

US-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION

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The term Indo-Pacific (IP) was first coined by a German geopolitical scholar Karl Haushofer, who used it in his work 'Indopazifischen Raum' in 1920.¹ The Indo-Pacific competition is primarily between two major powers China and the United States and has been on the rise for some years. The competition continues as both seek to strengthen the strategic as well as economic might within the Indo-Pacific region. During the Trump administration, the IP idea was embraced as the customary building block of the US commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. This included:

1. Building collective security through a network of regional allies and partners,
2. Promoting economic prosperity, and,
3. Encouraging good governance and shared principles.

To meet the required goals US signed multiple agreements with its like-minded partners who share the same goals and strategic objectives in the IP region. Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), US-Japan Trade Agreement (USJTA), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), US-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and

¹ Anderson, Atholl, and S. U. E. O'Connor, "Indo-Pacific migration and colonization—Introduction," *Asian Perspectives* 2008, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42928728>

Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), and US-Korea Trade Agreement (USKTA)² are a few amongst them.

President Biden after coming into office, followed the pursuit of his predecessor, and adopted Trump's policies in the IP region and pushed forward to modernize Washington's long-standing alliances in the region.

The most obvious common feature remains China. IP strategy documents from both President Biden and former President Trump outline China as the main concern. The Indo Pacific document released in February this year earmarks essential structure for the Indo-Pacific, in which China is accorded as the principal national security challenge for the United States and the Indo-Pacific region as well.³

The fundamental architecture of Biden's administration towards the IP strategy is to strengthen economic partnerships and build links among countries including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Mekong states, Pacific Island countries, South Asian nations, Taiwan, and other ASEAN countries to cater the challenges and threats in the future.⁴ The administration has also carried out various drives, including expanded commitment to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Islands region, provincial transparency and anti-corruption plans, and digital infrastructure and energy collaboration programs, which support these objectives.

According to the policy pundits in D.C, the Indo-Pacific strategy answers Beijing's destabilizing way of behavior and coercion of the region, which not only threatens US interests but also has subverted both US interests. It seems that US and China relations are going to be rocky for a long period as the US believes that its perusal of the Indo-Pacific strategy that encourages free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient is best at countering China.

² Revere, Evans, "The US-RoK Alliance: Projecting US Power And Preserving Stability in Northeast Asia," *Brookings. edu: Report* 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Paper-3.pdf>

³ Ford, Lindsey, "The Trump administration and the 'free and open Indo-Pacific'," *Brookings, May, 2020*, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fp_20200505_free_open_indo_pacific.pdf

⁴ Kenneth G. Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Brookings*, December 21, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/amp/>

⁵ Li, Mingjiang, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Geo-Economics And Indo-Pacific Security Competition," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mingjiang-Li-3/publication/350086588_Understanding_the_dynamics_of_the_Indo-Pacific_US-China_strategic_competition_regional_actors_and_beyond/links/61d256a9da5d105e5516619b/Understanding-the-dynamics-of-the-Indo-Pacific-US-China-strategic-competition-regional-actors-and-beyond.pdf

The Indo-Pacific Partnerships and Power Politics:

The Indo-Pacific is being posited as a counter to a China-centric view of regional order under the Belt and Road Initiative. With India being its major ally of the US in the region, both countries extend cooperation in trade, defense, education, and healthcare along with strengthening New Delhi's defense capabilities. testament to this relationship is multiple agreements between both the capitals such as the provision of drones to the Indian Navy for surveillance in the Indian Ocean; various bilateral agreements in the field of defense including, Logistic Exchange Memorandums of Agreements (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreements (COMCASA), and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreements (BECA).⁶

In the same manner, the US has multiple anchors or agreements in the Indo-Pacific with Australia. They both share an unshakeable relation to guarding opportunity and a democratic-based system, supporting freedom, defending law and order, and countering state-supported disinformation. The Australia, New Zealand, and US Security pact or ANZUS treaty⁷ endorsed in 1951 to safeguard the security of the Pacific.

Since the late 20th century, the US and Japan have had firm political, economic, and military relations. Successive US governments by and large considered Japan to be one of its closest partners in the region and for over 60 years the US had considered its alliance with Japan as one that has led to harmony, stability, and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region. The US commitment to Japan's protection under the US-Japan Security pact of 1960⁸ is unflinching.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD):

The QUAD composed of the United States, Australia, India, and Japan is not a formal alliance but the group was formed for security purposes. Furthermore, these four countries came together initially to deal with the consequences of the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean. After that, there was a working-level meeting of the group in 2007 and it was revived in 2017 in which each of the member states laid out its vision of a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific. The countries did not mention China clearly but are deeply involved to deter Chinese aggression and maintain the Balance of Power in the

⁶ Rosen, Mark, and Douglas Jackso, "The US India Defense Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective," *Center for Naval Analyses Arlington United States*, 2017, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1029959>

⁷ Siracusa, Joseph M, "The ANZUS Treaty Revisited," *Security Challenges* 1, no. 1, 2005, 89-104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26459022>

⁸ Revere, Evans, "The US-ROK Alliance: Projecting US Power And Preserving Stability In Northeast Asia," *Brookings, Report* 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Paper-3.pdf><https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Paper-3.pdf>

region. Following the QUAD countries regularly participated in a naval exercise named Malabar, held in the Bay of Bengal.⁹

AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States):

AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States which was signed in September 2021. AUKUS aims to promote sharing of technology to strengthen the security capability of the signatory states, particularly Australia. Intensifying disputes in the South China Sea present serious threats to Australia's key interests and relationships in the Indo-Pacific. Australia's current strategy might prove to be correct in the coming future in which she is working closely with the United States to convince China of the costs of unilateral actions and behavior she is possessing regarding the South China Sea.¹⁰

Politics of South China Sea:

The South China Sea stretches out from the Strait of Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the upper east. The essential significance of this is mainly because of its Geographical area, as the area is one of the world's most active and essential strategic shipping lanes. In order to meet the rising threats China has militarized no less than three of its artificial islands in the South China Sea, equipping them with rocket systems and fighter jets with 10,000 Chinese soldiers positioned in the South China Sea.¹¹

China's capacity to control this waterway would be a huge move toward dislodging the US from the Indo-Pacific region, extending its economic influence, and reordering the region in her support. National Security Strategy and the reason the Indo-Pacific is the US military's fundamental theater of operations. Thus, the US seeks multi-pronged maneuvering to prevent Chinese extension, in order to stay away from a risky showdown and direct confrontation with Beijing.

Furthermore, China has now become a reason for the strategic obsession for Washington and adds to heightening its security dilemma in the aerospace and maritime areas in the South China Sea. This design could prompt a crisis or conflict. The US has taken an unbiased position on the situation,

⁹ Lee, Lavina, "Assessing the Quad: Prospects and Limitations of Quadrilateral cooperation for advancing Australia's Interests," *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25090.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A7c2a9aac998848434de1c926440e3a26&ab_segments=&origin=

¹⁰ Cameron Hill, "Australia and the South China Sea: Debates and Dilemmas," *Parliament of Australia*, 2014 https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook45p/SouthChinaSea

¹¹ Fravel, M. Taylor, "China's strategy in the South China Sea," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 2011, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41446232>

legitimizing its contribution to a national interest in regional security and keeping up with freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, which would guarantee that any nation's commercial and military vessels could go through the South China Sea without impediment.¹²

Issue of Taiwan:

Command over the Taiwan Strait is a strategic issue for both the US and China. Taiwan is a key US accomplice in the Indo-Pacific, however, the US doesn't have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, it has a vigorous unofficial relationship.¹³ Taiwan has turned into a significant US country of choice in China's neighborhood as their relations are ushered with predictability.¹⁴ The relationship accounts for significant bilateral trade and investment, ties expanding to health care, basic supply chains, investment screening, science and technology, education, and progressing democratic values.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's administration has worked intimately with the US to deny China's endeavors to disengage Taiwan. Since Pelosi's visit, Taiwan has hosted delegations from different strategic partners like Japan, and France, while Canada, the UK, Germany, Denmark, and Australia follow suit.¹⁵ In addition, to multiply its pressure on China the US has proposed new arms deals to Taiwan and has sent two warships to travel the Taiwan Strait.¹⁶

US-China Strategic Competition Implications for Pakistan:

Intensifying competition between the US and China also poses major risks for regional stability in South Asia and Pakistan is no exception. Increased possibilities of conflict across contested boundaries, an escalating nuclear arms race, and a deepening US-China rivalry could exacerbate the protracted India-Pakistan conflict by increasing advanced arms and intelligence capabilities. India's capability enhancement will pose a risk for Pakistan as evidenced from the actively growing Indo-US strategic partnership.

¹² Bader, Jeffrey, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael McDevitt, "Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective," *Brookings*, 2014, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/upload/file/2014/South-China-Sea-in-Perspective.pdf>

¹³ Bush, Richard, "From Persuasion To Coercion: Beijing's Approach To Taiwan And Taiwan's Response," *Brookings*, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FP_20191118_beijing_taiwan_bush.pdf

¹⁴ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs U.S Relations with Taiwan, *US Department of State*, May 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/>

¹⁵ Hass, Ryan, "An American Perspective on the role of US-China Relation," *Brookings*, July 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FP_20220720_role_of_taiwan_hass.pdf

¹⁶ Sachs, Jeffrey D., Howard J. Shatz, Alan Deardorff, and Robert E. Hall, "Trade and Jobs in US manufacturing," *Brookings*, Papers on Economic Activity 1994, no. 1, https://www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/Sachs%20Writing/1994/EconomicPolicy_1994_TradeandJobsinUSManufacturing_1994.PDF

- Pakistan may face an undesirable diplomatic scenario where it is expected to take a position either with its trustworthy neighbor China, or a formidable superpower that has considerable influence over the International Financial Institutes (IFIs) for at least two decades or so.
- Pakistan will need to continue to stride a on a delicate balance in its relations with all major powers. Our national interest should be the only criteria for maintaining ties with these two important powers.
- India may also insist on the US to pressurize Pakistan to abandon CPEC. Pakistan must not compromise on the CPEC which is crucial for Pakistan's economy.
- India's enhanced military capabilities will pose a risk for Pakistan, therefore Pakistan has to be cognizant of the developments in this sphere and have to be proactive instead of reactive.
- The Indian military developments and overtures especially in the Indian Ocean needs to be carefully examined while appropriate preparations are to be made.
- Pakistan has to look at the effectiveness of the measures that are already instituted along its coast and at sea to safeguard its interests.

The future of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region is uncertain and this region is again vulnerable to giant economies like US-China rivalry in the IP. China and the United States need to take into consideration the regional countries because they are directly and indirectly impacted by the strategic competition.