



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Indo-Pacific Newsletter



A fortnightly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues in Indo-Pacific Region
from Centre for Air Power Studies

INAUGURAL MESSAGE

Amidst the changing World order, Indo-Pacific region has taken the centre stage in the recent years for establishing military, economic and diplomatic supremacy. The rush for dominance of the oceanic region for exclusive rights and control over SLOCs, as well as island territories in the region, has given rise to new alliances and realignment of nations. The region that was mostly a peaceful oceanic bed of economic activities is now abuzz with high intensity demonstrative military activities; both by US and China. The region today is in sharp focus of world leaders, military strategists and policy makers. The main objective of Centre for Air power Studies is to provide focused analyses on issues related to national security, defence, and aerospace in the evolving strategic and international security environment in this region. In order to provide a useful platform for researchers, military thinkers and policy makers with a regular update of developments in the Indo-Pacific Region, a fortnightly newsletter has been launched. I am sure the readers would immensely benefit from these well researched articles, news, issue briefs, opinions and video links. Jai Hind.

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PEEP-IN

EAM S Jaishankar's address on the Indo-Pacific business summit:
<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indo-pacific-reflects-reality-of-globalisation-s-jaishankar-2480824>

QUOTE

The Indo-Pacific reflects the reality of globalisation, the emergence of multipolarity and benefits of rebalancing. It means the overcoming of the Cold War and rejection of bipolarity and dominance

- S Jaishankar, EAM, India

Opinion/Review

China looks to East Africa for second Indian Ocean foothold

News that Tanzania will revive a \$10 billion port project in the town of Bagamoyo has ignited speculation that China, the project's main investor, is looking to establish an additional dual-use foothold on the East African coast, a move that would greatly enhance Beijing's strategic aims in the region.

The main purpose of Bagamoyo Port would be to ease the congestion at the country's main port, Dares Salaam, located 75 km to its south. Bagamoyo could also become a maritime gateway for neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, "the world's greatest untapped non-oceanic/polar minerals gold mine," according to Lauren Johnston, a visiting senior lecturer of the School of Economics and Public Policy at the University of Adelaide. But the port could be tapped for purposes that go beyond purely commercial endeavours. It may also be used as a ship repair hub for China's People's Liberation Army Navy, or perhaps even more. China established its first and only overseas military base in northern Africa's Djibouti in 2017. President Samia Suluhu Hassan announced on Saturday that Tanzania would restart the port project, which had been halted on concerns that Chinese demands about usage of the facility were too onerous.

Indian Ocean expert Darshana Baruah, an associate fellow with the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says East Africa offers China an easier entry point to the Indian Ocean than other locations closer to the Strait of Malacca. "China has been looking at the Indian Ocean in a more cohesive manner than I

think most other nations have been doing," Baruah said. "Any kind of an effort to build a facility or a port in the eastern Indian Ocean, whether it is Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives or Pakistan, I think would have more of a reaction, or a pushback, than I think in Africa. Many nations forget to connect it, but Africa is still a part of the Indian Ocean region."

Baruah said that a second naval base in the Indian Ocean, following Djibouti, would help with China's "Malacca Dilemma" -- a phrase former President Hu Jintao used to describe the Asian country's dependence on the world's busiest chokepoint. "Even if something were to happen within the Malacca Strait, if they would have two bases or more facilities in the Indian Ocean, they can still continue their operations in the Indian Ocean region," Baruah said. "I'm not talking about a war," Baruah said. "I'm talking about limited conflicts or competition. Even with the Strait of Malacca interrupted, from a grand strategy point of view, they could sustain their operations in the Indian Ocean region without

necessarily having to make frequent calls back home."

While Beijing's main maritime focus is in the South and East China seas, it has poured time and effort into building relationships in the Indian Ocean. China has diplomatic missions in all six of the island nations in the region, namely Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros. Washington has three -- in Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Madagascar -- with plans in place for a fourth in the Maldives. "No other Indian Ocean player -- India, France or the United Kingdom -- has a presence in all six island nations," Baruah noted.

Securing a foothold in East Africa would also allow China to prepare for contingencies such as the blockage of the Suez Canal, as was seen earlier this

China has been looking at the Indian Ocean in a more cohesive manner than I think most other nations have been doing

year. The Ever Given, the 400-meter-long container vessel, blocked one of the world's busiest waterways for almost a week. "If anything were to happen in the Suez Canal, then the Mozambique Channel will quickly again become the alternate route, which was originally the key trading route," Baruah said. The 400-km-wide waterway between Madagascar and Mozambique is an important route for shipping in eastern Africa.

University of Adelaide's Johnston said that for Beijing, Tanzania was "much more trustworthy than Mozambique and Kenya, both of which are more likely to be security partners of the West." But Tanzania's independent-minded tradition could stand in the way of China's ambition to use Bagamoyo as a dual-use port. "It's not their style," she said. "They are neutral-minded, and they are trusted by Africans for that. Housing a Chinese security port or base would undermine what Tanzania is." When Tanzania's Hassan announced that she would revive the Bagamoyo project, she said, "We are going to start talks with the investors that came for the project with the aim of opening it for the benefit of our nation."

At an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Tuesday, Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the U.S. Africa Command, warned African countries to be clear-eyed about engaging with China. "These countries ought to just go into these relationships with their eyes wide open. I think that it's possible to do business with China, but you better be on your game and have your eyes and ears open," he said. "China is bringing a lot of investment to the continent, and I would just urge our African partners: try to take advantage of that without getting taken advantage of."

At the same event, Vice Adm. Herve Blejean, director-general of the European Union military staff, warned of China's so-called debt-trap diplomacy. "China is tailoring its support to each country, answering immediately their expressed needs, but by doing that also trapping them in their net and establishing bonds for life that they would be unable to pay back." There is a possibility that the world wakes up one day to find that "most of the resources of Africa, legally, belong to China," he said. "That should be a real concern."

Carnegie's Baruah predicts that bigger players in the Indo-Pacific will be competing to win the hearts and minds of small nations in the region. In that battle, geography will play a major factor. "One example was during the outbreak of COVID-19, when a lot of countries were undertaking evacuation missions,

I think that it's possible to do business with China, but you better be on your game and have your eyes and ears open

bringing citizens back from Wuhan," Baruah said. "Indians were the ones who also brought back students for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and others. China sent an aircraft to Maldives to bring back their citizens but they did not offer those aircrafts to send

South Asian citizens who were in China." She praised India for actions during the pandemic "to show its presence, its investments and its friendship across the Indian Ocean region."

Source: Ken Moriyasu, Nikkei Asia chief desk editor,

https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/China-looks-to-East-Africa-for-second-Indian-Ocean-foothold?utm_campaign=IC_indo_pacific_free&utm_medium=email&utm_source=NA_newsletter&utm_content=article_link&del_type=11&pub_date=20210630053000&seq_num=1&si=16109425, 30 Jun, 2021

Opinion/Review

Report to Congress on Chinese Naval Modernization

In an era of renewed great power competition, China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, has become the top focus of U.S. defense planning and budgeting. China's navy, which China has been steadily modernizing for more than 25 years, since the early to mid-1990s, has become a formidable military force within China's near-seas region, and it is conducting a growing number of operations in more-distant waters, including the broader waters of the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and waters around Europe.

China's navy is viewed as posing a major challenge to the U.S. Navy's ability to achieve and maintain wartime control of blue-water ocean areas in the Western Pacific—the first such challenge the U.S. Navy has faced since the end of the Cold War. China's navy forms a key element of a Chinese challenge to the long-standing status of the United States as the leading military power in the Western Pacific. Some U.S. observers are expressing concern or alarm regarding the pace of China's naval shipbuilding effort and resulting trend lines regarding the relative sizes and capabilities of China's navy and the U.S. Navy. China's naval modernization effort encompasses a wide array of ship, aircraft, and weapon acquisition programs, as well as improvements in maintenance and logistics, doctrine, personnel quality, education and training, and exercises. China's navy has currently has

China's naval modernization effort encompasses a wide array of ship, aircraft, and weapon acquisition programs

China wants its navy to be capable of acting as part of a Chinese anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) force

certain limitations and weaknesses, and is working to overcome them.

China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, is assessed as being aimed at developing capabilities for addressing the situation with Taiwan militarily, if need be; for achieving a greater degree of control or domination over China's near-seas region, particularly the South China Sea; for enforcing China's view that it has the right to regulate foreign military activities in its 200-mile maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ); for defending China's commercial sea lines of communication (SLOCs), particularly those linking China to the Persian Gulf; for displacing U.S. influence in the Western Pacific; and for asserting China's status as the leading regional power and a major world power.

Consistent with these goals, observers believe China wants its navy to be capable of acting as part of a Chinese anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) force—a force that can deter U.S. intervention in a conflict in China's near-seas region over Taiwan or some other issue, or failing that, delay the arrival or reduce the effectiveness of intervening U.S. forces. Additional missions for China's navy include conducting maritime security (including antipiracy) operations, evacuating Chinese nationals from foreign countries when necessary, and conducting humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR) operations.

The U.S. Navy in recent years has taken a number of actions to counter China's naval modernization effort. Among other things, the U.S. Navy has shifted a greater percentage of its fleet to the Pacific; assigned its most-capable new ships and

aircraft and its best personnel to the Pacific; maintained or increased general presence operations, training and developmental exercises, and engagement and cooperation with allied and other navies in the Indo-Pacific; increased the planned future size of the Navy; initiated, increased, or accelerated numerous programs for developing new military technologies and acquiring new ships, aircraft, unmanned vehicles, and weapons; begun development of new operational concepts (i.e., new ways to employ Navy and Marine Corps forces) for countering Chinese maritime A2/AD forces; and signaled that the Navy in coming years will shift to a more-distributed fleet architecture that will feature a smaller portion of larger ships, a larger portion of smaller ships, and a substantially greater use of unmanned vehicles. The issue for Congress is whether the U.S. Navy is responding appropriately to China's naval modernization effort.

Source: USNI News, <https://news.usni.org/2021/07/05/report-to-congress-on-chinese-naval-modernization-9>, 05 Jul 2021

Opinion/Review

U.S. Pacific intel chief: Coming Chinese attack on Taiwan could target other nations

China's growing military power in Asia has increased the danger Beijing will launch a war against a neighboring state, with Taiwan just one of several likely future targets, the admiral in charge of intelligence for the Pentagon's Indo-Pacific Command warned this week.

Rear Adm. Mike Studeman, the top intelligence officer, or J-2, for the East Asian command, said in a conference Wednesday that U.S. military forces are bolstering arms and equipment for when conflict could break

out in the region over Taiwan or another American ally or partner. "What are we warning about: It's danger on all fronts," Adm. Studeman told an online conference via telephone from the command's headquarters in Hawaii. "This idea that it's only a Taiwan scenario vs. many other areas where the Chinese are being highly assertive, coercive, is a failure in understanding complexity, because it's not that simple."

Adm. Studeman said it would be a mistake to wait to act until intelligence agencies receive a warning that China is preparing to launch an amphibious assault against Taiwan, the island nation China's Communist leaders have vowed to reunite with the mainland. "That is one scenario and, frankly, it may not be the most likely," he said. China's Communist regime is placing pressure on "lots of its neighbours."

China in recent months has engaged in disputes with India, Australia, Japan, Taiwan and countries around the South China Sea in what analysts say is an increase in bullying by Beijing. In the past, the leaders of the ruling Chinese Communist Party sought to avoid multiple entanglements with neighbours and the new assertiveness is seen as a sign of China's growing power and military confidence. Regarding Taiwan, China has engaged in low-intensity conflict against the island that has increased the dangers across the 100-mile-wide Taiwan Strait. The campaign has involved

China in recent months has engaged in disputes with India, Australia, Japan, Taiwan and countries around the South China Sea

information operations and economic pressure, Adm. Studeman said. "It's already a struggle underway," he said. "Whether or not the Chinese resort to a military option is in question. To us, it's only a matter of time, not a matter of

'if,' because if you understand the problem set, you understand that Taiwan will unlikely fold based on

economic, and informational and diplomatic influence alone.”

The admiral was reflecting earlier comments by the former and current chiefs of the Indo-Pacific Command, who said in testimony to Congress earlier this year that China appears to be preparing for a move against Taiwan by 2030 or before. Adm. Studeman said the United States needs to approach countering China with the same type of effort used against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. “And we’re not there yet as a nation in understanding how to in fact employ our energy, our treasure to be able to grapple with” the danger, he said. “Much of what we do,” he added, “is internal to us — ensuring that people are ready for a very bad day” if war breaks out.

‘Too late’

Adm. Studeman said naval intelligence officials sum up the current situation with China in two words used by Gen. Douglas MacArthur in discussing the failure to head off World War II. “Too late,” Adm. Studeman said. “Too late in comprehending the deadly purpose of a potential enemy. Too late in realizing the mortal danger. Too late in preparedness. Too late in uniting all possible forces for resistance.” The command’s intelligence unit has provided Washington policymakers with strategic warning of the dangers and intentions of China in the region. The admiral’s blunt warnings about China contrast with a more measured assessment of the risk of a conflict with China from Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “I think China has a ways to go to develop the actual, no-kidding capability to conduct military operations to seize through military means the entire island of Taiwan if they wanted to do that,” Gen. Milley told a congressional hearing last month. Several days later Gen. Milley voiced concerns about the capabilities of the U.S. military

in waging an extended conflict with China. A war with China “would be an enormous expensive undertaking in terms of all measures and I would be concerned about the ability to sustain a long-term conflict,” he said.

Adm. Studeman said he feels confident U.S. forces would have adequate warning of a Chinese military attack on Taiwan. “The issue is even if you had, let’s say 90 days of strategic warning for Taiwan, whether or not we have ... have built up the capacities and the capabilities that we need to be able to handle the type of scenario which may be unfolding,” he said. Adversaries like China have a different concept of war than the United States. For them, “every day is a day of war in terms of the continuous struggle for advantage and disadvantage for influence,” he said.

A war with China would be an enormous expensive undertaking in terms of all measures

Despite reluctance to compare the threat from China to the Cold War with Moscow, Adm. Studeman said the scale and

breadth of the danger is “absolutely awesome and it has every dimension we saw in the 20th century.” China, he argued, is not simply seeking to become a leading world power but plans to surpass the United States and become the world’s most powerful state. “That’s what Xi Jinping’s course looks like,” he said, referring to the Chinese president. “And he’s been very aggressive across the way. He’s very Machiavellian. It’s not unfair to say that the Chinese rise has come through lying, cheating and stealing.”

China is expected to employ cyber warfare and anti-satellite attacks in any future conflict. Beijing is also investing heavily in space in anti-satellite weapons, including electronic jammers, and missiles capable of blasting orbiting satellites and conducting attacks with other satellites. “They are on the march,” Adm. Studeman said. “It’s clear as day what they’re putting into the investments.” U.S.

forces also are investing heavily in space defenses “and it will be a game of measures, and countermeasures, and counter-countermeasures” in a future space conflict. China’s government has used its technological capabilities around the world to gather masses of data that can be used for what the admiral called “effective control” over populations, such as in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. “This is a foreshadowing of what Chinese effective control will look like in other places,” he said.

China is seeking to simultaneously gain control over contested areas such as the border with India, areas around Bhutan in South Asia, the Mekong region of Vietnam, the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, he said. Internally, the ruling Chinese Communist Party, has strong institutions of power and the regime does not appear to be threatened by dissension that could produce serious opposition, the admiral added.

Source: Bill Gertz, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jul/8/us-pacific-intel-chief-coming-chinese-attack-taiwa/> 08 Jul 2021

Opinion/Review

South Korea’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ Dilemma

South Korea’s reticent response to the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy has been in the spotlight, producing mixed perceptions. South Korea’s geopolitical climate is dominated by the nuclear threat posed by North Korea but Seoul is also concerned about China’s growing assertiveness.

Embracing the U.S. FOIP rhetoric would likely enrage Chinese leaders, who could decode Seoul’s commitment to the U.S. FOIP construct as a risky

position taken up to counter Beijing’s growing influence. In 2017, Beijing was angered by U.S. anti-missile systems deployed in South Korea and retaliated against Seoul with economic measures.

South Korea’s economic dependence on China is rising, and Beijing is Seoul’s biggest trading partner, with exports totaling \$13.4 billion in April 2021. South Korea not only needs China as its core trading partner but also as the primary leverage for Seoul’s North Korea strategy, given Beijing’s close ideological links and traditional friendship with Pyongyang. In April this year, China’s ambassador to North Korea, Li Jinjun, hailed the Sino-North Korea friendship as “enduring and unbreakable.” Without the participation of China in the North Korean nuclear issue, it seems unlikely that Seoul can secure Pyongyang’s presence at the negotiating table.

Seoul’s balancing act between Washington and Beijing is unsteady. South Korea has been considering the possibility of presenting a united front with the United States and other middle-sized powers in the Quad. In the latest South Korea-U.S. bilateral joint statement, published in May 2021, both countries agreed to “align the ROK’s New Southern Policy and the United States’ vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific” and committed to “maintaining an inclusive, free, and open Indo-Pacific.” This statement echoed the Indo-Pacific language addressed by defense ministers from both

South Korea’s economic dependence on China is rising, and Beijing is Seoul’s biggest trading partner

sides in March, though there was virtually no commitment to embrace the U.S. FOIP construct from Seoul. South Korea has appeared to avoid bilateral dialogues on the possibility of South Korea’s participation in the U.S.

strategy.

South Korea’s endorsement of Indo-Pacific multilateralism is a matter of debate, especially

when President Moon Jae-in, delivering a video message to China's 2021 Boao Forum for Asia in April, called for joint efforts to strengthen multilateral cooperation in Asia. The onus to act is on Moon's ruling party, as anti-China sentiment in South Korea is peaking, reaching 75 percent in 2020 according to the results of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center. However, formally joining a U.S.-led coalition to challenge China in the region may destabilize bilateral relations between Seoul and Beijing. The enduring question for the Moon administration is how far it can go to develop its multilateral commitments without antagonizing China, while at the same time leveraging its middle power status in the Indo-Pacific.

Though South Korea is unlikely to go as far as Japan in joining a united front in a shared approach toward China, as stated in the Japan-U.S. joint statement in April, Seoul still has much room to navigate Indo-Pacific geopolitics. A three-pronged strategy can help bolster Seoul's middle power resilience in the Indo-Pacific. First, South Korea should embrace the construct of the Indo-Pacific in its official documents and public foreign policy discourses by incorporating its traditional notion of middle powers, like strong support for multilateralism and willingness to act as a balancing actor or bridge-builder in the region. Aspects of this middle power approach could be further embedded in Seoul's policies to send a clear-cut signal that it is committed to serve as a responsible stakeholder. As such, if the construct of the Indo-Pacific was embraced by South Korean leaders it would help stabilize expectations and advance Seoul's multilateralism, notably via Seoul's fostering of partnerships with like-minded countries and its longer-term commitment to engage with Indo-Pacific powers.

A three-pronged strategy can help bolster Seoul's middle power resilience in the Indo-Pacific.

Second, Moon's administration should be the first to extend its hand to the Biden administration. Since entering office in January, President Joe Biden has embraced a more nuanced approach toward South Korea. Contrary to Trump's bombastic approach to the South Korea-U.S. relationship, the new administration's flexible and restrained approach toward handling contentious issues with its allies has earned credit. One example is that Biden has not pushed Seoul to adhere its foreign policy to the U.S. FOIP construct. South Korea can work hand in hand with the United States in crafting the regional agenda, like deepening Seoul's engagement with Washington on nontraditional issues, such as climate change.

By placing climate change near the top of his agenda, Biden has sought close cooperation with U.S. allies and like-minded partners. In January's declaration pledging to put the climate crisis "at the center of United States foreign policy and national security," Biden urged international cooperation on climate change, opening a promising prospect for South Korean-U.S. joint efforts to address this issue. South Korea could embrace the role of "climate bridge" in the Indo-Pacific, helping to foster the U.S. regional agenda given Seoul's reputation as an active regional middle power. Seoul's credibility in the eyes of regional countries would likely facilitate its niche diplomacy when it comes to addressing regional climate cooperation.

Third, the time is ripe for Seoul's deeper engagement with Southeast Asian countries. Both South Korea and ASEAN share inclusiveness, a rules-based order, and a multilateral approach toward common interests and concerns in their Indo-Pacific visions. Among issues on which both parties can cooperate, taming the COVID-19 pandemic might prove to be of utmost importance.

Several ASEAN nations are currently facing a surge in confirmed cases, making regional economic prospects gloomier. Southeast Asia had reported nearly 5 million coronavirus cases and over 96,000 deaths as of July 6, placing its economies under strain amid the spread of the Delta variant, originally detected in India. Investment and exports in Southeast Asian economies are likely to experience ongoing delays as border openings may not occur soon, making “Southeast Asian growth targets beyond reach.” The slow pace of vaccinations also makes the current situation worse, presenting a worrying scenario as infections climb.

The efficacy of South Korea’s COVID-19 navigation, which has been largely due to Seoul’s policy and institutional responses, should be shared among nations within its New Southern Policy (NSP). Additionally, South Korea should distribute medical and aid items to Southeast Asian states, especially those presently facing a surge in coronavirus infections. South Korea promised to help India during its surge in April in terms of sending medical materials, and received much credit. Now, it is ASEAN nations that should top Seoul’s priority list. South Korea’s medical outreach to Southeast Asia could leverage its deeper engagement with the region in line with Seoul’s stated commitment to a “people-centered community of peace and prosperity” with ASEAN. As South Korea’s NSP-Plus strategy, announced by Moon in November last year, entailed public health and nontraditional security issues in its seven key areas of cooperation, a reinforced commitment from Seoul can reassure ASEAN countries that South Korea would offer member states not only good words, but practical actions. South Korea’s slow response might cost the Moon administration’s reputation, as southern countries are looking to

The time is ripe for Seoul’s deeper engagement with Southeast Asian countries. Both South Korea and ASEAN share inclusiveness

Seoul to play a firmer role in regional security matters.

A more active role by Seoul amid the latest COVID-19 surge in the region can bolster its engagement with the Indo-Pacific and enhance South Korea’s reputation as a responsible middle power. For a liberal democracy like South Korea, fostering multilateralism between Indo-Pacific countries will enable Seoul to enhance a strategic vision reflecting its interests and priorities in the region over the longer term. The three-headed strategy mentioned in this article can help Seoul to mold its middle power identity and Indo-Pacific commitment in line with regional principles and norms. The extent to which this perception matters to the South Korean government might depend on Moon’s strategic outlook and his promptitude to advance South Korea’s status as a resilient middle power.

Source: Tam-Sang Huynh, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/south-koreas-free-and-open-indo-pacific-dilemma-2/>, 06 Jul 2021

Recent Developments

US and Japan conduct wargames amid rising China-Taiwan tensions

The US and Japan have been conducting war games and joint military exercises in the event of a conflict with China over Taiwan, amid escalating concerns over the Chinese military’s assertive activity. US and Japanese military officials began serious planning for a possible conflict in the final year of the Trump administration, according to six people who requested anonymity. The activity includes top-secret tabletop war games and joint exercises in the South China and East China seas. Shinzo Abe, then Japan’s prime minister, decided in 2019 to

significantly expand military planning because of the threat to Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. This work has continued under the administrations of Joe Biden and Abe's successor, Yoshihide Suga, according to three of the people with knowledge of the matter.

The US and Japan have become alarmed as China has flown more fighter jets and bombers into Taiwan's air defence identification zone, including a record 28 fighters on June 15. The Chinese navy, air force and coast guard have also become increasingly active around the Senkaku, which are administered by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan. China insists that it wants to unify Taiwan with the mainland. While it says it wants peaceful unification, it has not ruled out the use of force to seize control of Taiwan.

"In many ways, the People's Liberation Army drove the US and Japan together and toward new thinking on Taiwan," said Randy Schriver, who served as the top Pentagon official for Asia until the end of 2019. "Assertiveness around the Senkaku and Taiwan at the same time drives home the issue of proximity."

The US has long wanted Japan, a mutual defence treaty ally, to conduct more joint military planning, but Japan was constrained by its post war pacifist constitution. That obstacle was eased, but not eliminated, when the Abe government in 2015 reinterpreted the constitution to allow Japan to defend allies that came under attack. As the two allies started to bolster their joint planning, Japan asked the US to share its Taiwan war plan. The Pentagon demurred because it wanted to focus on boosting co-ordination with Tokyo in phases. One former US official said the eventual goal was for the allies to create an integrated war plan for

Taiwan. Two of the people said the US military and Japanese self-defence forces had conducted joint exercises in the South China Sea that had been couched as disaster relief training.

The countries have also held more military exercises around the Senkaku, which could also help prepare for any conflict with China over Taiwan, which is just 350km west of the islands. "Some of the activities we're training on are highly fungible," said Schriver, adding that

exercises such as an amphibious landing in a "disaster relief scenario" would be "directly applicable" to any conflict around the Senkaku or the Taiwan Strait. Mark Montgomery, a retired admiral who commanded the USS George Washington aircraft carrier strike group and was director of operations at Indo-Pacific command between 2014 and 2017, said the Pentagon needed a "comprehensive understanding" of the support Japan could provide in the case of a conflict. "As a crisis grows and Japan is potentially drawn in as a participant, the US will need to understand how Japan could support or enable US operations," he added.

US and Japanese diplomats are examining the legal issues related to any joint military action, including access to bases and the kind of logistical support Japan could provide US forces engaged in a conflict with China.

In the event of a war over Taiwan, the US would rely on air bases in Japan. But that raises the odds that Tokyo would be dragged into the conflict, particularly if China tried to destroy the bases in an effort to hobble the US. One official said the US

China has flown more fighter jets and bombers into Taiwan's air defence identification zone

The countries have also held more military exercises around the Senkaku, which could also help prepare for any conflict with China over Taiwan

and Japan needed to urgently create a trilateral sharing mechanism with Taiwan for information about Chinese naval and air force movements, especially around the Miyako Strait to the east of Taiwan, which is covered by Japanese sensors from the north-east and Taiwanese sensors from the south-west.

“Some of that kind of data is shared between Taiwan and the US, and between Japan and the US. But we have no direct sharing trilaterally,” the official said. “You cannot start setting that up in the middle of a contingency. You have to do it now.” Another official said the three nations had taken a small but important step in 2017 by agreeing to share military aircraft codes to help identify friendly aircraft.

Taiwanese officials and US and Japanese sources said co-operation had since risen significantly, driven by the growing awareness in Japan about the importance of Taiwan — which is 110km from Yonaguni, the westernmost island in the Japanese archipelago — for its own security. “The Japanese government has increasingly recognised, and even acknowledges publicly, that the defence of Taiwan equates to the defence of Japan,” said Heino Klinck, a former top Pentagon official who oversaw military relations with Japan and Taiwan from late 2019 until the end of the Trump administration. The Japanese defence ministry said Tokyo and Washington continued to update their joint planning following the 2015 revision of guidelines that underpin the military alliance, but declined to provide any detail. The Pentagon did not comment.

Source: Demetri Sevastopulo and Kathrin Hille, Financial Times,

<https://www.ft.com/content/54b0db59-a403-493e-b715-7b63c9c39093>, 01 Jul 2021

Military Strategy/ Diplomacy – QUAD

Assessing the Trend of the Indo-Pacific Strategy

After the U.S. has put forward its Asia-Pacific strategy in 2017, many commentators believed that the concept was artificial and lacking in political foundation, concluding therefore that it would not take off. However, contrary to this prediction, the development of the Indo-Pacific strategy in recent years shows a trend of strengthening, and this trend is likely to continue in the near future. On the whole, the factors driving the Indo-Pacific strategy forward are clearly stronger than the constraints.

Prospects for the Squad-based Indo-Pacific

The political will of the U.S., Japan, India and Australia to foster the Indo-Pacific cooperation is increasing rather than weakening, which is the most important basis for further progress of the Indo-Pacific. Although the concept and objectives of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the four countries are not exactly the same and cannot be equated, and the Indo-Pacific has not yet produced tangible security effects and economic benefits for its participants, the four countries have a consensus on promoting cooperation within this framework, with this consensus becoming increasingly consolidated. With the interest of all the four participants, it is natural for the Indo-Pacific to continue to grow— though the extent of this remains uncertain.

At the same time, the relations between the four countries with China are in decline, and there is no possibility of directional improvement in the near future, which is also an important background for the future of the Indo-Pacific strategy. This situation will stimulate the four countries to get closer, thus naturally contributing to the development of the Indo-Pacific. Among these, the change in China-India relations has a greater impact. The relations between China and the United States, Japan, and Australia have been subject to strategic tensions, so the impact of them as variables is relatively consistent. India has been abiding by its non-aligned policy and pursuing diplomatic independence and balance in great power relationship. It has been cautious to join a group with an obvious anti-China intention.

However, the Galawan Valley conflict between China and India, which took place in June 2020, has brought China-Indian relations to a new low, while others see this as a turning point in the Sino-Indian relations, where India is likely to adjust its balanced and cautious policy to take advantage of the Quartet's role for its security. One sign of this realignment may be the joint naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal in November 2020 of India, the U.S., Japan and Australia.

Towards cementing Quad

The Indo-Pacific is likely gradually moving from intangible concepts to concrete formal or informal mechanisms. In this process, Quad, the dialogue mechanism of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia, will play a key role. Each of the four has their own ideas about the Indo-Pacific, but this is only a conceptual closeness, and the Quad is the link that connects them together.

Without the Quad, perspectives of the four nations on the Indo-Pacific would have been scattered, and it was the Quad that made them a whole.

Originally unrelated to the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Quad was set up as a dialogue mechanism between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia to coordinate relief efforts after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, but it fell silent after only one meeting in 2007. With the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy emerging, the Quad was reactivated as the Quad 2.0.

The factors driving the Indo-Pacific strategy forward are clearly stronger than the constraints.

Since 2017, the frequency of Quad activities has increased, with one or two ministerial dialogues held almost every year. It has broadened its agenda to include issues relating to security, democracy, economy, international order, cyber and infrastructure and so on. In March 2021, it has been upgraded from the ministerial level to the level of heads of state, which is a sign that Biden, far from abandoning Trump's diplomatic legacy, intends to make it stronger and bigger.

With the close inter-relationship between the Indo-Pacific and the Quad, further development of the Quad almost equals the process of institutionalization of Indo-Pacific. The more Quad develops, the more the institutionalization of Indo-Pacific progresses. In the future, it is quite possible for the Indo-Pacific to form its mechanism framework on the basis of Quad, but to what extent is another question.

NATO in Asia?

Much attention has been paid to whether Quad will become "Asia's NATO." No doubt, the U.S. would

The key to Quad's transformation into a military bloc lies with India

like Quad to go along this trajectory. But in today's international political environment, the possibility of establishing a NATO-style international military alliance is no longer likely. Not being "Asia's NATO" does not mean that Quad will have no security and military function.

Without being a formal military bloc, it can still act as a mechanism of security coordination. However, building a large-scale hostile and overtly multinational military alliance is more difficult, especially since its target is almost public: China. For America and for China, military security is of particular importance, however it would be too narrow to see Quad from a military perspective only. The significance of Quad is beyond purely military and security considerations, its influence and functions are much broader.

The United States already has military allies, such as Japan and Australia, so the key to Quad's transformation into a military bloc lies with India. For India, setting up a military alliance is a significant and fundamental issue relating to its basic political, diplomatic and security policies. Security cooperation is one thing, and joining a military alliance is another. To form a military alliance for India implies tying itself to a chariot that it can't fully control. Taking this step may be very difficult for India unless there is a massive war threat.

Indo-Pacific as a global point of interest

The Indo-Pacific has the possibility to expand, that is, to draw new countries into the Indo-Pacific strategy, with South Korea, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Vietnam and other ASEAN countries as the main objects. If successful, this will expand the Indo-Pacific's scope and provide it with a new impetus. The expansion of the Indo-Pacific may take the form of absorbing new members, that is,

new countries will join the Indo-Pacific, and thus Quad will be enlarged. It may also take the form of Quad Plus to form a flexible dialogue with other countries. In fact, low-level Quad Plus track-two communications have been in place for years. These may be lifted to a ministerial level or even higher.

Europe is also formulating and implementing its own Indo-Pacific Strategy, which is an additional stimulus for the development of the Indo-Pacific. The French Ministry of Defense published the French Indo-Pacific Defense Strategy in May 2019. In April 2021, France announced that it was joining the Indo-Pacific Initiative (IPOI) proposed by India in 2019 and sent its sole aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle, into the Indian Ocean to participate in joint

exercises with India. The German government issued policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region in September 2020, entitled "Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together." At the same time, the UK has also decided

to make the Indo-Pacific the focus of its future diplomacy and security, making a strategic shift to the Indo-Pacific. This has been reflected in the document published in March 2021 with the title "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy." Like France, Britain has sent its only operational aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, on a tour to the Indo-Pacific. Most importantly, in April 2021, with the push of France, Germany and the Netherlands, the EU launched its own Indo-Pacific Strategy, called the "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". This signifies that moving towards to Indo-Pacific has also become the common strategy of the 27 EU countries.

Although there are many differences in the Indo-Pacific strategies between the EU and the United

**Moving towards to Indo-Pacific
has also become the common
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States, they also have important commonalities and inherent closeness. This is particularly evident in two aspects: geo-strategically, they all take China as the main target and aim at curbing the rise of China's strategic influence. Ideologically, they both insist on cooperation based on Western values—the U.S. version is adherence to the liberal values; the EU version is cooperation with “like-minded” people. Due to its geographical location and traditional influence, the EU's Indo-Pacific also includes the Arab and African regions, which greatly expands the geographical span of the Indo-Pacific. It can be expected that the Indo-Pacific of Europe and that of the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia will form some sort of a connection, so that the Indo-Pacific is likely to be promoted to a higher level, and its scale and influence will go global.

Economic considerations

Finally, with globalization and regional cooperation deepening, the economic connection of the Indian and the Pacific Ocean regions will naturally go further. Meanwhile, the role of these oceanic regions has been growing in world politics, economy and security, turning them into the world's political and economic center of gravity, attracting players from both inside and outside and making the regions a major arena of international cooperation, competition or confrontation.

Located between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, Southeast Asia nations, Australia, New Zealand, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka are countries of the two Oceans. They have a natural interest in being involved in regional economic cooperation in both the Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. The agenda of the Indo-Pacific covers wide areas, alongside with the geostrategic content, it is also exploiting economic cooperation and trade, environmental protection, infrastructure

construction, regional connection, scientific and technological innovation, service, education, digitalization, anti-pandemic cooperation and so on. Although this cooperation could be used for geopolitical purposes by the U.S., for the regional countries concerned cooperation in these practical areas could be of interest, even if they do not necessarily share the anti-China goal and do not like to take sides between the U.S. and China. All these factors are favoring the connection of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions, particularly in economic terms, though it does not justify the confrontational nature of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States.

The agenda of the Indo-Pacific covers wide areas, alongside with the geostrategic content

Source: Zhao Huasheng, Modern Diplomacy Defense, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/06/03/assessing-the-trend-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>, 03 June 2021

Military Strategy/ Diplomacy – QUAD

QUAD Masquerading NATO

While the gravity of geo-politics and geo-economics have witnessed a shift from Transatlantic to Indo-Pacific, Quad has gained in currency. The Quad is a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of India, Japan, the United States, and Australia with the potential of becoming a mutual defense alliance like NATO. The growing aggression of China in Asia has impacted the Quad members and resulted in like-minded nations collaborating to counter the common belligerent nation, China. NATO was formed to counter the USSR's growing power during the Cold War. China challenges America's hegemony and alters the global order; Quad can be the NATO of the twenty-first century. The Cold War was based on the ideological differences between the United States and USSR that resulted in defense and economic competition between the

two superpowers. The Chinese defying American hegemony and taking power in Asia. This is Cold War II. Similar to the Cold War, the United States and China have ideological differences on liberty (Ideological) and pursuits of happiness (Economic) that challenge the global order. The Quad counters similar challenges like NATO during the Cold War, with China's growing aggression in the South China sea, trade war with the United States, border disputes with India, and the trade restrictions on Australia are contributing to the strengthening of bonds among members to counter China's global arrogance.

Cold War II

The impacted geopolitics of the world due to China's power politics has created insecurity for a liberal international order, threatening the hegemony of the United States. The Cold War has returned to world politics with a two-decade break-up in the twenty-first century. Similar to the USSR in the Cold War, China is investing intensively to build allies in developing nations with the Belt and Road initiative to achieve its hegemonic status ambition. The Quad members are balancing players against China's aggression in Indo-pacific. The United States supported the NATO allies to fight the USSR. In the present geopolitical context, the US has taken a firm stand in support of democratic allies in Asia to counter China and in calling for engagement with Taiwan. During the Cold war, USSR expanded its military capabilities and heavily invested in nuclear arsenal to fight the United States but in the twenty-first century, the form of war has evolved to be more cyber and space-oriented, and China's growing cyber and space power can be countered by Quad, Asia's NATO. Quad members are technologically sound and superior.

The Quad counters similar challenges like NATO during the Cold War

The United States, along with its allies, is now challenging China on world forums by taking a stronger stance against China's human rights violation in Xinjiang and democratic protest in Hong Kong. The support by the United States and its allies for littoral states in Nine-Dash line, Taiwan, Thailand, and Bhutan are likely to increase in coming years that will intensify the Cold War II between the two. China's race against the United States and resultant geopolitical developments is similar to the Cold War between the USSR and the United States because it is fighting another Communist regime with the same characteristics as the USSR. With China's growing economic and military strength, it is contesting for the world superpower similar to the USSR after World War II. According to Thucydides' trap, an apparent tendency to war exists when an emergent power threatens to supplant an existing great power as an international hegemon. The Quad in case of another faceoff will stand tall against China's alliance with Pakistan, Russia, and Iran just like NATO stood against the USSR.

Quad's Prospective

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue started in 2007. It resurfaced in 2017 out of necessity to balance China's increasing strength in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad has the potential to influence the Indo-Pacific region's geopolitics starting with maritime exercises and Naval cooperation. The grouping of the four countries is based on liberal democratic values, and they have announced a military coalition as like-minded nations. The Quad members are against the growing power and repeated provocation of China and changing power dynamics of the world, the coalition will become the NATO of East due to China's aggressive politics that is disrupting the

liberal international order, values and the United State's hegemony. The future of the Quad lies in evolving aggression of China, it is taking a hard stance against the United States in world forums but due to the underlying ideological differences, China will challenge the United States in economy and military to become the world hegemon in the future, and that will result in the conversion of the Quad: a military coalition, to the Asian NATO a military alliance between the United States, Australia, Japan, and India.

The geo-politics of the twenty-first century also point towards the rapidly changing power dynamics in Asia and the Middle East that will give space to China to exercise its power, the removal of forces from Afghanistan and increasing China's relation with Iran in the Middle East is providing China the opportunity to expand its ideological influence and counter United States hegemony by challenging the world order.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the world order with China's improved ties with weak economies and vaccine diplomacy to influence world politics. While the world economy paused, China made billions of dollars and inched closer to compete with the US in terms of GDP. The COVID-19 pandemic and China's influence over World health organization have challenged United State's hold over global institutions, but the vaccine diplomacy cooperation among the Quad members resulted in increasing success of the Quad and evolving interest in expanding Quad to become the Asian NATO.

India's View on Quad

India is a peace-loving country with friendly ties but after the military standoff in Galwan Valley, India's

interest in the Quad has increased rapidly. India has now taken the bold step of being a proud member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. This highlights the change in the approach of the Indian foreign policymakers concerning the Indo-Pacific region. Due to China's significantly increased activity in the Indo-Pacific region, India has realized that it needs to counter these Chinese initiatives as a Chinese-dominated Indo-pacific region would greatly deter and impact India's external and internal policies. The border dispute between India and China and the military standoff in the Galwan Valley has further impacted relations. S. Jaishankar,

Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2021, denounced speculations about the Quad being Asia's NATO but the growing aggression of China and the continued military standoff on the border is likely to change India's stance on the Quad. The Quad for India is not yet the

military alliance but the coalition of like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The military alliance with the United States through Quad will help India counter China's aggression and build better economic and defense ties with the United States. China's financial support for the South Asian countries, the Belt and Road initiative, and the growing influence of China in the Indian ocean threatens India's national security. With the military alliance of the Quad, India can counter the growing aggression of China and become a regional hegemon.

Masquerading NATO and Conclusion

The South China Sea is adversely affected by China's naval power, the Quad recent coalition exercises counter China's aggression against Island states. Global trade and communication are impacted by China's military advancement in the South China Sea. The coalition of Quad with

The future of the Quad lies in evolving aggression of China

maritime exercises, surveillance in the South China Sea, and support for its allies will change the geopolitics of Asia, it will therefore become Asia's NATO. With the United States military power, the Quad will be able to prevent disruption of international law, trade, and order in Asia. Quad has the potential to fill the vacuum of leadership in Asia and counter China's aggressive policies on the world forum. With the help of the Quad, the Liberal international order will be maintained. The strength of the Quad is in balancing the growing military and economic power in the region.

The formation and the re-emergence of the Quad come with high potential for security alliance in Asia, the Quad is likely to succeed in hybrid war of the twenty-first century because of their combined military capabilities. The Quad also needs to combine forces ideologically and politically on the international forum to fight a common disrupting force China to prevent the world order from plunging into chaos. NATO involved the USSR in the weaponry race and the poor economy of the USSR could not balance against the alliance, similarly, the Quad should form an economic and defense alliance to counter China. NATO with the help of the United States fought an unsustainable Ideology during the Cold War and similarly, in the twenty-first Century, the Quad will counter another communist threat to the liberal international order. It is China's unethical business strategy of debt trap under BRI which is trading money for values, ethos and sovereignty of a nation under the garb of infrastructural development that has unleashed a series of protests in Hungary, Maldives, Samoa and now, Democratic Republic of Congo. China is imposing an existential threat to many nations, liberal ethos, institutional order and the hegemonic power of the United States. This makes the perfect condition for history to repeat

The formation and the re-emergence of the Quad come with high potential for security alliance in Asia

itself and like-minded countries to combine forces. Each time history repeats itself, the price goes up. For China, this could mean losing Taiwan and Hong Kong and a series of massive protests in Xinjiang and Tibet.

For the Quad to succeed, it needs to have a clearer vision for itself. It is significant for individuals from the Quad to be more dynamic and tackle China with

strategic planning. It is likewise critical to show receptiveness and guarantee that all discussion of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' is something beyond a simple motto. India, Japan, and Australia can start to lead the pack in infrastructural

projects, while the United States too should be in any way more supportive of dynamics in pushing ahead the vision of availability. The Quad should zero in on building a powerful territorial conference component and organize with ASEAN countries on issues of local significance. The Quad needs an aggressive approach in the region, and it needs a military capacity building that can counter China's efforts in the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region.

Source: Amit Kumar, Modern Diplomacy Defense, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/06/26/quad-masquerading-nato/>, 26 June 2021

Military Strategy/ Diplomacy – Russia

Russia's Conduct in the South China Sea

As great power competition intensifies in the Indo-Pacific, its impact on the South China Sea (SCS) dispute has been stark, characterised by a more assertive China as well as a renewed focus by the United States on the issue. In addition, ASEAN disunity on the issue has led the Southeast Asian claimants to search for partners to effectively deal with the tensions. Russia — which has sought to

strengthen its pivot to the East even as relations with the West have touched a historic low — has refrained from altering its official policy of neutrality on the SCS dispute amid these developments. Not a direct party to the dispute, Russia has sought to carry out a delicate balancing act, especially given that two of its closest partners in the Indo-Pacific — China and Vietnam — are rival claimants in the SCS.

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union sought to strengthen the recently united socialist Vietnam to deal with China, even sending surface vessels and submarines of its Pacific Fleet to the South China Sea during the Sino-Vietnamese border war. However, by the late 1980s, the Soviet Union and China were looking towards a rapprochement and the active support to Vietnam declined, including in relation to territorial disputes. In the post-Cold War period, Russia has maintained that as a non-party to the dispute, it does not intend to interfere in the issue.

The official position

Russia officially maintains a neutral position on the SCS dispute and has argued against interference by outside powers, calling any such moves “detrimental and counterproductive”. Moscow has called for the dispute to be resolved peacefully without the use of force, following the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It has supported the Declaration on Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and called for the adoption of the Code of Conduct at the earliest opportunity. It has also cautioned against “attempts to “internationalise” the dispute as being unhelpful, especially concerning the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) that was

decided in favour of the Philippines, rejecting China’s nine-dash line claim.

Russia came out in support of China in this case, noting that its stance was based on a legal position that any arbitration should involve the parties involved, and since China did not go to the court, it could not recognise the final ruling. This position, while siding with China on the PCA decision, does not express support for its activities in the SCS.

This also indicates Russia’s intention not to antagonise the Philippines or other Southeast Asian claimants.

Russia officially maintains a neutral position on the SCS dispute

A balancing act

Moscow’s carefully calibrated position on the SCS has been most visible in its close engagement with both Beijing and Hanoi. Vietnam remains its closest economic and defence partner in the region. 84 per cent of its defence imports from 1995 to 2019 were met through Russia; the acquisition of Kilo-class submarines and modern frigates has provided the Southeast Asian nation with a “limited but potent deterrent against China” in the disputed waters. Russia’s oil company Rosneft has also carried out joint energy projects with Vietnam’s state energy company within the disputed nine-dash line.

This long-standing partnership has continued to grow, alongside Moscow’s engagement with China that has touched unprecedented levels in the years following the 2014 Ukraine crisis. While there has been concern that Russia is now more willing to openly support China on the dispute, given the decision to conduct a joint maritime exercise in the South China Sea came just two months after the PCA ruling, Russia has sought to allay such concerns. It has argued that the exercises were not conducted in the disputed waters of the South China Sea.

Experts point to another reason for Russia's active support of China regarding the PCA ruling. In early 2016, there were reports that Ukraine would approach the PCA about a dispute with Russia concerning coastal rights in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, and the Kerch Strait (this eventually happened in September 2016). The precedent set by China in not accepting the arbitration ruling could prove useful for Russia in case of an adverse ruling versus Ukraine. At the same time, differences in the SCS with China also persist, with reports in 2020 that Rosneft has had to stop drilling in Vietnam's EEZ after objections from Beijing; the future of the project remains unclear. While it might seem contradictory to be engaged in close coordination with both sides of a conflict, for Russia it is about more than making a profit from defence sales. These dealings allow it to maintain close relationships with long-standing partners, keeping open an opportunity to act as a facilitator in lowering tensions in case of an outbreak of conflict, prompting Russia to continue its 'two-track strategy' in the SCS.

Only one of many players

Russia's relations with other SCS claimants do not garner as much attention as the two aforementioned actors. This can be attributed to limited Russian engagement with these countries, including Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei. While Russia remains an arms supplier to countries like Malaysia, has signed a military-technical cooperation agreement in 2017 with the Philippines, and was even invited by President Duterte to explore its EEZ in the SCS, these efforts remain limited in nature. Since multiple middle powers are deeply involved in Southeast Asia, Russia is only one of the many players, and with a significantly lower economic and diplomatic presence as compared to several

other stakeholders. There have been efforts in recent years to engage more with countries in the region, but a major shift remains difficult to envisage.

In the long term, Russia has the potential to become a regional energy supplier as well as provide connectivity via the Arctic Northern Sea Route (instead of via the Straits of Malacca), which could mitigate the contradictions in the SCS. However, this only remains a potential at present, and while Russia's presence as an independent player is welcomed in the region, its 'successes' remain limited due to an overall low level of influence. Scholars argue that the Russian effort to maintain this delicate balance is a factor both of the rising

In the long term, Russia has the potential to become a regional energy supplier as well as provide connectivity via the Arctic Northern Sea Route

major power rivalry in the SCS as well as its hedging efforts. In the case of the former, Russia remains an important partner for China but does not openly side with its strategic partner on the dispute. This is because Russia also has its interests in pursuing

a multi-vector foreign policy, which includes engagement with other Southeast Asian states in the region. The apprehension that closer engagement with China would affect Russia's position on the SCS at the expense of Southeast Asian states is yet to be borne out.

With limited regional influence, Russia does not see the benefit in siding with one side over the other and would prefer to continue to act as a neutral party. Amid a heightened US-China rivalry and disunity on ASEAN over the issue, there remains a risk of conflict breaking out, a scenario Russia would like to avoid. It benefits from the status quo, allowing it to improve its regional engagement without explicitly being expected to take sides or negotiate a difficult situation.

Source: Nivedita Kapoor, ORF, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/russias-conduct-in-the-south-china-sea/>, 18 June 2021

Video Links

1. Is China Changing the World order? Where does India stand? A talk with Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Retd.) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggvy_Rv1Xxo
 2. The future of Indo-Pacific Strategy - https://youtu.be/_TyjFHJZYc8
 3. ‘Whatever happens in the Indo-Pacific, ‘it can’t be Australia alone’ - <https://www.skynews.com.au/opinion/whatever-happens-in-the-indopacific-it-cant-be-australia-alone/video/33f54377ad5819ef8184a75718b42324>
 4. A Conversation with Kurt Campbell, White House Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on5brIIIrI>
 5. “World’s eyes on Indo-Pacific – PM Scott Morrison - <https://www.9news.com.au/national/scott-morrison-g7-european-trip-world-focus-on-indo-pacific-pm-says/816dd98d-7ad9-49c7-b697-6c6db5634b1b>
 6. Future of Indo-Pacific Strategy - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5wkdjxFZy8>
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