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## **Strategic position of Indo-Pacific Ocean; Conflict or Cooperation among Major Powers**

**Muhammad Tayyab Usman**

Lecturer,  
Govt. Guru Nanak Graduate College  
Nankana Sahab  
**Email:** [tayyabusman866h@gmail.com](mailto:tayyabusman866h@gmail.com)

**Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad**

Assistant Professor,  
Govt. Guru Nanak Graduate College  
Nankana Sahab  
**Correspondence:** [malikmukhtar1963@gmail.com](mailto:malikmukhtar1963@gmail.com)

**Dr. Muhammad Munib Khalid**

Assistant Professor,  
Minhaj University, Lahore  
**Email:** [munibkhalid@mul.edu.pk](mailto:munibkhalid@mul.edu.pk)

### **ABSTRACT**

Indo-Pacific region has been gaining momentum because of its strategic and maritime significance. It has potential to serve as an engine of Global Economic Growth because of its natural resources through co-operation among major and regional players who can bring harmony in this super-region. In this framework, the study investigates the role of major stakeholders why they always remain in perpetual clashing point. This paper tries to examine the Indo-Pacific maritime potentials and its encounter in the changing geo-political condition. The existing research is substantial as it will benefit to touch not only India, USA and China's prominence in this region as emerging global powers but also for Pakistan as a key regional player because of its geo-strategic position. Plus, the study has applied the conceptual framework of power politics among major powers given by John Mearsheimer. As political scientists have not yet specified suitable consideration to this issue and it is right time to comprehend and emphasize what kind of associations these countries should mature and how they can discourse their concerns. Thus, this paper may be measured in the refinement of influential writing as it aims at encouraging the apprehensive powers to advance gracious links.

**Keywords:** *Global, Hegemony, Maritime, Conflict*

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Power Politics at Global Stage**

Numerous narratives in the West appear to belief that "everlasting amity" among the major powers is ultimately on the horizon. The abolition of the Cold War, so the reason goes, noticed an oceanic alteration in how great powers cooperate with one another. We have arrived in a world in which there is slight risk that the major

powers will involve each other in well-being rivalry, much less warfare, which has developed an old business (Mearsheimer, 2003).

This viewpoint proposes that great powers no longer observe each other as possible military adversaries, nevertheless instead as associates of a family of states, members of what is occasionally termed the "international community" (Elman & Elman, 2003) The projections for collaboration are plentiful in this capable novel World, a World which is liable to transport enlarged wealth and harmony to all the great supremacies. Even a few supporters of realism, a school of thought that has factually seized negative interpretations about the forecasts for harmony among the great authorities (Lee, 2007).

Interestingly, the statement that safekeeping rivalry and conflict between the great powers have been eliminated from the international structure is incorrect. Certainly, there is much proof that the capacity of eternal reconciliation among the great powers was fruitless (Strike & Posner, 1992). Moreover, alarm of Japan in East Asia is probably even more deep, and it is surely more regularly uttered. Finally, the probability of a clash and trade war between China and the United States can hardly be ignored. This is not to mention that such a war is expected, however the option retells us that the danger of great-power conflict has not yet been vanished from global stage (Walton & Kavalski, 2016).

The unhappy element is that worldwide policies have always been a callous and unsafe dealing, and it is prospective to continue that approach. While the strength of their struggle shines and diminishes, great powers frighten each other and always contest with each other for supremacy (Gunitsky, 2017). The prevailing objective of each nation is to exploit its share of world command, which means to achieve power at the cost of other states. But great powers do not only attempt to be the strongest of all the great powers, though that is a long-awaited result. Their final purpose is to be the super power that is, the only great power in the global structure (Waltz, 2008).

This indefatigable interest of power means that great powers are motivated to gaze for chances to modify the division of world power in their support. They will capture these prospects if they have the required competence. Therefore, a great power will protect the balance of power when forthcoming change supports another state, and it will attempt to weaken the equilibrium when the course of transformation is in its own support (Kusztal, 2017).

This setting, which no one deliberately planned or projected, is frankly catastrophic. Great powers that have no motive to fight each other—that are merely worried with their own existence—yet have little choice but to follow power and to pursue to dominate the other states in the structure (Gunitsky, 2017). While it is disappointing to comprehend that great powers might ponder and exploit this way, it befits us to perceive the world as it is, not as we would like it to be (Ikenberry, 2012). For instance, one of the crucial foreign policy matters confronting the United States is the problem of how China will perform if its quick economic evolution remains and efficiently fits China into a gigantic Hong Kong. Numerous Americans consider that if China gets autonomous and involves in the global capitalist scheme, it will not perform belligerently; instead it will be satisfied with the status quo in East Asia (Loyd, 2009). But the outcome would be strong safety rivalry between China and its competitors, with the omnipresent hazard of great-power war. In reality, China

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and the United States are destined to be adversaries as China's power grows (Dreyerand & Kim, 1989).

In this framework, the scholarship examines that why Indo-Pacific Region has conceived as a conflicting zone in 21st Century. What are the major factors that have made the region so pivotal for global as well as regional players? How far they succeed for collaboration or keep going to place the region in constant warfare. These are the objectives that this study will try to answer. Moreover, the primary sources have been re-examined in this research which includes agreements, formal reports, surveys, planned map and chart from official websites plus other pertinent documents to find tangible answers.

### **2. Indian Ocean**

The strategic focus has shifted from the Pacific-Atlantic to that of Pacific-Indian Ocean. This is mainly driven by factors such as the rise of China, the rise of India's economic and strategic clout as well as the growing importance of Indian Ocean. This has directed the advent of the concept of "Indo-Pacific" now the vital part of the 21st century global politics (Kaplan, 2010). The super maritime region of Indo-Pacific is far greater than merely territorial boundaries of some very important and nuclear-armed countries or sub-regions of the world including Pakistan, USA, China and India who are performing major directions in the maritime, security and economic domains due to their traversing economic as well as security interests (Bhatia & Sakhuja, 2014).

Bhatia and Sakhuja (2014) demonstrated that this zone is developing geo-strategic and geo-economic impression which consumes connotation in defense scholarship. The association of this zone is important because of its geography that covers the Eastern Coast of Africa through Indian Ocean and Western Pacific Ocean. This has newly added extensive recognition in geopolitical spheres. This notion could be understood a usual outcome as compare with India's Look East Policy, (LEP) that New Delhi follows over the last two epochs. It has not solitary facilitated New Delhi while revitalizing outmoded bond with the South-East and East Asian states but also interweaving through the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Aslanian, 2011). The rehabilitated Delhi's LEP into an 'Act East Policy', pursues to escalate social interaction along healthier relationship in the territory and obtains to show a superior part in this forward looking zone. Definitely, it has a complex body of marine areas and shorefronts manifested by a diversity of societies, beliefs, monetary replicas and ascendancy edifices. A shared association obligatory to the various sub-systems within the Indo-Pacific in the sea. The Indo-Pacific imagines original outlines that feature modest and union wellbeing attentions which has obvious in the sunlit of worldwide authority alteration to the region (Doyle, 2013). Outstandingly, the naval influences of Canberra, Beijing, Tokyo, Delhi and the Washington, regulate the pivot of this region, and being big players they talk to govern and effect each other to attain their nationalized objectives.

Moreover, it characterizes the epicenter of harshness of international commercial, governmental and estimated attentions. Indo-pacific region is abundant in physical possessions, particularly hydrocarbons which petrol the industrial locomotives of the global markets. The well-known and evolving supremacies of US, China, India and Japan are challenging all these possessions. But transnational trade and

investments is the only viable solution for its prosperity (Rynning, 2016). As the region contains of countless natural resources for the development of global market (Eichengreen, Gupta, & Kumar, 2010).

In reality, the region establishes the apparatus of global economic development and the geostrategic imperative of the region can be measured over the power of the engagements of goods and significant hamper opinions in the area (Tewari & Khanijo, 2016). As far as the security encounters, the Indo-Pacific region has materialized as a noteworthy geo-strategic cosmos and an auditorium of Great Power for contest and competitiveness. But conventional competitions over oceanic ground, dominance plus possessions underwired at regional levels and the growth of different intimidations has terrified combats for the states. The supremacy of the area includes natural resources, energy plus intercontinental trade (Li, 2009). The description of such safety confronts in the region is extensive multinational suggestions that necessitates worldwide supportive answer. The region has appeared as highly unpredictable because of the production of nuclear and missile weapons. The rebalance stratagem has had inadequate impression in reduction of the propagation of armaments because America has flopped to switch the part of Beijing and Pyongyang in atomic programme (Huang, 2016). It would be grave wellbeing inferences because states that are not endangered because of arm canopy would be below marvelous weight to nuclearized. Therefore, such expansions fashioned a newfangled sanctuary milieu and a growing accumulation of lucrative influences such as Beijing, New Delhi, Tokyo, Jakarta and Australia (Fishman, 2005). The USA rebalance tactic towards the Indo-Pacific region is chief involvement of the Obama administration. It is an inclusive policy which targets to guard and encourage American benefits to fast-tracking its monetary and tactful activities with its established supporters and evolving followers such as New Delhi and Jakarta that profoundly motivated by the geo-strategic domineering of the parsimoniously rapidly increasing Indo-Pacific along repercussions for American benefits power (Malik, 2014).

However, China's struggle to control this region is worrisome for America. China is playing a tactical role by influencing the developing states to make its allies stronger and maintaining its position. It pursues to attain this objective not through multifaceted method, but by accumulative bilateral rendezvous. This violent Chinese method has positively engendered undecorated worries and hazardous settings in the region (Chacko, 2016). Hence, its geo-strategic association rapidly improved and the Washington has been struggling to wider its external rule. Washington considers that the situation can be controlled by strengthening position in 'Asia Pacific region'. The USA conditions that harmony, constancy and liberty of routing are critical for the whole regional welfare. Hence, it's problematic for region if China gets control and creates hegemony. Therefore, Washington is endeavoring to play the role as arbitrator to end the everlasting skirmish in this region. It is jagged that Beijing's growth is suddenly fluctuating the geo-strategic calculations. Its push policy, sponsored by developing economic and military power, has transformed the geo-economics and geo-politics of the region (Richmond, 2009). Nevertheless, Beijing's escalation has encouraged neighboring states to enhance military influence upgrading and control prognostication (Deng, 2008). It instigated foremost anxieties, besides, whereas the Washington vestiges as an authoritative state because of its military and economic power, the widespread

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national power of China has shaped essential tactical plot for itself. Beijing's nationalistic governance and belligerent detection of national interests that has created a regional fluctuation (Goldstein, 2015).

It requests to accomplish this objective not through multilateral approach, but rather by cumulative two-sided appointments. This antagonistic Chinese attitude has engendered unembellished doubts and unsafe reassurance situations in the region (Tang, Li, & Acharya, 2009). Whereas Chinese specialists underline China as principal strength for harmony, strength and affluence. China is striving with neighboring countries to resolve the ultimate strategic matters. However, the cultivating bargain and commerce has generated huge opportunity in the last few years, Beijing's positive attitude caused profounder reservations among countries (Mitchell, Eisenman, & Heginbotham, 2007).

Furthermore, Big powers cannot afford Beijing's power for granted but on the other side, China don't wish to allow other powers to interfere in their matters in order to maintain its influence in this region. The uncertainties among the developing states is a real challenge for both peer competitors. The powerful states rivalry is a real problem for periphery states to find their position (Fryba, Christensen, & Li, 2012).

### 3. Options for South Asian States

India has invigorated its ties with other countries over its LEP in the early 1990s, freshly over 'Act East Policy' under the Modi administration. Indian arrangements along the two dynamic small areas of Asia have been heightened at economic, defense, politico-diplomatic and strategic stages. Its presently behavior is two-pronged bond along Hanoi, Tokyo, Jakarta, Seoul, Beijing and Canberra (Markey, Haenle, & Saalman, 2011). Delhi tactical ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Washington has radically advanced rapidly. There is also a New Delhi-Tokyo-Canberra-Washington quadrilateral and New Delhi-Tokyo Washington trilateral corporation. The America reflects New Delhi as a 'cornerstone' in its rebalancing stratagem. It is professed to establish the connection between the global major democracies will assist to indorse peacetime, sharing mutual ethics in this decade (Ali, 2012).

Nonetheless, China is turning Asians as a great competitor. The emerging power has quickly advanced its liaison with Indian Ocean circumference states, that has supposed as a 'string of pearls' stratagem, (Pehrson, 2006) surrounded with growing New Delhi state. Because of Chinese influence other countries have got alert to cooperate its maritime and sanctuary cooperation like the South-East and East Asian states. Besides, Beijing has freshly expanded its inspiration in the region by funding enormous sea substructure developments like Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Lamboo in Kenya and Chittagong in Burma (Deng, 2008). 'China's ability to put India under tension in the Indian Ocean is an increasing influence determining the bigger challenge for Asian security' (Aslanian, 2011) Apart from these factors the growth of non-state actors, naval border assertions and Big Power struggle over possessions has widened the sanctuary encounters for India. New Delhi has its interest authoritative in its cultivating commitment with this region (Pehrson, n.d.). Over the years, it has arisen as a crucial regional actor by generating deliberated space. Conversely, notwithstanding India's better ties with the neighboring nations, it gazes to assimilate its north-eastern region with South-East

Asia by augmenting economic collaboration and to develop people-to-people conversation and capacity structure (Sakhuja, 2011). On contradicting the developing safekeeping contests in this region, Indian policy designs to hearten and contribute in supportive method it would empower all states to stand with security encounters and to safeguard that the dangerous marine tracks should be reserved exposed. Therefore, India is supposed to become a web breadwinner of sanctuary in the Indian Ocean region and outside (Kan, 2009). Significantly, New Delhi-Beijing connection has upgraded in latest times, predominantly in the economic ground, with a bilateral annual trade of nearly \$70 billion in 2013. Temporarily, India endeavors to uphold an acceptable equilibrium in its tactical affairs with the regional nations (Bhatia & Sakhuja, 2014). As the strategic connotation of the Indo-Pacific has grown in previous durations. It is a predominant awareness that it has been sluggish in widening the prosperities that are happening from the international control modification due to native radical limitations (Venter, 2017). Its requirements as an inclusive along longstanding approach for external paybacks. India's 'Act East Policy', has delivered a novel motivation to India's arrangements in the vivacious zone (Ali, 2011). Nevertheless, Indian sustained internal commercial expansion is a major focus for its bond with South Asian Republics that would regulate the future course of its commitment with the Indo-Pacific.

As there is no iota of doubt, that the pendulum of world economy is shifting towards the Asian Hemisphere with increasing tactical overtone in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Considerably, there is gigantic prospects for economic incorporation in the area (Malik, 2014) It is rather relevant to note, the India-China ties is composed between the fundamentals of collaboration and engagement, like that of the US-China affiliation. This zone, nevertheless, vestiges of chief apprehension in the domain owing to the increasing safety intimidations. It might perhaps overwhelm global participant's competence and preserve stability inside the region in a continuous and operative routine. Most pointedly, states in the Indo-Pacific region segment countless of these collective apprehensions. Stimulating bigger collaboration and consistency in their approach that could help to address the difficulties cooperatively (Kadera, 2001).

Nevertheless, China's close cooperation with Pakistan and Iran is demanding for its strong manifestation in the Indian Ocean as eighty percent of the Chinese import of energy, comprising mainly of oil and gas, comes through the Indo-Pacific from the Middle East and Africa (Sharma, 1968). Likewise, mutual exchange between China and the Middle East is anticipated to spread up to \$500 billion by 2020 and by 2030, eighty-five percent of world energy utilization will originate from the Indo-Pacific zone and China is claimed to be a global leading economy (Harris, 1993). Additionally, Chinese have invested heavily in Africa and is previously amid Africa's upper five stockholders with a million Beijing residents are active and employed in Africa. The complex relationship between US, China, India (the three major stakeholders of Indo-Pacific region) and the rest of the other countries displays the situation from collaboration to skirmish (Cheng, & Lim, 2015).

However, the three chief authorities hang upon each other for their profitable assistances and collaborate for motives of economic interdependence, anyways if America will impose oil export assertions against Iran (Garver, 1996). Then automatically, China and India, the emerging great powers in the region will get

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benefit of such circumstances, their allies, and various dependent actors in South Asia will respond energetically to the growth of India and China (Khalid, 2013).

On the flip side, Pakistan, as a nuclear armed state, with the demography of approx.200m, is in a tactical path of the North Arabian Aquatic and at the doorsteps of the Persian Bay. Pakistan delivers the square estate course towards the Central Asian Republic, surrounded by twofold nuclear-armed states India and China. But Pakistan is also one of the increasing economic and military authorities of the Indo-Pacific territory. Pakistan's Army ranks fifth and Air Force ranks seventh, the largest in the world. Similarly, Pakistan is strategically blessed with ideal location to its west lie the foremost energy producers of the world and top energy users of the world lie to its east (Doherty, 2013). The shipment in Islamabad is in municipal segment along merely nine contemporary containers and 98% of its whole business is sea assumed, occupies roughly US\$3.5B, a cargo responsibility on importations and trades (Hussain, 2015). Notwithstanding, being over staffed, politicized and less efficient: Karachi Port Trust, Port Qasim Authority (PQA) are still running in profit. Gwadar Port Authority(GPA) has yet to make a start of any long consequences and profits.

Changing hands for port operation of Gwadar Port from PSA to Chinese so far has not made any difference on ground (Bhattacharjee, 2015). The project if and when gets completed will surely be a game changer from an economic and strategic point of view; not only for Pakistan and China but for the entire Indo-Pacific region and the world. Pakistan's ship breaking industry had done very well during 1970s and 1980s when it was the leading country of the world of the ship breaking industry. It is now one of the top four ships breaking country, since the past decade. The ship breaking industry of Pakistan has provided jobs to almost three thousand people and has generated significant economic activity (Abid, & Ashfaq, 2015). In this backdrop, Beijing can't take Islamabad for granted for its strategic objectives and power play agendas whereas Pakistan want to obtain strategic advantages keeping in view its rivalries with India and USA.

#### **4. East Asia**

Approximately, 90% of the global trade is accepted by the worldwide transport industry. Without shipping, the import/export of affordable food/goods and energy would be impossible to handle. In this context, East Asia is playing leading role in maritime multi-faceted activities at the map of the world and this is being documented as progressively significant to the growth of the Indo-Pacific economy, while contributing positively to the global economy. Equally, continuous rise in energy production and consumption, the growth in force of world merchant fleets, their construction and breaking yards across this region coupled with the development of regional and deduction of extra regional navies, which demonstrates a trend for a major shift in maritime power to Asia (U. S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2008). "Wealth and power has shifted to Asia ". Out of these, the biggest growth is seen in the demand of worldwide electricity and rough oil are anticipated a big rise to new heights. The rise in trade flows has led to a significant increase in the demand for shipping over the past decade, the greatest distinguished is the claim for larger vessel containers, Bulkers along tankers ships,

the demand of which is being met being by this region (China's Trade Performance Report: World Economy Restructuring and China's Trade, 2008).

Besides, maritime clusters in East Asia provide services to the maritime industry in an extensive variability of associated business containing and not incomplete to insurance, legal, regulatory, advisory, survey, engineering, repair and maintenance of sale and purchase etc. Three out of four maritime clusters of the world lie in the Indo-Pacific region helping sea borne trade of the world by enhancing the strength and growth of the maritime sector (Till & Chan, 2013). Ship building has been and will continue to be predominant and exclusive domain of the region. Like Japan, after Second World War (in 50s and 60s) took up ship construction as one of the leading industry for the remodeling of country and soon became the leading ship building country of the world. Following Japan's success model, South Korea in the 1970s started to construct merchant ships and rose to bigger heights particularly in special and large ships construction. In the meantime, the Chinese keeping an eye on this throbbing business jumped is only to break the world records of ships construction. Chinese ship construction and repair industry moved very fast in the last decade to capture the world market. China led in ship construction in the world and as an offshoot major manufacturers of ships engines equipment and machinery also established their businesses in China (Kim, 2013).

The Indo-Pacific maritime super region is not only a world leader by building over 79% of all ships being constructed in the World but also leads with even bigger percentage of 90% in the ship breaking industry of the world (Doyle, 2013). This industry has been flourishing in this region for decades. world's top 4 out of 5 countries namely, China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand engaged in ship recycling are located in this region, these four countries accounted for 90% of the total tonnage scrapped. Not merely through a stroke of luck but through connected efforts and maritime vision of the countries of this region, ten top ports by their productivity and 10 top container terminals of which 8 are in China alone also lie in this region providing leadership to world maritime trade. Ships, particularly container ships, move across oceans, using efficient ports of their choice for obvious economic reasons (Sachdeva, 2016).

But again the security concerns have prompted new security partnerships even in East Asia among the major countries. In reorienting their strategic framework, New Delhi, Tokyo, and the Washington have adopted "Trilateral Partnership" between the three countries given their convergence of interests in the Indo-Pacific security architecture. Whereas, China considers it USA containment policy against second economy of the World which is the real cause of power politics among major players that none are interesting to collaborate and bring all on the same page for shared prosperity (Huang, 2016)

### **Conclusion**

Briefly, the paper has revealed a new discourse of "Indo-Pacific" which can broaden the scope and contours of the existing Asia-Pacific matrix. Indeed, Indo-Pacific has become the new way to look at maritime Asia, the geographical extension shields to the Coast of Africa, over the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. What makes Indo-Pacific an active regional is to create positive competitiveness protecting the security interests of all small and big actors like Canberra, Beijing, New Delhi, Islamabad, Tokyo alongside Washington who are central actors of this region.



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Further, adding to the primacy of the region is the growing importance of the Indian Ocean as a geo-political and geo-economic nerve center which cannot be ignored. It has expressively exchanged the Atlantic and it has become the busiest place and most deliberately noteworthy business corridor, it transmits nearly two-thirds of comprehensive oil and a third of unpackaged shipment.

However, countries of Indo-Pacific region have worked very hard with focused attention over the past seventy years to develop and achieve this status of maritime Super region of the new millennium whereas facing varied disputes and problems. This area is a new advancing and emerging region that is gradually becoming a globally recognized super region for future, the genesis of which is primarily based in which maritime sea trade place an important part. Hence, countries of this region should explore ways and means for co-existence rather than to engage in power politics drama at global stage. In fact, it is a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of all existing financiers of Indo-Pacific Region to play in a way that other nations of the region should not feel threaten economically and from a security point of view, they should find an amicable solution for the furtherance of economic development and stability of this region. Developing maritime countries of the region like Pakistan should immensely benefit from the experience and technologies available in the other well-developed leading maritime nations of the region. USA containment of China policy and their military presence in the Chinese neighborhood namely in Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, South Korea, Japan etc., are antagonistic poisoning for China. Whereas China's raising soft power economic and political influence in the region has been strengthening its military with its allies. The growing reliance, investment and trade of USA, Beijing, New Delhi, Tokyo, Korea, and Canberra and energy relatives with Africa, South Asia and Middle East can collide with their relationships and have long lasting effects on the region. Similarly, India's disputes, external with its neighbors and internal unrest, will have to be resolved to ensure peaceful relationship for economic enlargement of this region. It's important to note which relationship among these countries will prevail for long lasting international security and stability of this region.

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