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I Ms. Vishakha Patil would like to express my gratitude towards Forum for Integrated National Security (FINS) for providing me the opportunity to write a paper on this very crucial topic. I thank my Professor Dr. Uttara Sahasrabuddhe for guiding me throughout the course of writing this paper and for providing her valuable inputs. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Rajiv Gupte Sir for believing in me and allowing me to undertake this research.
Abstract

The global order keeps on evolving. The 21st century has witnessed a shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The ascendancy of Asia in multiple spheres has captured the global attention. The major powers in Asia have carved out a path for themselves especially in the international security architecture. The Indo-Pacific region has become a critical component of international relations today. India and China have emerged as the major power centers in Asia. The growth of China technologically, militarily and economically is now challenging the established world order. It has been claiming territorial and maritime spaces in various regions. The Indo-pacific region has assumed significance as major Sea lines of Communications (SLOC’s) pass through it. Being a resource rich region in terms of oil and natural gas it has further assumed importance. Chinese have asserted claims over the South China Sea. This has led to contestations among the littoral states in the South China Sea as majority of the claims made by China overlap with the Exclusive Economic Zones of other nations like Vietnam, Philippines etc. This research paper aims to analyze China’s policy in the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific. It then further talks of India’s interest in the region and the policies India has adopted to strengthen its relations with the littoral states in the SCS. Moreover, the paper in detail discusses the evolution of the idea of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The research paper also talks about the approaches adopted by United States, Australia, India and Japan in the Quadrilateral security dialogue to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. The paper further suggest policy options for India to in the short and medium term vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region and the Quad.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, South China Sea, Southeast Asia, India.
Introduction:

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as we know supports the concept of ‘Free, Open and Prosperous Indo Pacific’. Through the QUAD, India has begun to play an assertive role in the domain of Maritime Security. India, in the coming years can actually play a significant role in ensuring freedom of navigation, security, rule based order in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, India also has the capability to play a crucial role in the South China Sea especially with Chinese aggression being noticed in the area. China’s policies have a direct or indirect effect on India’s security dimensions. Thus, it becomes significant for India to assert its power in the region by collaborating with various countries in different aspects like oil and gas exploration, climate change, securing the Sea Lines of Communications etc. It is in this context that we need to examine India’s growing role in the region and understand the future lies in the Indo Pacific. The fact that we presently have countries like USA, Japan and Australia who are a part of the Quad and that they share good relations with India is a testimony to India’s importance in this part of the world. Shinzo Abe, the former Prime Minister of Japan had expressed it as “Democratic Security Diamond” makes it more relevant for India which is the largest democracy in the world. India’s importance in the region and the need for India to build up strong ties with countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, etc. is very important especially when the Chinese aggression in the South China Sea is on rise which may prove to be fatal to India in the long term. Coupled with that China’s growing influence in our neighboring countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh makes it all the more decisive for India to secure its Maritime space. The construction of military facilities and assert its claim over most of the islands in the region pose a strategic challenge to India. In this context, the study examines India’s Maritime policy with respect to the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific. The Indian political leadership is seen to be more proactively engaged in the region over the years. The success of the Malabar exercises are a testimony to this. Thus, the objective of undertaking the study is analyze the geostrategic, geo-economic significance of the broader Indo-Pacific, understand China’s policy and subsequently also study India’s policies in the region.
Review of Literature

The world order can never remain static and undergoes continuous changes. New organizations and institutions are formed that work towards the achievement of a common goal. The last decade has seen rise of one such institution known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprising of India, Australia, Japan and the United States. The mechanism of QUAD propounds for Free, Open and Rules based Indo-Pacific. Its origins can be traced the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” envisaged by Shinzo Abe the former Prime Minister of Japan.

The CSIS report titled Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present, and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue by Patrick Gerard Buchan and Bejamin Rimland traces the evolution of the QUAD in 2007, the reasons for its failure in the initial years and its revival after 2017. It cites China’s revisionist behavior in the last decade that led to a consensus building among the four nations to work in close collaboration to counter China’s growing hegemony in the region. It discusses each country’s ingrained interest in the region which have forged ties between the states. The interest of these nations in the region has forged greater ties and is clearly visible in the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

In an article written by Lavina Lee in ‘The Strategist’ titled ‘It’s time to revisit the Quad’ cites the reasons the four nations would further engage in enriching ties with each other for the resurgence of the QUAD. It explores the leadership provided Modi, Shinzo Abe and Trump with whose efforts the QUAD resurged post 2017. The QUAD is a grouping that goes beyond regional boundaries and talks of free, open and rules based Indo-Pacific. Maritime sphere needs to be free from any one country’s hegemony is agreed by all the littoral states of the SCS too. However, China has confrontation with the littoral states in the SCS and wants to establish itself as a regional hegemon. (Lee, 2017).

Erik Beukel in his article on ‘China and the South China Sea: Two Faces of Power in the Rising China’s Neighborhood Policy’ analyzes the conflicts in the SCS. He asserts that due to the complexity of claims in the region it is called as the ‘mother of all territorial disputes’. This article also explores the two facets of Chinese strategy i.e. China’s rising military power as well as soft power diplomacy. This combination according to Erik Beukel has given China rich dividends.
(Beukel, 2010). The 1995 Mischief Reef seizure in the Spratly islands is very well analyzed and
explores the overlapping claims over the EEZ by both China and Philippines. Thus the importance
of the region for China is well articulated in the paper that makes it vital for India to counter
Chinese aggressiveness in the region. This is particularly important in the light of the strategic
importance of the region to India especially in the larger context of the Indo-Pacific. The term
Indo-Pacific is of recent origin.

New Delhi has over the years realized the importance of not only maintaining good
relations with its neighbors but also with the countries in the extended neighborhood. In order
to counter the Chinese growing hegemony and ensure that a rules based order prevails in the
region, New Delhi has since 1990s started forging and expanding ties with the littoral states in
the SCS. One of the crucial elements of this is the development of India’s relations with the littoral
states through ASEAN and India’s Look East and Act East policies.

In an article by Harsh Pant and Avantika Deb titled ‘India-ASEAN partnership at 25’
written for the Observer Research Foundation. The paper explores the relations between India
and ASEAN since their inception and argues that one of the common area of interest between
India and the ASEAN states which are situated in the SCS is agreement on the need to determine
the future balance of power in the region. According to Pant and Deb common concerns,
aspirations, threats bind the two mainly in respect of China’s growth. It describes how India has
tried to maintain string relations with the nations as evident from the initial period when India
supported anti-colonial struggle in the states.

Post 1970s due to India’s pro Soviet stance, ideological differences emerged. However,
after the end of cold war the relations further expanded with India conceptualizing the Look East
Policy an effort that led to expansion of cultural, economic as well as strategic relations. The
policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was upgraded to Act East Policy.
This has led to a number of collaborations at various levels to evolve a regional security
architecture. The article further elaborates that there has to be continuous co-operation to
maintain stability in the region not only because the tensions with China will heighten but also to
counter non-traditional threats to security like piracy, terrorism, illegal trafficking. It suggests deeper engagement and further co-operation to maintain regional balance. (Pant & Deb, 2017).

Viewed in this context it is crucial for India to play a constructive role in the region to counter Chinese aggression and evolve a rules based order to secure its interest. For this, India has to not only be the norm follower but also the norm setter in the region.
**Objectives of the Research:**

1. To trace the evolution of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue since its formation. To analyze the objectives and evolving policy of each partner towards the Quad. To forecast about the Quad co-operation in future – in short and medium term.
2. To analyze and forecast the policies of China with reference to the South China Sea littoral and the broader Indo-Pacific region.
3. To understand India’s interests in the littoral states of the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific.
4. To suggest policy options for India in the short and medium term vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region and the Quad.

**Research Methodology**

The research will be based mainly on secondary methods. The basic method adopted will be Library Research. It focused on Online referencing, Journals, Articles, Magazines, Books, Government Websites, etc.

**Secondary Sources:**

Books dealing with India’s relations with Southeast Asian nations, China, Strategic and Maritime Security, Geopolitics of Southeast Asia have been referred.

Journals such as Southeast Asian Affairs, Journal of Defense Studies, Pacific Affairs, Economic and Political Weekly and Foreign Affairs Magazine etc. are some of the journals that will be referred to for undertaking research on the topic.

Websites, Web Pages and blogs like Ministry of External Affairs, J-Stor, Scopus, Google Scholar, The Wire, Salute, The Diplomat etc. will be referred to.


**Scheme of Chapterization**

The research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter titles as ‘Introduction’ introduces topic, enlists the Review of literature and cites the major references used. Moving forward, it states the conceptual framework by explaining the basic concepts used in the research, the Hypothesis, the Key Research questions and the Research Methodology particularly in detail, by providing a glimpse of the Research design. Finally, it proceeds to explain the broad scheme of Chapterization in detail.

The second chapter is titled as the ‘Evolution of The QUAD and the Policy of each Partner towards it’. This chapter examines in detail the formation of the QUAD in 2007 and its growth over the years. It analyses in detail the various factors that led to QUAD not being in the forefront since 2007 to 2017 and the revival since then. The interest of the United States, Japan, Australia and India to be a part of this dialogue are examined in the chapter and the policies adopted by each of the partner towards it.

The third chapter is titled as Policies of China with reference to the South China Sea littoral and the broader Indo-Pacific region. This chapter explores the Chinese interest in the region. It further examines in depth the various maritime claims China has made in these years in the South China Sea region. It inspects its contestations China has with the littoral states in the South China Sea. The concept of Exclusive Economic Zones as ushered in the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Seas is widely analyzed. Chinese strategies of claiming reefs, islands, construction of artificial islands has also been assessed. The Belt and Road initiative is also a grand part of China’s increasing assertiveness in the region which has been scrutinized in the chapter. The chapter asserts that China’s rise has led the world to re-examine the importance of maritime space.

The fourth chapter is titled as ‘India’s interests in the littoral states of the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific.’ This chapter examines why the South China Sea region is crucial for India. The region harbors important maritime choke points like the Malacca strait, Sunda strait through which trade takes place. As China is asserting its claim over the entire region India is grossly concerned about the freedom of navigation in the region. This chapter highlights how
India has been trying to revive its age old relationships with the South East Asian nations. It further explores

The fifth chapter is titled as ‘Policy options for India in the short and medium term vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region and the Quad.’ This chapter tries to suggest some policies that India can adopt as a part to maintain its ties with the nations in the Indo-Pacific.

The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter. It suggest some future course of actions that could be undertaken by India in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the broader Indo-Pacific region. It concludes and summarizes the entire discussion.
End Notes

i The Indo-Pacific is broadly to be understood as an interconnected space between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

ii Sea lines of communication (abbreviated as SLOC) is a term describing the primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces.

iii A coastal state with land territory adjacent to a particular maritime area.

iv The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defined the EEZ as a zone in the sea over which a sovereign nation has certain special rights with respect to the exploration and usage of marine resources. It can extend to a maximum of 200 nautical miles from the baseline.
**Evolution of The QUAD and the Policy of each Partner towards it.**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is an informal group consisting of USA, Australia, Japan and India. The origins of it can be traced back to the ‘Tsunami Core Group’ established by the four nations to facilitate collaborations for relief activities. However, even before the Tsunami Core Group, a series of meetings were held between the member states of TDS- Trilateral Strategic Dialogue involving Australia, Japan and USA to fight global terrorism and contain nuclear proliferation. It was also intended to keep a check on Chinese activities in the South China Sea.

Later, in 2007 the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe outlined it to be a grouping for ‘Value-oriented Diplomacy’ based on Liberal Democratic values in order to create an ‘Arc of Freedom and Prosperity’. The “Confluence of Two Seas” speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe—the Indian and Pacific Oceans — that were undergoing a “dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity.” India and Japan, said Abe, shared an interest in and responsibility for securing these seas “by joining forces with like-minded countries.” (Abe, 2007)

The major reason for its conception was to curb the growing assertiveness of China in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The discussion took a serious turn when US Vice President Dick Cheney also showed interest in the formation of the QUAD. This informal grouping was however short lived. The four nations met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum i summit in Philippines to discuss the areas of common interest including disaster relief. (Buchan & Rimland, 2020)

The year 2007 also saw the beginning of Malabar Exercises ii. The grouping was widely criticized by China. Critics of QUAD also pointed out that it could become an ‘Asian NATO’ as the objectives of the QUAD were not clearly specified. Due to the growing criticisms of QUAD especially by China the four nations began to distance the QUAD as a strategic grouping. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also stressed that the QUAD held no Security implication.

Lavina Lee in an article written in ‘The Strategist’ titled ‘It’s time to revisit the Quad’ identifies some reasons for its failure in the initial stages, prominent being the forbearers of this grouping lost power in their respective nations. For instance, Shinzo Abe had to quit the office in
2007 on account of ill health, George Bush was more inclined towards maintenance of stability in the Middle East and soon also had to terminate the office of President, while Australian Prime Minister John Howard lost office in 2007 to Kevin Rudd who declared Australia’s withdrawal from the QUAD. (Lee, 2017)

This political instability led to the QUAD becoming dysfunctional in 2008. However, it was not dead and in 2017 on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Manila, Philippines the four nations met again and it led to the revival of the QUAD. One of the reason for the revival was that in 2012 when Xi Jinping came to power in China, he began shifting away from the strategy of ‘hide of your strength, bide your time’ propounded by Deng Xiaoping and instead signaled a New Era based on the idea of ‘Community of Common Destiny’. (Clover, 2017). The assertiveness of China in both the territorial and maritime sectors was seen as a great concern for the nations. Moreover, in the ten years that passed from 2007 to 2017, saw greater strategic imbalances in Asia. In these years, we could see more bilateral cooperation among the nations. For instance, India engaged with Japan, USA and lately Australia in 2+2 ministerial level dialogues (defense and foreign) (Ministry of External Affairs, 2019).

With USA, India signed in 2015, the COMCASA (Communications compatibility and security agreement) which will facilitate access to advanced defense systems and enable India to optimally utilize its U.S.-origin platforms. In 2016 the LEMOA (logistics exchange memorandum of agreement) (Panda A. , 2018). India Japan also signed the historic Japan- India Civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2017.

The naval exercise between Australia and India – AUSINDEX. Indian ships Shivalik, Kamorta and Jyoti participated in the exercise. (The Times of India, 2019). Other than that, the US- Australia exercise Talisman Saber and participation of Japan since 2019 has also led to strengthening of ties. The conduct of such bilateral and multilateral exercises among the four nations has led to increasing trust, strengthening cooperation and helped to foster political ties. Thus, even though QUAD remained dysfunctional the greater bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the four countries certainly led to evolving relations and the grounds for QUAD 2.0 were laid.
Thus, QUAD was once again revived in 2017 with the huge efforts of Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kano and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Representatives of the four nations met in Manila and had discussions relating to the Indo-Pacific. They talked about a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and rules based system. The meeting also led to discussion on issues like Freedom of Navigation\textsuperscript{vi} and Overflight in the Indo Pacific and its implementation. (Roche, 2017)

The ministerial level meeting in 2019 held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York marks an important development for the future of the QUAD. The first standalone meeting of the QUAD was held on 2020 in Tokyo in the presence of EAM Dr. Jaishankar, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Ann Payne, Motegi, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Here, the nations reaffirmed their "collective vision" of maintaining a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific in the face of growing Chinese assertiveness. This meeting is significant and very different from the earlier meetings held because for the very first time the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo talked of collaboration to “protect our people and partners from the Chinese Communist Party’s exploitation, corruption and coercion, we have seen in the South and the East China Sea, the Mekong\textsuperscript{vii}, the Himalayas, the Taiwan strait\textsuperscript{viii}". He also envisaged QUAD as a force for good in the region. (Gaurav, 2020)

Over these years, US had also refrained from directly criticizing Chinese aggression, however this is the first time that US openly criticized China. Dr. Jaishankar reiterated a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and said that India remains committed for upholding a rule based international order underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, and freedom of navigation in International seas and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes. (Laskar, 2020)

Thus, the QUAD which was conceptualized in 2007 is now seen as a major grouping of the four democracies who agree to maintain a rule based Indo-Pacific. With the standalone meeting happening for the first time it is pertinent to say the over the years the QUAD will assume greater importance in the region. However, the way QUAD functions in the coming years would be crucial to look into. Whether it will emerge as the Asian NATO and directly counter China or whether it
will remain a group working for promoting security in the region will depend on many factors like the Chinese future plan in region, leadership in all the nations etc.

It is vital to understand that the QUAD will definitely play a decisive role in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, over the years the QUAD has also been focusing on ASEAN as it is an organization that helps the QUAD nations to develop relations with the states present in the littoral of the South China Sea. Thus, ASEAN centrality, Inclusivity and strengthening the role of various ASEAN-led institutions like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit has also found a place in the Indo-Pacific strategy of the QUAD nations. (Bhatia, 2019)

**Japan**

Japan has been a major player in the QUAD as it was Japan under the leadership of Shinzo Abe who first propounded the concept of QUAD in 2007. He has left back a strong legacy of crafting out a successful forum in the Indo-Pacific. The birth of the Indo-Pacific initiative can be traced back to Abe’s ‘Confluence of Two Seas’ speech given in the Indian Parliament in 2007. Abe’s speech reflected the view that as India and Japan are located at the edges of the two seas it is their shared responsibility to ensure peace, stability, freedom of navigation.

The concept of QUAD was revitalized by Abe in an opinion piece titled “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond”. In the essay, Abe states that “peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are inseparable from peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean.” Abe also stated that “Japan, as one of the oldest sea-faring democracies in Asia, should play a greater role in preserving the common good in both regions”. This opinion piece reflected Abe’s vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Abe also warned about China’s growing assertiveness and asserted that the South China Sea is on the verge of becoming a “Lake Beijing”. This opinion speech reiterated Abe’s concern for China’s increasing assertiveness in the Indo-pacific as well as China establishing its claim on various islands like the Senkaku Islands. (Abe, 2007)

Thus, Japan which shares a geographical proximity with China was more worried than India, Australia and the United States.
Abe’s ‘Five Principles’ of Japan-ASEAN diplomacy asserted in 2013 also reflect Abe’s vision towards the QUAD. The five principles are:

1. "To protect freedom of thought, expression, and speech in this region where two oceans meet. These are universal values that humanity has gained and they must be allowed to flower to the fullest."
2. "To ensure that the seas, which are the most vital commons to us all, are governed by laws and rules, not by might."
3. "To pursue free, open, interconnected economies as part of Japan’s diplomacy. We must secure the power of networking by bringing our national economies closer together through flows of trade and investment, people, and goods."
4. “To protect and nurture Asia’s diverse culture heritage and traditions”
5. “To promote exchanges among younger generations to further foster mutual understanding.”

These five principles are also at the core of Japan’s policy towards the QUAD. (Panda, 2013)

Since 2015, China’s policy towards the Indo-Pacific and particularly to the Indo-Pacific has underwent dramatic changes. United States by this time has also grown anxious of China’s expansionism and started conducting patrols in the South China Sea. The US deployed Guided-missile Destroyer USS Lassen which breached the 12 nautical mile zone that China claimed around Subi and Mischief reefs in the Spratly archipelago. This act by the United States was termed illegal by China and Beijing opined that it would "resolutely respond to any country's deliberately provocative actions". This act led to US-Japan coming together and forging ties to ensure freedom of navigation. (US Navy destroyer passes disputed China islands, 2015)

In 2015, Japan and India also enhanced their relationship to ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’. The “Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World” was also announced. (Japan-India Relations, 2021)

Japan is thus also trying to build up a regional order that is not directed by China. To counter it Japan through the QUAD is continuously trying to build up closer ties with both India
and Japan. For instance, Japan has signed the "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement" with India in 2020 that establishes a for the settlement procedures for the reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces thereby enabling them to actively contribute towards establishing peace and security. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020)

In the same year, Abe and Australian Prime Minister Turnbull issued a joint statement and agreed upon the importance of deepening the ‘special relationship’. It was reaffirmed that Japan-Australia are strong supporters of economic prosperity and stability in the Pacific. The Prime Ministers affirmed their commitment to helping the region achieve a peaceful and prosperous future and will continue close cooperation in the Pacific. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020)

Thus, Japan has steered the process of making QUAD a functional forum by bringing India, Australia and the United Stated together. The concept of Indo-Pacific strategic framework has also begun to get more acceptance. The year 2015 thus remains very important for QUAD as Prime Minister Abe made a staunch progress towards reinvigorating QUAD.

Over the years, the QUAD has been revitalized and Japan has taken a lead role in broadening the scope and the horizon of the QUAD. For Japan, it means that it can have greater cooperation with the countries in the Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific as well. The QUAD plus framework also gives Japan the leverage to think and act beyond security and maritime issues and also incorporate economic cooperation especially with Vietnam, New Zealand and South Korea. For example, New Zealand is Japan’s fourth largest trading partner and the QUAD plus initiative provides Japan to boost its trade and also ensure economic growth. Vietnam has over the years emerged as the new important foreign investment destination for Japan. Moreover, it should also be noticed that most of the countries in the littoral of the South China Sea are vulnerable to China’s assertiveness and thus Japan could forge ties with these states in the area of maritime and defense cooperation as well. Thus QUAD proves to be not only a geo-strategic forum for Japan but also a mechanism through which it can broaden its trade, economic, cultural tie with the QUAD plus states. (Panda J. , 2020)
Prime Minister Jacinda Arden and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s summit meeting in 2019 led to a joint statement titled “Taking the Japan-New Zealand Strategic Cooperative Partnership to the next level,” whose objective was to promote a “free and open Indo-Pacific”.

Thus, if we try to relocate Japan’s position in the Indo-Pacific, it appears that Japan has not gone soft on its approach on China and is continuously fostering ties with other nations in the QUAD to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and counter the rising hegemony of China as well.

**India**

India has been a participant in QUAD since its inception. However, India in the earlier days seemed less enthusiastic about the QUAD. The earliest attempts at the QUAD proved unsuccessful. However, since 2017, the four countries have revived the forum. China, has been very critical of the QUAD and often termed it as the Asian- NATO. India however, did not view the QUAD as an Anti-China forum since its inception. The beginning of the QUAD can be traced back to India’s Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) amidst the 2004 Tsunami. Thus, the Indian leadership viewed QUAD as a forum for disaster management and relief that could be undertaken with the assistance of Japan, USA and Australian. (Chakradeo, 2021)

However, with the changing geopolitical dynamics in the Indian Ocean, India was at the same time concerned about Chinese aggression in the South China Sea as well in the neighboring states of India. The construction of port facilities by the Chinese in the countries surrounding India often cited as the String of Pearls accompanied by the One Belt One Road initiative developed apprehensions in New Delhi about increasing role of the PLA Navy in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi viewed it as China’s strategy of encircling India. (Klein, 2018).

Moreover, the standoff at the Doklam tri-junction increased these fears. For India, the Chinese aggression is not only in the military domain but Chinese opposition to the QUAD also raises a question that China opposes the liberal, democratic concept of a ‘free and open trade in the Indo-Pacific’. The focus of the QUAD has been largely towards the Western Pacific Ocean, however, India sees the need for a larger Indo–Pacific strategy. It was best reflected in the speech of Prime
Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri-La dialogue where he emphasized that for India the vision of Indo-Pacific extended “from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas” wherein India would promote a “democratic, rules based order, in which all nations small and big thrive”. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018)

The SAGAR\textsuperscript{xiv} Doctrine (Security and Growth for all in the region) unveiled in 2015 by the government of India seeks to strengthen security and economic co-operation with its maritime neighbors for ensuring that Indian Ocean region remains all inclusive. (Kanodia, 2020). Along with it various other initiatives have been launched by the Indian government in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, Project Mausam, intercontinental economic co-operation agreement the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)\textsuperscript{xv}, Cotton Routes etc. For India, this strategy guides its involvement in the QUAD as it through its Look East and Act East Policy is also trying to maintain stable relations with ASEAN countries especially with those states are a part of the South China Sea.

Thus, India’s focus has been on carving out a space for itself in the QUAD with a focus on freedom of navigation, trade, and respect for the laws of the seas. Moreover, it is pertinent to note that India has maintained a safe distance with China and has also been careful enough to not provoke it. In the meetings of the QUAD, India has not openly talked about the standoff at the border thus maintaining its position that the QUAD is not the Asian-NATO as China had criticized it to be. This stance of India was also seen in 2018, at the Shangri-La Dialogue when Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, “India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country.” India thus has tried to maintain a balance in the QUAD and has time and again reiterated that QUAD isn’t established for the purpose of cornering China. (Mishra & Das, 2019)

As Shyam Saran puts it, Quad 1.0 was formed with an understanding that it would not take a “military dimension” but instead be a regional consultative forum. For the first time in 2020 at Tokyo a standalone meeting was held of QUAD. The meeting took place at the time when the world was fighting with the Coronavirus In his opening remarks, the Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was content to call for “like minded countries
to coordinate responses,” this notwithstanding the difficulties India is in with China on its borders. He went on to add that “we remain committed to upholding the rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international sea, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes.” (Joshi, 2020)

Moreover, India has emphasized on ASEAN Centrality and Inclusivity with Southeast Asia. QUAD can help India to foster and increase ties with the nations in the littoral of the South China Sea. This strategy of India re-emphasizes its ‘Look East’ and ‘Act East’ Policy. The QUAD will provide a platform to India to enhance its ties with the countries in the littoral of the South China Sea through ASEAN and its various organizations. Many of the issues that the QUAD is talking about like the South China Sea, Mekong, freedom of trade and navigation relate to the ASEAN. India and the other countries need to strive towards enhancing greater co-operation from the ASEAN countries. (Panda J., 2018)

The South China Sea is the bone of contention between ASEAN nations and China. India over the years, has realized the importance of the South China Sea in terms of geo-economic and strategic interests. India has always been vocal that the maritime disputes should be settled in accordance with the UNCLOS. India’s focus to foster ties eastwards, is also a step to contain China’s maritime interest. India’s interest in the region is also due to the fact that important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) passes through the Sea. (Mishra & Das, 2019)

Securing the trade-transit route which passes through the South China Sea is vital to India’s growing trade, energy and security interests. India through the QUAD tries to balance Chinese aggression by promoting a rules based order as well as talks of inclusive region through the ASEAN.

ASEAN nations have also realized the importance of forging ties with QUAD nations and it could be seen in the year 2019 when ASEAN adopted the ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’. ASEAN and the QUAD can thus co-operate on a variety of issues from
maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) etc. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-pacific also contains references to ‘freedom of navigation’. Thus, it is in India’s interest to build up ties with ASEAN. The littoral states in the South China Sea are strategically important for India’s interest.

India thus views the QUAD as a mechanism which will help maintain stability in the Indo-Pacific as well as maintain friendly relations with the states. QUAD essentially is a forum of the four democracies however, India should focus on building QUAD plus formations. ASEAN Centrality was emphasized and now New Delhi needs to expand the forum and try to incorporate ASEAN Plus formations as well.

Over the years, India has viewed QUAD as inclusive, this indicates India’s approach towards a free and open Indo-Pacific. It does not exclude China despite concerns of China being assertive in the Indian Ocean Region. The QUAD also represents India’s evolving foreign policy. Aligning with likeminded countries without making a formal alliance or discounting its relationship with countries outside the Quad is the hallmark of India’s evolving foreign policy strategy. (Panda J., 2018)

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s speech at the Shangri-La dialogue on June 1, 2018 in Singapore explains this narrative. As eloquently stated by Modi, “India’s strategic partnership with the United States is a new pillar of our shared vision of an open, stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018)

At the same time, Modi expressed that India’s relationship with China has “many layers”, making it important for global peace and progress (India, 2018). In India’s acceptance of the QUAD has also invited debated whether India has abandoned its long established non-aligned foreign policy and moved towards a US led liberal order. The question here thus arises is whether India views QUAD as anti-China forum. (Mohan, 2017).

Certainly, India does considers QUAD 2.0 to be a strategic pivot against China but the fact that India has been trying to have good relations with China reflects India’s policies of trying to maintain an equilibrium. India is an important player in the QUAD. Australia considers India to be a ‘significant strategic partner’ in the Indian Ocean Region. Julie Bishop, the former Australian
politician who served as Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2013 to 2018 said that Australia and India share converging interest in the Indian Ocean as well as on the key pillars of security cooperation, economic engagement and, people-to-people linkages. (Bishop, 2018)

USA also views India as a leading power in the region. Looking at the centrality of India in the Indo-Pacific, it renamed the US Pacific Command as the US Indo-Pacific Command. It is vital as the U.S. military the Pacific region, has about 375,000 civilian and military personnel that proves crucial even for India to maintain stability in the region. (Panda J., 2018)

Thus, India’s approach towards the QUAD can be viewed in terms of the following:

First and foremost, India finds itself comfortable with the four democracies to collaborate and ensure a rules based order in the Indo-pacific. Secondly, QUAD provides India a platform to address power asymmetry in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Thirdly, India has to preserve its strategic interest in the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific especially with Beijing’s emergence as a revisionist power in the Indo-Pacific through its Silk Road strategy. Through the Belt and Road Initiative China aims to enhance infrastructure investment abroad, improve road and railway connectivity, and people-to-people contacts.

It implies that India’s is further restricted in investment and economic engagement in the immediate neighborhood. Growing assertiveness of China in the South China Sea, Indo-China border dispute have made New Delhi adopt strategic consonance in the QUAD. It is also pertinent to understand that the QUAD does not necessarily protect India’s security interest. Thus, New Delhi should view QUAD as mechanism to enhance its ties with the states in the Indo-Pacific area, promote inclusivity in the region by participating in various forums like the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, the Indian Ocean Commission etc. It should focus on infrastructure building, build connectivity, and strengthen people to people ties.

**Australia**

Australia’s geographical location is very crucial in the Indo-Pacific as it is situated at the edge of the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. Australia initially had been reluctant towards the QUAD as it didn’t wanted to invite any more conflicts with China. However in these recent years
Australia has shown greater involvement and co-operation with QUAD. India in 2020 invited Australia to be a part of Malabar exercises that it accepted mainly due to the growing use of coercive statecraft by China around it. Malabar 2020 signals a new stage as we find all the four countries cooperating truly with one another and also engaging to cooperate against China. Moreover, there are growing bilateral, trilateral exercise among the four nations that signifies their increasing co-operation. For instance, Australia and India have been conducting the AUSINDEX naval exercise.

In the present context the relations have deteriorated between Canberra and Beijing especially after Australia called for an inquiry for the Coronavirus. As early as in 2001 Australia was invited to be a part of ASEAN +3, mainly to dilute China’s influence in the region. Also, in the early 2000s the Trilateral Security Dialogue was formed between Australia- USA and Japan due to increasing concerns over the military buildup of China in the South China Sea. However, it was as early as the 1980s that Japan had realized the importance of Australia and the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) was created. This also suited the John Howard administration and was in consonance with their ‘Howard Doctrine’ that aimed to reinvigorate the AZNUS (Australia New Zealand) alliance mainly through ASEAN + 3. Australia and Japan also have framed agreements related to security co-operation, like the Acquisition and Cross Servicing agreement (ACSA) in 2010 and the Information Security Agreement (ISA) in 2012. (Chanlett, Kronstadt, & Vaughn, 2020)

The QUAD for Australia is not only a kind of strategic grouping to contain the assertiveness of China in the region, but it also provides Australia various other securities. Australia being an island continent has to face non-traditional threats as well. QUAD would also be beneficial for Australia to counter other threats like Piracy, human trafficking, climate change. Moreover co-operation is also seen in the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operations that have been regularly conducted. The other important concern for Australia is to preserve the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC’s) especially the important straits as all of Australia’s trade depends on the strategic maritime routes.
The United States of America

The United States of America has since the beginning been an ardent supporter of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. It has been discussing the security issues in the Indo-Pacific and appears to be very concerned about it. However it has also been very careful not to directly antagonize China and at the same time use the QUAD as a mechanism to address China’s assertiveness in the region.

The national Security Strategy of the United States of America of 2017 (America, 2017) and the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America , both mention US concerns over China’s growing power in the Indo–Pacific which it believes threatens the freedom of trade and navigation in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the National Defense Strategy says:

“China’s infrastructure investments and trade strategies reinforce its geopolitical aspirations. Its efforts to build and militarize outposts in the South China Sea endanger the free flow of trade, threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability. China has mounted a rapid military modernization campaign designed to limit U.S. access to the region and provide China a freer hand there. China presents its ambitions as mutually beneficial, but Chinese dominance risks diminishing the sovereignty of many states in the Indo-Pacific. States throughout the region are calling for sustained U.S. leadership in a collective response that upholds a regional order respectful of sovereignty and independence”.

Both documents talk about how the US administration is concerned about China’s military modernization to reorder the Indo-Pacific. The US is concerned that this behavior of China may lead to near term displacement of the US from the Indo-Pacific and achieve global preeminence.

To stop China from reordering the Indo-politics, Washington has been forging its alliances with many of its partners and the QUAD is one such area of operation. The vital objective behind U.S. playing a focal role in the Indo-Pacific is to preserve the liberal international order that is prevalent since the Second World War. The diplomacy of the QUAD kicked off in 2007 when U.S.
Vice President Dick Cheney showed American interest in joining it. Later with the visit of Prime Minister Abe to the U.S. QUAD assumed a formal shape. (Grossman, 2019)

It also saw the enlargement of Indo-US Malabar naval exercise and in 2007 the four navies along with Singapore’s navy participated in the Bay of Bengal. It could be called as the first iteration of the QUAD. Moreover, the U.S. has been seen collaborating with the QUAD nation and seeks to enlarge the cooperation not only in the strategic but also in the military sphere. For instance, Australia is a part of the ANZUS with U.S and New Zealand. These countries are also a part of the ‘Five Eyes’ an intelligence sharing arrangement between the U.S, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and the Australia. The U.S has also been supporting the idea of QUAD plus especially to incorporate Vietnam and South Korea. So, for the U.S. the QUAD represents not only a mechanism by which it can counter China’s hegemony and aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific but also a forum where it would engage more with the nations surrounding the Indian Ocean region. (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) was passed by the U.S in December 2018 in to law, intending to “develop a long-term strategic vision and comprehensive, multifaceted, and principled United States policy for the Indo-Pacific region, and for other purpose”. The same year the Pentagon released a report on the Indo-Pacific Strategy: Preparedness, Partnership, and Promoting a Networked Region. (Colombage & Shicun, 2019).

Thus, it would be correct to assess that all the four countries in the QUAD view it not only as a strategic grouping but also a grouping that would promote democratic trade, transparency in the Indo-Pacific.
End Notes

i ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF): Launched in 1993, the twenty-seven-member multilateral grouping was developed to facilitate cooperation on political and security issues to contribute to regional confidence-building and preventive diplomacy.

ii It is an annual trilateral naval exercise between the navies of India, Japan, and the USA which is held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

iii The Middle East is the area around the eastern Mediterranean that includes Iran and all the countries in Asia to the west and south-west of Iran.

iv The COMCASA or the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement is one of the four foundational agreements between the US and India. It was signed between the two countries in September 2018.

v The LEMOA or the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement is one of the three foundational agreements between India and the US.

vi Freedom of navigation is a principle of customary international law that ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states, apart from the exceptions provided for in international law.

vii The Greater Mekong Subregion, (GMS) or just Greater Mekong, is a trans-national region of the Mekong River basin in Southeast Asia.

viii The Taiwan Strait, also known as the Formosa Strait, is a wide strait separating the island of Taiwan and continental Asia.

ix an expedition to keep watch over an area, especially by guards or police walking or driving around at regular intervals.

x a ridge of jagged rock, coral, or sand just above or below the surface of the sea.
xi An archipelago is an area that contains a chain or group of islands scattered in lakes, rivers, or the ocean.

xii Humanitarian relief efforts are provided for humanitarian purposes and include natural disasters and man-made disasters.

xiii Doklam's is an important area as it is located between Tibet's Chumbi valley to the North, Bhutan's Ha valley to the East and India's Sikkim state to the West.

xiv Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India’s policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.

xv The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or AAGC is an economic cooperation agreement between the governments of India, Japan and multiple African countries.

xvi The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

xvii ASEAN+3 includes the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus the PRC, Japan, and Korea.

xviii The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.
Policies of China with reference to the South China Sea littoral and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

The 21st Century has witnessed the rise of China as a major economic, military, political power. It has become more assertive in recent years. The world has over the years become more complex and is interdependent. China has benefitted from the growing Global value chains system due to which millions of poverty stricken Chinese were able to lead a prosperous life. Still, the Chinese leadership greatly undermines the free, open and rules based international order. It has violated many treaties like the UNCLOS\textsuperscript{1} to which it is a signatory. (Zeng, 2016).

Two important regions wherein we could see aggressive activities of China are the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific. Chinese activities in these regions are the first step to establish a regional hegemony in the short term and finally achieve global prominence. To realize this dream, China has over the years been engaging continuously in military buildup. Anti-ship cruise missiles and long range surface-to-air missiles have been placed by China in the South China Sea. (Macias, 2018). It has been developing and modernizing not only its armed forces but also its cyberspace. It has also heavily invested in the Anti-Access and Anti-Denial capabilities that has prevented countries from operating near the Chinese installations. (Permal, 2014). These strategies of China flout the principles of freedom of navigation, free flow of trade and limit other nation’s sovereignty. These activities of the Chinese have been seen in the maritime domain at a large scale in the recent years.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The South China is strategically placed in the Indo-Pacific. It is bordered by Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. A huge part of the world’s merchant shipping passes through the region. The South China Sea not only encompasses major Sea lines of Communication (SLOC’s), but also is a source of fuels, natural gas and raw materials. The sea also has major fishing grounds\textsuperscript{ii} which are a source of food to the littoral states. The region is believed to be at the core of future economic growth in Eastern Asia and is also known as the “Second Persian Gulf”. (Beukel, 2010)
The region continues to witness major conflicts over territorial claims. The 1994 United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas provided that the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of a nation extends up to 200 nautical miles\textsuperscript{iii} and gives the nation sole exploitation rights over marine resources. However, the UNCLOS is open to interpretation by the states surrounding the South China Sea as the EEZ between countries overlap. As South China Sea has been a region with competing claims and disputes, it is referred to as the ‘Mother of all territorial disputes’. (U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress, 2021)

China has involved itself in to multiple maritime territorial disputes in the SCS. Some of which are listed below:

1. Paracel Islands\textsuperscript{iv} dispute in the SCS, which are claimed by both China and Vietnam, but are occupied by China;

2. Spratly Islands\textsuperscript{v} in the SCS, which are claimed entirely by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, and in part by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, and which are occupied in part by all these countries except Brunei;

3. Scarborough Shoal\textsuperscript{vi} in the SCS, which is claimed by China, Taiwan, and the Philippines, and controlled since 2012 by China; and

4. Senkaku Islands\textsuperscript{vii} in the ECS, which are claimed by China, Taiwan, and Japan, and administered by Japan.

China exercises its claims in these areas through the Nine dash line\textsuperscript{viii}. To fulfill its claim, China has been deploying its armed forces in the region. Moreover, the confrontation is not only limited to the littoral states but by and large the United States is also interested in the region and wants to secure the freedom of navigation. This is mainly due to the two strategic routes – The Strait of Malacca and the Taiwan Strait. The Strait of Malacca connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait connects South China sea to the Pacific Ocean. (U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress, 2021)
There prevails a dispute between USA and China over whether the coastal states could regulate the activities of the foreign military forces operating within a nation's EEZ. The U.S. claims that the UNCLOS gives the rights to the coastal states to regulate various economic activities (oil exploration, fishing) within their EEZ i.e. up to 12 nautical miles from the coast. China however opposes this argument of the U.S. and claims that UNCLOS gives the coastal states the right to not only regulate the economic activities but also foreign and military activities. (Rourke, 2018)

China’s stand has been to regain its ‘lost territories’ in this region which makes it pertinent to study the region. Over the years China has been trying to show flexibility in terms of its regressive policies and is also working for joint development through its ‘Neighborhood First Policy’. The South China Sea is a contested space as thousands of islands, islets, coral reefs, and atolls, spread over a wide area – about 1,800 kilometers from north to south, and more than 900 kilometers from east to west are claimed by multiple nations. Many of these are uninhabited places and if China’s claims over these areas are accepted it would give China the liberty to expand its EEZ and thereby also expand its military activities. (Beukel, 2010)

China sights historical evidences to support their claim over the Spratly islands. They argue that the Chinese first named and discovered the islands. In spite of the ever increasing tensions, the South China Sea did not witness any direct confrontation till 1974. In 1974, the Paracels Islands became the site of conflict between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. The western part of the island was already under Chinese occupation, but after the clashes the Eastern part that was under the control of Vietnam went to China. (Tri & Koh, 2014)

China has been more aggressive to assert its claims over SCS and has made it a national goal. (Casarini, 2017) The document titled “Evidence to Support China’s Sovereignty over Nansha (Spratly) Islands” released by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2000 states that “China was the first to discover, name, develop, conduct economic activities on and exercise jurisdiction of the Nansha Islands”. It cites the East Han Dynasty to claim that the soldiers, traders, fishermen all had used South China Sea for various purposes. (Montgomery, 2016)

2014 has reiterated the Chinese stance and thus asserts its claims over the SCS. In 2009, the Chinese government published the Nine Dash line map in the South China Sea. These maps claims the Paracels, the Spratlys, Scarborough Shoal and Macclesfield Bank\(^*\), and the Pratas – known in China as the Xisha, Nansha, Zongsha and Dongsha archipelagos respectively – all the way down to James Shoal – also known as Zengmu Ansha reef – as its southernmost tip, 1,800 miles away from mainland China. (Embassy of PRC, 2016).

The control over these areas is of utmost importance to China as most of China’s oil imports comes to its territory from the Persian Gulf and Africa and so to exert control over the sea lines of communications is a matter of national security to China. Another major concern for China is the U.S. presence in the region and it fears that if U.S blocks China access to the lanes it would hamper the Chinese economy. Observers have given various names to Chinese strategies. One of it is called the ‘Salami- Slicing’ technique in which a country continuously undertakes various actions – military, economic, etc., however none of it actually provokes a full scale war. This goes on for number of years and gradually changes the status quo in their favor. China’s actions and policies in the SC reflect similar techniques. (Haddick, 2012)

Another important technique pointed out by scholars is the “Take and talk” technique wherein a country is constantly engaging into negotiations with the surrounding nations through which it aims to gain control over the contested areas. Other options that China tries to undertake is “Island building”. In the SCS China’s influence is constantly increasing and through it, it is trying to construct small islands in the Spratly, Paracel islands. (Corr, 2017)

Some of the recent activities undertaken by the Chinese in the South China Sea are (Financial Times, 2020)

1. Near the Rizal Reef, the Chinese naval vessels pointed gun radars at the Philippine warship
2. Near the Fiery Cross reef and Subi reef- China operates two new research stations which are converted to military bases claimed by Philippines and Vietnam.
3. Through the Bashi Channel in the South China Sea, five Chinese aircraft carriers conduct exercises
4. Haiyang the Chinese research vehicle conducted a survey in Malaysia’s EEZ.
The dispute of the South China Sea is not only related to the maritime incursions but also prevails as the SCS proves to be a major region that have rich fisheries. The fisheries in the SCS have become a major part of the staple diet for the states surrounding it. As these areas are contested, the fisheries of the sea are in danger of completely getting depleted thereby leaving millions without food. This makes the nations further exert claims over the region. The contestations and uncertainty in the SCS is also due to the growing Naval race in the region. The Chinese navy is furthering China’s interest and projecting its authority in the region. The Chinese Navy also supports Chinese fishing vessels in the region. (South China Sea Expert Working Group, 2017)

The region of the South China Sea has become more important in the recent years as the global dynamics in terms of powers have changed. After 2000s we find the increasing military, technological and economic capabilities of China and subsequently we see a decline in the US power. However, the United States has been very prompt and developing allies in the SCS to secure their interest. For instance, in the Philippines constitution what we come across is the Defense Clause according to which it can take help of US Military aid in case of an attack. This may in the future aggravate the tensions in the SCS. American forces have been engaged in regular patrolling in the region, but have stayed away from the territorial disputes. In spite of the UNCLOS in place and China being a signatory to it, China has not been adhering to the Convention. The International Court of Justice in 2016 in Philippines v. China ruled in favor of Philippines. China claimed the ruling implemented by the Court to be unjust and has not adhered to it. The conflicts have extended further and one such conflict between the Philippines and China was taken over by the International Court of Justice. However, China has been very adamant and refuses to honor the UNCLOS. (Birdwell & Samantha, 2020)

The disputes in the South China Sea started since 1947 when the Chinese declared the Nine Dash line. The claims over the areas in the region also compelled the other littoral states in the area to make claims over the territory. The disputes have escalated since 1960s when huge oil reserves were discovered. This discovery changed the entire discourse of the disputes and from a region that was only strategically important it became a region critical to the economic growth. (Shukla, 2020)
The unification of Vietnam in 1979, led to the Sino-Vietnamese wars in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. The Johnson Reef Skirmish incident in the Spratly islands that took place in March 1988 led to a huge loss to Vietnam. The incident demonstrated the power of Chinese military and also served as a warning to the littoral states to not militarily engage with China. (Tordo, 2013)

To resolve these conflicts what is of utmost importance is also the role of the United Nations, It can do much of it through the UNCLOS. The UN can play the role of an international arbitrator. To make sure this happens, UN can try to resolve conflicts through various institutions-The International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas, the International Court of Justice.

The 21st Century saw a shift from Atlantic to the Pacific. The geo-political landscape in Asia has undergone change in the 21st Century. For China the region between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean is of strategic importance. The actions of China has led to threat to other nations in the region including India. China’s policies cater towards Realism – idea that talks of increasing a nation’s power- militarily, economically etc. This has given rise to ‘Security Dilemma’ among the nations. The formation of the Quadrilateral security dialogue is one of the mechanism that reflect Security dilemma among the states. (Mehra, 2020)

Very interesting to note is the point that many Chinese scholars regard the Indo-Pacific construct as an expansion of Obama administration’s rebalance strategy. Wang Xiaowen, a scholar at Beijing Language and Culture University, wrote that the Indo-Pacific strategy is essentially an extension and deepening of the “rebalance,” with the aim of strategically linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The importance of the Indo-Pacific region boils down to the economic security of China. China has pursued domestically a policy of rapid industrialization since 2000s. Middle East remains a major source to provide its domestic industry oil. To China, therefore protecting the maritime trade routes of vital importance. China is trying to secure the region not only by the development of the ports, and deployment of armed forces but is also seen in engaging in various anti-piracy missions. It could be best viewed in the Gulf of Aden where the threat from the Somalian pirates is large. (Chen, 2018)
The U.S. has been a vital player in the Indo-Pacific. The former Chinese leader Hu Jintao had expressed his concerns over China’s economic security as “Malacca Dilemma”. It meant that China was actually scared of U.S. or India blocking Chinese shipments in the Malacca strait thereby stooping its energy imports. Thus, Chinese heavy deployment in the region cannot only be called as strategy to increase its clout in the region but also to secure its trade. To thereby avoid its total dependence on the Malacca strait the Chinese have found out new ways to import the products. (Storey, 2006)

India has mainly stayed away from the power politics in the region and has maintained good relations with all the stakeholders. India has been both bi-laterally and multilaterally engaging with other countries in the region. India policies in the Indo-Pacific have been directed towards achieving inclusivity, openness and ASEAN Centrality. Although since last decade India was apprehensive about Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific, it maintained a neutral position. However, since the clash with the PLA troops along the LAC in Galwan area, India has been re-evaluating its priorities and has been increasingly vocal towards Chinese policies. (Chathurvedi, 2020)

China has been actively pursuing various infrastructural projects in the region such as the CMEC—China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, which will begin from Kunming in Yunnan province of China to Mandalay in central Myanmar. For this the Chinese have been investing heavily in the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone, the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone and the New Yangon City. With this, the Chinese aim to establish their footprint in Myanmar. 1,060 km of gas pipeline has been commissioned from Kunming in China to Kyaukpyu port in Rakhine in 2013. Myanmar being a least developed country is in need of FDI that China best provides. (Dutta, 2018)

The CPEC—China—Pakistan Economic Corridor is another such project developed by China. The Gwadar port was created by China in Pakistan to facilitate the movement of goods from Pakistan to China’s Xinjiang province. It would serve two purposes—One- It would allow the Chinese shipments to completely bypass the Malacca strait and second, it would reduce its expenditure to move goods from the Eastern part to the western part (As all shipments through
the Malacca strait would land up on the Eastern coast of China). (Kajal, 2018). Moreover, infrastructural developments are not only limited to Chinese policies of BRI. In Asia, China has been re-configuring the water map of Asia. Water has become a bone of contention in major parts of the world. Construction of Reservoirs and Dams is undertaken by the Chinese government on a large scale. On the Brahmaputra, also known as the Yarlung- Zangbo River\textsuperscript{xiv} the Chinese have started construction of mega dams. The project is a 60 gigawatt project. The project is viewed as detrimental to India as before entering India, the Brahmaputra\textsuperscript{xv} curves sharply through the Himalayas thereby having large untapped resources. On the completion of such projects the water flow can be easily manipulated thus proving to be a threat to India and Bangladesh. This policy of China is mainly seen along the transnational rivers.

The Mekong basin has become a security hotspot as the Chinese have constructed almost 11 mega dams on the river. The waters of the Illy and Irtysh rivers\textsuperscript{xvi}, which originating in Xinjiang\textsuperscript{xvii} have also been diverted by Chinese thereby making the region of Central Asia prone to droughts. Kazakhstan’s Lake Balkhash is turning arid due to this very reason. (Li, 2020). Xi Jinping in 2013 outlined a strategy called as the Maritime Silk Road in Indonesia and Silk Road Economic belt in Kazakhstan. Subsequently, it culminated in to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI is an ambitious Chinese geo-economic strategy of China. Across the regions of Indo-Pacific and Eurasia, huge investments have been done by Chinese. In 2014, at the meeting of the Central National Security Commission, Xi Jinping proposed the idea of ‘whole national security’, that envisioned political, economic, cultural security. Through the BRI the Chinese aim to revamp regional security in the Indo-Pacific. Since the rise in its economic power, China has been trying to revise the power politics and challenge the status quo. ( Yu, 2014)

At the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), held in May 2014, President Xi Jinping proposed a new regional security vision centered on ‘Asia for Asians’. It asserted to build upon Asian security community based on the premise of Asia for Asians. BRI is seen as a means by which US-centered security system could be phased out. Proposal was also laid for making CICA a platform for security dialogue and cooperation that covers the whole of Asia and explore the establishment of a new regional security cooperation architecture. (Li, 2020)
In order to ensure security for its ongoing projects associated with the BRI, Chinese military capacity is not enough. In order to fill this gap, the Chinese have entrusted this role to the private security agencies. Chinese military deployments have also increased substantially in the strategic channels, major ports, energy bases and mineral mines. These are very crucial investments for China especially for their economic security. (Sutton, 2020)

Geo-economic and Geo-political factors have for example made the Chinese undertake heavy investments in the Horn of Africa. The building up of a permanent naval base at Djibouti is of a great concern to the international community. This base shows China’s geo-economic interest in the region. For decades, China has pursued a policy of non-intervention in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa Region), however since the last decade we find Chinese abandoning the non-interventionist approach and establishing a military presence in the region. It is therefore also argued that the naval base at Djibouti is just the beginning of Chinese military expansionism in MENA. Wu Qian, spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defense in 2016 said that the base in Djibouti would be used for logistical support and will help Chinese troops carry out international peacekeeping and humanitarian rescue operations. (The Economic Times, 2016)

However, it is believed that the successful functioning of the Djibouti base would make China invest in such projects heavily in the Western Indian Ocean region. For the Chinese, securing the SLOC’s remains vital along with maintaining peace and stability in the strategic choke points like the Bab-el-Mandab. Moreover, the base at Djibouti would provide China with adequate support to implement its BRI project as Djibouti is strategically located at the Horn of Africa, near the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. It also is a major route to connect with Europe. (Chaziza, 2018)

Moreover, China has been greatly concerned about the regional stability of the area. In recent years, Chinese warships have been a part of the international anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden off the Somalian coast thereby employing a softer approach.

Similarly, China in the Indo-Pacific is identifying countries that could help it maintain its clout in the region. Pakistan has been identified as one of the important nations by the Chinese.
The Chinese have a history of good relations with Pakistan. Pakistan seems vital as it could prevent the growth of terrorism in western regions of China, help to keep a check on India. In order to reduce time and money it thus initiated the construction of the Gwadar (Yousaf, 2013)

Looking at the above mentioned scenario, it may be very well analyzed that in the coming years, Chinese investments in the BRI countries would expand. Moreover, there could be a growth of stronger military to military cooperation. The PLAN would play a vital role in also countering the non-traditional threats to security in the region such as terrorism, drug trafficking and most importantly piracy. Atlantic Council Strategy Paper Series by Gal Luft describes the BRI as ‘the most ambitious and all-encompassing economic development program in human history’. (Luft, 2017)

David Arase in his work ‘China’s Two Silk Roads: Implications for Southeast Asia’ describes the BRI project as a ‘win-win’ situation for China as if others respect China, China will reciprocate with material benefits; but if others do not offer proper respect, China will find ways to punish them. With this happening the BRI project would strengthen Chinese regional dominance and in turn it would also strengthen its territorial claims. The reason for Chinese to invest so heavily in the infrastructural projects are many, however the most important being that China needs to find out newer ways to source its requirement for raw materials. It is only then that China can continue to be a leading exporter of manufactured products such as electronic parts. (Arase, 2015)

China is making investments in certain strategic regions. Some of them can be identified as Mekong sub-region in the Bay of Bengal, Hainan and Guangdong areas, Xinjiang facing Central Asia along with Caspian Sea, the Black sea, South China Sea and Arabian Sea region in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, Chinese heavy infrastructure, military, naval investments in the region poses a huge challenge to India. The Djibouti military naval base along with the Gwadar port establishes China as a maritime player in the larger Indo-Pacific. The surveillance capabilities of China over the Arabian Sea and India’s islands have increased posing a direct challenge to India. Chinese thus have been very persistent to make sure that their energy interest are protected in the region.
The 2014 Blue Book, a prestigious compilation published annually by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences says that ‘China seeks to ensure the security of maritime pathways within the international order, it should also proactively seek complementary backup sea-lanes to “hedge against the risks of others states threatening China with sea-lane security.”

The Blue Book in addition to this also propounds that the Indian Ocean could end up “as an ocean of conflict and trouble” if countries like India, the U.S. and China failed to engage with each other more constructively. It talks of engaging proactively with the Indian Ocean countries. The increasing engagement within the region can be witnessed in the way Chinese have been engaging in rescue operations of Chinese nationals. More the involvement of China in Africa, the more China will have reasons to deploy its Navy in the region. For instance, the patrolling of Chinese submarines have enlarged in Indian Ocean. Submarines have been halting at the Colombo port situated very close to the southern part of India for replenishment. (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015)

Chinese officials are aware of the fact that Chinese still do not enjoy complete strategic clout in the region and thus been careful of not engaging into a confrontation. It is trying to fill the gap by engaging its troops in various other areas like conducting anti-piracy operations, curbing terrorism, indulging in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercises etc. It is thus also not adopting a very harsh posture but is in fact seen strengthening its bilateral relations with the countries in the region.

Since 2018, the ‘debt trap diplomacy’ of China has been a concern for countries. With the developing countries China is striking unsustainable debt for infrastructural deals to expand the BRI projects. In 2018, the former Secretary of State of the United States of America Mike Pompeo warned the Latin American and African nations of Chinese heavy investments in countries that may compromise their sovereignty. The Chinese authorities discarded these comments as being ‘ignorant’ and ‘malicious’ and asserted that the BRI project would lead to debt traps was fake. (Jourdan, 2018)

One of the visible manifestation of this policy is the Hambantota port in Sri-Lanka that the China Harbor Engineering Company, a state owned enterprise along with the surrounding 15,000
acres of land acquired for a lease of ninety nine years after the government of Sri Lanka could not repay the loan. (Habib, 2018)

One of the very important reasons for the countries to get trapped is the low level of economic development domestically. Generally ports always lead to overall development of the nation as along with it the railways, roadways are also developed to transport goods and services. Chinese have been taking advantage of low development in the countries and furthering their interests. These projects often labelled as ‘White Elephant projects’ are highly unsustainable for the host nations given their economic development. Similarly, Chinese investments in controversial Myitsone Dam and Kyaukpyu deepwater port projects in Myanmar, infrastructural projects in Djibouti and Kenya, energy projects in Ecuador and Venezuela have been of a great concern to the global community. (Ferchen & Perera, 2019)

Thus it could be argued that both in terms of the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific, China’s immediate interest are to safeguard its energy needs and also protect its diaspora living in these nations. Various others countries having prominence in the region see this as an attempt by CCP to establish its hegemony in the region. This mistrust has altered the power politics and generated a sense of threat.

The region of Indo-Pacific has over the years become increasingly complex and interdependent. The major players involved- China, India, U.S.A, Japan, Australia and France are concerned about Chinese deployments. These powers must try to reduce the complexities and to boil down the region’s tensions. Policy solutions should not only come from the U.S. but also India, Japan who have considerably stakes. Confidence building measures need to be promoted. The parties need to engage in collaborative effort to contain the risks and talk of Freedom of Navigation. . (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015)

China has become an indispensable player in the region as its interest are no longer regional but have become global in nature. China is a revisionist power and is constantly challenging the US hegemony. For China, to become a superpower it is essential that it increases its economic, military power. The BRI furthers China’s dream and is thus a vital component of Chinese strategies to broaden its influence in the region. China is therefore leaving no stone
unturned increasing its clout in the South China Sea as well as the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the United States is also trying hard to maintain its influence in the Indo-Pacific as well as SCS. Patrolling in the region, engaging in maritime exercises, conducting Freedom of navigation operations all of them oriented to curb the growing power of China in the region. The QUAD has also been strengthened over the years and one of its objective is to check Chinese expansionism. This situation has given rise to new power politics in the region and thus in the coming years it would be vital to study the policies of major actors. (Shicun & Colombage, 2019)

However, Chinese have been on the forefront in enhancing their power in the region and in the coming years will continue to do so. Thus, Chinese policies in the SCS and the Indo-Pacific are a combination of both hard and soft power diplomacy. China’s rise has led the world to re-examine the importance of maritime space. All the four countries in the QUAD are greatly concerned and thus all of them have formulated their own set of strategies to counter China.
End Notes


ii an area in a body of water where fishes congregate and fishing is usually good.

iii a unit used in measuring distances at sea, equal to 1,852 metres (approximately 2,025 yards).

iv The Paracel Islands, also known as Xisha Islands and Hoang Sa Archipelago, are a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea.

v The Spratly Islands are a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea.

vi Scarborough Shoal, is a shoal located between the Macclesfield Bank and Luzon in the South China Sea.

vii The Senkaku Islands are a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea.

viii The nine-dash line refers to the undefined and vaguely located demarcation line used by China, for their claims of the major part of the South China Sea.

ix Macclesfield Bank is an elongated sunken atoll of underwater reefs and shoals in the South China Sea.

x The Gulf of Tonkin is a gulf at the northwestern portion of the South China Sea, located off the coasts of Tonkin and South China.

xi China-Myanmar Economic Corridor are connectivity projects between Myanmar and China.

xii Rakhine State is a state in Myanmar. It is situated on the western coast, the Bay of Bengal to the west and the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh to the northwest.

xiii China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), massive bilateral project to improve infrastructure within Pakistan for better trade with China and to further integrate the countries of the region.

xiv The Yarlung Zangbo is the upper stream of the Brahmaputra River located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

xv The Brahmaputra is a trans-boundary river which flows through Tibet, India and Bangladesh.

xvi The Irtysh is a river in Russia, China, and Kazakhstan.

xvii Xinjiang is an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), located in the northwest of the country close to Central Asia.

xviii The Bab-el-Mandeb is a strait between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula, and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. It connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.
India’s interests in the littoral states of the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific.

As the world focus shifted from the west to the east, the notion of Indo-Pacific has assumed significance. Every major actor in world politics today is developing its strategic posture in the region be it the United States, Japan, China, India or Australia. The region is the hub of major maritime trade routes and is abundant in energy resources. Two paramount nations India and China are heavily dependent on them. The major choke points like the Bab-el-Mandab in the west and the Malacca strait in the east have added to significance of the region. The region is also the home of more than 50 percent of the global population and rich in mineral and marine resources. The geopolitical importance of the region can be seen from the fact that in 2018 the United States renamed its Pacific Command as ‘Indo-Pacific Command’. (Copp, 2018). China has become more assertive in the region while the nations which are a part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue are vouching for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The region is of crucial importance as it stands at the crossroads of India’s Look and Act East Policy, United States rebalance in the Asia-Pacific and China’s policy in the South China Sea.

The South China remains vital as major world trade routes pass through it. India through the QUAD has been a votary of ‘freedom of navigation’. Geo-politically, geo-economically and geo-strategically India has huge stakes in the region and has extended diplomatic relations with the littoral states in the South China Sea through its ‘extended neighborhood’ policy. The term ‘extended neighborhood’ in general refers to the various opportunities India has outside South Asia. The Atal Bihari administration declared “our concerns and interactions go well beyond South Asia. They include other neighbors, and countries immediately adjoining this region – our ‘extended neighborhood.” (Pant & Deb, 2017)

This was well expressed in 2006 also by the Minister for External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee; “India’s foreign policy today looks at India’s environment in expanding circles . . . starting with the immediate neighborhood . . . moving on to . . . the extended neighborhood.” By 2004 the Indian government was affirming “the concept” of an extended “extended neighborhood for India which stretches from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea and includes
within it West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region.” (Hughes, 2014)

Among these regions, the region of Southeast Asia is of crucial importance since China has been expanding its power in the region especially in the South China Sea and has acquired a critical dimension in India’s policy making. The Chinese footprints in the region are of concern to India too especially due to the claims by Chinese over the islands, reefs etc. If the Chinese are able to successfully establish their claims over the region a number of choke points like the Malacca strait would be under Chinese control which will prove to be futile to India’s interest. The location of the South China Sea is crucial as it lies between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean. To be able to navigate through unhindered access is necessary for which India needs to strengthen its ties with the littoral states in the region. The stability and peace of the region is pivotal for India as almost 55 percent of India’s trade passes through the region. (Jawli, 2016)

India’s official stand regarding the South China Sea was stated by General V.K. Singh, the External Affairs Minister of State, in the Upper House of Parliament on 4th August 2016. He stated in the House that India "supports freedom of navigation and over flight, and unimpeded commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UNCLOS. India believes that States should resolve disputes through peaceful means without threat or use of force and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability. As a State Party to the UNCLOS, India urges all parties to show utmost respect for the UNCLOS, which establishes the international legal order of the seas and oceans“. (Economic Times;, 2018)

Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei are the states with which India seeks to enhance its relationship. Although India is not geographically a part of the South China region, it has multiple stakes in the area as it is involved in the exploration of oil and natural gas, naval exercises, and is heavily dependent on the Sea lines of Communications. Besides, it is a part of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ and so it becomes imperative for India to have freedom of navigation in these waters.
Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific region assumes significance in India’s foreign policy because it is now a theatre of opportunity by which India can leverage its position in the changing global and regional dynamics. One of the crucial changes in the Indian foreign policy thinking post-Cold war is the rising importance of island nations like Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri-Lanka. It marks a huge shift as India now has started thinking beyond its continental borders and talks of maritime security. India traditionally had understood the importance of these Islands much attention was not paid to them. Since China has started viewing these islands as strategically important regions, India also began to pay more attention to them. Following its changed approach to the island nations, India took steps to enhance its island diplomacy. This could be seen as India developed the IOR-Indian Ocean Region Division within its Ministry of External Affairs. It was a much needed policy on the part of the Indian government to view these islands from the maritime prism as opposed to continental South Asian region. (Baruah, 2020)

India has traversed a long way to identify its interest in the Indo-Pacific that started from defining the region to formation of QUAD and making sure that it is not portrayed as an anti-China organization. Indo-Pacific has provided India with a foundation to balance its strategy vis-à-vis China. India’s increased interest in the Indo-Pacific should be viewed in the context of its security concerns in the Indian Ocean region where the Chinese initiated a series of developmental and infrastructural projects. The BRI initiative especially promised to address the lack of infrastructure in South Asia which made the countries look towards Beijing. In this context it is thus essential for India to increase its relations with the states. Moreover the small nations in the Indo-Pacific today are caught up in the power rivalry between the United States and China. New Delhi can perhaps position itself as the lead nation in stabilizing the Indo-Pacific through increased co-operation.

In this light the relations New Delhi shares with the littoral states is quintessential. Among all the states in the Indo-Pacific the Southeast Asian states have and will be at the epicenter of fostering relations.
India’s relations with the Southeast Asian Nations

Historically, India relations with Southeast Asia have been very strong. Through the spread of Hinduism in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Buddhism in Vietnam and Islam the civilizational ties have been strengthened over decades. Along with the spread of religion, the culture, traditions, customs, art, architecture and language have also widened. India’s relations with Southeast Asia were exemplary in the ancient times. However, since the entry of the British in the Indian Subcontinent the relations underwent changes. British colonial expansionism in Southeast Asia then governed our relations. Tamil laborers settled in Malaya (Malaysian), which even today remains one of the greatest places of Indian diaspora. (Sikri, 2009)

Since independence, India had not much engaged in the region despite having historical relations for centuries. As early as 1947, India organized a conference on ‘Asian relations’ (ARC) that brought countries of Asia and Southeast Asia together. India expressed solidarity with the national liberation struggles in Vietnam and Indonesia. (Gurjar, 2017)

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India was the driving force behind the conference. Subsequently, India has been playing a vital role in the region and had been a part of the Afro-Asian summit in 1955. The Asian regional conference, Afro –Asian summit and the Non alignment movement made India assume a central role in Asia. (Bhogal, 2018). With the advent of the non-alignment India and the Southeast Asian parted from each other and the relations halted for the coming years. In the 1960s and 1970s, India was tied up in border conflicts with China and Pakistan. The 1970s India concentrated on its relations with West Asia to secure its energy needs. In 1971 India signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union further distanced India from Southeast Asian nations. India’s relations with ASEAN suffered a setback when India recognized the People’s Republic of Kampuchea that was condemned by ASEAN. (Anand, 2009). Cold war prevented India and South East Asian stated to come together as the latter were apprehensive about Communism and sided with the United States. The relations underwent a drastic change with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and India adopting the policies of Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization. It made India revive and reorient its relations with many countries including Southeast Asian nations. This could
be seen from the fact that India became a sectoral partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1996. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018).

This was also because India realized that its pace of economic development was very slow and the success of economic advancement of the Southeast Asian nations led India to revive its ties with the, most notably, the ‘Asian Tigers’. The Chinese interest in the region also made India think in terms of engaging more in the region. 1990s stands out to be crucial as it is in these years that India managed to break out from its policy of isolation and expand its ties.

**LOOK EAST POLICY and ACT EAST POLICY**

India since 2000s has been paying significant attention to ASEAN. The ‘Look East Policy’ formulated under the leadership of the former Prime Minister P.V. Narsimharao has been further upgraded to the ‘Act East Policy’ under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who formally enunciated it at the 12th ASEAN India Summit and the 9th East Asia Summit held in 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018). India’s relations with these states started expanding further after New Delhi in 2005 became a full member of the ASEAN Plus Six, better known as the East Asian Summit (EAS). (Muni, 2006). With the enunciation of the Act East Policy, India aims to strengthen its relations with the littoral states in the SCS and in a way is also trying to counter Chinese hegemony in the region. India and China wherein we find China’s supremacy more than India’s.

P.V. Narsimharao’s Look East Policy (LEP) tried to revive the historical ties with the region focusing on economic, political and military relations. The 1990s decade saw India flourishing as a major economic player which made the two revive relations. Yashwant Sinha who was the External Affairs Minister of India in 2003 distinguished between the two phases of the LEP.

‘The first phase of India’s ‘Look East’ policy was ASEAN-centered and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. The new phase of this policy is characterized by an expanded definition of ‘East’, extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its core. The new phase also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect the sea-lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities’. The second phase extended the idea of East for India stretching till Australia and Japan. India was also concerned about the
security of the region and sought to protect it from both traditional and non-traditional threats to security. Subsequently, India also started expanding its military engagements with the region. Physical connectivity was also at the core of this phase, air to air linkages, comprehensive dialogues, and soft power relations became the most addressed issues. After the policy of LPG was adopted, economic relations were on rise, however events like the Asian Financial crisis\textsuperscript{vi} and Pokhran test\textsuperscript{vii} led to the deterioration of relations. (Sikri, 2009)

The link to establish relations with the South East Asian nations for India was the ASEAN. In 1995, India obtained the status of a full dialogue partner. The FDI increased from 1992 to 1997 in ASEAN especially Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. In 2002, to further strengthen the ties between these nations a ministerial level meeting took place in Brunei. The series of dialogues led to the signing of the Free Trade Agreement in 2009 between India and ASEAN. The role played by the United States and Japan cannot be disregarded in India’s Act East Policy. India and the United States signed a Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2005. It further boosted India’s credibility and FDI routes opened. (Gupta, et al., 2018)

Since the 1990s economic as well as security ties have expanded with the South East Asian nations. Defense ties, naval exercises, counter-terrorism operations, humanitarian relief, anti-piracy activities, security – both energy and maritime have seen a drastic rise. Moreover, India like these nations is also concerned about the growing footprints of China in the region. Almost all the nations of Southeast Asia have unsettled maritime boundaries and claim some islands, reefs, in the region. Interesting to note is that almost all these claims overlap with what the Chinese claims. Thus, this had created a confrontation in the region. To offset China, many of these nations thus consider India as a country that could rebalance the order in Asia and prevent China’s rise. The defense ties of India with these nations have thereby strengthened. Naval exercises since the 1990s have proved to be an important part of them. For instance, with Indonesia India carries out the ‘Samudra Shakti’ naval exercise, with Thailand the ‘Indo-Thai CORPAT’, ‘SIMBEX’ with Singapore etc. (Chaudhury, 2018)

Many confidence building exercises have taken place in the region due to the initiative taken by the Indian Navy such as the ‘MILAN’ exercise at Port Blair\textsuperscript{viii}. It could be used to develop
an effective regional response to the maritime issues across the Indo-Pacific. This is an example of India’s evolving regional ties and geo-strategic importance of the region that has assumed importance in the policy making discourse in India. (Amb. Singh, 2012).

The Indian government has been deploying Indian Navy in the SCS for many years now. For instance, on 18th May 2016, Indian naval ships today sailed for over two months long operational deployment to the disputed South China Sea during which they took part in Malabar naval exercise with the US and Japan. The Indians ships participation in MALABAR-16, a maritime exercise with the US Navy and JMSDF, reflected the vital strategic importance of the region to India. It made port calls at Cam Rahn Bay (Vietnam), Subic Bay (Philippines), Sasebo (Japan), Busan (South Korea), Vladivostok (Russia) and Port Klang (Malaysia). (India TV, 2016)

The purpose of this deployment was to foster and build up co-operation, inter-operability between the navies. The Indian deployments in the SCS should be viewed in the context of the increased Chinese deployments in the SCS. India has been trying to foster the links with the littoral states in the SCS. India is also engaged in surveillance operations over the SCS from the Campbell Bay (INS Baaz) the southernmost point of the Andaman Islands. India’s interest in the region could be noticed by the creation of the Andaman and Nicobar Command in the Bay of Bengal which is India’s first and only tri-service command that serves as a focal point for Indian naval engagement with Southeast Asian navies such as Indonesia. (Villaruel, 2015) This approach of India should be viewed from the lens of a ‘security maximizer’ and not a ‘power maximizer’.

The region of Southeast Asia is vulnerable to many of the natural disasters such as the Earthquakes, Tsumanis etc. This therefore creates a greater need for conducting disaster relief operations, rescue and disaster mitigation and preparedness. The Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations thus constitute a greater component of rehabilitation and disaster mitigation. The 2004 Tsumani that created havoc in the region led to an informal alliance of G4 countries i.e. India, Japan, the United States and Australia. Much could not be done in 2004 due to lack of planning. However, the HADR activities were increased post 2004 tsunami and new standard operating procedures were put in place by the Indian Navy. This definitely proved to be of a great help as was witnessed in the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake in Java, Indonesia. Thus, the
HADR exercises have helped to foster ties among the nations with the Indian Navy being at the forefront. However, there is a need to put a proper framework in place so that co-ordination among the countries could further improve. These issues should be discussed frequently in track 1 diplomacy. The India Navy has been actively engaged in the Disaster Relief operations. It kicked off in 2004 when along with the United States, Australia and Japan, the Tsumani diplomacy was envisaged to help the counties affected by Tsunami. (Amb. Singh, 2012).

‘Freedom of navigation’ stands out as one of the important concepts of securitization in the region. Chinese naval and maritime militia activities are a bone of contention to the littoral states. They support the People’s Liberation Army in variety of ways. Some of the important instances where the maritime militia had been active are in 1954 when the western parts of the Paracel islands were seized by the PLA. (Grossman , Derek ; Logan, M;, 2020). India is thus supported by the littoral states in the SCS who also are concerned about China’s aggressiveness.

India’s interest in the South China Sea region is multifold in nature. The SCS is situated strategically as major sea corridors run through it. It is a major region used for commercial as well as naval shipping. It is a rich source of fisheries, oil and natural gas which is very pertinent for a developing nation like India. Indian economy today is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and so is in huge need of coal, oil and gas. India has also realized that it is very crucial to find alternative area from where oil and natural gas could be imported apart from West Asia. China has been critical of non- littoral states conducting exploration in the SCS. India too faced heavy criticisms from China when India accepted Vietnam’s invitation to explore oil and gas in contested waters in the South China Sea in 2011. (Khanh & Thu, 2014). Chinese have been apprehensive of any other power indulging in the affairs of the SCS as it claims various islands, reefs and has also be constructing artificial islands. India has collaborated with various nations to explore natural gas, minerals and oil however, New Delhi has been very cautious of neither being party to the disputes nor taking sides.

These varied interest of India in the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific have made it adopt different policies to enhance ties with the littoral states. Both India and the Southeast
Asian nations need to co-operate with each other to ensure regional stability. (Blank, Moroney, Rabasa, & Lin, 2015)

The ASEAN states may share economic interest with China but with India the relations are not only economic but also security oriented and in this respect India has an advantage over China to expand its ties.
End Notes

i The Non-Aligned Movement was formed during the Cold War as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral.

ii The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union and the United States and their respective allies, the Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc, after World War II.

iii The removal or loosening of restrictions on something, typically an economic or political system.

iv Globalization is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide.

v The transfer of ownership, property or business from the government to the private sector is termed privatization.

vi The Asian financial crisis was a period of financial crisis that gripped much of East Asia and Southeast Asia beginning in July 1997.

vii The Pokhran-II tests were a series of five nuclear bomb test explosions conducted by India at the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range in May 1998.

viii Port Blair is the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a union territory of India in the Bay of Bengal.

ix The militia is comprised of fishing vessels that are used to augment the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and possesses sophisticated communication and GPS technology.
Policy options for India in the short and medium term vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region and the Quad.

In the context of China’s rising stature in Asia and particularly Indo-pacific it is imperative for India to act in a more upfront way to counter China. It is crucial as the region is of immense importance to India for various reasons like the natural resources. To establish regional stability in the Indo-Pacific the four democracies – India, Japan, the United States and Australia conceptualized the formation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The global order has undergone changes after COVID 19 disrupted the world economies. China which was the first nation to experience this disease used various means to curtail it. In this context, the COVID pandemic made the nations focus in internal aspects of the country more. China has used this opportunity to widen its health diplomacy by supplying ventilators, masks, Personal Protective Equipment kits etc. Since the advent of the pandemic, China has been leveraging its position in the Indo-Pacific as well as the SCS. India needs to formulate a strong policy to counter Chinese growth and to emerge both as a regional and global player. The latest confrontations on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh have further aggravated the crisis. In this light it is pivotal for India to revive the QUAD. India along with the Japan, United States and Australia could undertake patrolling in the SCS. It could make use of ports in Vietnam, Philippines etc. to anchor its ships.

A more assertive approach can be adopted by the Indian Navy in the waters of the SCS and extend their area of operation beyond the Malacca strait. India has responded to Chinese strategies like the ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean Region by creating a new network of ports like the Changi Naval Base in Singapore, Sabang Port in Indonesia, Duqm Port in Oman, Assumption Island in Seychelles and Chabahar Port in Iran. (Bubna & Mishra, 2020). With the co-operation of these nations along with other states in the Indo-Pacific and through QUAD, India can play a constructive role in the region.

The Quadrilateral Security dialogue mechanism can be expanded to foster greater ties with other nations in the region. This approach has started conceptualizing as could be seen in
on March 20, where officials from the Quad countries gathered to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a virtual meeting joined by three new partners: South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. (Smith, 2020). According to India’s Ministry of External Affairs, the seven countries “shared their assessments of the current situation with respect to COVID-19, and discussed ways to synergize their efforts to counter its spread.” This association is seen to be crucial by experts as Vietnam is currently the chair of ASEAN, New Zealand is one of the nations in the ‘Five Eyes’ and South Korea which is one of the closest allies of America. More importantly these three countries are the rising nations in the Indo-Pacific and too are concerned about China’s hegemonic rise in the rise. The commonality with the QUAD nations is that both propound for a free and open Indo-Pacific. This conjecture in international strategic circles is described as process of strategic alignments without a formal alliance in the Indo-Pacific. Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo convened a meeting on May 11, 2020. It signified a grander strategic construct as it Brazil and Israel alongside the QUAD and QUAD Plus nations that in itself signifies the sheer breath of the framework’s aims. (Mehta, Mathur, & Gopalkrishnan, 2020).

India has overwhelmingly supported the Quad plus framework led by America that aims at strengthening the liberal international world order in the Indo-Pacific. However it is also crucial to understand that the Quad plus framework has not achieved any institutional format as of yet. Institutionalization of the QUAD itself will take years, and so expecting that the QUAD or QUAD plus will pose a counter balance to China is too early to comment upon. Still, India can make use of these mechanisms to engage deeper strategically, militarily and economically with countries that are critical to India’s growing fortune in the Indo-Pacific. The QUAD plus however will definitely allow India to expedite a ‘Continental Connect‘ with nations across Asia. (Panda, Jagannath ;, 2020). The progress of the QUAD is slow as the countries involved have significant economic exposure to China. This dependence has constrained their capacity to participate in a mechanism which the Chinese government has opposed time and again. Even with all these limitations, in the coming years QUAD will assume a concrete shape as it has the capacity to provide a pragmatic path to greater security cooperation in the region.

Also, it is important to note that along with Australia and India being the prominent players in the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia is also one of the crucial nations in the region. The
geographic location of India to the northwest, Indonesia to the center and Australia to the southeast can ensure long term strategic stability in the region which depends on the three countries interaction with each other. The three countries have engaged in trilateral dialogues with each other over a variety of issue however, the need is to develop a broader trilateral framework. (Saha, Bland, & Laksmana, 2020). For this to happen the bilateral relationship between the nations should strengthen. One crucial step towards greater co-operation was when Indonesia adopted the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP) in 2019. (Shah, 2019)

Another aspect India should consider is expanding its relations with Southeast Asian nations. Although India has initiated the Look and the Act East policy, the focus has been mainly on specific nations like Vietnam and Singapore. The collaboration with countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines has been limited. Moreover, even in the Indo-Pacific, India has been focusing more on South Asian neighbors and not much on East Indian Ocean and littoral states. The relations need to be enlarged with these nations and re-examined.

Furthermore, New Delhi has been very clever to handle the geopolitical and boundary disputes with China separately. It is aware of the fact that managing China makes more sense rather than countering China as India does not have the military, technological resources to do so. India therefore should continue its approach to engage with China and strengthen the multilateral mode of association. India’s partnerships with China in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank under the BRICS framework, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Russia-India-China trilateral forum are instances of India’s willingness to co-operate.

The COVID 19 pandemic has changed the way global issues can be addressed. It requires greater co-operation among the nation states today as we now live in a complexly interdependent world. China has made use of ‘Health Diplomacy’ in the times of COVID as a soft power tool. THE OBOR initiative has paid rich dividends to China to use its infrastructure to supply health equipment’s. (Gautam, Singh, & Jaspal, 2020). India has also tried to expand its relations with the countries in the Indo-Pacific especially during the times of COVID by supplying medicines and vaccines. India for instance became one of the first Mauritius and the Seychelles and helped
them to tackle the challenge of COVID-19 by sending a consignment of life-saving drugs, including hydroxychloroquin. Free shipments of AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest producer of vaccines have been sent to Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. (The Economic Times, 2021) Moreover, India has quoted the lowest price for the vaccines as compared to other nations. (The Hindu, 2021). India’s ‘Vaccine Maitri’ will pay rich dividends to India in the coming years as it will help to build trust with other nations. The current crisis offers India an opportunity to expand its healthcare base in different parts of the world and look beyond only supplying vaccines and medicines. The crisis and India’s image in the global south should be utilized by India to support the WHO at large. India must utilize its expertise in areas of pharmacy, skilled doctors and nurses and bring in a new approach to address health challenges. The Ayushman Bharat program which is the largest healthcare insurance plan made by any country should be expanded enough and on similar lines, India can also encourage Africa, South Asian countries to formulate such a universal healthcare coverage for their nations. So the focus in respect of healthcare sector should not only be on supplying goods but also on collaborations with developing nations to mitigate various diseases that engulf the nations. For this, a multifold approach has to be sought that fuses diplomacy, external affairs, health, trade, urban planning, and finance etc. should be adopted. (Bhattacherjee).

Implementing this is not going to be easy as today the world is driven by Global Value Chains and India is heavily dependent on imports of raw materials required for pharmaceutical industries from China. Taking this into account, India should collaborate more with China that will help it to emerge as one of the global health leaders. Thus, the need of the hour for India is not only to scale up its facilities in the healthcare sector at home but even in the developing and particularly the countries of the global South. (Patanaik, 2020).

To summarize the policy options for India as far as the broader Indo-Pacific is concerned are forging ties with the countries situated in the region, elevating the QUAD to Quad plus and accommodating the interest of diverse nations to maintain the regional stability, collaborating with China when required by keeping the boundary disputes aside to manage its rise rather than countering China. More importantly in the post COVID world, India needs to scale up its health
diplomacy and support the developing nation to contain the further spread of diseases and minimize the loss of lives.
The LAC is the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.

The String of Pearls is a geopolitical theory on potential Chinese government intentions in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). It refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lines of communication, which extend from the Chinese mainland to Port Sudan in the Horn of Africa.

The Five Eyes is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Hydroxychloroquine is a medication used to prevent and treat malaria.

Global value chains (GVCs) refer to international production sharing, a phenomenon where production is broken into activities and tasks carried out in different countries.
Conclusion

The Indian Ocean and the Pacific remain vital geostrategically for India to be a regional and global player. The rise of China has disturbed the regional balance in the region that was prevalent since the Cold War. Major powers of the world specifically the United States is too concerned about the security of the region and believes that India could play a crucial role in maintain the order in the Indo-Pacific. The extensive participation of the four nations in the QUAD reflects their common concerns and thus believe that the issues have to be addressed collectively. The mechanism of QUAD has thus acquired prominence since 2017 and in the coming years will continue to see collaborations with other countries and will lead to the further enlargement like the QUAD plus framework.

India due to its economic, military and non-aggressive nature can be a vital player in the region. This is seen from different countries wanting to work and support India against Chinese assertiveness and to arrive at a free and open Indo-Pacific. China has been asserting its regional power in variety of spheres like culture, military, and so on. The United States has significantly increased its engagements around the Strait of Malacca, the South and East China seas that constrain Chinese power. (Hyung, 2002).

India needs to also scale up its engagements in the region to be one of the norm maker. Over the past two decades, the Chinese military budget has increased by double digits, India, Japan and Australia are too scaling up their resources. China through its ‘Maritime Silk Road’ is trying to increase its footprints in the region, the United States is engaging itself with a number of countries and strengthening alliances. (Bitzinger, 2015)

India’s Look East, Act East policy, SAGAR initiative, Vaccine Maitri etc are some of the crucial efforts made by India to remain a vital contender in the region. Japan, Australia have been articulating ‘Free, Open and rules based’ Indo-Pacific order on similar lines as of India and the United States. (Saeed, 2017)

The QUAD reflects these convergent interest and could emerge as an organization having the potential to decide the norms in the broader Indo-Pacific region. It is important to formulate
a democratic order in the region as all nations – small or large have been involved and get affected in some or the other way in the Indo-Pacific. QUAD can step in here and ensure that security and peace prevail in the region. Its development is vital for India especially in the current times where India-China relations are tense.

It is to be noted that the emergence of any one state as the hegemon in this region will disturb the security and thus, the regional and extra-territorial powers have to ensure that any attempt in this direction will be detrimental for the growth and prosperity of all. The region which is crucial for trade, tourism, economy, etc. has to be free, open and rules based as postulated by the QUAD to ensure that each country progress without having to undergo any conflict and contestations with others.

Thus, co-operation, collaboration and collective decisions should guide the policy formulation of all nations in the region be it the major or the minor actors. India should thus also continue to work in this direction.
References


