



Towards Open and Secure Indo-Pacific

This editorial is based on [“Drafting a robust security strategy for Indo-Pacific”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 07/10/2022. It talks about the current geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region with reference to the new trilateral format between France, India and the United Arab Emirates.

For Prelims: Indo-Pacific, South East Asia, Foreign Direct Investment, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, QUAD, Hambantota port (Sri Lanka), Terrorism, La Niña events, Climate Change, Marine Pollution, Food Security, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Vostok Exercise, Kuril Island, SAGAR Vision.

For Mains: Significance of the Indo-Pacific, Current Challenges in the Indo-Pacific, India’s Stand on Multipolarity in Indo-Pacific.

In a world undergoing **dynamic transformation**, few regions are changing more rapidly than the others like the [Indo-Pacific region](#). It is indisputable that the Indo-Pacific is the **21st** century’s locus in **trade and [technology incubation](#)** that makes Indo-Pacific a prominent addition to the **geopolitical lexicon**.

In line, the **security and stability of this region remains a major issue** and goes beyond a mere consideration of emerging political equations. And to achieve **open and secure Indo-Pacific**, stakeholder nations need a '**collaborative management**' approach.

What is the Significance of the Indo-Pacific?

- The **Indo-Pacific region** is one of the most populous and economically active regions of the world which includes four continents: **Asia, Africa, Australia and America**.
- The dynamism and vitality of the region is self-evident, **60% of the world's population and 2/3rd of the global economic output makes this region a global economic centre**.
- The **region is also a great source and destination for [Foreign Direct Investment](#)**. Many of the world’s critical and large supply chains have an Indo-Pacific connection.
- There are vast reserves of marine resources in the Indian and Pacific Oceans combined, including **offshore hydrocarbons, methane hydrates, sea bed minerals and [rare earth metals](#)**.
 - **Sizable coastlines and [Exclusive Economic Zones \(EEZs\)](#) provide littoral countries with competitive capabilities for exploiting these resources.**
 - In turn, a number of the world's largest economies are located in the Indo-Pacific region, including **India, U.S.A, China, Japan, Australia**.

What are the Current Challenges in the Indo-Pacific?

- **Theatre of Geo-Strategic Competition:** Indo-Pacific is the principal theatre of geo-strategic

competition between different multilateral institutions like [QUAD](#) and [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#).

- **China's Militarization Move:** China has been a challenge to India's interests and stability in the Indian Ocean.
 - India's neighbours are receiving military and infrastructural assistance from China, including **submarines for Myanmar, frigates for Sri Lanka**, and its [overseas military base in Djibouti \(Horn of Africa\)](#).
 - Also, China has a hold over [Hambantota port \(Sri Lanka\)](#), which is just a few hundred miles off the shores of India.
- **Hotspot For Non-Traditional Issues:** The region's vastness makes it difficult to assess and address multiple risks, including incidents of **piracy, trafficking and terrorism**.
 - The Indo-Pacific region is facing serious challenges related to **geographical and ecological stability** due to [climate change](#) and the three consecutive [La Niña events](#) that are causing [cyclones](#) and [tsunamis](#).
 - Also, **illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing** and [marine pollution](#) is hampering the aquatic life of this region.
- **India's Limited Naval Capacity:** [Indian Navy](#) has limited resources and capacity to strengthen its efforts because of limited allocation of Indian military budget. Also, **lack of overseas military bases** creates a fundamental logistical challenge for India to maintain its presence in the Indo-Pacific.

How can India Enhance its Presence in the Indo-Pacific?

- **Issue based Coalitions:** Indo-Pacific collaboration cannot be successful without coordinated and issue-based partnerships framed by a **burden-sharing model**.
 - Recently, three maritime nations, **France, the UAE and India**, launched a **trilateral framework in the Indo-Pacific** for **cooperation in maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), blue economy, regional connectivity, energy and food security** and **people-to-people cooperation**.
- **Maritime Awareness:** From Indian Naval perspective, there is a need to **create broader and more reliable situational awareness** of developments in the Indian Ocean Region through intelligence gathering and surveillance, with [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#) as a **line of sight**.
- **India's Stand on Multipolarity in Indo-Pacific:** With **1/5 of the world's population and the 5th largest economy**, India is **entitled to have its own side, weigh its own interests, and make its own choices** and these choices will not be cynical and transactional, but rather **reflect a balance of Indian values and national interests**.
 - **India emphasises upon all alignment**, for example, **it only participated in the military component of Vostok Exercise** and abstained from the naval component that took place near the [Kuril Island \(disputed region of Russian and Japan\)](#).
 - Also, India's [SAGAR vision](#) (Security and Growth for all in the Region), is a template of **shared responses to shared challenges in the Indo-Pacific**.
- **Enhancing Engagement with Indo-Pacific Countries:** India needs to **ramp up defence production at home** as well as promote arms exports that will open the door for a more active Indian engagement with hard security issues in the Indo-Pacific.
 - India is now looking to **liberalise trade relations with strategic partners like Australia and the** sale of the [Brahmos supersonic cruise missile systems to the Philippines](#) lend a sharper edge to India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific.
- **Towards Free, Open and Secure Indo-Pacific:** The need of the hour is to stress upon promoting economic collaboration and collective growth in **Indo-Pacific, with active participation of stakeholder nations in economic and social front** aiming for **open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific** and ensure a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Drishti Mains Question

Indo-Pacific has become a prominent addition to the geopolitical lexicon in recent years. Explain how India can enhance its presence in this region.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. India is a member of which among the following? (2015)

1. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
2. Association of South-East Asian Nations
3. East Asia Summit

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3 only
(c) 1, 2 and 3
(d) India is a member of none of them

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q.1 What is the significance of Indo-US defence deals over Indo-Russian defence deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region. **(2020)**

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