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Great Power Dynamics In The Indo-Pacific: Strategic Implications For Pakistan

Yousuf Sajjad^{1*}, Ms. Khushboo Farid², Fazal Rehman Wadood³

¹*Lecturer, Bahria university Karachi.

²Teaching Associate, University of Karachi.

³Mphil, Scholar University of Karachi.

***Corresponding Author:** Yousuf Sajjad

*Lecturer, Bahria university Karachi.

Abstract:

This research paper examines the strategic rivalry between the great powers in the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for Pakistan. The Indo-Pacific, a strategically critical region bounded by the Pacific and Indian oceans, is currently the focus of the strategic competition between the US and China. The United States has redefined this region, positioning India as a net security provider to counter China's influence, while China advances its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This great power rivalry reshapes diplomatic ties and impacts regional stability, particularly in South Asia.

Key actors in the Indo-Pacific, including the US, China, India, and other regional powers, are navigating this complex strategic environment. The US seeks to contain China through initiatives like the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy and alliances such as QUAD and AUKUS, while China's expanding naval capabilities and strategic partnerships pose significant challenges. The rivalry affects regional geopolitical and the global economy and permeates the diplomatically significant military, and financial realms.

For Pakistan, this competition presents both prospects and challenges. While CPEC enhances Pakistan's strategic and economic significance, India's growing military capabilities and strategic partnerships with the US threaten Pakistan's security and stability. The Indo-US alliance, marked by strategic agreements and India's enhanced naval presence, exacerbates regional tensions, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan is a major actor in this shifting geopolitical scenario due to its advantageous location and participation in the BRI.

This paper aims to analyze the dynamics of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific, the role of key regional actors, and the implications for Pakistan's security and foreign policy. It highlights the need for Pakistan to navigate this complex environment strategically, balancing its relationships with China and the US while safeguarding its national interests in an increasingly multipolar world.

Key words: Indo-Pacific, Great Power Rivalry, US-China Competition, Pakistan, India, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), QUAD, AUKUS, South Asia, Foreign Policy, Multipolar World

Introduction:

Southeast Asia's geopolitical environment is likely to undergo significant change because of US-Chinese strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific. The United States has contributed to its expansion across the region by designating the area bounded by the Pacific and Indian Oceans as the Indo-Pacific zone and acknowledging India as a "net security provider." China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and other major nations in the region are in the process of diversifying and reorganizing their diplomatic ties. In this scenario, it is likely that Pakistan and India will pursue their divergent strategic interests. While the US grants India the status of strategic partner, CPEC in Pakistan has become a benchmark for China's BRI. The conflict is expected to directly affect Pakistan's and South Asia's overall strategic landscape.

Unveiling the Term Indo-Pacific: A Strategic Crossroads

The Indian and Pacific oceans are part of a regional area called the Indo-Pacific. This maritime region spans from the Indian Ocean through the East Asian coastlines to the western Pacific Ocean. Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Oceans, and the seas that join them in the large territory of Indonesia are all included in this 24-nation territorial foundation.¹

¹ From Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific Significance: Implementation and Challenges, *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, July 9, 2020

Since 2011, there has been an increase in the use of the term "Indo-Pacific" in global strategic and geopolitical discourse. The Indo-Pacific is a framework that aims to establish a connected multipolar region that must be governed by generally accepted international standards, laws, and customs.²

Moreover, the phrase "Indo Pacific" refers to a conceptual shift in US strategic thinking that aims to encircle and contain China by reducing its influence. Opposing the Belt and Road Initiative in order to constrain China is underlined as the policy objective. At the same time, China's rigid adherence to the previous geographic connotation of Asia-Pacific demonstrates that it adheres to its policy of leading the world by emphasizing economic interdependence in Asia. Pakistan is directly effected economically and strategically by this great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region.

a) Key Actors in Indo-Pacific Region

The nations are impacted by transnational geostrategic shifts to differing degrees based on the magnitude of their geographical surrounds. The degree to which states are effected by global geostrategic changes depends on how big their local environments are. Pakistan enjoys the good fortune to occupy an advantageous place that determines the strategic environment of the region and allows various changes to seep in and have an impact on it. Even though this region has long been crucial to world politics, it is currently greatly impacted by the quickly shifting global dynamics. Shifts in geopolitics and geoeconomics have broad effects. However, the power struggle between China and United States of America is currently at the center of this. The United States, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, New Zealand, and Brunei were among the founding group's 13 members. Pakistan is impacted by the changing maritime environment in the Indian Ocean as well as regional changes and transformations around it. The economic, political and military power struggle between China and the United States is a crucial element right now in this specific zone. China's rapid ascent, the United States' attempts to encircle and limit China, and measures to minimize Russia's influence are laying the groundwork for global politics in general. The United States' most crucial ally in its strategy to contain China is India. India enjoys the title of "Net Security Provider" in the Indo-Pacific region in addition to critically important defense agreements with the US. Pakistan's options to diversify its relations were always limited by the tense relations between the US and Iran. The US's Free and Open Indo Pacific policy, which in theory upholds each rim state's right to sovereignty, free navigation, and trade, encircles China. The reactivation of the Quadrilateral Security Agreement (QUAD) between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, as well as the ongoing development into a trilateral security organization between Australia, the UK, and the US, are the most likely indicators that the United States continues to become fully engaged in Asia after a ten-year hiatus. While QUAD has a wide geopolitical view and a broad range to encircle China and curb its expanding influence within Asia, AUKUS primarily focuses on military collaboration in the Indian Ocean.³ Israel is another significant player entering the western Indian Ocean region through the Abraham Accords, a deal that allows the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, and Sudan to recognize the former and establish diplomatic ties. Israel now has the opportunity, thanks to the Arab world's rapprochement with it, to intervene in the Persian Gulf and confront Iran whenever it sees fit. Afghanistan's security is intricately linked to the regional stability in South Asia. Pakistan's security is immediately impacted by the the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The new Afghan leadership has a serious effect on Pakistan's security situation. Its security issues with India are getting worse, and as that country gains importance because of the Indo-US alliance, the former's security concerns grow. In a similar vein, Pakistan's biggest ongoing security challenges stem from the conundrum surrounding Afghanistan. The CPEC is also the biggest opportunity for Pakistan in the area. The partnership with China is the primary component of foreign policy under the shadow of the US-China power struggle. The expansion of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the Gwadar Port, and the security of marine communications (SLOCs) all contribute to Pakistan's growing interest in and engagement with the Indian Ocean. Alliances such as QUAD, AUKUS, the Indo-US Strategic Partnership, and the much-feared destabilization in Afghanistan provide a tough situation for Pakistan's security.

b) The US-China power struggle: A clash of titans

Nowadays, the regions of Asia that include the rims of the Pacific and Indian oceans are most commonly referred to as the "Indo Pacific." More so than geopolitical implications, this term has a geographic connotation. For the previous seven decades, the phrase has referred to the United States' dominance in the region; but, as the strategic backdrop has altered, so have the conceptual meanings. The terminology "Indo Pacific" is frequently used to describe this area, indicating that it is more than only the zone encircling the junction of the Indian and Pacific oceans, but also refers to the geostrategic reconfiguration. It manifests the US-China rivalry that is escalating quickly. The US's Pivot to Asia and Rebalancing to Asia policies have now crystallized into a clear plan to encircle China. It is now portrayed in the official US-Indo Pacific Policy documents as the geopolitical and geoeconomic space that is essential to its interests.⁴

The Indian Ocean, with its eleven major choke points, serves as the focal point for both global business maritime activity and its rich mineral resources. About 100,000 commercial vessels pass through this body of water every year. The Indian Ocean's coastal nations contain around 67% of the world's known oil reserves, a quarter of the world's gold deposits, and 60 percent

² Deepa M. Ollapally, The United States and the Indian Ocean: Power Shifts and Uncertain Leadership, *Maritime Governance and South Asia, Maritime Security and South Asia: Trade, Security Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean*, ed., Jivanta Schottli (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, 2018), 99-105.

³ Louisiana Brooke Holland, John Curtis and Claire Mills, The AUKUS Agreement, *House of Commons Library*, October 11, 2021, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9335/CBP-9335.pdf>

⁴ "From Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific Significance: Implementation and Challenges," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 9, 2020

of the planet's uranium. Additionally, nearly 80% of all diamond deposits are held in reserves.⁵ The US's most recent "Free and Open Indo Pacific" (FOIP) policy, which was announced in 2019, represents its strategy to reevaluate its position in this region considering its fundamental and enduring interests. India had been pursuing its "Look East" policy for 20 years, but under the Modi administration, it was reconceived as "Act East."⁶ According to the Defense Department of the United States, the Indo Pacific is the single most crucial zone for America's future.⁷ The US trades with this region in two directions annually for USD 2.3 trillion, and it makes USD 1.3 trillion in FDE.⁸ Given that this region generates 60% of the world's GDP, the US must be present to secure the sea trade routes in this area. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific region's fundamental values include upholding sovereignty and autonomy, peaceful dispute settlement, free, fair, and mutually beneficial commerce supported by unrestrained investments, open agreements, and connectivity. It also encompasses the idea of abiding by international norms and rules, such as those governing flight and navigation freedom. Free means that there must be no outside interference in national sovereignty, and open means that there must be connectivity and sustainable growth.⁹ Given that China's financial, political, and military ascent is cited as one of the defining aspects of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the liberty and transparency advocated in this study are a result of China's rise.¹⁰ According to this report, the US is particularly concerned about China's ability to conduct anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operations around its periphery, the militarization of the Spratly Islands in 2015, Chinese investment and its detrimental effects on host countries' sovereignty, the lack of transparency in the "One Belt One Road" Initiative, and the "Polar Silk Road" near the Arctic since 2018. The US considers Russia's expanded participation in the armed forces, economy, and diplomacy to be a "malign factor." Concerning US interests in the region, Russia's outreach to Asia for energy exports is concerning. Furthermore, Russia has claimed a bigger peninsula in the Arctic.

China's reservations about superpower involvement in Asia Pacific have been unambiguous since Mao Zedong's reign. It believed that the region's security architecture should not be harmed by the power struggles of the region's two rival superpowers, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The regional security architecture is a result of the Cold War arrangement that should be changed to benefit regional stakeholders after the collapse of the USSR. Despite China's implied defensive posture in the academic rhetoric emanating from the country's strategic community, China's rise after 2010 and growing influence in the region pose a significant threat to US interests.¹¹

A limited role for the navy was emphasized in China's first defense white paper, but that role has since changed. In 2004, President Hu Jintao broadened this function by entrusting the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) with maintaining international stability and national interests. The Strait of Malacca is where 85% of oil bound for China enters the Indian Ocean.¹² The expansion of naval operations to address the escalating security concerns and global shipping routes was highlighted in the following white paper in 2006. The 2008 white document, which stressed "remote partnership in seas" and announced PLAN's counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, increased on this task. The goals to create a blue water navy were successively increased by the white papers from 2010, 2013, and 2015.¹³ The most recent in the series, "Chinese National Defense in the New Era," was published in 2019. It views the Asia-Pacific region as largely stable and emphasizes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's role in fostering cooperation on a non-conflict and non-alliance basis.¹⁴ However, because the US is fortifying military alliances in the Asia Pacific through this action, this policy views the US's installation of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) in the Republic of Korea as a move undermining regional strategic balance.¹⁵ The US National Security Strategy, issued in 2017, declared that the Indo-Pacific region is currently facing strategic rivalry among liberal and oppressive ideologies of global order. Chinese commerce and development of infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific area, which runs from the US's eastern coastlines to Africa's western coast, poses a threat to US interests. In order to

⁵ Muhammad Umer Hayat, Syeda Aqsa Sajad and Farrukh Shahzad, "Great Power Play in Indian Ocean: Implications for the Region," *Global Political Review*, V (IV) (2020): 65-74.

⁶ Keynote Address by India's External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, in *Indo-Pacific Region: Political and Strategic Prospects*, eds., Rajiv K Bhatia and Vijay Sakhuja (New Delhi: Vaj Book, 2014): xi-xii.

⁷ Indo Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting Networked Region, *Department of Defense*, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

⁸ US treasury securities held by the Federal Reserve. (2014). https://doi.org/10.1787/sov_b_outlk-2014-graph37-en

⁹ "Indo Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting Networked Region," Department of Defense, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

¹⁰ "Indo Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships and Promoting Networked Region."

¹¹ Zhang Zhixin, "China's Pursuit of a New Asia-Pacific Security Architecture: Underlying Rationale, Ongoing Actions and Future Prospects," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 1, no. 4 (2015): 573-578.

¹² Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (Random House Trade Paperbacks: September 13, 2011).

¹³ Joshua T. White, *China's Indian Ocean Ambitions: Investment, Influence and Military Advantage*, *China Global: Assessing China's Growing Role in the World* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2020): 3-4, https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_chinas_india_n_ocean_ambitions_white-1.pdf

¹⁴ "China's National Defense in the New Era," Beijing: State Council of Republic of China, 2019,

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

¹⁵ China's Defense in the New Era.

counter China's growing influence, the US uses alliances and partnerships with every country in the region that could do so.¹⁶ According to this report, the US's military edge is deteriorating and, if properly addressed, will weaken their ability to thwart "China's aggression and coercion," which it refers to as the "revisionist power."¹⁷ The basic and defining components of the US rebalancing strategies are widely acknowledged to be China and Russia. In this context, the Indo-Pacific is deterministically significant. To accomplish the long-term aims and objectives, it is advised that the Indo-Pacific area incorporate a flexible posture and balance the critical capabilities in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and South Asia. The Indian Ocean was dealt with by the US under CENTCOM and PACOM, which divided it between them.¹⁸

c) US Indo-Pacific Policy

Although the US had only ever thought of this region as "Asia Pacific" until 2011, former Foreign Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton used the phrase "Indo-Pacific" in 2010. Robert Gates, the US secretary of defense, first mentioned India as a "net security provider" in 2009 at the Shangri-La Dialogue. Because the earlier geographic term "Asia Pacific" did not align with the US strategic objectives in this area, the US administration's conceptual underpinning evolved to rename this region as "Indo-Asia-Pacific" before becoming simply "Indo-Pacific" in 2017. The Obama administration's "Rebalancing Asia" foreign policy strategy had been its focus up until that point. The conceptual geographic term was finally changed to "Indo Pacific" in 2017, placing India in the foreground.¹⁹

In light of China's rise, the US and India's interests in the Indian Ocean are now strongly aligned. October 2020 saw the signing of a pact between the United States and India to share map data and sensitive satellite imagery related to the anticipated threat from China. The strategic meeting took place in New Delhi, where the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement on Geospatial Cooperation (BECA) was inked. In attendance were US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who spoke about the danger that China caused to their security and freedom.²⁰ This is the second of the US's three main agreements, with other countries that it maintains strong military relations. The underlying agreements gave India access to a network of US military installations around the world, and the US would gain from the Indian installations as the major player in the Asia-Pacific.²¹

India's economy grew quickly, surpassing France to become the world's sixth-largest economy, and it has since begun to make itself heard in the neighborhood and beyond.²² India is situated deep into the Indian Ocean, with a 7,500 km shoreline,²³ and much of its land forms an oceanic rim. Pakistan's security and financial prosperity in the Indian Ocean region is in jeopardy due to India's imperialist desires, which directly aim to contain China's ascent. India has constructed 200 smaller ports in addition to 12 major ports. It has begun a project known as Sagarmala to double its maritime capability.²⁴ The US actively supports and facilitates India's imperialist and belligerent posture in the Asian zone against China. During an address on the Indo-Pacific policy, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Alex N. Wong stated that India's heavy political activity was in the best interests of both the region and the US because India was a nation committed in free order. India now has the title of "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean.²⁵ This phrase serves as an all-encompassing term to describe the most significant strategic role that India has been given under the US plan to sway the region and encircle China. The term suggests that India is in a position to ensure its security, or rather to provide security to the states of the Indian

¹⁶ "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," The White House, Washington: 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

¹⁷ Summary of National Defense Strategy of the United States of America Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge, 2018, Department of Defense, 2-4, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

¹⁸ Deepa M. Ollapally, "The United States and the Indian Ocean: Power Shifts and Uncertain Leadership, in Maritime Governance and South Asia, *Maritime Security and South Asia: Trade, Security Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean*, ed., Jivanta Schottli (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, 2018), 99-105.

¹⁹ Axel Berkofsky, Sergio Miracola and Paolo Magri, eds., "Geopolitical by Other Means: The Indo Pacific Reality," Report, ISPI, 2019, 24-26.

²⁰ Neha Arora and Sanjeev Miglani, "US Warns of Threat Posed by China, Signs Military Pact with India," Reuters, October 27, 2020,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-asia-india-idUSKBN27C0OF>

²¹ Dinakar Peri, "What Is Lemoa?," Hindu, August 30, 2016,

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/What-is-LEMOA/article15604647.ece>

²² "India Muscles Past France to Become World's Sixth Biggest Economy," News 18, July 12, 2018,

<https://www.news18.com/news/business/india-muscles-past-france-to-become-worlds-sixth-biggest-economy-1807957.html>

²³ "Length of Indian Coastline," Statista, 2019,

<http://www.statista.com/statista734258/length-of-coastline-by-state-India>

²⁴ Ministry of Shipping, "Sagarmala: Concept and Objectives," Government of India, 2018,

<http://sagarmala.gov.in/about-sagarmala/vision-objectives>

²⁵ US Department of State, "Briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy by Alex N Wong, US Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs," US Department of State, April 2, 2018,

<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.html>

Ocean Region, and to improve their capability and capacity through direct deployment as a responsible strategic actor and capacity building.²⁶

India has flatly dismissed the CPEC project since it runs through the ostensibly controversial province of Gilgit Baltistan, which India considers to be part of the contested Jammu and Kashmir territory.²⁷ India's decision to revoke Article 370 with regard to the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir and declare the Ladakh region to be a part of the union despite China's claim to it clearly defines its efforts to stop China and Pakistan from pursuing the CPEC. This jurisdictional action has a direct influence on Indian Ocean safety and security.

In addition, India signed strategic agreements like Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA), which will give the Indian Navy (along with the US Navy) a lot more operational flexibility than it had previously in the Indian Ocean.²⁸ India has improved relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whose navies were previously allies of Pakistan and the Pakistan navy, under Modi. By 2027, the Indian Navy expects to have 200 warships in its fleet, three aircraft carriers, and several SSBNs at its core (nuclear submarines). The security interests of Pakistan are severely threatened by this.

As the focus of world politics has shifted from Europe to the Asia Pacific, many experts believe that the Indian Ocean is currently the most militarized body of water. The best way to describe the current maritime environment is as unstable, disruptive, and unpredictable. In contrast to the US-Iran rivalry and the Middle East's disintegration, the US and India are stepping up their strategic naval and military cooperation and signing ominous bilateral agreements like LEMOA.²⁹ India's strategic partnership with Iran, as well as its involvement in the construction and expansion of Chabahar Port's infrastructure and logistics, were designed to limit China's economic activity through the CPEC. India is a major user of Iranian oil via the Chabahar Port, but its intention to build a relationship with Central Asia was strongly contingent on safety conditions in Afghanistan.³⁰ The acquisition of the strategic port of Sabang by India from Indonesia, which is also seeking a naval choke point similar to the Malacca Strait, is part of India's growing presence and maritime interests in East Asia. In order to avoid the Belt and Road Initiative, Indonesia is also looking for alternatives. India is also interested in the African coast along the Indian Ocean. It announced the Japan-supported Asia-Africa Growth Corridor in 2017. The construction of this corridor, estimated to cost \$40 billion, will help the African nations build their infrastructure and human resources. This project tries to bring Chinese business to Africa. As a result, India and Japan might be able to use the abundant uranium resources in Africa for their nuclear requirements. To receive early reconnaissance information and updates on the maritime traffic in Africa, India established its listening post in Madagascar.³¹

d) The Indo-US Pact: Ripples Across Pakistan's Landscape

South Asia is one of the world's most rapidly developing areas, but it is also one of the most under developed. It is home to almost a quarter of the world's population and a wide range of conventional and unconventional threats, making it a highly ambiguous, vulnerable, and complex strategic environment. Wide-ranging implications for Pakistan, the regional power, result from a variety of conventional threats, concurrent struggles for the balance of power, and a highly volatile external environment that penetrates the region. Pakistan's main issue is its reliance on various intra- and extra-regional factors for security. Pakistan's security and financial prosperity in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) is threatened by India's hegemonic ambitions, which are directly aimed at containing China's ascent.

Since India's SSBN (Ballistic Missile Armed Nuclear Submarine), INS Arihant, went into operation, the ocean has become significantly more nuclearized, posing a serious danger to the strategic viability of the region. A direct threat to the strategic stability of the Indian Ocean region is the operational deployment of India's SSBN (Ballistic Missile Armed Nuclear Submarine), INS Arihant. The Indian Ocean strategy has undergone a substantial shift as a result of Modi. In comparison to earlier periods in the nation's history, it is significantly more aggressive and proactive.

India has established a large number of surveillance and tracking installations on the numerous islands in the Indian Ocean. The deployment of five SSBNs by India in the Indian Ocean over the next 50 years will begin with Arihant. These are intended to keep an eye on crucial sea lanes for communication in the area, effectively discouraging Islamabad in favor of New Delhi.³² Pakistan is situated in one of the most crucial areas of the Indo Pacific and at the strategic intersection of several regions. Along the coastline where the SLOCs pass, which is crucial for the international oil trade, the Indian Ocean is where it has the

²⁶ Suffian Ullah and Zeeshan Hayat, "India as a Net Security Provider in the Indo Pacific and Implications for the Region," *NUST Journal of International Peace and Stability*, vol. 4 (1) (2021):26-39.

²⁷ Prabash K. Dutta, "Beyond Kashmir: Status of Gilgit-Baltistan Is a Case in Contrast," *India Today*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/beyond-kashmir-status-of-gilgit-baltistan-is-a-case-in-contrast-1580373-2019-08-13>

²⁸ Sneesh Alex Philip, "The Three Foundational Agreements with US and What They Mean for India's Military Growth," *The Print*, October 27, 2020 <https://theprint.in/defence/the-3-foundational-agreements-with-us-and-what-they-mean-for-indias-military-growth/531795/>

²⁹ Gurpreet S. Khurana, "Indo-US Logistics Agreement LEMOA: An Assessment," *Maritime Foundation*, September, 2016, <https://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/636089093519640938.pdf>

³⁰ Hassan, "Indian Access to Chabahar and Duqm, Challenges for Pakistan."

³¹ "India Activates First Listening Post on Foreign Soil: Radars in Madagascar," *Indian Express*, July 18, 2007, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/india-activates-first-listening-post-on-foreign-soil-radars-in-madagascar/205416/>

³² Yasir Hussain, "Arihant and Deterrence Stability: Why Pakistan Needs to Strengthen Its Sea-Based Deterrent," *Pakistan Politico*, December 12, 2018, <http://pakistanpolitico.com/arihant-and-deterrence-stability-why-pakistan-needs-to-strengthen-its-sea-based-deterrent/>

most interest. Pakistan's EEZ, which has been expanded to 290,000 square kilometers, is another area of interest. Pakistan's security is concerned because of the undetermined status of its maritime border with India. Beyond that, even though Pakistan has not yet established any direct ties to the Indo-Pacific, South Asia's strategic environment is still **effected** by the broader maritime environment. Thus, Pakistan is the country most impacted by the US and China's evolving strategic rivalry. Due to CPEC, the project's flagship project linking the SLOCs of the Indo Pacific (Road) with the roads and railway networks, Pakistan is unquestionably a key member of the BRI (Belt).

Through the connectivity that BRI is fostering in Asia, the US is pursuing a policy of competing with China in this region and containing its growing influence. Pakistan faces increasing strategic challenges as India's status as the US's closest ally, China's adversary, and the region's main security provider rises. India's significant role in the **QUAD** makes it even more strategically audacious. Despite appearing to focus on soft power to influence all of Asia and lessen the impact of China's rise, this quadrilateral alliance now also has a military perspective. Following an initial summit-level conference of QUAD member states in March 2021, Australia took part in the Malabar naval drills in the Bay of Bengal. The AUKUS agreement, which will give Australia nuclear submarines, is a further advancement of **a trend towards the militarization of** the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-US alliance is directly opposing Pakistan's tactical and commercial goals with China through the CPEC due to this increasing risk. A significant security void is created by the US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan without a broadly endorsed power sharing agreement and the freezing of USD 9.5 billion in Afghan financial assets to exert pressure on the Taliban regime. Pakistan has a stake in Afghanistan because of its geographical proximity to the country, border disputes, and social and cultural ties. If Da'esh or Al Qaeda elements strengthen in Afghanistan, these factors could also support Pakistan's looming Tehrik-e-Taliban threat. This security gap would put strain on CPEC, which Pakistan will not be able to sustain, because of the national security concerns it poses. Furthermore, problems between the US and Iran or, crisis between Israel and Iran will directly **effect** the northern Arabian Sea, Pakistan's area of greatest importance. To address all these rapidly evolving realities, Pakistan's foreign policy must concentrate on a separate Indo Pacific strategy. At least Pakistan provides China with a quick detour around Iran if the US and its coalition partners encircle the country. Pakistan now occupies a prominent position in this picture of great power competition because of this reality.

e) **The Abraham accords and their implication for Pakistan**

A recent development in the region, the Abraham **Accords**, between Israel and Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates, may not only **effect** the region in the short term but also have significant long-term implications if it results in a military engagement³³ Israel would be directly on the other side of the Strait of Hormuz as a result. Israel signed these agreements with the four nations mentioned above from August to October 2020. Still, the bilateral cooperation is based on cultural and economic ties that could develop to include other significant Middle Eastern states, which would have a significant impact on the strategic environment as Iran would not be very tolerant of such developments if they led to a strategic blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Pakistan is also under the same threat. These developments further entangle China, Russia, and Pakistan and Iran in relation to the larger Indo Pacific's strategic interests.

Israel has the necessary tools to play a direct role in the Indian Ocean, as well as enough support from its allies, including the US, India, and now the Arab nations. The conflict between Iran and Israel has long influenced Middle Eastern politics and security, and it now also **effects** South Asia. In the case of a military stalemate or hostilities between Iran and Israel in the Strait of Hormuz or adjacent, Pakistan has direct access to the Indian Ocean if Gwadar Port and sea lines of communication run along its coastline. India also converges here, having already established strong military, economic, geopolitical, and technological ties with Israel, all of which are likely to strengthen in the aftermath of the **re-established** Indo-US alliance. Israel is the main and fundamental threat to Pakistan. **The** Israeli Foreign Minister recently suggested Israel and India could sign a free trade agreement by the middle of 2022.³⁴ The Fifth Fleet's headquarters are in Bahrain, so the US already occupies the top position in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, the US-led Counter Terrorism Maritime Task forces are present in this area and could offer security and support to Israel should it decide to invade directly.

Afghanistan — A Renewed Challenge

Afghanistan has been a conflict-**ridden** and unstable region for at least a century. During the traditional Great Game between Russia and Great Britain, it served as a buffer zone. Later, it was **a** pivotal Cold War front, but it also caused a great deal of regional instability. Since 9/11, the US and NATO forces had set up a temporary **occupation there** to keep the chaos under control. However, the US's abrupt withdrawal, which **took** place in 2021, without first reaching a comprehensive power-sharing agreement with all parties, hastened the Taliban's quick takeover of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's rule and control over Afghanistan raise a number of issues that are of concern to the international community regarding the regime's acceptance. Afghanistan will not be able to flourish unless a number of legal and political challenges are overcome. A humanitarian crisis is feared more than usual in this circumstance. Due to its dependence on foreign aid, which accounts for 40% of its GDP, the Afghan economy is on the verge of a terrible catastrophe should that aid be stopped. In the month of September 2021, the World Food Program issued a warning, stating that only 5% of families have enough food.³⁵ Terrorism becomes more likely **under** such **circumstances**. The continued existence of Daesh militants in Afghanistan has

³³ Patsy Widakuswara, "How the Abraham Accord might Impact the Middle East," Voice of America, August 1, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/how-abraham-accord-might-impact-middle-east>

³⁴ "India, Israel to Start Talks on Free Trade Agreement Next Month," October 19, 2021, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/business/india-israel-start-talks-free-trade-agreement-next-month-2021-10-18/>

³⁵ "Afghanistan Facing Desperate Food Crisis, UN Warns," BBC News, October 25, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59011501>

already made the international community nervous because they could become more brazen if the regime doesn't receive foreign assistance.

China, Pakistan, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics are all direct participants in this developing predicament. Due to the potential threat to the BRI and the possibility that chaos in Afghanistan will [effect](#) the security situation in the [Muslim majority Xinjiang Autonomous Region](#), China needs an amicable situation in Afghanistan. Russia needs a stable environment in this area as well because of its growing interests. Through Afghanistan, this region offers a significant potential energy and trade market for Russia.

f) Recommendation

In addition to the fact that the US has historically been a Pacific power, the presence of the US in the Indo-Pacific is justified now more than ever in order to "defend the interests of its allies" against an "aggressive and expansionist" China. Additionally, North Korea, China, and Russia are the United States' three main regional rivals in the Indo-Pacific region. Among its allies are Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and Japan.

Pakistan can participate in the developing "Thucydides trap" for control of the Indo-Pacific in a number of different ways. Pakistan can respond to the situation in a number of ways and offer workable solutions. Franklin Roosevelt famously stated that "a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor," and Pakistan might learn a lot from that observation in this particular circumstance. The current geopolitical waters are choppy. Uncharted waters frequently present a challenge to Pakistan's sailors. What choices does Pakistan have? First off, the rivalry is likely to cause conflict, so Pakistan must avoid becoming involved. Second, Pakistan needs to forge and present its impartiality as much as it can, all the while protecting its own interests. Thirdly, like it did in the early 1970s, Pakistan can act as a mediator between the United States and China. It must, however, avoid the dangers that come with playing the facilitator. A state's national interests are generally not served well by acting as a bridge if the returns are small. India and the Soviet Union had already agreed to a treaty of friendship, cooperation, and peace [in 1971 during the civil war in East Pakistan](#). After the Soviet Union and India had agreed to this mutual pact, Pakistan accelerated the Sino-U.S. agreement to foster a strong alliance. Brokering this agreement, however, did little to help Pakistan's cause, especially in preventing the division of the nation [and the secession of Bangladesh](#).

Exchanges in the fields of sociocultural, diplomacy, and law present opportunities for Pakistan. Pakistan, a multiethnic and pluralistic nation, is ideally suited to serve as a bridge between [Orient's](#) Chinese and Occidental Americans. Pakistan has many options for how to go about doing this. To understand and study each other's legal systems, for instance, American and Chinese lawyers could be housed in the same law center. Second, the advantages of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor ("C.P.E.C") to the entire international economic system can be demonstrated to the United States. Furthermore, Pakistan sees the myriad internal problems as requiring an internal rather than an external perspective. More urgent attention is required for problems like poor leadership, pervasive corruption, high rates of illiteracy, widespread structural poverty, and other internal problems. Pakistan must shield itself from the exogenous changes that the Indo-Pacific is likely to bring about while concentrating on its numerous internal problems.

Due to its internal and economic circumstances, Pakistan is unable to participate in the Indo-Pacific region's developing situation. Instead, Pakistan must work to leverage itself whenever possible to reap the greatest geoeconomic benefits, i.e., by enhancing regional economic connectivity and creating collaborative development initiatives. Lessons from yesterday are not a reliable road map for today. It is necessary to implement creative, clever, and incisive policies instead. Pakistan must also continue to forge partnerships that can support the protection of its borders, the advancement of its people's interests, and the security of its vital national interests.

g) Conclusion

States vying for control over marine routes, access to resources, and regional domination are progressively arming the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which has emerged as the focal point of strategic conflict. As a result, the strategic balance in the area has changed dramatically, and new frameworks within the developing multipolar system have emerged. Additionally, there is an increasing prevalence of regional groupings that has strengthened the IOR's securitization, with various nations launching their own versions of IPS.

Australia's military and foreign policy white papers, which seek to strengthen its national security capabilities, are the source of its Indo-Pacific strategies. In order to maintain neutrality and prioritize ASEAN's interests, governments have together chosen a meticulously tailored regional policy, as stated in the 2019 publication, ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific. India's position in the IOR, which is mostly focused on China containment, is reflected in its National Security Strategy of 2019, its Maritime Security Strategy of 2015, and its Act East strategy.

Pakistan now has only a small amount of holdings in the IOR, which is located in the country's south. Its location has, however, rendered it unable to continue being shielded from the consequences of the developing great power competition.

The June 2023 US-India Joint Statement restates Washington's commitment to continue providing India with preferential treatment in the political, economic, and information spheres. In the end, this will upset the balance of stability in South Asia. The security conditions along the CPEC roads are expected to worsen as long as Pakistan experiences political unpredictability and economic susceptibility. In light of this, Pakistan needs to abandon its Cold War mindset and adopt a more open-minded perspective on regional and global tactical reorganization in order to better prepare for the impending storm in the Asia-Pacific region.

It turned out that there was a shift in geopolitics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. 9/11 served as a turning point, shifting the superpower axis toward the East. Even though the Asia Pacific region received a lot of attention throughout the 20th century, new geo strategic goals changed the course of events. The region, which was significant due to strategic

considerations surrounding the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans, gained additional significance because of the oil trade that passed through it. However, due to **quick changing realities** and the competition between great powers, this has become the most important aspect of the world. The conceptual transition from Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific is more than just an academic examination of evolution; it also describes the geostrategic goals of the twenty-first century, which are driving shifts in the Indian Ocean's marine ecosystem. The rise of China, which is undoubtedly transforming the world into a multipolar one, is posing a threat to the unipolar one that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The term "Indo Pacific" now refers to the US's strategic objectives in the area, primarily competing with China. Through the reinvigorated QUAD, the development of AUKUS, and the Indo-US strategic alliance targeted at encircling China, the structural evolution pulls Australia, India, and Japan very close to the US interest. The same structural approach has spawned an expanding geostrategic engagement among China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia; this engagement necessitates a policy approach. The **geo-economy** of the region is the foundation of this dynamic strategic environment, dictating the future direction of global politics, despite the fact that the strategic outlook is the most prominent aspect. Following this examination of the Indo-Pacific and its consequences for Pakistan, the author proposes a few potential policy options:

- a.) As the strategic environment of the Northern Arabian Sea is now more closely reliant on the entire Indo Pacific region, Pakistan needs to develop an independent Indian Ocean Policy in addition to the National Maritime Policy with a focus on its strategic interests and foreign policy options in Indian Ocean.
- b.) To deepen its strategic links with these countries, Pakistan should reconsider its geo-economics partnerships with China, Central Asian Republics, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, as well as develop commerce with them.
- c.) Pakistan will be able to balance the relationship pressure it must deal with from the US through the diversification of its foreign policy options and trade relations with neighboring nations. Pakistan can then take a balanced approach and long-term look at its relations with the US.