

1. Introduction

A new chapter in global politics on Indo-Pacific has broadened the scope and contours of the existing Asia-Pacific matrix. Indo-Pacific has become the new way to look at maritime Asia, where an active geographical regional construct characterized by myriad of security risks meets competitive strategic political actors such as Australia, China, India, Japan, and the United States – who are the central players in this region. Adding to the primacy of the region is the growing importance of the Indian Ocean as a geopolitical and geo-economic nerve centre. The reality of the Indo-Pacific involves the intersecting interests of at least four major powers— India, Japan, United States and China—as well as many significant middle players including Australia, South Korea, the Southeast Asian countries, and more distant stakeholders such as countries from Europe and Russia.

The region is undergoing significant structural changes as particularly revealed in the relative decline of the US hegemonic influence in Asia, the growing strategic profile of China, India, Japan and other key regional actors and the emerging traditional and non-traditional security challenges. China's unilateral strategic moves in the South and East China Sea, have been a great concern among the neighbouring countries as well as the international community at large and affecting the strategic balance in the region.

With global shipping, energy resources and fisheries burgeoning into multibillion industries, the need for protection of maritime supply chains, global trade and energy flows and marine environment has been instrumental in raising maritime security objectives to the top of the security agenda of India, US, and Japan. As the home to maritime highways of global trade and energy, the Indo-Pacific region constitutes the primordial artery carrying oil from the Persian Gulf out to power the engines of the global economy. This in turn explains the myriad of emerging strategic dynamics in the Indo- Pacific Theatre.

Besides the threat of growing piracy, the security of these sea routes is important as the two important maritime choke points- Bal al Mandeb and the Malacca Strait are located on the either side of the Indo-Pacific. The region is located at the cusp of anarchy, competition, and inter-dependence all at the same time and has emerged as a centre of power politics due to its geopolitical and geostrategic significance. The region has been witnessing and characterized

by both cooperation and competition among the major powers. Meanwhile economic growth is conspicuously transforming the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, an open, free, and peaceful Indo-Pacific anchored on a rule-based order remains the desired goal.

The focus of this thesis is on the strategic context in which USA, Japan and India relations are gaining significant momentum and evaluates how congruence of strategic interests is shaping the contours of USA-India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific Region. The convergence of India, Japan and USA relationship in the Indo-Pacific fosters trust and confidence to promote a free, open, rules-based, and inclusive order. Japan, the United States, and India are partners in the Indo-Pacific that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. This thesis has examined the India, Japan and USA relation designed as a strategic partnership – a new form of security alignment that does not qualify as an alliance at this juncture. The study finds that the US-Japan-India trilateral look at ways to transcend traditional security cooperation.

This thesis assesses the maritime minilateralism between Japan, India, and the United States and critically examines its efficacy and sustainability to be the net security provider for the Indo-Pacific region. The thesis explores how the Indo-Pacific concept has developed in tandem with a transformation in the regional security architecture in the maritime Asia and facilitates the twenty-first century maritime security cooperation characterized by a range of dualities the reconciliation of contrasting aspects within one idea.

The thesis posits that managing a trilateral relationship will be a complex process. There will rarely be total uniformity of interests on any issue amongst all three partners, and this holds true for the US-Japan-India trilateral. There are different drivers — combinations of interests, values, identity — behind each state's actions in the region. But all three share a vision for security and prosperity for Indo-Pacific and beyond. An anti-China coalition cannot drive US, Japan, and India cooperation. The thesis identifies that the three countries have many shared interests and reasons to cooperate. Pragmatic pursuit of shared interests, economic connectivity that does not translate interdependence into one country's exploitation; rules and respect for sovereignty; the avoidance of force or coercion in resolving international differences, undergirded by realistic expectations of what their trilateral cooperation can accomplish.

The first part of the thesis examines the entire range of convergence of strategic interests between India, Japan, and USA. Subsequently, it looks at how continental China contested the term Indo-Pacific. China may not necessarily like the term Indo-Pacific, but a glance at a map shows that the geography of its so-called Maritime Silk Road policy, part of the wider Belt and Road Initiative, is the Indo-Pacific with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, as China militarizes artificial islands in the South China Sea, both commercial and military fleets from across the globe exercise their international legal rights by traversing this shared highway at the heart of the Indo-Pacific. A long game is unfolding in the region, with variants of the Indo-Pacific idea now being unfurled to contest the China-centric geo-economic and strategic narrative of Belt Road Initiative.

A. Statement of Problem

The Indo-Pacific regional geopolitical landscape is in a state of dramatic flux and undergoing unprecedented transformation which indicates that this maritime space is no longer considered as a backwater in global politics but is assuming a critical importance in the economic and geopolitical configurations of both the littoral states and world powers. The emerging geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific region depicts a complex interplay of several factors: ranging from the unique geography of the region, an abundance of strategically important natural resources, the growing presence of extra-regional powers to emerging security challenges. The shifting geopolitical dynamics coupled with commonalities in the interests in the Indo-Pacific has been identified as transforming the region into an arena of re-oriented strategic disposition for the littoral states and the global powers including India, Japan, and USA. In this changing Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape, a convergence of New Delhi's Act East Policy (AEP), Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Tokyo's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP) could be perceived in the expanding trilateral framework of cooperation. A major development in the emerging India-US-Japan trilateral relations is their growing strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region which is home to critical maritime routes of global trade and energy flows. On the other hand, China has made significant advances in the region, facilitated by BRI. The Indo-Pacific is emerging as key theatre for strategic and economic competition as well as regional engagement.

In this context, this research study has focused on undertaking an in-depth analysis of the complex variables vis-à-vis the expanding strategic engagement between India, the US and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. It has examined why and how the trilateral relationship has evolved since the initiation of the trilateral dialogue, within the timeframe 2010-2019.

B. Review of the existing literature

The Indo-Pacific region has gained geostrategic and geopolitical significance due to its volatile cartographic location in the maritime theatre. The region has been a spectator to building up new partnerships among the maritime nations due to their convergence of interests in the economic, strategic, and maritime spheres. Though ample literature is available on the different traditional and non-traditional security issues in the Indo-Pacific region, very few focus on India, Japan, and the USA minilateralism. The literatures focussed on the two major themes that are interconnected with each other- the geopolitical issues in the Indo-Pacific region and the amalgamation of maritime interests among India, Japan, and the USA in the Indo-Pacific region.

Rory Medcalf, prolific scholar and one of the chief protagonists in Indo-Pacific studies, in his scholarly works: *'The Western Indo-Pacific: India, China, and the Terms of Engagement. Asia Policy, Volume 22, 61-68, (2016), "China and the Indo-Pacific: Multipolarity, Solidarity and Strategic Patience', Paper delivered for Grands Enjeux Stratégiques Contemporains – Chaire en Sorbonne Université Paris March 12, 2018, 'Responding to Indo-Pacific rivalry: Australia, India and middle power coalitions', Rory Medcalf and C. Raja Mohan, Lowy Institute for International Policy, August 2014, 'Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance', Essay in Asia Policy, National Bureau of Asian Research, July 30, 2019;* in all these articles Medcalf discusses the geopolitical shift in the Indo-Pacific region and the relative decline of the US influence in the region. He discusses and considers this region as a mental map and explains the rise of the strategic story of the 'Indian' part of Indo-Pacific. He argues that the Indo-Pacific is a region where China is the architect as well as influencer of Indo-Pacific and the USA is a follower rather than a leader in the region. China's exertion of authority over areas of maritime interest is mostly through indirect means. He argues that it is the convergence of opportunities and interests in the larger canvas of Indo-Pacific that brings different like-minded potential partners and middle powers to play a vital role in the emerging

maritime security landscape. Medcalf views the Indo-Pacific through the realist balance of power terms.

Gurpreet Khurana first coined the term Indo-Pacific is another prolific scholar in Indo-Pacific issue areas. In his various scholarly works and presentations such as *The Indo-Pacific Region: The Emerging Geopolitical and Security Environment*, Dictus Publishing, January 25, 2018, 'The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and The Way Ahead', *Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies (JIORS)*, 2019, 'Maritime Security and Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region', *Artha-Journal of Social Sciences*, 2019, "What Is the Indo-Pacific? The New Geopolitics of the Asian-Centred Rim Land," in Axel Berkofsky and Sergio Miracola ISPI edited book, *Geopolitics by Other Means: The Indo-Pacific Reality*, 2019; discusses about the interests and approaches of key players and geopolitical dimension and imperatives in the region that form the emerging Indo-Pacific reality. Gurpreet Khurana has critically analysed the joint maritime security exercises undertaken by India-US-Japan in his various works. He has examined the maritime geography, the China factor, new and emerging security challenges which makes a case study of the drivers that examines the strategic convergence of shared interests of this trilateral- India, USA, and Japan.

Another great academician David Scott has been a prolific writer on Indo-Pacific. He has focussed on the country specific case studies with the view of balance of power and discourse analysis. In his writings- *China's Indo-Pacific strategy: the problems of success*, *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies*, 6.2, Summer/Fall 2019, 94-113. *The geoeconomics and geopolitics of Japan's "Indo-Pacific" strategy*, *Asian Security and International Affairs*, 6.2, August 2019, 136-161 *Naval deployments, exercises and the geometry of strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*, *Centre for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC)*, 8 July 2019; rep. as *Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*, *Australian Naval Institute (ANI)*, 14 July *India converges with the US on the Indo-Pacific, to delicately "constrain" China*, *China-India Brief*, 131, 23 Jan-15 Feb. 2019 *India's Indo-Pacific discourse*, in H. Pant, ed, *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy*, Nov. 2018, 195-214 *The Indo-P The US and India strengthen "Indo-Pacific" cooperation*, ditto, *Strategic Trend: Indo-Pacific (NDCF)*, Sept. 2018 *acific in US strategy: responding to power shifts*, *Rising Powers Quarterly*, 3.2, October 2018, 19-43 *Japan gathers allies in Indo-Pacific region to balance China's rise*, *Strategic Vision (TCSS)*, 7.37, April 2018, 4-9 *Chinese maritime strategy for the*

Indian Ocean, Centre for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), 28 Nov. 2017; rep. *Maritime Security Review*, Nov. 29, 2017; rep. *Australian Naval Institute*, 3 Dec. 2017; *The 'Indo-Pacific' – new regional formulations and new maritime frameworks for US-India strategic convergence*, *Asia-Pacific Review*, 19.2, Nov. 2012, 85-109; where he explored and analysed country specific case studies based on discourse analysis and predominantly through the realist balancing terms.

“U.S., India, Japan Begin to Shape New Order on Asia’s High Seas”, by Gordon Fairclough in the *Wall Street Journal*, discusses for a new Asian maritime-security order that unites democratic powers- India, USA, and Japan to contend with a more-assertive and well-armed China. Troy Lee-Brown in *‘Asia’s Security Triangles: Maritime Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific’*, *East Asia Volume 35*, (2018), argues that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ is utilised by Japan, India, and the USA to address deficiencies in Asia’s maritime security and institutional architecture. This maritime minilateralism has developed in tandem with the transformation in the regional security architecture in the Indo- Pacific. Purnendra Jain in *‘The Emerging Significance of Indo-Pacific: Japan, China US and The Regional Power’*, *East Asian Policy*, Volume 10, Issue 4, discusses about the role of major regional powers in the Indo Pacific and how are they contributing to the regional maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. In the CSIS report entitled *“The United States, Japan, and India: Toward New Trilateral Cooperation, issued by Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Washington DC, August 16, 2007*, looks into and investigates the trilateral/tripolar framework and captures an evolving trend of convergence in the strategic interests and the way forward for these three key Indo-Pacific players. Thomas F. Lynch III and James J. Przystup, National Défense University Press Washington, D.C. in *‘India-Japan Strategic Cooperation and Implications for U.S. Strategy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region’*, March 2017, assesses the growth of India-Japan strategic relationship and analyses this relationship’s importance to U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Gordon Fairclough in his article *‘U.S., India, Japan Begin to Shape New Order on Asia’s High Seas’*, in the *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 2016, examines the rise of a new Asian maritime-security order and argues that the changing geopolitical landscape is uniting the democratic powers- India, USA, and Japan to work together vis-à-vis shaping the emerging Asian security order with a view to cope with the military assertiveness and unilateral strategic moves of China.

Furthermore, Brendon J Canon and Ash Rossiter, in 'The *'Indo-Pacific: Regional Dynamics in the 21st Century's New Geopolitical Centre of Gravity'*, *Rising Powers Quarterly, Volume 3 Issue 2, 2018*, discusses how different countries use the Indo- Pacific to make their choices about the future global order. Tim Marshall in his book *Prisoners of Geography Ten Maps That Tell You Everything 2016*, in a very lucid language has given a detail description of the geopolitics of the 21st century and describes the advantages of favourable geographical circumstances shapes the destiny and determined the fate of the nations. Bredon J Canon and Ash Rossiter, in the "*'Indo-Pacific': Regional Dynamics in the 21st Century's New Geopolitical Centre of Gravity'*, *Rising Powers Quarterly, Vol 3 Issue 2, 2018*, discusses how different countries use the Indo- Pacific to make their choices about the future global order.

C. Research Gap

Within the wider context of the existing literature on the geopolitics of Indo-Pacific, regional maritime security and flourishing bilateral strategic partnerships involving functional agreements among the three countries this research has been contextualized in light of the onset of the twenty-first century which has seen a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific.

While there is a growing synergy and proximity between India, the US and Japan's foreign policy outlook vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region this research work has undertaken an in-depth study in examining the areas of divergences and challenges which could hinder the optimal growth of the trilateral relationship. While there is a large body of literature focusing on the growing proximity of these three Indo-Pacific powers, only fragmented work has been done focusing on the foreign policy divergences which have the potential to destabilise this trilateral relationship and hinder the growth of this minilateral into forging a comprehensive and sustainable regime of cooperation. This research has undertaken an in-depth and interdisciplinary study on the subject, thereby significantly contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the trilateral convergence in the broader Indo-Pacific framework. In this context the study considerably fills the gap in the existing literature.

D. Research Question

The primary questions that guided the research are:

1. What are the key factors that have shaped the convergence of the foreign policy approaches of the three states vis- a vis the Indo-Pacific region?
2. Is the India-US-Japan trilateral relationship focused on engaging with China or disengaging China from the Indo-Pacific region?
3. What are the strategic interests of the three states in the Indo-Pacific region and what are the areas of convergences, divergences, and challenges towards deepening the trilateral framework of cooperation?

The secondary research questions are as follows:

1. What are roles played by India, the US and Japan in the changing geopolitical power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Strategic Order?
2. Is Indo- Pacific largely a product of geopolitical imaginations about the perceived ‘rise of China’ -imaginations that are shared among some influential observers and practitioners, particularly in the USA, Japan, and India?

E. Significance of the study

A review of the extant literature on India-Japan-USA’s relation in Indo-Pacific indicates that deeper trilateral cooperation and more robust strategic conversations between Japan, India and USA could boost regional stability and benefit all three. While these nations have already engaged in preliminary trilateral dialogues and maritime exercises there is huge untapped potential to this partnership that is yet to be explored. This research assumes significance because it addresses these gaps and offers policy framework to elevate the trilateral relationship for a broader trilateral framework. It studies both the convergences and the divergences in this relationship which makes this study unique in this aspect. Given the regional uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific, and the limitations of existing institutions and partnerships, the researcher argues that stronger cooperation and alignment between the three countries could boost regional stability and provide strategic benefits for all three states. Although there have

been studies attempted to assess the future of the Indo-Pacific region, very few in any have focused explicitly on the actual and potential forces driving cooperation among India, Japan, and USA across the region from a primarily strategic perspective and their areas of divergences. This thesis would comprehensively fill the niche at a particularly opportune time when the region is on the cusp of unprecedented changes.

The significance and uniqueness of research lies in contributing to the literature an in-depth analytical study of India-US-Japan trilateral relations, the nature and scope of their strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and in particular study of the foreign policy divergences and challenges that have the potential to hinder the growth of the relationship and destabilize it. It has thus involved an in-depth study of the areas of convergences and as well as the divergences in this relationship.

F. Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical concept by focussing on the regional security complex and the hedging strategy as a realist understanding of the Indo-Pacific among India, Japan, and the USA. According to realism, the Indo-Pacific concept is mainly understood as a balancing strategy, which offers a strategic rationale for other states to form a military alliance against China's rise, especially in the maritime security domain. Based on liberalism, the Indo-Pacific can be seen as a new institutional setting, which aims to facilitate cooperation among states across the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. For constructivism, the concept of the Indo-Pacific is a new ideational construct based on shared values and a common identity in the region. As a balancing strategy, the realist understanding of the Indo-Pacific faces a dilemma of threat deficiency among member states, which precludes building a coherent and effective alliance among them against China's rise. As an institutional setting, the liberal face of the Indo-Pacific needs to address its weak economic and institutional foundations for successful cooperation across the two Oceans. Lastly, as an ideational construct, the constructivist underpinning of the Indo-Pacific on values and identities is also shaky in nature due to the decline of liberal values and democracy in the region (*He, 2018*).

Scholars in international relations have pointed out that the strategic anxiety caused by the rise of China is one of the main reasons for India, Japan, and the United States to promote

this new concept of the Indo-Pacific in regional security (*Pan, 2014*). The Indo-Pacific concept entails three realist justifications for the states of the region. First, the Indo-Pacific highlights the strategic importance of India in regional security. As a rising power India is a natural balancer against China (*Chacko, 2014; Ranjan, 2016; Scott, 2012*). India was excluded from the picture in the Asia Pacific as India was not the member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. But now the Indo-Pacific concept, offers a strategic opportunity for India to play a more important role in counter-balancing China's increasing power and influence in regional security. Green and Shearer pointed out in this regard that the rise of India is itself an inherently stabilizing development in the security order of Asia (*Green and Shearer, 2012*). To a certain extent, this realist face of the Indo-Pacific frames India as an important balancer against China in the future regional security architecture (*He, 2018*). To a certain extent, this realist face of the Indo-Pacific frames India as an important balancer against China in the future regional security architecture (*Medcalf, 2019*). The Indo-Pacific concept provides a strategic rationale or strategic space for a potential alliance formation beyond the US hub-and-spokes system. The rising influence of China in the Asia Pacific has caused strategic suspicions from other states, especially- India, Japan, and the United States. In its pivot or rebalance policy, the United States has strengthened its military cooperation with its traditional allies as well as other strategically important countries, especially India (*Manyin, Daggett, Dolven, Lawrence, Martin, O'Rourke, & Vaughn, 2012*).

Defensive realism is one of the structural realist theories that explains the manner in which the structure of the international system influences state behaviour (*Walt, 2005; Evera, 1999*). Defensive realism predicts that the anarchy of the international system causes states to become obsessed with security. In order to overcome the inevitable "security dilemma," states will try to preserve the balance of power and "maintain their position in the system," instead of gaining power through offensive actions (*Herz, 1950*). Moreover, great powers could avoid attempting to increase their power too greatly, because "excessive strength" may cause other states to form alliances against them, leaving them in a worse position than before (*Rabb and Rotberg, 1982*).

There are two ways in which states can balance power: internal balancing and external balancing. Internal balancing means that states grow their own capabilities by increasing their domestic sources of power, such as economic growth and/or increasing military spending.

External balancing occurs as states enter into alliances to check the power of more powerful states or alliances. According to defensive realism, should a state begin to create a power imbalance, other states should balance against this rising power by forming a counter-coalition and increasing their domestic sources of power. This also means that achieving a balance of power instead should be states' primary goal, instead of pursuing the maximization of power. "Band-wagoning" and other power-seeking policies increase instability, because they make the option of waging a preventive war more attractive, which is contradictory to the goal of security. States will seek power as a means to ensure their security through the balance of power-gaining power is not an end in itself (*Waltz, 1979*).

Offensive realism is another approach under the rubric of structural realism, one that is primarily associated with John Mearsheimer. It adopts the same structural formulation as does Waltz's defensive approach but draws different conclusions about state behaviour and international outcomes. Defensive realism claims that states are restrained in their pursuit of power, and they only seek power to the extent that it creates a balance. Offensive realism, on the other hand, claims that states are insatiable for power. As Mearsheimer puts it, "A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system," (*Mearsheimer, 2001*). In the offensive realist understanding, states do not believe that maintaining a balance of power alone will provide security, because states have the ability to attack each other. They have little proof of other states' benign intentions, and any state can cheat the system at any time. States are always potential dangers to each other. The only way for a state to maximize its security and therefore maximize its chance of survival is to maximize its power, since a powerful state is less likely to be attacked and more likely to win a war if it is attacked (*ibid.*)

The second theoretical analysis is the theory of regional security complex which had been sketched by Barry Buzan in its work *People, States and Fear* (*Buzan, 1983*). The very first definition by Barry Buzan and Ole Waiver for security complex was- "set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another". In 2003 this definition was revised by them in *Regions and Powers- The Structure of International Security* and was defined as - "regional security complex is a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritisation or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another" Barry Buzan and Ole Waiver argued in their

work that regional security complex theory has a significant importance in order to understand and analyse the international politics: “regional security complex theory (RSCT) enables one to understand this new structure and to evaluate the relative balance of power of, and mutual relationship within it between, regionalizing and globalizing trends” . By Securitization we mean ‘the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.’ Desecuritisation is defined as” the discursive process by which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as a threat.” By contrast, desecuritisation is the process by which those involved acknowledge that the threat is no longer an imminent reality and that it is an issue that can be dealt with within the ordinary framework of day-to-day politics. Buzan and Waever viewed the world as regional clusters, whereby security complexes are magnified within these clusters. They argued that the security complexes of states depend primarily on:

1. the pressures deriving from geographic proximity,
2. the interplay between the anarchic structure and
3. How balances of power play out in the system.

Buzan and Waever further clarify the central ideas of RSCT as follows:

“The central idea in RSCT is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, security interdependence is normally into regionally based clusters: security complexes. [...] Process of securitization and thus the degree of security interdependence are more intense between actors inside such complexes than they are between actors inside the complex and outside of it” A major benefit of RSCT is that it allows analysts to confront common conceptions and thus discuss security concerns between members of a given security complex – this dispels the overly generic assumptions of liberalism and realism (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998).

RSC theory provides a conceptual synergy of realism and social constructivism. It is based on realist arguments about power relations and social constructivism’s understanding of patterns of amity and enmity (Buzan & Waever 2003). RSC theory utilise neorealism bounded

territoriality and distribution of power but contradicts realism emphasis and global structure (*ibid*). According to it- security complexes are driven by pressure stemming from geographic proximity and the interaction between the anarchic global structure and regional balances of power (*ibid*).

From the above discussion it is clear that both mutual and rival interests can contribute towards the formation of such a region. Alongside its economic significance, the geopolitical importance of the region is also on the rise and has been instrumental in driving securitization activities in the Indo- Pacific region. This interlocking of interests has, in turn, escalated concerns over matters of security (both traditional and non-traditional) and led to the forging of new alliances among nations in the Indo- Pacific Region. The geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region is shifting the paradigm of power politics from Trans-Atlantic towards the Indo-Pacific region focusing on strategic and military alliances within the regional and global powers. The region is under the new emerging dynamics due to China's rapid rise since the last two decades. The Indo-Pacific countries are coming close to increase geostrategic proximity due to their maritime security concerns. The combined security framework among these countries in turn is redesigning the strategic security architecture in the region. Therefore, India, Japan, and the USA are playing a very effective role to design the new security architecture due to China 's antagonism nature in the region.

Finally, the scenario of the U.S., India and Japan coming closer in the Indo-Pacific Region could be explained by employing the theoretical concept of 'hedging,' which in International Relations literature, is embedded into the Balance of Power theory (*Jackson 2014, Lim and Cooper 2015, Kang 2007, Roy 2005, Goh 2005*). Traditional Balance of Power theory posits that balancing or bandwagoning dictate state behaviour. A balance of power system evolves in which states tend to balance their rivals domestically by acquiring greater military and economic power and/or by building alliances with stronger powers (*Waltz,1979*). Bandwagoning involves aligning with a rising or dominant state (*Walt, 1987*). Hedging refers to a national security or alignment strategy, undertaken by one state toward another, featuring a mix of cooperative and confrontational elements. It is often contrasted with balancing or bandwagoning, concepts developed during the Cold War era to depict the alternative strategies of resisting or accommodating a mighty or menacing great power. Theories about balancing and bandwagoning could not answer these questions convincingly, in part because they tended

to focus on how states respond to identified threats (*Walt, 1987; Lake, 1996*). The line between hedging and balancing behaviour has been particularly blurry. While some studies suggest that hedging and balancing are mutually exclusive, others suggest that balancing can constitute the military component of a broader hedging strategy that also features economic and diplomatic engagement.

Following the Cold War some states have endeavoured to gradually encourage the shift from a unipolar international system into one of multipolarity where they seek to enhance their influence whilst avoiding confrontation with a hegemon (*Layne, 1993*). Strategic hedging adds to the complexity by deepening and broadening the analysis of states to include both internal and external and hard and soft balancing whilst they still seek to avoid confrontation (*Salman and Geeraerts, 2015*). The use of hedging occurs at times of strategic uncertainty and power shift and should be viewed as located on a spectrum stretching from balancing to bandwagoning as a third strategic choice (*Koga, 2018*). Numerous studies present hedging as a mixed strategy in which a government engages toward a major or rising power both economically and diplomatically while adopting fallback security measures as a form of insurance (*Medeiros, 2005; Kuik, 2008; Tunsjo, 2017*). Others treat hedging as a security strategy adopted by small states or middle powers, often as they seek to navigate triangular relations with China (*Goh, 2005; Roy, 2005; Tessman, 2012*). Scholars focusing on alignment politics have also argued that states hedge in that context when they pursue limited or ambiguous alignment vis-à-vis one or more major powers (*Ciorciari, 2010; Lim and Cooper, 2015; Kuik, 2016*). A fourth way of conceptualizing hedging has seen scholars discuss how states address specific strategic and economic vulnerabilities, such as the danger of a curtailment of energy supplies (*Tessman and Wolfe, 2011; Tunsjo, 2013; Salman and Geeraerts, 2015*). Evelyn Goh, for instance, defines hedging as “a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies in) a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality” (*Goh, 2005*). States seek to “cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another” (*ibid*). Roy defined hedging as “keeping open more than one strategic option against the possibility of a future security threat” (*ibid*). A more detailed definition, by Cheng-Chwee Kuik, defines hedging as “a behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects under the situation of high-uncertainties and high-stakes” (*Kuik, 2008*).

David Lake, meanwhile, defines (*Lake, 1996*) hedging as “an insurance policy against opportunism” while Medeiros defines it as a “geopolitical insurance strategy” because it allows states to offset and reduce the scale of potential threats in their relations with both international and regional powers without confronting any of them (*Medeiros, 2005*). Similarly, Tessman and Wolfe define strategic hedging as an insurance policy that helps states guard against two possibilities: that relations between the hedging state and the system leader deteriorate to the point of a militarized crisis, and/or that the system leader will cease the provision of public goods that the hedging state currently enjoys (*Tessman and Wolfe, 2011*). However, by defining hedging as merely a response to the “system leader” by second-tier states (*Salman and Geeraerts, 2015*) in a unipolar system, Tessman and Wolfe’s theoretical exposition of hedging is too restrictive and narrow, hence missing a wide range of hedging behaviours under other conditions. Containment is not hedging, just as using force is not deterrence. Use of force is an option after deterrence fails. Similarly, containment is an option should hedging fail. Such a distinction is helpful for theoretical rigor as well as more rigorous strategic and policy analysis. This strategy allows states to utilize other instruments of statecraft, such as enmeshment, balancing, engagement, and restraining (*Alagöz, 2017*).

The basic motivation for “hedging” is to reduce the risks and uncertainties associated with a particular course of action—balancing or bandwagoning. Risk and uncertainty are inherently similar concepts: both are context-dependent and subjective. The major difference between them is the issue of probability: whereas risk involves a certain probability of negative consequences caused by a particular course of action, uncertainty is not a measurable concept (*Domingo, 2015*). Hedging can be conducted regardless of polarity and power status in the foreign policy dimension (*Walt, 1996*). While the conventional means of pursuing hedging involve economic bandwagoning and military balancing (*Kuik, 2008*), other methods can be used to conduct hedging through various combinations of economic and military balancing/bandwagoning.

There are six main patterns of hedging that can be identified as explained by Kei Koga (*Koga, 2018*). They are as follows:

1. Military Balancing / Economic Bandwagoning (Conventional Hedging).
2. Diplomatic Balancing / Economic Bandwagoning (Soft Hedging).

3. Military Bandwagoning / Economic Balancing (Economic Hedging).
4. Military Bandwagoning / Diplomatic Balancing (Security Hedging).
5. Economic Balancing / Diplomatic Bandwagoning (Diplomatic Hedging) and
6. Military Balancing / Diplomatic Bandwagoning (Politico-Military Hedging).

The Indo-Pacific region is a centre of gravity for the world's economic, political, and strategic interests. It is a home of world's most densely inhabited states, different forms of governance and includes over half of the world's population. It is also a theatre of great power politics, cooperation, competition, and rivalry. In this fluid and uncertain Indo-Pacific- security environment the strategies adopted by the regional actors are more complex than a simple choice between balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing refers to the state's behaviour that politically and militarily prevents a rising state from becoming a hegemon, whereas bandwagoning is state behaviour refers to allying with a source of threat. In traditional "balance of power" theory, these two types of behaviour dictate state behaviour, which is often difficult to identify because of the more complex state behaviour that exists in reality. However, three potential problems can distort this balancing function of Indo-Pacific dynamics. First, although India is rising, it still hesitates to formally balance against China as China has become India's largest trading partner in recent years (*He, 2018*). Secondly, the United States did not place a strategic priority on the Indian Ocean. Third, although, economic interdependence will not prevent military conflicts between states, the deepened economic ties between China and the trilaterals- India, Japan and the USA make it difficult to form an anti-China military alliance in the region (*Green and Shearer, 2012*). This has led to the development of several 'middling strategies,' one of which is concept of strategy strategic hedging, which sits between balancing and bandwagoning. The Indo-Pacific balancing landscape is coloured by a changing, more economically interdependent world, the lure of profitable engagement with Beijing, and the subdued threat perceptions of many of China's neighbours (*Smith, 2019*). Along with China's effective deployment of carrots and sticks, these factors have created disincentives to more traditional military coalition-building and to containment strategies of eras past, replaced by "softer" forms of balancing and institution-building (*ibid*).

The concept of "hedging" implies that a state spreads its risk by pursuing two opposite policies towards another state. A state prepares for the worst by balancing – maintaining a strong military, building, and strengthening security alliances and partnerships – while also

preparing for the best and engaging – building trade networks, increasing diplomatic links, and creating binding multilateral frameworks of cooperation (*Hemmings, 2013*). The root definition of hedging combines cooperation with competition. The complex Indo-Pacific geopolitical and geo-economic scenario is increasingly marked by security challenges to regional peace and stability, competition as well as growing economic interdependence and regional engagement. Established and emerging powers like the U.S., China, India, Japan, Australia, and the major Southeast Asian states are caught up in a complex web of deepening economic dependencies and growing security uncertainties. As foreign policy issues of states are increasingly multi-dimensional, states are incentivized to conform to multiple, sometimes competing hierarchies which equates to a hedge (*Jackson, 2014*). The strategic convergence of the U.S., India, and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region can be meaningfully analysed by drawing upon the theoretical concept of hedging which extends the logic of traditional balance of power theory for explaining a wider range of foreign policy behaviour of the states including cooperation and engagement while maintaining an emphasis on structural incentives. This will further ensure a cooperative engagement in the maritime dimension. It also becomes a vital bridge between the apex policymaking and the basic execution of a decisive transaction. Thus, in the Indo-Pacific region- India, Japan and the USA needs mutual cooperation for economic development and threat management.

In this scenario in a practical sense trilateral security framework have served as a diplomatic means of balancing China while falling short of military alliance that can upset Beijing. (*Koga, 2017*). This type of strategic hedging by India, Japan, and USA demands for regional security burden sharing. Strategic hedging makes sense for these three countries. It explains the present economic – security relationship between India, Japan, and USA on one hand and China on the other hand. All the three nations have utilised strategic hedging in the Indo-Pacific region due to multiple strategic dilemmas. Japan as a long alliance of USA since the second world war has strong economic links with China and rely heavily on trade with China (*ibid*). India's strategic autonomy has gradually been replaced by greater dependence on partner states through new strategic partnership and hedging (*Mishra and Das, 2019; Scott 2012*). India has been developing ties with Japan and the USA amid its problematic relationship with China. Thus, the states have been pursuing two contradictory policies of balancing and engagement simultaneously. They are preparing for the worst by balancing – maintaining a strong military, building, and strengthening ties – while also preparing for the best by engaging

i.e., by building trade networks, increasing diplomatic links, and creating binding multilateral frameworks with China.

G. Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research methodology involving case study approach to acquire the knowledge to understand the background behind the emerging maritime security architecture in the Indo- Pacific Region. The research involved in-depth investigation of knowledge through adopting the structured interview technique, text, and document analysis. The study also used the analytical method to analyse the geostrategic and geopolitical factors to understand the security architecture and events in the region. The analytical method helped to analyse the official documents and statements of experts and government sources. The research has been an empirical study based on content analysis and review of primary and secondary resources to understand the minilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

The primary sources of data collected involved using various governmental reports and official documents, statements, and structured interviews. The structured interviews have taken through email and telephonic recording sources to obtain the expert's views on the trilateral relationship within the broader Indo-Pacific regional security architecture. The following list of experts' interviews from various academic institutions is mentioned below.

1. Dr Gurpreet S Khurana, former Executive Director of National Maritime Foundation (NMF), New Delhi,
2. Dr. David Scott, ongoing presenter at the NATO Defence College (NDC) in Rome, and Indo-Pacific analyst for the NDC Foundation,
3. Prof. Sumit Ganguly, Rabindranath Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations and Professor of Political Science, Indiana University, Bloomington,
4. Prof Barry Buzan, Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and honorary professor at the University of Copenhagen and Jilin University,
5. Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus, and former Dean of the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government,

6. Rory Medcalf, Professor, and Head of the National Security College at the Australian National University,
7. David Shambaugh, Gaston Sigur Professor of Asian Studies, Political Science & International Affairs, and director of the China Policy Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, Washington DC,
8. Prof. Yamamoto Takehiko, Emeritus Professor, Graduate School of Political Science, Waseda University, Tokyo,
9. Prof. Yoshihide Soeya Faculty of Law of Keio University,
10. Horimoto Takenori, Visiting Professor, Gifu Women's University,
11. Sataro Nagao, Visiting Fellow at Hudson Institute, and
12. Dr Thomas S. Wilkins, Senior Research Fellow, Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA), Senior Lecturer, Department of Government & International Relations (GIR),

Along with these interviews of experts, the study has also used the other primary sources such as government reports, press releases, speeches and reports issued by the Government of India including the Ministry of Défense and the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the United States White House Official documents, defence white papers, joint declarations, joint statements, Maritime Doctrines and primary News Papers' cutting related to research that helped to understand the trilateral relationship in the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, the secondary data of study have been collected from published reference books, research articles from various research journals, e-journals, Magazines, News Paper's articles and online websites. The research has also accessed various working papers from various educational and research institutions such as Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, Observer Research Foundation, Indian Council of World Affairs, National Maritime Foundation, Carnegie Centre for International Peace, RAND Corporation, Chatham House, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Australian Défense Collage, Stimson Centre, and other Security Studies centres. Sincere attempt was made to achieve the fundamental objectives of the study through investigating and analysing the primary and secondary data to reach at a rational and unbiased outcome. Thus, the

researcher aimed for a detailed qualitative analysis validated by data which will be crisp yet concerning.

H. Research Objectives

The objective of this research lies in its two-pronged study. The thesis examines firstly the twenty-first century strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific as being the vital commercial artery of the geo-economics marked by comprehensive competition with elements of co-operation. Undoubtedly, the 21st century will pave the way for maritime context as the strategic focus for planning, cooperation, and competition among the littoral states in years to come.

The second objective of this thesis is to explore the trilateral -India, USA and Japan's strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific region and their China dilemma. All three democracies have elevated to 2+2 and ministerial-level dialogues and at the same time are exploring the dangers and openings that this oceanic super-area presents. Though the three nations have different interpretation of the Indo-Pacific still they have come together to navigate their common strategic interests. An India, Japan and USA axis can pave a concrete roadmap towards geostrategic roadmap to gain objectives of strategic triangle. The India-Japan-US trilateral is robust in character.

Thus, this research seeks to undertake an in-depth study of the trilateral cooperation among India, Japan, and USA with a particular focus on the growing strategic and maritime engagement that has evolved over the last decade. This thesis intends to outline a policy approach by India, US, and Japan towards a cooperative and consultative working framework to address common threats and challenges to regional peace and stability. The study has focused on the analysis of the trilateral relationship between India, US and Japan that has evolved over the last decade in the backdrop of the shifting geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region. For this purpose, the study has examined the three states' foreign policy approaches vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on their trilateral framework of cooperation.

This research thus:

- Examined the key drivers behind the growing increasing engagement among these three democracies,
- This study has assessed the challenges and opportunities that this trilateral face and,
- This research has critically examined and highlighted the strategic alignment and shared commonalities within this trilateral relationship as they navigate the challenging geostrategic 21st century Indo-Pacific region.

I. Hypotheses

The key hypotheses of the thesis are as follows:

1. The convergence of foreign policy approaches between India, the US and Japan vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region is conditioned by the region's shifting geopolitics.
2. India-US-Japan trilateral engagement is not solely focused on balancing vis-à-vis China's growing military assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region
3. All three- India, Japan and USA share a vision for security and prosperity for Indo-Pacific and beyond.

J. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study is also going to contribute in the larger academic and intellectual circle to understand the minitrilateralism among India, Japan and United states of America. It has examined both the converging as well as the diverging factors among these three countries within the broader Indo-Pacific Region. In terms of policy making process, this research would be helpful as its significance due to the dynamic and evolving nature of the Indo-Pacific region. It would help the policy makers to understand and explore the maritime interests and the areas of divergences in the Indo-Pacific region. This study is also going to contribute in the larger academic and intellectual circle to understand the minitrilateralism among India, Japan, and USA. The research would also make substantive contribution toward understanding the maritime security.

The research is based on the present premises which can change in the future due to change in the evolving geostrategic power politics within the region. Another limitation of the study would be in the aspect of procuring data in course of the research interviews with the diplomatic personnel and naval officers engaged in the foreign policy establishment as their responses are likely to be guarded.

K. Organization of Chapters

The thesis is divided into six chapters and offers a more holistic understanding when read in continuation.

The first chapter examines the rise of Indo – Pacific- mental cartographic concept. The Indo Pacific construct, as a mental map, signifies the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Ocean. provides a comprehensive overview of the geographical region of Indo-Pacific and the evolution from Asia- Pacific to Indo-Pacific. It examines the geophysical attributes of the region and its geostrategic and geopolitical importance in the 21st century. Furthermore, it provides a detailed discussion and in-depth analysis on the security imperatives in the region. The chapter investigates the diversity and complexity anchored in geographical determinism. It examines the interplay of the forces of geopolitics and geo-economics in the region. The chapter also situates the India-US-Japan trilateral relationship in the Indo-Pacific strategic map.

Chapter 2 studies the imperatives and drivers of the trilateral. It examines foreign policies of India, Japan, and USA vis- a -vis the Indo-Pacific. This chapter is divided into two parts- the first part studies the bilateral relationship among these three nations. It studies how the bilateral relations has evolved in the post-Cold War era which has been the foundation for the building of the trilateral relationship. The second part studies how these three nations perceive the Indo-Pacific region. It also studies the geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific for the three countries and their strategic involvement in the region.

Chapter 3 focuses on examining and providing an assessment of China’s growing military assertiveness and unilateral strategic moves in the Indo-Pacific region which is a cause of common strategic concern for India, Japan, and the US. Beijing’s rapid military build-up,

coupled with its aggressive diplomacy and behaviour in territorial, diplomatic, and economic disputes with its neighbours, is widely perceived as an expression of Chinese assertiveness. This chapter also analyses whether these activities increase China's influence in the region as a part of its grand strategy of building a Sino-centric regional order in Asia facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative. The chapter also examines China's perception on the Indo-Pacific ideational construct and its reluctance to identify itself as part of the Indo-Pacific. It examines whether the India-US-Japan trilateral engagement is solely a balancing act vis-à-vis China.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on the emerging dynamics of India-US-Japan Convergence in the Indo-Pacific Theatre and divergences in the trilateral relations. It studies the strategic context in which the India-US-Japan relationship is gaining significant momentum and evaluates how congruence of strategic interests is shaping the contours of USA-India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific Region. The chapter argues that mini-laterals arrangements including the India-US-Japan trilateral offer flexibility to countries to engage with each other on specific issues -the issue of promoting a rule-based order. This chapter also studies and analyses the issue of maritime security engagement between the three states in the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 5 examines the enduring constraints in the India-US-Japan trilateral relationship. It also examines why the trilateral relationship among Washington, Tokyo, and New Delhi are paying increasing attention to the issue of promoting a rule based regional order and identifies how the evolution of US-Japan-India relations has and will continue to impact the larger debate over regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. This chapter elucidates the importance of the divergences among trilateral partners which is critically significant in the calculus India- US-Japan relationship.

The last chapter provides an overall assessment and key research findings and concludes by offering policy recommendations.