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# Emerging Geopolitical and Security Concerns of the Indo-Pacific

CSS DIALOGUE REPORT

THE CENTRE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

# Emerging Geopolitical and Security Concerns of the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a critical geopolitical and security focal point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, captivating the attention of policymakers, analysts, academicians, leaders, and strategists all over the world. From the eastern shores of Africa to the western coasts of the Americas, the Indo-Pacific comprises some of the world's most dynamic societies, influential economies, vibrant cultures, and strategic maritime routes. Over the past few decades, the region has experienced rapid and substantial transformation, characterised by a shift in power dynamics, heightened security challenges, and the convergence of geopolitical interests, making it a pivotal area of study.

This report is the work of 15 Research Interns at CSS, who examined critical issues pertinent to the countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The report aims to offer valuable insights and perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of the region's evolving geopolitical and security landscape. By doing so, the report aims to aid in navigating the path towards a secure and prosperous future for the Indo-Pacific.

This report is a product of the Centre for Security Studies, Jindal School of International Affairs.

## Centre for Security Studies

Jindal School of International Affairs

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## Prologue

*“India’s Role in the Indo-Pacific”* highlights India’s security concerns due to China’s aggressive foreign policy tactics in the region, the role and importance of security and defence alliances like QUAD and AUKUS, India’s military exercises with the QUAD members, the threat posed by China’s “String of Pearls” strategy in the region, and India’s “fishhook” policy.

*“Evolution of the Strategic Importance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific”* emphasises the importance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of global trade, balancing China’s growing assertiveness, and as an attractive destination for investments from developed countries. The author evaluates how ASEAN views the region and discusses the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy. Finally, the report assesses the Confidence Building Measures undertaken by ASEAN and other stakeholders in the region and concludes by suggesting the future direction ASEAN must take if it wants to consolidate its power, preserve peace, and protect its interests.

*“Cyber Security in the Indo-Pacific”* attempts to highlight the significance of cyber-based technology and explores the cyber vulnerabilities faced by the Indo-Pacific nations. The report emphasises how several countries in the region still lack a robust and reliable cyber infrastructure. Finally, the author delves into the roles of QUAD and ASEAN, the implications of US-China rivalry, the establishment of new cyber defence forces, and joint statements issued by countries like India and Australia.

*“Maritime Security Mitigation in the Indo-Pacific”* traces the roots of the Indo-Pacific region and the maritime importance of the region. It mainly focuses on two nations - Australia and Japan. The author highlights how Australia in the year 2013, articulated for the first time on the growing strategic relevance of the Indo-Pacific and thus also became the very first country to officially make an international acknowledgement, while on the other hand, even from a historical perspective, the Japanese strategy has always viewed oceans at the centre of its power dynamics. She also sheds light on the shortcomings as well as the devised solutions with respect to Japan’s strategy.

*“Japan’s National Security Strategy and ‘The Indo-Pacific’”* sheds light on the important aspects of Japan’s new National Security Strategy. The author focuses on the Implications of Japan’s National Security Strategy on the Indo-Pacific and how the relationship between the United States and Japan would become even more coherent and integrated than ever before. The author further does a comparative analysis of United States and Japan’s National Security Strategy.

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# India's Role in the Indo-Pacific Security

*Jaskirat Singh Gujral*

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## Introduction

The term 'Indo-Pacific' refers to the region that stretches from the red sea and Suez Canal to the gulf of Panama and the Panama Canal, and from the Sea of Okhotsk to the Tasman Sea. This vast stretch of Earth's territory, comprising the entirety of two Oceans, is the current hotspot for geopolitical activity en masse. This region consists of two superpowers, three permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and multiple regional hegemon and potential superpowers, all vying to become stronger and more dominant in the region.

## Security Concerns

One of the main security concerns regarding the Indo-Pacific region is the upscaled Chinese aggression in the South China sea region and the increased pressure that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is putting on Taiwan. China's growing influence disbalances the already existing power balance in the Indo-Pacific region. To counterbalance this influence, The United States, Australia, India, and Japan have formed an informal strategic forum known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as 'QSD' or 'Quad'. The motive behind the Quad is to keep the strategic sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any military or political influence. Thus, one of the primary objectives of the Quad is to work for a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.<sup>1</sup> Alongside Quad, The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom have also created a three-way strategic defence alliance known as AUKUS. AUKUS is an enhanced security partnership among traditional allies that focuses on sharing high-end technologies including nuclear propulsion for submarines, cyber capabilities, long-range precision weapons, and artificial intelligence <sup>2</sup>.

India's role in the security aspect of the Indo-Pacific is to stand for a "free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific" as "it is important for the economic development of not only the region but also the wider global community."<sup>3</sup>, as stated by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. In a

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<sup>1</sup> "What Is the Quad, and How Did It Come About?"

<sup>2</sup> Mohan, "AUKUS, the Quad, and India's Strategic Pivot."

<sup>3</sup> Ministry, "India Stands for Free & Rules-Based Indo-Pacific Crucial for Economic Development of the Region & Wider Global Community, Says Raksha Mantri at Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue in New Delhi."

2016 maritime security strategy document, The Indian Navy designated the South and East China Seas, the Western Pacific Ocean, and their littoral regions as their secondary areas of maritime interest <sup>4</sup>.

## Quad and AUKUS

Whilst not a member state of AUKUS, India considers the organisation as a complement to Quad. New Delhi has no reason to complain if Australia, Britain, and the United States raise the military capabilities of their coalition by several notches with the introduction of nuclear-powered submarines, thereby complicating the Chinese maritime calculus.<sup>5</sup>

To avoid confrontations on either side, India has delved into multi-alignment and multilateralism as a strategy. This allows India to strategically hedge itself, and become an important swing state, one that either side cannot afford to lose. India's participation in the alliances of both BRICS and Quad has been to avoid conflict between rival powers. In BRICS, India has resisted efforts by China and Russia to turn it into an anti-Western bloc, but more importantly, India has actively avoided turning the Quad into an anti-China block and shaped its evolution as a non-military forum<sup>6</sup>.

However, this strategy of strategic hedging has caused discomfort in India's quad and European allies. India's refusal to sanction and condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and banning of wheat exports have not been taken well by the west and its allies.<sup>7</sup>

## Military Capabilities and Threats

### Military Capabilities

In 1992, the Indian Navy (IN) conducted the exercise MALABAR with the US Navy (USN). From 2015 onwards, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) became a permanent member of the exercise MALABAR, and in 2020 all four navies of the Quad members, i.e., the Indian Navy, the U.S. Navy, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force took part in the exercise as well. Following 2020, The four navies conducted the exercise MALABAR again from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2022<sup>8</sup>, and again from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> "Indian Maritime Security Strategy Document."

<sup>5</sup> Mohan, "AUKUS, the Quad, and India's Strategic Pivot."

<sup>6</sup> Mohan, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/between-the-brics-and-the-quad-indias-new-internationalism/>.

<sup>7</sup> "What Is the Quad, and How Did It Come About?"

<sup>8</sup> "The Quad Conducts Malabar Naval Exercise."

These exercises are done to provide an opportunity for common-minded navies to enhance inter-operability, gain from best practices and develop a common understanding of procedures for maritime security operations, the official spokesperson for the Indian Navy commented.<sup>9</sup>

The exercise allows the four quad nations to fight and learn together, and allows them to create a deterrent naval force, should the need ever come. In the 2021 edition of the exercise, MALABAR-21 would witness high-tempo exercises conducted between [sic] Destroyers', Frigates, Corvettes, Submarines, Helicopters and Long-Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft of the participating navies. Complex surface, sub-surface and air operations including Live Weapon Firing Drills, Anti-Surface, Anti-Air and Anti-Submarine Warfare Drills, Joint Maneuvers and Tactical exercises will be conducted during the exercise, the Indian Ministry of Defence said in a press release.<sup>10</sup>

Previous editions of the exercise have seen participation by other Indo-Pacific naval forces, such as the Royal Canadian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy. Apart from MALABAR, the IN has conducted multiple bilateral exercises with other Indo-Pacific states, those being:

- Indo-Thai Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT)<sup>11</sup>
- Indo-Japanese bilateral exercise (JIMEX)<sup>12</sup>
- Indian and Indonesian exercise (SAMUDRA SHAKTI)<sup>13</sup>
- Indo-Singaporean exercise (SIMBEX)<sup>14</sup>
- Indo-Philippine naval exercises<sup>15</sup>
- Indo-Thai-Singaporean naval exercise (SITMEX)<sup>16</sup>
- Indo-Bengali naval exercise (BONGOSAGAR)<sup>17</sup>
- Indo-Sri Lankan naval exercise (SLINEX)<sup>18</sup>

India's early reluctance to participate in Quad activities mainly stemmed from increasing threats from China. As Quad's only member to share a border with China, India was in a vulnerable position to maintain peace while pursuing national interests. However, As Beijing's pressures on New Delhi mounted in recent years, India was more willing than ever to abandon its old hesitations and work with the United States and its allies. That is

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> "Exercises with Foreign Navies | Indian Navy."

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

the big reason for the Quad's current momentum.<sup>19</sup> This push also comes from the recent steps being taken by the Indian armed forces to theaterise commands, and integrate all three forces: Indian Army, the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy, in certain commands to improve combat effectiveness and readiness.

### Threats

The current Chinese “String of Pearls” strategy is a strategy deployed by China, by building a network of commercial and military bases and ports in many countries. This strategy has been deployed by China to protect its trade interests, as a major chunk of its trade passes through the Indian Ocean and various choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, and the Lombok Strait.<sup>20</sup>

The reason why it is considered a threat to Indian interests is due to the following reasons:

1. It endangers Indian maritime security. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is developing more firepower with more submarines, destroyers, and aircraft carriers. The presence of these ships will pose a threat to India's security through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).<sup>21</sup>
2. Impact on the Indian economy – Indian resources will be diverted towards defence and security. Thus, the economy will not reach its potential, hampering economic growth.<sup>22</sup>
3. The strategic clout of India which it enjoys today in the Indian Ocean will be reduced. China doesn't have any openings in the Indian Ocean, the Strings of pearls will lead to China surrounding India and it will be able to dominate it. Countries that today consider India as a partner in response to Chinese aggression may find themselves trapped in Chinese hands.<sup>23</sup>

To counterbalance the string of pearls strategy, India has taken a few initiatives of her own. The strategy involves building ports, extensive Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) systems to track Chinese Warships and Submarines, importing state-of-the-art surveillance planes which can track down Chinese submarines, deepening defence ties, expanding bilateral relations with South and Southeast Asian countries, Island nations in the Indian Ocean region and carrying out regular military exercises with navies of USA, Japan, Australia.<sup>24</sup> Some of the important actions that are undertaken by India to counter the Chinese Navy and its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are as follows:

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<sup>19</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/23/india-modi-biden-aucus-quad-summit-geopolitics/>

<sup>20</sup> “Necklace of Diamonds vs String of Pearls : India-China Standoff.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid



- 1) India's Act East Policy, which was started as an endeavour to integrate South-East Asian nations with India's economy. To help India confront China, it has been utilised to reach significant military and strategic agreements with Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand.<sup>25</sup>
- 2) Building & Accessing Ports
  - a) Indonesia – India is building a deep-sea Port in Indonesia, a place named Sabang. It has strategic significance as it is close to the Strait of Malacca and India's Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
  - b) Myanmar – India built a deep-water port in Sittwe in 2016.
  - c) Bangladesh – India would help Bangladesh modernize the Sea Port in Mongla. India can also use the Chittagong port in Bangladesh.
  - d) Singapore – India has signed an agreement to access Changi Naval Base of Singapore, which is strategically located close to the Strait of Malacca.

India is also rumoured to use the "double fishhook" marine strategy to counter China's "String of Pearls" tactic. India's "fishhook" policy is anticipated to support the "fishhook" initiative the US and its allies are pursuing in the Pacific Ocean. The "double fishhook" refers to a series of alliances and port developments that India has made. Beginning in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and ending at the US military station (Diego Garcia) in the Chagos Archipelago, the eastern "fishhook" spans the eastern Indian Ocean. The US' "fishhook" approach comes to an end with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Indian Maritime Transport Agreement with Oman allows the western "fishhook" to start from the Duqm port and travel through Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar. France and India are establishing marine ties as France has security concerns for its possessions in the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

India's role in Indo-Pacific security is, thus, one of national security and balancing power. As written earlier, all actions being taken by India or its quad allies are done to maintain the power balance, along with disallowing China to become a Hegemonic power in the region. India wishes to see a prosperous and multipolar Indo-Pacific and stands by the vision of a rules-based order which can guide the region and its countries to prosperity.

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<sup>25</sup> ibid

<sup>26</sup> Jha, Phoebe, and Pratama, "Countering Chinese String of Pearls, India's 'Double Fish Hook' Strategy."

# Evolution of the Strategic Importance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific

*Mehak Johari*

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## Introduction

Southeast Asia lies at the intersection of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, making it one of the most dynamic regions in the world. The region provides opportunities for economic growth and cooperation on issues like poverty alleviation, while at the same time, the rise of military and economic prowess of regional giants like China, India or Japan has intensified the risk of mistrust, miscalculation, and patterns of behaviour based on a zero-sum game. The region has had great strategic importance since the origin of maritime navigation to the 'Far East' and continues to exert its importance as a budding economy in contemporary geopolitics.

The Southeast Asian region first received support from the US during the Cold War era in its bid to fight the spread of communism under the USSR. The western security umbrella allowed these countries in Southeast Asia to focus on their economic growth and domestic stability. **Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO)** was established in 1954 by the West to block USSR's advances in the region, however, internal conflicts rendered it a failure. SEATO was dissolved in 1977 and its decline paved way for the future cohesion of the members of ASEAN which was already established in 1967 but was yet to find its footing.

**The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is a successor of the **Association of Southeast Asia (ASA)** which was formed by Thailand, the Philippines, and the Federation of Malaya in 1961. When the foreign ministers of these 3 countries and Singapore and Indonesia got together and signed the ASEAN Declaration in 1967, it led to the formation of ASEAN whose primary objective was to accelerate economic growth, social progress, and cultural development of the Southeast Asian region. As Asia, Africa, and Latin America went through a phase of decolonization, the establishment of ASEAN was imperative to consolidate the strengths of these smaller powers to ensure their stability as well as protect their regional peace in the face of the ongoing Cold War between the US and the USSR. Since the end of the Cold War, ASEAN nations have gained greater political independence and have emerged as a leading voice on regional trade, security issues, and cooperation efforts.

## Trade

The Southeast Asian region is a significant player in global trade, particularly trade in manufactures. A report by the Asian Development Bank<sup>27</sup> evaluated the economic performance of the ASEAN members Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Newly Industrialized Economies (NIEs) which includes Singapore initially adopted export-oriented manufacturing in the 1960s which was followed by export-oriented policies in the 1970s and the 1980s. During the 1980s, ASEAN countries started exporting electrical and non-electrical machinery and other more sophisticated products<sup>28</sup>. Vietnam, along with PRC, emerged as a growing exporter of labour-intensive manufactures by the 1990s. International trade facilitated the transformation of predominantly agricultural economies of the region into modern industrial economies. From 2004, ASEAN countries showed an increase in their world export share with a proportionate decrease in their world import share. ASEAN moved on from labour-based export to higher skill and technology exports along with Japan and other NIEs. The share of ASEAN countries in global trade stands at approximately 7% and while it may be less than that of global powers like the EU or China, ASEAN has made significant strides in enhancing its competitiveness through initiatives like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with other powerful states.

**The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)** aims to enhance the organization's competitive edge as a production base by either reducing or eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers on intra-ASEAN trade. It was first agreed upon in 1992 at the ASEAN Summit in Singapore and aims to create a single market for ASEAN products, establish an international production base, and finally, attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). It was established in response to the growing eminence of other regional groupings like the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU). AFTA not only strengthened intra-ASEAN industrial links but also helped in creating a competitive set of small and medium enterprises. This trade liberalization enhanced the efficiency and competitiveness of ASEAN's manufacturing sector in the international market. AFTA employs the mechanism of the **Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme** which was established in 1992<sup>29</sup>. Under CEPT, there is no common tariff regime on imported goods and individual ASEAN member states are allowed to implement import tariffs based on their national schedules. Intra-ASEAN tariffs have been eliminated based on the level of sensitivity of the products to the ASEAN member's domestic industry and member states can only apply a tariff rate of 0-5% for goods produced within ASEAN. The CEPT Scheme was restructured into a new agreement called the **ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA)** during the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit Meeting in 2010. ATIGA aims to

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<sup>27</sup> *Trade and structural change in East and Southeast Asia: Implications for growth and industrialization*. (2018). Asian Development Bank. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/27709/part01-trade.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> MITI FTA. (n.d.). <https://fta.miti.gov.my/index.php/pages/view/asean-afta>

deepen the economic linkages between ASEAN members by lowering business costs, minimizing barriers (both tariff and non-tariff), establishing a single, larger market, and increasing trade, investments, and economic efficiency in the Southeast Asian region<sup>30</sup>.

The 10 ASEAN countries have also signed the world's largest Free Trade Area (FTA), the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** with China, Japan, S. Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. RCEP covers about 30% of the global GDP and 30% of the world's population. It aims to ensure post-pandemic economic recovery and sustainable development in the long term by eliminating 92% of the tariffs on goods for the next 20 years. It seeks to increase the ceiling on foreign investments and foreign ownership in financial services, telecommunications, and other service sectors<sup>31</sup>.

It is not only the share of exports in global trade that gives ASEAN its strategic importance but also its proximity to one of the most important channels of communication, **the Strait of Malacca**. The Strait of Malacca is an important channel for the transportation of goods, especially oil, because of which it is highly vulnerable to the push and pull of increasing economic, and therefore strategic, competition among the major powers of the world. It is surrounded by Malaysia in the North, Singapore in the East, and the Sumatra Island of Indonesia in the South, all of which are ASEAN members. Of the 95 million barrels of oil produced per day, approximately 16 million barrels are transported through the strait of Malacca<sup>32</sup>. Approximately 150 ships per day and 80,000 ships per year transit through the Strait of Malacca which means an estimated 40-60% of the world's maritime trade is dependent on it. It is the shortest sea route between oil producers in Africa and the Persian Gulf and its Asian markets due to which 90% of the crude oil transported between the Middle East and the South China Sea is transported through this strait, giving it high strategic importance in global trade. Being one of the world's primary oil transit chokepoints, the Strait of Malacca makes ASEAN an important ally for all those nations heavily dependent on oil to meet their energy needs. For India and China, cordial relations with ASEAN nations and continued access to the Strait of Malacca are important for other reasons as well. For India, control over the strait of Malacca is important because China's access to the Indian Ocean is dependent on it. In the event of a war, China needs access to the Indian Ocean to subdue India which can only be prevented by blocking the strait of Malacca. Thus, India needs to maintain good relations with ASEAN to control Chinese aggression in the region. In addition to this, Singapore's Changi port and Indonesia's Sabang port are an important part of India's '**Necklace of Diamond Strategy**' which aims to counter China's growing prowess in the region. On the other hand, the strait of Malacca is considered China's Achilles heel. 70% of China's oil demands are met through imports, 80% of which is transported to the country through this strait. The strait of Malacca is also important for the export of Chinese manufactured goods to the world and any blockage on this strait has the potential to paralyze the Chinese economy. Proximity to this strait has

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Briefing, A. (2021, August 20). *ASEAN's Free Trade Agreements: An Overview*. ASEAN Business News. <https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/aseans-free-trade-agreements-an-overview/>

<sup>32</sup> *The Strait of Malacca, a key oil trade chokepoint, links the Indian and Pacific Oceans*. (n.d.). <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32452>

made it necessary for the regional and international powers to maintain good relations with ASEAN.

While other straits like the Sunda Strait and the Lombok Strait provide reasonable alternatives to the Malacca Strait, it is still the preferred route for the transportation of goods. The Malacca Strait provides a shorter route than the other two which saves billions of dollars in transportation costs. The Sunda Strait is also shallower and narrower making it non-navigable for modern ships which require deeper waters and wider passages. The strait of Malacca is also safer and more dependable because no one country has complete control over it. After all, it falls within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of all three Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, unlike the Sunda and Lombok straits which fall within Indonesian territory and can be blocked at its discretion.

## **Counterbalancing China**

Since the end of the CW, there has been a significant shift in the power dynamics of the region. The threat has shifted from USSR to the rapidly growing China, with whom ASEAN countries share a border, unlike the USSR. The Chinese economy is five times that of the ASEAN countries combined, which translates into a defense expenditure also five times that of ASEAN. China has not only replaced Japan as the largest economy in the region but has also become ASEAN's largest trading partner. Even though China continues to act as a regional bully, the economic overdependence of ASEAN countries on China has made it virtually impossible for any Southeast Asian country to loosen its ties with it. However, the economic and strategic importance of ASEAN in recent years has compelled China to initiate efforts to maintain cordial relations with its member nation, evident by its recent efforts to reinstate the Code of Conduct (COC) negotiations on the South China Sea. These COC deliberations are viewed as Beijing's attempt to calm the discontent and suspicion in the region against it after it refused to abide by the 2016 arbitration ruling on the South China Sea. The arbitration ruling was given by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016 and declared various Chinese claims – like the nine-dash line, its land reclamation activities, and other activities in the Philippines waters – as unlawful. The COC negotiations are seen as a Chinese attempt to rebuild its image as a good neighbour to its smaller ASEAN counterparts since it cannot afford to lose its favour, especially in the current geopolitical scenario.

## **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Other Investments**

The ambitious Belt and Road Initiative launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 aims to expand China's economic and political influence through a series of development and investment projects stretching from East Asia to Europe. While the majority of the world is sceptical of the BRI project being a ruse for its military expansion in the region, ASEAN countries seek to benefit from it. If properly envisioned and executed, BRI appears

to benefit all southeast Asian countries<sup>33</sup>. This is because emerging economies are always in need of more investment, especially in building their infrastructure, which is exactly what is being offered by the BRI project. The BRI project is expected to provide an estimated US\$172.77 billion<sup>34</sup> in investment and construction contracts to ASEAN countries.

Other initiatives from China include the **Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB)** to fund infrastructural projects to boost economic growth. The AIIB has already pledged US\$670 million in loans to ASEAN countries<sup>35</sup>. However, ASEAN countries are increasingly becoming conscious of the dangers of overreliance on a single power due to which they are inviting investments from other countries like Japan, Australia, and the US as an alternative to the generous investment, trade, and infrastructural aid from China.

Investing in infrastructural projects in ASEAN countries can be an effective way for Japan, India, Australia, and the US to establish a rival joint regional infrastructural scheme capable of competing with China's BRI. Investing in ASEAN countries can be an effective way to increase the participation of these countries in security alliances and regional groupings like the QUAD and the AUKUS that need to be accepted in the region to be effective in their goals in the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN participation in such regional groupings is imperative because history has shown that military coalitions created to defend a region without actual regional participation either remain weak or wither away over time. Hence, alliances like QUAD and AUKUS must enhance ASEAN participation if they desire to effectively counter the growing prowess of China in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Other Investments

Alternative doors of investment have opened up to boost infrastructural investment in ASEAN countries. Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, promised to increase infrastructural financing to Asia by US\$110 billion from 2015 to 2020<sup>36</sup> and allotted an additional \$50 billion in aid as part of its FOIP strategy. Similarly, the US has announced a funding of \$113 million on technological, energy, and infrastructural initiatives and \$300 million in military assistance in the Indo-Pacific region<sup>37</sup>. Investments are also being extended by India, though to a lesser extent. Indian PM Narendra Modi promised to

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<sup>33</sup> Lecture by Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, published by The Straits Times, "Singapore will not join Indo-Pacific bloc for now: Vivian", May 15, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Chirathivat, S., Rutchatorn, B., & Devendrakumar, A. (2022). China's Belt and Road Initiative and Its Implications for ASEAN: An Introduction. In *World Scientific*. Retrieved January 20, 2023, from [https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789811241314\\_0001](https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789811241314_0001)

<sup>35</sup> "Asian Infrastructure Forum workshop 5- Advancing Together: ASEAN Infrastructure Development (June 26, 1500-1630), Experimental Theatre, NCPA". Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. <https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/events/annual-meeting/program/detail/asean-infrastructure-development.html#:~:text=All%20ten%20ASEAN%20member%20states,sub%20region%20for%202018%2D2019.>

<sup>36</sup> Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Banquet of the 21st International Conference on the Future of Asia, "The Future of Asia: be Innovative," Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, May 21, 2015

<sup>37</sup> The Washington Post, "Pompeo announces \$113 million in technology, energy and infrastructure initiatives in 'Indo Pacific' region," July 30, 2018.

enhance trade and investment in Southeast Asia during his visit to southeast Asia in 2018. A UNCTAD report highlights that ASEAN's share in global FDI has increased from 11.9% in 2019 to 13.7% in 2020<sup>38</sup>.

## ASEAN's Outlook towards the Indo-Pacific

ASEAN has followed a normative policy of engaging with all major powers, but it needs a more strategic approach to deal with the new geopolitical reality of the Indo-Pacific region. It needs a focused, overarching, and long-term approach to preserve its autonomy from both China and the US. ASEAN views itself as playing a central role in the Indo-Pacific region, demands dialogue and cooperation rather than rivalry from great powers, envisions development, prosperity, peace, and stability for all its members, and finally, aspires to strengthen confidence and trust in the region<sup>39</sup>.

## Free and Open Indo – Pacific (FOIP) Strategy

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy, advanced by Japan and the US, aims to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open, maintain a rules-based order, and follow the principle of rule of law in maritime security. FOIP Strategy poses both advantages and concerns for the ASEAN member states. It is advantageous for ASEAN since a rules-based international order would be better able to protect the member states from bullying and intimidation from greater powers, especially China and the US. Similarly, rule of law would give ASEAN member states an equal footing with other great powers in the international dispute settlement mechanism. The organization is, however, wary of the FOIP Strategy because it is viewed as an interventionist policy, capable of being used by external powers to legitimize their intervention in the domestic governance systems of the member states. ASEAN member states also believe that FOIP Strategy can undermine the organization's centrality, the decline of which is equated to ASEAN's loss of neutrality and manoeuvrability amidst great power competition in the region. It is because of these reasons that ASEAN views QUAD (based on the FOIP Strategy) as an alternative driver of regional cooperation and thus, a threat to itself. However, the FOIP Strategy must be seen as a tool to maintain a balance of power, prevent the creation of a power vacuum in the region and block China from single-handedly changing the status quo of the region by threat or use of force and coercion.

## Confidence Building

ASEAN has been an honest mediator for peace in the Indo-Pacific as is evident by the **Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty** signed in 1995. The Philippines

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<sup>38</sup> ASEAN Investment Report 2020–2021. (2021). In UNCTAD. <https://investasean.asean.org/files/upload/ASEAN%20Investment%20Report%202020-2021.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> A Statement titled 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' was published on June 23, 2019 on <https://asean.org/speechandstatement/asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific/>

became the last member to ratify the treaty in 2001, after which nuclear weapons have been completely banned within the ASEAN territory. ASEAN has hosted various regional and inter-regional dialogues and led cooperation efforts in the region. ASEAN's confidence-building efforts have spread beyond the Southeast Asian region as is evident by the **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)** it signed with China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, the US, and Russia. The treaty aims to sustain peace and stability in the region for over 40 years through peaceful settlement of disputes, renunciation of force, and employment of rule of law in the Indo-Pacific.

## Future Direction

ASEAN is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy in Asia and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the world following US, China, Japan, and Germany. It has had an annual GDP growth rate of 4.4% from 2001 to 2020 and is projected to become the 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy by 2030. However, the international world order is rapidly changing, and ASEAN needs to become more proactive if it wants to consolidate its power, maintain peace and stability, and protect its interests in the region. First, it needs to resolve its internal disputes and strengthen its internal unity if it wants to enhance its bargaining power against China, especially on the issue of the South China Sea. Second, ASEAN must remain united under its common interests and shared principles if it wants to survive the growing power rivalry between the US and the 'Big Neighbour' in the Indo-Pacific. Third, it needs to be more proactive and decisive in forming its vision for the economic order it wants to be a part of. Currently, ASEAN lacks a policy framework of its own that is well-suited to address the turbulent security issues arising in contemporary geopolitics. And finally, it must reform its own existing ASEAN-led institutions to better accommodate urgent regional security situations. ASEAN is increasingly becoming an important player in regional and international politics, but only time will tell if the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) emerges as a leader with an independent and strong position in regional politics or remains a mere pawn in power rivalry of other emerging centres of power.



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# Cyber Security in the Indo-Pacific

*Prabal Padam Singh Rana*

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The pandemic has made it clear how essential it is for businesses and organizations to have access to the internet and computers to maintain and expand their operations. During the pandemic, scam emails, phishing attempts, fraud, and malware have also escalated simultaneously. Since the advent of globalization, the Indo-Pacific region has been a center of innovation in cyber technologies, and it is home to some of the world's leading economies. Cybersecurity concerns have been front and center in the media as of late, particularly with the ongoing trade and chip war between the United States and China. The world feared a global cyber war would break out when Russian forces invaded Ukraine in 2022. The world may have been saved from a digital Armageddon, but the two sides have been engaged in a fierce battle on the internet. Russian security agencies used a suite of offensive cyber tools to conduct reconnaissance and attack specific Ukrainian computers, information systems, and networks with the goal of manipulating, denying, disrupting, degrading, or destroying them. The Ukrainian IT sector rallied support from around the world, including governments, corporations, and NGOs, to strengthen their defenses, and they appear to have been effective.

The United States of America and its western allies assert that Chinese hacking organizations such as APT-10<sup>40</sup> have been at the forefront of the attempts to coordinate cyber assaults directed against members of the United States Navy, American technological initiatives, and even NASA systems. Attacks on the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai by the cybercriminal group Petya, which originated in Ukraine, is one of the examples of the many times India has been the target of foreign cyber-spies. To define the bounds of cyberattacks, norms growth continues to be extremely important. It will be especially important to have the involvement of governments in the Indo-Pacific region since they are amongst the nation's most vulnerable to cyberattacks.

Several countries in the Indo-Pacific region still haven't developed comprehensive policies, while others lack a defined threat landscape and set of recommended responses. Despite this, most of the area has a shaky cyber infrastructure since many nations have just recently upgraded to IT systems in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the prevalence of small businesses and weak economies in the Indo-Pacific, state-level cyber defense and recovery measures in this region would be hindered. A further point of reference is cooperation amongst minilateral nations. Australia, India, Japan, and the United States make up the Quad grouping, and they have urged for regional capacity building and sharing systems, citing the danger of ransomware to supply chains and economic growth. In

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<sup>40</sup> GUDURU, SAMEER. 2020. "Cyber Domain Challenges and the Indo-Pacific – Defstrat." Defstrat. [https://www.defstrat.com/magazine\\_articles/cyber-domain-challenges-and-the-indo-Pacific/](https://www.defstrat.com/magazine_articles/cyber-domain-challenges-and-the-indo-Pacific/).

addition to the United States, the International Ransomware Initiative includes 36<sup>41</sup> other nations throughout the globe including the Indo-Pacific region. The purpose of this new U.N. convention is to facilitate cooperative efforts to reduce the impact of criminal organizations and to develop appropriate standards in this area.

## Role of Quad

The four partners in the Quad are taking the issue of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region much more seriously. They are coming up with bilateral and various types of agreements among themselves, but they are also bringing in other nations from Europe, including France and the United Kingdom, that have an interest in the area. This is not intended to take the place of the Quad entirely; rather, it is meant to complement it. While these other accords are expanding and deepening their focus on security cooperation, the Quad runs the risk of being left behind. A military pact between the United Kingdom and Japan was only just struck, and it will make it easier for one nation to station soldiers in the territory of the other. In a statement regarding the signing of the Japan-U.K. Reciprocal Access Agreement<sup>42</sup>. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the agreement's purpose is to "simplify procedures when implementing cooperative activities, such as port calls of vessels and joint exercises between the two countries and further promote bilateral security and defense cooperation." According to a news statement issued by the government of the United Kingdom, the agreement "would also solidify the United Kingdom's commitment to Indo-Pacific security, enabling both forces to plan and undertake greater scale, more sophisticated military exercises and deployments."

There is a major gap between advanced and developing countries in their military's cyber stance in the Indo-Pacific region right now. The latter's approach, at least for the moment being, will be defensive in character and motivated primarily by domestic concerns. However, the escalation hints at an increasing militarization of the Indo-Pacific digital domain, which carries the possibility of unexpected and immature cyber actions spilling across borders, especially from those states where political prudence and legal scrutiny are less firmly ingrained. People usually think that the Indo-Pacific, which includes China, Japan, and Russia, is not a major player in cyberspace<sup>43</sup>. However, according to a recent analysis of current cyber forces as well as military units that have a cyber function, most of the governments in this geographical arrangement have established these organizations

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<sup>41</sup> Tiwari, Sachin, and Sudha Ramachandran. 2023. "Ransomware: A Wake-Up Call for Cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific." *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/ransomware-a-wake-up-call-for-cybersecurity-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

<sup>42</sup> Rajagopalan, Rajeswari P., and Sudha Ramachandran. 2023. "Beyond the Quad: Booming Security Cooperation Efforts in the Indo-Pacific." *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/beyond-the-quad-booming-security-cooperation-efforts-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, James. n.d. "Hidden Arena: Cyber Competition and Conflict in Indo-Pacific Asia." AWS. Accessed January 22, 2023. [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/130307\\_cyber\\_Lowy.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130307_cyber_Lowy.pdf).

and invested in the requisite capacities to operate in cyberspace.

In addition to this, the area is making more use of this setting to promote its own economic interests. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) sees the Internet as crucial to the region's development and economic prosperity. Indicators such as the ICT Development Index developed by the International Telecommunication Union attest to a consistent increasing trend regarding ICT access, usage, and competence although discrepancies may continue to exist across the nations that make up the Indo-Pacific region.

The Pacific Rim is currently home to many companies operating in the information technology sector, with the United States of America, India, and Asian nations being the primary manufacturers of digital goods. As a platform for international trade, the internet has played a key role in the booming economies of Asia. Through the establishment of new ties and associations, it opens up new avenues for economic growth. The internet has been embraced wholeheartedly by Asian cultures, which have made it a vital platform for political discourse inside and between Asian countries. Conflict and rivalry in the cyber realm have significant Asian dimensions, including the use of cyberspace for military competition and asymmetric warfare planning, economic espionage for the purpose of gaining long-term economic and trade advantages, and a new kind of transnational mass political activism.

## US - China Rivalry

The United States and China's geostrategic rivalry will shape the course of future cyberwarfare in the Indo-Pacific. The timing and breadth of the adoption of offensive cyber tools and tactics could be determined, however, by the success of a few concurrent operations that are now being carried out in the area.

To begin, a new equilibrium of influence and cyber power is being established because of the application of digital transformation to the economies and cultures of the area. The governments of most Southeast Asian countries have embraced forward-thinking policies regarding the digital economy, which are dependent on the thriving youth and grassroots technology ecosystems in the Indo-Pacific region. India is a leading software development country, and China is a leading distributor of affordable technology and manufacturing to the rest of the world. Singapore, Japan, and South Korea are amongst the world's leading digital economies. South Korea is also one of the world's leading digital economies. This tendency will continue, although at varying rates, and a bigger share of a country's GDP will be accounted for by digital commerce.

After that, it's quite probable that the regional governments would go ahead with reactive and restrictive regulatory strategies in the areas of technology, online information, and cybersecurity. While some governments view the widespread use of social media platforms and the (mobilizing) power of smartphones as a threat to national security, others view it as a threat to the survival of their regimes or the social cohesion of their citizens. Countries in the Indo-Pacific region are moving in the direction of establishing national borders on

the various cyber levels.<sup>44</sup> This is the case even though the region is home to nations that adhere to vastly varied political ideologies, levels of economic development, and perspectives towards the regulation of the internet.

Discussions on battles that take place on the internet of the Indo-Pacific region have entered a new phase with the formation of the new cyber defense forces. The cyber units that were formed earlier have been given prominent roles in their nations' broader strategies for maintaining national security. The more recent forms of cyber defense may count on political attention, and as a result, their mandates and impact are more likely to expand in the future. The degree to which appropriate checks and balances can be established in the context of civilian oversight and control of the cybersecurity agencies will be a key factor in determining a state's future behavior in cyberspace. This behavior will be determined by how well the state can protect its civilians.

Another example is of Australia and India, Australia and India have issued a joint statement condemning "attempts to exploit cyberspace and cyber-enabled technologies to undermine international peace and stability" (an indirect allusion to China's role in this area) and reiterating their commitment to "an open, secure, free, accessible, stable, peaceful, and interoperable cyberspace and technologies that comply to international law." In fact, Australia<sup>45</sup> has been eager to strengthen its defenses, particularly its cybersecurity, in recent years as the country has been expanding its position in the Indo-Pacific region.

Therefore, it is safe to say that cyber-based technology will play an ever-increasing part in our daily life. Not only do such technologies have a wide range of uses in a variety of settings, but they also have strategic importance. It is vital to understand the nature of the hazards that are associated with cyberspace; yet the definitions and rules that are now in place are insufficient to deal with a variety of concerns including cybercrime, cyberwarfare, cyberterrorism, and cyberweapons. This is because international legal institutions were established in a period when developing technologies and the internet did not yet exist. Together, via the use of regional and international forums, and with the adoption of universal definitions and guidelines, we can successfully handle such difficulties by combining efforts.

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<sup>44</sup> Hogeveen, Bart. 2023. "ISSUE NO. 604 JANUARY 2023." ORF. [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ORF\\_IB-604\\_Future-of-Cyber-Warfare-in-the-Indo-Pacific.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ORF_IB-604_Future-of-Cyber-Warfare-in-the-Indo-Pacific.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Bana, Sarosh. 2022. "Cybersecurity: Underpinning India-Australia Ties." Australian Cyber Security Magazine. <https://australiacybersecuritymagazine.com.au/cybersecurity-underpinning-india-australia-ties/>.

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# Maritime Security Mitigation in the Indo-Pacific

*Reet Mansharamani*

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## Conceptual Underpinnings

In 2007, the then Prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe had talked about the “confluence of the two seas”, emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation between the Indian and Pacific Ocean countries.<sup>46</sup> The concept has now assimilated into a real geographical area with political implications has become of the reasons why major powers are keen to build strong relation within the region. As a sign of their regional engagement, the United States, Australia, Japan, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and ASEAN have all used the phrase "Indo-Pacific." The shift in the "Indo-Pacific" region's geographical definition, however, has received less attention.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to know that the constituent ‘strategic areas’ in the Indo-Pacific, depend upon the geopolitical perceptions attributed to those areas by each country. The very same phenomenon holds truth for zeroing in the emerging security concerns and strategies to mitigate them. Thus, through this paper, my aim is to excavate the maritime strategies of the major powers like that of Australia and Japan in the Indo-Pacific to keep the waterways open for global exchange of interests while simultaneously highlighting how their moves are backed by their own geopolitical interests.

## Tracing The Roots

Several theorists have argued that more than a geographical framework, the term Indo-Pacific has been used as a connotation to the rising emergence of the Indian ocean as a power base having the capacity to fuel economies. Therefore, it is argued that a multifaceted approach be adopted in dismantling the homogenising and totalizing notions of the sea space. This will give space to newer insights in comprehending projects, policies, and integrating agendas that are at the heart of maritime politics of the Indo-Pacific (Timothy Doyle: 2019, 12).<sup>48</sup> The two oceanic areas are considered so different that scholars such as Gurpreet. S Khuranna have referred to it as a conceptual aberration. He further adds that this modern geopolitical

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<sup>46</sup> Berkofsky, Axel, and Sergio Miracola. *Geopolitics by other means: The indo-Pacific reality*. Ledizioni-LediPublishing, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Wada, Haruko. *The Indo-Pacific Concept: Geographical Adjustments and Their Implications*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Doyle, Timothy, and Dennis Rumley. *The rise and return of the Indo-Pacific*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

"aberration" was non-existent until the 18th century, when India and China's civilizational ethos began having a significant impact on Asia and beyond, accounting for more than half of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>49</sup> Taking cue of this importance, Karl Haushofer, a German Geopolitician in the year 1920 had also reiterated Asia's resurrections in the future as the center of great power dynamics. Similarly, way before Haushofer made his predictions, Kautilya's Arthashastra further focusses on the expansion and protection of the water ways to boost trade in luxury goods.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the above two instances show us that irrespective of the origins of opinions, the strategic importance of the Indo- Pacific has been tantamount across time and space.

In the contemporary scenario, it goes without saying that a number of countries in the Afro-Asian rim and the Oceania have been witnessing a fast pace of development and a point of commonality between those nations is that they fall in the "Maritime Underbelly" of Asia. As per reports by the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) in New Delhi, the 36 nations that make up "maritime Asia" already account for 48% of the world's GDP when measured in PPP terms (2017), thereby, reflecting the maritime importance of this region. We will now turn to various regional heavyweights of the Indo- Pacific and their strategies to deal with various maritime challenges and especially those posed by China.

## Australia

### The Relevance

Australia in the year 2013 articulated for the first time on the growing strategic relevance of the Indo-Pacific and thus also became the very first country to officially make an international acknowledgement. Sitting at the centre of the Indo-Pacific, Australia has a natural right to be interested in the stability of the region.<sup>51</sup> It contains Australia's main economic and political interests. The Australian Safety Maritime Authority estimates that about 99% of the trade to and from Australia is sea-borne. Thus, Australian shipping lanes aka, the Sea Lanes of Communication are important for its economic vitality.

### The Challenge

Many of its sea routes pass through major choke points. For example, the oil imported to Australia has to undergo refinement at Singapore. It thus, acts as a channel between the Persian Gulf and the rest of Asia. The imported petroleum must pass the three major choke points to reach the country: the strait of Hormuz in the Gulf, the strait of Malacca and Sunda around Indonesia. Thus, its incapability to protect these sea routes is a major fetter on its strategic balance<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Angus Maddison. *Contours of the World Economy 1-2030AD*, Oxford, Oxford University, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Kamal, Kajari, and Gokul Sahni. "India in the Indo-Pacific: A Kautilyan Strategy for the Maritime Mandala." (2022).

<sup>51</sup> Matthew, P. A. R. R. Y. "Australia's strategic view of the Indo Pacific." (2022).

<sup>52</sup> *Australia Maritime Strategy*. YouTube. YouTube, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhN9C4yPALI>.

Australia and its people seem incapable of supporting a navy capable of protecting its economic interests in the region. The Defence Strategic Update (DSU) document of 2020 highlights the need of Australia to effectively deal with the rapidly changing security environment through advancements in its defence capabilities to influence the strategic environment. Additionally, the DSU also reiterates the role of North Korea as becoming as a grave security threat in the region.

### The Action

It is imperative for Canberra to be a part of security partnerships. Up until 1942, it was the UK which provided maritime security to Australia after it agreed to be a military participant in British empire's conflicts. The post WWII period saw America rise as a great power and its unsinkable need for a stable Australia to maintain a presence in the Pacific became apparent. Since then, Australia's role has not changed much. Even today, its conventional security needs are primarily met by defence agreements such as the 1951 Security ANZUS treaty including the U.S, Australia and the New Zealand and the Five Eyes treaty meant for sharing intelligence across the 5 nations of the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.S.

Additionally, China too is being perceived as having the capacity to exert coercive influence in the region. Its Blue Water navy build-up, in particular, of its submarines and amphibious fleets along with threats in the Grey zone are seen as a potent threat to the United States' regional partner's maritime security. Thus, as a response to a more influential China, Australia needs a greater U.S. involvement. The trilateral pact between Australia, the U.K and the U.S- **AUKUS**- is a result of the above realization. An agreement for the Royal Australian Navy to purchase, at least eight nuclear-powered submarines as part of the arrangement. Apart from this, the agreement should act as a platform for collaboration among the three nations on military and submerged capabilities, as well as cyber, AI, quantum, and other crucial technologies.

Australia's role in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue also deserves mention here. With its initial futility, **QUAD** gained momentum with Japan's proposal of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative of 2016. Simultaneously, Australia's Defence White Paper gave QUAD its legitimacy too.<sup>53</sup> One of Australia's top foreign policy initiatives is the Pacific Step-up, a neighbourhood involvement strategy. Towards this end, Australia and the U.S in multiple ministerial level meetings have pledged developmental grants and assistance to Pacific Island nations. Canberra and Washington have also decided to support and fund the Pacific Islands Forum. The Development of these nations is necessary to have a strong hold on the regional geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>53</sup> Vijaya, Poornima. "Australia's Role in the Quad and Its Crumbling Ties with China." Air University (AU). Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2870644/australias-role-in-the-quad-and-its-crumbling-ties-with-china/>.

Additionally, relations between Australia and India have also seen a boost. With the aim of creating alternate maritime supply chains, both nations have engaged in projects like Sagarmala, Mausam, and the ‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ (SAGAR) initiative. SAGAR has become operational with about 17 percent of goods being imported using this coastal route.

These initiatives jointly taken by countries, like Australia, will play an important role in stabilising maritime routes and securitising trade and commerce along such routes.

## Japan

From its normative framework to the geopolitical space, a Free and Open Indo-Pacific was formed on the ideals of Shinzo Abe. Ash Rossiter reiterated in his article that FOIP has emerged as one of the most important organising ideas of Japanese foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> Abe’s farsightedness generated from the realisation that by stretching for thousands of miles through the Pacific ocean, Japan’s Archipelagic nature and scarcity of natural resources have deepened its reliance on the seas not only for personal consumptions of goods but also as a channel for exporting manufactured goods like automobile and machineries and for importing overseas extracted energetic resources. Even from a historical perspective, the Japanese strategy has always viewed oceans at the centre of its power dynamics. Back in the 1600s too, the country’s military leadership, Shogunate, decided to isolate the country from the rest of the world using the ocean as a barrier against any foreign invasion. In fact, during the WWII Japan’s navy had ruled briefly over the Pacific Ocean, contending its control with that of the U.S.

Additionally, the development of FOIP was also prompted by two security and economic-related crises in the 2010s. First, information about China’s BRI spread throughout the world’s foreign policy discourse. Second, the South China Sea judgement rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal in July 2016 did not impose any restrictions on China’s behaviour in the maritime sphere.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it’s not hard to anticipate why Abe was one of the first proponents for greater cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

### The Shortcomings

Speaking in terms of maritime geography, there are 3 main sea lanes that branch out from Japan and connect it with the rest of the world-

- 1- The first one heads towards Indian ocean which links Japan’s biggest industrial hubs with the gulf region. The Gulf also accounts for origin of a majority of the Asian and Japanese fuel. Ships carrying petroleum from this route pass through some hot waters like the Taiwan and the Malacca strait as well as the South China Sea. These are the lanes which also carry the threat of being blocked.

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<sup>54</sup> Rossiter, Ash. "The ‘free and open indo-Pacific’ strategy and Japan’s emerging security posture." *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2018): 113-131.

<sup>55</sup> KOGA, KEI. “Japan’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Strategy: Tokyo’s Tactical Hedging and the Implications for ASEAN.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, no. 2 (2019): 286–313. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26798855>.



- 2- The second route starts from Tokyo and the areas of Kansai and finally making its way to the U.S west coast. The U.S undoubtedly presents itself as one of the major export destinations for Japan.<sup>56</sup>
- 3- In the recent years, the Ryukyu archipelago, and the disputed islands of Dokdo (in Korea)/ Takeshima (in Japan) and Senkaku (in Japan)/ Diaoyu (in China) have become areas of strategic interests becoming points of contention between Tokyo, South Korea and China. The South China Sea's abundance of natural resources and fishing grounds has also sparked a vigorous struggle over the designation of the Exclusive Economic Zone's borders.

Thus, the sea represents itself as Japan's biggest power as well as its grave vulnerability.

## Devised Solutions

One of Japan's major strategies to contain China is the First Island Chain which are an imaginary chain of islands starting from Kyushu towards the South China Sea and acts as a buffer region for China. For years, the Chinese governments has been making attempts to secure the chain to gain greater control over its coastal borders.

To this effect, Tokyo too has been making headlines for restricting Chinese naval aggression by installing anti-ship and anti- missile aircraft batteries on these islets from the tip of Kyushu down to Miyakojima. Additionally, for the Chinese navy, the Miyako strait holds strategic importance which stretches from the Okinawa islands at the north to Miyakojima archipelago at the south, as it is close to Taiwan. Thus, with the Japanese control over it, any Chinese ships sailing through would easily come under the radar of anti-ship batteries. This greatly diminishes China's blue water power projection capabilities.

It is of no surprise that certain other nations in the Oceania such as Palau, followed by Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga too are of great importance to Japan. Therefore, Japan has various projects in the pipeline to ensure that these countries are independent enough to keep away from China's debt trap expansionism. To develop schools, airports, ports, solar power systems, desalination plants, and help with catastrophe resilience and recovery, among other things, Tokyo has also been involved in extensive humanitarian initiatives to make these countries self-sufficient. Since 1997, Tokyo has also hosted the summit-level Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM), which will be held for the ninth time in 2021. Additionally, in 2019, a Committee for the Promotion of Cooperation with Pacific Island Countries was founded.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Japan's maritime strategy, as can be seen from the evidence above, depends greatly upon keeping the island nations and other adjoining states out of Chinese influence. Scholars also

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<sup>56</sup> *Japan's Maritime Strategy: How Japan Plans to Stop China's Expansion into the Pacific*. YouTube. YouTube, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEuhRa7sHJ8>.

<sup>57</sup> Paskal, Cleo. "Indo-Pacific strategies, perceptions and partnerships." *Chatham House* 23 (2021).

predict that Japan's focus on the region is only going to increase in the forthcoming times.

## Conclusion- Way Forward

Securitization of the Indo-Pacific region is coming together effectively with various transcontinental partnerships being concretised as a way of increasing area of operations across the ocean. Nevertheless, multilateral forums like QUAD and AUKUS need to do more than mere discussions through conferences. The Indo Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA) is a huge step towards this end. To create a single operating picture which will integrate three vital regions - the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region - in the Indo-Pacific, it is expected that the member states will pool their knowledge, cooperatively develop, and deploy their existing, and new technology. However, for this initiative to come to fruition focus should be laid on interoperability of technology, accurate sharing of intel and availability of resources for future technological collaborations.<sup>58</sup>

Amidst these developments, the need of the hour calls for greater cooperation on sustainable developmental grounds. The fifth Indo-Pacific Business Forum hosted by United States and Japan talked about various developmental investments projects like that of solar panels in Georgia by Hanwha Solutions, a Korean based country.<sup>59</sup> Alongside these projects, there is greater awareness with respect to the Blue Economy which denotes the idea that greater growth in the maritime domain should also inculcate conservationist niches. The Seychelles, for instance, secured the first-ever debt restructuring for climate adaption and unveiled a ground-breaking sovereign blue bond. Mauritius has also launched a plan to develop aquaculture, marine biotechnology, and renewable energy sources while integrating its tourism, seaports, and fishing industries.<sup>60</sup>

All these initiatives together with a sustainable approach are going to make the Indo-Pacific partnerships stronger than ever by including the tiny but mighty Island nations and creating an Indo-Pacific with proportional development plans and secure coastal regions for a greater maritime security.

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<sup>58</sup> Kapoor, Lalit. *Assessing the indo-Pacific partnership for maritime domain awareness*, June 23, 2022. <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/assessing-the-Indo-Pacific-partnership-for-maritime-domain-awareness.html>.

<sup>59</sup> "2023 Indo-Pacific Business Forum Promotes Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in the Indo-Pacific - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State, January 14, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/2023-Indo-Pacific-business-forum-promotes-inclusive-and-sustainable-growth-in-the-Indo-Pacific/#:~:text=The%20Governments%20>.

<sup>60</sup> Larik, Joris, and Abhijit Singh. "Sustainability in Oceans Governance: Small Islands, Emerging Powers, and Connecting Regions." *Global Policy* 8, no. 2 (2017): 213-215.

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# Japan's National Security Strategy and 'The Indo-Pacific'

*S. Shailesh*

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## Introduction

On December 16th, 2022, the Japanese government authorized the adoption of key National security policies which mainly consisted of a pristine National Security Strategy (NSS), an ambitious National Defence Strategy, and other vital defence-related documents. The National Security Strategy is Japan's first in nearly 10 years, and only its second ever<sup>61</sup>. With this unprecedented move, Japan has signalled its intent for developing Counteroffensive and advanced defence capabilities, which, until now was capped and constrained majorly by Cold War era policies and the infamous Yoshida Doctrine adopted by Japan after its defeat in World War II (1945). Moreover, the Japanese government has made it visible that these developments are not only aimed at defending national interests and preserving peace in the region but also correspond to the military capabilities of potential adversaries.<sup>62</sup>

The National Security Strategy (NSS) document starts by clearly highlighting the need and purpose for adopting such an extraordinary security strategy. It states, "Turning our eyes to the neighboring region (Indo-Pacific), Japan's security environment is as severe and complex as it has ever been since the end of World War II<sup>63</sup>." The Japanese security planners have expressed that the changes in the International, as well as regional spheres, have pressurized Japan to adapt and alter their policies towards National security and defence. Moreover, the document has cited the Chinese Military Modernisation program and North Korea's Nuclear Missile Program as the greatest strategic challenge to both Japan as well as the International Order. Furthermore, the security planners, referring to the Russian-Ukraine War have expressed that, if a war is possible in the European Continent, it could take place in the Asian Continent as well, and Japan needs to be prepared for any unforeseen circumstances. Hence, the National

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<sup>61</sup> Galic, M. (2022) *What you need to know about Japan's new National Security strategy*, United States Institute of Peace. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/what-you-need-know-about-japans-new-national-security-strategy> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>62</sup> Editorial Board and The Sankei Shimbun (2022) *Editorial: Japan's National Security Strategy a fulfillment of duty to its people*, JAPAN Forward. Available at: <https://japan-forward.com/editorial-japans-national-security-strategy-a-fulfillment-of-duty-to-its-people/> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>63</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat (2022) *National security strategy of Japan - cas.go.jp*, National Security Strategy of Japan (Provisional Statement), Pg.2. Available at: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

Security Document states and concludes that to safeguard and secure Japan's homeland as well as to preserve domestic and regional peace, it is imperative for 'us'(Japan) to develop a robustly comprehensive, and ambitious defence strategy which until now was absent and considered redundant.

## Important Aspects of the New National Security Strategy

### I. Counterstrike Capability

One of the most important inclusions in this strategy would be the authorisation to acquire Counterstrike capability. Previously, the counterstrike capability was viewed as superfluous and was immensely controversial due to its offensive usage capability. Moreover, the people of Japan have been sceptical about such capability and have previously questioned the necessity of acquiring similar technology. Surprisingly, this time, public opinion as well as the Government have been absolutely clear and supportive of acquiring such a capability for Japan. North Korea's Nuclear program as well as the modernisation and diversification of China's missile arsenal have been the main reasons for this new development.

Security planners point out that, to counter the increasing qualitative and quantitative missile capabilities in the region (referring to The People's Republic of China and North Korea) Japan would like to acquire counterstrike capability, mainly weapons capable of striking targets inside the territory of a potential adversary. The weapons include Long Range Precision Strike Cruise missiles, which would be Japan's first. Apart from this, Japan also plans to acquire advanced missile defence systems, UAVs, Surface to Air missiles, and Air to Surface missiles. Furthermore, it also ambitions to increase the range of its existing missile arsenal, which would help Japan in achieving its goal of having an efficient Counterstrike Missile system. At the time, the NSS document also explicitly rejects pre-emptive strikes (striking first at a stage when no armed attack has occurred) and has called for a system to ensure counter strikes are responsive and not pre-emptive<sup>64</sup>. These measures would therefore not only make this new capability secure but also guarantee its responsible usage and further, prevent its misuse, ensuring peace and stability in the region.

### II. Defence Spending

The Defence build-up plan specifics the equipment and expenditure required over the next five years in order to attain the advanced capabilities and technology as stated in the National Security Strategy document. Increasing Japan's defence spending is the main objective highlighted in the National Defence Strategy (another document released alongside the NSS document on December 16th, 2022). Japan has traditionally capped its defence budget at 1% of GDP once again owing to Cold-war policies and the Yoshida Doctrine. Moreover, the

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<sup>64</sup> Galic, M. (2022) *What you need to know about Japan's new National Security strategy*, United States Institute of Peace. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/what-you-need-know-about-japans-new-national-security-strategy> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

reliance for security and defence on the United States is another major reason for Japan constraining its defence expenditure. However, there has been a significant change in popular sentiment concerning defence expenditure, given the increased vulnerability Japan faces from China, North Korea as well as Russia. With a renewed defence strategy, Japan plans to double its defence spending, moving close to 2% of its GDP by 2027 keeping in line with NATO standards<sup>65</sup>. In other words, Japan plans to invest approximately \$320 billion additionally over the already in-place defence expenses, in a phased and timely manner for the next five years<sup>66</sup>. Numerous expert opinion states that, with this large investment over the next five years, Japan would undoubtedly become the third largest spender on defence, just behind the United States and China, by the year 2027<sup>67</sup>.

### III. Dramatic Change in Language with respect to China, Russia, North Korea, and Taiwan

Ten years ago, Japan viewed Russia as a potential asset for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and called for “cooperation in all areas”<sup>68</sup>. But now, in the National Security Strategy section on Russia, Japan cites Russia to be a threatening entity whose “aggression against Ukraine has easily breached the very foundation of the rules that shape the international order”<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, Japan presently views Russia’s activities around the Kuril Islands and Japan, as well as its strong coordination with China as a strong security concern to Japan’s National Security.

Similarly, concerning China, Japan has taken a more offensive and blunter stance. The NSS regards China’s military activities as “unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge to the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community”<sup>70</sup>. In addition, Japan has also voiced for a swift and strategic response to China’s threat through its comprehensive national power and in cooperation with the United States as well as like-minded countries like India, Australia, U.K, etc.

NSS section on North Korea and its activities have also been expanded, majorly citing how “North Korea’s military activities pose an even more grave and imminent threat to Japan’s national security than ever before”<sup>71</sup>. The document specifically points out Pyongyang’s rapid development of missile-related technology as one of the existential threats to peace and stability in the region.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Desk, W. (2022) *Japan to increase defence spending to up to \$320 billion amid China fears*, *The Week*. The Week. Available at: <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2022/12/16/japan-to-increase-defence-spending-to-up-to-dollar320-billion-amid-china-fears.html> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>67</sup> Desk, W. (2022) *Japan to increase defence spending to up to \$320 billion amid China fears*, *The Week*. The Week. Available at: <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2022/12/16/japan-to-increase-defence-spending-to-up-to-dollar320-billion-amid-china-fears.html> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>68</sup> Galic, M. (2022) *What you need to know about Japan's new National Security strategy*, *United States Institute of Peace*. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/what-you-need-know-about-japans-new-national-security-strategy> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

The other most remarkable element of the document is its new terminology referencing Taiwan. Japan has identified Taiwan as “an extremely significant partner and a precious friend of Japan, with whom Japan shares fundamental values, including democracy, and has close economic and personal ties<sup>72</sup>.” Moreover, Japan has also identified Taiwan’s security as integral to Japan’s defences and has assured that they would play a role in Taiwan’s defence if push came to shove (referring to China’s aggression against Taiwan).

#### IV. Other Important Developments with regards to National Security

Apart from acquiring Counterstrike capabilities, increasing defence spending, and change of diplomatic language, the NSS is packed with many other crucial components shattering the already in place traditional strategies and norms that had limited Japanese military activities.

Firstly, the NSS voices for new collaborations with foreign military establishments and at the same time focus on building a comprehensive domestic military industry that would not only suffice Japan’s defence needs but also cater as a defence exporter to various countries. The recent joint venture between Japan, the United Kingdom, and Italy to build a futuristic Sixth generation fighter jet<sup>73</sup>, could be seen as a step taken in line with the new National Security Strategy.

Secondly, the NSS focuses on the declining and aging population in Japan. Hence to mitigate this and to have a continuous supply of manpower, NSS resolves to ensure an “International environment that is conducive in facilitating cross borders economic and social activities such as the trade of goods, energy, and food which are essential for industries, and the movement of people.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Japan also aims at increasing births and promoting nationalism among the population through various programs and educational institutions.

Thirdly, the NSS also focuses on building a comprehensive defence architecture and protecting Japan’s territorial integrity as well as ensuring maritime security<sup>75</sup>. To achieve this, Japan has identified partners, or as the document refers to them, “Like-minded countries”<sup>76</sup>. The list of countries includes the United States, The Republic of Korea, India, Australia, ASEAN countries, etc.

Lastly, Japan also aspires to utilize its Overseas Development Assistance and other International Cooperative mechanism strategically in order to maintain and develop a free and open international order. In other words, Japan would improve connectivity through quality

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Beale, J. (2022) *UK, Italy and Japan team up for New Fighter Jet*, *BBC News*. BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63908284> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>74</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat (2022) *National security strategy of Japan - cas.go.jp, National Security Strategy of Japan (Provisional Statement)*, Pg.2. Available at: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pg. 20

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

infrastructure and human resource development, marine security, the rule of law, and economic security, while enhancing trust and cooperation partnerships with developing countries and others<sup>77</sup>.

## **Implications of Japan's National Security Strategy on the Indo-Pacific**

Primarily, the relationship between the United States and Japan would become even more coherent and integrated than ever before. The major reason for this is undoubtedly the strategy's major demands with respect to technological advancement in defence. Currently, Japan does not possess the capability to achieve these demands without external assistance. The United States is the only ally of Japan that is capable of supporting and helping Japan in achieving this unprecedented military advancement. Hence, this would result in a more cooperative and interconnected relationship mainly in the fields of technology, defence, space, and missile technology.

With a stronger Japan, China would now face immense pressure from all the sides of its border. China, which already faces a looming danger from the Indian side on its south-Western border and the mighty United States Navy on its eastern flanks (Taiwan), would now also face a stronger Japan, strategically circling the Chinese on almost all the sides (except for the Northern Border along Russia). Moreover, it would also bring in the much-needed balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and restrain the Dragon country from unilaterally altering and disturbing the peace in the region.

With Japan becoming a major military power, the Allies and the Western nations would have a more powerful standing in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, this would also provide a stronger platform for Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and many security pacts like AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to engage more efficiently in countering the Chinese aggression in the region.

Finally, a new security strategy for Japan would mean immense opportunities for various countries may it be developed or developing countries. Countries like the United States and the United Kingdom now would play a major role in developing defence infrastructure in Japan. This would also mean an increasing sense of insecurity and vulnerability to potential adversaries like China and North Korea, who might staunchly oppose these developments and also could provoke military reactions. On the other hand, with a stronger Japanese defence industry, many developing nations like India and other ASEAN countries would benefit from low-cost defence equipment as well as joint ventures in manufacturing certain defence technology and capabilities.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, Pg. 17

## Comparative Analyses of United States and Japan's National Security Strategy

National Security Strategies of both countries view the US-Japan alliance and partnership as an important strategic asset and a necessary tool to maintain peace and harmony in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>78</sup> Both strategies focus on reshaping the ability of their alliance, mainly to protect the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world. Both nations, through their strategies, have committed to increasing investments in enhancing their roles, missions, and capabilities in the region as well as developing closer defence cooperations among themselves and other allies and partners<sup>79</sup>.

Japan's National strategy, in many aspects, reflects and converges with the United States National Security Strategy<sup>80</sup>. The main reason for this would be the traditional alliance/partnership Japan maintains with the United States since the end of World War II. Both strategies share a similar stance when it comes to engagement in Indo-Pacific. The United States in cooperation with Japan believes in a free and rule-based Indo-Pacific and pursues a policy of expanding and widening the range of partners in the Indo-Pacific region as well as across the globe. Apart from Indo-Pacific, both the nations' strategies speak of future collaborations in the spheres of Space, Artificial Intelligence, and multiple joint ventures in developing Military technology and capabilities to defend the shared values and interests, which both the nations considered to be of paramount value. Moreover, both strategies call out China for its military activities and term it to be the greatest strategic challenge to the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, both Nations condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and assure their unconditional support to the people of Ukraine. Finally, both countries aspire to build a comprehensive and modern defence architecture for Indo-Pacific with the like-minded countries and secure the region from any unforeseen actions from potential adversaries like China, North Korea, or Russia.

### Conclusion

The Japanese NSS reflects a gradual shift from Pacifist and Cold War era policies and showcases the present-day perception of its threats and its objectives to develop a robust deterrent capability against its potential adversaries. Moreover, Japan, through this National Security strategy considers it necessary to enhance its capabilities to ensure a Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, one could argue that this particular NSS indicates the

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<sup>78</sup> Antony J. Blinken, Secretary Of State (2022) *Welcoming Japan's new National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and defense buildup program - United States Department of State, U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/welcoming-japans-new-national-security-strategy-national-defense-strategy-and-defense-buildup-program/> (Accessed: January 20, 2023).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid



increasing confidence in dealing with nations considered to be a threat to a free and inclusive world order, and who often tend to adopt measures hindering the stability of the International community. This Japanese model also sets an appropriate precedent for other countries that are supposedly facing aggression from the Chinese side, both economically as well as militarily. To conclude, this report argues that likeminded countries should firmly welcome and accept a stronger Japan and offensive strategies like these are crucial and necessary to contain Chinese unilateral activities motivated at altering the status quo as well as to stop any other countries considered to be a threat to the free world, from resorting to violence and war.



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