

## Original Research Article

## Indo-Pacific Significance: A Study on Geopolitical Impact on India and China

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## ABSTRACT

Today, Indo-Pacific is a buzzword interpreted differently in its outlook or vision papers by different countries. For its vision for a stable Indo-Pacific, India will need to manage its relations with China and Japan. Global economic growth engines have moved to Asia, first to the Asia-Pacific and now to the Indo-Pacific which include South Asia. One might argue that the natural evolution of trade, investment and energy flows favours the broader Indo-Pacific definition of Asia and the Asia-Pacific as opposed to the narrower confines. This study focuses on the importance of the Indo-Pacific region. These issues are mostly geopolitical in nature such as dominance over the region. For analyzing this paper, we mostly relied on secondary data which was collected through different books, journals, authentic internet sources, grey literatures and websites. The paper tries to highlight on how to minimize the strategic challenges which India is facing presently. This research will be useful for scholars and academicians, foreign policy, decision-makers, security, and strategic influence on frontiers.

## 1. Introduction

It's a contemporary concept, about ten years ago, the globe began to talk about the Indo-Pacific topic, and however its augment was relatively momentous. Most vital reasons behind the recognition of this phrase is the indulgent that the Indian and the Pacific Ocean are associated tactical theatres. (Academy, S.2019, April 07)<sup>2</sup>. The centre of gravity also moved towards Asia (Kamraju, M. 2019)<sup>3</sup>. The reason for this is the sea routes, the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, which provide the sea lanes. Much of the globe's business goes all the way through these routes. Before the Cold War, there was a time when the centre of gravity of the universe was across the Atlantic, i.e. trade was still passing from the Atlantic, but now it has changed. Asia-Pacific used to be the former term, from which India was excluded this term was prevalent during the Cold War. The shift to the term 'Indo-Pacific' shows India's relevance to the new construction. In the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific region developed as a centre of power politics given its geopolitical and geostrategic importance. It remains a hub because of its maritime connectivity between the Pacific and Indian regions Meadows (Chacko, P. 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Divers stakeholders interpret the term 'Indo-Pacific' differently. India regards the region as an area which is comprehensive, open, incorporated and impartial. India continues to focus on tactical interconnections, general challenges and opportunities among the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The United States of America regards it as a free and open Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the value of the rules or behavioural norms of the region, thus attempting to curb China's position in the region. The

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<sup>2</sup> Academy, S. (2019, April 07). Indo-Pacific : Strategic Importance. Retrieved September 01, 2019, from <https://iasshiksha.blog/2019/09/07/indo-pacific-strategic-importance/>

<sup>3</sup> Kamraju, M. (2019). Gravity Shift: How Asia's New Economic Powerhouses Will Shape the 21st Century by Wendy Dobson: A Book Review. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 1(1), 7-11. Retrieved from <https://al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jbms/article/view/37>

<sup>4</sup> Chacko, P. (2016). *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Drivers, dynamics and consequences*. New York: Routledge.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations perceives the Indo-Pacific as a consociative model, not only for the sake of offering China some stakeholders, but also for ways of cooperating with it (Academy, S. 2019, September 07)<sup>5</sup>.

The term indo-pacific was first used by Gurpreet Khurana in 2007 he was a marine strategist and executive director of the New Delhi National Marine Foundation. He recently wrote in the Washington Post that since China's "reform open up" in the 1980s, the new term has shifted the new strategic mind map (Japan. n.d.)<sup>6</sup>(Khurana, G. 2017)<sup>7</sup>.

## 2. Objective of the Study

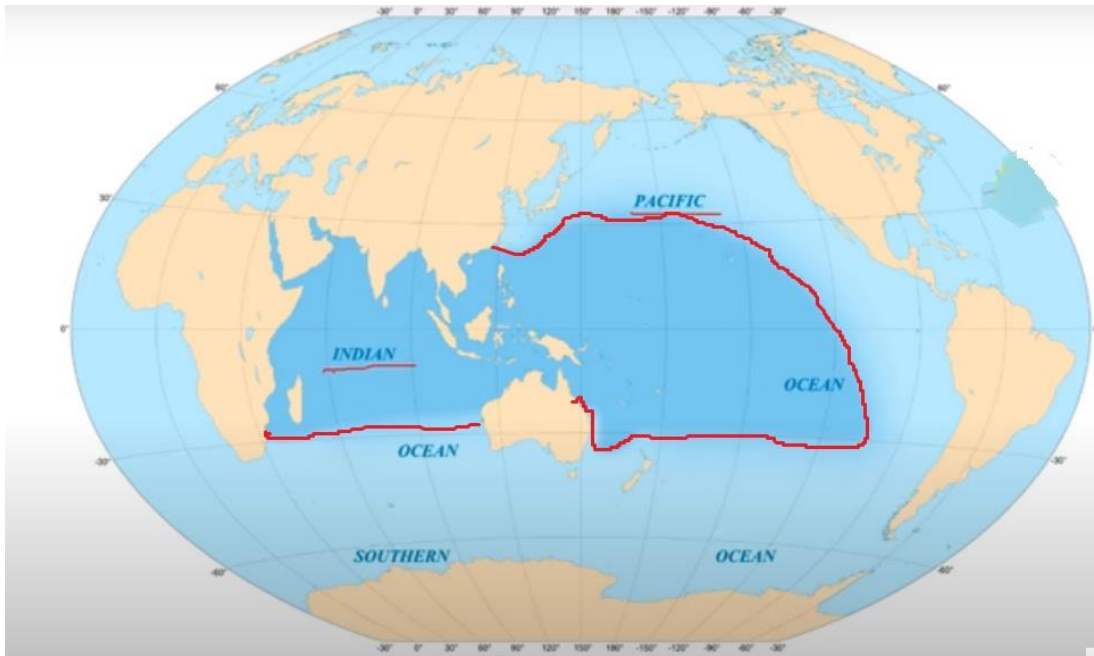
The main aim of this paper is to put emphasis on the significance of Indo-pacific region for India and China.

## 3. Data and Methodology

In writing this paper, secondary data has been used from different sources such as; books, published journals, newspapers, government policies, authentic internet sources, and websites. For analysis of this paper, efforts have been made to take in to account the overall objective of the research.

## 4. Study Area

The Indo-Pacific region, sometimes referred to as the Indo-Western Pacific or Indo-Pacific Asia, is a biogeographical region of the Earth's seas, comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Oceans, and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia<sup>8</sup>. It does not include the Indian and Pacific Oceans 'temperate and Polar Regions, nor the Tropical Eastern Pacific along the Americas' Pacific coast, which is also a distinct maritime domain<sup>9</sup>.



Source: Study IQ

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Japan. (n.d.). Retrieved April 02, 2019, from <https://www.ispionline.it/it/tag/japan?page=2>

<sup>7</sup> Khurana, G. (2017). "Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific..." - Trump's New Cold War Alliance in Asia is Dangerous(WASHINGTONPOST). Retrieved April 01, 2019, from <https://www.academia.edu/35152806/IndoPacificTrumpsNewColdWarAllianceinAsiaIsDangerousWASHINGTONPOST>

<sup>8</sup> Indo-Pacific. (2019, April 26). Retrieved April 01, 2019, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific>

<sup>9</sup> Indo-Pacific. (2019, April 26). Retrieved April 01, 2019, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Pacific>

## 5. Indo-Pacific' Region: Conceptual Understanding

The definition of the Indo-Pacific is generally an emerging word in the international context Regulation. It articulates the littoral interests of the Indian and Pacific Oceans Legitimizing the federal integrated system for the region. Defining the It is important to understand those constructions of the Indo-Pacific region Interrogations concerning area of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The Indian Ocean area is home to roughly the vast population 35.7% of the world's population occupies 20% of the Earth's sea Surface. It is after the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, the third largest Ocean. It is half of the Pacific-Ocean and marginally less than Atlantic Ocean (Braun, 1982)<sup>10</sup>. The northwest part of the Indian Ocean Region shares its borders with the Indian subcontinent, Arab, and coast of Africa, respectively. The eastern part is bordered by Indonesia, North-West Australia and Thailand. The south side shares Boundaries of Antarctica and coasts of Australia. Further nearly 38 coastal states Share sea borders with the region of the Indian Ocean (Michel & Sticklor, 2012)<sup>11</sup>.

Despite sharing the maritime borders, the region was ignored because of Rivalry over superpower during the Cold War period. Currently the region is the centerpiece of world politics, owing to the naval progress of extra regional powers (Prabhakar, 2016)<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, Indian Ocean region is a place of major checkpoints such as the Suez Canal/Horn of Africa, Strait of Hormuz, Bab Al- Mandeb, Strait of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits (Michel, & Sticklor, 2012)<sup>13</sup>. Hence Indian Ocean because of its great and regional forces, the sea area is the centre of attraction in Asian political theatre geostrategic and geo-economic importance.

The term was initially propounded by German geographer Karl Haushofer as Indopazifischen Raum“ in 1920 under the circle of geographical and geopolitical discourse (Saha, 2016)<sup>14</sup>. However, after the Cold-War period the term is regularly used by Australian fisheries council to create the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council (here in after IPFC) in 1948 (Singh, 2014)<sup>15</sup>.

Likewise, India has underscored the term Indo-Pacific by various means. Since World War II, the former Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, had anticipated. His 1944 book 'The Discovery of India', that the Asia-Pacific region would emerge as a geostrategic entity in world politics, and India, will play an integral part in the new regional dynamics (Mishra, 2014)<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, in 2011, former foreign secretary Shyam Saran officially used the term for US recognition of the Pacific and Indian Oceans as an interlinked geopolitical space.<sup>1</sup> India, however, has quite different intentions towards the Indo-Pacific region compared to the USA, Japan and Australia. It considers that the Indo-Pacific region as a geostrategic opportunity to build the Indo-Pacific region Regionalism to reform its own previous foreign policy strategy (Chacko, 2012)<sup>17</sup>.

Although the Indian Ocean is only one of the major oceanic areas for other nations, it is a crucial Sea for India. India's maritime safety is concentrated in this area, and its freedom depends on the surface of the water. Thus, no industrial development, no commercial growth, no stable political structure is possible for India unless it protects its shores (Ballabh, 2013)<sup>18</sup>.

In India-ASEAN summit 2012 this term has been used by former Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh. In addition, the phrase has been used on the diplomatic level by the former American Indian ambassadors such as Nirupama Rao, and then Jai shanker in 2014.

The phrase has also been used at different junctures by former naval officers, Arun Prakesh and Devendra Joshi. Similarly, the former head of the Defense and Intelligence Agency also based Indian interests outside the Indian Ocean area on building geostrategic proximity to Indo-Pacific coastal courtiers (Scott, 2012)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Braun, D. (1982). The Indian Ocean: Region of Conflict or „Peace Zone“. United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co. (Publisher) Ltd

<sup>11</sup> Michel, D. & Sticklor, R. (2012). Indian Ocean Rising: Maritime Security and Policy Challenges. Washington DC: Stimson.

<sup>12</sup> Prabhakar, W. L. S. (2016). Growth of Naval Power in the Indian Ocean: Dynamics and Transformation. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation.

<sup>13</sup> Michel, D. & Sticklor, R. (2012). Indian Ocean Rising: Maritime Security and Policy Challenges. Washington DC: Stimson.

<sup>14</sup> Saha, Premesha. (2016). 'Indo-Pacific: Evolving Perceptions and Dynamics'. In Vijay Sakhuja & Gurpreet, S. Khurana (Eds.), Maritime Perspective 2015 (pp.19- 27). New Delhi: NATIONAL MARITIME FOUNDATION.

<sup>15</sup> Singh, S. (2016). Strategic Scenario in the Indo-Pacific Region: An Indian Perspective. In Khurana, S. G. & Singh, G. A. (Eds.) India and China: Constructing a Peaceful Order in the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation

<sup>16</sup> Mishra, R. (2014). India and 'Indo-Pacific': Involvement rather than Entanglement. Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 9 (2), 93-137

<sup>17</sup> Chacko, P. (2012). India and the Indo-Pacific: An Emerging Regional Vision. IndoPacific Governance Research Centre (IPGRC). Policy Briefs, (5), 1-7

<sup>18</sup> Ballabh, A. (2013). Towards Dominating Indian-Ocean. New – Delhi: Harmain off set press.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, D. (2012). The Indo-Pacific'—New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US-India Strategic Convergence. Asia-Pacific Review, 19(2), 85-109.

India primarily faces the region's non-traditional security threats over the last two decades. As a result, it has moved towards reviving its regional historical, cultural, economic, and maritime connectivity. It is also rising its protection and defence at the moment Proximity to the region via bilateral and multilateral littoral commitments. On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific region's geostrategic significance draws other global and regional forces such as the US, China, Russia, Japan, and Australia. Regional powers like Australia and Japan are also growing their geostrategic and security engagement with the South East Alliance in this context Countries of Asian nation.

## **6. India's Perspective of Indo-Pacific**

Indeed, many of India's special partners — the US, Australia, Japan, and Indonesia — look to Indo-Pacific as Asia Pacific plus India (Academy, S. 2019, September 07)<sup>20</sup>. They're trying to integrate India into the Asia Pacific strategic framework. They want India's presence in the East China Sea, in the South China Sea, to effectively fight China. However, India tries to cooperate for a peace and security framework in the country. Shared prosperity and security require that the countries establish a common regulatory order for the region through dialogue. Indo-Pacific stands for a democratic, open and inclusive zone for India. It includes all the regional nations, as well as those that have a stake in it. India considers the area in its geographical dimension, from Africa's shores to America's shores<sup>21</sup>.

India is promoting the Indo-Pacific region's rule-based, free, fair, and secure trade climate, which lifts all nations up on the tide of trade and investment. That is the same as what the country expects from the Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership (RCEP)<sup>22</sup>. In contrast to China, India is pursuing a single ASEAN rather than a divided one. China seeks to play off some ASEAN members against others, thus pursuing a conquest policy of 'divide and rule.' India is not compliant with the US Indo-Pacific edition, which seeks to contain Chinese supremacy. India is looking rather for ways in which it can collaborate with China<sup>23</sup>.

India is trying to democratise the area. The area used to be just about like an American lake before. There is, however, a concern that the area will now become a Chinese lake. The Scarborough Shoal conflict is one example of this. India doesn't want any player in the area to take control. In trilateral countries like India-Australia-France, India-Australia-Indonesia, India is working to ensure that China does not control the region<sup>24</sup>.

## **7. China: A Threat or a Challenge**

China has become a threat to the Asia Pacific nations, and even poses a danger to the Indian Ocean 's interests. China maintains a grip on the port of Hambantota (Sri Lanka), just a few hundred miles off India 's shores<sup>25</sup>. China supplies military equipment to its neighbours, such as submarines to Myanmar, frigates to Sri Lanka, equipment to Bangladesh and Thailand, thus colonising the region<sup>26</sup>.

Some of the ASEAN member countries were under the control of China and thus pose a danger to erode the unity of ASEAN with regard to the Indo-Pacific term. China, however, is the largest trading partner of ASEAN and can hardly be overshadowed by the whole grouping which further threatens India 's ties with the grouping<sup>27</sup>.

Despite many discrepancies, India-China interests fit on issues like globalisation, climate change etc. India and China are also part of various foreign groups such as BRICS, SCO etc. Consequently, China is seen as more of a challenge to India 's role in the Indo-Pacific than a threat to its influence in the region<sup>28</sup>.

There are many contradictions regarding the emerging Indo-Pacific construct. Like India, the US advocates freedom of navigation and overflight as well as respect for the rule of law and international norms. It adheres to many UNCLOS tenets without the Treaty having been ratified.

The 2018 United States Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), which embraces the Indo-Pacific versus Asia Pacific, describes China as a strategic and economic competitor. Yet it also has a whole section aimed at "promoting US values in the Indo-

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

Pacific region." By claiming to have always had a historic right to the Indian Ocean, China now justifies its increasing forays in the IOR. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) credibility is being eroded because of the absence of a key neighbouring country such as India.

## 8. Conclusion

According to international law, countries in the region should have fair access as a right to use open spaces at sea and in the air which would include freedom of travel, unimpeded trade and peaceful resolution of disputes under international law<sup>29</sup>.

Connectivity in the region should be built based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, accountability, viability and sustainability. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is important for Indo-Pacific security<sup>30</sup>. MDA implies an accurate understanding of any maritime-related operation that may affect safety, safety, economy or the environment.

Security & stability and rule that abide by the countries across the region is key. This will also allow the area to have multipolarity. The region's smaller states expect India to step up into the plate and help them expand their options, both economically and militarily. India should strive to live up to its expectations.

In order to meet the challenges of the Indo-Pacific region, India needs strong naval capabilities, multilateral diplomacy, and economic integration with nations. India needs to stick to its vision of the Indian Ocean, like SAGAR - Security and Growth for All in the Region<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid