

Chapter 1

Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific Region: Strategic Significance and Security Challenges

1.1 Introduction

Indo-Pacific is not only the result of US led agenda to contain China's advances, but an effort of the regional countries to confront Chinese aggression through its historical territorial reclamations and militarisation of the South China Sea. The shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific is specifically to address the 'deficiencies of maritime security and institutional architecture and thus reconceptualising the geographic space as Indo-Pacific' (*Brown, 2018*). Furthermore, the major motive behind this geopolitical construct are:

- a) Security; maritime security and surveillance,
- b) Strengthening the already existing economic regimes in the region, and
- c) Institutionalising Indo-Pacific through structural-functionalism; contemplating Quad to be beyond defence (*He and Huiyun, 2020*).

The emergence of Indo-Pacific can be studied from two perspectives

- a) Japan's conceptualisation of Indo-Pacific
- b) US Pivot to Asia-Pacific.

Incidentally both the perceptions are not mutually exclusive, and both have kept China at bay. In fact, China being a growing economy and a rising power and very much a part of the region surely will have a decisive role in the formation of a region (*ibid*), but Chinese style of functioning seems like interference in other's territory, political agenda, and diplomacy just

like a hegemon which is irking the regional countries since these countries also have a decisive role at the global stage. The broad contours of Indo-Pacific are side-lined by the popular narratives of US and Japan. The formation of a middle power communion is taking shape; a reaction to China's aggression and US' assumption of reclaiming its hegemonic status, making Indo-Pacific a 'great power rivalry free zone.' Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 pronounced the Indo-Pacific as a 'confluence of the seas' and in 2012 Shinzo Abe used the term "Democratic Security Diamond" (*Brown, 2018*), shaping the regional architecture. Here Japan emphasises the Quadrilateral Security Arrangement between Australia, India, Japan, and Australia, which is similar to the architecture assumed by the US in balancing China. Japan had gone further than security and conceptualised the term which helps in institutionalising and regionalisation of Indo-Pacific countries; one good example is the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) where India and Japan will collaborate for 'development, connectivity and cooperation' (*Panda, 2017*) for an inclusive, pluralistic, and liberal rules-based order. From Japanese view the Indo-Pacific region will have more cooperation among like-minded countries and build bridges for better connectivity, emphasising on 'Freedom of Navigation;' 'Free, Open and Peaceful Indo-Pacific' and follow the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), lastly without superpower rivalry. The regional stakeholders like Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, US are building ways to engage with each other through bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral arrangements. By mid 90s itself Japan considered the freedom of navigation in the Malacca strait as a matter of life and death for its economy (*Wirth, 2019*).

The other version of 'Indo-Pacific' is used and developed by Australia. The Defence White Paper 2013 mentioned to prevail 'Rules Based Order,' a strategy to support Obama's rebalancing strategy i.e., 'Pivot' to Asia and the Pacific. Hillary Clinton in 2012 emphasised on 'Indo-Pacific' to enhance maritime security cooperation in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans; (*Haruko, 2020*) especially with Australia, India, and Singapore. India's deepening engagement with ASEAN made open acceptance of Indo-Pacific as the area of primary concern, overtly emphasising on the 'Freedom of Navigation' which is an interchangeable term with the US 'Rules Based Order.' Christian Wirth rightly mentions that 'the language of international order or global governance is never politically neutral...and so are the practices of power' (*Wirth, 2019*) and further adds that rules-based order and freedom of navigation is to maintain US hegemony and has a neo-colonial ring to it and hence the countries of the region

need to debate as to what is actually been addressed, a peaceful region or American invincibility (*Lippert and Perthes, 2020*). The Cold War tactics of Domino theory could be felt in the ‘Indo-Asia-Pacific’ strategy of US where the containment of China is not the only aspect as much as to ‘prevent a hostile power from dominating a vital centre of World’s wealth and productivity’ like the US presence in post- World War Europe was to prevent domination of any hostile power over its economic productivity and wealth (*Betts, 1993*). The process of institutionalising the Indo-Pacific is evolving through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; popularly called as Quad; a ‘minilateral security regionalism’ (*Brown, 2018*). The Quad is an informal grouping and for it to bind into a formal structure depends on China by default. The more China shows its aggression the more specific, real, and structured the Quad will become. The expansion of Quad into a regional grouping may become a reality, courtesy China.

China had started regionalisation quite early compared to the Indo-Pacific regionalisation. Since the end of Cold War and the steady rise of East Asia, China has been relentlessly urging the rising economic giants; especially ‘Japan and Russia for a closer cooperation to counter US hegemony in the region,’ (*Betts, 1993*) but China’s historical reclamations has disturbed Japan, India, and the Southeast Asian region, who were also apprehensive of American hegemony time-to-time. Chinese perception of ‘common or collective security; a Pan-Asianism’ (*He and Huiyun, 2020*) by removing US from its Asian security architecture; with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had worried the states in the region, since it was having an air of Chinese hegemony over Asia. Furthermore, China’s ‘hybrid’ form of institutionalisation of Indo Pacific on the terms of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) dilutes the narrative of multipolarity as well as Indo-Pacific community of middle powers. (*Wada, 2020*). Hence China looks at Indo-Pacific as a ‘discursive construct to dilute Chinese influence in the efforts of regionalisation’ (*He and Huiyun, 2020*). The sustainability of Indo-Pacific regionalisation depends upon the regional countries more than the US. Since there has been some apprehension by the regional countries (from East Asia to South Asia) that US was not successful in building military alliance/s; especially in Asia, leading to a new construction of global norms and mode of operation. Asia more and more realised that maintaining American military bases in Asia will not necessarily bring peace (*Ross, 1999*). Japan insisted on comprehensive security ever since 1991; that emphasise on security to be an all-encompassing concept apart from its narrow understanding of enhanced military might, where ‘security will be assured with less military and with more economic and

non-military means (*ibid*). The nomenclature of Indo-Pacific is willingly grabbed by the regional powers to frame their foreign policies since the idea of comprehensive security needs a banner. On the other hand, with multipolarity comes the very discourse on how to distribute the power among the rising economies.

Rapid regional development and the growing interdependence of key Indo-Pacific players amid an increasing number of contradictions among them have caused the outside world to view the region as a “complex multi-layered” strategic system that extends beyond the borders of Southeast Asia and includes India and the Indian Ocean (*Medcalf, 2012*). However, the concept of “Indo-Pacific” has gradually been closely combined with the word “strategy,” thereby resulting in the term “Indo-Pacific Strategy” (*Chen & Wei, 2015*).

Modern scientific discourse is developing in two directions: experts either focus on an analysis of the positions of the countries involved and their approaches to the implementation of the Indo-Pacific concept (e.g., the so-called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or QUAD, consisting of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN countries), or they look at the prospects for multilateral partnership in other areas of interaction (e.g., security, strategic or economic cooperation). It is worth mentioning that the concept of the partnership itself is broadly discussed in the academic community as well, as far as there is no consensus on the definition. Usually, a partnership is considered a more comprehensive concept, including common goals and interests, as well as values and an ideological component (*Maslova & Sorokova, 2019*).

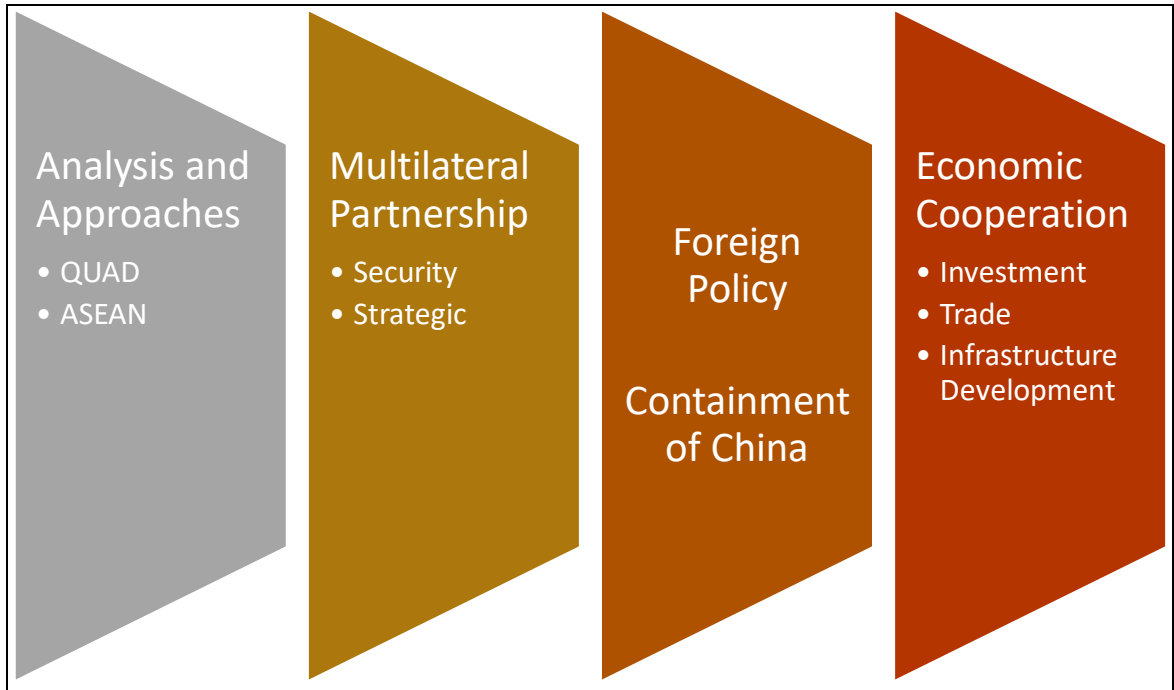


Figure 1.1 Approaches to the study of Indo-Pacific

Source: By the Author

Meanwhile, another group of researchers prioritizes economic cooperation. The strategy’s economic components cover three areas: trade, investment, and infrastructure development (*Pitakdumrongkit, 2019*). In particular, Pence stresses that the United States also wants to promote investment in the private sector, including regional infrastructure development projects (*The White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence, 2018*), and Wilson (*Wilson, 2017*) notes that Asian countries are, in turn, interested in expanding investment “in creating an Indo-Pacific economic architecture.”

Most experts interpret the Indo-Pacific concept as the basis of the U.S. foreign policy strategy, which is aimed at the military and political containment of China through the development of bilateral and multilateral ties with Asia-Pacific countries (*Grossman, 2018; Streltsov, 2018*). Saeed (*Saeed, 2017*) sees the concept as “rebalancing efforts to sustain U.S. leadership in the Asia Pacific by strengthening political, security and economic ties with regional countries,” whereas Pejsova (*Pejsova, 2018*) points out that “beyond the official rhetoric, the most obvious common interest remains the containment of China.” At the same time, experts note that “in order to avoid conflicts with the U.S. caused by advancing eastwards,

China continues its steps of expanding westwards by proposing the cross-border and inter-continental ‘Belt and Road Initiative’” (*Jung and Chen, 2019*). China’s role in the implementation of the regional concept remains the subject of heated discussion in the scientific literature. Some experts believe that the high level of dependence on the Chinese economy is forcing Asian “middle powers,” such as India, Japan, Australia, and Indonesia, to hedge their potential economic and geopolitical risks (*Prasad, 2018*). They recognize that “multilateral exercises need to be conducted for maritime infrastructures such as the ports along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” as well as the need to conduct such exercises in cooperation with China, deepen relations in non-traditional areas of security, disaster relief, and so on (*Shimodaira, 2018*). Others, on the contrary, call for QUAD to be an “inclusive mechanism” to be able to “reconcile with the wisdom of ASEAN-centred regionalism” as an “adaptable framework [that] would promote recognition of the QUAD as an anchor or idea incubator for issues-led functional cooperation for peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific” (*Fukushima, 2018*).

1.2 Defining the Indo-Pacific

Indo-pacific sometimes also known as the Indo-West Pacific is a biogeographic region of the Earth's seas, comprising the tropical waters of the East Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and to the Western Pacific Ocean and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia. The geographical extent of Indo-Pacific region covers the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, equatorial Indian Ocean, and Western Pacific Rim.

However, it does not include the temperate and polar regions of the Indian and Pacific oceans, and the Tropical Eastern Pacific, along the Pacific coast of the Americas. The appellation has been especially in use in marine biology, ichthyology, and similar fields for a long time. This bio geographically defined region is different from the Atlantic region as many marine habitats and a number of species that are continuously connected from Madagascar to

Japan and Oceania are not found in the Atlantic Ocean (*Helfman, Collette, and Facey, 1997*). The Indo-Pacific is also the world's most biodiverse area.¹

Geologically this region is rich in mineral wealth and resources, abundance of oil and gas. Indo-Pacific portrays a degree of physiographic façade- lofty mountain ranges, plateaus, river valleys, longest coastlines, coastal plains, largest area of continental shelf and its hydrographic pattern of the river-drainage pattern. These rivers have played decisive socio-economic impact on the lives of the people along their course of flow. Physically it has the deepest trench, the largest continental margin sea, and the lowest-spreading ridges. The unmatched richness of Indo-Pacific is due to the region's geographic location at the crossroads, the striking biogeographic boundary, abundance of the Asian biotic elements towards the west of the Wallace's line and the Australasian elements on the other side as demarcated by Alfred Russel Wallace.² "The Pacific and Indian Oceans," in the words of ADF chief, General David Hurley, "are emerging as a single strategic system that is straddled by the Southeast Asian archipelago" (*Hurley, Scott and Gailyn, 2018*).

Former Australian Defence Minister Kim Beazley viewed the Indo-Pacific region that "not only brings together two of the planet's most important bodies of water, but also two of the world's most geopolitically, geo-economically and geo-strategically interconnected regions" (*Salil 2015*). Indo-Pacific is also viewed as synonymous for maritime Asia (*Buzan and Waever, 2003; Bisley, 2016*); implicitly, the Indo-Pacific is a maritime "super-region" with its geographical centre in Southeast Asia. Explicitly, the three invariable geographic components-single maritime domains constituted by the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the notion of emerging India and Southeast Asia as the geographical centre of the Indo-Pacific- are the base of overlapping geographical scope of the various conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" (*Haruko 2020*). However, the Indo-Pacific is looked upon as a framing device rather than a geographic reality, given the differential propositions entailing a situation that "each country has its own Indo-Pacific" (*Ciuriak, 2020*).

1 The Indo-Malay-Philippines Archipelago is believed to host the maxima of the world's marine biodiversity

2 For details see [https:// www.nationalgeographic.org/ maps/dividing-species-wallace-line-map/](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/maps/dividing-species-wallace-line-map/)

This vast geographic area is characterized by diverse and distinct ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural indigenous people. It is home to half of the world's population. Economically, Indo-Pacific economies portray both similarities that necessitate the countries embarking on extra-regional trade and complementarities that facilitate intra-regional trade.

The Indo Pacific construct has laid emphasis on the sea as the main conduit of commerce, co-operation, and competition. It has the busiest and strategically significant trade corridor. The waters of Indo-Pacific have been a source of livelihood for its people due to its common linkages and complementary features intersected by international sea-lanes. Understandably, it is a key transit zone between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the main route for commerce and trade in energy to East Asia forming the core of Indo-Pacific encompassing the South China Sea, maritime Southeast Asia, and the Bay of Bengal (*Brewster, 2016;2018*).

Indo-Pacific is not simply a new name for the Asia-Pacific, but nor is it a radically redefined regional concept that downplays the centrality of Asia (*Medcalf, 2016*). 'Indo-Pacific' has begun to be viewed as "a shorthand for the wider region of the Asia-Pacific area plus South Asia and the Indian Ocean region: hence Indo + Pacific" (*Heiduk and Wacker, 2020*). The 2009 Australian Defence White Paper perceptively called the Indo-Pacific as the 'logical extension' of the 'wider Asia-Pacific region' (*Tyler and Shearman 2013*).

Long back, Karl Haushofer (1869-1945), the German General geographer, professor of geography, and a proponent of geopolitics envisaged a world of four "pan-regions," and visualized Indo-Pacific as one of the four "pan- regions". He had then perceived the strategic and economic unity of this region. (*Li, 2021*). The American sea-power theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan outlined the primacy of the Indian and Pacific oceans as two oceans which will hedge the continental world island creating direct implications on the geopolitical security and strategy of the world. (*Gunter,2020*).

The concept of Indo-Pacific was first mentioned by Gurpreet S. Khurana, an Indian naval officer, in 2007 (*Khurana, 2007*). According to him there is an overlap in the concepts of Indo-Pacific among the major powers in the region especially India, Japan, and the USA. He also linked the term Indo-Pacific to vigorous trade flows and possible military conflict. ³ The geographical scopes of the Indo-Pacific visions vary among India, Japan, and the USA respectively. The United States considers the Indo-Pacific to range from the western shore of India to the western shore of the United States. India and Japan have somewhat similar views as they consider the Indo-Pacific as roughly consisting of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They all however agree that Indo-Pacific is not only contiguous territorial space, but also linked together by economic and strategic ties.

In terms of Indian engagement in the region, the Indo-Pacific term fits easily into India's existing geopolitical formulations, combining as it does the Look South (Indian Ocean) and Look East (Pacific Ocean) settings used in India's 'extended neighbourhood' framework (*Scott 2009*). Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh began using the term in late 2012 and into 2013 as a way of defining his country's relations with ASEAN and Japan. Modi has used analogous language, e.g., in describing his vision for relations with Japan.

The spirit of the term was picked up by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in his own poetic formulation: the "confluence of two seas" (*futatsu no umi no majiwari*) as reflected in his speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007 for freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia". Japan became the first country to officially put forth the concept of the Indo-Pacific (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2007*).

Back in October 2010 the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a speech at Honolulu in used the term 'Indo-Pacific' to describe 'a newly emerging integrated geographical and strategic reality'. Speaking at Honolulu, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke about "expanding our work with the Indian Navy in the Pacific, because we understand how important the Indo-Pacific basin is to global trade and commerce". (*Clinton, 2011*). However,

³ The author's interview with Captain Gurpreet Khurana, 2017

the term Indo-Pacific began to receive the world's attention after it was mentioned in President Donald Trump's speech in Danang, Vietnam in 2017. The then US secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a speech at a think tank in Washington in October 2017 referred the Indo Pacific as a strategic arc extending from India through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia including the sea lanes of communications on which the region depends. He further describes Indo-Pacific as "a large swathe of sea and land stretching from the US Pacific coast to Australia and beyond to India," (Tillerson, 2017; Hu and Meng, 2020).

Indo-Pacific or Indo-Pacific Asia, according to noted academician Rory Medcalf (2012), is "an emerging Asian maritime strategic system," and the region has begun to be viewed as "the world's strategic centre of gravity". Medcalf (Medcalf, 2013) has, therefore, underscored the need for understanding the "Indo-Pacific" which is implicitly meant for recognizing the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as a single strategic system. Inasmuch as the term remained in dormant for decades in geopolitics, the 'Indo-Pacific' idea is now contested (Medcalf, 2012).

Interestingly China was initially circumspect of the 'Indo-Pacific' coinage. As the Australian writers, Nick Bisley and Andrew Phillips wrote in 2012:

"...Viewed from Beijing, the idea of the Indo-Pacific...appears to be to keep the US in, lift India up, and keep China out of the Indian Ocean... (Which is why), the Indo-Pacific concept has...received a frosty reception in China..." (Bisley and Phillips, 2012)

In July 2013, a Chinese scholar Zhao Qinghai trashed the 'Indo-Pacific' concept based on his interpretation of it being an "India too" geopolitical construct. Notwithstanding, not all Chinese scholars have been dismissive of the concept. In June 2013, Minghao Zhao wrote,

"...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)'' (Zhao, 2013).

In view of the vast expansive territory of Indo-Pacific, its littoral states and extra-regional stakeholders are too dissimilar and countless to be expected to achieve timely and practical multilateral solutions to a host of problems ranging from piracy to strategic mistrust (*Jakobson and Medcalf, 2015*). It comprises dozens of countries; yet effective cooperation to address its security problems will often only be possible in flexible coalitions of a few (*Medcalf, 2013*). Today it is the pivot of the world power and a contiguous maritime strategic space with ever-increasing geopolitical salience. Economically it is the centre of gravity and too large for any single country to dominate the region. It is by no means driven by any natural geographic factors, as there exist no exact boundary delineations for the Indo-Pacific area. 'Indo-Pacific' is neither a new paradigm nor a Western concept but a framework of strategic relevance for the world at large, including India (*Mishra, 2014*). The future will only tell whether it is the apple to ones' eyes or the apple of discord.



Figure 1.2 Map of Indo-Pacific, Image source: Global Village Space, Google

1.3 The Characteristic of Indo-Pacific Region

From the above discussion we can sum up certain characteristics of the Indo-Pacific Region. They are as follows:

1. The very first characteristic of Indo-Pacific is the ceaseless presence of the sea, which represents a single, unbroken expanse of water around the globe. From the standpoint of geography, contiguous maritime regions can be seen as being joined even if the connections are narrow passages confined by the land formations of both peninsular and archipelagic Southeast Asia and the Australian continent. The seas and oceans are inherently transnational. The growing importance of the sea, whether taken as a primary vector for international trade or a natural environment in an increasingly resource-constrained world. The region is identified as primarily maritime (*Till, 2009*).

2. Secondly, the increase in both the volume and disruptions in the flow of international seaborne trade, most notable among them is oil, the most strategically vital of traded commodities, which will remain irreplaceable for transportation for the years to come (*Rahman, 2011*). Most oil originates in the Persian Gulf or West Africa while other key commodities needed for economic development such as iron ore transit the Indian Ocean to reach Northeast Asia through the straits of Malacca-Singapore or Lombok-Makassar from Africa, Brazil, India, and Western Australia. The maritime traffic passing through these straits reaches ports in Northeast Asia via the South China Sea. The Lombok-Makassar traffic generally passes through the Celebes and Philippine Seas, although some ships travel through the Celebes Sea, Sibutu Passage, Sulu Sea, and Mindoro Strait to the South China Sea (*Rahman and Tsamenyi, 2010*).

3. The Indian Ocean has replaced the Atlantic as the globe's busiest and most strategically significant trade corridor. This geographic super-region is the nerve centre of 21st-century global politics. As Nicholas Spykman asserted, "the Indo-Pacific is the circumferential maritime highway which links the whole area together in terms of sea power" (<http://www.insssl.lk/index.php?id=154>). Thus, freedom of navigation and maritime security have become very important aspect of this region.

4. The third and one of the most important characteristics of the Indo-Pacific has been the role rising China and its unilateral assertive behaviour in the region. The rapid expansion of China's naval force and broader military equipment with a long coastline adjacent to the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas is aimed at giving China the ability to deploy its power in important strategic oceanic areas (*Ramadhani, 2015*). Irredentist claims in the South China Sea, string of pearl -port facilities across the Indian Ocean Region, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road in terms of connectivity and infrastructure all puts forward the growing Chinese power in the region. Interestingly, economically China has been a crucial trading partner for all the major states in the region including India, Japan, and the USA.

5. The forward presence of the US Navy as well as the bases, airfields, and facilities of the other services to enable America to maintain its geographic inclusiveness in the Indo-Pacific⁴ (*Erickson, 2018;2019*).
6. From the above two characteristics one can derive the next characteristic of the Indo-Pacific i.e. the U.S.-China conflict is at the heart of the Indo-Pacific.
7. India's emergence as a responsible maritime actor in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical order and her recent development of relations with major regional and extra-regional powers.
8. Being physically vast in area – this region is populated by diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic people. As a result, there are potentially dividing socio-economic factors in the region. Indo-Pacific is rich in natural resources which fuels the industrial engines of the world's economies.
9. Indo-Pacific is the most militarized area in the world with seven of the world's ten largest standing armies, the world's largest and most sophisticated navy and five of the world's declared nuclear nations (*Yoshihara, 2013*).
10. To sum up Indo-Pacific as a region is located at the cusp of anarchy, competition, and inter-dependence all at same time. It has worrying security concerns due to growing non-traditional security and maritime boundary disputes. The geostrategic, geo-economic and geopolitical salience of Indo-Pacific lies in the fact that the countries in this region have convergence of interests but may have divergent approaches towards them.

⁴ United States has accorded renewed importance to the Indo-Pacific by a significant renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific command

1.4 Defining maritime security

Two-thirds of the earth's surface is covered by water. In the 21st century oceans and the seas provide for over 80% of international trade. The marine waters are also rich sources of energy resources. Thus, along with process of globalization the strategic role of water ways has steadily risen. As such the maritime areas are subject to an increasing number of security risks and threats. “Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and functional integrity against the forces of change, which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence. Quite where this range of concerns ceases to merit the urgency of the ‘security’ label (which identifies threats as significant enough to warrant emergency action and exceptional measures including the use of force) and becomes part of everyday uncertainties of life is one of the difficulties of the concept (*Buzan,2011*).”

Maritime security thus refers to the protection of vessels (both internally and externally), protecting coastal areas, safeguarding the ocean resources, and maintaining freedom at sea for movement of ships and facilitating and protecting trade. It is a nexus between the preventive and responsive measure. Issues such as piracy and armed robbery; terrorism; drug trafficking and trafficking in nuclear materials and firearms; freedom of navigation, human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants; illegal activities in the fisheries sector; waste trafficking, interstate naval conflicts, physical threats to seafarers, security threats and challenges to global shipping industry, intentional and unlawful malicious damage to the marine environment and cyber security threats -represent a challenge to the marine peace and security.

Maritime security aims at:

- facilitating and defending commerce
- maintaining good governance and behaviour at sea, and
- preserving the freedom of the seas

Though there is no internationally agreed definition of maritime security- Professor Christian Bueger (*Bueger, 2015*) identified and proposed four keyways in which the term ‘maritime security’ can be understood. These included:

1. National Security / Sea power: the traditional role of maritime security agencies, particularly naval forces, in the protection of states, including patrolling and protecting sea lanes, claimed maritime zones and delimited maritime boundaries and coastal state rights within these maritime spaces.
2. Marine environment and safety: addressing threats to ships and maritime installations and assets, including responding to maritime disasters and accidents at sea and participating in search and rescue activities.
3. Economic development: enforcing laws and regulations in relation to resource use in the oceans, including countering piracy and smuggling and providing a secure maritime environment which enables and supports economic development.
4. Human security: in relation to ensuring food security and sustainable livelihoods, with a particular focus on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and human trafficking (*Bueger, 2015*).

According to Professor Bueger, Maritime security can be seen in a “maritime security matrix” with related concepts, including national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security; it can be put into a “securitisation framework” with a list of threats to human beings; or it can be seen through the aspect of “security practices and communities of practice” or the security of those whose work is related to the sea (*Bueger,2015*). Figure 1.3 gives a graphical representation of Professor Bueger’s understanding on maritime security.

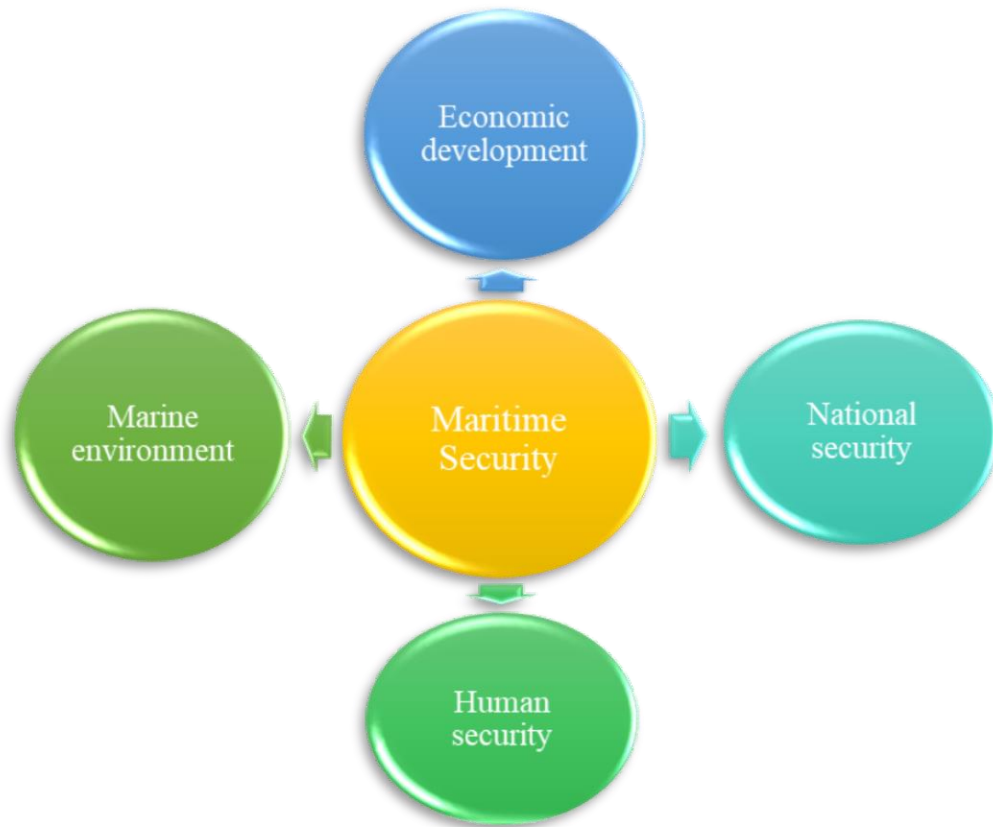


Figure 1.3 By the Author

An alternative view of maritime security from five different approaches has been put forward by Chris Rahman:

1. Security of the sea itself including the marine environment.
2. Ocean governance under the international regime of the Law of the Sea.
3. Maritime border protection with regard to sovereignty of states.
4. Military activities at sea.
5. Security regulation of the maritime transportation system. (*Rahman, 2009*).

Thus, broadly, maritime security can be understood as covering two aspects: traditional security concerns that pertain to infringement of state sovereignty as well as power projection by states in their relationships with other states; and the more recent threats including piracy and armed robbery, terrorist attacks, illicit trafficking in arms, proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction, drugs and humans, migrant smuggling, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. These threats, clubbed with the challenges posed by climate change, are popularly known as non-traditional threats. (Klein, 2011).

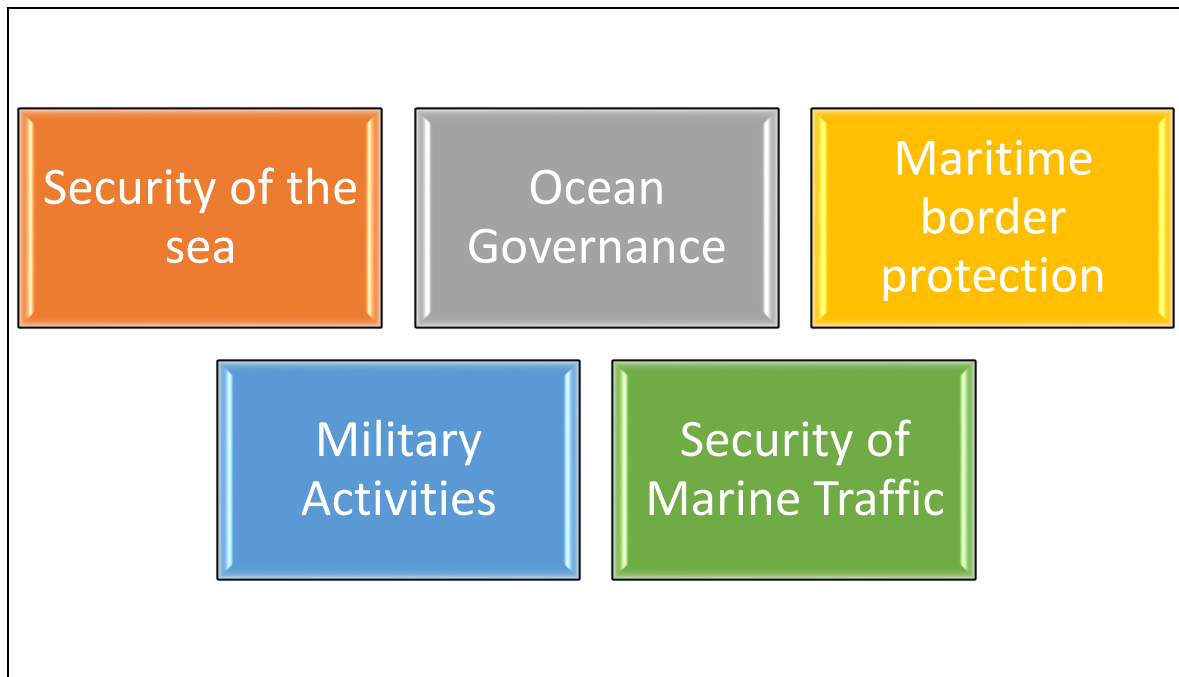


Figure: 1.4 By the Author

Maritime Security Approaches as put forward by Chris Rahman

The 2005 National Strategy for Maritime Security by the United States considers maritime security from the perspective of a list of threats, including nation-state threats, terrorist threats, transnational crimes and piracy, environmental destruction, and illegal seaborne immigration. The United States’ Indo-Pacific Strategy believes that the vital sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific “underpin global commerce and prosperity.” (*The Department of Defence, 2019*). The United States, therefore, tries to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific through promoting linkages in economics, governance, and security.

On the other hand, India’s 2015 Maritime Security Strategy views maritime security as conditions for the “freedom to use the seas for the pursuit of maritime activities, in support of national development and prosperity, and [to] promote legitimate use of the maritime global

commons” (*Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015*). India has its own vision of the Indo-Pacific, in which it wants to promote peace and stability through equal access to the sea and air, freedom of navigation, combating maritime crimes, protecting the marine environment, and developing the blue economy (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 2018*).

“海洋安全保障 (Kaiyo anzen hosho)”⁵ is the most used phrase in Japanese for maritime security. However, there seems to be no official definition of maritime security in Japan though the words repeatedly appear in official documents. Official Japanese documents tend to identify threats and describe the approved strategy to counter those threats. The Basic Plan on Ocean Policy sets out, inter alia, Japan’s comprehensive maritime security policy (*The Basic Act on Ocean Policy Act No. 33 April 27, 2007*). The current Basic Plan states the three main policy directions for maritime security. These are to secure:

- national interests in Japan’s territorial waters, etc.,
- stable use of Japan’s important sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and
- to strengthen the international maritime order to ensure freedom of use of the oceans (*ibid*).

The National Défense Program Guidelines (NDPG) also touch upon maritime security. The NDPG for the fiscal year 2019 and beyond formulate a maritime security strategy to “ensure the safety of maritime and air traffic by strengthening the order of “Open and Stable Oceans,” an order based on fundamental norms such as the rule of law and freedom of navigation.” The Guidelines explain that, because Japan is an island nation, it heavily depends on energy and food imports and maritime security is essential to its peace and prosperity (*Ministry of Defence, Japan, 2018*). Japan also has its own “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” initiative, which stresses the importance of linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. This initiative aims to

⁵ The first word, “kaiyo,” means maritime or ocean. “Anzen” stands for safety in general. “Hosho” means to ensure or to secure.

promote a rules-based order; freedom of navigation; free trade; economic prosperity; and commitment to peace and stability.

1.5 The maritime security challenges in the Indo- Pacific

In the lexicon of international relations maritime security has emerged as one of the burning issues in the 21st century in general and Indo-Pacific region in particular. This cartographic area includes numerous choke points that are geo-strategically located. Energy security, trade and economy of many countries are heavily depended on the maritime security of the sea lanes of Indo-Pacific. It is the lifeline of the 21st century world economy as oil, gas and cargo from the Middle East Countries are transported to the East. Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific also involves the protection of the marine environment, the blue economy and human security of coastal communities. Indo -Pacific faces both opportunities and challenges regarding maritime security issues.

The Indo-Pacific region includes numerous “choke points” on maritime routes that are strategically important to world trade. The sea route through Straits of Malacca⁶, and geostrategic position connecting the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) and the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean), have been playing an important role in the transportation of oil, gas, and cargo products from the Middle East to Australia and East Asia. This region accounts for world’s busiest marine traffic annually. About 60 percent of the world’s maritime trade goes through the region, of which one-third pass through the South China Sea (*The Department of Defence, 2019*). Due to its geostrategic location the region is witnessing competing economic interests, competitive activities for marine resources and development of military power. Although the Indo-Pacific generally enjoys peace and security, it faces several challenges in maritime security. They are discussed as follows:

⁶ which is the shortest route between the Middle East and Asia in general and Pacific Rim countries in particular.

Firstly, the region has about 40 sea-related disputes among regional countries, either disputes on sovereignty over territories at sea or sovereign rights over maritime areas. Both the East and the South China Seas are plagued by significant territorial and maritime disputes. Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam each claim sovereignty over parts of the South China Sea, including its land features. Japan, the Republic of Korea, and China each have overlapping claims in the East China Sea. While these disputes have existed for decades, tensions have increased significantly as China has deployed massive military, paramilitary, and civilian assets. China has further militarized outposts in the South China Sea, has interfered with commercial surveys, shipping, and fishing – and in a few cases U.S. naval operations – and has applied coercive pressure against rival claimants. On the other hand, Indian Ocean region has comparatively, been less afflicted by tensions over maritime disputes in recent years. The unresolved maritime disputes in the region are relatively stable. Among these disputes, those in the South China Sea or the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, are considered potential causes of a Sino-U.S. war or even a Third World War. (*Allison, 2017*).

One of the urgent transnational maritime security issues in the Indo- Pacific Oceans remains the Somali pirate threat, which affects the sea from the Gulf of Aden, the waters off Somalia, the Arabian Sea, and the western part of the Indian Ocean. Maritime terrorism, piracy, and armed robbery has been one of the important security challenges in the region. Maritime piracy and maritime armed robbery placed the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to be at the top of the list of the world's most dangerous waters. In 2018, the number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in those areas were 57 and 25 respectively, ranking only after West Africa with a total of 81 cases. (*Tseng, Her, and Pilcher, 2021*). Maritime terrorism has been spread to the region by Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups like Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia. The Super Ferry 14 case, the bombing of a ferry in the Philippines in 2004 which killed 116 people, is considered the world's deadliest terrorist attack at sea even today. Piracy once used to be a major threat in Strait of Malacca, but fortunately multilateral engagement has been successful in eliminating the danger. However, since the start of 2005 Somali pirates began roaming the Indian Ocean with modern equipment which enable them to operate in the range of 1,500 nautical miles from Somali coastline. Interestingly, the Somali pirates are also linked to terrorist organization such as Al-Qaeda and Al Shabab. Maritime terrorists evolve from using the ship lines as supply chain to conduct terror attacks towards ships and vessels to send political message. Philippines-based terror group, Abu Sayyaf which

pledged allegiance to ISIS, has been conducting strikes to cargo ships in Sulu Sea and abducting hostages. In Southeast Asia, including the South China Sea near Singapore, crimes have involved a mixture of robbery at sea, hijacking of vessels, kidnapping for ransom, and theft from ships at anchor (*Johri and Krishnan, 2019*). It is interesting to note here that maritime piracy and maritime terrorism have different targets. Whilst maritime piracy is economic and the latter i.e., maritime terrorism is political in character. But they both have common interest which is to ensure weak states remain corrupt and vulnerable.

Illicit maritime trades in things like drugs, arms, and contraband are a problem across the globe, but the Indo-Pacific stands out in its role in two of these illicit markets: synthetic drugs and wildlife products. Drugs produced in Afghanistan, India, and Indonesia is distributed by sea to other countries through illegal markets. Synthetic drug production in places like Myanmar and Thailand has risen dramatically in the last decade and these drugs are often moved through the maritime space to markets within and outside the region. In addition, Southeast Asia is the fulcrum for the international trade in illegal wildlife products due to its geographic placement between the primary source of such products in Africa and the primary markets in East Asia (*Benson, 2020*).

Lastly, the Indo-Pacific is also witnessing several new maritime security threats. Climate change has led to sea-level rise and an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters affect the lives of coastal communities. Apart from this, the seaborne economic activities, such as oil transfer and offshore drillings, fishing, and cruise ship movements have the potential to damage the surrounding marine environment and biodiversity. Major oil spills into the sea affect the ecology of the sea waters and eventually kills many marine species. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing that often use explosives and cruise ships which are prone to endanger the coral reefs that harbour marine biodiversity. While the damage is threatening to marine ecology, such sea accidents may also disturb SLOCs, thus should be considered as common maritime threats, especially in busy waterway of Indo-Pacific (*Agastia, Dharma & Perwita, 2016*).

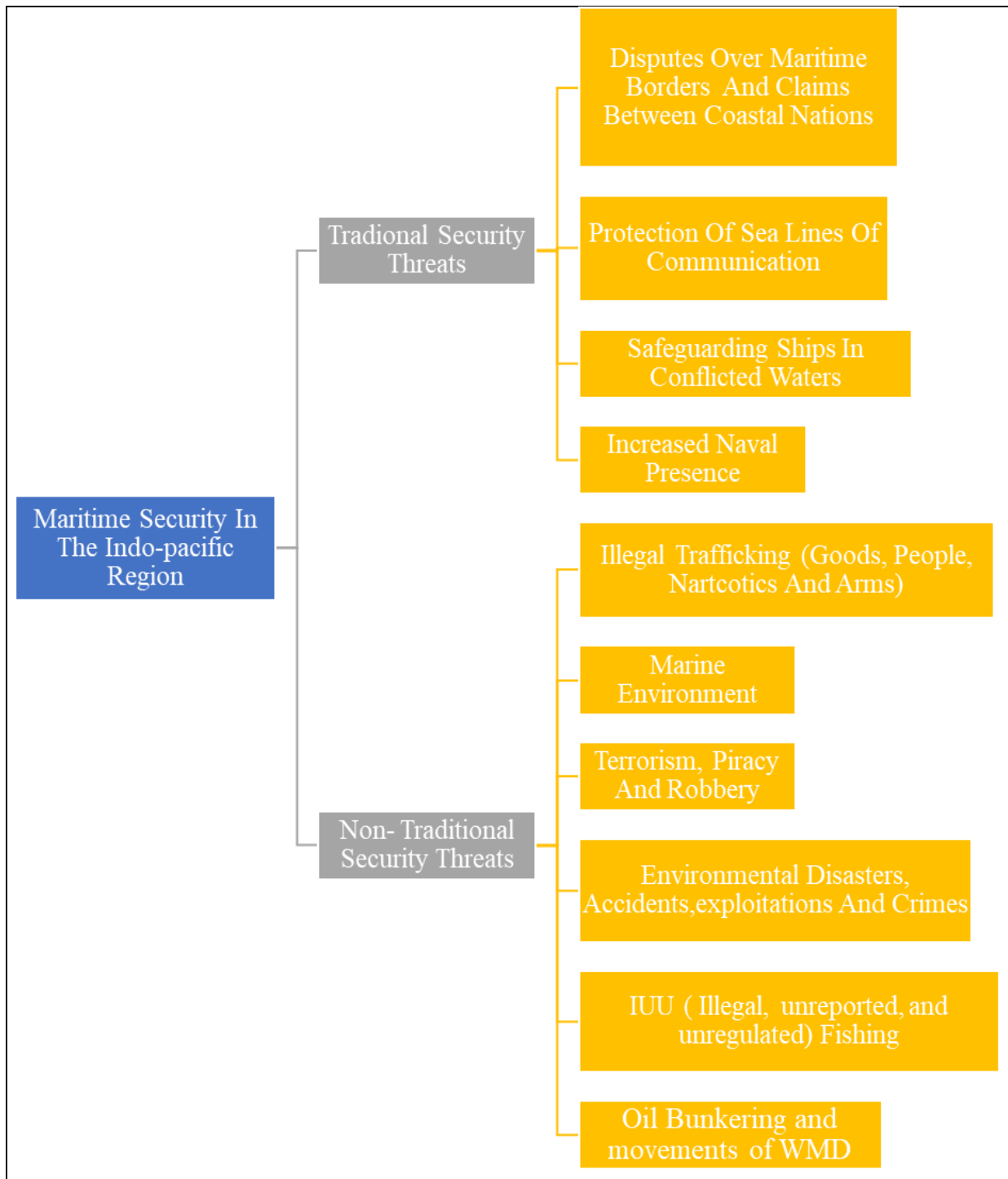


Figure1.5 Maritime Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

Source: By the Author

Thus, the Indo- Pacific region is witnessing a complex interplay among the politics of sea, geopolitics, geoeconomics, and the emerging security challenges where the countries have a vision for and committed towards securing a stable rule- based order in the Indo-Pacific.

1.6 Minilaterals in Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is the geo-political reality of maritime Asia. It both a construct and a geography that has come to define the contemporary 21st century geopolitics. As the countries in the maritime Asia are developing, they owe their economic growth to the growth of China. Countries of Southeast Asia, Australia and Japan have had deep economic linkages with China. Southeast Asian countries are well entrenched in the Chinese supply chains in the region. This complicated the regional geopolitics. On the one hand, countries were alarmed by Chinese territorial aggression, but on the other the economic dependency with China was too deep, or necessary for national development. This is the fundamental dynamic of Indo-Pacific today. The countries are in no position to make an either-or choice like the Cold War era. In fact, countries do not wish to be in that position. Additionally, India's rise as a rapidly developing economy and fourth largest military in the world could no more be ignored. Post 2014, the Indian foreign policy has been vigour wherein the prime minister was personally involved. India was willing to play its part, shoulder responsibilities in global affairs. The erstwhile traditional policy of reticence was seemingly discarded. A good example was renaming to 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East'-which not only indicated a greater resolve to be involved in the eastern neighbourhood, but also expanded engagement to Northeast-Asia. Secondly, increased energy dependency of East Asia-be it China, Japan and South Korea on West Asia has led to increased maritime movement through the Indian Ocean. This means that the Indian Ocean has become a lot more strategically significant than before. Thus, a combination of geopolitics of the Indian Ocean as well as strategic significance of India led to a shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo Pacific.

The idea of remaining non-aligned or autonomous is very strong in the Indo-Pacific. This notion is the most important variable whilst understanding mini-laterals in the Indo-Pacific. The notion of strategic autonomy is not merely a normative position but is the reality. A reality born out of contemporary globalisation whose rising tide has raised every country in the Indo-Pacific. It has also established complex network of interdependencies in the form of supply chains and financial markets. Today no country is in a place where it can claim self-sufficiency. The global centre of economic gravity is Asia and particularly China. When it comes to characterising Asian International relations, it is held that smaller nations do not want

Cold-War-type binaries. But it also holds true at systemic level. The US is heavily invested in China, so is Europe. Neither US nor Europe are interested in a confrontation with China. The discourse over Taiwan points at how China is probably testing US's resolve.

European countries and Asian countries like Japan have societies with large number of ageing population. They require investment which comes from China. In Southeast Asia, many countries are dependent on Chinese investment in their economy and infrastructure; and legitimacy of several states is contingent on their continued capacity to deliver prosperity to their citizens. Some seventy-two countries are signatories to the Belt and Road Initiative of President Xi Jinping. Due to these factors China has gained immense influence globally. It has carefully crafted its foreign policy to wield influence in places where Western world had placed sanctions for ideological reasons.

A simultaneous reality is that the US continues to be the top player in security affairs. It is still the highest spender on defence and has the largest naval and air wing in the world. There are no second thoughts about the importance of US to global security and same holds true in the Indo Pacific. South Asia or Southeast Asia has preferred US's predominance in security affairs. It would be no exaggeration to state that regional prosperity was enabled under American security cover. US ensured peace and stability for most part of Asia (maritime Asia to be specific). Despite China's growing and deepening influence, the importance to US's role in the Indo-Pacific has not diminished. In fact, in the last couple of years it has only increased.

To summarise, the contemporary geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific does not have any room for an iron curtain. Yet, the two great powers continue to compete in the Indo-Pacific. In order to deal with these dynamics, countries are increasingly emphasising their autonomy and it is in this context that mini laterals are to be understood. The second driver behind mini laterals is the limitation of existing regional security mechanisms. The multilateral structures in the Asia-Pacific provide limited role for India. The ASEAN has been under strain since 2012, and it has organic limitations to manage challenges such as South China Sea. Indonesia has grown to have wider interests where conduct only through ASEAN may prove inadequate.

Mini-laterals or trilaterals provide a way out of the aforesaid problems. First, it allows for flexible foreign policy. For instance, France or Indonesia are not part of the QUAD but have stake in Indo-Pacific security so these countries could engage with more than one QUAD members. Another example would be India and Japan engaging with Russia. One way in which countries are engaging is on the basis of a single or specific issues. For example, India has stated that its foreign policy is issue-based and that its strategic autonomy is to be understood in this light. In addition, minilaterals allow greater and more rapid strategic convergence Among the Indo-Pacific states. Satoru Nagao views these overlapping trilaterals as an emerging form of ‘mini-multilateralism’ and as a ‘new alliance system’ for the region (*Nagao, 2015; the author’s interview with Dr. Nagao*).

The Indo-Pacific construct represents needs-based, practical endeavours focused on shared values and common interests. At a practical level, trilateral cooperation promotes greater intelligence sharing, interoperability and expands joint military exercises among the states from the bilateral to the minilateral level. The concept of minilateralism introduces ‘magic number’ problem solving, but also importantly allows a narrower convergence of political interests and common identity by member states. In addition, Sahashi’s ‘three-tier’ approach takes this analysis a step further, by highlighting how minilateralism represents an effective gap-filling exercise, in plugging inadequacies that exist between bilateral and multilateral institutions. Green’s ‘security triangles’ analysis contributes the notion that trilateralism not only fills the gap but does so in an efficacious manner, which builds the confidence of members but not at the expense of non-member states, lessening the security dilemma (*Brown, 2018*).

There is another perspective to the phenomenon of mini-laterals, (and this perspective is contrary to the first two drivers) and that is in the context of US’s ‘Hubs and Spokes’ strategy. During the tenure of Hillary Clinton, the State Department had designed its Rebalancing strategy on the concept of hub and spokes wherein the US is the hub, and it would engage its allies and partners to serve as spokes to maintain regional balance of power. This policy design was such because of the realisation in Washington that the US no longer has the resources to act unilaterally. It has therefore, cultivated relationships in Asia to this end. These trilateral arrangements are intended to supplement the traditional US bilateral alliance structure in a

context whereby member states regard extant multilateral security arrangements as either underdeveloped or unsuited to prosecuting their core security concerns. In what Silove (*Silove, 2016*) has described as ‘the pivot before the pivot’, the George W. Bush administration undertook a military-diplomatic reorientation towards the region in 2004 with the overriding purpose of pre-empting a concerted challenge from China for strategic superiority in Asia. A key component in this strategy was a decision by Washington to approve ‘unprecedented measures to lay the foundations of enhancing interoperability among its allies and partners in Asia by encouraging them to forge new formal security relationships with one another’ (*ibid*). In this context, minilateralism not only broadens the architecture by allowing Indo-Pacific states to effectively hedge and allow the USA to burden share, but it also stretches the effectiveness of Sino naval capacity. Patrick Cronin contends that the trilateral forms part of the US goal of increased burden sharing by bringing India into East Asia and Japan into the Indian Ocean and it does that at a very low cost to the United States (*Rogin, 2011*).

A few mini laterals in the Indo- Pacific are discussed as follows:

1. India-Japan-Australia

Japan, Australia, and India (also known as JAI) trilateral is the most recent and perhaps most important evolution in Indo-Pacific trilateralism which strikingly does not include the USA. This minilateral is born out of the growing convergence of the respective perspective on the Indo-Pacific. Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS) and India’s Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) are similar in essence. Australia-Japan-India grouping, Strategic cooperation between India, Japan and Australia goes back to the 2007 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, but after considerable protest from Beijing, the grouping was indefinitely shelved. In June 2015, high level foreign affairs officials from the three countries held the initial trilateral dialogue in New Delhi. The 2015 meeting focused on common concerns about regional maritime security, including freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and China’s island building, but also activity in the Indian Ocean and discussed the possibility of future joint exercises (*Hall, 2017*). Evidently, the focus was predominantly on China, whereby Australian official Peter Varghese claimed that ‘it’s the pace and the scale of China’s reclamation which is causing some anxiety in the region’ (*Haider, 2015*).

The three countries have shared commitment to peace, economic growth, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Individually Japan, Australia and India are invested in Southeast Asia to various degrees. Hence the joint statement upheld the principle of ASEAN centrality in management of regional political and security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. The three countries aim to cooperate to bolster maritime security and maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific. There is shared interest to work together in disaster relief. Terrorism is a major threat so the trilateral would also cooperate on counterterrorism. The joint statement vowed to fight terrorism in all its forms. The three have also agreed to cooperate in regional connectivity projects.

The underlying dynamic behind this trilateral is the US-China naval balance of power. US Navy number going down, and the navy is diffused while PLAN numbers are increasing and concentrated in Asia. Such trilaterals are a way for the US to 'let' its partners and allies take a lead in managing regional security wherein each has strength in capacity building in Southeast Asia; be it Japan's anti-piracy operations, India's submarine training in Vietnam, Australian's training of special forces and UNPKF of Vietnam, etc. The three have their respective influence in the region, particularly in the South-Pacific. Lang argues that while the three nations already have many good reasons to cooperate, a coalition of like-minded Asia-Pacific maritime democracies would also act as a balance against China, further complicate China's strategic calculus and encourage Beijing to engage as a responsible stakeholder in the stable and open regional order' (*Lang, 2015*).

In 2020 the three countries launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) in order to reduce dependency on Chinese supply chains. The SCRI is a welcome project and much needed as well but doubts remain on its viability as well as its execution.

Whilst interests align in the India-Japan-Australia grouping, there has been a relative lack of action on the practical level in comparison to the other trilateral initiatives. Lang further argues that 'military-to-military contacts are a practical and tangible trilateral pursuit [and] given their strategic maritime locations across the Asia- Pacific, cooperation between

Australia, Japan and India should focus on exercises at sea between the RAN, the Japan Maritime Self-Défense Force (JMSDF) and the Indian Navy (IN)' (*ibid*).

2. India-France-Australia:

Indian Ocean is the area of common concern and so Western Pacific. France has territories in the Western Pacific, this region is Australia's immediate neighbourhood, and the islands states like Fiji have Indian Diaspora. India has been increasing its engagement in the Western Pacific. The possibility of this trilateral was mentioned during a bilateral meeting between India and France. In September 2020 the foreign secretaries of the three countries met. The main focus is likely to be maritime security specifically aiming at inter-operability and pooling of assets. This become important because both France and Australia have smaller navies, whereas India has numbers, but it is suffice to protect the homeland. Pooling of resources will ensure regular naval presence across the Indo-Pacific. The three countries have sought cooperation in blue economy, HADR efforts, protection of maritime commons, combating illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing. Multilateralism is a common foreign policy theme amongst the three, hence it would cooperate in multilateral fora. The three Are expected to coordinate and collaborate their policies when it comes to ASEAN and the IORA. One thing to note is that interoperability and maritime security was mentioned in the Indian statement while the Australian statement had no mention, and the focus was more on economic recovery, multilateral cooperation, and prosperous and inclusive Indo- Pacific.

3. India-Australia-Indonesia:

The idea of this trilateral had been proposed for a few years. The first Track II was held in 2013. The fundamental focus area from the Track II suggested was the IORA and specifically work to strengthen HADR in the Indian Ocean region. This holds true because the three countries are important countries of the Indian Ocean- India is of course located at the apex in the Indian Ocean, and Indonesia's major cities and economic centres face the Indian Ocean. The entire western side of Australia faces the Indian Ocean though its economic activities and

population is concentrated toward the Pacific face. But the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean is no less for Australia.

The first official meeting took place in 2017 where the three sides discussed meeting to discuss a shared vision for an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and explored ways to achieve common goals & build habits of cooperation in the region including protection and promotion of rules-based order in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, improving connectivity & economic cooperation, combating terrorism and trans-national organised crime & cooperation in disaster-management. The trilateral complements the work the three countries do in IORA and EAS. The meeting next year (i.e., in the year 2018) aimed at consolidation of relations amongst the three countries as three major democracies and maritime powers of the Indo-Pacific. There was discussion on emerging regional dynamics, explore opportunities to improve maritime security, respond to humanitarian disasters and strengthen democratic institutions.

The meeting held in 2019 wherein discussion on respective foreign policies, counter-terrorism efforts, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific, India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative, (IPOI) Developments in the Indo Pacific and regional forums, and development assistance programme and maritime issues and HADR efforts took place. In 2019 the three navies came together for a naval trilateral workshop. The three countries have a great deal of potential to work on blue economy and marine ecological issues. They can also work together to strengthen respective maritime industries.

5. India-Japan-France:

Indian external affairs minister, Dr. Jaishanakar described these three countries as key pillars of the Indo-Pacific and India's IPOI and Japan's FOIPS are complementary, and France bilateral relation have maritime security as its core. The common focus area for the three countries is the Indian Ocean, specifically the Western Indian Ocean. France has its overseas territories in this region and also military presence in Djibouti. Japan's energy imports are

thought the Indian Ocean which makes this region a legitimate security interest. India's interests are well known, ranging from energy security, its diaspora in West Asia, and its fight against terrorism. Besides, the three countries have interests in Africa too, and each country has been involved in Africa in individual capacity. India and Japan have been trying to collaborate in Africa through the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) but that has not taken off. It is highly probable that the trilateral would want to focus on Africa-from an economic point of view, but also in the context of increasing Chinese influence in the continent. Eastern Africa is critical from the perspective of maritime security. From the Indian perspective this trilateral should work to realise the IPOI by focusing on a rule- based order and comprehensive maritime security.

6. USA-Japan-India:

This trilateral has been around for a long time. The three navies have been conducting Exercise Malabar since 2007. Maritime security has always been the common interest. The three countries have common interest in freedom of navigation, and respect for international law. There is agreement that regional disputes should be peacefully resolved. This trilateral has become to be significant ever since China's BRI. The BRI is a major concern for the three countries. It is held that Japan, with its long experience at developmental assistance, can provide an alternative to the BRI.

The second Indo-Pacific trilateral dialogue to develop was the US-Japan-India grouping. In December 2011, the three states held their first official trilateral meeting at the U.S. State Department, in what has eventually become an increasingly robust trilateral dialogue (*Rogin,2011*). In September 2015, the trilateral was upgraded from the official to the political, when John Kerry hosted the inaugural US-Japan-India Trilateral Ministerial dialogue. The meeting highlighted the growing convergence of their interests in the Indo-Pacific and also underscored the importance of international law, peaceful settlement of disputes, freedom of navigation and unimpeded lawful commerce in the region (*United States, Department of State, 2015*). Whilst this trilateral has encouraged greater strategic convergence between the three maritime states, the role of the Japanese as a trusted partner of both India and the USA, has

also generated closer bilateral strategic partnerships. Increased cooperation with Japan has now become a vital component in the rapidly evolving India-US bilateral relationship. Greater levels of strategic convergence, both in form of minilateralism and bilateralism between the three states, have transformed the extent of their military enmeshment in the Indo-Pacific.

The US-Japan-India trilateral dialogue has seen a significant increase in strategic policy coordination, but it has also witnessed greater levels of practical trilateral cooperation. By enhancing the political aspect of the trilateral, the practical relationship was also given a boost in 2015, with India's agreeance that Japan should be included as a permanent participant in the annual Malabar naval exercises (*Raghuvanshi, 2015*). The Indian decision to allow Japan into Malabar, significantly enhances India's leadership role in the region and assists in the evolution of the trilateral relationship (*ibid*). If the Indo-Pacific is conceived as a strategic arc that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans, then the practical use of maritime-based trilaterals can only assist in addressing issues of common interest. Miller argues that the US-Japan-India trilateral can be used as a regional bulwark that thwarts China's ambitions to control the maritime domain in East Asia and the Indian Ocean, with the grouping being significant because it helps to connect US alliances and partnerships in East Asia with a South Asian anchor in India (*Miller, 2016*). Taking all these factors into account, the three countries would explore avenues to improve connectivity in the Indo-Pacific.

1.7 Conclusion

A study of mini laterals or trilaterals offer interesting insights into the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. It also helps to analyse the undercurrents of regional dynamics. These mini-laterals arrangements offer flexibility to countries to engage with each other on specific issues, thus safeguarding their much-valued policy of strategic autonomy. At a systemic level such engagement preserves and strengthen multilateralism. The US-China competition or potential conflict would have destabilising effect on the world. In this context, such mini laterals prevent binary choices, and has come to be a tool of aggregate strength. Specifically, from India's point of view, these engagements are in tune with its issue-based engagement approach to foreign policy. This would also help India to carve a space for itself. A cooperative approach is

imperative for regional stability and specifically in the maritime domain, where no country can secure the length and breadth of the vast maritime space of the Indo-Pacific. The focus areas of these mini-laterals serve very well with US's security interests in the Indo-Pacific. The following chapters would delve deep into India, Japan, and the USA minilateral and their trilateral relationship in the Indo-Pacific region.