

India and the Indo-Pacific in the Post-Pandemic World Order

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Received: 23 October 2023 Accepted: 01 March 2024

Abstract

Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical construct that combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, representing the new strategic reality of the twenty-first century. Indo-Pacific is also considered significant for countries as it is a strategic and economic domain with a critical role in maritime security and cooperation. With a strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region, India is now a theatre of opportunity to increase its role regionally and globally. The Indian Ocean carries 90 per cent of India's trade and its energy sources, and nearly 50 per cent of India's trade is centred in the Indo-Pacific region. India's relations with incredible powers, island nations, and smaller littoral states will significantly shape India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Increasing non-traditional threats and growing challenges from rising China are significant drivers of India's policy options in the post-pandemic world. India's soft power diplomacy and bilateral and multilateral partnerships in the region continue to be decisive factors for security and balance of power in the post-pandemic scenario. Thus, the geo-strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific in the post-pandemic era is crucial for India and the countries in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole for their growth, development, and security. Thus, this paper explores India's crucial role in ensuring the security and equilibrium of the post-pandemic Indo-Pacific through a comprehensive analysis of its strategic initiatives and regional dynamics.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific; India; Geopolitics; Maritime Security; Post-Pandemic-World Order

Introduction

Due to its sheer size, including the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Indo-Pacific area has quickly become a significant player in the contemporary geopolitical stage. Its significance in economic and security terms is undeniable, making it a subject of strategic interest for countries worldwide. India's strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region and the country's overall geopolitical importance are at the centre of this ever-changing landscape. In light of the global pandemic's aftermath, this article investigates India's complex role in the Indo-Pacific region. It examines the nuanced elements that shape India's strategic choices in this dynamic and complicated geopolitical environment. The Indo-Pacific area, encompassing the vast Indian and Pacific Oceans, has emerged as a crucial force in global geopolitics. With its economic and security implications, countries worldwide closely watch this region. In particular, this article delves into India's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific, exploring the intricate factors that influence its decision-making in this dynamic and complex environment, especially in the post-pandemic era. India's strategic asset of being geographically situated at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region has far-reaching ramifications¹.

India's position in this area is more crucial than ever as it negotiates the evolving international landscape in the wake of the pandemic. The strategic interests of major nations and the Indo-Pacific's prominence in the global economic network create unique geopolitical concerns. Economic necessity, maritime security worries, and shifting ties with regional and global actors all play a role in India's strategic decisions in this context. With the world altered by the pandemic and the ever-changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical landscape, this article seeks to untangle the complexity of India's developing role in the area. India's geographical location in the Indo-Pacific region is strategically important, especially amid the evolving global landscape following the pandemic. The region's economic significance and the interests of significant nations make India's position vital in maritime security and geopolitical concerns². This article aims to delve into the intricate factors that shape India's role in the Indo-Pacific, considering the pandemic's impact and the region's changing dynamics.

The Origin of the Indo-Pacific Concept

The term "Indo-Pacific" has gained prominence as a geopolitical and strategic framework in recent years, altering how countries view and interact with the sizeable oceanic region ranging from the western and central Pacific to the Indian Ocean³. Originating from a wide range of circumstances, including changes in geopolitical dynamics, the economic rise of key regional players, security issues, and the altering foreign policy of major powers, this idea has been gaining traction in recent years. The Indo-Pacific seeks to encourage cooperation and long-term planning to solve the region's economic, political, and security problems as a reaction to the increasing connectivity between these two seas⁴. In recent years, the term "Indo-Pacific" has emerged as a significant geopolitical and strategic framework, reshaping how countries perceive and engage with the vast oceanic region stretching from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean⁵. The Indo-Pacific concept has garnered attention and support from factors such as shifting geopolitical dynamics, the rise of key regional players, security concerns, and evolving foreign policies of major powers⁶. This section delves into the origins and evolution of the Indo-Pacific idea, shedding light on its intricate inception and the changing discourse surrounding it. The rise of the phrase "Indo-Pacific" may be traced back to the early 21st century and the shifting geopolitical forces that prompted its use⁷. It reflects a more holistic geopolitical perspective integrating the western and central Pacific Ocean with the Indian Ocean to form a single strategic theatre. This idea considers the growing commercial, security, and geopolitical ties between the two oceans. The advent of India and China, particularly as economic powers in the region, influenced the conception of an Indo-Pacific region. These countries' growing economic clout made them essential players in the Indian and Pacific oceans, necessitating a consolidated view of commerce⁸.

Security dynamics have heavily influenced the Indo-Pacific concept, including territorial disputes, maritime conflicts, and worries over freedom of navigation. The region, particularly the South China Sea, has seen a rise in security threats, prompting talks of regional collective security and collaboration⁹. During the Obama administration, the United States emphasised the significance of the Asia-Pacific region by announcing a strategic "pivot to Asia" in 2011¹⁰. This reorientation sparked the Indo-Pacific idea by highlighting the importance of holistically seeing the region's security and economic concerns. The Quad (composed of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia) and ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) are regional alliances and conferences that have helped spread awareness of the Indo-Pacific concept¹¹. These groups foster cooperation and coordination between regional powers. Australia has been an outspoken supporter of the Indo-Pacific idea and has worked to promote its widespread acceptance and implementation. Australia's influence in the region has allowed it to play a role in spreading support for the idea. The Indo-Pacific idea

should focus more on the West and include the perspectives of other countries in the region. However, it has acquired traction in international diplomacy and strategic discussions and is constantly adapting to reflect the varying priorities and viewpoints of member states in the region¹².

The Strategic Significance of the Indo-Pacific for India

India is now a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region. India has broad geostrategic and commercial interests, focusing on the Indian Ocean¹³. Due to its central role in moulding India's geopolitical, economic, and security landscape, the Indo-Pacific region has been a focal point of strategic relevance in recent years. The Indo-Pacific area stretches from Africa's eastern coastlines to the western shores of the Americas and is critical to India's national interests¹⁴. The Indian Ocean and the western and central Pacific have become important theatres for Indian foreign policy and strategic calculations. Economic necessities, geopolitical dynamics, security concerns, and the search for constructive connections with other regional and global powers all contribute to this relevance. In this context, the paper examines several factors contributing to the Indo-Pacific's strategic importance for India, including the country's economic needs, security concerns, and overarching diplomatic initiatives in this pivotal geopolitical arena.

Economic Imperatives

There are several reasons why the Indo-Pacific is so important for India's economy. India's economy relies heavily on the marine domain's safety and prosperity, including the Indian Ocean. This area is strategically significant since it is a conduit for almost 90% of India's trade¹⁵. Connecting markets in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and beyond, the Indian Ocean is vital in importing and exporting commodities from and to India. India places a high priority on ensuring its energy supply in the Indo-Pacific region. India imports a lot of oil and natural gas from countries in the Middle East and Africa to meet its massive energy needs. India's energy security, critical to preserving economic stability, depends on safely delivering significant energy supplies through the Indian Ocean. India's industries are also intertwined with global supply chains, with the Indo-Pacific as a crucial node. Impacts on the availability and pricing of raw materials, components, and finished goods can directly influence India's economic growth if disruptions or uncertainties exist in the Indo-Pacific. Business prospects abound in the Indo-Pacific region as well. India plans to increase its financial involvement by investing in and forming joint ventures and collaborations with businesses across various economic sectors, including infrastructure, technology, and manufacturing. The Indian Ocean is important because it serves as a commercial corridor and a repository for marine resources¹⁶. Food security and economic growth depend on well-managed ocean resources, vital to industries like India's fishing industry. The Indo-Pacific area is also a centre for technical development and global information networks. The expansion of India's economy could be boosted by the country's thriving IT industry and its highly sought-after skilled labour force. India's economy can benefit from increased collaboration, investment, and information sharing if the country opens up to the Indo-Pacific's dynamic, technology-driven economies. Economic integration and collaboration across the Indo-Pacific region are India's priorities. India can expand its economic relations with its neighbours through initiatives like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and events like the East Asia Summit. This advances regional stability and development, which is consistent with India's broader economic and geopolitical interests, strengthening India's regional commercial relations.

The proposed port, rail, and connection developments in the Indo-Pacific area will make it a centre for infrastructure development. India has the potential to increase its economic influence and gain access to new trade and investment avenues through its participation in various bilateral and global initiatives. As India looks to take advantage of economic possibilities, assure energy security, maintain resilient supply chains, and promote sustainable economic growth, its involvement in the Indo-Pacific region will become increasingly essential in the coming years. Conflicts or disturbances in the Indo-Pacific area can hurt its economy, making it less appealing for commerce and investment because economic growth and advancement are integrally related to political stability. This is why India's security and geopolitical goals in the Indo-Pacific are inseparable from its economic demands. As a worldwide supply chain hub, energy source, and primary transportation hub, the Indo-Pacific is vital to India's economic development. India contributes to regional diplomatic and cooperative efforts to ensure the security of this strategically important ocean region¹⁷.

Blue Economy and Maritime Security

The concept of the "Blue Economy" and maritime security are interwoven in the context of India's strategic interests and the broader Indo-Pacific region. The Blue Economy is an economic model that emphasises the responsible and sustainable utilisation of ocean resources for long-term growth while preserving marine ecosystems¹⁸. India's extensive coastline and location in the Indo-Pacific position it to benefit significantly from embracing these principles¹⁹. The Blue Economy encompasses various sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transportation, renewable energy, tourism, and marine biotechnology. These industries offer substantial economic development and employment potential, aligning with India's sustainability goals²⁰. India's territorial waters and exclusive economic zones contain vast opportunities for economic diversification. Responsible fisheries management, eco-friendly shipping practices, renewable energy utilisation, and the exploration of marine biotechnology can drive India's economic growth while addressing environmental concerns and climate change²¹.

The Changing maritime security and India's worries

A dramatic shift is occurring in maritime security, characterised by several interrelated trends and issues that directly affect India's security and strategic interests. All governments, including India, are adapting their strategies for marine security in response to shifting geopolitical, economic, and technical conditions. The Indo-Pacific area is becoming increasingly important as a battleground for great powers, especially the United States and China²². The potential of maritime violence has increased due to territorial disputes, militarisation, and freedom of navigation concerns in the South China Sea, all of which have contributed to escalating tensions between the two countries. As a major power in the region, India is worried about the effects of this rivalry on its maritime safety and the peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific²³. Challenges to international security that go beyond the usual suspects, such as naval rivalries and territorial disputes, are on the rise. Petty theft, trafficking in humans, illicit fishing, and environmental damage all fall into this category. Combating these non-traditional challenges that threaten maritime trade and stability is a top naval priority for India. Unmanned systems, cyber warfare tools, and artificial intelligence are just a few examples of the emerging technologies altering the face of marine security. State and non-state actors have access to new means of interfering with maritime operations and infrastructure made possible by technological advancements²⁴. India must adjust to the latest technological reality to safeguard its marine interests. Importing oil and natural gas is crucial to meeting India's energy demands, yet this import strains the country's energy security. Disruptions or conflicts in these water lanes directly affect India's energy

security and economic stability. Maintaining these marine routes' dependability and security is of utmost importance.

The strategic ramifications of expanding ports and infrastructure projects, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, are significant. India is worried that other countries will be able to exert more strategic influence due to these advancements and that the infrastructure that may be exploited for military reasons will threaten its national security. India has taken steps to resolve its maritime security issues through multilateral diplomacy by participating in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)²⁵. Cooperation, dispute resolution, and collaboration around common security concerns can occur in these settings. India takes a multipronged approach to the evolving security situation at sea. Promoting a free, open, and rule-based Indo-Pacific necessitates a mix of naval modernisation, enhancing coastal security, regional diplomacy, and involvement in efforts like the Quad (with the U.S., Japan, and Australia). India's safety and the stability and prosperity of the greater Indo-Pacific region depend on its ability to navigate these changing security concerns successfully²⁶.

Ocean-based economy (Blue economy) and its importance for India

As the world looks for new ways to achieve sustainable development, the concept of the Blue Economy is gaining traction. The Blue Economy emphasises the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic expansion while protecting marine ecosystems. India's nautical interests and expansive coastline make it a prime candidate to reap the benefits of the Blue Economy as it develops²⁷. The Blue Economy includes the industries of fishing, farming, shipping, renewable power, eco-tourism, and marine biotechnology. India's vast maritime territory gives the country easy access to the sea's riches. To keep up with the needs of India's expanding population, the government needs to diversify and strengthen its economy, which can be achieved by making better use of these resources. India is the world's second-largest fish producer, and fisheries and aquaculture are at the heart of the Blue Economy. India's ability to provide its people with a steady supply of healthy food while expanding its export market depends on the efficient management of these industries. Wind and tidal energy potential abound throughout India's beaches. India's energy security, dependency on fossil fuels, and global efforts to address climate change can all benefit from investments in offshore wind farms and tidal energy projects. The tourism industry in India can benefit significantly from the country's coastline, which boasts several beautiful beaches and interesting marine features. India's natural attractions, such as scuba diving and seaside resorts, can draw visitors from all over the world, thereby bolstering the country's tourism industry and, by extension, the economy²⁸.

India's rich marine biodiversity has numerous prospects for academic study and the creation of novel commercial goods. There is potential for technological growth and economic prosperity in this area. Protecting marine habitats and promoting environmentally responsible business practices are central to the Blue Economy. The coastline of India is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. Protecting these habitats from pollution and overexploitation is more accessible by adopting sustainable development concepts. India's maritime interests and strategic location in the Indian Ocean make the Indo-Pacific region a critical node on the global trading network²⁹. India's involvement in international trade and economic connectivity with its neighbours is bolstered by its efforts to create a thriving Blue Economy. Blue Economy has the potential to generate new employment possibilities, especially in coastal areas. It could increase prosperity for all people and alleviate poverty. The Blue Economy provides an essential path towards India's long-term goals of sustainable development, environmental protection, and efficient use of scarce resources as the country's economy grows. India can ensure the long-term viability of its maritime ecosystems by capitalising on the vast potential

of its marine resources through investments in the Blue Economy. This will improve food security, increase renewable energy generation, and boost economic growth.

Indo-Pacific and India's Global Reach

India is becoming an increasingly important and influential player on the international stage³⁰. As one of the world's most populous and quickly developing countries, India significantly impacts internationally in its immediate region. The fields of politics, economy, security, culture, and international relations are just a few of the many that feel its impact. The nation's strategic engagements with crucial global powers, regional organisations, and international platforms, as well as its location in South Asia, highlight its delicate balancing act between regional leadership and global participation. This investigation examines the complex interplay between India's regional and international roles, analysing India's contributions to regional stability, economic growth, diplomacy, and its place in global affairs.

Great Power Relations

India's ties to the Pacific Rim have developed during the past decade. This was first articulated in the early 1990s through the Look East policy³¹. This policy's focus was narrow, primarily targeting economic ties to ASEAN nations. India, however, has expanded its economic horizons beyond those of ASEAN and Southeast Asia in the past decade. The second stage of its Look East strategy has begun. As a result, India has upped its involvement in power projection in the military and security realm, primarily through naval deployments and maritime diplomacy. India has also expanded its sphere of influence to include other parts of East Asia and the Pacific Basin. This shows competition with China and balance with other Pacific actors like Japan and the United States. India's influence in the Indian Ocean is still more pronounced and evident, although it has spread further to the east. As a result, India is becoming a significant participant in the Pacific and an essential part of the power dynamic between Asia and the Pacific³². India's relationships with the United States, Russia, and China greatly influence the country's Indo-Pacific strategy. India, as a rising regional and global player, must balance between these forces while simultaneously expressing its strategic autonomy. Suppose India wants to achieve its development goals and maintain or increase its strategic influence in the Indian Ocean and beyond. In that case, it can benefit from considering itself part of a hypothetical maritime triangle with the United States and China³³. The evolution of these connections is crucial to developing India's position and clout in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S.: India's relationship with the U.S. has changed significantly. As a result of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership, ties between the two countries have been enhanced. Defence ties, business dealings, and diplomatic efforts are all included in this alliance. India hopes the United States will back its efforts to establish a free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific³⁴.

India faces a complex challenge in balancing its desire for closer ties and its policy of maintaining strategic independence. The economic relations and regional capacity to deal with complex challenges might be significantly enhanced by multi-dimensional regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific³⁵. While India works with others to advance shared goals, the country always puts its interests first. India's connection with Russia is long and significant, especially in defence and energy. The friendship between India and the Soviet Union and India and Russia has been a constant in Indian foreign policy. Maintaining these long-standing relationships while accommodating changing dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, where Russia's stance may diverge from India's, requires nuanced diplomatic manoeuvring. India acknowledges the necessity of adapting to evolving geopolitical

circumstances while sustaining its engagement with Russia, particularly in areas like defence procurement and energy cooperation. India recognises the importance of upholding this partnership to achieve strategic independence while pursuing its objectives. India's expanding influence and its policies in the Indo-Pacific have the potential to reshape the region's existing geopolitical order, but they also come with challenges, particularly concerning China³⁶.

India's relationship with its northern neighbour is both cooperative and competitive³⁷. Border issues and security concerns have impacted economic and trade associations. Protecting its interests in the Indo-Pacific while controlling this relationship is a significant concern. India works with other countries in the Indo-Pacific area, like Japan, Australia, and the United States, to keep the region secure. Still, it also participates in Chinese-led organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS. India takes a cautious, deterrent, and cooperative stance towards China, informed by its desire for strategic autonomy. Strategic Independence: The Indo-Pacific strategy is based on India's desire for strategic independence. This strategy comprises rejecting external pressure in favour of making decisions that are in keeping with national interests and goals. India fiercely protects its right to act independently or in partnership with other countries. This idea of strategic autonomy is a guiding principle in maintaining a healthy equilibrium in its interactions with the United States, Russia, and China in the Indo-Pacific³⁸.

In conclusion, India's Indo-Pacific policy is a finely balanced act heavily influenced by its contacts with established global powers. India recognises the importance of these partnerships to its safety and progress, but it is committed above all else to preserving its strategic independence. By taking this tack, India is better positioned to negotiate the intricate geopolitical scene in the Indo-Pacific, where it can promote its interests while also helping to maintain peace and strengthen a rules-based system. India's Indo-Pacific policy lies at the intersection of its alliances with global powers and its commitment to maintaining strategic independence. With a keen understanding of the intricate geopolitical landscape, India aims to promote its interests while contributing to regional stability and fostering a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Littoral States and Island Nations

India's Most Important Allies in the Pacific and Indian Oceans are Island and Coastal States³⁹. Regarding regional power and influence, India's ties to smaller coastal states and island nations in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean are crucial. The Indo-Pacific region is now more peaceful and prosperous with the efforts of these bilateral and international partnerships. The stability and security of the region are threatened by the location of several of the smaller littoral states and island nations of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in strategically significant areas. Enhancing regional stability and security requires cooperative efforts with these countries. To promote collaboration in resolving conventional and unconventional security issues like piracy, maritime conflicts, and disaster management, India participates in initiatives like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and events like the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Together, the security of the region is strengthened through these alliances⁴⁰. India's economic relationships with the littoral states and island nations of the Indo-Pacific region are essential to the country's success. India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies emphasise developing diplomatic and economic ties with its neighbours⁴¹. Trade, investment, and infrastructure development are just a few of how India's economy is strengthened by collaboration with other countries. As a result, regional economic integration and development are facilitated, not just India's economic benefits. Maintaining safe shipping lanes in the Indian and Pacific Oceans is a top priority for economies worldwide. India works closely with smaller governments and island nations regarding maritime domain awareness, search and rescue operations, and counter-piracy

initiatives.

India's economic and energy security depends on the safety of the marine lanes through which trade and energy resources pass; hence, the two countries' cooperation in this area is crucial. India's relations with these countries rely heavily on diplomatic initiatives. India is an active member of regional organisations and summits, including states on the coast or islands. It promotes regional cooperation through talks, pacts, and other means of building connections. Smaller countries and island states appreciate India's dedication to the values of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Relationships between India and its smaller neighbours heavily rely on cultural and people-to-people ties. Many countries have cultural, linguistic, and historical ties to India. Diplomatic relations are strengthened through educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and tourism between India and these countries⁴². There are several multilateral venues that India can use to interact with other island states as a bloc. These include the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). Further strengthening India's relations with its island partners, these forums allow for open dialogue on issues, development projects, and sustainable practices that affect them all. India's regional stature relies heavily on the strength of its ties to smaller coastal states and island nations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The many facets of India's participation in the Indo-Pacific are reflected in the breadth of the region's collaboration with the country on issues ranging from security to economic partnerships to marine cooperation to diplomacy to cultural connections and engagement in global forums. India's interests and the regional aspirations of peace and prosperity benefit significantly from these connections⁴³.

China Factor

The rise of China as a global force and its assertive presence in the Indo-Pacific area have presented numerous difficulties for countries in the region, particularly India⁴⁴. The advent of non-traditional dangers beyond conventional security paradigms and China's emergence as an economic superpower, regional influencer, and global participant characterise this ever-changing scenario. Successfully negotiating this complex setting calls for forethought, tact, and awareness. In this light, we explore the opportunities and concerns that China's rising power and the changing nature of non-traditional threats pose to India's regional and global interests.

China's Expanding Reach

Since the late 1940s, relations between China and India have been turbulent. This paper provides a broad overview of the bilateral relationship by discussing the border dispute, status competition, and economic ties between the two countries. It then discusses various geostrategic points of contention, such as the relationship between Pakistan and the United States, bilateral water disputes, China's Belt and Road Initiative, nuclear weapons policies, and maritime competition in the Indian Ocean. After what T.V. Paul called a "managed and enduring rivalry" in 2018⁴⁵ the relationship between India and China has deteriorated into a "serious and enduring rivalry" in the years since the Galwan Valley incident in June 2020, in which Indian and Chinese soldiers killed each other with improvised weapons⁴⁶. India's strategic calculations have been complicated by China's rise as a world power and its assertive moves in the Indo-Pacific⁴⁷. Maintaining calm while managing tensions between India and China is crucial. This complex dilemma includes economic cooperation, border disputes, regional security, and global power dynamics. India and China's economies are intertwined in cooperative and competitive ways. Even though China is India's largest commercial partner, tensions have arisen due to trade imbalances, worries over market access, and increased competition in global markets.

India needs help navigating the benefits and drawbacks of increasing economic reliance. Long-standing border disputes between India and China have led to military standoffs like the 2017 Doklam showdown and the 2020 Galwan Valley confrontation. The region's stability depends on these conflicts being resolved and additional escalations being avoided. In this regard, India's peaceful negotiation and conflict resolution attempts are noteworthy. China's rising clout in the Indian Ocean and the broader Indo-Pacific area threatens India's position as a regional power. India has raised concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been heavily criticised for its potential debt consequences and strategic goals⁴⁸. India is working to forge closer ties with like-minded countries like Japan and the United States to counter China's growing regional might.

A major new regional strategic initiative, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy is primarily seen as the centre of anti-China efforts. The United States, Japan, Australia, and India have revived their Quadrilateral Security Dialogue after a 10-year break to represent the proposal on the international front; years of discussions with like-minded nations formed the basis for Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Washington worries that Beijing, as a rival, may shift the balance of power in favour of China, which would undermine American primacy. Whether the Indo-Pacific Strategy will isolate China arises in light of Beijing's rising prominence in the region. It can be claimed that China is no longer under siege because Japan's and India's strategic objectives align with China's. These parallels demonstrate China's peacefulness rather than aggression towards other major regional powers. Recent agreements on essential problems like the China–India boundary, the Beijing–Tokyo Senkaku islands, and military cooperation are significant steps to mend strained ties⁴⁹. New security challenges have evolved beyond the traditional ones, such as cyber threats, rivalry for natural resources, and the possibility of wars in the cyber and space domains. India's strategic calculus in its relationship with China hinges on how it handles these non-traditional problems. The rise of China as a world power affects not only the Indo-Pacific but the entire international system. The United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, and climate negotiations influence the India-China relationship. India is looking for ways to promote its principles and interests abroad while working with China to address global issues like climate change. Geostrategic factors further complicate India's strategy. The maritime security of India is threatened by China's military aggression, specifically by China's naval development and activities in the South China Sea. As a result, India has increased its security cooperation with countries like the United States and Japan while also bolstering its naval forces.

Indian diplomats are in China trying to iron out any differences so that their administration can get along with Beijing. Meanwhile, India is constantly on guard and ready to protect its interests. Diplomacy plays a critical part in handling the complexity of this relationship, and initiatives like the "Wuhan Spirit" and the "Chennai Connect" sessions have been crucial in de-escalating tensions. Managing China's rising influence and averting potential confrontations will be a significant test for India's strategic approach. Economic cooperation, border conflicts, regional dynamics, non-traditional security issues, shifts in global power dynamics, geostrategic considerations, and diplomatic engagement are just some of the many facets of this partnership⁵⁰. China's aggressive border activities and naval expansion in the Indian Ocean continue to be a top concern for India. Concerns and opposition to China's unilateral moves, especially in the South China Sea, have revived devotion to a rules-based international system. In a post-pandemic world, China would be best served by adopting Chinoy's 2020 proposal for a multipolar world order as the basis for permanent peace and prosperity. Protecting the Indian territory and interests is a priority in India's grand plan, which prioritises teamwork. India's continued leadership in the Indo-Pacific and the world depends on its ability to navigate this complicated dilemma successfully.

Non-Traditional Threats

Non-traditional security challenges beyond traditional military concerns have become prominent in the post-pandemic international system. India must adjust its strategy to deal with new challenges such as cybercrime, environmental degradation, and epidemics. First, with the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks in the modern era, it is essential to take further precautions to protect vital systems, finances, and people's health. To effectively counter global cyber threats, international cooperation is necessary. Climate change, natural disasters, and a lack of resources are some environmental challenges that threaten national security. India needs to increase its catastrophe preparedness and response capabilities and capacity for climate change mitigation. Cooperation on a regional scale is equally essential for solving global environmental problems. Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic showed how infectious diseases might threaten national security⁵¹. India's plan includes improving public health facilities, conducting international health diplomacy, and increasing vaccine production. It is crucial to have early warning systems in place and work together internationally to produce and disseminate vaccines in the event of future pandemics⁵². These unconventional dangers can have far-reaching geopolitical effects, heightening existing rivalries and opening new arenas for fighting. India should promote international collaboration as part of its strategy, which necessitates consideration of how these challenges affect India's regional and global interests. Coordinating government institutions, involving the commercial sector and civic society, and maintaining investment in R&D are all necessary to effectively address these difficulties. To effectively build resilience and foresee emerging risks, multilateral collaboration is essential from a long-term perspective. Finally, in the post-pandemic world, India's approach must incorporate internal preparedness, international cooperation, and a forward-looking, proactive stance to adapt to the amplification of non-traditional security threats. The security and stability of India, as well as its economic growth, depend on this strategy.

Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

Recently, "minilateralism" has emerged as a diplomatic and strategic approach in international relations⁵³, in which a smaller group of countries works together on a specific issue or initiative outside of the framework of more prominent, more formal multilateral organisations like the United Nations or regional blocs like the European Union. Due to the complex and ever-changing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, this strategy is gaining traction in the region. A small group of like-minded countries meets in this forum to tackle issues that larger multilateral organisations like ASEAN cannot handle. It is a flexible and quick response to new problems that can be solved⁵⁴. The rule of law, stability, and economic success are all areas where these minilateral groups in the Indo-Pacific have common goals. Some well-known examples of such regionally tailored partnerships are the Quad, the U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateral collaboration, and the Mekong-Japan cooperation framework⁵⁵. To promote regional peace and represent their interests, these groupings offer smaller or medium-sized nations a viable counterbalance to the influence of considerable powers like China. However, to avoid the appearance of exclusion or regional conflicts, it is crucial to find a middle ground between addressing specific needs and preserving inclusivity and openness in these groups⁵⁶.

Minilateralism is an approach that works in tandem with existing multilateral bodies, such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, rather than as a substitute for them. To effectively address the complex difficulties of the Indo-Pacific, both methods must work in unison⁵⁷. In this regard, India is a significant player. Its presence at these gatherings has been shown to increase its diplomatic clout, improve regional security, and encourage business partnerships⁵⁸. In addition, India's growing

financial investment in the area bolsters its potential to shape the international order by creating alliances based on shared values and opposing threats to the international system⁵⁹. Minilateralism, as a means of negotiating the Indo-Pacific's intricate geopolitical landscape, has thus become an indispensable tool. Facilitating cooperation between like-minded nations helps maintain peace and prosperity in the region. The importance of minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific is highlighted by the fact that India, with its rich cultural heritage and broad educational outreach, wields tremendous soft power in moulding its international relations and participation in multilateral forums. India uses its soft power resources to help maintain peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and influence regional power dynamics.

Conclusion

India's position in the Indo-Pacific region is a dynamic and vital factor in the post-pandemic world order. India's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific, an area at the crossroads of economic and marine security and geopolitical complexity, cannot be understated. As we have seen, the Indo-Pacific is essential to India's economy because it is where much of India's trade and energy come from. India is committed to regional stability and power balance, as seen by its participation in international organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the BRICS, and the Quad. The advent of non-traditional security challenges like piracy and terrorism calls for comprehensive policies to protect India's interests at sea, and these issues have been brought to light. Interactions with preeminent global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China and their attendant complexities were also covered. Maintaining a delicate equilibrium with superior global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China while preserving India's strategic independence is a complex challenge.

India's participation in regional organisations, international forums, and bilateral partnerships has allowed it to exert influence beyond its borders. Because of its ties to smaller littoral states and island nations in the Indian and Pacific oceans, cooperation is essential in various fields, including regional stability, economic partnerships, maritime security, and cultural ties. In addition, India must take a flexible, proactive position in the face of heightened non-traditional security risks such as cyber threats, environmental concerns, and pandemics. These threats integrate domestic readiness with international cooperation to maintain peace and prosperity after a global pandemic. The importance of India's soft power diplomacy based on its cultural heritage and educational outreach was emphasised. Through participation in multilateral forums, India can use its soft power assets to forge diplomatic connections and positively contribute to the Indo-Pacific's security and power balance. In conclusion, India's role in the Indo-Pacific is diverse and crucial in the post-pandemic world order. India's strategy is to balance local and international interactions, tackle conventional and atypical security threats, and use its cultural and educational outreach to promote mutual understanding. To achieve regional stability, economic progress, and diplomatic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and on the global landscape, the nation's role is crucial, not just for the country's interests.

Notes

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