

Reenergizing Indian Security in the Indian Ocean Region

Analyzing the Security Problem through Bilateral and Multilateral Arrangements

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Abstract

John H. Herz describes security dilemmas as those that occur when one state's actions to increase its security threaten the security of others and hence cause a reciprocatory effect. The effect has a higher likelihood of occurring when the intentions of the prior states are either uncomprehensive or have adverse effects on the former. Such security complexes have arisen in the region of the Indo-Pacific, where China has synthesized its expansionist ideologies and modernized its naval power to address its security issues, but in turn has also led other players in the region to appraise their own security concerns. For India, the advent of the Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region, along with security threats emanating from Pakistan as well as Afghanistan, has led to the perception of a "two-front war." For an area where regional security complexes are dominated by China's regional convictions and movements, different states along with India have been compelled to act. This article delves into the security position of India with the escalation of Chinese involvement, along with threats emerging from Pakistan and a destabilized Afghanistan, and sees to what degree bilateral and multilateral arrangements help India to solve its security concerns in the region. Along with that, this article seeks to answer the question of what role India could play in the region to incentivize the regional security dynamics.

India has historically had two rivals to its north, one being Pakistan and the other being China. Regarding the former, India-Pakistan relations have been historically sour and, in the future, also seem to lack any positive turn of events, but regarding the latter, India has been mindful not to aggravate China. But despite it being cautious, it seems that China does not address India's concerns for its safety in the region and has been continuously provoking aggression because of its revisionist and expansionist ideologies. From increasing naval presence in the maritime regions surrounding India to malicious economic investments in India's neighboring countries, China has continuously challenged India's notion of being the hegemonic power in the region. This has also been the reason why India has been keep-

ing itself out of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), so as not to provoke China.¹ But with the recent turn of events in the Ladakh region and the continuous standoffs in the border areas along the Sino-Indian border adding to the Chinese advancing economic expansionism in the Indian Ocean region (IOR), India has been driven to express renewed interest in being a part of the Quad.

The reason for India being concerned about not poking China has been China's massive economic and military might. Adding to that, the security threats emerging from Pakistan and Afghanistan could lead to a dire situation for India in the future in terms of its territorial security. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also been pumping massive investments into South Asian nations such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, and Bangladesh, which has also helped China acquire bases for sea lines of communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean such as the Hambantota and Gwadar Port in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, respectively. India has shown renewed interest in such matters in South Asia but competing against a giant such as China in economic and military aspects would not be an easy task for New Delhi.² The Quad has emerged as a counterbalance to China in the Indo-Pacific region, and India's active participation in the Quad could result in a solution to New Delhi's problems. Apart from solving India's security issues, New Delhi could also revitalize its "Act East" policy by cooperating with Japan, Australia, and the United States in providing aid, investment, and security to the region.³

Theoretical Framework

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver states that regional security complexes are generated within regional boundaries that are separated from other regions through geographical barriers. These barriers are easily identifiable, such as oceans, mountains, or in some cases, may even involve a neutral state between two regions. The theory states that security matters in each region may differ from one another, and hence, the security policies and concerns of nations within the region are dominated by the security complexes dominant in those regions. There could also be the involvement of global powers in such regions, and the actions of such powers are also shaped by these regional security complexes.

The Copenhagen School of Thought also defined security from an elevated viewpoint from that of a traditional security perspective, which had been largely shaped by military issues. For the school of thought, security complexes have been categorized into five divisions: military, political, cultural or social, economic, and environmental. The theory states that each division plays an important role in the security dynamics of a region, and each and every division has been interlinked with each

other to some degree. Hence, when dealing with issues of security, states must think about securing all five elements.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen School of Security, propounded by scholars of RSCT, presents the concept of a *referent object*. The referent object can be used as an indicator to define a security problem in each of the five dimensions. An issue can be analyzed through a referent object that makes an issue a security concern and differs in each category. The referent object is easier to define in some cases, such as in military (survival of the state or the armed forces) or political (survival of the rule of law or ideologies that define one's aspirations) lenses and difficult in others, such as the economy (for firms it may mean not going bankrupt and for nation-states it may mean survival of economic supply chains so as to not threaten states' supply of basic necessities), cultural (survival of the established societal hierarchy), and environmental (making sure biological and natural resources do not go extinct).

The theory also states what issues can be defined under the banner of security—for example, what does it take to see that an issue has become a security concern? The scale on which one determines if the point at which the referent object becomes an issue of security also changes according to each observer's threshold, and a way to be assured of the threshold is determined through major moves being made by the observers, such as major changes in functions or major changes in military expenditure. With these changes being made we can determine that those issues are security issues for observers. Such steps are also called securitization. Hence, securitization steps can be an indicator for issues being concerned as those of security for the mentioned nation.

Through the RSCT, further theories can be attached to regional security dynamics, such as the Balance of Power (BOP), which will be used to study regional power dynamics and various bilateral and multilateral arrangements to address the security concerns. The theory of limited hard balancing under the BOP will be used in this article, which is an intermediary theory between the hard balancing and soft balancing theories. Limited hard balancing advocates the use of soft power mechanisms to balance along with limited military coordination.⁴ These theories will be used to analyze the regional security complexes and how India can use these bilateral and multilateral arrangements to minimize such complexes.

India's Threat Perception:

The Importance of the Indian Ocean to China

China has been experiencing fast-paced development, and its crude oil demands have been on a marked rise. China is the world's largest importer of crude oil and

imports around 10.5 million barrels per day.⁵ The major import destinations are from the Middle East and Africa, supplying almost 50 percent of China's imports. With the increase in demand for crude oil and falling domestic production, China has to look for outside sources to meet its oil demands.⁶ With the strategic ellipses producing 70 percent of global crude oil and 10 of 14 states there deemed unstable in nature, securitizing its oil sources has become critical for not just China, but for any nation.⁷ China came up with aid and investment policies to protect its oil sources, such as its peace missions to Mali in 2013 to minimize its militant outburst against its oil rich neighbors or China's inclusion in peace talks in South Sudan.⁸ Securing not just the sources but even the SLOCs has become an important aspect to which China has responded through the arrangement of a Chinese base in Djibouti along with various naval forces being deployed in the Indian Ocean to secure the SLOCs there. But for China, its geostrategic location and routes of trade have given rise to another of security issue, the "Malacca Dilemma." Coined by Hu Jintao in 2003, the dilemma sheds light on the strategic importance of the Strait of Malacca for China and its potential to impair the Chinese economic machine in times of disagreement with a foreign nation.⁹ The Strait of Malacca is an important geostrategic location for China as 60 percent of its trade passes through the Strait and almost 70 percent of its crude oil passed through in 2016.¹⁰ Analyzing China's security issues through the RSCT, it becomes evident that the military and political aspects of the IOR serve as security issues for China. Along with that, the presence of the United States as a regional player, challenging China's role as a leader in the reformation of the global governance system, has led to a wide array of military, political, and economic security complexes.

Chinese BRI in South Asia

To secure its interests in the Indian Ocean, China has been aggressive in its approach to providing alternate routes for transportation of its imports as well as structuring its presence in the region by providing aid and investment, such as it has achieved through its BRI. The importance of the BRI for China can be ascertained through its induction into the Chinese constitution, and analysts believe that the BRI aims to promote regional integration, infrastructure connectivity, and economic development as well as assert influence on international economic governance, construct and control key supply chains and energy routes, and advance China's soft power globally.¹¹

China, since its introduction of the BRI in 2013, has been pressing its objectives of the BRI throughout the globe, and such investments have been seen in South Asia. Under the banner of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Pakistan is at the forefront of the receiving end, followed by various other port, power, and trans-

portation projects in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and even Nepal. China's major investments in South Asia have been visible in two countries, namely China and Sri Lanka, with China investing in major ports, transportation, infrastructure, and oil and gas pipelines. China, through its investment in these countries, has been able to gain control of the strategic ports of Hambantota and Gwadar on lease for 99 and 43 years respectively. The ports provide China with an alternate route to import goods, reducing its dependence on the Strait of Malacca as a checkpoint for Chinese naval vessels in the region, reducing China's distance from the Strait of Hormuz as well as revenue generated from the ports and a location to refine its crude imports.¹² The BRI has brought massive debts to the receiving nations as well as an increasing Chinese investment foothold into key sectors of banking, military, stock exchanges, electronic and IT sectors, which have potentially tightened China's grasp on the economy as well as politics of the client countries.¹³

China has also been rapidly modernizing its naval power, as has been evident from the sporadic growth of its naval vessels and missions. China has taken an adamant stance in the South China Sea as well and has emerged as a strong challenger to the US Navy and its allies in the region. Through its economic ventures, China has also been able to propagate its ideology and backing, which has been seen multiple times on various international platforms.¹⁴ Hence, China has taken multiple economic, military, and political steps to securitize itself in the region.

“String of Pearls” or “Places not Bases”

Chinese expansionism and its own ventures to secure its interests in the region have given rise to security complexes for other players in the region. This has created a security complex that has seen the involvement of global players as well due to the economic and geopolitical potential the region holds. Consequently, Chinese investments made through the BRI have given rise to a geopolitical theory of the “String of Pearls,” which concludes that Chinese investments in South Asia could hinder Indian aspirations in the IOR, as these investments could result in Chinese military domination in the region—even though they are currently being made as commercial investments. While many political analysts believe in the theory, many others believe after analyzing the investments that China's policy is a “Places not Bases” policy.

The level of investment made in the bases and the infrastructural development required for these bases to be militarized is far from enough. Daniel Kostecka talks about the “dual-use logistics facility” or the “Places not Bases” policy by analyzing the low development and installation of defense mechanisms in the pearls. The policy states that the bases that China has been investing in play a role in sustaining its forces in the region rather than providing a base for China to operate its military

endeavors from.¹⁵ David Brewster also lays emphasis on the “Places not Bases” policy but also cautions against the security dilemma that has been formed in the Indian Ocean, which has led China and India to pursue their own security challenges, and has in turn led to a more coercive and suspicious relationship. He states that although China’s policy has not been one to challenge India militarily in the Indian Ocean, China could eventually give rise to an alternate policy to counter Indian presence in the IOR and securitize its own SLOCs in the region.¹⁶ Christopher Yung, Ross Rustici, Scott Devary, and Jenny Lin also disapprove of the “String of Pearls” policy and lay more emphasis on the dual-use logistics facility. But on the contrary, the research also states that India and the United States should be wary of China’s naval development as, according to them, “China’s buildup of naval forces in the IOR would be a better indicator of Chinese military ambitions in the region rather than the String of Pearls.”¹⁷ The researchers recommend India to modernize its naval fleet and the United States to develop its bilateral and multilateral relations in the South Asian region so as to safeguard their interests against an unfriendly Chinese presence in the IOR in the future, in case such a situation arises.

Although the analysts and advocates for dual-use logistics facilities refute any claims of militarized Chinese behavior from the pearl bases, they also do not reject the notion of an aggressive Chinese policy implementation in the IOR. The rapid modernization of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and the emphasis given to its development and application, along with China’s desire to expand its influence further into foreign nations, as has been evident from its white papers, raise suspicion of Chinese ambitions in the IOR for India.¹⁸ One argument against the use of pearl bases by China has been the unwillingness of the host nations to participate in an aggressive stance against India in the region. The only exception to the case has been Pakistan, whose dislike for India could drive it to pursue said policy. Pakistan’s new drive to securitize its bases and the involvement of Pakistan’s military in the same give emphasis to India’s suspicions.¹⁹ The instability in Afghanistan has further heightened India’s worry about insurgency along its borders. The distrust among Indian policy makers toward Pakistan and China’s motives against India have brought into discussion the theory of a two-front war.

“Two-front war” is a military term that describes a nation facing two opposing forces in two geographical areas. The joint forces engage in such a war to increase their chances of winning and, in turn, put less pressure on their own forces and reserves. For India, clashes with China in Doklam, the Galwan Valley, and the most recent Pangong Tso have scarred the confidence it laid in China’s acceptance and consideration of the peace deals between the two nations. Also, continuous conflict in Arunachal Pradesh has been a cause of worry for India as the region holds major

political and religious aspirations for China, and their activities on the border greatly threaten India's sovereignty.

The clashes have also fueled debate about a potential two-front war and whether India is capable of fighting on both fronts.²⁰ Unfortunately for the Indian side, the discussions do not have a positive outcome if such a conflict arises, raising further discussions on what steps India should take to protect itself from such adversaries.²¹ Hence, it has become important for India to securitize itself from Chinese aggressive policies, so it can shoulder the threat of a two-front war. This article will stress the importance of countering China more than Pakistan. China is a larger threat to India than Pakistan both militarily and economically, and also, the disintegration of Pakistan's confidence in its ability to wage a conflict with India without China's support on the second front will contribute a concluding effect of balancing China.

Here arises the need for the BOP theory, according to which, when a nation or a group of nations is threatened by the increase in power of another nation, they either try to increase their own power or try to form coalitions with other like-minded nations to balance against the power of the former. When interpreting the BOP through RSCT, it becomes clear that alliances and coalitions must be formed to address security concerns of not only military but also political, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects as well. These aspects are also noticeable in "The Spirit of the Quad," where the member states commit to a free and open Indo-Pacific where the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight (economic), peaceful resolution of disputes (military), democratic values, and territorial integrity are upheld (political). The Quad has also supported the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) centrality (cultural and societal), and an increased importance is also shown toward environmental issues such as vaccine production and supply during the COVID-19 pandemic and relief provisions during natural disasters.²² The decreasing US influence in the region, coupled with the increasing economic and military might of China, has brought the importance of balancing China through the formation of coalitions and allies.²³ Thus, based on the same outlook, India should also move forward to form bilateral and multilateral arrangements to securitize its interests in the regional security domain. India will have to produce internal as well as external reforms, changes that will allow India to defend itself in case some form of combat erupts, and secondly, to balance China in the Indo-Pacific. The article will mainly focus on areas distant from the Indian northern borders, into the maritime domain, Southeast Asia, and rest of South Asian countries, as India's attempts to balance China in these regions would lead to the best preferred outcome.

Securitizing India's Interests through Economic Undertakings

The Challenge

One of the aims of the Quad involves provision of loans for infrastructural and technological advancements in the Indo-Pacific region. China's ambitious BRI has been successful in investing in major infrastructural projects in multiple nations worldwide, and those include nations from the Indo-Pacific as well. India fears the encirclement that has been caused due to such investments, referred to earlier as the "String of Pearls," and to counter it India would have to step up into the forefront and counter Chinese investments with its own. One of the reasons why Chinese investments were heavily desired in the South Asian region was the neglectful nature of India toward its neighbors and the impression that India had been acting as a hegemon in the region, which could be effectively counterbalanced through Chinese economic intervention.²⁴ Recently, a change in the political dynamic in the region can be seen as Chinese "dept-trap" diplomacy has garnered backlash from not just its global rivals but also the receiving countries, and has caused new nations acquiring such investments from China to be cautious of becoming trapped themselves. India has also started to act in accordance by providing various investments to countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Maldives.²⁵

China's growing presence in the IOR demonstrates the region's importance to all global powers, owing to the massive volumes of global trade that pass through the region, its resources, and its geopolitical significance. China's massive investments in port and pipeline projects in the littoral nations would enable China to secure its SLOCs in the Indo-Pacific. But it can also, in turn, pressure global trade and China's detractors in the region. The Quad's aim of the formation of a "Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific" is in direct opposition to China's activities in the region, and India has shown full support for the initiative. Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed "5 Principles for Global Maritime Security," and the doctrine of Security and Growth for all in the region, or SAGAR, which can also be viewed as opposing China's maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific.²⁶

Advancing the "Act East"

Southeast Asia has emerged as a focal point for the great powers in the contemporary era. For India too, the region holds importance as India's major oil imports and 40 percent of its total trade passes through the Strait of Malacca.²⁷ The importance of the region for India can be appraised through the "Look East" policy that eventually morphed into "Act East" under the current ruling government. If India is to achieve its goal of becoming an economic power while also unlocking the poten-

tial of its northeastern states, it must establish ties with Southeast Asian nations. Setting up supply chains and construction of infrastructure will go a long way for India to not only link India to its Southeast Asian neighbors economically but also politically. India has signed various deals with the ASEAN nations such as the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements with Singapore and Malaysia in 2005 and 2011 respectively, a trade in goods agreement in 2016, free trade agreements with Japan as well as held security dialogues and memorandum of understanding with Australia but has still felt lacking in its economic (aid and investment) and security ventures. India has pushed forward its ASEAN venture but as Bajpaee states, “India has lost its focus on the ASEAN centrality. India has been timid in enforcing its efforts on security posts along its immediate borders, and has been unable to set up economic links with the ASEAN as it is only the 9th largest trading partner, with smaller nations such as Taiwan and Hong Kong racking up more number.”²⁸ India has also left itself out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership that could have enforced its “Act East” out of fear of Chinese malpractices, but India has been pursuing other projects to form links with ASEAN: the various infrastructural projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, which is now being planned to envelop Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam along with Bangladesh, the Kaladan Transit Project, and various other envisioned programs with members of the Quad to connect India’s northeast to Southeast and East Asia.²⁹ India has also been looking to form other alternate routes to trade with the ASEAN nations that exclude dealing with China.³⁰

Afterimage of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

Another area of focus for India could also be the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor initiative by New Delhi and Tokyo and announced in 2017. The plan envisioned the creation of quality infrastructure to promote development and people-to-people partnerships. As the goals of both the nations aligned with the rule of law, political liberalism, and the market economy, the initiative showed great strength in India-Japan unity but has shown no consecutive gains.³¹ The initiative was envisioned as a counter to China’s BRI, but rather than pursuing the goals further, the plan was scrapped, and in its place are other initiatives with similar goals, such as the Platform for Japan-India Business Cooperation in the Asia-Africa Region or the India-Japan Development Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including Africa. The initiative showed that India and Japan can work in tandem to produce infrastructure in the Asian and African nations and have also worked on it to some extent by funding projects such as roads and hospitals in Africa. As such, it can help India to further its aims not just in the Southeast Asian region, but also in Africa as well as South Asia. India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that Japan and India

have been looking forward to working together on island nations in the Pacific and South Asia as has been seen in Sri Lanka and under various banners of the Quad, ASEAN, and East Asia Summit.³² As a part of Japan's "Exit China" strategy, South Asian nations could also benefit from foreign direct investment (FDI) as a result of Japanese industries moving out of China, and they have also seen its presence grow in countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.³³

Economic Enterprising with Regional Allies

India and the United States have also moved further in their cooperation to achieve mutual aims in the Indo-Pacific region. Although mutual aims and cooperation between both nations have been majorly seen in the defense and security aspects, with the Quad and maritime security gaining importance in the region, the leaders of both nations affirmed the importance of building strategic partnerships and working together with other groupings such as ASEAN and the Quad.³⁴ The United States could also play a major role in India's periphery by directly coordinating with India to help construct infrastructural development, capacity building, and help revive a region on the path of a post-pandemic recovery.³⁵

The Indian Ocean currently accounts for 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) through blue economy ventures, and the scale of that proportion will balloon with global estimates rising for demand in the sector. India will have to venture into developing its blue economy sectors besides production of infrastructure, security, and promotion of a rules-based order. India has enhanced its maritime cooperation with Australia in this sense. India-Australia maritime cooperation has raised concerns about tackling the issues of promoting peace, stability, and a rules-based maritime order based on international law while combating terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, and environmental challenges such as climate change, ocean acidification, while preserving marine ecology and promoting resource sharing.³⁶ Hence, India and Australia have strengthened their cooperation to safeguard their interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Along with bilateral arrangements, the region has seen a rise in trilateral arrangements such as the India-Japan-Australia supply chain initiative as well as the Australia-India-Indonesia and the India-Australia-France groupings.³⁷ The groupings will promote a "free and open," peaceful, and law-abiding Indo-Pacific, focusing on economic, security, and environmental challenges in the region. Meanwhile, the India-Japan-Australia Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) will focus on forming resilient supply chains in the sectors of petrochemicals, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and textiles in the wake of the COVID pandemic.³⁸

Provision of Alternate Sources of Investment

China has been successful in achieving its goal of promoting its BRI across multiple nations in Asia and Africa and has been able to do so on its own terms and conditions. One of the major reasons for that has been the absence of other major economic powers in the scenario to provide aid and investments to these states, as they usually involve tackling weak rule of law and weak protectionist laws for incoming FDI, hence investors from other countries remain hesitant to invest.³⁹ Even if such investments are offered, they are offered with tight ends, which leaves the countries no better option than Chinese investments through which China has been able to invest in main sectors of the local economy and has been able to grab the “guts” of the economy.⁴⁰ India needs to work in this respect along with other regional powers, because the oversight of investment demands by the developed world has been one of the key factors for the increase in Chinese presence in Asia and also in the African nations. The recent joint venture by the United States, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand to build a Papua New Guinea power grid shows the Quad wants to move further in this direction.⁴¹ India should capitalize on the move by increasing its collective presence in Southeast Asian nations to exert pressure on China from regions other than the Indian Ocean.

Maintaining Military Interests

Investing in and Modernizing Military Capabilities

India's most comprehensive military coordination in the Indo-Pacific has been with the United States. With the United States shifting its priority to the “Asia-Pacific,” as was stated under the Obama administration, the United States has also prioritized India's role as being centric to the United States' “Pivot to Asia.”⁴² The India-US shared vision gained formal recognition in the year 2015, and gained pace under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government headed by Narendra Modi with the finalization of three essential agreements: the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, and finally the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement.⁴³ The three agreements will aid both nations to restock each other's designated military facilities, secure communication between their militaries, and supply high-tech equipment and intelligence, respectively.⁴⁴ Along with the said deals, the United States also cleared sales of Guardian unmanned aerial vehicles and the US-P8I patrol aircraft, both of which will aid India in countering Chinese naval and, notably, submarine presence in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁵ If the United States wants India to aid it in its “Pivot to Asia,” and if India wants to secure itself in the maritime domain

against Chinese aggression, then India has to upgrade its naval capabilities, which the above stated agreements have been specifically designed to do. Along with the procurement of technology and equipment, India and the United States have also furthered their capabilities through military exercises, with India hosting the highest number of military exercises with the United States among all its allies. The India-US Malabar exercise, which is specifically aimed at joint operations in the maritime domain, has seen great leaps, with Japan joining the exercise officially in 2015 and Singapore and Australia being unofficial participants. India has conducted multiple other naval exercises categorically with Asia-Pacific countries such as Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines, which saw the participation of anti-submarine corvettes, multi-role guided missile stealth frigates, and P8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft.

Hence, India has begun to gain traction in upgrading its naval capabilities and operability, but one area where it has lagged is in its budget allocation to the Navy. The Indian Army takes up 56 percent of the budget, and proportionally so as it is the largest branch, but only 15 percent is handed out to the Navy.⁴⁶ Based on numerical values, the Indian Navy has the least proportion of expenditure in both revenue and capital expenditure. That indicates neglect and disregard, despite the increasing importance of the required naval capabilities to counter maritime threats to India. Even when compared to other Quad members, India spends less on its Navy, with the United States, Japan, and Australia allocating 30, 23, and 25 percent of their budgets to their respective navies.⁴⁷

Harnessing Geopolitical Assets

India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands also play a vital role due to their geographical location. The islands, which are close to Southeast Asian nations and the Malacca Strait, provide a great geostrategic position for India to operate its military functions, such as the already established Tri Service Command. But despite developments on the island, it is generally criticized for not being vitalized to its full potential. Within the changing political and strategic environment, the islands can be used for the naval capabilities of Indian allies in the region, such as Australia, Japan, the United States, and France, among others.⁴⁸ This could meaningfully increase cooperation among regional allies, especially considering the Quad's aims and outreach. If India opens the islands to other navies, it can also enable infrastructure, technology, and intelligence upgradation through collective participation and development of the islands, especially with greater influence being put into the region seen even with the establishment of the new United States Indo-Pacific Command.⁴⁹

The Indo-Pacific from the Indian interest perspective ranges from the eastern coasts of the African continent to the western shores of the American continent, and if India is at the strategic end of one part of the region, then Australia is at the important junction where the Indian Ocean and the Pacific meet, and this geo-strategic value of both the nations has made the nations realize the importance of each in achieving their aims in regard to the future of the Indo-Pacific. This has also enabled the promotion of relations between the two nations, with India and Australia signing agreements covering a broad range of interests, including military interoperability, intelligence cooperation, technology cooperation, and maritime capabilities.

India has a strategic and geographical advantage over China when it comes to control of the Indian Ocean, but economically, China has been aggressive in connecting itself to the Indian Ocean, connections that have been hampered by the harsh geographical landscapes between the Indian Ocean and China. When it comes to a conflict situation between India and China, India would want to push the conflict to the maritime region, but with an increasing Chinese naval presence over the years through facilitation of ports and by participation in antipiracy missions, India needs to find allies in the form of its neighbors.⁵⁰ India has used its geographical position and leadership to form and lead initiatives such as the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) to promote the concept of trade, transportation, communication, tourism, counterterrorism, energy, and other areas that could reduce demand for Chinese investments and increase Indian influence over such countries.

Increasing Intelligence Network Effectiveness

Abhijnan Rej states that to achieve dissuasion and deterrence against China in the Indo-Pacific, the political military means that the Quad should use include logistics networks and interoperability through joint exercises, defense diplomacy, and patrolling and presence operations in the maritime domain.⁵¹ India also needs to conduct intelligence and reconnaissance operations both on the land borders as well as in the maritime domain to carry out precise and accurate operations, failing which, China could gain the upper hand.

To achieve decisive and practical results, legitimate and precise intelligence information is an important element. India's intelligence history has many instances that have shown major intelligence breakdowns, such as during the 1962 Sino-Indian war, the 1999 Kargil War, the 2001 Parliament attacks, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2016 Uri attacks, the 2016 Pathankot attacks, and the most recent 2019 Balakot airstrikes.⁵² Indian intelligence has suffered from overlapping

responsibilities and shortcomings in administrative structure, communication within the intelligence hierarchy, and data analysis—as well as leadership challenges during dire moments. Indian intelligence agencies have not just lacked in their functioning but in evolution as well. While intelligence agencies tend to evolve, learning from their failures, Indian intelligence agencies have suffered under the pressures of the Indian bureaucratic system, with every new government making changes to the previous governments' decisions to revamp the intelligence structure, halting any progress in the process.

An obvious solution to India's lack of an intelligence sector could be through intelligence sharing and agreements with partner nations in the region. A major step for India in this avenue has been the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement with the United States. This includes the sharing of unclassified as well as to some degree classified information, which drastically improves the Indian military's ability to strike its enemies with pinpoint precision. Another agreement that has been highlighted is the "Five Eyes."⁵³ Joining the agreement would pave way for India to receive quality intelligence information from advanced equipment that would improve India's preparedness against border infiltrations, along with opportunities to train and develop its lacking intelligence capabilities. India has also been pursuing intelligence sharing with Australia and Japan, as well in diversified fields such as counterterrorism and cybersecurity.⁵⁴

Supplementing Significance through Soft Power

Soft power is a concept that has gained major prominence in the contemporary international relations setting, with countries focusing on their foreign policies and cultural propagation to further their relations with other countries. Joseph Nye, the designer of the concept, stated that there is a third form of power that dictates one country's relations with another, and unlike the coercive methods of military and economic powers, is a more compassionate and humble method. The COVID-19 pandemic came as an opportunity for India to become a vaccine production hub for the globe, and through collaboration with the Quad, India's ambitions have started to take form. India had exported 66 million doses of vaccine to other countries before it hit a halt due to internal turmoil.⁵⁵

Soft power can be used as a competent tool for persuasion and attraction, but for the Indian side, its soft power diplomacy has not been effective. Despite continuous efforts by the Indian side, internal political turmoil and conflicts, along with the shutting down of various industries due to the pandemic, have put a halt to India's soft power diplomacy.⁵⁶ Although India has tried to grasp the opportunity of the moment through its vaccine diplomacy, the mismanagement of the pandemic internally has put a dent on India's hope to be the pharmaceutical hub

globally, while Russia and China push forward in this respect.⁵⁷ With the country's stability restored, India has resumed its push to export vaccines, with Iran, Bangladesh, and Myanmar each receiving a supply of one million doses.⁵⁸ There has also been an extensive growth in the production of vaccines, which gives the Indian government relief to push its national vaccine movement in tandem with its global commitments. Hence, vaccine diplomacy can be used as an efficient political tool to increase India's soft power globally, and India could step up its image as the "pharmacy of the world."

India has recognized the importance of a positive self-image in the Indo-Pacific and has given rise to multiple policies of "neighborhood first," "Act East," and several bilateral and multilateral arrangements. T. V. Paul states that globalization has led to a form of BOP in South Asia between India and China, giving the smaller nations options for investments without having to bandwagon in the process.⁵⁹ Because of this India has lost its domination over the smaller states. If the same logic can be used in the context of Southeast Asia, India's pursuit of economic and diplomatic linkages could also go a long way to counter China in the region. Another agreement signed by India with its Southeast Asian neighbors on the same topic was the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, which not only aids India to strengthen its relations with the region's nations, but also aids it to improve its soft power through initiatives in the fields of culture, agriculture, health, and education.⁶⁰

Conclusion

India has been using several soft and hard balancing options for countering China in the Indo-Pacific, along with multiple policies and developments that have taken place internally to counter deficiencies and increase preparedness. The pandemic has exposed major global economic and political inadequacies and adding to India's already existing internal and external instabilities has brought out new desires and ventures from the Indian side. For India, the regions in the Indo-Pacific are divided into immediate neighbors and further to the western borders of Africa and east toward Southeast Asia, and through this article it has been laid out that India needs to venture outside its neighborhood, and it has lately started to give importance to the greater Indo-Pacific region given China's intervention in the region. Also, we can see a partial shift in the Indian political stance against China, where India has shifted from a passive to a nonchalant yet active stance. India has started to shape its policies and its stance to achieve limited hard balance against China in the Indo-Pacific. To achieve that goal, India has cooperated with multiple regional allies and will continue to do so in the future. These arrangements provide India with a feasible and effective way to balance China without resorting to a direct confrontation, which India is unlikely to want.

Through the implementation of the RSCT theory along with BOP, we see India securitizing against not just conventional but unconventional threats as well. Through various economic, cultural, political, environmental, and military agreements, India has been balancing as well as countering Chinese security threats in the region. As discussed, this could be an effective solution to India's "two-front war" threat. As one, it would be beneficial to stop any Chinese aggressiveness on the borders by compelling China to be mindful of India's aspirations. Secondly, countering Pakistan without a coercive Chinese threat on the second front would be a much more desirable stance for the Indian side. With India's desire to become a global power in mind, India's involvement in the Indo-Pacific could be a productive step to achieve that goal.

India could play a leading role in the region considering its massive geographic, economic, military, and cultural might. Various regional players with shared mentalities have all shown interest in coordinating with India. Countries such as Japan, Australia, the United States, and France have shared interests, but even the smaller nations have benefited from such arrangements and have shown the desire to commit to such endeavors. Countries that have been dominated by China, such as Laos and Cambodia, have also been reached through various ventures. Although some of these arrangements are fairly new and insufficient as of now against China, with continuous efforts and participation, they could become a significant strategy to balance China. ★

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