

# **Role Of Increasing Defence Cooperation In Indo-Pacific: Opportunities And Challenges For India**

---

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Defence cooperation working in Indo-Pacific region</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Contemporary players in the Indo-Pacific region.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Opportunities for India in the region.</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusions.</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>References.</b>	<b>16</b>

## Abstract

Maritime transport is an important factor not only for economic development but also from a security perspective. The research paper starts with an introduction to the Indo-Pacific region and its geographic location and characteristics. With different defence cooperation made to govern the Indo-Pacific region. Then dwelling on the understanding of the same region from different dimensions and analysing the dynamics of one of the most important strategic locations Analysing the situation from India's perspective Knowing the benefits that await India's attention as well as the challenges that need to be solved through diplomacy or other strategic defence corporations

The research papers highlight how, over the last few decades, the Indo-Pacific region has gained importance and is emerging as an important strategic location. The role of defence corporations is to handle these challenges. Being part of these defence strategies can help India in not only securing the Indo-Pacific from security loopholes but can also assist in gaining economic as well as diplomatic advantages over the Indo-Pacific region.

## Introduction

As Kautilya mentions in his **Arthashastra**, " maritime security is evolving as an important and relevant aspect of securing a nation." Following India, it promotes the security and prosperity of the country through the maritime region. India is located at the head of the Indian Ocean and is an important player in the Indo-Pacific. It becomes necessary for the country itself to get involved in defence cooperation to bolster its role in the strategic region.

Indo-Pacific is the region covering the vast stretch of Indian and Pacific oceans bordering twenty-four nations. The region has been stretched from the eastern coast of Africa to the western coast of the Americas. Encompassing the Indian and Pacific oceans. It is a strategically important location because of countries like the United States of America, India, South Korea, China, Japan, Australia, and other growing nations.

The term 'Indo-Pacific' is not in use and is not globally accepted; instead, the term 'Asia-Pacific' is relevant and is used by countries like Russia and China. Until **Karl Haushofer** articulated his view in his academic paper titled '**Geopolitik des Pazifischen Ocean' (Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean)**, stating about the term 'Indo-Pacific', Further, in 2007, the former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, expressed his views on the strategic location of the Indo-Pacific at the '**Confluence of Two Seas**' in the Indian Parliament.

The region turns out to be economically significant due to the presence of the Malacca Strait, Sunda Strait, and Strait of Hormuz, which are known as the busiest points of global trade as well as

global choke points. The region does face maritime security concerns such as piracy, territorial disputes, and issues raised due to naval powers present in the region. The region is strategically competitive as these growing economies try their best to establish their influence over it. In contemporary times, the region has been facing the issue of climate change and environmental vulnerabilities.

Defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region has been playing a crucial role in extracting maximum benefit for the good of mutually agreed countries. From the Indian context, we can observe that the relevance to the importance of the Indo-Pacific emerged in the late 1990s, when the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was launched in 1997 with the purpose of fostering regional economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Defence cooperation working in Indo-Pacific**

India in the Indo-Pacific region, being the advocate of a free and open Indo-Pacific, needs to have a rule-based order over the region, and all the stakeholders in the region need to have an equal say over the opportunities. The relevance of the Indo-Pacific began in the late 20th century with the formation of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 1997**, envisioning the idea of fostering economic development in the Indo-Pacific Ocean Region (IOR). Further in the 21st century, we can observe that in the year 2014, India became part of the **Forum for India-Pacific Ocean Island Cooperation (FIPIC)**, which became a regional defence cooperative dialogue between India and the other 14 Pacific nations. In the year 2015, India embarked on the formation of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**. Followed by Indo-Pacific construction in the year 2018 to secure the eastern and western fronts of the Indian Ocean.

Coming to the other defence cooperation in which India has been playing the role of a key member, we can observe the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)** involving India, the United States of America, Australia, and Japan with a major aim of defence cooperation, discussing security challenges and common challenges hampering the countries in the Indo-Pacific region. practising military cooperation and defence practice, namely in the Malacca military exercise involving India, the United States of America, and Japan.

India's involvement with ASEAN is of great importance. In the recent **20th India-ASEAN summit**, we can observe how extensive deliberation takes place over the partnership between the two, further fostering the **ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**. This gives important reference to ASEAN's strategic location as well as its being at the core of the Indo-Pacific

region. Mutual ideas were shared for robust connectivity, trade, digital transformation, multimodal connectivity, the eco-corridor link, the blue economy, and food security.

Coming close to home, we can observe **India's trilateral missions with Sri Lanka and the Maldives**. We can observe military exercises like DOSTI, which has been conducted since 2012 and was initiated in 1991. There are security meet-ups like the Colombo Security Conclave, which upholds the objective of maritime peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Contemporary players in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region is not only affected by the countries bordering it but also by several external factors. Here

1. Starting with the **ambitious nature of China** in the region, we can state the aggressive stances taken by the country. For example, we can observe the clashes between China and Japan over territories. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe referred to the South China Sea as 'Lake Beijing'. Dwelling on the foreign policy of China, we came across policies like the Belt and Road Initiative, which deals with restoring China's Silk Route. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of those initiatives taken under China's RBI, giving China direct access to the Arabian Sea and further hampering India's maritime security and peace. We can further mention China's String of Pearls initiative, under which port development projects are undertaken. Leading to the loss of the sovereignty of the concerned nation. It will be relevant to mention Pakistan in this instance. Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is one of the victims.
2. In terms of the **interests of India**, we can say that the Indo-Pacific is a strategic location when it comes to trade, economic development, and maritime security. As mentioned in Kautalita's Arthashastra, Maritime security is more important than continental security. Securing a country's interest in a region of importance is the prior need of the hour. Secondly, we can observe India's Act East Policy, which fosters the country's ties with its east and southeast Asian neighbours. Its involvement with ASEAN and BIMSTEC presents the country's idea of promoting regional cooperation in order to foster economic development and maritime security. Being a founding member of The East Asian Summit in 2005 with the motto of enhancing the 'Act East Policy' with ASEAN and other regional countries
3. **ASEAN**,<sup>1</sup> Being the centre of the Indo-Pacific arena, led by Indonesia, has integral importance in affecting geopolitical rivalries. When it comes to defence cooperation, it can be a reflection of its ambivalent approach. As we observe, ASEAN can't be in the extreme groups. As it has been a partner in economic development with the United States of America and does have to maintain its

---

1

<https://fulcrum.sg/aseanfocus/aseans-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/#:~:text=MUHIBAT%3A%20ASEAN%20is%20at%20the,powers%20from%20shaping%20the%20region>

cultural relations with China. With the establishment of the ASEAN Outlook in the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019, we can observe the grouping's growing interest in the region.

4. **Japan's effort for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"**, mentioning the growing relevance as well as strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, The country forms FOIP ideals through the promotion of cooperation and a shared vision for the region. Promoting public diplomacy, open trade opportunities, and a free and fair economic order. Japan places a deep emphasis on the shared vision ideals, as no single power can control a large domain affecting the lives of people across the landmass.
5. **Australia, being the central location** of the Indo-Pacific region, has been influencing the geopolitics of the region since 2012, when the Australian government defined the Indo-Pacific in terms of its security as well as foreign policy. The rise of China has made Australia cautious about the situation. Being part of QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America) working to foster maritime security in the region and hampering the assertive growth of China over the region.
6. **America's involvement** increased as the aggressive nature of China increased in the Indo-Pacific region. The situation invites the United States of America to get involved and sustain its dominating position in the region. America is an important defence ally to India when it comes to counter attacking China over its aggressive territorial policies. America's Indo-Pacific policy put emphasis on the advanced free and open trading region, bolstering the Indo-Pacific and enhancing the connections over the oceans.
7. **The European Union** is able to emphasise the Indo-Pacific region not directly but through the economic and security relevance it upholds. Being important trade partners in the Indo-Pacific region, capturing two-thirds of the global trade patterns. Influencing other Non-traditional security factors like climate change, piracy, supply chains, and technology over the whole Indo-Pacific.
8. **Indonesia**, being at the centre of the Indo-Pacific, upholds the aspirations to dominate the region through trade and investment. Being one of the developing countries in ASEAN with a growing economy and manufacturing unit. The country has signed around 23 bilateral trade agreements with countries like South Korea, the U.S.A., and China, which highlights the interests of the country in trade and developing a global supply chain in the region. The country has been trying to play a neutral political-economic role to balance out its two important economic partners, China and the U.S.
9. **South Korea** being one of the leading economies in the region, we can observe the idea of aligning common interests and values in the Indo-Pacific region. After a long period of 'strategic ambiguity' in the Indo-Pacific, we can observe how the country is trying to synchronise its interests with the U.S. and China. Several initiatives, like IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework), its interest in QUAD, MSP (Mineral Security Partnership), and the launch of ROK-ASEAN (2022), highlight the country's efforts in pursuing an inclusive strategy in the region. Its recent engagement at Camp

David with the U.S. and Japan shows how critical the country is to the region and how it is engaging itself in solving the common challenges faced by the strategic location of the Indo-Pacific.

10. "Although island nations are vulnerable, I don't believe that we are powerless," as mentioned by Abdullah Shahid, the foreign minister of the Maldives, highlighting how the **island nation states** are being victims of ignorance when it comes to crafting policy over the Indo-Pacific region. Being vulnerable due to climate change, a lack of access to finance, and weak maritime security. These countries aren't taken into consideration or turned into 'stepping stones' on which the formulated policy is based. Without considering them, large nations can tangle themselves in ineffective cooperation over the strategic region of the Indo-Pacific.

### **Challenges India facing in the Indo-Pacific**

Following are the key challenges that India has been facing to secure its maritime border and integrate the Indo-Pacific region:

1. Geopolitical competition
2. Territorial disputes
3. Climate Change and Environmental issues

1. Geopolitical competition has been on the rise in the region, creating tussles and tensions. China and the United States of America are the power giants evolving in the region of power tussles. We can observe that

- A. **The United States of America and the European Union** are balancing power in strategically important geopolitical locations. The United States of America's necklace of diamonds strategy to counter China's string of pearls As a whole, the policy of the United States of America seems to be counter-attacking China's increasing influence, and to save its domination over maritime security and the economy, the U.S. stepped in.
- B. **The economic, strategic, and geopolitical rise of China** in the region South China Sea being the victim of China's militarization and tensing the situation with disputes involving other countries The former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, quoted the South China Sea as 'Lake Beijing' due to the overexploitation and aggressive territorial policies over the region, further afflicting the Indo-Pacific region's security.

### C. Role of other small factors like southeast Asia, south Asia, and other Pacific islands.

- **South East Asia**, or the countries included in ASEAN, is ambiguous over its power share in the region. Confused over the economic ties with the U.S.A. or cultural ties with China? Inviting a balanced approach from these ASEAN countries to maintain their dominance.
- **The South Asian** region is the victim of China's aggressive territorial policy. Take, for instance, the Gwadar port in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a part of the Road and Belt Initiative. Not only Pakistan is anti-India. Other small countries like Nepal, China, and Bhutan in South Asia have been trapped under China's major project policy, reducing their sovereignty over their own land.
- Coming to **Pacific island countries**, including Small island Developing states (SIDS). Coping with a wide range of challenges in the Indo-Pacific region like climate change, natural disasters, and economic shocks They are mostly aided by Australia for maintenance on these issues. China's diplomatic, economic, and security rise has impacted the SIDS region. India has tried to develop strategic diplomatic ties with Fiji, and the current visit to Papua New Guinea will be worth mentioning.

2. Territorial disputes<sup>2</sup> in the Indo-Pacific region have been hampering the role of cooperation and collaboration to extract maximum benefits from the strategic location. Some of the infamous disputes are over territories, such as:

- A. The **Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute**, located in the East China Sea region, became a bone of contention among China, Japan, and Taiwan. As the location has a strategic location as well as being rich in potential natural resources. The island invites claims from these countries.
- B. The **Dokdo/Takashima island dispute**, involving South Korea and Japan, is held between the Dokdo island, known in South Korea, and Takashima island, prominently known in Japan. The conflict had roots in historic, geographic, and political spheres.
- C. The well-known **Kuril Islands dispute** between Japan and Russia. The islands have been stretched from Japan's Hokkaido to Russia's Kamchatka peninsula. The dispute was raised

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/asian-territorial-and-maritime-disputes-a-critical-introduction/>

after the end of World War 2. But it still influences the diplomatic ties between the two countries.

- D. **Taiwan** is a dispute between the sovereignty of an island nation and China, which is a power pool for countries like the United States of America, Japan, and China.
- E. **Sino-Indo** disputes are not only limited to territories but have also extended to marine borders, influencing each other's marine and security policies.

**3. Climate change and environmental issues,**<sup>3</sup> as the Indo-Pacific region's temperature rises, presenting new challenges to address. The challenge associated with climate change is multifaceted; it can hamper ecological security, human security, and national security. As the sea level and temperature rise, the concern of facing environmental catastrophes has grown.

The following situation can hamper the Pacific Island nations located in the Indo-Pacific region: As mentioned, these countries are Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The current situation invited the United States of America and the European Union, as non-regional members, to express concern about the same. Collaboration with other countries located in the region to provide them with safety and security has been influencing the contemporary geopolitical dynamics in the region.

## Opportunities for India in Indo-Pacific

India, being in a strategic location, enjoys a lot of opportunities that can ensure better future opportunities for the countries. These can be dissected as follows:

1. Bilateral ties and defence cooperation between the other countries can provide India with an opportunity to secure economic and maritime security.
  - A. The defence cooperation between **India and the United States of America**<sup>4</sup> is an important one to mention. With their common objective of hampering the aggressive nature of China's policy of territorial expansion and fostering economic and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. Both India and the U.S.A. have been cooperating at the QUAD and participating in the Malabar naval exercise along with Japan as permanent

---

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/climate-change/asiapacifics-climate-change-challenge-can-it-become-cleaner-and-greener-101686042603152.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_US\\_brief.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf)

partners. The United States of America does join the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative, dealing with the secure, safe, and stable maritime domain proposed by India at the 14th East Asian Summit in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2019. India also joined the Partners in the Blue Pacific Initiative of the U.S. and its allies as an observer country. The U.S.A.'s Diego Garcia and Guam islands can help in extending India's control over the same and foster the economic and maritime security development of the Pacific nations.

- B. **India's defence cooperation with South Korea** has been enhanced with cooperation in various sectors of defence, technology, climate change, and adaptation. Both are advocates of a "Free Indo-Pacific" that advances peace among the countries. with the protection of naval bases and the key maritime routes in the region. South Korea has been participating in the India-led Information Fusion Centre for the Indo-Pacific Region (IFC-IOR) started by India in 2018 to foster regional maritime security. When it comes to India and South Korea's defence cooperation, we can observe that the country can help fulfil India's requirements in semiconductors, high technology usage in defence, and nuclear reactors and can help replace China to fulfil these demands for the Indian industries. South Korea's "contributive diplomacy and India's SAGAR (security and growth for all) can foster defence cooperation in the region.
- C. **Australia** views India as the rising power in the Indo-Pacific region and places priority on cooperation and collaboration with the country to maintain maritime security. Both being strategic partners, there has been cooperation in defence platforms like QUAD. They both have been participating in high-level meetings to uphold the idea of maritime security and development. They both have a joint declaration and shared vision on maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The navies have been strengthening themselves through naval military exercises like AUSINDEX and the RIMPAC 2022 biennial exercise in Hawaii. India also invites Australia to participate in the Talisman Sabre (TS) military exercise to induce cooperative defence ideals. Australia's Cocos and Keeling Islands can act as a potential resource for India.
- D. **Japan** is part of India's Maritime Domain Awareness Agreement to protect the India Ocean Region (IOR) from threats like piracy, maritime threats, trafficking, illegal fishing, etc. Strategic application of Japan's Okinawa port can help India sustain the West Pacific region. Proposing the idea of Smart Islands in 2016 initiated the development of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in a sustainable manner to promote commerce and foster security by the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean region. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are placed in a very strategic location.

2. Trilateral or multilateral defence ties have been proposed in the Indo-Pacific region. As the partnerships are small, it is easier to converge the benefits for the countries. Some of the trilateral or multilateral ties present in the Indo-Pacific region are as follows:
  - A. **France, India, and Australia (2020)**,<sup>5</sup> wanting to raise their trilateral ties from partnership to leader-level grouping to fulfil objectives of peaceful resolution, democratic values, sovereignty, and territorial integrity over the region, The idea to uplift cooperation will lead to maritime security, foster the blue economy, and provide humanitarian relief.
  - B. **India-Indonesia-Australia (2020)**<sup>6</sup> trilateral defence cooperation was made with the objective of discussion over the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), G20, Indo-Pacific, and blue economy. Efforts are made by India and Australia to raise the status of the trilateral organisation to ministerial level, but due to the destination of Indonesia, the aspirations can't be fulfilled. Indonesia is feared for its relations with China, as it does share important cultural ties with the country.
  - C. **India, the US, and Japan (2018)**<sup>7</sup>, with the core premises of promoting the common concept and aspiration of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Trilateral cooperation promotes the idea of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law in the region and promotes engagement with ASEAN countries to hamper the aggressive territorial policies of China.
3. Other defence corporations that can provide an edge to India over the Indo-Pacific region are as follows:
  - A. **ASEAN's** central location in the Indo-Pacific is geographically and strategically important to India and other competitors in the region. India's policy of "Act East" initiates the country to promote cultural, cooperative, and coordinating ties with the country in the East. Following the same, India has been trying to enhance cooperation on defence, climate change, and connectivity with ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region.

---

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.livemint.com/news/world/india-france-australia-plan-to-upgrade-trilateral-partnership-11679940633922.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-australia-india-indonesia-trilateral-finally-takes-off/>

<sup>7</sup>

<https://diplomatist.com/2020/10/29/confluence-of-the-seas-the-india-us-japan-trilateral/#:~:text=Premises%20and%20Stakeholders%20of%20the%20India%2DUS%2DJapan%20Trilateral&text=The%20trilateral%20not%20only%20seeks,and%20Open%20Indo%20Pacific%20Region>

- B. In **The Middle East** and the hidden opportunity, India has made contacts with Middle Eastern countries to strategically tie up for fostering maritime security and trade over the Indian Ocean. For example, Oman's Duqm port was provided with access to India in 2018 because of its strategic importance. This port can assist India in hampering China's 'String of Pearls' policy. The strategic location of Duqm port in the Northwest can provide easy access to the Red Sea further into the Gulf of Aden. Similarly, the Chabahar port in Iran does have the potential to strengthen India's role in the Indian Ocean. In the year 2016, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Iran, Afghanistan, and India over the same.

## Recommendations

Following are the steps that can foster India's defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. These recommendations deal with varying dimensions of the Indo-Pacific region:

1. **Robusting India's capacity and connectivity:** To enhance the connectivity and capacity to foster defence cooperation, one thing is important: strategically use the resources provided and well-edify them through efforts benefiting countries mutually. Some of them can be as follows:
  - A. **Strategic use of island territories:** islands like Okinawa (Japan), the Reunion islands of France, US military facilities provided at Diego Garcia and Guam, and Australia's Cocos (Keeling) islands This location can foster India's role in the Indo-Pacific as well as promote defence cooperation between the countries.
  - B. **The role of ports,** like Duqm port (Oman) and Chabahar port (Iran), where India has been provided with the opportunity to enhance connectivity as well as use them for trade and commerce, does enhance the country's engagement in the region and helps it strengthen connectivity.
  - C. **Military drills** help improve the country's network with other countries in the same domain. Military drills like the Malabar Naval Exercise (Japan, India, and the US), DOSTI (a trilateral exercise between India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives), the Samvedna exercise with South Asian countries, and COBRA-GOLD (Asia-Pacific countries)
  - D. **Improving self-capacity,** developing self-territories, and improving connectivity with the island states like Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep can enhance the country's engagement in the Indian Ocean and can help improve the country's capabilities. Smart Island Project (working in collaboration with Japan to develop the Andaman and

Nicobar Islands): such projects should be promoted and adopted for better connectivity and development in the regions.

- E. **Connectivity and indulging** in the Middle East and East Africa can be beneficial for India in order to secure the western boundaries of the Indian Ocean. For instance, The USA's military base in Djibouti can be of great benefit to India in order to secure its western boundaries. Similarly, in the Ashgabat Agreement (2022), India joined in 2018. We can observe how the idea of improving transportation in central Asia can help India extend its connectivity in the western fronts of the Indian Ocean, opening up better opportunities for the country.

2. **Focusing on non-conventional strategies:** having a dynamic perspective over the Indo-Pacific region with an approach of solving multi-faceted problems can foster India's role and influence on the region.

- A. **Technology and Innovation**, investing in research and development, and promoting innovation with emerging technology can help foster the country's regional influence. Further support in balancing the power in the region.
- B. Promoting **maritime security** and helping other countries promote security in the maritime region Dealing with Non-traditional security Threats as well as environmental issues due to climate change became important issues to address. Hence, addressing the above can bolster India's image among the Indo-Pacific nations.
- C. **Engaging with non-regional powers**—countries that aren't directly involved in the Indo-Pacific region but do influence the dynamics of the region—can be an important element of the strategy. For example, the European Union can act as an important indirect player in the Indo-Pacific region to influence the working and strategic positions of countries in the region.

Another example can be of the latest **India- Middle East -Europe Economic Corridor** fostering the connectivity to Europe through multimodal transport and energy corridor. The following act of cooperation can help India in securing it's role and influence at the western boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region.

- D. **Following the rule of law:** India, being a signatory of UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), anticipates the idea of upholding the rules and regulations made for the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, the countries in the region with the aspirations of a disciplined geopolitical system over this strategic region need to come forward to form a structured framework in order to make the UNCLOS follow.

E. **Stimulating security on maritime routes:** The Indo-Pacific is not only strategic from a location or geography perspective; it has also been one of the most important economic routes in the sphere. Hence, the trade and transport routes in the region need to be secured. To foster this, the same countries like the U.S., India, and Japan that are leading in trade over the region need to come forward and take initiatives to promote maritime security over these routes.

3. **To encourage defence cooperation and foster India's position in the Indo-Pacific,** it is necessary to tie up and restore the older ties in order to deal with the contemporary challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Some of these can be as follows:

A. **Coalition to keep an eye on Dragon and Russia:** It is well known, China, with its assertive policy of territorial acquisition, is becoming a challenge not only for India but also hampering global maritime security on a large scale. It has not been hidden how China's policy of loan and investment has dilapidated the neighbouring countries of India.

For Russia, we need to be quite cautious, as it has been involved in conflicts over the Kuril Islands with Japan. Take this as an instance: India's relations with Japan have to be balanced over the same. Both India and Japan have come together for manufacturing fabrication plants in recent times. Keeping in check that any of such activities need not hamper India's relations with Japan.

B. **Backing of the small island nations in the Indo-Pacific:** For these small nations, resources are an important aspect. China can take advantage of the situation. In the same vein, India needs to take initiatives to collaborate with these small island nations for mutual growth and development. Despite being insignificant on the map of the Indo-Pacific, these nations do hold a lot of potential when it comes to power balance. Hence, India needs to take positive action on the same.

C. **The reorganisation of SAARC,** the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985), formed with the objectives of fostering sovereignty, equality, and territorial integrity, but the principles remain unfulfilled due to communication gaps between the countries, a lack of resources streamlined for the projects, and the disputes between the Indo-Pacific. SAARC nations, being at a strategic location in the Indian Ocean, can play an important role when it comes to increasing India's role in the Indo-Pacific. Restructuring the organisation can help in solving the dispute and having common goals to foster economic and maritime security over the Indian Ocean.

D. **QUAD Plus,** the grouping, traces its roots back to QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which dealt with the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. consisting of India, Japan,

Australia, and the United States of America. QUAD Plus is an extension of QUAD, including countries like South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. Their initial focus is streamlined towards economic development and strengthening the economy, which has suffered after the pandemic. The objectives of the grouping can also extend to cover the Indo-Pacific as one of the important issues to deal with. As the grouping is inclusive of economically important countries like South Korea, Vietnam, an important ASEAN country, and New Zealand, it can help unify other Pacific nations to promote maritime security and peace.

- E. **Cross-group interactions:** having cross-group interactions between groupings can contribute to promoting mutual understanding and having a common vision towards problems. These kinds of interactions can bolster the steps taken to address Non-traditional security threats like climate change, environmental issues, and several other maritime security challenges. For instance, the India-Myanmar border, where ASEAN meets SAARC, are some of the platforms that can help in solving the common challenges and extend India's role over the Indo-Pacific region.
- F. **Island nations in the Indian Ocean,** fostering cooperation over defence with small island countries in the Indian Ocean like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Mauritius, can help in securing the western part of the Indian Ocean and can help India in creating its diplomatic influence over the countries and region. This region has the potential to make India a power among the competitors of the Indo-Pacific, whether China or the US.
- G. **Africa is a new hope,** Africa has been transmitting from being a 'hopeless continent' to a hopeful continent' due to its demography, strategic location, resources, and market. The continent has been inviting attention from the US, Russia, China, ASEAN, and other important countries. But India seems to be absent in the following power arenas: There has been a less diplomatic presence of the country in Africa, with ignorance towards the continent. Africa can act as a potential region when it comes to the Indo-Pacific. All India needs to do is pay attention to its diplomatic and strategic ties with the continent.
- H. **European Union and India:** European Union being an indirect player in the Indo-Pacific region. The Indian Ocean being an important trade route for the E.U. member countries. Rising China's influence and assertive policies, fear of maritime security has been prevailing in the union. For India this can act as an opportunity to cooperate with E.U. and establish a Regional Maritime Security Building Programme just like has been done with the ASEAN countries, African Union and coastal nations who are in the Gulf of Guinea region for fostering maritime security as well as building defence expertise.

## Conclusion

As far as we discussed it has become clear that India is an important element in the Indo-Pacific. Its location, interests and aspirations do influence the region. Growing the relevance of maritime security makes it important for having a foolproof maritime security plan to arise as an important leader in the region. It turns out necessary for the country to indulge in defence cooperation with other nations as it can't conquer the Indo-Pacific alone due to scarcity of resources and technical know-how. It's better to work in a team to fulfil a common vision and hamper the common challenges over the region of interest.

## Bibliography

1. India in Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's theatre of opportunities, by Darshan M. Baruha  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/30/india-in-indo-pacific-new-delhi-s-theater-of-opportunity-pub-82205>
2. Indo-Pacific strategies: what do they entail for India, by Dr. Pankaj Vashishtha  
<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3371487/indo-pacific-strategies-what-do-they-entail-for-india/>
3. The state of defence cooperation in Indian ocean region by Antonie Levesques  
<https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/05/the-state-of-defence-cooperation-in-the-indian-ocean-region/>
4. International cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region by Kanwal Sibal  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/48622907#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/48622907#page_scan_tab_contents)
5. ASEAN's engagement in Indo-Pacific by Pongphisoot  
<https://fulcrum.sg/aseanfocus/aseans-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/#:~:text=MUHIBA,T%3A%20ASEAN%20is%20at%20the,powers%20from%20shaping%20the%20region>