



Indian Council
of World Affairs



CHINA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Issues and Concerns

DR. TESHU SINGH





“The Pacific and Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A ‘broader Asia’ that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability – and the responsibility – to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency.”



Former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe

(<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>)



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China and the Indo-Pacific

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First Published, March 2023

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ISBN: 978-93-83445-76-9

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ABSTRACT



There has been a shift in the geopolitics; the new concept of the “Indo-Pacific” has entered the geopolitical discourse by replacing the term, Asia Pacific. The Indo-Pacific refers to a contiguous zone encompassing the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The geographical boundaries of the Indo-Pacific stretch from East Africa to the west coast of the US and encompass a large number of countries at varying stages of development, with distinct policy agendas and divergent interests. In June 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented India’s vision of “Indo-Pacific” in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue. He described “Indo-Pacific” as a natural region, and concretely as a region “from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas”. However, each country has its definition about the stretch of the concept. In recent times, the concept of Indo-Pacific has evolved and has become the primary space for the geostrategic contestations. The paper investigates into the Chinese position on the concept and its responses to the evolving frameworks in the Indo-Pacific region. It brings out four levels of analysis of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Think Tanks, University and the media coverage on the Indo-Pacific region within China. It further makes an attempt to decipher the Chinese postures in the region by analysing the China’s Defence White Papers and attempts to comprehend the overall Chinese objectives in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key words: China, Indo-Pacific, QUAD, AUKUS

INTRODUCTION



One of the central themes of international relations is to theorise about the relationship between geography and security. Theories of geopolitics are the study of politics taking place with regard to geographical circumstances, territorial relations and aspirations of political entities. Further, it analyses politics, history and social science with reference to geography. It is synonymous with power politics; modern geopolitics focuses on the great powers and presupposes that they are driven to expand in an attempt to secure natural resources and safeguard borders. The most significant proponent of geopolitics in the early twentieth century was Halford Mackinder, Karl Haushofer, Alfred Mahan and Nicholas Spykman.

THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INDO-PACIFIC



Halford Mackinder presented the famous “Heartland theory” in an address entitled *The Geographical Pivot of History*, in which he examined the relation between geography and politics in a historical context.¹ In his lecture, he defined the geography and history of land power, the core of Eurasia as the “Pivot Area”. In Mackinder’s conception, the world, as of 1904, was primarily divided into three distinct spaces – the Pivot, or heartland (represented by Eurasia’s continental interior); the Inner Crescent (a partly continental and partly oceanic crescent that ran from

1 Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 122



Western Europe through the Middle East, India, China, along the Pacific littoral); the Outer Crescent (Australia, the Americas, Southern Africa, Britain and Japan).²

Alfred Thayer Mahan in his book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* argued for the importance/supremacy of sea power over land power, and that naval superiority was the fundamental principle and basis of foreign policy. His work was recognized and was widely read in Great Britain and Germany.³ His idea about sea power, which among other things dealt with the interconnectedness of force, economics and geography has prompted considerable discussion of the relationship of his work to geopolitics. Mahan made a historical distinction between land power and sea power, which was to influence geopolitical thinkers through the cold war. He believed that great powers were those countries whose insularity, coupled with an easily defensible coastline, provided a secure base from which the aid of a network of land bases, sea power could be developed and national and global power attained and enhanced. In addition, Mahan advocated an alliance with Britain to counterbalance Eurasian powers. His aim was to increase US global influence and reach, while avoiding conflict with the dominant British Navy.

Amongst geopolitical thinkers, Karl Haushofer forecasted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region which he called “Asiatic Monsoon countries”. He urged German policy makers to promote the geopolitical unity of this region to offset British and American

2 Halford J. Mackinder, The Geographical Pivot of History (1904), *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4 (April 1904), pp. 421–444.

3 Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 20

“Indo-Pacific” has become an integral part of global geopolitics. It refers to the maritime space between the Indian Ocean region and the western Pacific region.

sea power.⁴ His theory of Indo-Pacific matured between 1920 and 1930s, as a prescription for Germany and a vision for world politics, prior to the formation of the Third Reich’s foreign policy. Karl Haushofer had articulated his views in the paper “Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ozeans” (Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean).⁵ It was one of the first academic work on the concept. His ideas reappeared in another paper, the *Building Blocks of Geopolitics, Geopolitics of Pan-Ideas, and German Cultural Politics in the Indo-Pacific space*.⁶

In recent times, “Indo-Pacific” has become an integral part of global geopolitics. It refers to the maritime space between the Indian Ocean region and the western Pacific region. It also includes the contiguous seas of East Asia and Southeast Asia into a singular regional construct.

In terms of demography, the region is home to around 60 per cent of the global population and 20 per cent of the world’s 33 megacities. The term started gaining currency in 2007 when the Japanese PM Late Shinzo Abe referred to the term in his speech “Confluence of the Two Seas” in the Indian Parliament. Shinzo Abe said, “We are now at a point at which the Confluence of the Two Seas is coming

4 Francis P. Sempa, Karl Haushofer and the Rise of the Monsoon Countries, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/03/karl-haushofer-and-the-rise-of-the-monsoon-countries/>, Accessed on 2 December 2021

5 Hans W. Weigert, Haushofer and the Pacific, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 4.4 (July 1942), pp. 723–742

6 Hansong Li, The “Indo-Pacific”: Intellectual Origins and International Visions in Global Contexts, *Modern Intellectual History* (2021), pp. 1–27, doi:10.1017/S1479244321000214



into being.” He further reiterated: “The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea.”

In modern India, Kalidas Nag in his book, *India and the Pacific World*, used the term “Indo-Pacific”. He referred to the term to indicate cultural and civilisation entity. His association with Rabindranath Tagore had a great impact on him in tracing India’s links with this maritime universe.⁸

Strategic analysts in India have also tried to conceptualise the term and its relevance for India. Analysts opine that the seas of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean constitute “a single integrated geopolitical theatre”, which is the “Indo-Pacific”.⁹ The concept of Indo-Pacific has gained currency and is being used across Asia and beyond. According to preliminary indicators, the relevance of the Indo-Pacific concept is likely to enhance in the future due to the strengthening linkages between the Indian Ocean region (IOR) and the western Pacific (WP). Events and developments in one part of the Indo-Pacific are likely to affect countries located in the other part. Furthermore, over the decades, the growing trade and people-to-people connectivity between the two regions will eventually iron out the dissimilarities in terms of economic and human development indices. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the

7 Shinzo Abe, “Confluence of the Two Seas”, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, Accessed on 2 December 2021

8 T.C.A. Raghavan, The changing seas: antecedents of the Indo-Pacific, The Telegraph, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/the-changing-seas-antecedents-of-the-indo-pacific/cid/1694598>, Accessed on 2 December 2021

9 C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi), ISBN: 9780198092339, p. 212

Strategically, two broad reasons explain the rise of the Indo-Pacific. The first reason is attributed to the increasing footprint of China in the region. The second is the comparative decline of the US alliance system and strives for resurgence. China is increasing its footprint in the region in multiple forms.

Indian-Pacific Ocean continuum is required to assess the evolving balance of power in Asia and to address the faultiness.¹⁰

Eventually, India, the United States, Australia, Japan, France, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, South Korea and the European Union have adopted the concept. All these countries have published White Paper on Indo-Pacific and are projecting it as a policy symbol of regional engagement.

CHINESE RESPONSES TO THE INDO-PACIFIC

Strategically, two broad reasons explain the rise of the Indo-Pacific. The first reason is attributed to the increasing footprint of China in the region. The second is the comparative decline of the US alliance system and strives for resurgence. China is increasing its footprint in the region in multiple forms. They have shown aggressive postures in the South China Sea, building ports across Indian Ocean region (string of pearls) and connectivity project in the name of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Growing Chinese influence in the region is also marked by the relative decline of the US. The US is still considered to be a net security provider in

10 Gurpreet S Khurana, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Retrospect and Prospect, India", <https://maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/636215922419657386.pdf>, Accessed on 9 December 2021



the region and possess the most effective navy; its strategies have given space for China in some cases and harmed its own allies in the rest.¹¹ The US renamed the US Pacific Command (PACOM) to the US Indo-Pacific Command. James Mattis alluded that the US Indo-Pacific Command is critical for “a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade, not bound by any nation’s predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads”.¹²

China’s rise and its increasing political and economic aspiration are challenging the established powers in the region. There is a shift in the balance of power in the region. At the same time, there are no effective structures for cooperative security and mechanisms to contain conflict. There are geopolitical rivalries, border disputes and simmering domestic and cross-border conflicts that put the region at risk of instability.¹³ Rory Medcalf has stated, “The Indo-Pacific is unified by the quest to balance, dilute and absorb Chinese power; it is both a region and an idea.” Notably, the trigger for the formation of the concept can be attributed to increasing

China’s rise and its increasing political and economic aspiration are challenging the established powers in the region.

11 Udayan Das, What Is the Indo-Pacific?, The Diplomat, 13 July 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/what-is-the-indo-pacific/>, Accessed on 10 December 2021

12 Varghese K. George, U.S. Pacific Command renamed U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, The Hindu, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-pacific-command-renamed-us-indo-pacific-command/article24043314.ece>, Accessed on 30 July 2022

13 The Indo-Pacific region, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/indo-pacific/2493040>, Accessed on 10 December 2021

Chinese military assertiveness, the String of Pearls¹⁴ and the Belt and the Road Initiative (BRI) and the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding Chinese ambitions.

CHINESE VIEWPOINT ON THE INDO-PACIFIC

Ever since the formation of the Indo-Pacific, China has been wary of the concept. Any development in the region has in turn led to sharp and critical observations and reactions from China. China does not have a comprehensive strategy on Indo-Pacific nor there is any document stating its aims and objective in the region. At best, its strategy can be gleaned by the statements, speeches, related White Papers and Defence White Papers. Chinese postures and overtures in the region demonstrate Chinese strategic interests in the region. The official Chinese stance remains a black box. China has criticised the concept and has refrained from using it in its foreign policy parlance. However, there is no clear vision, White Paper or statement from China on the concept.

China has not openly discussed the US “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy. There has been internal debate about the plausible impact of the concept on China and the region, and the future of US-China relations. These continuing debates among China’s internal voices shed some light on an important concept in US-China relations and regional affairs in Asia.¹⁵ The strategic community

14 China builds up strategic sea lanes, The Washington Times, 17 January 2005, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/17/20050117-115550-1929r/>, Accessed on 10 December 2021

15 Dingding Chen, What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, The Diplomat, 27 August 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-china-thinks-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>, Accessed on 30 September 2022

and scholars in China are following the developments in the Indo-Pacific region. There are various perspectives within China. Further, the Chinese perspective can be gleaned from four level analysis of the remarks by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Think Tanks, University and the media coverage.

Views of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Leaders

While addressing the SCO 2022 summit in Samarkand, Xi Jinping said: “Obsession with forming a small circle can only push the world toward division and confrontation, and the SCO members should remain firm in safeguarding the UN-centred international system and the international order based on international law, practice the common values of humanity and reject zero-sum game and bloc politics.”¹⁶

As late as March 2018, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared that the concept of the Indo-Pacific was as short-lived as the “foam on the two seas”.¹⁷ In 2020, Wang Yi said the “Indo-Pacific strategy” proposed by the US is in essence aimed at building a so-called Indo-Pacific “new NATO” underpinned by the quadrilateral mechanism involving the US, Japan, India and Australia. The aim of the strategy is to proclaim the old-fashioned cold war mentality to stir up confrontation among different groups and blocs and to strengthen

16 Ananth Krishnan, Xi calls on SCO countries to band together against ‘external forces’, *The Hindu*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/xi-calls-on-sco-countries-to-band-together-against-external-forces/article65899735.ece>, Accessed on 30 September 2022

17 “Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 9 March 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1540928.shtml, Accessed on 24 January 2022

geopolitical competition, in a bid to maintain the dominance and hegemonic system of the US. According to the Chinese, this strategy breaches the spirit of mutual benefit and win-win spirit that has been pursued by East Asia cooperation and impacts the regional cooperation framework with ASEAN at the centre, and it will eventually weaken the prospect of peace and development in East Asia. He opines that if this strategy is forced forward, it would only wind back the clock of history and this will mark the beginning of danger.¹⁸

On 22 May 2022, Wang Yi said the “Indo-Pacific strategy” is bound to fail. He stated: “The US’ ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’ is causing more and more vigilance and concern in the international community, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.”¹⁹ He reiterated that the Indo-Pacific strategy was “cooked up” by the US, in the name of “freedom and openness”.²⁰ At the 78th session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Wang Yi reemphasised the importance of the Asia-Pacific over the Indo-Pacific. The concept of Asia-Pacific should not be diluted. He argued that the Asia-Pacific has assumed a more important place in the world and has a greater role to play.²¹

18 Wang Yi, U.S. “Indo-Pacific Strategy” Undermines Peace and Development Prospects in East Asia, 13 October 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus//eng/zgyw/t1824140.htm>, Accessed on 30 July 2022

19 Huaxia, U.S. “Indo-Pacific Strategy” bound to fail: Chinese FM, *Xinhuanet*, <https://english.news.cn/20220523/614fea0b9ea546358d0e0e363885e729/c.html>, Accessed on 12 June 2022

20 PTI, 23 May 2022, Ahead of QUAD meet, China says US’ Indo-Pacific strategy ‘bound to fail’, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/ahead-of-quad-meet-china-says-us-indo-pacific-strategy-bound-to-fail/articleshow/91731692.cms>, Accessed on 30 June 2022

21 Jointly Building an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future, 23 May 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjzb_663304/wjzb_663308/2461_663310/202205/t20220523_10691371.html, Accessed on 30 July 2022

Wang Yi has called QUAD as a “mini-NATO”, or an “Asian NATO”.²² China perceives it as “closed and exclusive cliques”, a reference to the US-led democratic, universal values-based construct of the free and open Indo-Pacific. China sees NATO as the manifestation of the US “selective multilateral (collective) security system”, and QUAD as an extension of the same design.²³ Wang Yi said that the US is trying to build a “Indo-Pacific NATO” using QUAD and its allies.²⁴

Further, China thinks under the guise of fighting illegal fishing and continuing supply chains resilient, the QUAD has forcefully pursued military cooperation and intelligence sharing. The US has also encouraged NATO’s involvement in the Asia-Pacific. These are all attempts to materialise an “Asia-Pacific version of NATO” and promote “integrated deterrence” against China.²⁵ On 22 March 2022, China’s Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng compared the Indo-Pacific to the eastward expansion of NATO in Europe and also issued a warning to the QUAD countries.²⁶

Since inception, China has been condemning the Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership which

22 What’s the 4-nation QUAD, where did it come from?, *The Hindu*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/explained-whats-the-4-nation-quad-where-did-it-come-from/article6545582.ece>, Accessed on 30 June 2022

23 Jagannath Panda, China, the Indo-Pacific and NATO: Staying Relevant in a Shifting World Order, 28 June 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/china-indo-pacific-and-nato-staying-relevant-shifting-world-order-35565>, Accessed on 30 July 2022

24 Ananth Krishnan, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi says U.S. wants ‘Indo-Pacific NATO’, *The Hindu*, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/chinas-foreign-minister-wang-yi-says-us-wants-indo-pacific-nato/article65201008.ece>, Accessed on 30 July 2022

25 China’s comprehensive, systematic and elaborate response to Secretary Antony Blinken’s China policy speech, 19 June 2022, http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zmgx/zxxx/t202206/t20220619_10706097.htm, Accessed on 23 June 2022

26 Sutirtho Patranobis, US strategy for the Indo-Pacific as ‘dangerous’ as NATO expansion, warns China, *Hindustan Times*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/us-strategy-for-the-indo-pacific-as-dangerous-as-nato-expansion-warns-china-101647784979765.html>, Accessed on 5 April 2022

was formed on 15 September 2021. Expressing concern about the trilateral security alliance, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China stated: “It will gravely undermine regional peace and stability, aggravate arms race and impair international nuclear non-proliferation efforts.” He further added that “the three countries should discard the cold war zero-sum mentality and narrow geopolitical perspective, follow the trends of the times for peace and development, and stop forming exclusive blocs or cliques”.²⁷

China has never missed opportunity to disapprove of the developments in the Indo-Pacific region. In his annual press conference along the side-lines of China’s National People’s Congress (NPC), Wang Yi was more explicit with regard to its Indo-Pacific strategy. He equated the US, Australia, India, Japan – the QUAD grouping – with the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance involving Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US and the UK and the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) defence pact. According to him, “The US Indo-Pacific strategy is becoming an epitome for bloc politics.” “It professes desire for international cooperation but, in reality, is stoking regional rivalry. It talks about multilateralism but, in reality, creates exclusive clubs. It claims international rules but, in reality, is setting and imposing rules suiting itself and its acolytes.” “From Five Eyes and QUAD to AUKUS the US is staging a ‘54321’ formation in the Asia Pacific. It is by no means a blessing but a sinister move. The real goal of the Indo-Pacific strategy is to establish an Indo-

27 Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian’s Regular Press Conference on September 22, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1908814.shtml, Accessed on 30 July 2022

A few scholars out rightly reject the concept of the Indo-Pacific, some find it too focused on India while the other feel it is an anti-China block.

Pacific version of NATO.... These perverse actions run counter to common aspirations of the region and are doomed to fail.”²⁸

Chinese Ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, said, “In fact, there is no such concept as an ‘Indo-Pacific’ in geopolitics.” It is a concept created by the US. “In the past, we used to talk about the Pacific or the Asia-Pacific region, never about the Indo-Pacific. Why did the Americans include the Indian Ocean? It is because they believe their Asia-Pacific allies alone are no longer enough to contain China, they want to bring in India and other US allies, such as France, which considers itself an Indo-Pacific country. This is wrong.”²⁹

Think Tanks

A few scholars out rightly reject the concept of the Indo-Pacific, some find it too focused on India while the other feel it is an anti-China block. According to a study titled “From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific Significance, Implementation and Challenges”, SWP research paper, in China, the term “Indo-Pacific” was mentioned in relatively few articles. The usage increased from 2018 onwards. Eventually,

28 Ananth Krishnan, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi says U.S. wants ‘Indo-Pacific NATO’, *The Hindu*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/chinas-foreign-minister-wang-yi-says-us-wants-indo-pacific-nato/article65201008.ece>, Accessed on 15 June 2022

29 Ananth Krishnan, U.S. created Indo-Pacific concept to bring in India to contain China, says Chinese official, *The Hindu*, 15 December 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-created-indo-pacific-concept-to-bring-in-india-to-contain-china-says-chinese-official/article66266771.ece>, Accessed on 17 January 2023

there is no standard translation of the “Indo-Pacific”
in the Chinese language and hence it has not been
generalised in writings coming from China.

it has been accepted that this concept is not going to disappear anytime soon from the foreign and security policy vocabulary of the US. Therefore, it is important to gain a better grasp of the new construct.³⁰ China perceives any US strategic move in the region as a direct target to itself. Hence, until now China refers to the region as Asia-Pacific rather than Indo-Pacific.³¹

A paper titled *The Indo-Pacific: Its Geopolitical Implications for China* by an anonymous author, published by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies,³² elucidates the geopolitical implications for China in the Indo-Pacific. It emphasises that like many other countries in the Asia-Pacific, China has strong historical connections both in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. The term “Indo-Pacific” has not been accepted in China until recent times. Lately, China started paying some attention to the Indian Ocean and the new concept of Indo-Pacific. The paper brings out the fact that there is no standard translation of the “Indo-Pacific” in the Chinese language and hence it has not been generalised in writings coming from China. The author argues that the structural

30 Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific Significance, Implementation and Challenges, SWP Research Paper, 2020, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020RP09/>, Accessed on 13 January 2022

31 Feng Liu, The recalibration of Chinese assertiveness: China's responses to the Indo-Pacific challenge, *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2020

32 The Indo-Pacific: Its Geopolitical Implications for China, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, <http://www.siiis.org.cn/Research/EnInfo/1692>, Accessed on 16 January 2022



posture in the Asia-Pacific remains unchanged. The US is trying to rebalance and shift its military force to Asia and subsequently to the Indian Ocean with a new terminology of Indo-Pacific.³³

Analysts are of the view, in the foreseeable future, US-China relations are likely to be dominated by bickering. However, this quarrel should not translate into a zero-sum relationship. The world is big enough to accommodate multiple superpowers. If there is a conflict between major powers, the outcome will be more catastrophic, not only for the conflicting power itself but also for the entire world. Even if there is a cold war, it will cause great danger to the world, not to mention that the cold war may inadvertently turn into a hot war. Both China and the US should understand the consequences of continuing the collision process. The best way to do this is to find intermediate solutions to these issues, minimising the risk of escalating other controversial issues, while avoiding self-destructive attitudes.³⁴

Chinese University

It may be noted that the response of many Chinese scholars to the shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific is contingent on the implications this shift will have for China. Lin Minwang, a South Asian expert at Fudan University, argues that “with the development of China and India’s maritime interests and navies, the growing

33 The Indo-Pacific: Its Geopolitical Implications for China, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, <http://www.siiis.org.cn/Research/EnInfo/1692>, Accessed on 11 January 2022

34 Wu Shicun, How does China crack the US “Indo-Pacific strategy”? 13 December 2019, National Institute of South China Sea Studies, http://www.nanhai.org.cn/review_c/402.html, Accessed on 28 January 2022

strategic competition has led to the integration of the Indian and Pacific Oceans”, and that the concept “demonstrates the strategic importance of Australia and India to the US”.³⁵ Scholars have also called it as a “bubble” that will disappear as soon as the sun shines.³⁶

Chinese Media Coverage

Strategists in China opine that the challenge in the region is to accommodate the US, India and China. The three sides should discuss their Indian Ocean strategies amongst themselves. The US, India and Japan along with other countries are collaborating to build an “Indo-Pacific order” that is congenial to their long-term interests. According to the author, the three sets of bilateral ties (China-US, China-India and US-India) are in a fluid state “...And it is true that a power game of great significance has unfolded in Indo-Pacific Asia. The US, India, Japan and other players are seeking to collaborate to build an ‘Indo-Pacific order’ that is congenial to their long-term interests. China is not necessarily excluded from this project, and it should seek a seat at the table and help recast the strategic objectives and interaction norms (in China’s favour).”³⁷

Notably, China is also wary of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and sees it as a ploy to create divisions and incite confrontation

35 Minwang Lin, ‘Yintai de jiangouyuyazhouyuanzhengzhi de zhangli’ [The construction of the Indo-Pacific and the tensions of geopolitics in Asia], *Waijiaopinglun*, *Foreign Affairs Review*, no. 1, 2018, pp. 20–21

36 Feng Zhang China’s Curious Nonchalance Towards the Indo-Pacific, *Survival*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1614791>, Accessed on 22 January 2022

37 Minghao Zhao, The Emerging Strategic Triangle in Indo-Pacific Asia, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/06/the-emerging-strategic-triangle-in-indo-pacific-asia/>, Accessed on 21 January 2022

China is also wary of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and sees it as a ploy to create divisions and incite confrontation in the region.

in the region. China has criticised the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework³⁸ and called it loud and empty.³⁹ He said, “Facts will prove that the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy is in essence a strategy to create division, to incite confrontation and to undermine peace.”

In the Shangri La Dialogue (SLD 2022), Wei Fenghe reiterated “US’ Indo-Pacific strategy is aimed at maintaining US hegemony, creating divisions and fanning confrontation”, the Chinese delegation said, refuting US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin’s speech at the SLD.⁴⁰

China has been critical about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) since inception. QUAD began as a loose partnership formed after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. India, the US, Australia and Japan joined together to provide humanitarian and disaster assistance to the affected region. It was formalised by late former Japanese PM Shinzo Abe in 2007.⁴¹ Indian External Affairs Minister has alluded to the Indo-Pacific as a theatre and the QUAD as a

38 Huaxia, U.S. “Indo-Pacific Strategy” bound to fail: Chinese FM, *Xinhuanet*, 23 May 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20220523/614fea0b9ea546358d0e0e363885e729/c.html>, Accessed on 20 June 2022

39 US-led IPEF is ‘loud but empty,’ unlikely to go very far, *Global Times*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1266404.shtml>, Accessed on 20 June 2022

40 GT staff reporters, Chinese delegation says Indo-Pacific Strategy ‘fanning confrontation’ as US defense chief made ‘most barefaced’ Shangri-La speech attacking China, *Global Times*, 11 June 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1267841.shtml>, Accessed on 15 June 2022

41 Teesta Prakash, Abe Shinzo: the QUAD stands as his Indo-Pacific legacy, 9 July 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/abe-shinzo-quad-stands-his-indo-pacific-legacy>, Accessed on 20 June 2022

platform.⁴² Reaffirming the importance of the QUAD, the group was resurrected in 2017 and the first QUAD leaders' summit was held in 2021. Commenting on the QUAD, Zhang Jie, a senior researcher at the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing, wrote in *Guangming Daily* that the transition from “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific” is a prominent feature of the Quadrilateral Security Mechanism dialogue. This brings out the importance of the Indian Ocean and the connection between the two oceans along with the increasing weight of India in the world.⁴³

China has enlisted five problems that AUKUS will bring to the region. The trilateral alliance may cause dangers of nuclear proliferation, bring a new round of arms race, undermine regional prosperity and stability, sabotage the building of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Southeast Asia and revival of the cold war mentality. China further added that it is against “the trend of the time”.⁴⁴ They believe that it is a deliberate move by the US and the UK to provide carriers of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear technology and nuclear

China has been critical about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) since inception.

42 NMF, KK Nayyar memorial lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohZpagSNPv0>, Accessed on 15 July 2022

43 Hemant Adlakha, QUAD is the US “Latest Toy” to Thwart China’s Growth. But India Now More Keen to Play Along, say Chinese Experts, <https://icsin.org/blogs/2020/10/28/quad-is-the-us-latest-toy-to-thwart-chinas-growth-but-india-now-more-keen-to-play-along-say-chinese-experts/>, Accessed on 23 January 2022

44 AUKUS nuclear submarine deal brings five harms to region, says Chinese FM, *People’s Daily*, 30 September 2021, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0930/c90000-9903020.html>, Accessed on 30 June 2022

materials to the Anglosphere world, and the process is counter to the objective of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.⁴⁵

China is anxious about the role of the US and goes on to say “the US has never got tired of moving its allies around like pieces on a chessboard against China”.⁴⁶ China has been continuously issuing statements on AUKUS. The Chinese Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs, Li Song, said: “It is a ‘textbook case’ of nuclear proliferation based on the cold war mentality and narrow-minded geopolitical calculation.”⁴⁷ China has stressed that the ASEAN countries are wary of the alliance and are concerned about it. Therefore, the Southeast Asian countries have not released any official statement as there is no consensus among the ASEAN states on the alliance, though countries such as Malaysia have expressed concerns as it would spark a regional arms race.⁴⁸ China has been critical of AUKUS as it may help Australia to build nuclear-powered submarine and develop hypersonic weapons, which could trigger a regional arms race.

China has not missed a chance to critique AUKUS. Even after a year of the AUKUS formation, the China’s permanent representative to the

China has enlisted five problems that AUKUS will bring to the region.

45 Guo Xiaobing, AUKUS plans to provide nuclear submarines to Australia seriously endangers nuclear non-proliferation, *Global Times*, 19 September 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234647.shtml>, Accessed on 30 June 2022

46 GT Voice: Supply chain security only a fig leaf for US geopolitical aggression, *Global Times*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234958.shtml#:~:text=it%20seems%20that%20the%20US,supply%20chains%20or%20regional%20security>, Accessed on 11 April 2022

47 Huaxia, Chinese ambassador slams AUKUS pact as “textbook case” of nuclear proliferation, *Xinhuanet*, 13 October 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/13/c_1310242751.htm, Accessed on 11 April 2022

48 AUKUS likely to harm regional stability, raise tensions, say analysts, *Xinhuanet*, 20 September 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/30/c_1310219900.htm, Accessed on 2 April 2022

United Nations in Vienna, Wang Qun, said: “The nuclear-powered submarine deal under AUKUS is a blatant, irresponsible act of nuclear proliferation, and once again proves that AUKUS countries are practicing a double standard on nuclear non-proliferation and using the deal as a tool for geopolitical gamesmanship.”⁴⁹

DECIPHERING CHINESE POSTURES IN THE REGION

China is geographically located in the Indo-Pacific waters and is surrounded by the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

In 2012, Xi Jinping proposed the concept of the “Chinese Dream” of national rejuvenation to make the country strong and prosperous. Chinese Dream is the vision to achieve the “Two 100s”: first, China becoming a moderately well-off society by 2020 and, second, China becoming a fully developed nation by 2050.⁵⁰ The concept aims to build a moderately prosperous society and realise national rejuvenation. For the realisation of the dream and smooth functioning of globalisation, China needs unhindered access to energy resources and market access abroad. With its growing demand for energy driven by rapid economic growth, China has become the world’s largest energy importer. For China, a secure and sustained supply of energy is vital for its national security, especially in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

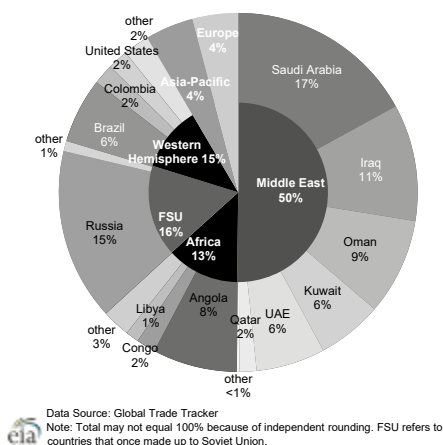
49 Hu Yuwei, Chinese envoy recounts fierce exchanges at IAEA over AUKUS deal, calls nuclear submarine plan a blatant violation of non-proliferation, *Global Times*, 19 September 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202209/1275621.shtml>, Accessed on 19 September 2022

50 Robert Lawrence Kuhn, Structuring the Chinese Dream, *China Daily*, 25 January 2014, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2014-01/25/content_17257856.htm, Accessed on 25 April 2022

Energy Security: China faces an ever-growing “energy security” (*nengyuananquan*) issue.

With the starting of the modernisation program, China has become dependent on energy importer of oil and gas. Around 50 per cent of the crude oil is imported from the Middle East.

China's crude oil imports by source, 2021



Source: <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/CHN>

The energy imports from the Middle East flow across the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea and up to China. Thus, it becomes imperative for China to secure its sea lines of communication. In 2005, Pentagon-sponsored study on Energy Futures in Asia argued that “China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China’s energy interests but also serve its broader

security objectives”.⁵¹ Thus, securing oil resources has become one of the imperatives for China to fuel its economy. Major oil securing basins are mostly located far from the consuming centre, so the international energy market is dependent on reliable transport. Over the years, as China’s trade grew around 95 per cent of traded goods and materials were shipped by sea. Consequently, China has become increasingly dependent on imported oil to fuel its economy. Most of the Chinese vessels carrying oil had to be transported through the critical sea lanes of communication.⁵²

Malacca Dilemma: Eighty per cent of China’s oil currently passes through the Strait of Malacca.⁵³ Given China’s dependence on energy resources and particularly on sea-based supplies, the issue of sea lines of communication (SLOC), particularly the Strait of Malacca, needs special attention. It is one of the most important and busiest waterways and provides the shortest route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In November 2003, President Hu Jintao said that “certain major powers” were determined to control the Strait of Malacca and called for the adoption of new strategies to mitigate the vulnerabilities. The strait offers a route that is faster and more economic than alternate pathways around Indonesian islands.⁵⁴

51 China builds up strategic sea lanes, *The Washington Times*, 17 January 2005, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/17/20050117-115550-1929r/>, Accessed on 20 April 2022

52 Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A history of China Quest for Sea Power* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), pp. 183-215

53 The Malacca Strait is located between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore; it links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Approximately, 15.2 million bbl/d flows in 2011, compared to 13.8 million bbl/d in 2007

54 Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (Random House: New York, 2010), p. 286



Eighty per cent of China's oil currently passes through the Strait of Malacca.

It may be noted that in 2019, China's annual crude oil imports increased to an average of 10.1 million barrels per day (b/d). There is an increase of 0.9 million b/d from 2018. In 2017, China surpassed the US and became the world's top crude oil importer. The major factors contributing to the increase in China's crude oil imports in 2019 was its new refinery capacity and strategic inventory stockpiling, combined with flat domestic oil production.⁵⁵ According to an estimate, China's dependency on foreign oil will reach 80 per cent by 2030.⁵⁶

For China to overcome the Malacca Dilemma, there are broadly two options. The first is to provide alternative sea routes from one ocean to the other. The second is to get more of China's energy supplies overland from the Middle East and Central Asia so that the supplies do not have to transit through the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Further, Chinese investments in Pakistan and Myanmar are an alternative to bypass the Malacca Dilemma.⁵⁷

55 China's crude oil imports surpassed 10 million barrels per day in 2019, 23 March 2020, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=43216>, Accessed on 29 April 2022

56 Qiang Wang, Shuyu Lia and Rongrong Liab, China's dependency on foreign oil will exceed 80% by 2030: Developing a novel NMGM-ARIMA to forecast China's foreign oil dependence from two dimensions, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0360544218316633>, Accessed on 29 April 2022

57 Lucas Myers, Internal Politics, Instability, and China's Frustrated Efforts to Escape the "Malacca Dilemma", 20 July 2021, Wilson Centre, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/internal-politics-instability-and-chinas-frustrated-efforts-escape-malacca-dilemma>, Accessed on 29 April 2022

The USD 62 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was conceived in 1990. It connects Gwadar, in the south-western province of Baluchistan, to Xinjiang province of China. Gwadar port is vital for China as it is strategically located between South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia and its proximity to the Persian Gulf. China's eastern seaboard ports are 3,500 kilometres from the city of Kashgar in western China, whereas the distance from Kashgar to Gwadar is only 1,500 kilometres. It acts as a pivot for Central Asian traders. Being the westernmost railway station in China, Kashgar connects the Central Asian region to the rest of China through the 488-km Kashgar-Hotan Railway, which was opened for freight traffic in December 2010 and for public usage it was operational from June 2011. Thus, it is ideal for China's economic activities and connectivity. However, the Gwadar port is facing challenges within Pakistan. In November 2019, Alice Wells while speaking at the Wilson Center in Washington DC questioned the economic viability of CPEC.⁵⁸ The strategic and economic intention of China vis-à-vis the port is also moot.

The geographical position of Myanmar is of immense importance to China. It gives China access Bangladesh and Southeast Asia via the Indian Ocean and land border. China is expanding its footholds in Myanmar to meet its expanding energy needs. In 2015, Consortia led by China's CITIC Group Corporation got two projects to develop a special economic zone in Myanmar's western Rakhine state.

58 A Conversation with Ambassador Alice Wells on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, <https://www.state.gov/a-conversation-with-ambassador-alice-wells-on-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>, Accessed on 30 April 2022

CITIC's consortia include China Harbor Engineering Company Ltd., China Merchants Holdings, TEDA Investment Holding and Yunnan Construction Engineering Group. One consortium won a tender to build a deep-sea port on the Bay of Bengal, while another consortium won a contract to develop an industrial area, managers of the economic zone. Also, China already has oil and gas pipelines from Kyaukphyu, across Myanmar to China's Yunnan province, bypassing the Malacca Strait.⁵⁹

Piracy: Since 2009, piracy threats have prompted ongoing anti-piracy deployments by China into the Gulf of Aden.⁶⁰ China's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden have led China to seek and gain friendly re-provisioning access at Salalah (Oman), Aden (Yemen), and Djibouti. Djibouti is of particular significance as it is China's first explicit overseas military base. China's anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden has given Beijing with a strong case to set up naval bases and increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Security: China is cautious of the changing security situation in the neighbourhood. Zhang Jie, in an editorial in *China Daily*, "Is Asia-Pacific more insecure in 2021?"⁶¹, argues that the overall security situation in China's neighbourhood has been increasingly complicated although without military conflicts. The US has

59 Aung Hla Tun and Timothy McLaughlin, China's CITIC wins projects to develop Myanmar economic zone, 31 December 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-citic-project-idUSL3N14K1D720151231>, Accessed on 27 April 2022

60 Minnie Chan, Call for China to set up naval bases abroad, *South China Morning Post*, 30 November 2009, <https://www.scmp.com/article/702338/call-china-set-naval-bases-abroad>, Accessed on 20 April 2022

61 Zhang Jie, Is Asia-Pacific more insecure in 2021?, *China Daily*, 24 December 2021, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202112/24/WS61c5005ba310cdd39bc7d2c4.html>, Accessed on 20 April 2022

intensified its comprehensive competition with China in the region, by promoting its aggressive Indo-Pacific strategy. The overall traditional and non-traditional security challenges are increasing. The US aims to use the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to hedge against China's BRI and to "decouple" with China's economic issues. According to the author, China should strengthen its strategic cooperation with Russia and the ASEAN states to shape an open, inclusive and cooperative regional order.⁶²

CHINESE DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY OVERTURES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Chinese overtures in the Indo-Pacific region can be analysed through its defence and naval strategy. The Chinese aims and objectives in the Indo-Pacific region can be analysed through the annals of Chinese Maritime ambitions and the "two-oceans strategy".

Another important nexus between China's national defence strategy and naval strategy is the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s two "1.5 war" doctrines. With the prospect of a land war disappearing, the country's security gravity has shifted from the western and northern land borders to the eastern side. If the PLA is dragged into a full maritime conflict in the East and the South China Seas with the US and Japan, according to Chinese perception, India may take

China is cautious of the changing security
situation in the neighbourhood.

62 Ibid

advantage by encouraging farther across the disputed India-China land borders. This is the first 1.5 war scenario for China. The second scenario, if a sizeable maritime war erupts in East Asia, the Indian Navy may be called on to disrupt China's SLOCs in the Indian Ocean in order to both strengthen India's position in the India-China border dispute and help US operations in the Pacific. For China, both scenarios involve India. In response, the PLA's frontier defence would inevitably require the People's Liberation Army and Navy (PLAN) to expand its one-ocean strategy into a two-ocean strategy (the western Pacific Ocean plus the northern Indian Ocean) and spread its naval combat reach into the Indian Ocean rim.⁶³

Since the 1980s, the Chinese Navy has made a strategic transformation to offshore defensive operations. They have increased friendship visits, conducted joint military drills and international humanitarian missions with foreign armies. In November 1985, a Chinese flotilla consisting of destroyer *Hefei* and supply ship *Feng cang* visited Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It was the PLAN's first foreign visit. From May to September of 2002, another flotilla consisting of the destroyer *Qingdao* and supply ship *Taicang* completed the PLAN's first global navigation journey and visited 10 countries.⁶⁴

Chinese overtures in the Indo-Pacific region can be analysed through its defence and naval strategy.

63 You Ji, China's Emerging Indo-Pacific Naval Strategy, *Asia Policy*, National Bureau of Asia Research, no. 22 (July 2016), pp. 11–19

64 Chinese Navy Sails onto World Stage, 25 September 2009, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cohk/chn/xnyfgk/t606631.htm>, Accessed on 25 May 2022

“Near Seas” vs “Far Seas”



Source: <https://theasiadialogue.com/near-seas-far-seas/>

Jiang Zemin, in 1990, put forward the concept of the “far sea operations” and advocated that while continuing to implement the “near sea” active defence strategy, the PLAN should in the long run pay attention to enhancing the far-sea defence and operations capabilities. In terms of operational scope, because all the sea areas beyond the “near sea” are “middle and far seas” the sea areas adjacent to the inner and outer rims of the second island chain⁶⁵ and the maritime space beyond this chain can be understood as the PLAN’s definition of the “far sea”. This is a vast area that stretches from the northwest Pacific to the East Indian Ocean. It significantly expands the geography and mission scope of PLAN

65 Island Chains: The “first island chain” refers to the first major archipelagos off the East Asian continental mainland, including the Japanese archipelago, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan and the northern Philippines. The “second island chain” runs down from Japan to the Northern Marianas and Guam.



operations.⁶⁶ The shift from the near sea to far sea marks a shift in Chinese maritime thinking.

China felt the need to enhance its strategic control to protect its facilities along the Indian Ocean in order to secure its sea line of communication. On 24 December 2004, Hu Jintao gave a speech to the Central Military Commission. His speech is known as the PLA's "Historic Missions". In the speech, he provided the PLA with a new set of missions to fulfil – to ensure military support for continued Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in Beijing, to defend China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security, to protect China's expanding national interests and to help ensure a peaceful global environment and promote mutual development. Beijing desires a military that is capable of conducting military operations other than war (MOOTW). In addition to being able to conduct MOOTW, the PLA should also actively participate in these types of operations, both domestic and abroad.⁶⁷ Further, the sixth national defence strategy adopted in 2004 and updated in 2015 introduced the concept of "frontier defence".

Yet another related development is the China's "Two-Ocean Strategy" (*Liang Yang Chu Hai*). The increasing Chinese naval operations from the South China Sea and western Pacific into the Indian Ocean, China is following a "two-ocean strategy". This is a manifestation of China's strategy of "far-seas operation". China aims

66 Nan Li, The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From "Near Coast" and "Near Seas" to "Far Seas", *Asian Security*, vol. 5, no. 2, 144–169, DOI: 10.1080/14799850902886567, Accessed on 20 April 2022

67 Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission "China's Military and Security Activities Abroad", Washington, DC, 4 March 2009, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.4.09Hartnett.pdf>, Accessed on 20 April 2022

to achieve this through deployment and berthing facilities across the Indo-Pacific, to meet energy security imperatives and achieve “far-seas protection” and power projection by Chinese Navy.⁶⁸

The Chinese outlook of a two-ocean approach to maritime security is in line with forwarding edge defence, which envisions China establishing an “arc-shaped strategic zone that covers the western Pacific Ocean and northern Indian Ocean”. The concept of “forward edge defence” articulated in Science of Military Strategies (SMS) 2013 has strong naval-maritime implications; it supplements the general call for strategic capabilities projection radiating coast, sea, and oceanward from China’s continental core, and specifically for the establishment of a Chinese “arc-shaped strategic zone that covers the western Pacific Ocean and northern Indian Ocean”. In case of any unforeseen situation, the arc can become a “strategic outer line” whose deterrence, absorption and control are enabled by “operations with the mainland and the coastal waters as the strategic inner line”. This relates to a formulation appearing increasingly in this and other Chinese sources: “using the land to control the sea, and using the seas to control the oceans”.⁶⁹

There has been internal discussion within China on the “two-ocean strategy” as well. Chinese have stressed the need of establishing a landline of communications to connect the southwest part of China

68 David Scott, Chinese Maritime Strategy for the Indian Ocean, 28 November 2017, <https://cimsec.org/chinese-maritime-strategy-indian-ocean/>, Accessed on 25 July 2022

69 Andrew S. Erickson, China’s Blueprint for Sea Power, *China Brief*, 6 July 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-blueprint-for-sea-power/>, In Their Own Words: Foreign Military Thought Science of Military Strategy (2013), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2021-02-08%20Chinese%20Military%20Thoughts-%20In%20their%20own%20words%20Science%20of%20Military%20Strategy%202013.pdf?ver=NxAWg4BPw_NylEjxaha8Aw%3d%3d, Accessed on 9 May 2022



The increasing Chinese naval operations from the South China Sea and western Pacific into the Indian Ocean, China is following a “two-ocean strategy”.

with the Ports of Gwadar, Hambantota, Chittagong and Kyaukpyu in order to avoid the challenge in the control of the choke point in Southeast Asia. China’s two-ocean strategy vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean also points out the importance of synergy between land and sea and the importance of countries like Pakistan, Myanmar and Cambodia in the Chinese calculations. Thus, a pertinent development in Chinese military strategy has been its shift towards a “two-ocean strategy” of operating not just through the first and second “island chains”⁷⁰ of the Pacific, but also of its deployment into the Indian Ocean. The Chinese Science of Military Strategies (SMS) states, “Because our at-sea sovereignty and interests have frequently come under intrusions ... we need to form into a powerful and strong two oceans layout in order to face the crises that may possibly erupt.”⁷¹

These developments have further increased Chinese interests in the region. Chinese interest has risen since the mid-1990s and crossed a major threshold in late 2008 when China decided to send and

70 Island Chain Strategy was formulated in 1951 by John Foster Dulles. The First Island Chain comprises the Kuril Islands, the Japanese Archipelago, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, northwest Philippines and ending at Borneo. The Second Island Chain consists of the Bonin Islands, Volcano Islands, Mariana Islands, western Caroline Islands and Western New Guinea. The Third Island Chain refers to the Aleutian Islands running through the centre of the Pacific Ocean through the Hawaiian Islands, American Samoa, and Fiji culminating at New Zealand. (Lt Col JS Sodhi, Island chain strategy: Steps to checkmate China, *Financial Express*, 19 June 2022, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/island-chain-strategy-steps-to-checkmate-china/2565232/>, Accessed on 27 July 2022)

71 Christopher Colley, A future Chinese Indian ocean fleet?, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/a-future-chinese-indian-ocean-fleet/>, Accessed on 25 May 2022

sustain a naval contingent on a piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden.⁷² In addition, the 18th Party Congress work report first defined China as a “maritime power” that will “firmly uphold its maritime rights and interests”. Hu Jintao, during his keynote address at the National Party Congress in Beijing on 8 November 2012, directed for “enhancing Chinese capacity for exploiting marine resources, resolutely safeguarding China marine rights and interests, and building China into a maritime power”.⁷³ Further, the Chinese media elaborated on the rise of China as a maritime power.⁷⁴ *People’s Daily* commented that this was the “Century of the Oceans”, and the world powers were all making maritime rights and interests a top priority.⁷⁵

During the same time, China has published a “blue book”. It is the first document on the Indian Ocean region. The 300-page blue book is divided into four sections: the Indian Ocean region’s political, economic and security situation; China’s Indian Ocean strategy; India’s Look East Policy and the roles of China, the US and India in the Indian Ocean; and the Indian Ocean and China-Myanmar relations. It states that until now China did not have a clear Indian Ocean strategy. The changing geopolitical situation at home and of the international relations has pushed China into the region. In 2018, Xi Jinping reiterated his predecessor’s (Hu Jintao) task

72 C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi), ISBN: 9780198092339, p. 110

73 Hu calls for efforts to build China into maritime power, *Xinhua*, 8 November 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpnc/2012-11/08/c_131959403.htm, Accessed on 24 May 2022

74 “Maritime power a priority at National Congress,” Chinese Media Digest, *Global Times*, 13 November 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/DesktopModules/DnnForge%20-%20NewsArticles/Print.aspx?tabid=99&tabmoduleid=94&articleid=744050&moduleid=405&PortalID=0>, Accessed on 24 May 2022

75 Ibid

The 18th Party Congress work report first defined China as a “maritime power” that will “firmly uphold its maritime rights and interests”.

of making China into a “maritime power”. He stated: “The task of building a powerful navy has never been as urgent as it is today.”⁷⁶

CHINA’S DEFENCE WHITE PAPERS

China’s maritime policy is based on the objective of becoming a blue water navy. It aims to make forward projection into the South China Sea, the “island chains” in the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. In the year 2013, the Chinese Navy fulfilled its long-held dream of breaking through the “first island chain blockade”, and its vessels gained access to the Pacific Ocean through various waterways along the route. A senior researcher at the PLA’s Academy of Military Science alluded to the fact, “the Chinese Navy has the capability to cut the first island chain into several pieces”.⁷⁷

In absence of a White Paper on the Indo-Pacific, the Defence White Papers help us to understand and gaze the Chinese overtures in the Indo-Pacific. China started publishing National Defence Paper from 1998,⁷⁸ giving not much emphasis to the Chinese Naval Policy. Eventually, for the first time in 2004, the Defence White

76 Xi Jinping urges building of strong Chinese navy, CGTN, 12 April 2018, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3367444d346b7a6333566d54/index.html>, Accessed on 24 May 2022

77 Li Xiaokun, China sails through ‘first island chain’, *China Daily*, 2 August 2013, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-08/02/content_16863833.htm, Accessed on 23 May 2022

78 China’s White Paper 1998, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/cnd9807/index.html>, Accessed on 2 May 2022

China's maritime policy is based on the objective
of becoming a blue water navy.

Paper stated the PLA Navy is responsible for safeguarding China's maritime security and maintaining the sovereignty of its territorial seas along with its maritime rights and interests.⁷⁹

The 2006 White Paper, with regard to naval development, stated, "the navy is working to build itself into a modern maritime force of operation consisting of combined arms with nuclear and conventional means of operations". It further talks about the gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations and enhancing its capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks.⁸⁰ The 2008 White Paper further added that since the beginning of the century the Chinese navy is trying to develop capabilities of conducting cooperation in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats.⁸¹

As the Indo-Pacific concept was gaining currency, in 2013 China released the Defence White Paper. The paper argued that the concept of Asia-Pacific region currently dominates Chinese military thinking.⁸² It mentioned about the: "strategy to exploit, utilise and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime

79 China's White Paper 2004, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/natdef2004.html#3>, Accessed on 5 May 2022

80 China's White Paper 2006, <http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/defense2006/defense2006.html>, Accessed on 5 May 2022

81 China's White Paper 2008, https://programs.fas.org/ssp/nukes/2008DefenseWhitePaper_Jan2009.pdf, Accessed on 5 May 2022

82 China's White Paper 2013, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-07/24/content_9567369.htm, Accessed on 7 May 2022

power”. Xi Jinping pinpointed the need to “‘strategically manage the sea’, and continually do more to promote China’s efforts to become a maritime power”.⁸³ In addition, in 2015, Defence White Paper explained China’s ambition to become a maritime power and one not confined to East Asian waters. It stated: “the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned”. Explicitly, the paper added a new role called “open seas protection” to the PLA Navy’s existing task of “offshore waters defence”. The turn to the “far seas” of the Indian Ocean became increasingly apparent in Chinese deployments. It further emphasised that “the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans” and for China “building itself into a maritime power”.⁸⁴

Xi Jinping has mandated greater efforts to make the country’s navy world-class and strong in operations on, below and above the oceans, as it steps up its ability to project power far from its shores.⁸⁵ The 2019 Defence White Paper of China emphasised on “combat readiness and military training in real combat conditions” and China’s new war fighting capabilities in the western Pacific and the South China Sea.⁸⁶ It further outlined the need “to build a strong and modernised naval force” that is capable of carrying out

83 Andrew Chubb Tuesday, Xi Jinping and China’s maritime policy, 22 January 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/xi-jinping-and-chinas-maritime-policy/>, Accessed on 8 May 2022

84 China’s Defence White Paper 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm, Accessed on 10 May 2022

85 China’s Xi says nation’s navy should become world class, 25 May 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2095610/chinas-xi-says-nations-navy-should-become-world-class>, Accessed on 25 May 2022

86 Anthony H. Cordesman, China’s New 2019 Defense White Paper, 24 July 2019, CSIS, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-2019-defense-white-paper>, Accessed on 25 May 2022

“missions on the far seas”. China recognized the fact that the armed forces will have to play a more active role in its foreign policy.

To move ahead with the Chinese Dream, Xi Jinping announced a complimentary “Strong Military Dream”. In his 2017 speech to the National People’s Congress, he explained that “building people’s forces that obey the party’s command, can fight and win, and maintain excellent conduct is strategically important to achieving the two centenary goals and national rejuvenation”.

Xi Jinping has set future markers for the PLA’s development, announcing that the PLA’s modernisation be “basically completed” by 2035 and that the PLA field “world-class forces” by 2050. Thus by 2019, China had stated the goal for modernising its armed forces. Xi Jinping has urged the military head to push forward the modernisation of the China’s military by making it “comprehensive and overall improvements” to training amid growing security challenges at home and abroad. Also, the Communist Party of China has declared to modernise the army by 2027 and a world-class military by 2050.⁸⁷

China’s increasing footprints in the countries of Pacific Island is also connected to its growing interest in the Indo-Pacific region. In

In 2015, Defence White Paper explained China’s ambition to become a maritime power and one not confined to East Asian waters.

⁸⁷ Minnie Chan, China’s military: Xi Jinping tells top brass to ‘transform’ training amid security challenges, *South China Morning Post*, 26 November 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3111542/chinas-military-xi-jinping-tells-top-brass-transform-training>, Accessed on 22 May 2022



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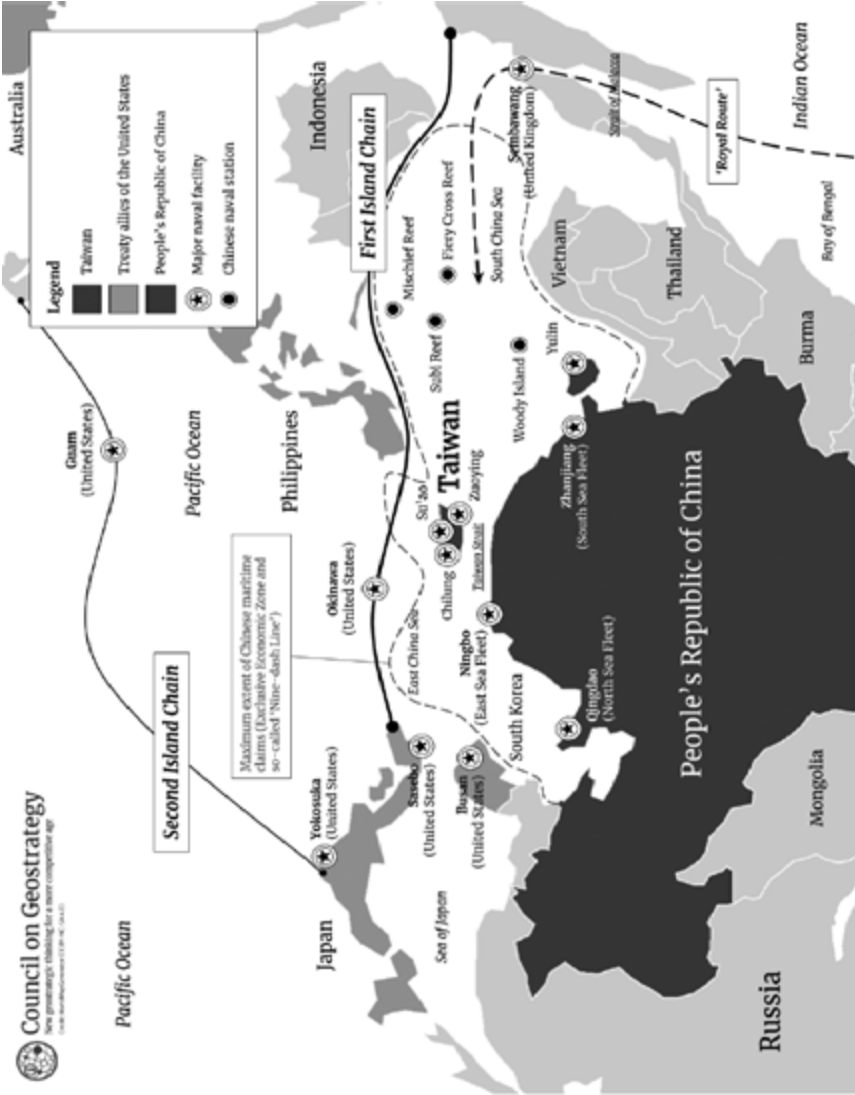
June 2022, Wang Yi visited Pacific Island Countries. On 3 June 2022, Wang Yi and the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea, Soroi Eoe, met the press in Port Moresby. Wang Yi met and held talks with leaders of 17 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and over 30 ministerial officials and also co-chaired the second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting with the Prime Minister of Fiji. China and PICs signed and reached 52 bilateral cooperation outcomes, covering 15 cooperation areas, including Belt and Road cooperation, climate change, pandemic response, disaster prevention and mitigation, green development, medical and health care, agriculture, trade, and tourism and at the sub-national level.⁸⁸ China also released a position paper on the PIC.⁸⁹ His visit has once again refurnished China's commitment to expanding its influence in the Pacific Islands. Many of the PICs are also skeptical of the Chinese intention's vis-a-vis the security issues. On the other hand, they are open to engaging with China.⁹⁰

88 Wang Yi, China's Cooperation with South Pacific Island Countries Having Diplomatic Relations with China Shows a Vibrant Situation of "Two-Wheel Driving", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/kjgzbdffyq/202206/t20220603_10698495.html, Accessed on 25 November 2022

89 China's Position Paper on Mutual Respect and Common Development with Pacific Island Countries, http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202205/t20220531_10694923.htm, Accessed on 25 November 2022

90 Jennifer Staat, Four Takeaways from China's Tour of the Pacific Islands, *USIP*, 9 June 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/four-takeaways-chinas-tour-pacific-islands>, Accessed on 25 November 2022

China's Vision of Indo-Pacific



Source: <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/09/GPR01-06092022.pdf>

CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGIES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION



At the past five Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO summits, President Xi Jinping has stated China's vision of openness and cooperation to energize regional economies and address changing global challenges. Further in his speech, he said: "Development is a journey with no end, but with one new departure point after another."⁹¹

During the 17th National Party Congress Hu Jintao used the term "community of common destiny" to describe the cross-strait relationship. Since China has been using this term in its relationship with neighbouring countries, Xi Jinping again used the term in 2013, during his visit to Africa and the ASEAN countries. The community of common destiny has become core of the "Chinese Dream" to maintain domestic unity and stability, "new type of great power relations" to find different ways of peaceful co-existence with major powers, and the "community of common destiny" to ensure a peaceful and stable neighbouring environment, which is essential for China's continued rise. Notably, the timing of the reemphasise of the concept is interesting as it coincides with the

China's increasing footprints in the countries of Pacific Island is also connected to its growing interest in the Indo-Pacific region.

91 From Bali to Da Nang, Xi expands China's footprints in Asia-Pacific development, *China Daily*, 17 November 2022, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-11/17/content_34635768.htm, Accessed on 29 April 2022

The way the US translates its growing connection
between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean into
an operational concept remains moot.

US pivot to Asia.⁹² It may be recalled that Hillary Clinton in an essay published in *Foreign Policy* titled “America’s Pacific Century” had elucidated on the US foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region. She affirmed that the US is using “forward-deployed” diplomacy in the region. By virtue of its geography, the US is both an Atlantic and a Pacific power. The US is expanding its alliance from a Pacific partnership to an Indo-Pacific one. The way the US translates its growing connection between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean into an operational concept remains moot. The US is looking forward to a pivot in this region and is committed to seeing it through.⁹³

Notably, China’s Belt and Road Initiative was also started in 2013. The BRI comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and also illustrates their grand strategies. Subsequently, the BRI has helped China to increase its footprints in the Indian Ocean region and across South Asia dramatically. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for Beijing to expand its presence in the region through strategic collaborations such as developing maritime infrastructure in the recipient countries.

92 Jin Kai, Can China Build a Community of Common Destiny?, *The Diplomat*, 28 November 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/can-china-build-a-community-of-common-destiny/>, Accessed on 21 October 2022

93 Hillary Clinton, America’s Pacific Century, *Foreign Policy*, October 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, Accessed on 18 January 2022

In 2012, Wang Jisi published an article arguing that China should rebalance its strategy to the West as part of the response to the US pivot to Asia. His argument remains one of the clearest articulations of the economic and strategic considerations behind the BRI: that China should draw more heavily on the traditional continental orientation in its foreign policy and develop an international strategy to underpin rebalancing efforts from the coastal to the interior regions; that the westward-facing economy, running down the old Silk Road, now has the highest growth potential and should be a new focus for China's economic strategy. Wang Jisi formulated the economic and geostrategic rationale for China's Belt and Road Initiative. He also predicted the tensions and confrontations between China and the US. His paper provides a framework to understand the China's diplomacy in the region, whether it's the evolving partnership with Russia, anti-terrorism in Xinjiang and Tibet, rising risks of military confrontation with the US in the Far East, the need for an alternative expansionary policy in Central Asia, and the growing importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).⁹⁴

At the 76th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session on 21 September 2021, Xi Jinping projected the Global Development Initiative (GDI) as a global public good. The stated purpose of GDI is to galvanise worldwide attention to development, strengthen global development partnership, promote international development cooperation, and give a fresh impetus to the realisation of the

94 Alex Lo, How a seminal paper in 2012 predicted our world today, *South China Morning Post*, 5 July 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3184198/how-seminal-paper-2012-predicted-our-world-today>, Accessed on 20 October 2022

2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs). While announcing the initiative, President Xi talked about eight priority areas for cooperation: (i) poverty alleviation, (ii) food security, (iii) COVID-19 and vaccines, (iv) financing for development, (v) climate change and green development, (vi) industrialisation, (vii) digital economy, and (viii) connectivity. Further, he called for the acceleration in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for SDGs as a means to “build a global community of development with a shared future”.⁹⁵ Global Development Report released by the Center for International Knowledge on Development (CIKD), Beijing, in June 2022 highlights the importance of GDI as it aims to build a “global community of development”, promote international exchanges and share development knowledge. Further, the report informs that more than 50 countries have joined the “Group of Friends of the GDI” established by China at the UN platform and over 100 countries have articulated their support for the GDI.⁹⁶

On 21 April 2022, President Xi Jinping delivered a virtual keynote speech titled “Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation” at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022 held in Boao, Hainan Province. In his speech, he proposed a Global Security Initiative (GSI) which stressed commitment to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security and rejected a cold war mentality, group politics and bloc confrontation. The

95 State Council, PRC, “Bolstering Confidence and Jointly Overcoming Difficulties to Build a Better World”, Statement by President Xi Jinping at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the UNGA on 21 September 2021, http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202109/22/content_WS614a9d11c6d0df57f98e0a81.html%20, Accessed on 20 October 2022

96 IKD, *Global Development Report*, <http://archive.cikd.org/fileCache/pdf/G/Global%20Development%20Report.pdf>, Accessed on 20 October 2022



most prominent concept of his speech was “indivisible security”. Xi Jinping, in his speech and subsequent explanations, has illustrated that China is trying to push for an alternative international order led by China.⁹⁷

While China has not endorsed the concept and the term Indo-Pacific, it has appreciated the ASEAN’s “Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, speaking at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta on 11 July 2022, gave a lot of importance to the ASEAN centrality and promoting solidarity and cooperation in the region. He reiterated that China would like to increase synergy and cooperation with ASEAN on the implementation of the Outlook to produce cooperation outcomes.⁹⁸ There has also been increase in China-ASEAN trade. China’s import and export to ASEAN was USD 970 billion in 2022. Overall, in 2022, it was a 15 per cent increase in China-ASEAN trade.⁹⁹ As a part of its Neighbourhood Diplomacy China is trying to attract ASEAN towards itself.

Overall, China’s objectives in the Indo-Pacific region appears to first establish regional hegemony over the Indo-Pacific and then to use

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97 Huaxia, Full Text: Chinese President Xi Jinping’s keynote speech at the opening ceremony of BFA annual conference 2022, *Xinhua*, 21 April 2021, <https://english.news.cn/20220421/f5f48ba605ed427dab911188af175ebf/c.html>, Accessed on 29 April 2022

98 Upholding Peace, Development, Independence and Inclusiveness and Renewing the Firm Commitment to Open Regionalism, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202207/t20220712_10718689.html, Accessed on 8 February 2023

99 Trade between China and ASEAN grows 15% in 2022, first year of RCEP’s enforcement, *Global Times*, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1283779.shtml>

that dominant position to propel China to become the “leading world power”, shaping an international order that is favourable to its interests. Achieving these objectives requires turning China into a wealthy nation under strict CCP rule by using a strong military and advanced technological capability to pursue the Chinese objectives, regardless of other countries interests.

China’s military strategy seeks to keep the US military from operating in the western Pacific and erodes the US security guarantees. China is aggressively pursuing exclusive control of critical land routes, sea lanes, and air space in the Indo-Pacific in the hopes of eventually exercising greater influence beyond the region. China is modernising the PLA to attain a level of capacity and capability superior to the US in terms of equipment and conduct of modern military operations by shifting its military doctrine from having a force “adequate [for] China’s defensive needs” to having a force “commensurate with China’s international status”. In due course, this transformation could facilitate China’s agenda in the region.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

The increasing Chinese interest in the Indo-Pacific region and the subsequent inroads in South Asian region have larger ramification for India. In July 2013, a Chinese scholar Zhao Qinghai rejected the “Indo-Pacific” concept on the basis of it being an “India too” geopolitical construct.¹⁰⁰

100 Byron Chong, India and the South China Sea, <https://cimsec.org/tag/india/page/2/>, Accessed on 8 October 2022



Notably, China has taken aggressive posture in the South China Sea and eventually they are increasing their foothold in the Indian Ocean region. Seemingly, China appears to have chosen the path of confrontation. The height of the Chinese aggressive posture was evident at the Galwan stand-off in 2020. The Galwan incident is a watershed movement in the India-China relations. It was first time in 45 years that a bullet was shot at the Line of Actual Control. “On the late evening and night of 15 June 2020 a violent face-off happened as a result of an attempt by the Chinese side to unilaterally change the status quo there. Both sides suffered casualties that could have been avoided had the agreement at the higher level been scrupulously followed by the Chinese side.”¹⁰¹

It is evident from the 20th Party Congress that China is cautiously looking at the India-China border. Xi Jinping has included people with experience in dealing with India. Notably, Politburo Standing Committee Member Ding Xuexing accompanied Xi Jinping during his visit to Mamallapuram in 2019. General He Weidong, Li Fengbiao and Xu Qiling also have experience in dealing with India and the Indian border in different capacities. Wang Yi has also been

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¹⁰¹ Official Spokesperson response to media queries on the situation in the western of the India-China border, 16 June 2020, <https://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/32761/official+spokespersons+response+to+media+queries+on+the+situation+in+the+western+sector+of+the+indiachina+border>, Accessed on 10 October 2022

promoted to the Central Commission on Foreign Affairs.¹⁰² It is likely that India will be the focus in the Chinese strategic thinking.

China has reservations on India joining any US-led alliance or groupings. They consider the development in the region as a design of the US. On the formation of the QUAD, China perceives that the US has brought up again the idea of building an alliance, similar to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with India, Australia and Japan to form an anti-China network in the region. Chinese experts cautioned that instead of relying on the US to pressure China or playing geopolitical games, India should focus on solving border disputes by negotiating with China. Further, they caution that India should not go “astray” with the US to pressure China on the border issue.¹⁰³

India has strongly pushed back against China’s invoking of NATO as a comparison and pointing to the fact that India is not an ally of the US neither is the QUAD a military alliance. Indian officials have rejected the Chinese argument that the US was “stoking” tensions in India-China relations. India believes that the recent strain in the bilateral relations is due to China’s aggressive postures along the Line of Actual Control. However, China attributes the downturn in

**It is evident from the 20th Party Congress that China
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102 Aadil Brar, Xi Jinping’s dream team has ‘India’ written all over it. Border specialists handpicked, *The Print*, 26 October 2022, <https://theprint.in/opinion/eye-on-china/xi-jinpings-dream-team-has-india-written-all-over-it-border-specialists-handpicked/1182112/>, Accessed on 27 October 2022

103 Liu Xin and Liu Xuanzun, US-led NATO-like alliance not reliable for India in border talks with China: experts, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1199583.shtml>, Accessed on 10 October 2022



India has strongly pushed back against China's invoking of NATO as a comparison and pointing to the fact that India is not an ally of the US neither is the QUAD a military alliance.

the relation to India-US increasing ties¹⁰⁴ Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar has categorically said that the ongoing Ukraine-Russia crisis does affect India-China relations. He said, “This idea that I do a transaction, that I come in one conflict because it will help in conflict 2 – that’s not how the world works. A lot of our problems in China have nothing to do with Ukraine or Russia. They are predated.”

¹⁰⁴ Ananth Krishnan, U.S. created Indo-Pacific concept to bring in India to contain China, says Chinese official, *The Hindu*, 15 December 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-created-indo-pacific-concept-to-bring-in-india-to-contain-china-says-chinese-official/article66266771.ece>, Accessed on 17 January 2023

CONCLUSION



It may be noted that the essence of these analyses of the Indo-Pacific strategy is that China's main concern is preventing this geopolitical concept from becoming a converging point for neighbouring states and the entire region to form a platform against China. China has not officially adopted the term "Indo-Pacific" instead has been using the term "Asia-Pacific". Arguably, the various reasons cited by the Indo-Pacific experts and scholars from China on the evolution of the concept are essentially critique of the Indo-Pacific concept.

The rise of China is an overriding issue in the region. China's economic and strategic clout continues to grow in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, thereby creating a new balance-of-power structure across the vast region.

As a pivotal region, the Indo-Pacific has become a new power centre of global geopolitics. China is aggressively working on strengthening win-win cooperation and interconnectivity within the region. Xi Jinping launched his signature project in 2013. China has been unilaterally advocating that the BRI projects will create a win-win situation for all the participating countries. The construction of ports, rails and roads is for bringing in the community of common destiny. However, the BRI has not been a success; issues such as debt trap, lack of transparency, unilateralism and environmental

With the rise of India and China in the twenty-first century, the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has significantly changed.



The Indo-Pacific region has become indispensable
to the world economy and security.

issues have become synonymous with the initiative. It is facing a huge pushback from the host countries.

While China continues to play its cards, the major global powers are now coming together through the Malabar exercise and the QUAD 2.0. India, the US, Australia and Japan could form a security architecture. Various European countries like France, Germany and others are joining hands with the US and India to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region and have come up with their perspective on the Indo-Pacific.

With the rise of India and China in the twenty-first century, the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has significantly changed. The US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, has reiterated: “Even as President Putin’s war continues, we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order – and that’s posed by the People’s Republic of China.” National Security Strategy released by the US has labelled China as the “most consequential geopolitical challenge”, declaring that the US is “in the middle of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order”. “The PRC [People’s Republic of China] is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”

The Indo-Pacific region has become indispensable to the world economy and security. To sum up, “Indo-Pacific is the future and not the past”. Indo-Pacific will remain the main geopolitical theatre of the world.



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