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## China's increasing competition in the indo-pacific Region: A challenge

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### Abstract

India and China are two emerging superpowers of Asia and countries with huge populations. The cultures of both the countries are very ancient. India has a long-standing disputed border issue with China, but at the same time, China's strategic and economic dominance in the Indo-Pacific region has created challenges for India. Due to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the region is emerging as an area of great power competition. India also plays an important role in the Indo-Pacific region. Because India wants to balance its strategic ambitions and prevent China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region and protect its strategic interests. China makes agreements with India's neighbouring countries and gives grants in the name of development. China is trying to show that it is helping these countries to develop economically. But in reality, China is trying to surround India from all sides in the Indo-Pacific region. Through the presented research paper, it has been explained how China is adopting the policy of 'String of Pearls' to surround India in the Indo-Pacific region. How will India be able to resolve China's growing claims in the Indo-Pacific region? All its aspects will also be highlighted.

**Keywords:** Indo-pacific region, string of pearls, India-China, challenge, strategic, economic strategy

### Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region is the most important region for any country due to its trade and strategic importance. In view of the changing global economic, political and strategic scenario, all countries are playing an important role in the Indo-Pacific region. But China is continuously making efforts to increase its influence in this region. Because India plays a big role in this field. KM Panikkar says that India "wants to keep the Indian Ocean as India's ocean." Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had said in the Shangri-La Dialogue that "New Delhi's definition of the Indian Ocean From the coast of Africa to the coast of America.

Since Chinese President Ji Jinping announced the creation of the Silk Road (BRI), the strategy of the Indo-Pacific region changed rapidly. Due to which the role of India and China has become important in the Pacific region. As the dragon extends its reach, India and other countries find themselves navigating a complex landscape, where economic partnerships coexist with strategic rivalries. The Indo-Pacific witnesses a delicate dance of power dynamics, necessitating a nuanced understanding of shared interests and potential frictions. Challenges ranging from maritime disputes to economic competition underscore the importance of fostering a region that embraces collaboration while respecting diverse national aspirations. In this intricate tapestry of nations, the rising competition demands a collective response. India, in particular, faces the intricate task of balancing its historical ties, economic ambitions, and strategic autonomy. As countries grapple with the implications of China's ascendancy, the Indo-Pacific stands at a crossroads, beckoning cooperation, dialogue, and a shared commitment to shaping a future that accommodates the aspirations of all. The evolving dynamics in this region compel stakeholders to adapt to change, finding common ground in the pursuit of peace, prosperity, and stability.

India envisions a more promising, prosperous and broader role in the Indo-Pacific. We have to protect our strategic security against the rise of China by balancing the strategic possibilities.

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### China's string of Pearls policy

China is trying to surround India on the southern tip of the Indian Ocean through the policy of 'String of Pearls'. The String of Pearls policy includes investments in ports and infrastructure projects in countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Maldives, among others. These investments are aimed at enhancing China's maritime presence and influence in the region, as well as securing its maritime trade routes and energy supplies. For example, China has built a deep-water port in Gwadar, Pakistan, which is seen as a potential naval base for the Chinese navy in the future <sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, China has also invested in the construction of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, and the Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar, which could provide China with strategic access to the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal <sup>[2]</sup>. If this route is seen in a connected manner, then this route appears to surround India from all sides. Under the 'String of Pearls' policy, China is building its ports and bases on ports and islands in all these countries, which poses a big challenge for India in the Indo-Pacific region. India, as a key regional player in the Indo-Pacific region, has been closely monitoring China's String of Pearls policy. The Indian government views China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean with suspicion and has sought to counter China's influence through partnerships with other countries and by strengthening its own naval capabilities. India has also been wary of China's growing economic and military ties with countries in its immediate neighbourhood, such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, which it sees as encroaching on its sphere of influence <sup>[3]</sup>. In response to China's String of Pearls policy, India has been actively engaging with other regional powers, such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, to bolster its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region. The concept of the Quad, a strategic dialogue between these four countries, has gained traction in recent years as a forum for discussing security cooperation in the region and countering Chinese influence. India has also sought to strengthen its partnerships with countries in Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, to enhance its maritime security and naval capabilities <sup>[4]</sup>. In conclusion, China's String of Pearls policy in the Indo-Pacific region has raised concerns among regional powers, including India, about the implications of China's growing influence and presence in the region. India has responded by strengthening its own strategic partnerships and naval capabilities to counterbalance China's expanding footprint. The evolving security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region are likely to shape the strategic calculus of regional powers in the coming years, as they seek to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape and ensure their own national interests in the face of a rising China <sup>[5]</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A. Dorje, "China's String of Pearls Strategy: An Analysis", *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2018), pp. 45-60.

<sup>2</sup> B. Khan, "The Implications of China's String of Pearls Strategy for Regional Security", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2016), pp. 78-91.

<sup>3</sup> Prashant Jha, "India's Alliance with US, Japan, and Australia to Contain China," *The Diplomat*, September 23, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ankit Panda, "India's Role in the Quad and the Future of Asia's Four-Power Coalition," *War on the Rocks*, August 30, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "China's String of Pearls Strategy and India's Response," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2021.

### Importance of Quad in Indo-Pacific region

Australia, Japan, the US and India created the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) organization in 2006 to face the challenge posed by China's growing geopolitical uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. First and foremost, the Quad serves as a key platform for strategic cooperation among like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region. As China continues to assert its influence and expand its military capabilities in the region, the Quad provides a counterbalance to Chinese power and helps to deter any potential aggressive actions. The combined military capabilities of the Quad countries, including naval and air assets, provide a strong deterrent against any potential threats to regional security <sup>[6]</sup>. The rise of China as a major regional power. China's rapid economic growth and military modernization have led to concerns among the Quad countries about its assertive behaviour and expansionist actions in the region, including its territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea <sup>[7]</sup>. However, Quad is an organization working for strategic and economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. But it is seen as an alliance of powers challenging China. Because the border dispute between China and India continues continuously.

Japan and China have historically been adversaries, and relations between the United States and China have been adversarial. China-Australia relations have also been tense. Due to which Quad is seen as an anti-China organization. According to the Communist Party's newspaper 'Global Times', "China views the Quad as an anti-China informal security group." This announcement has been made at the meeting of foreign ministers of this organization in the beginning of 2023, "Quad partner Japan has announced as part of its defense strategy that it will create the capability to respond. That is why it has announced doubling of its defense spending in December."

Quad plays an important role in keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open. India has a strong hold in this region. Because of which India's position becomes diplomatically and strategically important for all the Quad countries. In view of the border dispute with China, Quad becomes a very important partner for India. China continuously formulates strategies to reduce China's influence in the Quad Indo-Pacific. Due to which China has been calling Quad a conspiracy against itself in the Indo-Pacific region.

### Immense wealth of the Indo-Pacific region

The Indo-Pacific region became an area of conflict after the Second World War and during the Cold War, in which the United Nations made many efforts to establish peace, but it was not successful. The rise of powers in the Indo-Pacific region is not a coincidence, rather it is a competition for sovereignty, power and to outdo each other, which is attracting all countries to enter this region. The Indo-Pacific region has long been known for its immense wealth and resources, making it a crucial area for global trade and commerce. From the rich biodiversity of its marine ecosystems to the abundant mineral deposits found in its

<sup>6</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony, "The Quad: Advancing a Rules-based Regional Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific," National University of Singapore, May 2020.

<sup>7</sup> "China's Expanding Influence in the Indo-Pacific," Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-expanding-influence-indo-pacific>

land, the region has attracted the interest of many countries seeking to exploit its vast potential. One such country that has been particularly active in the region is China, whose ambitious economic growth strategy has led to increased investment and presence in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>[8]</sup>. There are riches like oil, gas and iron etc. in Indo-Pacific. Due to which China wants to increase its penetration in this region, China has strengthened its hold on the ports in all the neighbouring countries of India. China's interest in the Indo-Pacific region can be attributed to its desire to secure access to key resources such as oil, gas, and minerals, as well as to expand its influence and presence in the region<sup>[9]</sup>. With its rapidly growing economy and increasing demand for resources, China has been eager to tap into the wealth of the Indo-Pacific region to fuel its economic growth and development. This has led to significant investments in infrastructure projects, mining operations, and establishment of strategic partnerships with countries in the region<sup>[10]</sup>. Despite these challenges, India has taken steps to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific region through initiatives such as the "Act East" policy, which aims to promote economic cooperation and strategic partnerships with countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific<sup>[11]</sup>. By deepening its ties with countries in the region and enhancing its maritime capabilities, India hopes to counter China's growing influence and secure its own interests in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>[12]</sup>.

India has also increased relations with the countries of South East Asia, but this is opposed by China. Most of the world's population resides in this region, due to which the strategic importance of this region increases greatly.

### India's strategy in the Indo-Pacific region

The Indo-Pacific region has always been of great importance to India, India's Indo-Pacific strategy stands on two pillars, firstly India is strengthening its national interests in the region as well as building strong partnerships with powerful countries. Due to which India's national capabilities will increase and its influence will also remain in this region.

India's Indo-Pacific strategy was acknowledged by Prime Minister Modi in a speech at Singapore 2018 under the SAGAR principle and presented in the context of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. India has considered partnership with ASEAN countries which are important in this field. ASEAN has emerged as a place in the region where various interests can sit together and talk. Naval exercises with the United States, Japan, Korea, ASEAN and Vietnam countries have proved to be an important strategy for India to strengthen its military power.

<sup>8</sup> Parameswaran, P. (2018). "China's Energy Engagement in the Indo-Pacific." *The Diplomat*. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/chinas-energy-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/>

<sup>9</sup> Cho, Y. (2019). "China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2), 151-167.

<sup>10</sup> Panda, A. (2020). "China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Indo-Pacific." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. URL: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-indo-pacific>

<sup>11</sup> Joshi, P., & Shankar, S. (2018). "Act East, Think West: India's Indo-Pacific strategy." *Observer Research Foundation*.

<sup>12</sup> Singh, G. B. (2019). "India's naval strategy in the Indo-Pacific." *Naval War College Review*, 72(4), 53-73.

The Indo-Pacific region was the main topic of discussion in the Japan-India-US trilateral meeting at the G-20 Summit 2019 in India. Considering the importance of this region to India, the Ministry of External Affairs established the Indo-Pacific Wing in April 2019.

However, India's strategy in this region is to build peace and a free, open and inclusive region. India considers this region from the coast of Africa to the coast of America as the Indo-Pacific region. India does not accept the hegemony of any one country in the Indo-Pacific. Because of which India is trying to reduce China's growing claims through trilateral groups like Australia-France and India-Australia-Indonesia. Due to which China cannot be very effective in the Indo-Pacific region.

### Research Methodology

Analytical method has been used in the presented research paper. Along with this, secondary sources like magazines, research papers, newspapers, government reports and literature available on the internet have been studied.

### Literature Survey

Lo Chunhao, 2012, 'US-India-China Relations in the Indian Ocean: This is a Chinese perspective. It describes the increasing competition between India, China and America in the Indian Ocean. China continues to challenge India and America in the Indian Ocean. All three countries are strategically moving towards increasing their competitiveness in IOR and becoming competitive. China's excessive penetration into the Indian Ocean has been described and how China is trying to encircle India. This includes the issue of China gaining control over most of the land and competition with all countries.

Hapatra Chintamani (2019)<sup>[11]</sup>, 'Rise of the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives, Dimensions and Challenges', the author has divided the presented book into three sections. It includes chapters related to the perspectives of major powers in the Indo-Pacific in section one, the second section describes the issues of sovereignty in the South China Sea, the rise of the Quad, the role of soft power, challenges to ASEAN's centrality and regionalism, How China is becoming a challenge for ASEAN countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The third section details terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, drug trafficking and health threats.

N Sagar (2020)<sup>[5]</sup>, 'China and India in the Indo-Pacific', In view of the trade and strategic importance, various countries are continuously making efforts to increase their influence in the Indian Ocean. China has developed strategies to expand its borders across the sea through the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Through which China is building ports and harbours in strategic partner countries - China is continuously trying to encircle India, due to which it is playing an important role in the partnership of various strategic organizations in the Indo-Pacific, has also been clearly described.

Gupta Maya (2022)<sup>[10]</sup>, 'Different Dimensions of India-China Relations and Emerging Challenges of the Indo-Pacific Region', various dimensions of the growing claims of various superpowers in the Indo-Pacific have been described. He believes that different countries want to establish their hegemony in the Indian Ocean. China is making important claims in this area. India wants to further strengthen the partnership with ASEAN and Quad

organizations to reduce China's growing competition, so that China can be stopped in the Indo-Pacific region. In this, China's policy of String of Pearls has also been described, how China is adopting the policy of encircling India from all sides in the Indo-Pacific like a string of pearls. Abighausen Rodiane (2023) <sup>[12]</sup>, 'China's growing dominance in the Indo-Pacific region' in the presented article, China's increasing dominance in the Indo-Pacific region is challenging the US-led security system. It described Xi Jinping's declaration in 2014 that the US-dominated security architecture was a relic of the Cold War. Xi Jinping has studied the replacement of the US-led system with a regional system led by Asian countries. In this article, there is a clear description of increasing military expenditure by various countries in the Indo-Pacific and making a security strategy by Japan, Australia and India in the Indo-Pacific region.

### Conclusion

At present the global scenario has changed a lot. Napoleon Bonaparte had said, "Let China sleep, because when it wakes up, it will shake the whole world." This prediction of Bonaparte seems to be coming true after centuries. And given the current geopolitical situation, today China has woken up to the Indo-Pacific region and is claiming to become a global superpower. For this, it is necessary that India should try to improve relations with China despite various challenges. So that peace can be established in the Indo-Pacific region.

The visit of the Prime Minister of Japan to India has strengthened the relations between the two countries. India's relations with South East Asian countries have become stronger due to India's Look East policy. India is trying to counter China's growing position in the Indo-Pacific by collaborating with America and South Eastern countries to stop China and by strengthening the ASEAN organization. India should promote strategic power politics to enhance its military power in the Indo-Pacific region. India should focus more on cooperation with Asian countries and peace, stability and security. In recent years, India, America, Australia and Japan have agreed to strengthen the Quad, which has strengthened India's position in the Indo-Pacific region. Indian companies have played an important role in reducing China's commercial dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

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