

The Emergence of Quad and Its Implications for China: Analyzing the Politics of Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific Region

Hari Yadav¹

Abstract

The rise of China has changed the Indo-Pacific region's regional dynamics and led to the geopolitical competition between major powers of the 21st Century. In 2007 Australia, India, Japan, and the United States initiated QUAD, a multilateral initiative based on shared security interests and mutual geopolitical concerns. Even though the QUAD initiative had limited scope for bilateral and multilateral co-operation, the recent meetings between Australia, Japan, India, and the US created security and strategic concerns for China. China considered this initiative a threat and declared its intention to establish an Asian NATO to protect its economic and strategic interests. However, India-Australia-Japan has claimed QUAD as an economic and democratic initiative to create a free, transparent, and interconnected Indo-Pacific region. However, India can use this collaboration to balance the power politics in the Indo-Pacific region against China's domination. The multilateral co-operation on strategic and military lines will boost India's position in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper's main objective is to analyze the politics of balance of power between India and China in the Indo-Pacific region with QUAD's help and its implication for China.

Keywords: India, China, Quad, Indo-Pacific, Belt-Road Initiative, Geopolitics, Asian NATO, Balance of Power.

Introduction

This article helps us to understand the balance of power politics in the Indo-Pacific region with the reference to emergence of Quad formed with global powers such as United States, Australia, and Japan. Indo-Pacific has a more profound understanding and closely associated with these powerful

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actors. While the economic co-operation between these rising powers has significantly grown in the past, but the geopolitical and geostrategic framework remains uncertain (Bishoyi 2015). So the Pacific actors like Japan and the United States interacting with India in the Indian Ocean and India interacting with other Pacific Rim actors in the South China Sea to mark its presence in the region (Scott 2012). However, it's essential to understand why India has considered the Indo-Pacific region as the salient one after 2010; according to Vibhanshu Shekhar, "the Indo-Pacific world as the 'triangular space between India, Japan, and Australia, connecting two maritime systems of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean,' which has reckoned him to constitute an integrated Unit of Analysis, in a huge and unwieldy classification of Asia-Pacific' (Scott 2012).

In the current scenario, it reflects the belief that the term 'Indo-Pacific' finds an increasing remark in the strategic discourse, and also an indication of its growing prominence as a geostrategic entity, which is an integrated arena of the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific (Scott 2012) has regarded as a critical strategic arena in 21st Century. Indo-Pacific represents the Centre of gravity of the World's economic, political and strategic interests. This region is rich in natural resources, especially hydrocarbons that fuel the World economies and industrial engines (Bishoyi 2015).

Further to maintain the balance of power in the region, with a common notion all four democracies Australia, India, Japan and the United States grouped together and formed Quadrilateral security dialogue or QUAD, was first mooted by Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, the attempt is to engage more through pivot of Asia and now Indo-Pacific partnerships. The most common thing about these countries are being the democratic nations and unhindered maritime trade and security interests (Financial Express 2018).

With the due interests of these countries in achieving the Economic integration and globalization it had given Space to Asia-Pacific powers with smaller trading arrangements that boost their economic growth, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are the means to accumulate military, political and now soft power and new interests to defend (Menon 2017) in competing over these resources.

India being a one of the prominent player in the Indo-Pacific region, its foremost concern is towards the security management with the other liberal democracies who are part of this

Quadrilateral initiative, and also it reflects on the growing Chinese maritime presence in Eastern Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and Western Pacific.

The essence of emerging Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific as a dominant region has offered the nations various opportunities and challenges in terms of trade, investment, rivalry, competition, and co-operation (Scott 2012).

Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific

According to Commander Abhijit Singh, "Indo-Pacific' has lately entered the geostrategic discourse as a substitute for the more established term 'Asia-Pacific,' The two words, however, are fundamentally different" (IDSA), But Asia-Pacific states are in the process of reacting to western visions of a new world order which is resulting in new regional tensions (Rumley 2003)

Indeed Indo-Pacific forms a composite entity of sea regions and littorals marked by a multiplicity of cultures, religions, economic models, and governance structures; there is a common link binding the diverse subsystems of Indo-Pacific, i.e., the Sea.

As Prof. Lawrence Prabhakar Williams opined the importance of the Indo-Pacific region and essence to understand the different approaches are constructivism, the balance of power, global power shift, strategic autonomy choices, and the concert of democracies, Indo-Pacific regionalism and Indo-Pacific commons (Bishoyi 2015).

The Idea of Asia-Pacific has become almost ubiquitous in our understanding of the World. This Space's idea as a 'region' underlays new groupings and forums such as APEC and the East Asia summit to manage these dynamics better. The Concept of the Indo-Pacific is not intended to replace the Asia-Pacific, but merely to emphasize that, at least for specific purposes, we need to be considering a broader geographic space and broader set of interactions (Brewster 2016).

Besides, the world economy's robust growth has created a space for port construction, heightening Indo-Pacific's strategic significance and is likely to generate more significant commercial traffic and the possibility for greater strategic competition among the powerful actors.

Thus it is a very interesting development that the Americans have started using the term 'Indo-Pacific' instead of Asia-Pacific. This is related to the idea of 'Heartland' and 'Rimland' as

articulated by the geographers, perhaps the word 'Indo' is being resurrected, and in this formulation, India is seen as being important for the new Century (Srinivasan 2011).

Rise of China and Emergence of QUAD: Politics of Balance of Power

After the end of the Cold war, World has witnessed the greatest beneficiaries for two decades in globalized trade and investment flows; it is China and India who have led the Asian Region to sub-regional growth. In amidst the rivalry between both the countries, they have successfully navigated in managing their bilateral relations for several years now (Menon 2017).

In the Contemporary world order, the rise of China is a critical factor in the Indo-Pacific and the return of geopolitics, china's economic, political and military rise is one of the defining elements in the 21st Century and also increasing US-China strategic competition or rebalancing strategy, the new capabilities that state and non-state actors acquired, unmitigated by institutions or habits of co-operative behavior, have each contributed to the pervasive sense of unease (Menon 2017). It is also clearly pointed out that china's rise is swiftly altering the geostrategic equations in the region. As long as China continues to be the economic and military ascendance, it seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and ultimately global preeminence in the long-term (DOS, USA 2019).

Based on the recent events, it is understood that today's Asian power distribution is neither lies with the USA nor China alone, nor both together can impose security order on the Asia-Pacific or settle disputes. There is a talk of Thucydides trap for China and the USA, where the fear of rising powers leads to the conflict with established hegemon, there were many such cases encountered in the last 500years (Allison 2015), But if there is a security to unlock the Thucydides trap for China and the USA, it lies in Asia and its security architecture and India-China relations are casually centered to Asia-Pacific Security (Menon 2017).

In the Past 70 years china has raised economically, politically and militarily, in order to achieve the global hegemonic power. To enhance its global power the Chinese foreign policy has come up with a new initiative One Belt One Road which was unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. The core objective of this project is to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among countries along belt and road (BRI official Website). Besides this initiative China's role has evolved

gradually in the Indo-Pacific region or Asia-Pacific is because of its traditional security arrangements, but in the present time this region is under distressed condition due to some uncertain circumstances. However, multipolar geopolitics has returned, and so has internal and external balancing behavior by all China's Neighbors (Ibid).

One of the Crucial Dimensions of Indo-Pacific Security is China and India's growing interaction across this Space; China and India are fast emerging as major maritime powers in the Indo-Pacific as a part of long-term shifts in the regional balance of power (Brewster 2016). In order to maintain the regional harmony the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has become an important venue for four Indo-Pacific democracies such as Australia, India, Japan and United States with shared common values to address the shared interests (Economic Times 2021).

After Joe Biden took over the office, he held the first virtual meet on March 12 with the leaders of four countries, and he noted that a “free and open” Indo-Pacific is essential to their and his country was committed to working with its partners and allies in the region to achieve stability (Economic Times 2021). But China's rise and its presence in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of claiming the maritime boundary and increasing military activities in the East and South China Seas and nationalist rhetoric are seen as China's strategy to keep the United States out of its sphere of influence. And it's a clear indication for India that it couldn't counter with its rivalry alone because of its strategic flux in the region and certainly generated severe uncertainties and dangerous security situations in the area (Bishoyi 2015). As the Scholars noted that Quad is also one of the initiative which is trying to contain China and lessen its naval activities in the Indo-Pacific region.

India's Geopolitical Interests

The Indo-Pacific region is an emerging geostrategic and geo-economic concept that has gained significance in the International arena. The concept can also be seen as a corollary to India's Look East policy, which India is following since 1992; this policy has not only helped India in reviving its traditional relationship with the Southeast and East Asian Countries but also interlinking across the Indian and Pacific Ocean Countries too (Bishoyi 2015).

The Post-Cold war period has been the remarking era where India focused more on geopolitical interests (Jain 1990) towards other regions, especially with its immediate neighborhood countries

such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, China, and other Southeast Asian states and also with extended neighborhood countries such as United States, Russia and European Union (Mohan 2008).

Over a Period of time, emerging India is clearly visible on global stages; it stands ten among the powerful countries in the World (Pathak 2016), and it is the only region that shares territorial boundaries with some states of South Asian region that would connect both through air and sea routes. Due to its interconnectedness with the countries, it has provided fortunate opportunities to strengthen India's relation with other states in a global domain. It is essential to analyze that Indo-Pacific is an increasing prominence for India. However, the "Indo" in the Indo-Pacific represents the Indian Ocean and also the rise of India in terms of economic and military; and then, with the help of the global players it is playing a crucial role in protecting the maritime environment that enables economic growth and development.

During the Contemporary times, it has been witnessed, India has emerged as a significant power in the South Asian region that could support other developing countries, so with its significance, it has moved its interest towards the Eastern Part of the World where that would be an important link between geo-economics and Ocean realm (Diplomat 2018), that may help India to lead Asia's growth. Moreover, it also fulfills India's dream of being a part of the Indo-Pacific as a singular and integrated geopolitical construct.

Since around 2010, the region Indo-Pacific has gained more importance not only for India, even for the United States, China, Japan, and Australia, which assumes this part has crucial for geo-economic interests, good area at sea, and Freedom of Navigation (Kuo 2018). Moreover, India's available opportunities in this region enable it to revitalize its Look East Policy as Act East Policy, which includes new maritime security strategy and expands its areas of maritime interest amidst of these great powers. In a series of projects unveiled by India under Vajpayee Government in 2003 to leverage the country's coastline and inland waterways to drive industrial development is named as Sagarmala Project which is expected to reduce the cost and time for transporting goods, benefitting industries for export/import trade (Siva 2018).

In Raja Mohan's book *Samudra Manthan* was perhaps the most widely discussed in the subtitle being *Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo Pacific* (Mohan, 2012), This affects the associations of terminology with one Indian commentator arguing that 'fear of an increasingly aggressive China

and its policies provides an opportunity for India to develop the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” (Scott 2012).

Implications for China

Indo-Pacific's idea has come into existence during 2007, before the preponderance of china being a dominant power in the Asian region. But after the formation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving the four major democracies of the World as posed a major challenge to China, and US Senator Josh Hawley in his remarks in the QUAD virtual summit held on March 12 has said that Quad being a regional coalition to stand up to Chinese aggression, and also the main motive of this formation is to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region (Economic Times 2021).

Naturally China has been attempting to take advantage of America's distractions, partly by saber-rattling in South-China Sea and building up its blue water navy for conducting various naval exercises, which has posed a serious security threat to Indo-Pacific member countries (Srinivasan 2011). Since china has been legally claiming the landforms as well as the water of South China Sea on the basis of historic maps since 1951, and the South China Sea incorporated as an area from Karimata and Malacca straits to the strait of Taiwan, presents an unusual challenge that the World is finding it difficult to overcome. It is one among the World's largest maritime trade routes and is currently under dispute due to china's unilateral and excessive claims in the region (Bhatt 2018).

The South China Sea is considered as a prime location which connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean via the narrow straits – Malacca, Lombok and Sunda, all lying to the west of it. The region is also important for the maritime trade flow and its abundant resources (Bhatt 2018). As the former Diplomat said “China is now Shaping its environment in its periphery in quest of an objective dating back to the 19th Century of an economically prosperous and military strong nation” (IANS 2018).

As a part of Chinese Foreign Policy Initiative, it has unveiled One Belt One Road or Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, this project is not just viewed as connectivity and building infrastructure in the countries (IANS 2018), rather it is planning to influence rules being set in its periphery and also to ensure its geopolitical interests that hindrance to other states (Kuo 2018). Especially South Asian Region which is more attractive to BRI and turned to be its main battleground.

According to Ashok Kanta “China is impinging on India’s Strategic Space and will change India’s Strategic and Operational environment in a significant way”, but in one way to counter China’s activities in the region especially with regards to BRI, India’s Sagaramala Project which is a strategic investment initiative of India that envisages setting up of over six mega ports, modernization of seven dozen more ports and development of coastal economic zones among others (IANS 2018). Over a period of time, the possible opportunities and challenges is helping the China to dominate the region through a combination of hard power, sharp power and economic power (Singh 2020).

Conclusion

To Sum up the discourse, that Pacific Century cannot simply be an Asian one; it needs to be based on more than just economic growth, that it will not occur without the help of the United States, moreover it continues to exist with several intra-regional difficulties which have to be resolved, So in Short, the original concept of pacific Century is as much a myth as it is a reality (Rumley 2003).

Indo-Pacific is considered as the most prominent region in the International Arena, in order to balance the power politics between the actors’ common interests in the region. And due to the lack of institutional structure that has led to the formation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal body better known as the Quad.

The Primary objective of this structure is to maintain the rule-based order in the regional maritime security architecture.

In essence, the Indo-Pacific envisages new frameworks that feature the competitive and converging security interests, which are evident in the light of global power's shift to the region. Importantly the maritime powers, such as Australia, China, Japan, India, and the United States, determine the pivot of the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, they seek to dominate and influence each other to achieve their own national goals.

And Over the period, as both India and China's wealth, interests, and power expand, the two countries are increasingly coming into contact with each other in the maritime domain; considering all the possible opportunities and challenges, how India and China will get along in the shared

Indo-Pacific Space Co-operation, Co-existence, Competition or Confrontation may be one of the key strategic challenges of the 21st Century. (Brewster 2016).

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