

## Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region:

### China's growing dominance and India's response to it.

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#### **Introduction:**

The name '*Indo-Pacific*' emerges from the coinage of the names of two important oceans- the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This region was previously addressed as the 'Asia-Pacific' region, in a bid to encompass the nationalities of the Asian countries. It describes the part of Asia that lies in the Pacific Ocean. As mentioned by India's then Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 at the *Shangrila Dialogue*, India's geographical demarcations of the Indo-Pacific region range from Africa to both the Americas (covering both, the Indian and the Pacific Ocean) , including the entire western Pacific region.



The *official 13 initial members* of the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** as announced by the US Government are-

*India, U.S.A., Japan, Australia, South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, New Zealand, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.* These nations account for almost 40% of the global GDP. This economic grouping does not include Chinese friendly nations from the ASEAN grouping. This particular economic grouping can be seen as a way for the U.S. to increase its presence and economic power in the Indo-Pacific region, as China keeps on increasing its influence steadily.

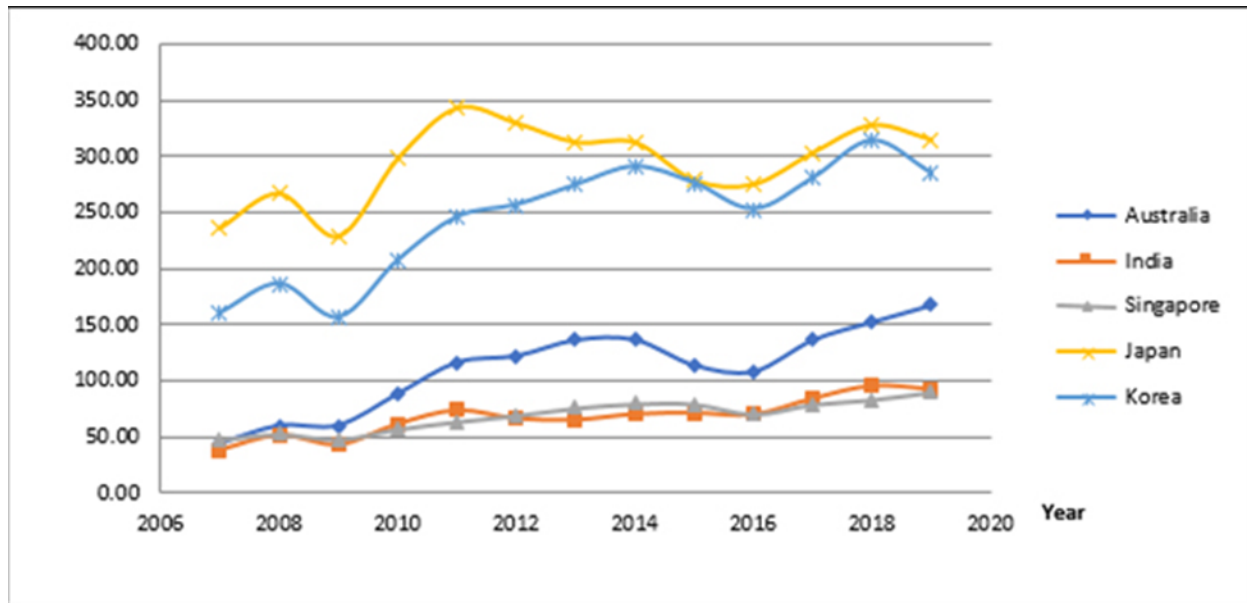
Strategically speaking, the Indo-Pacific region is of immense geopolitical significance to the entire world. The region accommodates more than half of the world's population. The Indo-Pacific region is home to some of the world's largest and strongest economies. It would not be an exaggeration to tout the Indo-Pacific region as the latest global hotspot. The region is the center of global commerce, engaging in around 65% of the global trade and contributing around 60% of the global GDP. The region marks the steady shift of power and global impact from the western hemisphere to the eastern hemisphere of the world very systematically.

The Indo-Pacific region is of great importance to India. Themistocles has rightly said, '*He who commands the sea, has a command of everything*'. This is precisely why India needs to develop and focus strongly on her maritime positioning and strategy.

### **Growing Chinese Dominance:**

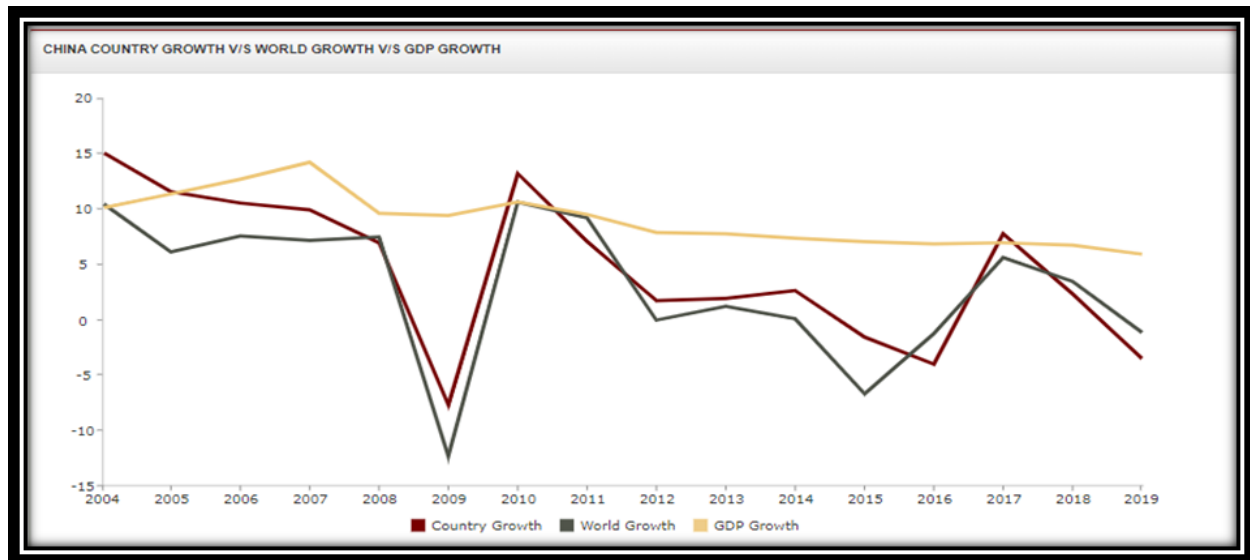
The most prominent of the issues that needs to be addressed in this region is the growing dominance and the implementation of aggressive foreign policies of China in the Indo-Pacific region. China's powerful rise can be viewed in tandem with the US's lessening impact in the region. China's ambitious BRI (Belt-road-initiative) project spans over 65 (around 70) countries across the world. As of March 2022, around 146 countries have agreed to sign up for the BRI, Chinese Premier Xi Jinping's key foreign policy. One of the key projects of China's BRI is the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). China has been expanding its reach and exerting its power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), by building ports in different nations and by the Chinese 'Debt Trap Policy'. One of the key reasons for the Sri Lanka economic crisis was the humongous debt that it owed to China. China, in a bid to recover the debts that Sri Lanka owed her, and also as a part of her debt-trap policy has already acquired the 'Hambantota Port' in Sri Lanka for a lease of 99 years.

China has a significant trade volume with major nations in the Indo-Pacific region. It can be seen in the figure below: *(The trade volume figures are in billion USD).*



China has been able to maintain positive trade surpluses with most nations. China has been ASEAN's largest economic and trading partner since the last decade. Hence, in spite of China posing a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring economies, the trading ties that those economies have with China, makes them think carefully on their foreign policies.

Below is a graph showing China's economic prowess:



Beijing's expansionist policies started officially with the erection of a port in Djibouti in 2017. China's close ties with Cambodia, a member nation of the ASEAN need to be examined and closely looked after by the international community and especially India. If these concerns are not attended to, then it can pose a threat to regional stability. Over the past few years, China has asserted unlawful and uncalled maritime claims over most of the South China Sea. It has been claiming its autonomy in the region by giving other South-east Asian countries little to no hold over the South China Sea. The sea is known to have an estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 cubic trillion feet of natural gas. Beijing continues to use military coercion and aggressive military policies to intimidate the people of Taiwan and to capture it. India faces border issues with China on two fronts. One with Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as South Tibet and the other one with Aksai Chin in Kashmir. The portion of Aksai Chin, is claimed by China as its own. The Galwan Valley Clash and the Doklam standoff have further heightened the tensions between China and India.



From infiltrating the domestic markets to claiming territorial sovereignty over different regions, China's dominance poses a regional threat to the Indo-Pacific countries and especially to India.

### **The QUAD and the IPEF:**

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a grouping of 4 nations- India, U.S.A., Japan and Australia, was officially founded in 2004 after the Indian Ocean Tsunami. This organization is known as the QUAD. After lying dormant for a few years, this organization was again revived in 2017, to curb the growing ambitions and influence of China.

IPEF stands for Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. It was unveiled by Joe Biden in May 2022. It is a grouping of 13 Asian countries, leaving out Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. It has the motto, 'Connected Economy', with specific focus on 'Digital Policy'. By working closely, IPEF can keep a close tab on Chinese expansionist policies.

## **India's way forward:**

India shares terrestrial as well as maritime boundaries with China. Hence, it is extremely important for India to maintain amicable relations with China whilst keeping a close tab on aggressive Chinese foreign policies. By being a member of organizations like the QUAD and the IPEF, India can exercise her role in the region more effectively. India should also try to improve her trade relations with other countries in the region, especially with the ASEAN countries. India should also expand her military bases in the country along the Chinese borders to prevent any cross-border clashes and ensure stability in the region.

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Bio: I am Gauri Gotekar, an economics enthusiast and a passionate dancer based out of Thane. I am interested in reading about policies from a data-oriented perspective. I am currently doing MS in Analytics from TISS.