



“THE INDO-PACIFIC CONCEPT”: GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract

This article elaborates on the Indo-Pacific concept promoted by the US. Taking into account the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and the actual importance of the region, the competition within the region and the conflict of interests of the leading powers were discussed in detail. The Asia-Pacific region is important not only for the countries of the Far East, but also for the countries of Central Asia and South Asia and a number of other countries. therefore, this region is becoming a competitive field at the global level in recent years.

Key words: “Indo-Pacific”, Asia-Pacific, Belt Road and Initiative (BRI), QUAD, AUKUS, Indo-US alliance, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Introduction

Until recently, the region along the perimeter of the Pacific and Indian Oceans was commonly referred to as the Asia-Pacific region, but in 2007, former Japanese Prime Minister Abe introduced the term “Indo-Pacific Region” into the political world. In 2010, Hillary Clinton referred to the region as the “Indo-Pacific”, demonstrating US bias towards India and its geostrategic agenda in the region. Also, in 2017, the Trump administration named the region the “Indo-Pacific Ocean”.

Methods

This study employed comparative, factor and event-based political analysis techniques. To ensure adequacy, the opinions of Russian, Pakistani, Chinese and Western scientists were equally analyzed. The opinions of politicians and experts from major think tanks were studied in detail to cover the topic more widely. The article presents an in-depth analysis of current issues together with their possible solutions.

Result and Discussions

The Indian Ocean region is a region rich in mineral resources. It contains 35% of the world's natural gas, 67% of oil, 40% of gold, 60% of uranium, and 80% of diamond deposits. The strategic importance of the region can be assessed by the fact that it includes seven of the ten countries with the largest



armies in the world and six nuclear powers.¹ It provides two-thirds (60 percent) of the world's gross domestic product. The region is also very important for China, as it is the main transit route for the supply of oil to China. At the same time, 85% of the oil imported from China passes through the Strait of Malacca.² According to Chinese President Wang Yi in 2022, the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" aims not only to destroy the name of the Asia-Pacific region, but also to destroy effective regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. He noted that the United States seeks to turn the countries of the Asia-Pacific region into "pawns" of its hegemony.³

Political scientist Ksenia Yegorova said that⁴, Russia does not support the concept of "Indo-Pacific region". According to him, Russia views this concept as pro-American and strongly opposes the Indo-Pacific region, which aims to limit China and Russia's geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the region. The concept of the "Indo-Pacific region" is perceived by Moscow as an echo of the Cold War. Russia does not approve of the idea of accepting the Indo-Pacific region as a new geopolitical structure that will supposedly replace the Asia-Pacific region. In 2019, the Russian Defense Minister stated that the transition from the Asia-Pacific region to the "Indo-Pacific" would cause divisions and conflicts and negatively affect the regional order. It is aimed at distracting the region from cooperation with ASEAN and the SCO, and it is a natural process for the United States to look for new energy routes and regional economic integration projects with the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan. This may be due to the Indo-Pacific concept. The countries of the region, in turn, see these processes as a threat to them.

Russia is directly concerned that QUAD (The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) will turn into "NATO of Asia". The Russian Federation considers such activity in the Asia-Pacific region to be a manifestation of a unipolar world and a US-based world order⁵. In addition, Moscow has economic interests related to the development of natural resources in the region, the export of energy resources and agricultural products to Asia, and its strategic location as a corridor between the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. All of these economic integration activities can be influenced by the Indo-Pacific concept.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is a security dialogue between the United States, Australia, Japan, and India that aims to contain China and limit Russian influence in the region. Although it is paramilitary in nature, it involves conducting joint military exercises and expanding the format to other regions. For example, the Middle East QUAD (USA, India, Israel and UAE) is a clear example of this. In September 2021, to add military power to the QUAD, Australia, Great Britain and the United States formed the AUKUS military alliance aimed at ensuring collective security in the Indo-Pacific region. AUKUS supplies Australia with long-range ballistic missiles and nuclear submarines. This is against Article 1 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which prohibits nuclear-weapon states from transferring nuclear weapons or explosive materials to non-nuclear-

¹ https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/1_SS_Farhan_Hanif_Siddiqi_No-1_2022.pdf

² https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/4-SS_Zainab_Ahmed_No-4_2021.pdf

³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202205/t20220523_10691136.html

⁴ <https://politik.brin.go.id/kolom/politik-internasional/russias-perspective-on-the-indo-pacific/>

⁵ https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb476_1.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=37134



weapon states. In addition, it is contrary to Article 2, which prohibits non-nuclear-weapon states from acquiring such weapons.⁶

China's emergence as a global economic power in 2010 and the rise of the Belt and Road Initiative, which since 2013 has included nearly 150 countries and organizations, encouraged the US, the UK and their Asian partners India, Japan and Australia to resist changes in the world order. The Indo-Pacific concept is an anti-Belt and Road initiative as an economic development initiative. China's initiative aims to build infrastructure in a world where development is difficult due to the conflicting policies of rich countries and the harsh conditions imposed by international financial institutions. The availability of infrastructure leads to increased investment, creating beneficial cycles that lead to further increases in income, production and employment. That is why Belt and Road is recognized as a "success model" that increases production, income and employment in the host and investor countries.

But such an approach directly contradicts the existing world order established by rich former colonial countries. This world order is based on the development of conflict, resulting in increased demand for weapons, increased GDP in rich arms-producing countries, and reduced economic activity in developing countries due to conflict, capital flight, instability, loss of life, and destruction. In such a world order, the benefit of one causes the loss of the other. So, it is not a model that achieves success. The current world order will most likely maintain its status quo, confirming German sociologist Andre Gunder Frank's theory that rich countries develop at the expense of the rest of the world. Therefore, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Japan and their proxies such as India react against the "Belt and Road". It is an economic development initiative, and the US, UK, Australia and India are responding with military initiatives in the form of QUAD and AUKUS.

The US National Security Strategy for 2022, released on October 14, 2022,⁷ identified China as the "biggest geopolitical challenge to the United States". Russia has been declared the second most important threat to US global interests and condemned for the special operation in Ukraine. Interestingly, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are not even mentioned in the National Security Strategy. Pakistan's absence is a natural reality and reflects Pakistan's understanding that it is not interested in fighting wars that are foreign to it. But the concept of "Indo-Pacific region" has a negative impact on Pakistan's interests and leads to the militarization of the Asia-Pacific region. Pakistan has enough reasons not to join these processes. Its regional adversary India, allied with superpowers, seeks to disrupt regional peace, and its views on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its actions in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh mean that Pakistan must focus on its home region first.

India is listed in the US National Strategy as a "critical defense partner" helping to realize the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific region". "The United States and India will work together bilaterally and multilaterally to support a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region," the document said. India's role in the "Indo-Pacific" is very uncertain. Because India is a close partner of the Russian Federation and the main beneficiary of Russian oil. Russia is strengthening India economically, but

⁶ <https://hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/detail/NjM0Mg==.html>

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1714960>



that power is being wielded against those who helped New Delhi gain it. Russia seems to have to compromise between economic and geostrategic interests. Against the backdrop of Western sanctions, it needs to sell oil, gas and other exports to get out of the current economic crisis. As a result, the country whose main task within the US National Security Strategy is to advance US interests in the “Indo-Pacific region” is supported by Russia’s energy resources.

The militarization of the Asia-Pacific region looks like a scary scenario. What will be the consequences if war breaks out there? Who will win and who will lose? If the conflicts become so unbearable, they will lead to war between major powers, which will result in heavy loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and collapse of development and prosperity. Major wars and conflicts cause the destruction of existing powers and their replacement by new ones. India’s extensive participation in military alliances and friendly relations with opposing factions indicate that India hopes to become such a power.

Conclusion

The countries that are negatively affected by the Indo-Pacific project, in particular, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian republics, can compensate for its negative consequences by strengthening their strategic integration. In addition, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia are also countries that may be affected. In his speech at the 2022 Boao Forum for Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a global security initiative based on a common, comprehensive and sustainable security vision. This initiative will foster multilateral and international solidarity and lead to increased security in countries threatened by current war mongering, which has become increasingly dangerous over time.

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