



India's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Balancing Partnerships, Power-Politics and Challenges in a Shifting Geopolitical Order

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Abstract

India's Indo-Pacific strategy reflects a multidimensional approach that integrates diplomacy, security, and economic cooperation to strengthen its role in an evolving geopolitical environment. Positioned at the crossroads of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, India seeks to advance a free, open, and inclusive regional order by deepening partnerships with like-minded nations such as the United States, Japan, Australia, France, and ASEAN members. Through frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), India promotes maritime security, resilient trade networks, and sustainable development. However, growing strategic competition, especially with China's assertive posturing, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and climate-linked challenges, compels India to recalibrate its strategic posture. Drawing upon realism, liberalism, and constructivism, this paper examines how India balances power politics, cooperative engagement, and normative commitments in shaping its Indo-Pacific policy and it will also assess the strategic perspective of major players in the geopolitics of Indo-Pacific region. The analysis suggests that India's pragmatic blend of strategic autonomy, multilateral participation, and value-based diplomacy positions it as a key stakeholder in maintaining regional stability and ensuring collective prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.



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1. Introduction

In contemporary global affairs, Indo-Pacific region has gained prominence as a critical strategic zone. It stretches from the eastern littoral of Africa to the western Pacific Ocean and is household to more than half of the world's populace. This area connects some of the busiest sea lanes, major economies, and rising powers. For India, the trajectory is not just a distant physical perception; it is a vital space where its economic growth, security needs, and diplomatic ambitions intersect. India relies on these waters for trade, energy imports, and economic connectivity. At the same time, it faces challenges such as maritime disputes, piracy, terrorism, and the growing influence of other major powers like China. India's approach to the Indo-Pacific has undergone significant changes recently. Earlier, India focused mainly on South Asia and its immediate neighborhood. Now, it has adopted a broader vision that looks outside the Indian Ocean to the wider Indo-Pacific. This shift is visible in

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policies like the “Act East Policy,” stronger partnerships with countries including Japan, Australia, and the United States, and initiatives like Quad. India also introduced the idea of SAGAR (i.e. Security and Growth for All in the Region), which focuses on inclusive development and collective security for all nations in this sector.

It is easier to comprehend the Indo-Pacific strategies of India through the lens of international relations theory (IR). From a realist view, India is strengthening its naval capabilities, forming strategic alliances, and countering China’s assertiveness. This reflects how power politics and national interest drive security decisions. From a liberal perspective, India actively engages in multilateral forums, promotes connectivity, and seeks cooperative solutions to regional challenges, believing that interdependence can lead to stability.

From a constructivist perspective, India shapes its policy based on ideas and identity; it wants to be accepted as a responsible, inclusive, and rule-abiding power in the Indo-Pacific, promoting a “free, open, and rules-based order.”

The Indo-Pacific also offers both opportunities and vulnerabilities. It presents chances for economic growth through trade, blue economy initiatives, and infrastructure development. However, it also faces risks like climate change, illegal fishing, natural disasters, cyber threats, and strategic rivalry among major powers. India must carefully balance these factors while safeguarding its autonomy and sovereignty.

The changing global order reflects another key factor in India’s Indo-Pacific engagement. The rise of China, the U.S.-China duopoly, and the enhanced strategic value and growing importance of strategic middle states like Japan and Australia have created new challenges and opportunities for India. By strengthening defense cooperation, improving maritime awareness, and deepening economic ties, India act as a change agent, aiming to play a proactive role in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific. This paper argues that India’s strategic outreach with the Indo-Pacific goes beyond military security. It also includes diplomacy, trade, connectivity, and cultural exchanges. By looking at India’s actions through realism, liberalism, and constructivism, we can better understand how power, cooperation, and the shared values will influence its approach. In the coming years, India will continue to evolve as it meets new challenges like technological competition, environmental security, and shifting alliances. This study will explore these aspects in detail, presenting how India balances its strategic, economic, and normative goals to assure peace, prosperity, and stability in the region.

1.1 Why India Initially Hesitated towards Indo-Pacific

India was initially hesitant to embrace the Indo-Pacific concept in the early 2000s for several reasons. First, India valued its ability to make independent foreign policy decisions, often called “strategic autonomy,” and did not want to appear aligned with the United States or other Western powers. Second, India was cautious about upsetting China, especially since China was growing closer to Russia, a long-time ally of India. Third, India is concerned that the Indo-Pacific idea was a U.S.-led plan to contain China, which could harm India’s efforts to maintain a balanced relationship with Beijing (Pant, 2020). Finally, India’s main focus was securing the Indian Ocean, while early supporters like United States, Japan, and Australia prioritized the Pacific Ocean. A key moment occurred in 2007 when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the Parliament of India about the “Confluence of the Two Seas,” connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic region (Heiduk, 2020). This speech ignited significant discussions about the Indo-Pacific. India’s stance changed due to several factors. First, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China expanded its impact in countries near India, like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. Namely, Sri Lanka hired out Hambantota port to China for 99 years due to indebtedness, and Bangladesh received Chinese military equipment and port investments (The Hindu, 2017). This made India feel that China was challenging its influence in the Indian Ocean. Second, the 2020 Galwan Valley clash with China, the worst since 1962, worsened relations and showed India it needed stronger military alliances rather than just diplomacy. Third, India’s growing partnership with Japan, which shared concerns about China, was key. In 2015, India and Japan agreed on a vision for a peaceful, open, and rule-based Indo-Pacific. In 2020, they signed the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), making it easier for their militaries to share supplies like fuel and food (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020). In 2024, the foreign and defense ministers of India and Japan reaffirmed their commitment to international rules, respect for sovereignty, peaceful dispute resolution, and opposition to forceful changes in the region. They also updated their 2008 security agreement to address new threats. As a result, India overcame its early doubts. While still valuing its independence, India now actively uses the Indo-Pacific framework to protect its interests and shape the region with its partnership with Japan playing a central role.

1.2 Why India Embraced the Indo-Pacific Key Drivers

India initially hesitated to back the idea of Indo-Pacific, but later embraced it due to several key reasons. First, the rising impact of China in South Asia worried India. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China built projects in countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives, which are in proximity to India. For example, Sri Lanka handed over control of the Hambantota Port to China on a 99-year lease after failing to pay back Chinese debt, which gave China a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean (The Hindu, 2017). Bangladesh also bought Chinese military equipment and received Chinese investments in its ports. This made India feel it was losing influence in its region.

Second, tensions with China, especially the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, the worst since the 1962 war, pushed India to rethink its approach. Ongoing border disputes and Chinese military actions showed India it needed stronger military power and partnerships instead of just trying to get along with China.

Third, India's partnership with Japan grew stronger because both countries were concerned about China's actions. In 2015, they agreed on a vision for a peaceful, open, and rule-based Indo-Pacific (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2017). This allowed India to counter China's influence and shape the region without seeming too aligned with Western countries. In 2020, India and Japan signed the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which lets their militaries share supplies like fuel and food (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020). In August 2024, India and Japan's defense and foreign ministers met in New Delhi for their third 2+2 dialogue. They committed to supporting international rules, respecting sovereignty, resolving disputes peacefully, and opposing forceful changes in the region. They also agreed to update their 2008 security cooperation agreement to address new security challenges (Rajagopalan, 2022).

2. Literature Review

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a central arena of strategic and security debates over the past two decades, increasingly recognised as the geopolitical and geo-economic fulcrum of global politics. Scholars highlight that this expansive maritime space, stretching from the eastern shores of Africa to the western Pacific, embodies shifting power dynamics, vital trade corridors, and competing strategic visions (Brewster, 2014; Heiduk, 2020). Although the concept "Indo-Pacific" has historical roots, its contemporary revival reflects renewed interest in the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic theatre.

Early intellectual foundations of the Indo-Pacific idea can be traced to works like those of Karl Haushofer, who referred to Indo-Pacific linkages in *Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans*. In modern scholarship, authors such as David Brewster (2014) and Devare (2006) emphasize that the Indo-Pacific is more than a geographical expression, it is a strategic construct shaped by the rise of China, the U.S. pivot to Asia, and the proactive engagement of middle powers including India, Japan, and Australia. Their analyses highlight that maritime security, freedom of navigation, and rule-based cooperation form the core of this evolving framework.

In the Indian context, several studies explore New Delhi's expanding strategic horizons. Historically rooted in Nehru's Oceanic imagination and Panikkar's (1945) articulation of sea power, India's policy has evolved significantly. Contemporary analyses argue that India's transition from Look East to Act East, and subsequently to its Indo-Pacific outlook, reflects both geopolitical concerns and economic imperatives (Haokip, 2011; Malhotra, 2022). CUTS Global (2024) notes that India's Indo-Pacific strategy has broadened to include deeper engagement with ASEAN, capacity-building initiatives, and enhanced maritime connectivity, aligning strategic and developmental objectives.

Regional institutional perspectives also enrich the literature. ASEAN documents such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (2021) stress inclusivity, dialogue, and a rules-based order—principles that resonate closely with India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision articulated by Prime Minister Modi in 2018. Scholars note that India's emphasis on an inclusive Indo-Pacific aligns with ASEAN's diplomatic centrality, reinforcing cooperative security rather than alliance-driven structures (Sridharan, 1996; Wagner, 2019).

Security cooperation frameworks have received extensive scholarly attention as well. The Quad, involving India, Japan, the U.S., and Australia, is viewed as a flexible security network aimed at supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific (Smith, 2021; Juster, 2021). Estrada (2023), however, argues that India resists fully securitizing the Quad, preferring a balance between strategic partnerships and the preservation of strategic autonomy. This approach reflects India's cautious yet deliberate attempt to navigate multipolarity without entering rigid alliance structures.

Maritime security remains a crucial domain in Indo-Pacific literature. Brewster (2014) and CSCAP (2020) observe that India has strengthened naval capabilities, expanded maritime awareness initiatives, and deepened cooperation with Japan, Australia, France, and Southeast Asian states to safeguard key Sea Lanes of

Communication (SLOCs). At the same time, developments such as AUKUS have intensified debates on regional security architectures, with studies indicating potential recalibrations in Southeast Asian and Indian strategic thinking (Suharto et al., 2024).

Economic analyses present another dimension of India's Indo-Pacific engagement. Scholars highlight that trade with ASEAN and the wider region continues to shape India's strategic interests. Research by Bhardwaj et al. (2021) and Ray et al. (2023) shows that India's economic relations with RCEP countries present substantial opportunities and challenges, influencing India's cautious withdrawal from RCEP negotiations. Non-traditional security issues are increasingly significant in the literature, with analysts pointing to climate change, technological rivalry, cyber governance, and maritime environmental degradation as critical themes (Heiduk, 2020; CUTS Global, 2024). These emerging challenges demand cooperative mechanisms, aligning with India's emphasis on capacity-building, disaster resilience, and blue economy initiatives in the region.

Despite a growing body of scholarship, gaps remain. Much of the literature disproportionately focuses on India-China competition or India's participation in the Quad, often overlooking India's broader strategic, economic, and normative engagements. There is limited integrated scholarship that combines traditional security factors with emerging domains such as digital infrastructure, climate security, and supply-chain resilience. Moreover, debates persist regarding India's ability to balance strategic autonomy while deepening partnerships with like-minded states (Estrada, 2023; Wagner, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design to examine India's evolving Indo-Pacific strategy, its opportunities, and related challenges. The Indo-Pacific remains a fluid geopolitical construct without a universally agreed definition, and its meaning shifts across regional and extra-regional stakeholders (Brewster, 2021). India's approach is similarly dynamic, shaped by strategic imperatives, economic ambitions, and changing regional alignments. Given this fluidity, an exploratory design is most suitable as it enables the identification of emerging patterns rather than the testing of predetermined hypotheses.

The study also incorporates descriptive and analytical elements by outlining India's major initiatives—including the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine, the Act East Policy, and engagements through platforms such as the Quad and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)—and assessing their implications for long-term strategic goals (Pant & Rej, 2020). A qualitative approach is appropriate because it prioritizes the interpretation of ideas, policies, and strategic narratives, which are crucial for understanding foreign policy behavior in international relations.

The methodology relies on secondary data, including policy documents, speeches issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs, Quad and ASEAN-India summit declarations, and reports on the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. Academic literature from peer-reviewed journals and think tank publications—such as ORF, Brookings, and CSIS—provides deeper analytical perspectives, while reputable media sources like *The Hindu* and *The Diplomat* offer contemporary insights.

The study employs content and thematic analysis to identify recurring themes in strategic discourse. It also uses a case study approach, focusing on India while drawing limited comparison with actors such as the United States and Japan to highlight areas of convergence and divergence. The analysis is guided by realist, liberal, and constructivist theoretical lenses to capture both material and ideational dimensions of India's Indo-Pacific vision.

4. The Indo-Pacific Region: Power, Politics & India's Key Role

The Indo-Pacific region, stretching from the eastern shores of Africa across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, has become the central stage for global politics today. It's where the world's biggest economies trade, powerful militaries operate, and critical issues like climate change and security play out. Within this crucial space, India is increasingly seen as a pivotal player, a nation whose actions significantly shape the region's future. We can understand why this is happening by looking through the lens of International Relations (IR) theories.

4.1 Why the Indo-Pacific Region Leads Global Discourse

Imagine the world's busiest shipping lanes, carrying oil, electronics, and food between Asia, Europe, and the Americas. That's the Indo-Pacific. It holds vast resources and is home to over half the world's people. Economically, it's the engine of global growth. Militarily, it's where major powers like the US and China increasingly focus their strength. Conflicts here, disputes over islands or sea lanes, or disruptions to trade, would ripple out to affect everyone globally. It is simply too important to ignore.

4.1.1 India's Position: Explained by IR Theories

India sits right in the middle of this vital geography. Its importance isn't just location; it's what India does and represents, which IR theories help explain:

4.1.1.1 Realism: Playing the Power Game (Countering China)

Realists see world politics as a constant struggle for power and security between states, where military strength is key. The rise of China and its assertive actions, such as building military bases, claiming vast sea areas, and expanding its navy, are seen by India (and others) as a major power shift. India feels directly threatened, especially along its land border and in the nearby Indian Ocean, where China is more active. To survive and protect its interests, India must "balance" against China's power.

India's Actions: This explains India's massive naval buildup (new ships, submarines), its crucial role in the Quad (with the US, Japan, and Australia), and its deepening military ties with partners like France and Vietnam. The Quad, especially its military exercises, acts as a powerful counterweight to China. India also builds strategic ports and aids smaller Indian Ocean nations (like Mauritius) to counter Chinese influence. It is a classic realist balancing behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001).

4.1.1.2 Liberalism: Building Rules & Teamwork (Promoting Stability)

Liberals focus on in what manner countries cooperate through shared rules, institutions, and trade to achieve security and prosperity. They believe interdependence reduces conflict. India champions a "free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific." This means:

- Freedom of Navigation: Ships and trade should move freely without coercion (following the UN Law of the Sea, UNCLOS).
- Peaceful Dispute Settlement: Conflicts should be resolved by agreed rules, not force.
- Regional Cooperation: Groups like ASEAN (Southeast Asian nations) should lead the regional structure. India actively participates in forums like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

4.1.2 Constructivism: Changing Identity & Ideas

Constructivists argue that what matters most isn't just power or interests, but how countries see themselves and the world. India's role is shaped by its evolving identity. It's moving beyond seeing itself *only* as a South Asian power to embracing its destiny as a leading *Indo-Pacific* power. This growing confidence changes its goals and actions.

India's Shift: Its active promotion of the "Indo-Pacific" concept itself (formally adopted in 2018; Modi, 2018) reflects this new identity. The idea that India should be a "net security provider" and take leadership responsibility in the wider region is a powerful new self-perception. How India interprets China's actions (as a threat) and how partners like the US view India (as a crucial democratic counterweight) also actively shape its pivotal role (Wendt, 1999; Brewster, 2014).

5. Indo-Pacific and India's Look East Policy to Act East Policy

Over the years, India's foreign policy has evolved significantly, particularly with regard to its neighbors in the east. This shift is mostly due to the expanding significance of the Indo-Pacific region, which encompasses both the Indian and Pacific oceans and is home to numerous significant nations, including the United States, China, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). India introduced the Look East Policy (LEP) at the beginning of the 1990s. Improving India's political, cultural, and economic ties with Southeast Asian nations was the goal of this policy's introduction. India was opening up its economy and attempting to forge closer ties throughout this period as well. China's increasing influence was one factor contributing to India's interest in the area. In order to counterbalance China's influence without starting a direct conflict, India sought to forge close ties with ASEAN (Haokip, 2011).

The relationship between India and Southeast Asia is not new. India and this area had extensive economic and cultural exchanges from the first to the twelfth centuries. Many Southeast Asian nations were influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism, Sanskrit, and Pali (Chandra, 1969). The introduction of Islam and subsequent colonial control, however, caused these ties to deteriorate after the 12th century. Although its strategic significance grew throughout colonial times and World War II, India had little autonomous interaction with the area (Braun, 1983). Following its independence, India once more prioritized Asian unification. According to their shared history and geography, leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru aimed to establish solid ties with East Asian nations (Panikkar, 1945; Nehru, 1946). However, these attempts were hampered by Cold War tensions and China. India did, however, advocate for peace and participated in the 1953 Korean peace accord (Gonsalves, 2007). In the 1960s, Indira

Gandhi also attempted to encourage the establishment of ASEAN, despite India's inability to participate at the time because of the Vietnam War (Sridharan, 1996).

For geopolitical and economic reasons, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao formally introduced the LEP in the 1990s to link India with East and Southeast Asia (Devare, 2006). This was LEP's third phase. During this period, India's ties with ASEAN rapidly expanded. Prior to joining ASEAN-led forums such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum, India was a Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 1992 and a Full Dialogue Partner in 1995 (Muni, 2007; ASEAN, 2019).

This policy was upgraded and called the Act East Policy (AEP) by India in 2014. With this shift, India was actively attempting to strengthen its ties with the East rather than only "looking" at it. Enhancing connectivity, trade, interpersonal relationships, defense cooperation, and maritime security were the main objectives of the AEP (CSCAP, 2020; Wagner, 2019). The concept of an inclusive Indo-Pacific (IP), where all nations can develop peacefully without being dominated by one state, was also supported by India (Kumar, 2025). India and China continue to have a complex relationship. Although trade with China increased, border disputes and security issues persisted. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was rejected by India in 2019 due to concerns that it would worsen trade deficits and harm Indian businesses (Narayanan et al., 2023). With other accords like the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, India is still enhancing trade and investment with ASEAN (Bhardwaj et al., 2021). In order to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and create infrastructure, India also collaborates with nations like Iran, Russia, and Japan. India collaborates with other nations to maintain regional stability and peace thanks to the Indo-Pacific concept.

6. India's Approach to the Indo-Pacific

6.1 India uses several strategies in the region: Act East Policy (2014) to Indo-Pacific: At the ASEAN-India Summit in Myanmar, Indian government announced India's Act East Policy (AEP). As part of the new realpolitik seen in Indian foreign policy, the AEP was characterized as beckoning 'a strategic shift' in that country's foreign policy and as an effort to establish deeper and closer economic integration with its eastern neighbors. The AEP's main goals were to integrate the economies and security of the region and to fortify ties with East and Southeast Asian nations. An upgrade from the older "Look East" policy. It aims to boost India's economic ties, security partnerships, and cultural links with Southeast Asia (especially ASEAN) and the wider Indo-Pacific. It also strengthens ties with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, promoting a free, open, and inclusive region.

6.2 SAGAR Vision (2015): Stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region." It focuses on maritime security, working with neighbors, and sustainable development. Its goals are protecting India's interests, building stronger regional relationships, encouraging peace, and working with other powers.

6.3 Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) (2019): A plan to tackle common challenges in the region, matching ASEAN's vision. It has seven focus areas:

- Maritime Security
- Protecting the Ocean Environment
- Managing Ocean Resources
- Helping Build Skills & Sharing Resources
- Disaster Preparedness & Response
- Science & Technology Cooperation
- Trade, Connectivity & Shipping

India's Indo-Pacific strategy is a carefully planned approach that aims to ensure regional stability and growth. This region, stretching from Africa's eastern shores to the Pacific Ocean, is vital for India's economic interests, sea route security, and geopolitical influence. To secure its interests, India focuses on two key pillars: tackling challenges and deepening partnerships.

7. Opportunities in the Region

India has to take use of all the economic prospects available in the 'Indo-Pacific Region' (IPR). Enhancing infrastructure, drawing in investments, guaranteeing energy security, fostering the digital economy, and establishing a robust financial system are some ways to do this. High-quality infrastructure is in considerable

demand throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Effective and well-designed infrastructure can advance society and the economy. Regional development banks and assistance agencies should contribute sufficient funds to assist nations in achieving sustainable development in order to accomplish this objective (Bhonsale & Bansal, 2024). However, issues like non-tariff barriers to trade like corruption must be addressed first. Development and commerce may be slowed by these problems. Building capacity, exchanging technical expertise, and promoting collaborations between public and private entities are effective strategies for overcoming difficulties. Strong and long-lasting infrastructure that promotes the region's long-term growth may be built with the aid of these initiatives.

Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) are another tool that India ought to utilize more effectively. By making it simpler for businesses to operate and invest in the area, these accords can aid in increasing foreign direct investment (FDI). BITs can promote sustainable development, ease constraints, and enhance market access. Regional cooperation and a well-structured investment policy are necessary to draw in additional capital. Lack of collaboration between nations to support cross-border business expansion is one of the Indo-Pacific's weaknesses. An Indo-Pacific Business Forum should be established to promote business collaboration in order to address this. To address the demand for trained people in export industries, programs for skill development must be implemented concurrently. Additionally, these initiatives can boost employee productivity and advance technology (Wagner, 2019).

By assisting in the establishment of regional organizations like an IP Regional Investment Framework, IP Business Forum, IP Skill Development Framework, IP Economic Development Fund, and an IP Development Bank, India may play a significant role. These groups would facilitate coordination, enhance collaboration, and promote equitable and balanced economic growth. Concise and straightforward rules are essential for bettering company circumstances. Starting and operating a company can be made much easier by digitizing business registration and guaranteeing sound governance. Additionally, regional establishments should collaborate to advance optimal procedures and raise participation requirements. To facilitate information and technical skill sharing, sub-regions should establish public-private partnerships (ASEAN, 2021).

Energy security is an additional crucial subject. The proportion of renewable energy in the production of electricity must increase in order to satisfy the growing demand brought on by development and population growth. For development to benefit everyone, local energy systems should be strengthened. Additionally, initiatives to boost the development of clean technologies and increase energy efficiency should be undertaken (Bhonsale & Bansal, 2024). Last but not least, the region requires ideal procedures along with straightforward regulations to manage the growing importance of the digital economy. Increasing availability of the internet and high-speed services will aid in bridging the digital divide. Building robust domestic financial systems also need the assistance of local and regional companies. India should effort to guarantee the sustainability of debt and enhance its financial infrastructure, particularly through cooperation with Asian financial institutions.

7.1 India's Tackling Key Challenges

7.1.1 India's Diversifying Defense Suppliers

Historically reliant on Russian equipment, India is now shifting toward Western arms, including deals involving F-35 jets and naval hardware with U.S. and French partners (AP News, 2025; ET, 2025). This diversification boosts India's ability to respond to regional threats and reduces vulnerability to any one source.

7.1.2 Technological and Cybersecurity Resilience

Rapid developments in cyberwarfare and surveillance highlight the need for Indo-Pacific nations to build robust digital defenses. India collaborates with allies to share best practices, improve critical infrastructure security, and reduce risks from cyberattacks.

7.1.3 Non-traditional Threats

Environmental hazards like climate change, maritime piracy, and natural disasters pose significant risks. Through initiatives like SAGAR and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), India supports sustainability, resource management, and maritime rescues—aiming for shared prosperity (CUTS Global, 2024).

7.2 Deepening Strategic Partnerships

7.2.1 India's QUAD vision

India's vision for the Quad, a group including India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, as a “*security community*” is based on the idea of a pluralistic security community, as described by Karl Deutsch, Deutsch, K.

(1957). Deutsch and his colleagues described a security community as a group of people who share a belief that their common social problems can and should be solved through peaceful means rather than violence. By peaceful change, they meant resolving issues through established institutions and discussions instead of using physical force or war. Members of such a community are also connected by a strong sense of togetherness, which includes mutual trust, understanding, and shared interests. This means the countries work together for peace while keeping their independence, rather than uniting into one entity. However, India's approach differs from the other Quad members, affecting how the group functions as a security community (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023).

The U.S., Japan, and Australia strongly support the Quad as a way to protect a free and open international system based on shared democratic values. However, they have been hesitant to fully include India due to concerns about India's internal politics, which some see as less democratic. India, on the other hand, believes its democracy is rooted in its ancient culture and does not need outside correction (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023). Indian leaders also question the idea that a security community must follow the same values as the other Quad members. India's strategy also differs because it avoids openly opposing China. Unlike the other Quad countries, India does not name China in joint statements with the U.S. or Quad partners. Kenneth Juster, a former U.S. Ambassador to India, noted that India avoids directly challenging China to prevent conflict (Juster, 2021). For example, in his 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed that India sees the Indo-Pacific as inclusive, not as a limited group aimed at any country, like China (Modi, 2018).

The other Quad members are more committed to making the Quad a strong security community. When this effort struggles, they turn to other groups like AUKUS (Australia, UK, and U.S.), which share a clearer democratic vision (Suharto, et al. 2024). India's reluctance to form traditional alliances and its rejection of external judgments about its democracy shape how the Quad works in the Indo-Pacific. This makes it harder for the Quad to become a tight-knit security community aligned with U.S. ideals.

India's membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), with the U.S., Japan, and Australia, boosts maritime security through joint exercises, information sharing, and humanitarian missions (Wiki Quad, 2025).

7.2.2 Bilateral Ties with Japan and Singapore

India and Japan enjoy close security cooperation, including naval drills like Malabar, counterterrorism efforts, and nuclear energy collaboration (Wiki India-Japan, 2025). Likewise, India's defense agreements with Singapore, e.g., SIMBEX and port access arrangements, enhance operational readiness and coordination (Wiki India-Singapore, 2025).

7.2.3 Strengthening ASEAN and EU Engagement

India deepens ties with Southeast Asia through ASEAN platforms, maritime projects, and trade deals. Collaboration with the EU includes shared goals like maritime law enforcement, climate action, and technological cooperation (FES, 2023).

8. India's Policy Response to Shifting Indo-Pacific Realities

India's policy response to the changing realities of the Indo-Pacific has evolved steadily over the past few decades. As the Indo-Pacific region becomes more central to global trade, security, and geopolitics, India has adjusted its strategies to reflect these changes. The Indo-Pacific, stretching from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of the Americas, includes many strategic maritime routes, making it important for India's economic and security interests. India sees the Indo-Pacific as a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based region that should not be dominated by any one country. This vision aligns with India's broader goals of promoting regional peace, security, and development (CSCAP, 2020).

India's policy shift began with the Look East Policy in the early 1990s, focusing on building closer economic and cultural ties with Southeast Asia. Over time, this policy transformed into the Act East Policy in 2014, which placed greater emphasis on strategic, defense, and connectivity partnerships with countries in East and Southeast Asia. This shift reflects India's growing interest in playing a more active role in shaping the Indo-Pacific region. Under the Act East Policy, India has strengthened defense cooperation with countries like Japan, Vietnam, Australia, and the United States through joint naval exercises and strategic dialogues (Wagner, 2019). India has also built strong relations with regional groupings like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and participated actively in platforms such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus. These forums provide India with opportunities to share its concerns, promote dialogue, and work together with other countries to maintain regional security and economic growth (ASEAN, 2021). India has also developed the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which promotes cooperation in areas like maritime security,

disaster response, connectivity, and sustainable development. This initiative reflects India's willingness to contribute to the collective growth and safety of the region (CSCAP, 2020).

China's growing military and economic presence in the region, especially in the South China Sea, has also influenced India's policies. India has expressed support for the freedom of navigation and respect for international law, particularly the "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea" (UNCLOS). By doing so, India aims to protect its maritime interests and maintain peace in the region without entering into direct confrontation with China (Malhotra, 2022). India's decision to stay out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2019 was also influenced by concerns over China's economic dominance and the potential negative impact on Indian industries (Narayanan., 2019).

In response to these shifting Indo-Pacific realities, India has also increased its partnerships with like-minded countries through strategic frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which includes the United States, Japan, and Australia. The QUAD promotes a shared vision of a secure and stable Indo-Pacific. Overall, India's response to the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific shows its commitment to playing a responsible and balanced role in ensuring regional cooperation and long-term peace.

9. Conclusion

In the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), India should work to foster multifaceted regional cooperation in order to forge deeper and more robust ties. Working with other nations in the region on political, cultural, security, and technical relationships is just as important as fostering economic ties. Numerous nations in the broad and varied Indo-Pacific area share opportunities and difficulties. Working together, India can strengthen its capacity to address intricate strategic concerns like safety concerns, economic disruptions, and marine dangers. A more stable and peaceful environment that benefits all participating nations can be achieved through such cooperation. Maritime connectivity becomes crucial to achieving this. The Indo-Pacific has some of the busiest shipping paths in the world, and trade, investment, and the flow of people and products all depend on efficient transportation over these seas. Strong maritime ties can contribute to the development of a market-driven, reciprocal economic system where nations can cooperate and capitalize on one another's advantages. The performance of maritime services, including ports, shipping, and logistics, will boost regional investments, lower transportation costs, and accelerate trade. This can expedite progress and assist nations in the region in attaining mutual prosperity.

In this regard, India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision represents a significant step. By enhancing marine infrastructure, guaranteeing sea route safety, and fortifying relations with surrounding nations, SAGAR seeks to further peace, collaboration, and economic development. It promotes international cooperation to make the oceans safer and more effective for all. India is attempting to contribute responsibly and cooperatively to the Indo-Pacific's increased stability and inclusivity through SAGAR.

The Indo-Pacific region also faces numerous maritime security issues, including border conflicts, terrorism, illicit fishing, smuggling, and piracy. No single nation is capable of addressing these threats on its own. India and its allies must therefore address them collectively. This entails collaborating in technical cooperation, training, capacity building, and knowledge and expertise sharing. Nations can build cooperative plans for humanitarian assistance and maritime safety, share experiences, and support one another in times of need.

The major Indo-Pacific economic powers, including the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, have a significant role to play. They ought to back programs that advance fair trade, free markets, regional economic integration, and the efficient flow of products and services. Increased employment, faster growth, and increased international trust are all benefits of closer economic relations.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, can be a key player in this endeavor. ASEAN have the expertise to successfully manage regional cooperation and unite nations. Its Southeast Asian position and sway make it an ideal center for Indo-Pacific collaborations. Organizations led by ASEAN may be powerful pillars for communication, commerce, building infrastructure, and resolving disputes. India and its allies in the Indo-Pacific can accelerate the transition to a secure, economic, and peaceful region that benefits everyone by collaborating more efficiently with ASEAN.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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