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Re-examining geopolitics in the indo-pacific region and India's strategy

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Abstract

Major world powers China, the United States, Japan, Australia, and other West European states have turned the Indo-Pacific into a battlefield, leading to political competition. China has a strong interest in the Indo-Pacific area under the current situation. On the other hand, China's dominance in the region is being challenged by other powerful nations. In the changing context, India's role is becoming increasingly important in the Indo-Pacific region, a vital battleground for international politics and trade. In addition, India must contend with maritime disputes, geopolitical rivalry, and a dynamic international system. Now is the moment for the region to modify its marine policy to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Indo-Pacific and successfully address new difficulties.

Keywords: Dominance, battleground, rivalry, policy

Introduction

The Indian and Pacific oceans, which are the two main oceans, meet in the Indo-Pacific area. The region is very important because of the active participation of major world powers like China, the United States, and Western European nations. The four continents of Asia, Africa, Australia, and America make up the Indo-Pacific region, which is among the most populated and economically active in the world. The region's dynamism and vitality are visible; it is home to two-thirds of the world's economic production and 60% of the world's population, making it a worldwide economic hub. Additionally, the area is a fantastic source and destination for FDI. An Indo-Pacific connection may be found in many of the major and vital supply chains worldwide. Large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and coastlines give coastal nations a competitive advantage in resource extraction. The Indian and Pacific Oceans together contain enormous deposits of marine resources, such as rare earth metals, offshore hydrocarbons, methane hydrates, and seabed minerals. It therefore has both geopolitical and geo-economic significance. Furthermore, there is intense power rivalry and competitiveness in this region. India plays an increasingly important role in this setting, and given the changing circumstances, the country's maritime strategy is shaped by a careful balancing act between regional cooperation, commercial interests, and national security concerns. The significance of India's developing alliances with major nations in the Indo-Pacific, including the United States, Japan, and Australia, and its participation in regional organizations like QUAD. Strategic circumstances for Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington, DC, were changing due to China's ascent and its growing military, political, and economic linkages with regions ranging from Asia and the Pacific to Europe and Africa. The growth of China, especially in the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, has created a new strategic environment that has impacted India's approach to the Indo-Pacific. Beijing's growing influence throughout the Indo-Pacific poses a shared strategic challenge for Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington, even though their goals and capacities are still distinct. To handle a growing China in the area and fortify alliances in response to a shifting security landscape, New Delhi developed an Indo-Pacific policy as India started to confront these problems in the Indian Ocean and South Asia. In doing so, India has to strike a balance between its rekindled alliances with the West and its growing geopolitical rivalry with China. To overcome its capacity limitations in ensuring its strategic interests, New Delhi saw an opportunity to increase its footprint while utilizing alliances through its Indo-Pacific policy.

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Geo-strategic importance of the Indo-pacific For India

The Indo-Pacific region is vital for India due to several important factors. First and foremost, this vast region encompasses major global maritime trade routes that connect the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. India is an emerging power and is a significant player in international trade. India's dependency on Sea lanes is obvious and necessary for its economic growth and energy security. Therefore, increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region is a compulsion to protect its strategic interests and an uninterrupted flow of trade.

Secondly, in the evolving situation, there has been a pragmatic shift in the power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region where China has emerged as a big player posing a strict challenge to India. China is tightening its naval presence in the region on the one hand and its domineering attitude in the South China Sea has raised an extreme concern for India on the other hand. In retaliation, India has been proactively engaged in making alliances at the diplomatic level to secure its interests in the region and counterbalance China.

Thirdly, the Indo-Pacific region is home to several important bottlenecks and maritime territories that have an ultimate significance for India's security for example Strait of Malacca is an important bottleneck where major chunks of India's import and export pass, and India must maintain strongholds in the region so that it can secure its Sea trade routes, illegal activities, protection against piracy, as well as nurture its interests in the neighboring waters.

Fourthly, During the Modi era India has acted on the "Act East Policy" vehemently further to develop smooth relations with East Asian nations, including the ASEAN countries and Japan and Australia both economically and strategically. India's core concern is to maintain regional connectivity, strengthen maritime cooperation, and foster multilateral partnerships. India has always tried to maintain good relations with such nations so that it can create a conducive environment for sustainable growth, as the reason is quite clear the Indo-Pacific Region is rich in natural resources which includes fisheries, minerals, and hydrocarbons which have a very important say to meet the demands of India's growing energy needs and economic development. Subsequently, it is seen that India is a robust player in participating in the Indian Ocean Rim Association and investing in renewable energy projects, India aims to secure these vital resources for long-term sustainability.

Assessing India's Maritime Policy in Context to the Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific region has the utmost geo-significance for India, shaping its maritime policy and reflecting its broader national interests. India's interest in the Indo-Pacific is guided by especially economic, regional, and security considerations, taking cognizance of the economic front, the region has vital Sea lanes of communication that promote India's trade with some of the important partners like Oceania, East Asia, and South Asia. In the emerging scenario, it cannot be denied from this fact that there has been looming large a complex and evolving geopolitical landscape. China creating a very complex situation in the South China Sea which extends from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific and is hindering India's security environment. India has to ascertain its interests and promote rule-based order as well as freedom of navigation and also assist in the peaceful resolution of disputes in the existing

region.

On the other side, India is strongly building strategic partnerships and eyeing for defense cooperation with those countries of the Indo-Pacific Region, it is also conducting joint patrols, military exercises, and naval cooperation initiatives which is nurturing and fostering interoperability among like-minded nations. In the simmering circumstances, India has to play an affirmative as well as effective role to shape regional order and promote its influence on the global stage, as it cannot be denied from this facet that India is a major stakeholder in the region and has been an active participant of Indian Ocean Rim Association and East Asia Summit. The Indo-Pacific region has been a litmus test for India's Foreign policy in the long run.

India's stands on the Indo-Pacific region

India has taken a leading role in promoting an open and free Indo-Pacific. The US, Australia, and ASEAN countries have all stated that they believe India ought to have a bigger say in the region. India, on the other hand, sees the 10 ASEAN nations as a geographic and geopolitical region that connects the two big oceans. India's view of the Indo-Pacific is centered on "inclusiveness, openness, and ASEAN centrality and unity."

For India, the Indo-Pacific region encompasses the Pacific Island nations as well as the eastern coast of Africa and Oceania, or the coastlines of Africa and the Americas. In addition to hosting the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, India has been a proactive participant in various mechanisms including the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Mekong Ganga Economic Corridor, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). India is taking steps to establish relations with the Pacific Island nations through the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).

India supports an Indo-Pacific that is open, free, and governed by laws since it is critical to the economic growth of the region and the entire world community. Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh made this claim in his keynote speech on November 25, 2022, at the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) in New Delhi. Shri Rajnath Singh used a quote from Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's June 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore to illustrate India's vision for the Indo-Pacific. With foreign capital flowing to the East, India's trade in this region is expanding quickly. Examples of this include the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with South Korea, Japan, and Singapore, as well as the Free Trade Agreements with ASEAN and Thailand. India's policy towards the region is demonstrated by its developing "Act East Policy," which includes strategic collaboration with East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea), Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Island nations, in addition to economic involvement with Southeast Asia.

India does not view the Indo-Pacific region as a limited membership club or as a strategy. Maintaining security in the region requires communication, a shared rules-based system, unhindered trade, freedom of navigation, and the resolution of conflicts in line with international law. To prevent any one state from controlling the region or its waterways, India believes that it should cooperate with other like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific area to govern a

multipolar regional order based on rules. For example, although India has consistently emphasized the need to protect overflight and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (SCS), a more assertive stance is currently being adopted, with the SCS being referred to as "the global commons," where disputes must be resolved in line with international law and "no third party's interests should have impinged." These are subliminal statements aimed at Beijing. India is in favour of an Indo-Pacific trade environment that is stable, equitable, and based on norms. Initiatives for sustainable connectivity that benefit both parties should be continuously supported. India has held significant stakes in both the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank in this regard.

According to the Prime Minister, India supports an open, free, and welcoming Indo-Pacific region that unites all of us in our quest for development and prosperity. He presented, "our vision of ASEAN's significance in the area and stated that we must build a common rules-based system through conversation to ensure our mutual prosperity and security."

Dialogue, according to Shri Rajnath Singh, is the only civilized means of settling conflicts and establishing regional or international order. He emphasized the Prime Minister's unwavering declaration that "the era of war is over" during the recent G-20 summit in Bali. The world leaders agreed, noting in the G-20 communiqué that "this is not the time for war." "At a time when the world is dealing with issues like widespread poverty, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate change, it is imperative that we all work together to overcome these enormous challenges, without being side-tracked by the destructive allure of wars and conflicts," he stated.

The inability of New Delhi to reach a "modus vivendi" with China resulted in a confrontation between the two Asian superpowers in June 2020 in Ladakh, the Himalayas, for the first time in many years. China has been militarising the Indian Ocean with military sites at Gwadar and Djibouti, given its reliance on the region for petroleum and commercial supplies. India is concerned about this since it has been seeking alliances with nations that share its values to create a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. India has reacted positively to the US Indo-Pacific strategy since it fits in nicely with the country's Act East policy. India has stepped up its complete national power to counterbalance China by participating in the quadrilateral security discussion. Although QUAD isn't a traditional military alliance, it does work in delicate fields including cyber security, critical and developing technology, space exploration, marine security, and climate change. India is providing Brahmo's rockets to the Philippines in exchange for a maritime dispute with China in the western Philippine Sea. With this agreement with the Philippines, India has shown its willingness to compete with China in its neighbourhood. China has been arming India's neighbours in South Asia. In the upcoming months, more nations, including Vietnam, may acquire Brahmos missiles to bolster their deterrence against China. India is now modernizing its military facilities at the strategically important Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are close to the Malacca Straits. Delhi has also strengthened its relations with Taiwan, particularly in the wake of the June 2020 Galwan incident. The strategic community in India is becoming more and more alarmed that China's activities towards Taiwan may directly affect India's security as well. India's new

enthusiasm for the Indo-Pacific region is indicative of the shifting power dynamics in Eurasia, where China is expected to remain more powerful than Russia in the years to come. India is getting closer to the US and other like-minded nations in the maritime sphere within the Indo-Pacific framework as a precaution against possible development. A supply chain resilience agreement was signed by countries such as India, the US, Australia, Vietnam, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea to reduce reliance on China's economy.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region stands as a centre of great power competition in the coming years, but the future will still remain in the hands of small and middle power what the strategic choices have been made by them and will be a critical juncture in deciding the trajectory of the outcome of the rivalry, and in the present scenario it is quite obvious that all powers would be employed to achieve strategic gains over rivals. Furthermore, India is facing geopolitical rivalries, maritime disputes, and the changing of the world order. It is a compulsion for India to adopt its maritime policies effectively and capitalize its opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region.

In essence, valuable assets in India's strategic thinking are not only the maritime domain, but to establishing the rule of order, safeguarding security, delicate balancing with small and middle powers of the region, and promoting its Act East Policy, which plays a dominant role in Indian Ocean Rim Association to counter the growing surge of China. New Delhi's equities mostly relied on the Western partner to sustain its effective presence in the region and maximize its strategic interests and utilize its needs which looks imperative in the long term.

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