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EMERGENCE OF THE INDO –PACIFIC: GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Abstract

The post-Cold War era of multilateralism also witnessed dynamics of various forms of regional cooperation in global politics. Recent developments in international relations argued that geopolitical factors influence regional and global order. Theoretical approaches of regionalism focus on the perspectives of interstate institution building in international relations. Regionalism has become an important component of academic as well as policy debates in global politics. Redefinition of regionalism, trans-regionalism and new regionalism has become the dominating trend in the 21st century. Regional cooperation is one of the ways States achieve their national interests.

The idea of regional cooperation and integration used to be dominated by geopolitics and political economy in international relations. The Indo-Pacific became the region of interest for great powers in international politics. The idea of the Indo Pacific landscape is a very vast trend in the emerging new world order. The conceptual framework of Indo-Pacific was floated by the US to connect the Pacific and Indian Ocean in the context of regional cooperation with dynamic strategic visions.

Classical theories of international cooperation and integration are based upon rationalist and state-centered approach in global politics. Forming regional alliances to balance powerful States may threaten inside or outside the region. A rationalist approach of cooperation considers regionalism as a strategic response of States in the context of geopolitics. Mainstream theorists consider regional cooperation to advance the hegemon's interests and collective efforts. Managing economic interdependence and security threats provides the powerful accounts for engaging powerful States in regional institutional building. Global,

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local and indigenous factors drive the emergence of regional cooperation and also shape institutional design in international relations.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics, International Relations, Regional Cooperation.

I. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific framework signals a re-mapping of geopolitical space and strategic power interests in the context of hegemonic perspectives in international relations. The worldview has transformed from the Euro-Atlantic dimension to the Indo-Pacific in the context of the emergence of a new geo strategic calculation in international relations. It has become a crucial focal point for major powers after the Cold War. The Indo-Pacific is also the fastest growing powerhouse of the world. The dynamics of the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific region is very complex and evolving. It is a newly emerging region in world politics- In terms of cooperation and security. Shifting balance of power and the growing new dynamics of geopolitics accelerate the framework of Indo-Pacific in the new world order in the analytical framework of the 21st century.

The Indo-Pacific region has become a subject of popular discourse in the foreign policies of major powers of world politics in international relations. This regional framework matched the dynamics of multilateralism in the era of globalisation and also defined the framework of maritime geostrategic and geopolitical views of the region.

The Indo-Pacific has acknowledged the supremacy of nation-states in international relations. It has fundamental implications for stability, peace and for cooperation and is defined as state-centric cooperation and offers an opportunity for a global power base. (Doyle and Rumley 2019) Realists assume that the balance of power is the core for shaping the Indo-Pacific and maintaining order in global politics. It is shaping global and regional security and economic architecture in the 21st century and has been creating a web of cooperative relations with all stakeholders on the basis of mutual interests. In theoretical perspectives, Indo-Pacific regionalism is state-centric and state-interest oriented. It is also a product of mixed material realities and nation-state's perceptions of national interests.

The Indo-Pacific region is considered a shared ‘Oceanic Neighbourhood’ in the context of grand ‘Oceanic’ regionalism in international relations. It is not only about the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is a confluence of two great and geo-oceanic systems in international relations. It is also about land associated directly or indirectly in the Indo-Pacific region in the dynamics of security, cultures and trades. It enjoys similar fashionable positions in geostrategic circles in international relations and also represents regional security complex in world politics. (Doyle and Rumley 2019)

The Indo-Pacific region is also a critical area for regional and global security including territorial disputes, piracy, terrorism, cyber threats, and non-traditional security threats such as climate change, environmental degradation, and ocean acidification, etc. Growing China and its expansionist strategic approach has become a threat to the countries of the Indo-Pacific as well as to the common interests of India, Japan, Australia and the US.

In the context of theories of international relations, the Indo-Pacific explains the balancing of powers against China in a new global order. It also provides an opportunity to India and its strategic importance in regional cooperation with major powers of world politics now. It offers a new frame for strategic balance for India against the Chinese in the 21st century. China is now a potential threat to the national interests of India, US, Japan and the ASEAN countries in the Indo-Pacific. (Kai 2018) It will also redefine-the patterns of cooperation and conflict between China and other dominant actors of the Indo-Pacific region.

Some scholars argue different interpretations of the Indo-Pacific in the context of world views. US policymakers consider it as a new American geopolitical perspective view of Asia. India considers this region as an inclusive, open, integrated, balanced space and a rule-based order. The ASEAN states look at Indo-Pacific as a consociational model for regional cooperation. We can say most of the stakeholders stand for a free, open and inclusive region in the multipolar world order. It is also a space for open markets and investment in the era of globalisation. Geographical inclusiveness is also an important dynamics of the Indo-Pacific architecture. (Prakash 2022)

The Indo-Pacific is highly exposed to climate change driven hazards, including extreme hydrometeorological and heat events, sea level rise, and an acidifying ocean. The growing geo-strategic rivalries including maritime boundary disputes, military build-up in contested zones of South China Sea, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from North Korea, transnational crimes, and Climate-Change exacerbated impacts such as food and water insecurity, forced migration, economy and energy security will lead the future conflicts in this region. (IMCCS 2020)

In the context of geopolitical dynamics, the Indo-Pacific has given rise to geopolitical competition, including tension around contested territories and maritime zones. There has been a significant military build-up by China, and a significant presence of military force has been increasing tensions in regional hotspots including in the South China Sea, East China Sea and in the Taiwan Strait which may have a direct impact and implications on regional and global security and prosperity.

The Post-Cold War era of multilateralism also witnessed dynamics of various forms of regional cooperation in global politics. Recent developments in international relations argued the geopolitical factor influencing regional and global order. Theoretical approaches of regionalism focus on the perspectives as interstate institution building in international relations.

The Indo-Pacific alliances explored different strategic pathways to meet the future challenges in this region. These alliances also redefined the future of a rule-based international order in global politics and will be a new models of transatlantic strategic cooperation in the sphere of diplomacy, economy and security in the era of multilateralism in international relations.

II. Geopolitical Context and Regionalism in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific landscape is a very vast maritime zone in the present context of the new world order in international relations. It is a maritime space stretching from East Asia and West Asia's littoral states, across the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean to East

Asian littoral states in the present geographical conditions. It consists of the Strait of Malaca, Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait routes which are very significant for global trade and is a vital source of natural resources and energy security. The South China Sea is also located in the central Indo-Pacific region, which indicates its growing strategic and economic significance in the new global order in post-Pandemic times.

Geopolitics defined the spatial dimension of political power in international relations. Regionalism explains envisioning the enlargement of a state's territorial power. Regionalism has become an important component for academic as well as policy debates in global politics. Redefinition of regionalism, trans-regionalism and new regionalism has become the dominating trend in the 21st century and regional cooperation is one of the ways in which states achieve their national interests.

The idea of regional cooperation and integration used to be dominated by geopolitics and political economy in international relations. The Indo-Pacific became the region of interest for great powers in international politics. The idea of the Indo Pacific landscape is a very vast trend in the emerging new world order.

Some scholars argue that geostrategic apprehensions of the hegemonic rise of China and its dream project "Belt Road Initiative" (BRI), US-China Trade war, Brexit, trade protectionism, growing nationalism, climate crisis and rise of China-India border disputes led to a comprehensive strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. (Bhoumik and Sohni Nayak 2022)

The Indo-Pacific defined the geographical region of 36 countries' regional framework cooperation in the prism of geopolitics and international relations today. It is a zone of eight fastest growing markets. The idea of Indo-Pacific revolves around the centrality of sea power and the strategic advantage of continental powers and the geostrategic reach in the era of new regionalism of international relations of global politics. (Plober 2022)

International thinker Mearsheimer pointed out that great powers which always aim to maximize their share of power are in constant competition with other powers contenders,

with the aim of maximising their own power in international relations. The great powers also worry about other states' capabilities and intentions in global politics.

The liberal theoretical perspectives of International Relations marked the Indo-Pacific as a new "institutional setting" facilitating cooperation among the States across the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Constructivism explained it as "Ideational Construct" for promoting value oriented and rule-based diplomacy in this regional cooperation. Realism considers it as "New Balancing Strategy" and "Strategic Anxiety" caused by the rise of China and common threats in this region. (Kai 2018)

It also links strategic theater in the multipolar world order after the Cold War in international relations. The Indo-Pacific is an interconnected space between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific in terms of geo spatiality. It is a new design of strategic geopolitical convergence in international relations after the Cold War era. In the realist perspective, the State is the primary actor, while Indo-Pacific is a State-led dominance of regionalism.

India, Japan and the US are concerned about the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific region. China warns the US of the new geopolitical framework to spark the new Cold War in international relations. The collective cooperation framework emerged in the New Delhi-Washington-Tokyo-Canberra-Brussels meet because the concerns of regional cooperation may change the dynamics of geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region and world views.

III. Dynamics of Maritime Security

Maritime security is one of the emerging dynamics of global security in the new world order. It has become a core concern for the major actors of international relations today. Many scholars have highlighted the strategic importance of seas in the age of globalisation under the maritime security studies of national security, policy and doctrinal publications. (Bueger and Edmunds 2017)

Maritime security is defined in the context of the territorial waters, regional seas, ports, and rivers along with marine environment, and national security. It is mainly concerned with piracy at sea, illegal immigration, weapon smuggling and also physical threats in maritime regions. It is also an important factor of national security of countries of the Indo-Pacific region. Maritime security interests defined the spheres of Sea Lines of Communication (SLPCs), maritime economy, transportation, investment, and also energy security in the economic world order.

Maritime security is a significant approach of the Indo-Pacific strategy of any states associated with it. Security at Sea has important dynamics of the Indo-Pacific with a prism of realist, liberal and critical security studies. We can analyse this with regional or global power supremacy with reference to the rise of China's naval power and the US as an Asian 'pivot'. The approach of investments in naval capabilities of emerging powers is also linked with resource competition in the context of the Indo-Pacific. The geopolitical framework and hard naval power priorities have structural influence on international order at sea. (Bueger and Edmunds 2017) The concept of maritime security at Indo-Pacific links with development, regional and global security and new world order.

Maritime space has become a major source of the blue economy. It is linked with economic development and commercial connectivity, infrastructure and also investments. A majority of trades conducted through sea routes also defined the commercial values of seas and oceans.

IV. Major Powers and Their Strategy in the Indo-Pacific

It was the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who revealed his strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific as a "Confluence of the Two Seas" during his speech in the Indian Parliament in August 2007. The new Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has proposed a new plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) in India in March 2023. (Hakata and Cannon 2023) He also referred to India as an indispensable partner for global responsibility in the Indo-Pacific.

India, US, Japan and Australia are the major players for promoting a “free and open” Indo-Pacific. It is a collective effort to redefine Asia as a strategic centre in the 21st century. The ASEAN is also a major regional organization for comprehensive cooperation in this region.

In the changing geopolitical landscape after the Cold War, the US and China have been attempting to alter the regional order for their own economic and security interests. China has been driving its own regional and global agenda through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) in the regional cooperation strategy while the US is engaging in rebalancing Asia through a new strategic design of the Indo-Pacific. The idea of “Indo-Pacific” is opposed by China, which it considers a containment policy against the rise of China.

Japan's official documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated the basic concept to realise Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). It stated that the region should be an “international public goods”, which can ensure a rule-based international order which is also inclusive and works in a transparent manner. Japan has advocated enhancing connectivity with ASEAN, etc. and between Asia and Africa through Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

An official document has stated that the Japanese vision is based on the following three pillars in the context of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Free and Open 2023):

- a) Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.
- b) Pursuit of Economic prosperity
- c) Commitment for Peace and Stability (capacity building on maritime law enforcement, Human Assistance /Disaster Response Cooperation, etc.)

Japan and Australia's security interests are forced to enhance partnership with the US and India in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan has planned to connect to the world through its "FOIP as a "shared vision" with EU and its States - UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherland, Japan-ASEAN/Mekong Countries, Japan-Pacific Island Countries, Japan-Canada, Japan-Australia-India-US and other regions also. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan's efforts 2023)

V. The US Strategy Framework

The US foreign policy has been focussed on a multiple approach system to connect the Indo-Pacific. The American administration has been committed to a free, open, connected, prosperous and secure environment for this region. It has been working with a broader strategic approach and a network of security alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific as it also considers the Indo-Pacific is an epicenter of the climate crisis.

The United States is considered an Indo-Pacific power. It is also assumed that the Indo-Pacific is very crucial for its security and prosperity in the present international situation. Many US administrative and policy makers supported the new initiative for the Indo-Pacific since the 9/11 terror attacks and the US President George W. Bush also designed a new framework to engage Japan, India and China in this. The Obama administration also went extra miles to ensure a comprehensive presence in the Indo-Pacific. (The Executive office of the President 2021)

The American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton referred to the "Indo-Pacific" in her article "America's Pacific Century" as a US strategic move for global partnership from Pacific to Indo-Pacific in 2010. The article clearly explained the strategic approach of foreign policy for the Indo-Pacific in future. (Kai 2018)

The Obama and Trump administrations also recognised the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific in their foreign policy framework. The Trump administration considered the Indo-Pacific as the global center of gravity in the 21st century. The US administration has been engaging politically, diplomatically, and strategically with countries of the Indo-Pacific and

the Biden administration too has been determined for a long term commitment to the Indo-Pacific. (The Executive office of the President 2021)

The US has major security, strategic and economic partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines and Thailand in this region after the Second World War. The US also promoted and supported the ASEAN for comprehensive trade, investment, freedom, promotion of democracy and human rights in its member states.

The American President Joe Biden pointed out recently that 21st century global politics is a grand struggle between democracy and autocracy and autocratic governments across the world. He highlighted, with reference to the US plan to build an alliance as a “democratic cooperative network” with Europe and Indo-pacific liberal democracies against rising China and its influence. (Grieco 2023)

The US administration has released many policy drafts for strategic consideration of the Indo-Pacific. It has been pursuing five objectives in its strategic interests in Indo-pacific (The Executive office of the President 2021):

- a) Advance a free and open Indo-Pacific,
- b) Build connections within and beyond the region
- c) Drive regional prosperity
- d) Bolster Indo-Pacific security
- e) Build regional resilience to transnational threats

The US has been focussed on building an alliance in the multidimensional approach, and a collective capacity for tackling emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The US is also

enhancing regional treaty alliances with the countries of the Indo-Pacific including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. Under the new strategic framework, it has been strengthening cooperation with leading regional partners including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Pacific Island. It has also built alliances under Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD comprising the US, Australia, Japan, and India) cooperation on climate change, global health, critical and emerging technology, cyber education, infrastructure, clean energy and also military ties in the Indo-Pacific. It has also been supporting the ASEAN in its efforts to deliver a sustainable solution to the regional challenges. (The Executive office of the President 2021

The US has also focused on helping its partners during the COVID19 pandemic and building resilience on the common threats in the Indo-Pacific. It has actively engaged with bilateral and multilateral cooperations with countries of the Indo-Pacific. The US has made joint efforts with many international organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO), G-7, G-20 and other multilateral fora which facilitate high standard infrastructures, improve supply chain, build digital connectivity, promote digital economy, and focus on health issues, sustainable developments, industrial initiatives, environmental security and also shared opportunities in this region.

The US administration has proposed to the Congress for funding the ‘Pacific Deterrence Initiative’ and ‘Maritime Security Initiatives’. It has also identified challenges under the AUKUS partnership and is also ready to deliver nuclear powered submarines to the Royal Australian Navy. In addition, it has concentrated on strategic initiatives for advanced capabilities including cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technology and mechanism for under-the-sea capabilities. Also, the US has promoted the “QUAD” to build a green shipping network and also coordinate the sharing of satellite data to improve maritime domain and climate response in this region. The US also announced QUAD fellowships to 100 students from all the four countries of QUAD to pursue higher education in STEM fields in the US from 2023. (The Executive office of the President 2021

VI. Chinese Strategy for the Indo-Pacific

China assumes that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ strategy is the new design of the China-US strategic competition in the geostrategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific region in the 21st century. China thinks that it is a plan to isolate China and balance its influence in this region. It is a counter policy against China’s ambitious ‘Belt and Road Initiatives’ (BRI) and especially its 21st century Maritime Silk Road. (Bo 2020)

Chinese Government officials and academics have started a debate over the ‘Indo-Pacific’ strategy of the US. It considers the US as a dominant actor in the Indo-Pacific region and suspects its strategic aims to contain the rise of China. China’s policies and its academic community have high interests in the framework of ‘Indo-Pacific’ after the Obama administration declared its blueprint for it. Chinese officials are assessing its nature, purpose, and its impact on China’s foreign policy and on its surrounding region.

China believes that the Indo-Pacific and the design of “QUAD” is a mechanism of beginning a new Cold War with China. Chinese scholars argued that BRI is an effective deterrent against the Indo-Pacific. We can say that China’s BRI is fundamentally different from the US Indo-Pacific strategy in normative orientations. China claimed that the US’s promotion of its own value through “Open and Free” policies and portraying China’s developmental model as “Neo-Imperialism” and “Neo-Colonialism”, are ways to damage China’s image and influence. (Bo 2020)

Some Chinese experts have claimed that the design of Indo-Pacific or Belt Road Initiative is the outcome of the perceptions of the security threats and economic interests under the ‘interests-threat nexus’ model in the changing dynamics of the order transition in Indo-Pacific. (Liu and Kai 2023) Historical issues, border disputes and strategic rivalries of rising China mainly with the US, Japan and India can change the dynamics of geopolitics and threat perceptions of China in this region. China has not engaged in any military conflict with other states after the Cold War. In the Chinese perspective, India’s growing security cooperation with the US, Japan and the ASEAN States may increase the threat perceptions of China towards India in the Indo-Pacific region. China is considered as a challenger of the existing

regional order and national security to the major players of the Indo-Pacific region in the present scenarios. (Liu and Kai 2023)

VII. India's Strategy for Indo-Pacific

New strategic realities forced India to enter the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century. India considers itself as a leading State of the grand strategic views of the Indo-Pacific in the present scenario of global politics. After the end of the Cold War India's 90% trade and its energy supplies are transported through the Indian Ocean and 50% of its trade is connected with the Indo-Pacific region. India's border and trade disputes with rising China are other major challenges for its security and economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region.

India's strategic vision of the Indo-Pacific is also based on the fundamentals of long term cooperation and collaboration along with enhancing its ties with countries of this region. It is based on (MEA 2020)

- a) India-ASEAN Relations
- b) India's participation in East Asia Summit (EAS)
- c) India's cooperation in Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
- d) Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM)
- e) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)
- f) Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)

India has outlined its blueprint for the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given crucial remarks on this issue during his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in June 2018.

Former Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh also referred to “Indo-Pacific” to define future strategic frame of foreign policy in his public speech in Japan in May 2013. (Kai 2018)

The Indo-Pacific global alliance offers India an opportunity for inclusive cooperation with major powers and also for using its strategic importance in regional cooperation for global partnership in the context of security and economics in the new world order. India has emerged as a counter balancer to the hegemonic rise of China and has been working on this issue with the ASEAN countries through different initiatives under the leadership of ASEAN since 1996.

The Indian Strategic Vision of Indo-Pacific is based on a free, open and inclusive order, respect for territorial integrity, respect for the sovereignty of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue, and adherence to international rules and laws. India’s inclusive vision of Indo-Pacific also includes respect for the rights to freedom of navigation, based on cooperation and collaboration and upon the principle of “ASEAN Centrality”. India also focuses on the need for shared responses to share challenges in this region. (MEA 2020)

India launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok (Thailand) on November 4, 2019. There are seven central pillars of the IPOI initiatives to enhance regional cooperation mechanism and focus Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Maritime Transport, Capacity Building, and Resources Sharing, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Science, Technology and Academic cooperation, and Trade Connectivity. (MEA 2020)

India organised the ‘Delhi Dialogue-XI’ with ASEAN members on the theme “Advancing partnership in the Indo-Pacific” along with the 6th Indian Ocean Dialogue with IORA

member states on the theme “Indo-Pacific: Re-Imaging the Indian Ocean through an Expanded Geography” in New Delhi on December 2019. (MEA 2020)

Later, in Chennai in February 2020, India hosted the 4th East Asia Summit (EAS) conference on Maritime Security Cooperation. This conference focussed on the maritime security, maritime safety, and framework of blue economy with participating countries of the Indo-Pacific. (MEA 2020)

In a similar fashion Australia and the European Union also initiated their Vision Document Policy in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

Australia has had mutual defence pacts with the US and has also been part of the US Security Alliance since 1951. Australia inked a security treaty with the US and New Zealand under ANZUS as well as the “Five Eye” signals intelligence sharing agreement with the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand. Australia also adopted a new security strategy recently under ‘AUKUS’ for security and technology partnership in the context of geopolitical change in the Indo-Pacific. It introduced its Government Policy White Paper “Australia in the Asian Century” in 2012 and also released its defence and foreign policy White Paper including ‘2016 Defence White Paper’(DWP), “The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” (FPWP), and the “2020 Defence Strategic Update”(DSU) in the context of its strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific, regional and global security. All White Papers indicate Australia's role and its strategic challenges and global engagements with major powers in international relations. Australia also joined the QUAD with the US, Japan, and India and assumed QUAD as a response to China’s growing power and assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific in recent years. (European Parliament research Services 2022)

The European Union relations with the Indo-Pacific are projected on the basis of historic, cultural and commercial links and decades of significant cooperation and assistance. The EU has bilateral Partnership Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with many Indo-Pacific states and also with the ASEAN. (European Commission 2021)

The rise of China and the reshaping of the world geopolitical map also forced the European Union's (EU) foreign policy to adopt a new official strategy in the context of development in the Indo-Pacific region. It introduced "Strategy for Indo-Pacific" in 2021 with the main objective of building partnerships for rule-based international order and also addressing the global challenges. It is part of the 'EU 2030' agenda. Europe and Indo-Pacific together account for 70% of global trade in goods and services and over 60% of FDI flows. The European Union thinks the condition of Climate Change in the Indo-Pacific will increase pressure on marine biodiversity, natural resources and also lead to changes in ecosystem dynamics. The EU vision is based on the principle of engagement and long term, human rights and democracy. The European Union Vision for Indo-Pacific is based on seven priorities in its principal approach (European Commission 2021):

- a) Sustainable and Inclusive Prosperity
- b) Green Transition
- c) Ocean Governance
- d) Digital Governance and Partnership
- e) Connectivity
- f) Security and Defence
- g) Human Security

The many important economies and powers like Canada, Singapore, Germany, Italy, etc. have been actively drafting their policy framework to engage in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific has been becoming the global center of economic dynamism and strategic challenges in world politics today. It will also define and shape the design of national security, economic prosperity, democratic values, public health, and environmental concerns of major powers of the world.

VIII. Economic, Energy and Trade Regionalisms in the Indo-Pacific

Economic cooperation and regional connectivity for enhancing trades is a key determinant for Indo-Pacific in the post Pandemic economic world order. Regional economic integration is one of the frontier objectives in the Indo-Pacific in the era of globalisation. It is one of the most effective approaches addressing regional challenges and increasing economic growth.

The Indo-Pacific has become the centre of gravity for international trade and commercial activities in the post Pandemic times. Multiple factors determine the prospects of regional economic cooperation in this strategic region today. This region also identifies as the faster growing region in the framework of internet adoption and digital connectivity. (Bhoumik and Nayak 2022)

Recently, US President Joe Biden initiated the “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework” (IPEF) in May 2023. It has broader views of economic integration with States of the Indo-Pacific including India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Indonesia, Republics of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. This US-led trade agreement focused on the inclusiveness, sustainability, economic growth, investment and advance link of supply chains and commercial activities. The 14 IPEF partner countries represent 40 percent of global GDP and 28 percent of global goods and services trades in the world economy. The IPEF is based mainly on four pillars – a) Trade, b) supply chain, c) decarbonisation and infrastructures and d) Tax and Anti-corruption. (Office of the US Trade Representative 2023)

The COVID19 Pandemic exposed the gaps in multilateral structures and institutions and also highlighted national capacities of each and every State in the world. Global economies facing recession due to the unexpected effects of the COVID19 Pandemic, the lack of natural resources and disruption of supply chains forced major powers to rebuild multi-alignment in the post Pandemic global order. It is another dimension for comprehensive cooperation under the Indo-Pacific trajectory.

Post Pandemic recovery of economies of the region may revitalize the tourism industries across the Indo-Pacific region. Collective efforts for economic development and resilient infrastructure and maintaining the Blue Economy will be critical for addressing the regional economic and security challenges.

In the frame of the Paris Agreement, clean energy, decarbonisation and infrastructure are the main pillars to provide technical assistance and also to help mobilise finance, and enhance connectivity in the region. The framework of the supply chain resilience, also aspires to secure access to important raw and processed materials, semiconductors, critical minerals and clean energy technology to ensure business continuity. (The Hindu 2023)

India also agreed to the terms and conditions of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). It called for a collective desire and efforts to make the Indo-Pacific region an engine of global economy growth. (The Hindu 2023)

IX. The Climate Challenges in the Indo-Pacific

Climate Change is interlinked to broader ecological change which impacts health and sanitation with consequences for both regional and global security. The region is the most populous region on the planet and also most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. (Asia Society 2023) Its ecosystem is at risk from climate change and environmental challenges. It has emerged as a center of risk of disasters and serious effects of climate change.

There are more than 15 states which can be considered high risk States in terms of environmental degradation and oceanic challenges. Australia is working together with other Indo-Pacific States to reduce the risk of disaster under the agenda of sustainable development. It is leading an integrated programme in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, and also regions across the Pacific and is also working and supporting innovative solutions to climate change. (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2023)

The major states of the Indo-Pacific initiated global efforts to support climate action and regional impacts of Climate Change under the idea of regional cooperation, which need financial and technical support for existing regional challenges in the region. Under the dynamics of regional cooperation, the Melbourne Climate Features (MCF) is an important achievement and a leading establishment of the Indo-Pacific Hub (INPACC Hub) to accelerate a positive climate future. The INPACC has three impact pathways (Indo-Pacific Climate Hub):

- a) Accelerating regional solutions
- b) Building capacity and nurturing the next generations of climate professionals
- c) Leading by example to maximise global climate outcome.

Climate security in the Indo-Pacific depends upon strategic cooperation and cooperation among the government policy makers, industries and different communities to protect the ecosystem. Institutional cooperation will be a primary challenges for multi-level governance of climate change adoption, disaster risk management, and sustainable development.

X. Concluding Remarks

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a strategic arc in the dynamics of geopolitics of international relations in the 21st century. This region will play a critical role in shaping the future of global politics and economics in the 21st century. It can be said that this new regionalism of Indo-Pacific can be also considered as being crucial in bringing peace, stability and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean as well as in the Indian Ocean.

China's strategic moves under BRI have already accelerated the economic dominance in new economic world order. The hegemonic rise of China is a clear geopolitical challenge for India, Japan and the US in the dynamics of the new world order in international relations.

In the context of geopolitical dynamics, the Indo-Pacific has given rise to intense competition, including tension around contested territories and maritime zones. The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a new spatial framework in the strategic discourse in international relations and as a very significant region in terms of regional economic cooperation and security frameworks. It is a multipolar region, which contributes more than half of the global GDP and is like the lifeline of world trade, sea routes and networks.

The Indo-Pacific region represents the link of two oceanic regions namely the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is the frontline region facing climate related challenges, which may lead to instability, forced migration and conflict. It is also the most natural disaster-prone region. Rising China is expanding its power and influence across continents through the Belt Road Initiative. The participants of this Initiative account for 40 percent of the world GDP and the vision of the Late Japanese Prime Minister Shinze Abe is reflected in the dynamics of maritime space in the Indo-Pacific

Most of the major actors believed in the principle of open and free Indo-Pacific in the dynamics of regional integration and the Indo-Pacific cooperation shares a strategic vision and driving force for the multi-dimensional regional cooperation in global politics.

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