

INDIA AND THE “INDO-PACIFIC”

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of “Indo-Pacific” as a spatial region in marine biology has been in use for quite some time. It is essentially used to denote the continuity of marine habitats and species from Africa’s east coast to the outer limits of Oceania’s geographical region (that do not exist in the Atlantic Ocean). The irony is even when used now as a strategic concept, it primarily refers to the maritime arena of security. The Indo-Pacific as a spatial geo-strategic region gained heavy traction since the publication of the 2013 Australian Defence White Paper when Australia became the first country to categorically define its zone of strategic interest as the **Indo-Pacific**. The 2013 White Paper recognised that a new “Indo-Pacific strategic arc” is beginning to emerge with the increasing economic and security interdependencies between the Indian and Pacific Oceans demarcating Southeast Asia as its “geographic centre”. However, the concept of Indo-Pacific has been around since the new millennium. The term “Indo-Pacific” has been debated over, and used by, the US, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, China and India in varying degrees to comprehend the radical changes in international affairs and define their respective roles and national interests. Be it the US’ Asia Pivot, Burma’s Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, Japan’s Confluence of Two Seas, Australia’s Two Ocean Navy and Indo-Pacific Strategic Zone of Interest, Indonesia’s

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Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, China's Yin Tai Concept, or even India's Look East Policy, the term "*Indo-Pacific*" has entered the international strategic lexicon and is here to stay.

With the economic resurgence of Asia, the *Indian-Pacific Ocean combine* has replaced the Atlantic-Pacific Ocean combine as the new hub of strategic and economic activity. Countries in the region are bound to each other by economic linkages through trade and production networks, which have led the region to have a joint stake in its shared prosperity. Much of that economic activity in the region is intra-firm trade that is carried via the seas. This has led the

Indian Ocean Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) to gain tremendous strategic prominence after being considered as international backwaters for a greater part of the 20th century, since over 90 percent of international trade is carried by sea, and of that, over half crosses the Indian Ocean. In monetary terms, over US\$ 7 trillion in international trade crosses the Indian Ocean every year on more than 23,000 ships, accounting for 50 percent of all container traffic and a full 70 percent of global oil and gas exports.¹ These emerging dependencies between the Indian and Pacific Oceans have been a primary cause to combine the two economic and geo-politically distinct regions into a single supra-strategic region still defined by the sub-regional security and commercial structures. Since this region is a hotbed of not only traditional security concerns such as maritime disputes over territory, sovereignty and resources but also of non-traditional security threats such as piracy, terrorism and trafficking, there has been a need for maritime

1. Hugh D. Wetherald, "Indian Ocean Maritime Security: Challenges and Opportunities", in Pradeep Kaushiva and Abhijit Singh, eds., *Indian Ocean Challenges* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2013), p. 4.

security of the global commons of ocean waters to be a multilateral effort and joint essential priority for all countries in the region.

INDO-PACIFIC AND “GLOBAL COMMONS”

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) also called the Law of the Sea Treaty is an international agreement that defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources. Concluded in 1982 and in effect from 1994, UNCLOS

recognised the oceans as the common heritage of mankind and freedom of navigation on the high seas as a fundamental principle of maritime law. While it allowed for coastal waters to be claimed for private use such as for oil drilling, oceans more than two hundred miles from land were stated to belong to all mankind.² Therefore, unlike every inch of land which is legally owned by nations, the seas, in their natural state, are not under any political domain. The geo-strategic significance of the maritime domain becomes all the more important when one looks at the fact that over 150 of the 192 member states of the United Nations are coastal states. However, with globalisation, the world today is increasingly becoming economically and geo-politically integrated, with the maritime dimension gaining quantum importance of what is often referred to as the '70, 80, 90 Concept'. Seventy percent of the world's surface is covered by the oceans, 80 percent of the world's population is moving closer to the ocean littorals and the majority

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2. “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea

of the world's major cities, industries and urban populations lie within 200 km of the coast, and 90 percent of international trade by weight and volume, including most of the strategic cargo, is carried over the oceans.³ As the bulk of international activity is carried via the Indian Ocean, there has been a steady build-up of naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Also with the relative decline of US power and control over the **global commons**—and the rapid diffusion of technological capabilities and crowding of the global commons—the management of the commons in a multipolar world has resulted in further issues and problems.

RATIONALE Vs CRITIQUE FOR “INDO-PACIFIC”

The rationale for the Indo-Pacific derives from the rapid growth in energy, economic and security linkages between the Indian Ocean region and Western Pacific that have created a single strategic system. Approximately 77 per cent of the world's population resides in the “Indo-Pacific” region.⁴ Trading nations globally have stakes in its shipping lanes. Much of the United States and European Union (EU) nations' trade with Asia which traverses across the Pacific remains dependent on Indian Ocean SLOCs. This is due to the dependence of the East Asian trading countries on raw material and other sources being transported across the Indian Ocean from East Africa, the Gulf, South Asia, or Australia. Therefore, though it ranks only fifth out of nine regions [as classified by Lloyd's Marine Intelligence Unit (MIU) in London] in terms of commercial shipping port call volume (the first three being Northern Europe, the Far East and the Mediterranean/Black Sea), the Indian Ocean is an inescapably central feature of global maritime trade.⁵ However, 15 of the top 20 container terminals in terms of throughput capacity are located in the Indo-Pacific, with China leading the

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3. Sureesh Mehta, “The Centrality of the Indian Ocean to Global Maritime Security”, in Kaushiva and Singh, eds., n.1, p. 4.
 4. Rajiv K Bhatia, “Foreward”, in Rajiv K. Bhatia and Vijay Sakhuja, eds., *Indo- Pacific Region: Political and Strategic Prospects* (New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2014), p. vii.
 5. Amit A Pandya and Rupert Herbert Burns, “Maritime Commerce and Security: The Indian Ocean”, *Stimson*, February 2011, http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/March4_-_Full.pdf.

field with 9 such terminals.⁶ The concept of Indo-Pacific not only emphasises the sea as the main medium for commercial and security integration by virtue of the large volumes of trade, it is also breaking down the late 20th century idea of East Asia and South Asia as separate strategic settings.

Some researchers argue that the Indo-Pacific is too broad a term to denote a meaningful strategic system as it does not have clear organising principles to analyse and explain the interactions of big and rising powers. Critics also reiterate that no single strategic system is capable of capturing all the complex contingencies of the “two oceans-one continent” region as the Indo-Pacific construct cannot be developed sufficiently to simultaneously address traditional security issues in the sub-regions along with other non-traditional challenges. However, the Indo-Pacific’s major criticism stems from it being a code for containing China and serving dual US purposes of constraining the rise of a “peer competitor” in Asia and preventing the regional integration from being “inward looking and exclusive.” The political/economic terminology of regions, though relying on neutral vocabulary of geography, still has an element of tilting to particular countries that become the main players and mainstay of the political/economic realm in those specific regions. Wherein East Asia as a term tilted to China and Asia-Pacific to the US, **Indo-Pacific** is ambiguous in whether it calls for a defining role for India or the growing significance of the Indian Ocean to the Asia-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific region, like the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), is geographically constrained and access is feasible only through narrow choke points. This leads to any traditional or non-traditional threat having a transnational nature, wherein events in one part of the region impact another, thereby creating a need for an integrated strategic system. A major disruption anywhere in the region will have large repercussions for the interests of all the major powers, and the future of the Indo-Pacific will be strengthened or shaken by how they get along. In the future, China will have a stake in the fate of Afghanistan, and issues pertaining to the

6. Raghavendra Mishra, “India in the Indo-Pacific Region: Maritime Stakes and Challenges”, in Bhatia and Sakhuja, eds., n.4, p. 159.

Yearly trade that passes through the New Silk Route from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca has been estimated at a whopping US\$18 trillion, and roughly 17 million barrels, comprising a fifth of the world’s oil supplies, pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

South China Sea will not be a matter for just East Asia, let alone for China. Further, with rapid globalisation, there has been a rapid expansion of maritime commerce, capacity and technology which, in turn, has facilitated newer developments. Increasingly sophisticated means for transporting large cargoes – such as containerisation, or increasingly large vessels for specialised transport of liquid and dry cargoes in bulk – have transformed the speed and efficiency of transport logistics.⁷ This has made possible the development of globally distributed supply chains and production processes, especially the dense and elaborate network of cross-border production networks in East Asia, that have tied the stakes of the region in a shared destiny.

STAKES IN “INDO-PACIFIC”

The Indo-Pacific is rich in natural resources, especially hydrocarbons which fuel the economic engines of the world’s economies. Around 65 per cent of the world’s oil reserves belong to just 10 of the Indian Ocean littoral states. Further, 90 per cent of the world’s seaborne trade, primarily oil, passes through the Indian Ocean. Studies show that the cost of exporting oil over a distance of 1,000 km (540 nautical miles—nm) in 2007 was estimated at \$0.163 by tanker, \$0.793 via pipeline and \$7.190 by train. Indian Ocean SLOCs assume critical importance not only to global trade and economic stability but also to the security of the global oil trade.⁸ Further, the Indian Ocean holds two of the primary gateways in world maritime trade: the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Yearly trade that passes through the New Silk Route from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca has been estimated at a whopping US\$18 trillion, and roughly 17 million barrels,

7. Pandya and Burns, n.5.

8. Mishra, n.6 p. 153.

comprising a fifth of the world's oil supplies, pass through the Strait of Hormuz.⁹ Further, with more than 80,000 vessels transiting through the straits every year, the Malacca Strait is the world's most crucial strategic choke point and with new projects going on in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand, the use of the straits will only grow. Owing to the primacy of the maritime domain, even continental connections across Asia, like the evolving "Indo-Pacific" Corridor comprising Burma and Bangladesh, will gain prominence where they are linked to seaports.

The demands of Asia's growing middle classes also accelerate the exploitation of the ocean's mineral and food resources. In the Indian Ocean, the International Seabed Authority – the UN agency responsible for mineral rights in the high seas – in 1987 accorded India exclusive rights to explore mining polymetallic nodules in the Central Indian Ocean Basin. India's allocated area of 150,000 sq km may contain 380 million metric tonnes of nodules. In July 2011, China received the right to explore a 10,000 sq km polymetallic sulphide ore deposit in the southwest Indian Ocean. While these enterprises remain exploratory, India's National Institute of Ocean Technology has undertaken sea trials and plans to deploy a fully developed deep-sea mining system in the next few years. Beyond the Indian Ocean, the Canada-based Nautilus Minerals and the UK affiliate of the US' Lockheed Martin have announced plans to begin commercial mining operations in the Pacific. Yet practical development of seabed minerals faces major hurdles. Only 2 to 3 percent of the global sea floor has been properly mapped, and just 0.0001 percent has been scientifically investigated. Identifying resource sites whose value exceeds more readily accessible onshore deposits will prove a difficult task, requiring ventures with uncertain rewards. Their highly localised concentration renders commercially viable recovery of

The Indian Ocean harbours a wealth of mineral and living resources such as fisheries. Various technological, environmental, economic, and political factors determine the potential for developing these assets.

9. "Rising Stakes in Indian Ocean", <http://m.newindianexpress.com/opinion/251181> .

polymetallic sulphides especially problematic. Seafloor deposits, usually of one to five megatons, also tend to be much smaller than those onshore, which can reach 50 to 60 megatons. Furthermore, deep-sea deposits, which typically exhibit a 0.2 percent concentration of rare earth minerals, pale in comparison to onshore ore deposits, which can have 5 to 10 percent concentrations.¹⁰

The Indian Ocean harbours a wealth of mineral and living resources such as fisheries. Various technological, environmental, economic, and political factors determine the potential for developing these assets. The security situation in the Indo-Pacific is complicated by maritime boundary disputes. As energy security becomes important for nations, maritime boundary delineation has turned into a potent source of international conflict. While potentially rich oil and gas resources lie within national maritime zones, they will be inaccessible for exploitation as long as the hundreds of overlapping offshore boundary claims remain in dispute. While long standing maritime boundary disputes in the South China Sea attract much media attention, disagreements over territorial waters and in the Bay of Bengal are also on the rise. India, Bangladesh and Vietnam today find themselves in the middle of such a dispute. There is a need for clear principles and mutually agreed upon framework on the basis of which such maritime boundary disagreements can be resolved.¹¹

THE GAME OF POLITICAL PRIORITIES Vs ECONOMIC NECESSITIES

As China turns into one of the strongest competitors the US has faced to its unilateral dominance in the longest time, the dynamics of power rivalry, security concerns coupled with extensive economic interdependence have led to limited space for manoeuvring for both the US and China (unlike the US-Soviet rivalry which had no significant economic element). Like Australia, a majority of the middle powers in the East Asian region have security ties to the US or host its military bases, yet the same countries

10. David Michel and Russell Sticklor, "Indian Ocean Rising: Maritime Security and Policy Challenges", *Stimson*, July 2012, http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/Book_IOR_2.pdf.

11. Sureesh Mehta, "The Emergence of a Geostrategic Realm", in Kaushiva and Singh, eds., n.1, p. 18.

have China as their largest trading partner. This had reduced the space for diplomatic and political strategising, distorting the balance of power in the region. The East Asian region, while contributing 26 percent to world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (the same as North America), is home to four of the most volatile political conflicts: the Taiwan Strait, Korean Peninsula, East China Sea and South China Sea. Further, according to a 2008 analysis of global conflicts by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, altogether 42 per cent of world conflicts can be associated with Indian Ocean countries. In 2011, in all, 142 political conflicts were recorded in the IOR, representing more than a third of the 388 conflicts worldwide, including 12 of the world's 20 wars, as well as an additional eight limited wars.¹² Hence, in this scenario of balancing out their political priorities and economic necessities, the countries in the Indo-Pacific region look to bring in multilateral power players to balance out the delicate power scenario that is building up after the decline of US unilateralism.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF "INDO-PACIFIC"

Economics and economic integration have only recently emerged as organising principles on par with traditional factors in establishing strategic structures and international institutions to manage the "*global commons*". The rapid rise of Asian economic giants such as China and India has led the **Asian Century** to be dubbed as the century of economics. World trade has leapfrogged world GDP in the recent decade. Further, with increasing economic openness, growing economic interdependence and deepening production networks in the East Asian region, economic growth has truly assumed a more transnational nature. While bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and other FTAs between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional countries such as India, China, Korea and Japan exist, only the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) has encompassed membership from both South Asia and East Asia. An effort, however, was made by Japan when it proposed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership for East Asia (CEPEA) in 2007 to include 16 member

12. Michel and Sticklor, n.10.

nations of ASEAN (ASEAN Plus Three along with India, Australia and New Zealand) to strengthen economic ties between South and East Asia and reduce development inequalities in Asia. However, despite its all-inclusive aims, it was disrupted by China that favoured a more East Asia centric association around ASEAN Plus Three and proposed its own East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA), favoured by China in 2001.¹³

The tussle between CEPEA and EAFTA ended in 2011 when ASEAN proposed to formulate the ASEAN centred FTA—Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Negotiations for the RCEP were launched in November 2012 during the 7th East Asian Summit and are expected to be concluded by 2015. The RCEP, if successful would achieve the feat of being the biggest trading pact in the world incorporating 45 percent of the world’s population and 1/3rd of the global economy. However, the RCEP, despite its sincerity to untangle the “noodle bowl” resulted by the proliferation of FTAs in the Asian region, is controversially seen as a Chinese attempt to exclude the US. Even the US led regional trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation’s (APEC’s) Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (which includes non-ASEAN members) are perceived as US attempts to coopt its geo-political allies into its larger geo-economic system. Therefore, despite the win-win scenario of economics, competing political motivations and disagreements to forming a regional arrangement may lead to a bleak future for the Indo-Pacific.¹⁴

On the security front, a range of multilateral regional organisations in the IOR such as IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation), IONS (Indian Ocean NAVAL Symposium), CMF (Combined Maritime Forces) comprising three distinct Combined Task Forces or CTFs), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) have been working with other groupings in the West Pacific region such as ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence

13. Asanga Abeyagoonasekera and Amali Wedagedara, “Prospects for Economic Integration in Indo-Pacific Region: A Perspective from Sri Lanka”, in Bhatia and Sakhuja, eds., n.4, pp.167- 168.

14. Ibid.

Ministers Meeting (ADMM)+ and the East Asia Summit, to ensure better governance in the broader Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN led initiatives such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), an offshoot of the AMF, encourages EAS participating countries to utilise opportunities and address maritime challenges building upon the ASEAN-based platform. In recent days, there have been efforts by countries in South and Southeast Asia to revive the IOR-ARC, giving it an expansive and ambitious mandate that includes security.¹⁵ As Australia took the chair of IOR-ARC in late 2013, it has led the association to greater facilitation of regional cooperation and become a strong vocal proponent of the Indo-Pacific.¹⁶

Other regional organisations include the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy, which is a regional Maritime Security (MARSEC) information-sharing centre. Inaugurated on April 27, 2009, it aims to facilitate information-sharing and collaboration between partners to enhance maritime security and ensure timely and effective responses by partner countries to MARSEC incidents. With linkages to 64 agencies in 34 countries, and with 15 International Liaison Officers (ILOs) from 13 countries currently working in it, the IFC also conducts various capacity-building activities such as international information-sharing exercises and MARSEC workshops such as the biennial Maritime Information Sharing Exercise (MARISX) and the annual Regional Maritime Security Practitioner Course. The ASEAN ILOs in IFC also serve as the Permanent Secretariat of the ASEAN Navy Chiefs' Meeting. As the Permanent Secretariat, the IFC facilitates and monitors the development of new MARSEC initiatives among ASEAN Navies. The IFC also hosts maritime information sharing portals such as the ASEAN Information Sharing Portal (AIP) and the Regional Maritime Information Exchange (ReMIX), which facilitates information sharing

15. Mehta, n.11, p. 19.

16. "India to Handover IOR-ARC Chair to Australia", <http://www.newindianexpress.com/business/news/India-to-handover-IOR-ARC-Chair-to-Australia/2013/10/31/article1866479.ece>, October 31, 2013.

On July 20, 2004, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore launched the first trilateral patrol called Operation MALSINDO, a year-round coordinated naval patrol. In September 2005, the three countries also launched the coordinated aerial surveillance Eyes in the Sky (EIS) initiative.

among ASEAN Navies and Western Pacific Naval Symposium members, respectively.¹⁷

Another initiative is the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), a first regional government-to-government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery in Asia. It was finalised on November 11, 2004, and entered into force on September 4, 2006. To date, 19 states have become contracting parties to ReCAAP. It also includes the

ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC), an initiative for facilitating the dissemination of piracy-related information. ReCAAP has many initiatives, including identification of focal points in participating countries and its capacity-building programmes. Despite the limitation that Indonesia and Malaysia are not parties to ReCAAP at present, it provides a useful “building block” for a more integrated approach to good order at sea. Data from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) and the ReCAAP ISC show that the situation with piracy and armed robbery against ships worldwide had improved in 2012 compared to 2011.¹⁸

The East Asian littoral states, on their part, to address the piracy problem in the Strait of Malacca have also made numerous initiatives. On July 20, 2004, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore launched the first trilateral patrol called Operation MALSINDO, a year-round coordinated naval patrol. In September 2005, the three countries also launched the coordinated aerial surveillance Eyes in the Sky (EIS) initiative, wherein

17. “Fact Sheet: Information Fusion Centre (IFC)”, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press-room/official_releases/nr/2014/apr/04apr14_nr/04apr14_fs.print.noimg.html.

18. “Report by the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre for the Ninth Meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea”, http://www.un.org/depts/los/consultative_process/mar_sec_submissions/recaap.pdf.

each country would patrol twice per week along the Malacca and Singapore Straits and in which each flight would carry a maritime patrol team made up of military personnel from each of the participating states. To further improve the effectiveness of the naval and air patrols, terms of reference and standard operating procedures were agreed on in April 2006 and the combined efforts were renamed the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP). The MSP has three elements: the Malacca Strait Surface Patrols (MSSP); the EIS; and the Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG). The IEG developed the Malacca Strait Patrols Information System (MSP-IS) to improve coordination and situational awareness at sea among the three countries. In 2008, the MSP was given a boost when Thailand joined both the MSSP and the EIS. Thailand's area of operation comprises the northern approaches to the Malacca Strait in the Andaman Sea.¹⁹

More than three and a half decades of rapid economic growth following its opening up in the late 1970s were bound to produce a shift in the relative power of China just by virtue of its sheer numbers. However, China's rise has turned out to be all the more theatrical because of the weaker trajectories of its competitors.

Along with resolutions and recommendations adopted by the United Nations and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the regional states expressed their commitment and efforts to together combat piracy through the Tokyo Appeal (March 2000), the Model Action Plan (April 2000), the Asia Anti-Piracy Challenges 2000 (April 2000), and the Asia Maritime Security Initiative 2004 (June 2004). However, it is not likely that these efforts will serve as an effective framework for regional efforts since they are not binding. Several UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions based on the UNCLOS have been passed to deal with the scourge of piracy but they have collectively been ineffective in dealing with the issue. The biggest drawback of the 1982 UNCLOS has been that it addresses only

19. Suk Kyoong Kim, "Maritime Security Initiatives in East Asia: Assessment and the Way Forward", *Ocean Development & International Law*, vol. 42, issue 3, July-September, 2011, p. 229.

piracy and largely precludes the applicability of piracy laws to maritime terrorism. In order to address this legal vacuum, the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA Convention) and the Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Fixed Platforms located on the continental shelf were adopted in 1988 and entered into force in 1992 to expedite the extradition and prosecution of the offenders.²⁰

Cooperation and collaboration to deal with the common challenges offer a good vehicle for the engagement of ASEAN and nations within the IOR, and will engender trust and confidence in the member countries of the Indo-Pacific.

ACCOMMODATING THE DRAGON

Far-reaching political events and accelerating global economic linkages since the 2000s have led to blurring of lines between the traditional and non-traditional, regional and global, inter-state and transnational issues. The greatest of all these changes and challenges has been the remarkable and rapid geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic rise of China. More than three and a half decades of rapid economic growth following its opening up in the late 1970s were bound to produce a shift in the relative power of China just by virtue of its sheer numbers. However, China's rise has turned out to be all the more theatrical because of the weaker trajectories of its competitors. The Soviet Union collapsed and the successive Russian governments have struggled to define an international role whilst reminiscing about its erstwhile glory days. Japan stagnated economically and has vacillated between dependence, interdependence and independence from the US in ensuring its defence and security. India, till two decades earlier, maintained autarky and engaged less deeply than China with the world economy and focussed most of its security energy on its nearby enemy Pakistan. The US with its unique situation of being the only superpower, entangled itself in a series of wars and confrontations that weakened rather than strengthened

20. Ibid., p. 232.

its global influence. For all these reasons, the shift in China's relative power has been more dramatic than it otherwise would have been.²¹

With its massive economic growth, China now assertively seeks to shape regional and international conditions to serve Chinese interests. In the modern world system, world powers have been sea (ocean) powers as sea power confers greater mobility, security of trade along with access to a wider variety of resources and effecting desired national interests. China has been very visible in expanding its maritime capabilities to ensure unhindered logistics for its resources and trade along with securing its maritime frontier.²² It be won't be an exaggeration to say that accommodating the expansion of China's interests, its aggressive diplomacy and growing strategic reach into the Indian Ocean is what most of all defines the Indo-Pacific. China is more strongly connected to Southeast Asia and South Asia than other states in these regions, including India. China is now the number one trading partner of more than 120 countries and regions in comparison to the US which is the largest trading partner of about 75 countries. China's annual imports in merchandise of about US\$2 trillion create numerous jobs and investment opportunities, propelling economic growth for its trading partners, thereby giving it tremendous bargaining power and leverage in international affairs.²³

The US' shifting military and diplomatic 'pivot' or the 'US' rebalancing strategy' is also primarily a strategic response to China's military assertiveness and deliberate belligerence in the East and South China Seas. China's strategy, on the other hand, is based on a strategy of denial of American intervention power through development of Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities to seek greater strategic influence to match its economic weight. As a matter of fact, it is fear of China's rising clout in Asian regionalism that largely accounts for the US', Japan's and Australia's overtures to India and their endorsement of the 'Indo-

21.. Andrew J Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search For Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), introduction p xiii.

22. Mishra, n.6, pp.140-141.

23. "China Replaces US as No. 1 Merchandise Trader", <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/china/china-business/2014/03/03/401877/p1/China-replaces.htm> , March 3, 2014.

Pacific'. While 'Indo-Pacific' as a strategic concept brings India into the power politics of China's neighbourhood in an effort to dilute Chinese influence in East Asia, the Indo-Pacific also recognises China's role and interests in the Indian Ocean posing a challenge to Indian dominance. Hence, it is ironical that a majority of countries pushing for an Indo-Pacific categorisation are the ones that have extensive economic relations with China, running into billions of dollars. Australia and Japan have China as their largest trading partner, while the US and Indonesia have China as their second largest trading partner. However, the US-China bilateral trade is also the second largest bilateral trade relationship in the world (after the US-Canada one) standing at more than US \$550 billion.

ROLE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA (ASEAN)

It isn't any surprise that the notion of Indo-Pacific elaborated by most nations has had one commonality, that of ASEAN centrality. China has shown difficulty in accepting the "Asia-Pacific" label which draws the US into Asia, and even more so the "Indo-Pacific", which creates a triumvirate of regional powers by including India, and has continued to insist on exclusionary strategies based on narrow definitions of its own security interests. However, even China has been accepting of the new regional architecture building, based on multipolarity and multilateralism espoused by ASEAN rather than a single power taking centre-stage. Southeast Asia is located strategically at the crossroads of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. While ASEAN's solidarity faces numerous challenges due to the unresolved bilateral disputes among its members and its inability to pursue a united stand in the South China Sea, ASEAN has emerged as a workable regional grouping. Indonesia, the hinge of the door that swings between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and a staunch champion of ASEAN centrality to managing the Asian strategic environment has proactively called for an Indo-Pacific "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation." The proposal echoes the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and revolves around ASEAN norms : confidence-building and peaceful resolution of disputes and security. India too has been constantly

emphatic on establishing “an open, balanced, inclusive and transparent regional architecture” defining ASEAN as the “lynchpin” of the economic and security structures in the region.

After the end of World War II and the ensuing Cold War, Asia was divided into the two power camps of the US and USSR. From the late 1960s, the concept of Asia-Pacific was propounded by the US and encouraged by its allies, Japan and Australia, to reflect the US crucial strategic and economic role across the water. The establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in the late 1980s made it evident that the idea of the **Asia-Pacific** as the grand design of Asia’s strategic and commercial template was there to stay. After the end of the Cold War, it helped allay concerns about US retrenchment from the region. With China’s rise and its subsequent engaging with Asian multilateralism in the 1990s, the game was distinctly Asia-Pacific. However, it was not only APEC but ASEAN and its wider security dialogues such as ARF, ADMM and ASEAN Maritime Forum that attracted even non-members to become part of the process that soon became predominant in the strategic template of Asia. However, the limits of being an East Asian exclusive strategic system were clearly evident and the ARF soon came to include India and other South Asian players. And at its defining moment—the establishment of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005—the process of Asian institution-building took a decisive turn. ASEAN’s acceptance of India, Australia and New Zealand as members of that regional leaders’ forum meeting from the outset, despite China’s vehement protests, led to the beginning of an Indo-Pacific era, though few noticed it at the time.²⁴

Therefore, ASEAN’s centrality to the success or failure of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic system has roots right from its inception and is even now crucial to maintaining the balance of power when the emergence of multilateral powers along with new rivalries and alliance equations threatens to disrupt the precarious internal system.

24. Rory Medcalf, “In Defence of the Indo-Pacific: Australia’s New Strategic Map”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2014, pp. 470-483.

The large coincidence between the geographical stretch of the Indo-Pacific and the 'areas of interest' defined by the Indian Navy in its doctrine underlie the Indian interests in the Indo-Pacific.

CONCLUSION

The Indo-Pacific as a strategic space incorporates the growing role of India which has tended to be seen as an outlier in the strategic concepts pertaining to the Asia-Pacific.²⁵ Given the traditions of non-alignment in its foreign policy, India is neither feared nor associated with a quest for hegemony. While the earlier concept of the Asia-Pacific had sought to exclude India, in contrast, the term Indo-Pacific encompasses the subcontinent as

an integral part of the Asian system. India has featured prominently in international commentaries as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific regional architecture-building. According to Stephen Smith, for instance, in addition to the need to ensure maritime security in the Indian Ocean, which has emerged as a crucial thoroughfare for global trade, it is India's 'rise' that is driving the emergence of the Indo-Pacific regional construction. He further states, "So significant is India's rise that the notion of the Indo-Pacific as a substantial strategic concept is starting to gain traction."²⁶ Similarly, Hillary Clinton says, "The stretch of sea from the Indian Ocean through to the Pacific contains the world's most vibrant trade and energy roots, linking economies and driving growth", and "India straddling the waters from the Indian to the Pacific Ocean is, with us, a steward of these waterways."²⁷

At a time when a vigorous debate is on over the Indo-Pacific as a strategic region, India's own position on the terminology is not clear. Yet one can try and club India's views into two major strands: remain clear of all politics surrounding the term and maintain a strategic autonomy, or adopt the inclusive approach, downplaying the China threat and allowing

25. Amb. Hemant Krishan Singh, "Reimagining the Region: 'Asia-Pacific' or 'Indo-Pacific'?" *ICRIER Issue Brief*, vol. 3, issue 3, October 31, 2013, p 2.

26. David Scott, "Australia's Embrace of the 'Indo-Pacific': New Term, New Region, New Strategy?", <http://www.d-scott.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Australia-Indo-Pacific-online.pdf>

27. "Hillary Clinton Urges India To Expand Influence", <http://www.indiatvnews.com/print/news/hillary-clinton-urges-india-to-expand-influence-9289-1.html>

for Southeast Asia to play a significant role in the region. India, on one point, worries that the challenges associated with the rise of China through the unwitting adoption of a geo-political categorisation might send a wrong, if not false, signal to other countries about India's intentions and actions. It is felt that maintaining its strategic autonomy has been an integral part of India's foreign policy and strategic objectives are best met through engagement with countries in the region, using forums such as the East Asia

Summit and ASEAN, rather than through new military partnerships. On the other hand, there is a view that the Indian and Pacific Oceans constitute an 'inter-linked' space and a 'logical corollary' to the Look East policy. It is perceived that the growing strategic convergence with the USA, Australia, Japan, Indonesia and Southeast Asian countries, while, at the same time, downplaying the China threat and encouraging a "more active Russian role in the newly emerging theatre of the Indo-Pacific" will help in creating a more balanced security architecture in the region.²⁸

The large coincidence between the geographical stretch of the Indo-Pacific and the 'areas of interest' defined by the Indian Navy in its doctrine underlie the Indian interests in the Indo-Pacific. Primary areas of interest include the Maritime Zones of India covering the territorial waters, contiguous zone and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) upto 12 nm, 24 nm, and 200 nm from the national baseline and the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal which largely encompass India's island territories and EEZ, and the littoral reaches. The choke points leading to, from and across, the Indian Ocean, viz. the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, the Lombok Strait, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, the Cape of Good Hope, the Mozambique Channel, the Six Degree Channel and the Eight/Nine Degree Channels also

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept is partly a product of the regional integration produced by the Look East and extended neighbourhood policies, and its adoption in India signals a greater focus on regional architecture-building.

28. Priya Chacko, "India and the Indo-Pacific: Three Approaches", <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/2013/01/page/2/> January 24, 2013.

assume strategic importance for India. The Persian Gulf is also the source of a majority of oil supplies and is also home to a considerable population of expatriate Indians.²⁹ Further, the greater Indian economic interdependence stretching over the Indo-Pacific continuum motivates India to take a strong interest in the debate on the Indo-Pacific as a strategic zone of interest. All 10 leading export destinations and 9 out of 10 major import origins in the context of bilateral trade with India comprise the surrounding littoral/island states.³⁰ Further, refined oil products form the largest component of Indian exports accounting for about 26.8 percent by value among the top 10 export commodities. Hence, while India imports 70 percent of its crude requirements, it is also as much a major oil power in the export sense, making the security of its SLOCs a prime priority. It is the 3rd largest exporter (8.9 percent of global share), 4th largest producer of refined oil products (5.4 percent of global share), and has the 5th largest crude distilling capacity in the world (4.5 percent of global share).³¹

Since 1990, ideational change in India's regional policies has been seen, firstly, because of the de-legitimisation of older inward-looking economic policies and South Asia-focussed regional engagement due to multiple economic and political crises and, secondly, as a result of the emergence of new ideas about economic development that are based on India emulating and engaging states in the broader Asian region. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept is partly a product of the regional integration produced by the Look East and extended neighbourhood policies, and its adoption in India signals a greater focus on regional architecture-building.

29. Mishra, n. 6, p. 145.

30. Ibid., p. 151.

31. Ibid., p. 154.