Pathways to Future Peace*

Concept Note for Young Scholars' Conference 2019 in New Delhi

Interested young scholars from Japan can submit their abstracts on the above themes and CV's to Mr. Kousuke Noguchi and Ms. Rinki Roy of the Japan Foundation, New Delhi (kousuke.noguchi@jfindia.org.in/rinki.roy@jfindia.org.in) no later than October 12, 2018. It is mandatory to submit the full papers (4000 – 5500 words) for discussion at the conference by December 31, 2018.

Abstract and Paper Submission guidelines:

- ❖ Word Limit for Abstract: 250-300
- ❖ Word Limit for final papers: 4500 to 5500
- ❖ Formatting:
 - Font: Time News Roman
 - Font Size: 12
 - Spacing: Single Line
 - Please use The Chicago Manual of Style for citation:
https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

End Notes

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ⁱⁱ "Confluence of the Two Seas" Speech by H.E.Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan*, available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

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

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^v Amrita Jash, "China, United States and the Changing Balance of Power in the Asia Pacific," *East Asia Research Programme*, available at <http://earp.in/en/china-united-states-and-the-changing-balance-of-power-in-the-asia-pacific/>

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^{xi} Graham Glusman, "China's Imminent Decline," *The Pensive Post*, March 15, 2018, available at <https://pensivepost.com/chinas-imminent-decline-163042be51a7>

^{xii} Xie Yu, "All signs point to an impending economic slowdown in China," *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2018, available at <https://www.scmp.com/business/article/2146647/all-signs-point-impending-economic-slowdown-china>

^{xiii} David Brewster, "A 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and what it means for Australia," *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, March 7, 2018, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/free-and-open-indo-pacific-and-what-it-means-australia>

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^{xv} Hugo Seymour, "Trilateral Diplomacy: Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, April 3, 2018, available at <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/trilateral-diplomacy-foundations-in-an-australian-indo-pacific-strategy/>

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^{xxi} Prateek Joshi, "With India a reluctant partner, the US South China Sea strategy is more about muddying the waters than concrete action by Quad allies," *South China Morning Post*, June 8, 2018, available at <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/asia/article/2149770/india-reluctant-partner-us-south-china-sea-strategy>

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This Concept Note has been drafted by Ms. Saranya Sircar. The previous documents of the East Asia Research Programme have also been used in drafting the Concept Note.