

## **Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Assessing the Case of QUAD and IORA**

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### **Abstract**

The Indo-Pacific signifies the integration of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean into a singular regional construct. The region is experiencing debates over regionalism, and the Indo-Pacific concept is invoking the idea of regional-ness broader than that of "Asian regionalism." A new discourse of institutionalization is emerging in the Indo-Pacific as regional institution-building is a requisite step in regional construction and an essential step towards gaining recognition and acceptance for political ideas and concepts. This paper examines the process of institutionalization in the Indo-Pacific region. The cases of QUAD and IORA have been chosen for investigation. QUAD, the first Indo-Pacific institution, is undergoing structural changes expanding its priorities, and its members are dedicated to transforming it into an effective institutional platform. Quad is still a nascent institution, but its members are determined to strengthen the framework and reassure their commitment to the group and its endeavor of an "open, prosperous, and rules-based" regional order. IORA, primarily an Indian Ocean player, has a diverse and broad range of members, issue areas, and priorities and thus has the potential to serve as an Indo-Pacific institution. IORA is cognizant of the economic and political transformations occurring in the Indian Ocean region and the broader Indo-Pacific, and set out objectives and passed several declarations regarding diverse issues such as terrorism, blue economy, etc. Nevertheless, IORA must redefine itself and broaden and assert its agenda by undertaking proactive initiatives to ensure its survival amidst the changing regional dynamics.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, Asian regionalism, Institutionalization, QUAD, IORA, Regional Dynamics

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## **The Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific is a gigantic region that traverses Africa's East coast to the West coast of the United States of America. It is a geographical reality to many. It signifies a vast maritime space that "combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Oceans into a singular regional construct" (Khurana, 2019), naturally converging the "countries, communities, and cultures touched by these waters in both physical and metaphysical sense"(Doyle & Rumley, 2018). As Gurpreet Khurana (ibid) observes, Indo-Pacific "acknowledges the importance of the IOR in Asia's security and geopolitical construct."

The post-cold war era witnessed the rapid growth of Asian economies and intensified trade and connectivity, intertwining the different economies across the region, resource-rich Africa into a broader economic and political equation. Currently, the region contributes to nearly 72% of the global GDP (home to 74 countries, including Afro-Asian rimland and Americas). These transformations created enough congruity between geo-economics and geostrategy to the extent that they are treated operationally inseparable. This complexity also implies that the Indian and Pacific Oceans are 'strategically linked,' and 'the Indo-Pacific region should be viewed as a strategic space evolving 'gradually and partially' (Doyle & Rumley, 2018). The "third discourse wave" of the Indo-Pacific elevated the concept to the policy level, as evidenced in the form of the Indo-Pacific Strategic report released by the United States on June 1, 2019, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific published in late June 2019 (He & Feng, 2020).

According to some analysts, there's no such thing as the Indo-pacific (To Each Their Own 'Indo-Pacific' | East Asia Forum, 2018). The "Indo-Pacific" is a geopolitical nomenclature representing the changing political, security, and economic dynamics. The Indo-Pacific is framed by the like-minded regional countries around their various interests, and as a result, "each country has its own Indo-Pacific" (*To Each Their Own 'Indo-Pacific' | East Asia Forum*, 2018). The Indo-Pacific notion is fundamentally based on the idea that the two oceans, the Indian and Pacific, are seen as one entity. However, each country has a distinct interpretation of the regional concept, which varies in terms of the region's geographical extent, strategic orientation, essential characteristics, and priorities (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020).

## **Asian regionalism and Institutionalism**

Regions have emerged as phenomenal constructs shaped by political, economic, and strategic transformations. In terms of politics and international relations, there are no natural or geographically defined regions.

The Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific have been linked for centuries. The Indic, Sinic, and Islamic civilizations heavily influenced Asia's 'regional-ness,' and the continuous economic and cultural interactions between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia sub-regions solidified the current conceptualization of Asia as a region. Following World War II and decolonization, the cold war superpower rivalry dominated Asian politics, which were already burdened by several internal conflicts. Japan pushed East Asian regionalism through the 'Greater East Asia Co-property Sphere,' and the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signaled the start of nascent Asian regionalism and institutionalism. This aspect will be examined in detail later. India played a pivotal role during the early years of Asian regionalism by organizing the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 and through the Non-alignment movement (NAM), supported by many Asian countries, including East Asian nations Myanmar, Cambodia, and Indonesia (Lee-Brown, 2021). Simultaneously, the United States "San Francisco System" of bilateral alliances established a web of security ties with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, creating a sense of an East Asian regional security system.

Maritime Asia witnessed a proliferation of institutions by the end of the Cold war. ASEAN, founded in 1967, was imbued as a grouping in the solidarity of Southeast Asian countries and as a resisting force against foreign interference, and cold war influence, in its internal and inter-state affairs. ASEAN has emerged as the go-to institution for discussing a wide range of issues concerning East Asian dynamics, and some constructivists attribute post-cold war peace in East Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region in general, to the "attributes of shared identity, institution-building, and norm diffusion driven by ASEAN" (He, 2014). Initially a five-member group, ASEAN expanded its boundaries to become an Eleven-member multilateral institution. Despite the "decline of its international standings," Burma was admitted as an ASEAN member (Cribb, 1998). However, Sri Lanka has been denied permission to begin the ASEAN membership process because it lacks the "fundamental socio-cultural" values shared by the other Southeast Asian countries (Cribb, 1998). This mechanism of inclusion and exclusion is commonly seen during regionalization or institutionalization of a region, as is the case with the Indo-Pacific

concept. The Inclusion-Exclusion mechanism alters mental maps and impacts regional political cartography.

In the case of India and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a similar mechanism of inclusion/exclusion occurred. APEC, backed by Australia and Japan, emerged as a multilateral economic forum in the 1980s, with trade facilitation being the priority of its members. India requested APEC membership, which was supported by the United States, Australia, and Japan. However, the membership bid was rejected primarily due to India's "extra-territorial status," which means that India is not a Pacific littoral country and lacks a desirable economic interdependence with the Pacific economies (*Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, n.d.). Here, India's exclusion is carried out following the philosophy of "maritime regionalism" and "economic regionalism."

Similarly, there are several institutions and multilateral forums in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the Asian institutions are considered weaker and ineffective due to a lack of natural cohesiveness perpetrated due to complex historical experiences (Beeson & Lee-Brown, 2016). The "strategic functional theory" of institutions demonstrates that the institutions matter only in resolving non-traditional issues but fail to address the traditional disputes which involve the distributional problems (He, 2014).

Unlike the older nomenclature "Asia-Pacific," the Indo-Pacific uplifts the prominence of the Indian ocean and India in the global political landscape. The regional capitals interact through multilateral regional institutions like ASEAN, IORA, BIMSTEC, QUAD, excluding bilateral and trilateral arrangements that significantly serve as platforms for communication. The apparent limitations of these institutions are either that their membership is limited to a particular region within the Indo-Pacific (ASEAN), or the scope and objectives are narrower and confined to addressing issues related to a specific subject (QUAD, a mini-lateral security arrangement). There is an absence of an overarching institution to address the broader regional issues. This institutional dearth steers confusion and contestation of the regional players' views and visions and renders their international relations unintelligible because "they would lack shared expectations and understandings" (Keohane, 1990).

Moreover, regional institution-building is a requisite step in regional construction and "an essential step towards gaining recognition and acceptance for political ideas and concepts" (He & Feng, 2020). The long-term significance of the Indo-Pacific concept and its sustainability as

a region depends upon whether or not it is institutionalized on the grounds of multilateralism (Beeson, 2018).

### **The Complexities and Concerns in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific region faces complex traditional and non-traditional challenges that need to be addressed collectively.

- Firstly, there is a resurgence of the traditional geopolitical thinking in the region. The Indo-Pacific is often referred to as a theatre for the 21st Century great power competition. The unquenched ambitions of rising powers like China and India, the Challenge to rules-based order due to China's revisionist tendencies, and India's strategic convergence with other democracies of the region (Japan, Australia, and the US) have territorialized the region to a great extent. The realist constructions of the Indo-Pacific present "state-centered depictions" of the region, which the states use to strengthen "domestic and national support for state-building programs in the region" (Doyle & Rumley, 2018). These stories fulfill nationalistic ambitions, often overlapping with the other nation-states' ambitions. "Spheres of influence," China's approach to the South China Sea and "Geopolitical nationalism," maritime "Fulcrum," the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy" are some of the ideas whose underlying philosophy is founded on state-centrism. The "free and open" Indo-Pacific professed by the democracies makes the ocean space open for all, including the respective "spheres of influence," even to the strategic competitors. This paradox appears to be one of the reasons why states are hesitant to envision a larger regional institution-based Indo-Pacific. Future conflicts can potentially be reduced only by a "series of 'grand bargains' based on "mutual recognition, awareness, and appropriate accommodation" amid growing volatility (Doyle & Rumley, 2018a, 162-180).
- All the geographic concepts are, to a certain extent, 'socially constructed,' and the dominant countries play a significant role in deciding which nation-states do and do not include in the regional cartographies. The Indo-Pacific conceptualization is broadly categorized into "Inclusionist" and "Exclusionist" (Doyle & Rumley, 2018b). Inclusionists include China and Africa in the Indo-Pacific construct (India and Japan); exclusionists do not (Australia and the US). China considers the Indo-Pacific as just a strategic concept advanced by the US to contain its rise and ASEAN endeavors for the

"ASEAN-centric" Indo-Pacific. Ironically, the prominent advocates of the concept, QUAD countries, have contradictory regional images. This lack of understanding or misunderstanding and consensus about the regional cartography has become a significant challenge to the Indo-Pacific institutionalization. Interestingly, the lack of an institutional platform is also why there is a lack of consensual understanding.

- "Health security" is once again high on the international agenda, and so is it in the Indo-Pacific (Kamradt-Scott, 2018). The region is loomed by several infectious and hazardous diseases like SARS, H1N1, Nipah, Ebola, Zika, and the recently out-broke Covid -19 pandemic. Australia is playing a leading role in strengthening regional health security. Australia launched a regional health security initiative and created Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security in 2017. The Indo-Pacific countries met virtually in the form of "the QUAD Plus video conference" to discuss cooperation issues such as vaccine development, challenges of stranded citizens...mitigating the impact on the global economy (Jash, 2020). There are also issues like "Vaccine Nationalism" prevailing today, which made the UN Secretary-General reiterate his call "for vaccines to be treated as a global public good" (*The Hindu*, 2020). A more extensive and inclusive institutional setup is desirable to effectively address these pressing global concerns.
- The Indo-Pacific region constantly faces "climate security" challenges (*International Military Council on Climate and Security*, 2020). According to Asia-Pacific Disaster Report, 2017, almost half of the world's natural disaster events occur in the Indo-Pacific region, killing around 1.1 million people from 1970 to 2018. The region is responsible for 50% of the global greenhouse emissions. Also, it is more vulnerable to climate change-induced catastrophes like floods and rise in sea levels, which contribute to 'instability, forced migration, and conflict. Facing these kinds of complex challenges is possible only by collective action.
- Maritime trade routes are the lifelines for the countries' growth and development. The Indo-Pacific is emerging as "the dominant international waterway of the 21st Century." It consists of crucial Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and choke points (Malacca and Hormuz), which are "hotspots" facing constant threats like piracy, maritime terrorism, and also conflict between countries over the Exclusive Economic Zones

(EEZ) (Khurana, 2007). Therefore, the preservation of SLOCs is in the collective interest, and it can only be ensured by governing the ocean space with rules espousing a cooperative and multilateral spirit.

- There is a dearth of institutional-minded leadership in the region. According to the "leadership-Institution" model, the Indo-Pacific region lacks "executive leadership" and "ideational leadership" (He & Feng, 2020a). Executive leadership is necessary for the states "to address operational difficulties such as relative gains and collective action." Ideational leadership help states "to perceive and identify common interests or 'absolute gains' from cooperation" (He & Feng, 2019). However, critical states like QUAD member countries are still in a phase of substantializing the "Indo-Pacific" concept. The lack of leadership conditions and the inability to frame an agenda for regionalism is also challenging institutionalization.

The following section of the paper examines the evolution of Quad and IORA and their prospects for playing a more significant role as Indo-Pacific institutions.

### **QUAD; the first Indo-Pacific Institution**

Quad is the first Indo-Pacific grouping, and its evolution is intertwined with that of the Indo-Pacific concept. The "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech delivered by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in India's Parliament in 2007 laid the groundwork for the modern concept of the Indo-Pacific. In his remarks, Mr. Abe stated, "the Pacific and Indian oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and prosperity" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2007*). Though he did not use the term "Indo-Pacific" to describe the Africa-Asia collective, his speech popularised the concept of Indian and Pacific Ocean integration in political and academic circles.

Dr. Manmohan Singh (India's Prime Minister) visited Japan in 2006 for a bilateral summit, during which the two nations' leaders agreed to raise their bilateral relationship to "Strategic and Global Partnership" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006*). The joint statement released after the summit noted: "the usefulness of having dialogue among India, Japan and the other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region on themes of mutual interest" (*Ministry of External Affairs, 2013*). However, in reality, the current view of the "Indo-Pacific" concept was articulated and explained by an Indian academic and strategist, Capt. Gurpreet Khurana, in a paper titled *Security of Sea Lines: Prospects of India-Japan Cooperation*. He used the term

"Indo-Pacific" to describe Asia's extensive economic integration as well as the convergence of India and Japan's interests, such as "sea route security" and "strengthening strategic congruence" (Khurana, 2007).

On the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), India and Japan, along with the United States and Australia, the four major stakeholders in the Indian and Pacific Ocean region, gathered to formalize the above concept. The meeting formed a mini-lateral arrangement known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). Later that year, QUAD held a naval exercise that included Singapore. Some observers saw the grouping, particularly Chinese academia, as "containment" of China, while others criticized the term calling it "Asian NATO." Due to diplomatic pressure from China, Australia withdrew from Quad in 2008, effectively ending the group's existence. The Indo-Pacific concept appeared to be a godsend for these countries, reinforcing discussions about the convergence of mutual interests and the development of relationships. Naturally, these countries began advocating and promoting the Indo-Pacific for more than a decade, which resulted in the resurgence of Quad in 2017.

The Covid-19 pandemic dubbed the "catalyst for a new world order" (Jash, 2020), devastated the world by 2020, causing severe social and economic disruption. The pandemic also harmed relations between countries, primarily the United States and China, which engaged in a verbal spat after President Trump allegedly dubbed the "Chinese virus," accusing China of failing to control the virus's spread (Christensen, 2020). During this turbulent time, the Indo-Pacific countries came together to discuss and work on the pandemic response.

Quad, which ceased functioning due to Australia's withdrawal, has been resurrected, with Australia joining the Malabar exercise off India's western coast in 2020. On March 12, 2021, the leaders of the Quad countries, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, met virtually for the first time to discuss various issues concerning the Indo-Pacific region. The meeting emphasized "cooperation among member countries to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, with a joint vaccine partnership" and emphasized the need for an "open and free Indo-Pacific" (Haidar & Bhattacharjee, 2021). According to a joint statement released after the summit titled "The Spirit of the Quad," the Quad members pledged to use their "partnership to help the world's most dynamic region respond to a historic crisis, so that it may be the free, open, accessible, diverse, and thriving Indo-Pacific we all seek" (The White House, 2021). The leaders agreed to work together on various issues, including vaccine production, climate

change, cyberspace challenges, counter-terrorism, infrastructure investment, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.

The Quad countries, joined by three other Indo-Pacific powers, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam, convened over a telephonic conference initiated by the US (Smith, 2020) to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. This event was dubbed the "Quad-plus video conference" by the Times of India. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated in a readout of the March 20 meeting that "the participants shared their assessments on the current situation concerning COVID-19, and discussed ways to synergize their efforts to counter its spread." Participants also agreed to collaborate on "vaccine development, challenges of stranded citizens, assistance to needy countries, and mitigating the impact of the global economy" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020). According to one report, the "Quad-plus" nations are engaged in a series of conversations over time and are emerging as a "plurilateral formation within the Indo-Pacific and is poised to enhance partnership in the post-Covid world order" (Chaudhury, 2020).

Quad is still a nascent institution, but its members are determined to strengthen the framework and reassure their commitment to the group and its endeavor of an "open, prosperous, and rules-based" regional order. Furthermore, the Quad has a greater chance of being a significant player in the Indo-Pacific. In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the four Quad countries formed the "Tsunami core group," which provided help and relief in disaster-affected areas through coordinated Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities. As previously said, natural catastrophes are common in the Indo-Pacific area. Therefore, the Quad can focus on developing a HADR-centric agenda and a unified "framework for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," which would be a "win-win" for both Quad and the region (Chakradeo, 2021).

Quad should step up its regional health security cooperation. Despite Quad's effort for health diplomacy and vaccine collaboration in the shape of a "Quad-plus" arrangement, the region's vaccine manufacturing and distribution lacked impetus. To address future health-related challenges, such as pandemics, "Health Security" and "Health Diplomacy" should be made an intrinsic component of the Quad's agenda, and the Quad should operate in tandem with the already established ASEAN health-security mechanisms (Anaur & Hussain, 2022).

Quad should also consider extending its membership to the regional countries, including those who participated in the " Quad-plus " arrangement that shared similar concerns. Quad must broaden its agenda and enhance a cooperative endeavor addressing issues such as connectivity, infrastructure development, and non-traditional security concerns like piracy, terrorism, cyber-security, and climate change. Broadening its agenda and expanding membership will eventually tone down the security underpinnings of the Quad and attract more countries to be part of the institution.

### **IORA and the prospects of the Indo-Pacific institutionalization**

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is more comprehensive and representative than any other regional institution of its sheer size and diversity. IORA's analysis alongside the Quad does not suggest that the former is an alternative to the latter, but it highlights IORA's potential to become an Indo-Pacific institution that can work complementary to the other regional institutions in ensuring economic prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific. IORA was established in 1997 to foster economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The association celebrated its Twentieth anniversary in 2017, and it currently has 23 member states and nine dialogue partners, including the heavyweights like Japan, the USA, France, and the UK, the major stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region.

IORA is cognizant of the economic and political transformations occurring in the Indian Ocean region and the broader Indo-Pacific. The Indian Ocean emerged as a center for trade, fuelling the economic prosperities of the pacific littoral countries and its region. The rise of the Indo-Pacific also signifies the rise of the Indian Ocean and underscores the fact that the Indian Ocean replaced the Atlantic as the world's busiest and most strategically important trade corridor" (Naidu, 2019). The rise of the Indian Ocean should be credited to East Asia's growth story, and, hence, its destiny is linked to East Asia. The more economically interconnected these two regions get, the more strategically linked they become. IORA realizes that it needs a comprehensive regional vision and a proactive engagement in promoting its agenda and "maritime regionalism" to ensure stability and peace. Accordingly, in 2011, IORA outlined the following seven priority areas:

- a) Maritime safety and security,
- b) Trade & Investment facilitation,
- c) Fisheries management,

- d) Disaster risk management,
- e) Tourism & Cultural exchanges,
- f) Academics, Science & Technology, Blue Economy,
- g) Women's Economic Empowerment.

The Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA) adopted the "IORA Economic Declaration" in 2014, which is based on "common principles for fostering sustainable and equitable economic growth in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)" (*IORA Economic Declaration, 2014*). Few guiding principles were recognized in the declaration, including encouraging the private sector toward sustainable economic growth, blue economy, facilitation of trade and investment, the preeminence of the global, rules-based trading system, infrastructure development, investment in education and skills training, equal access to employment and economic opportunities, women's empowerment, and support for less developed countries, all of which will help "unlock the economic potential of the IOR" (*IORA Economic Declaration, 2014*).

In 2017, IORA held a Jakarta Summit commemorating its twentieth anniversary under the theme "Promoting Regional Cooperation for a Peaceful, Stable, and Prosperous Indian Ocean" (*JAKARTA CONCORD, 2017*). The summit resulted in IORA's leaders signing the "Jakarta Concord," which outlined the organization's commitment to the following objectives;

- Promoting Maritime Security and Safety in the Region
- Enhancing Trade and Investment Cooperation
- Promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries management and development
- Enhancing disaster risk management in the region
- Fostering tourism and cultural exchanges
- Harnessing and developing cross-cutting issues and priority objectives
- Broadening IORA's external engagement
- Strengthening IORA's institutions (*IORA Leaders Sign Jakarta Concord, 2017*)

During the summit, IORA nations decided to sign the "Jakarta Declaration on Blue Economy" and the "Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism," marking a "significant change from its narrow economic focus" (Islam, 2017). In April 2019, IORA held its first strategic workshop with the theme "Indo-Pacific Strategy for IORA," silently announcing its interest in operating in the emerging Indo-Pacific construct. IORA may have pan-Oceanic aspirations, but it has only 23 member states leaving many potential

members unrepresented. It also has nine dialogue partners, including China and USA. Initially, India rejected South Africa's proposal of giving membership to several African nations due to its confinement to the narrow regional vision. However, India's disenchantment with the changing economic, political, and security environment has broadened its vision and elevated Africa's position in its political calculus. India realized that it was imperative to give Africa deserving weight in its "inclusive" Indo-Pacific construct (Doyle & Rumley, 2018). Accordingly, the African states and other potential members should be encouraged to participate in IORA to make the organization more comprehensive, inclusive, and effective. India launched its maritime cooperative initiative called Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in 2015. While introducing the initiative, the Indian Prime Minister stated that "the goal is to seek a climate of trust and transparency; respect for international maritime rules and norms by all countries; sensitivity to each other's interests; peaceful resolution of maritime issues; and increase in maritime cooperation" (Rishi, 2019).

A similar theme resonates in its Indo-Pacific vision too. These principles coincide with the spirit of "tolerance, collaboration, consensus, respect," which are the founding principles of IORA's architecture. Hence, by proactively engaging the regional states in the IORA institutional framework, India can fill the void of executive leadership existing in the institution. In the 2018 Shagril-La Dialogue, the Indian Prime Minister stated, "We are advancing a comprehensive agenda of regional cooperation through IORA" (*Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue*, 2018). With continued effort, SAGAR and IORA can coexist as complementary mechanisms governing the region, and SAGAR can "provide the necessary framework for IORA to expand and adapt into the Indo-Pacific."

IORA is troubled by weak institutional structures, a lack of a tangible agenda, and poor political support from member nations (Naidu, 2019). Implementing a "two-track" strategy is necessary for any institution to remain relevant and practical. The track I focus on executive leadership issues, while Track II focuses on policy input and identifying shared interests. Hence, IORA should implement "robust two-track mechanisms of leaders, academics, and experts" who actively pursue the institutional cause (Naidu, 2019).

IORA can more robustly engage Dialogue partners and harness their economic strength to boost regional growth through connectivity and infrastructure development investments. IORA must focus on strengthening its blue economy framework and push for the implementation of the blue economy practices to ensure sustainable growth in the region. IORA can potentially

broaden the cooperation in areas such as maritime safety and security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, academic, science and technology cooperation, tourism, and cultural exchanges (Islam, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the global political and economic 'center of gravity and a theatre for great power competition. Many significant powers like India, Japan, the US, Australia, China, and other rising middle powers like Indonesia have vested interests in the Indo-Pacific. Their future depends on the security and stability of the region. Despite having several regional institutions, the Indo-Pacific remained least connected in terms of cooperation and loosely governed. The region is bombarded with several challenges, including traditional and non-traditional security issues, which could be addressed and resolved only through collective multilateral action.

However, the regional political, economic, and strategic circumstances created a fresh wave of regionalism and institutionalism reflecting the Indo-Pacific reality. Quad is the first Indo-Pacific grouping, and its evolution is intertwined with that of the Indo-Pacific concept. Quad's revival in 2017 filled its member states with renewed energy and spirit. Though Quad is a nascent institution, it has opportunities and potential to play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific. Quad still has a long way to go, and hence, it should consider extending its membership to the regional countries, including those who participated in the "Quad-plus" arrangement that shared similar concerns. Quad should make "Health Security" and "Health Diplomacy" an intrinsic component of Quad's agenda, and it should operate in tandem with the already established ASEAN health-security mechanisms. Quad must consider broadening its agenda and enhancing a cooperative endeavor addressing the connectivity, infrastructure development, and non-traditional security concerns like piracy, terrorism, cyber-security, and climate change.

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific signifies the rise of the Indian ocean's prominence. Therefore, IORA stays relevant. On the other hand, IORA is beset by inadequate institutional structures, a lack of a concrete goal, and a lack of political support from member countries. IORA will remain relevant only by broadening its agenda and engaging its member-states more pro-actively. IORA must focus on strengthening its blue economy framework and push for the implementation of the blue economy practices to ensure sustainable growth in the region. IORA can potentially broaden the cooperation in areas such as maritime safety and security,

disaster risk management, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, academic, science and technology cooperation, tourism, and cultural exchanges. IORA should implement robust two-track mechanisms of leaders, academics, and experts who actively pursue the institutional cause, enhancing the vigorous and broader reach of its "maritime regionalism" agenda.

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