

The Implications of Indo-Pacific Strategies for Bangladesh *Challenges and Options*

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific Strategies (IPS) is still in development, and participation in something that does not yet exist is challenging. However, we notice that many things are common when we examine the Indo-Pacific region. There are distinctions between Chinese and American soft power. China's soft power manifests through constructing roads, ports, bridges, and schools, whereas the United States focuses mostly on military assets. Some fear that the region would fall victim to the Thucydides Trap, in which a rising state forces an existing power into a conflict that results in the demise of the established power. The Indo-Pacific will play a crucial role in the geostrategic and geo-marine strategic battle between developing nations; it elevates maritime thought in our strategic discourse and is a crossroads of geopolitics, geo-strategy, geo-economics, and geo-energy. As a result, the Indian Ocean has become the epicenter of all geostrategic strife. Bangladesh's location on the Bay of Bengal positions Dhaka at the epicenter of Indo-Pacific talks. The unfettered access of Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal has attracted geo-political interest in recent years. In response, Bangladesh has moved its strategic focus from land-based to maritime, with the Bay of Bengal serving as its 'third neighbor,' displaying its recognition and dedication to the Indo-Pacific. Foreign capital specialists continue to see Dhaka's foreign policy via a geo-political lens despite Bangladesh assuming its role as an Indo-Pacific state. Bangladesh has opted to be a regional leader instead of joining the bloc. This context is vital for comprehending Dhaka's forthcoming Indo-Pacific perspective.

Key Words: Balance of Power and Economic Development; BRI; Geo-strategy; Indo-Pacific Strategies; Quad; Regional Connectivity.

Introduction

Dr. Gurpreet Khurana, the National Maritime Foundation executive director in Delhi, developed the diplomatic term "Indo-Pacific." This strategy was established in response to China's opening in the 1980s. In a 2018 interview with *The Diplomat*, Dr. Khurana stated that the phrase "Indo-Pacific strategy" (IPS) included two essential components. He viewed it as a geo-political construct on the one hand. According to him, the marine underbelly of the Indo-Pacific area should be viewed as a connected organism. He continued by stating that "Indo"-Pacific highlights India's significance and pre-eminence

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as a state, but the term “Asia”-Pacific obscures India’s significance and pre-eminence (Rahman & Semul, 2020).

Moreover, the Trump administration has given the Indo-Pacific strategy top priority. A closer study indicates that people-to-people connection and people-centred diplomacy were central to the Obama administration’s Asia-Pacific policy. The National Maritime Foundation’s executive director Dr. Gurpreet Khurana coined the term “Indo-Pacific” for usage in diplomatic discourse in Delhi. In a 2018 interview with *The Diplomat*, Dr. Khurana stated that the phrase “Indo-Pacific strategy” (IPS) included two essential components. He viewed it as a geo-political construct on the one hand. According to him, the marine underbelly of the Indo-Pacific area should be viewed as a connected organism. He continued by stating that the term “Indo”-Pacific highlights India’s significance and pre-eminence as a state, but the term “Asia”-Pacific obscures India’s significance and pre-eminence. These are his thoughts. This strategy was established in backwash to China’s opening in the 1980s. Moreover, the Trump administration has given the Indo-Pacific strategy top priority. A closer study indicates that people-to-people connection and people-centred diplomacy were central to the Obama administration’s Asia-Pacific policy (Bhattacharjee, 2020).

The IPS is a fledgling idea that has not yet taken form. Predicting the function of diplomacy in this circumstance would therefore be somewhat presumptuous. Diplomacy is unquestionably essential for managing interstate relations. China’s expanding influence and Beijing’s support plans are visible in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) shape. India will have an enormous effect on the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese have efficiently utilized trade policy, investment policy, trade aid, enhancing regional connectivity, infrastructure investment, and banking and monetary policy. BRI is superior to IPS, which is still in development. BRI infrastructure consists of, among other things, roads, ports, bridges, energy connectivity, fiber optic connectivity, satellites, and digital connectivity. China has stepped up to meet the demand for infrastructure investment in the Asia-Pacific region, beset with problems that growing nations must address. Competing dollar for dollar would be challenging, but the Japanese have begun their projects. Asia’s most prominent development donor is Japan (Rahman & Semul, 2020).

The Indo-Pacific region strategically will continue to have an impact on global politics. In some ways, it reinforces the prediction that the expanding Indo-Pacific powers of China, India, and Japan will rule the twenty-first century. India and China are rising as Asia’s superpowers, with China aiming to spread its influence beyond its borders (Castro, 2017). Perhaps one of its manifestations is the Maritime Silk Route. Look East Policy of India has evolved into the Act East Policy. There is a power struggle going on. The term “Indo-Pacific” refers to all of these instances. As a result, this new reality is only normal. However, another minority says this is unnatural and that the Indo-Pacific is a figment of China’s imagination (The Daily Star, 2019).

In the context of South Asia, there are three levels of analysis: the influence of an Indo-Pacific strategy on South Asian politics and strategy in general, how this will be executed

in the context of China's BRI and FOIP led by the Quad, and the methodology (What methodologies and tools will be employed). Will port and heavy industry construction significantly connect the diverse Indian and Pacific Ocean coastlines? How will residents near the ports be impacted? Sometimes, the decision appears to be between jumping on the bandwagon. However, Bangladesh's foreign policy demonstrates that we have profited from both approaches, thus it may be premature to debate whether we have completely realized the promise of BRI or FOIP. We have endeavoured to keep communication with each of these parties (Rahman S. A., 2023).

Will this region now take on the traits of a distinct strategic region? How will the Indian Ocean Region's power politics evolve? Can the regional countries cohabit peacefully? Can the region be viewed as a united regional construct? What are the implications for the China-US rivalry and the ASEAN nations? Some flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific region need states to adapt their foreign policies. These are some questions to think about. There will not, in my opinion, be a single strategic structure. The region's sheer size impedes cohesion, and there are numerous potential flashpoints. This article aims to look at the implications of Indo-specific policies and the difficulty in finding the best geopolitical options for Bangladesh to consolidate its national interests in South Asia. Based on a study of the documents, the content has been provided.

Indo-Pacific Strategies: Theoretical Framework

Sea power theorist, Julian Corbett narrated that sea power is not always about what occurs at sea, but about the consequences of sea power's effect on land: "Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life, or else by fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do" (Corbett, 1918: 67). The sea's dominion has long been at the core of geopolitical debate. Even now, the relevance of ocean-centered global dialogue is rising, not decreasing. In recent decades, the newly established Indo-Pacific phrase has begun to emerge as a worldwide political force. There are several examples of sea power being crucial to global politics and influence dating back to ancient times.

The ancient age bears witness to the importance of maritime power. Oceanic activities have acquired awareness and played a crucial part throughout the history of human activities and existence. The Bronze Age Minoa (c. 2000-1420 bce) acquired prominence as a marine power and the first thalassocracy. As a result of having sea power, the Greek city-states were able to save themselves from Persian domination. In the Peloponnesian wars, Spartan allies were able to protect themselves against Athens' fleet in the same period. Another example is Roman Navy, which gained its supremacy over its rival Carthage in the Punic Wars (264–146 bce) (Bradford, & Bradford, 2022: 1).

From the time of John, I (1385-1433), Portugal grew as a state that operated the exploration of many countries, particularly Africa, and subsequently the Spanish Navy emerged as a sea power state between 1475 and 1492. That year also happened to be the

year of Christopher Columbus' first trip to the Americas. Portugal and Spain formed the first big marine empires during the following century. Between 1618 and 1648, Europe was engulfed in the Thirty Years' War, and the Treaty of Westphalia established an enduring Great Power System in which five nation states—Russia, Austria, Prussia (Germany after 1870), France, and England (Great Britain after 1707)—played prominent roles. The idea was to establish a "balance of power" that would avoid future complete conflicts like the Thirty Years' War.

Theoreticians arose over time to construct naval force doctrines, proposing theories and plans to retain the maritime superiority of the United States of America, Britain, and Europe, and debating theories. Mahan, known as "the father of modern naval history" (Moll, 1963: 131-140.), was one of them. He took a historical approach to the examination of sea power rather than a theoretical one in order to construct generally applicable norms (Albrecht, Tsetsos & Grunwald, 2020: 1-17). The influential book "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History" by Alfred Thayer Mahan explained his ideas on the importance of naval might in determining international affairs.

By controlling seas and naval routes, especially those important routes that are used as most for trade, commerce and transports will facilitate the country. Strategic arrangements and position will lead an economic prosperity and develop of a country. Even control over the seas and sea routes sustain the security and economic growth of a country. Alfred Mahan's Sea power theory, which emphasizes that maritime dominance was crucial for a nation's political and economic prosperity (Mahan, 2020). Mahan's philosophy basically said that: (1) The United States ought to be a world power; (2) Control of the oceans is required for world power status; and (3) The means to retain such control is by a potent Navy (Manship, 1964: 15-30).

According to Mahan, an undivided navy may achieve victory at sea by concentrating its forces appropriately (Gough, 1988: 55-62). This concentration of fleets, according to Mahan, is the most essential tool of naval warfare. The battle fleet's primary way of exercising sea power should be concentrated fire on the opposing fleet (Paret, Craig, & Gilbert, 1986). However, under Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman's geopolitical paradigm, it was viewed as a strategy for establishing maritime dominance for Anglo-American states and their allies by creating conditions in which no continental hegemon formed. According to Wu (Wu, 2018: 786-823), "The inextricable linkage between maritime supremacy and the continental balance of power constitutes the overriding theme of Mahan, Mackinder, and Spykman's geopolitical theories." For all three, the balance of power was not an abstract term that could be applied anywhere, but rather to a specific location: Europe before 1945 (for Mahan and Mackinder) and Europe and East Asia after 1945 (for Spykman) (Rossiter, 2021: 19).

Corbett was primarily concerned with the effectiveness of sea power during conflicts (Albrecht, Tsetsos, & Grunwald, 2020: 1-17). The seminal book "Some Principles of Maritime Strategy," by Julian Corbett, offered important insights into the strategic issues and guiding concepts that underpin naval operations. He sees command over the seas as

the main objective to establish naval influence and creating strategy that ensure naval trade and commerce, shatter enemy's trade and plan own power successfully. Command over the sea will ensure when a country effectively dominates over the sea as well as denies its enemy over the influence over the sea activities, especially for defensive measures or security purposes (Corbett, 2004).

Corbett classified maritime strategy into two types: major strategy and tactical strategy. This includes an examination of international relations as well as economic functions. The minor strategy, which dealt with the real aspects of battle, was the second. The planning and execution of army and navy operations (as well as joint actions) are addressed here (Gough, 1988: 55-62.). Corbett distinguished between maritime and naval strategy. In terms of organizing the mutual interactions between army and navy within a war plan, maritime strategy plays a superior function (Corbett, 1918). Corbett, unlike Mahan, believed that fleet concentration did not have to be a permanent element, and that battles at sea are waged via strategic combinations and decisions that necessitate a degree of flexibility and freedom of movement (Albrecht, Tsetsos & Grunwald, 2020: 1-17).

The book "The Geography of the Peace (1944)" by Nicholas Spykman was his major work in which he outlined his Rimland Theory. According to Spykman, the Rimland is the place that is most strategically important and if any country can establish control over the Rimland, it is the Heartland; can control access to land and land area. He opined that the maritime zone mainly acts as a buffer zone and will function as a central zone or force to maintain the balance of power. A state that is rich and powerful in maritime power can easily use his or her power to gain access to the sea and gain control over it and maintain its influence. Due to which they will establish control over the Heartland as well. Since, sea has been used as a major medium and route of world trade. Therefore, control over maritime areas would give powerful naval nations the opportunity to influence global affairs (Spykman, 1944).

The "Indo-Pacific Strategy" adopted by the United Nations and its allies is congruent with one of the dominant views concerning the interests and security of nations, namely the realism theory. Each actor's principal function is to maximize either its power or security in order to survive themselves or the states in the long run. Power and security are obviously important factors in accomplishing that aim (Richard, 2017). Realists see the world and the events that occur in it as a zero-sum game. The focus of actors is on relative gains (Albrecht, Tsetsos & Grunwald, 2020: 1-17). In a realist perspective, alliances and partnerships instead originate from the congruent concrete interests of two or more individuals at a particular time rather than from shared ideological grounds. To remain in a position of power and be able to respond to threats is the aim of both solutions (Richard, 2017).

The worldwide power in the globe is determined by sea power. Since Thucydides established thalassocracies as representatives of international power as a way to maintain the "balance of power," The naval armaments competition before the First World War and during the Cold War serve to underscore this realist understanding of maritime

power. In all instances, the parties concerned pursued the objective of amassing strong naval forces in order to be in a stronger position than their rivals in the event of assault. While democratic nations encourage collaboration among themselves based on shared interests that go beyond simple survival, liberal states are motivated by egoism. International anarchy is a topic that is discussed in liberalism as well (Albrecht, Tsetsos & Grunwald, 2020: 1-17).

As opposed to Realism, sea power in Liberalism should be regarded as a collective force that supports the advancement of liberal standards and cannot just be considered in terms of national interests. By controlling the oceans, maritime power gives the ability to safeguard marine common goods while promoting free commerce and liberalism. This is further demonstrated in a document released by US navy officials, which attests to the fact that US maritime power collaborates with others to advance prosperity and security (Corps, Navy & Guard, 2007). As a result, the Indo-Pacific region only began to garner geopolitical attention in the late 2010s as part of the post-clash of civilizations international order, primarily due to Australian concerns in the 1970s as previously indicated.

Although the term Indo-Pacific itself has existed for many years, it was thus with new “ideational forces” (Hijar-Chiapa, 2020: 78-93) and by virtue of a gravitational power that the Indo-Pacific rapidly emerged as “both a region and an idea” (Medcalf, 2020). The Indo-Pacific has significantly changed during the past ten years, both strategically and geographically, driven by the need to forge a common vision for achieving shared regional objectives (Mishra, 2019). The term 'Indo-Pacific' has been used for a long time in geographical arena but its political use is more recent. The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are included in the geographical term "Indo-Pacific" (Chen, 2018). Under the Obama administration's rebalancing policy towards Asia, the phrase "Indo-Pacific" was first used by the US government. However, under the administration, "Indo-Pacific" did not have a distinct and cohesive geographic description.

For instance, South and Southeast Asia was the geographic emphasis of the "Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor" program, which was unveiled by the US Secretary of State John Kerry at the US-India Strategic Dialogue in June 2013 (Haruko, 2020). Additionally, the "Indo-Pacific" was described as "the vast littoral arc stretching from South Africa to Australia" by the Assistant Secretary of the US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs in April 2014 (White House, 2017). These like-minded governments, which view the Indo-Pacific as a "strategic space" (Jimbo, 2019: 7-16), have developed policies that are gradually influenced by geostrategic thinking. Since 2010, it has steadily ingrained itself into the vocabulary of several nations' foreign policies (He & Li, 2020: 1-7), particularly those of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States (Chacko, 2014: 433-452). Hillary Clinton mentioned that the US was considering expanding its alliances with Australia beyond the Pacific to Indo-Pacific and even global (He, 2018: 149-161). In a public speech delivered in Japan in May 2013 (Bergmann,

2013), India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also used the term Indo-Pacific to describe the region (He, 2018: 149-161).

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The ability and position of a country will create a position to influence over other states' diplomatic decision in favor of the country which has the position and influence over the seas and sea power. Also, such situation and position will lead the acquisition of national interests, creating alliances and preserve influence in the world stage. Alfred Mahan's Sea power theory, which emphasizes that maritime dominance was crucial for a nation's political and economic prosperity (Mahan, 2020). Mahan's philosophy basically said that: (1) The United States ought to be a world power; (2) Control of the oceans is required for world power status; and (3) The means to retain such control is by a potent Navy (Manship, 1964: 15-30).

The seminal book "Some Principles of Maritime Strategy," by Julian Corbett, offered important insights into the strategic issues and guiding concepts that underpin naval operations. He sees command over the seas as the main objective to establish naval influence and creating strategy that ensure naval trade and commerce, shatter enemy's trade and plan own power successfully. command over the sea will ensure when a country effectively dominates over the sea as well as denies its enemy over the influence over the sea activities, especially for defensive measures or security purposes. To conduct a war or establish a better position in warfare naval forces should work in line with ground forces.

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The term "Indo-Pacific" is used by the United States as part of a rebalancing policy towards Asia, however there is no precise and comprehensive geographic definition of the word. Additionally, the Assistant Secretary of the US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs defined "Indo-Pacific" as "the vast littoral arc stretching from South Africa to Australia" in April 2014 (Jaiswal & Bhatt, 2021: 1-9).

Japan was the first country that advocated the 'Indo-Pacific' idea proposed by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2012 with its partnership with Australia, and India, in addition to The United States (the participants in the original 2007 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or "Quad") makes the famous "democratic security diamond" (Abe, 2012). In 2017, the idea was revived under the name "Quad 2.0." Abe's 2016 adoption of Japan's new "open and free Indo-Pacific strategy" is intended to emphasize the economic and security ties between Asia and African countries, especially in the infrastructure sector (He & Li, 2020: 1-7).

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During Donald Trump's first trip to Asia as US president in late 2017 (He, 2018: 149-161), the phrase 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) dominated headlines (White House, 2017). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited President Donald Trump to an Asia trip during which Trump used the term Indo-Pacific prominently. Then this term reemerged and was revived by the Quad countries' ventures (India, the US, Australia, and Japan). On several occasions, this term was repurposed as a new expression, such as "Free and Fair Indo-Pacific" by top Trump Administration officials, including former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, as well as Abe's administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy initiative (2016) (Jaiswal & Bhatt, 2021: 1-9).

The United States administration has been releasing a series of essential documents for some time (Paskal, 2021). The US Navy renamed its Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command. Many analysts referred to the name change as a strategic shift (US Government, 2017: 25). Which will shift America's focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific (Ali, 2018). It added, 'A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.' One of the reasons for this is that over time, China is strengthening its position in the Indo-Pacific region and rearranging the power structure of the region by empowering itself militarily. By doing this, they are able to influence other countries' policies, foreign relations, and economies (US Department of Defense, 2019).

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), which was published in February 2022, highlights the region's importance to core US interests and acknowledges the challenges posed by China (The White House, 2022). This version of the IPS differs from the one pursued by the Trump Administration. Under the Biden Administration, there is a greater emphasis on cooperation with regional allies and a recognition of the need to strengthen economic presence in the Indo-Pacific. To achieve this, an Indo-Pacific Economic Framework has been proposed, aiming to counter China's dominance in areas such as economics, technology, and foreign policy within the region (Atkinson, 2022).

Beijing has been actively pursuing military bases in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, seeking to establish a strong foothold in the Bay of Bengal. This expansion has raised the geopolitical stakes in the Indo-Pacific region (Hardy, 2019: 265-280). Furthermore, the formation of the Australia, United States, and United Kingdom military and technology pact, known as AUKUS, has further heightened the significance of the Indo-Pacific region in terms of its geopolitical implications (William Choong and Sharon Seah, 2022).

BRI and FOIP: A Shifting Power Balance in the Indo-Pacific

Due to the shifting of the balance of power in the global process, the liberal order led by the USA has been under constant pressure to defend its position as the world order. It is insufficient to argue that the Cold War was merely a decades-long battle between the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead, the Cold War altered the international system, resulting in a liberal world order. But from the middle of the last decade, the growth of rival power blocs appears to have put US primacy in jeopardy (Layne, 2012). Because of the progressive income movement from the North to the South and their worldviews, the “emerging powers” have consolidated their places in the international system. One group supports the current global governance system, while the other wishes to alter the post-World War II liberal order because it is unjust to grow powers (Florini, 2011) (Terhalle, 2011). However, this research does not entirely picture the Indo-Pacific power balance. On the one hand, major rising powers such as India work together with other rising countries such as China, Russia, and Brazil in organizations such as BRICS and the G-20 to change the way the world is governed. On the other hand, India and the United States have come together in an effort to stop China from establishing a dominant position in this region.

The balance of power thesis asserts that China is the revisionist or challenger power to the current global process since China's emergence is viewed as an increasing threat to the unipolar world led by the United States, despite China's stated desire for a “peaceful ascent.” The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP), another term for the Indo-Pacific Strategy, can therefore be viewed as a balanced response to China's “power transition” issues. Under this policy, the United States is balancing itself internally by increasing its military, etc., and balancing itself externally in the Indo-Pacific area by forging new alliances and bolstering old ones (Bhattacharjee, 2020).

Australia, India, The United States, and Japan have revived the Quad, a former international organization that no longer exists. They aim to establish a new dictation-based security and economic framework for the Indo-Pacific. Despite the organization's youth, it appears that the four democracies intend to use it as a counterweight to China's BRI projects. The "balance of power" theory explains why the United States is attempting to contain China, but it does not explain why Australia, Japan, and India are allied with the United States in the Quad since it assumes that weaker states will automatically ally to counterbalance the power that is already in place (Manicom & O'Neil, 2010). According to this viewpoint, Japan, India, and Australia must have balanced China against the United States, not the other way around. The "balance of danger" concept proposed by Walt aids in resolving this issue by providing four crucial ways to quantify "threat" from one state to another. The "balance of threat" idea considers a state's anticipated hostile intents in addition to its location, population, and military strength (Walt, 1985).

Why has The Indo-Pacific arisen as a regional framework for the US strategy?

As tensions between the US and China grew, the Obama administration refocused US efforts on the Asia-Pacific region to stop China from taking over the area. But after it was first announced in 2013 as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), BRI shortly became China's top geo-political priority. After the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, China became the world's most important financial centre. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) says that between 2016 and 2030, Asian economies will need to spend \$26 trillion on infrastructure (Asian Development Bank, 2019). China made the BRI in response to the demand. It includes the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Beijing has stressed that the BRI is not a threat to the current liberal international order, but rather an addition to it (MoFA, 2007).

The US Indo-Pacific vision is a government-wide plan to make the Indo-Pacific an open and free region where sovereign, independent nations can live in peace. The vision puts the economy, the government, and security at the top of the list. It comes from the fact that the US is an Indo-Pacific country with many connections to the area. The United States works with key allies like Bangladesh to protect and strengthen a rules-based system in the Indo-Pacific that follows norms like peaceful dispute resolution, liberty of navigation, an open and transparent investment climate, and government institutions that are held accountable (The Daily Star, 2019).

Bangladesh has many of the same goals for making the Indo-Pacific a more prosperous and safer place to live. Its strategic location and quickly growing economy put it in an excellent position to play an important role in the region. In order to reach this goal, the US has strengthened its long-term security cooperation with Bangladesh. But the US and its partners in the Indo-Pacific think China can be cocky because the BRI could be used as a key factor for economic statecraft to increase China's political dominance. For example, the BRI/MSRI umbrella programs have made China a power in the Indian Ocean, even though it doesn't have a navy that can operate in blue water or a group of

foreign bases. Beijing has access to partner governments' ports and naval facilities (Kostecka, 2011) (Brewster, 2017).

Consequently, some academics contend that the Indo-Pacific idea is not a logical extension of international power and economic redistribution from the North to the South. Another significant objective is accelerating private-sector-led economic growth, notably through US enterprises with a track record of supporting innovation and strengthening labor standards. In 2017, the United States' bilateral commerce with the Indo-Pacific area totalled \$1 trillion. In addition, direct US investment in the region exceeded \$940 billion, making the United States the largest foreign investor (Rahman & Semul, 2020).

Indo-Pacific Strategy: Bangladesh's Challenges and Handling Strategy

As the competition among major nations in the Indo-Pacific Region intensifies, the Bay of Bengal and its South Asian coasts are rapidly gaining economic and strategic significance. The Bay connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and its recent economic growth makes it an important link between East, Southeast, and South Asia (Haacke, 2019). Bangladesh participated in this regional economic achievement despite being a former colony with a relatively low economy. It did so because, by 2024, it hopes to transition from Least Developed Country (LDC) to Middle Income Country (MIC). The country's economic growth has been aided by the industrial sector's rapid expansion and a significant push to upgrade infrastructure (Rahman S. A., 2023).

Bangladesh doesn't try to define the Indo-Pacific region at the point where different parts of the world meet. By not calling the Indo-Pacific a "region," Dhaka's point of view makes things even easier to understand. In place of this, Bangladesh wants the Indo-Pacific region to be free, open, safe, inclusive, and based on international legal systems, prosperous for everyone (Kuik, 2016). By not going into detail about its physical limits and the laws that govern them, Dhaka tries to be as flexible as possible in the face of growing competition. This is shown by Bangladesh calling its policy position document a "outlook" instead of a "strategy." Even though it hasn't been released yet, people are looking forward to the Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh. Early accounts show that the book has two parts. First, Outlook will talk about where Bangladesh is in the Indo-Pacific regarding the opportunities and problems that its location brings. Second, the Outlook is based on three related ideas: security, connectivity, and long-term growth (Yasmin, 2023).

The GDP growth rate in Bangladesh will be the highest in this region, at 8% (Asian Development Bank, 2019). The Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector has been critical to this expansion. In 2018, it supported over 4.5 million employments and accounted for about 80% of all Bangladeshi exports (Robinson, 2018). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is critical for Dhaka to diversify its exports and enhance its infrastructure to maintain its prosperity while moving up the industrial value chain. As a result, any significant power

clash or increase in competition among regional and global powers in the Indo-Pacific Region will significantly impact Bangladesh's progress (Rahman & Semul, 2020).

For Bangladeshi policymakers, SLOC in the Bay of Bengal and the larger Indo-Pacific maritime region is becoming more important from a strategic point of view. Around 82 percent of the country's international trade goes through these sea lanes. This includes exporting ready-made clothes and importing raw materials, as well as crude oil and liquid natural gas (LNG), which help Bangladesh's manufacturing sector grow (Karim, 2018). So, any convicted regional or global actor along these Indo-Pacific marine lanes threatens the country's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2041 and its security.

Bangladesh's foreign policy is best understood and interpreted through strategic hedging, a way of dealing with problems that many other South Asian and Southeast Asian states use. In the years after the Cold War, when international relations theorists saw that traditional tools weren't enough to explain how small and middle powers handled their foreign policy in a highly volatile and uncertain global environment, especially in the face of a rising power like China, hedging became popular (Rahman & Semul, 2020).

Bangladesh intends to maintain equidistance from this major power conflict and unwillingness to balance or bandwagon. Bangladesh's foreign policy heritage of neutrality informs Dhaka's stance in this great power struggle, as articulated by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina: "Our foreign policy is very clear: cordial relations with everyone; what China and the United States are doing is between them" (Robinson, 2018). The majority of South Asian lesser states, including Bangladesh, have thus far maintained a reasonable distance from the balancing game of the major countries. In the absence of a clear adversary, however, simple equidistance may not be sufficient for these minor and intermediate powers in South Asia. As a result of rising competition between powerful nations in the Bay of Bengal, the Indo-Pacific Region, and its South Asian littorals are rapidly gaining strategic and economic significance. In addition to connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Bay links East, Southeast, and South Asia due to its recent economic success (Haacke, 2019). Bangladesh has participated in this regional economic achievement despite its colonial past and severe economic deprivation, as it aims to transition from the Least Developed Country (LDC) to Middle Income Country (MIC) by 2024. The country's economic growth has been boosted by rapid industrial sector growth and a significant effort to upgrade infrastructure.

With no obvious adversary in sight, Bangladesh's adoption of "Forces Goal 2030" in 2009 to modernize its armed forces can be regarded as part of the country's hedging strategy. The main goal is to build a "three-dimensional force capable of conducting multi-platform warfare" to preserve Bangladesh's marine space and resources in the Bay

of Bengal, which is gaining popularity due to the country's expanding industrial and energy sectors (Mushtaq, 2018).

Advancing Geo-political surface

Bangladesh's armed forces have been heavily outfitted with Chinese military equipment since the 1980s, making it the second-largest purchaser of Chinese arms, accounting for 19% of China's overall defense export. China remained Bangladesh's leading arms supplier between 2013 and 2017, accounting for 71 percent of the market, while Russia rose to second place, accounting for 16 percent of the market (Pubby, 2018). China has demonstrated a greater interest in defense cooperation with Bangladesh in recent years. It is possible that other large nations could soon follow suit. As a result, Bangladesh has begun to slowly diversify its sources of military equipment, making substantial acquisitions from the United States, Europe, and most recently India.

As part of its strategy to reduce risk, Bangladesh has said it wants to take part in a wide range of international forums that deal with connectivity, non-traditional security cooperation, energy cooperation, regional integration, economic development, and disaster management, among other things. Bangladesh's participation in international projects like BRI, BBIN-EC, BIMSTEC, and IORA has given it access to foreign direct investment, energy, and infrastructure funding, along with the regional cooperation and integration process, all of which are needed to keep its fast economic growth going. Also, these operations give Dhaka diplomatic flexibility as it navigates a changing political landscape in the Indo-Pacific (UNB, 2023).

Even though the Indo-Pacific Outlook hasn't been released yet, rumors have been going around about what it says because of recent media attention on Bangladesh's growing role in the Indo-Pacific. Observers in Bangladesh might think that the draft Outlook emphasizes the neutral position of Bangladesh and its primary and long-term interests in the Indo-Pacific, while some in the West might see a tilt toward the United States. In order to reach its goals for development, Bangladesh would rather keep equal ties with all regional and non-regional groups than become exclusive (Yasmin, 2023).

Maintain equal cohesion with all regional and non-regional actors instead of being exclusive in pursuing its development goals.

The future of Bangladesh will be "open to all." Even though this language is expected because of Dhaka's business ties, it is more likely that Dhaka looks at the Indo-Pacific from the point of view of its own economy and security, not as a political bloc. Bangladesh is now seen as a trading country instead of one that depends on foreign aid. This makes it harder for the country to understand and work in a world that is divided between the US and China. Bangladesh's importance in world politics makes it more valuable to both the US and China, as shown by their growing interest in the country. Bangladesh wants to be a high-middle-income country by 2031. It must work well with its neighbors and other countries to do this. The Indo-Pacific Outlook will not help Bangladesh's geo-political goals. This article will look at specific cooperation,

partnership, and inclusion issues in the Bay of Bengal to help bring about new marine opportunities there. So, Dhaka is in the best place to take advantage of its opportunities and reach its goals.

Conclusion

The “Asian Century,” or the move of geo-political gravity to the Indo-Pacific, has brought both challenges and opportunities to the countries in the region. The desire to have a say in new alliances, defense, or huge infrastructure deals, as well as to set rules for this region, has led to a complicated web of security ties. Even though this was a huge power war, Bangladesh tried to keep a delicate balance and avoid anything that could be seen as favoring one side over the other. Article 25 of the Constitution outlines rules for keeping good relationships with other countries. These rules form the basis of Bangladesh’s foreign policy. Article 25 of the United Nations Charter, for example, talks about the need to promote international peace by staying out of other countries’ business and dealing with security issues in line with the Charter’s international rules and principles.

Bangladesh was founded in 1971 as a small, independent country in the middle of a bipolar system. The country’s constitution had to include neutrality to stay in the middle of the great power conflict. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, Dhaka’s foreign policy was more tied to Washington and Beijing than Moscow. Bangladesh’s foreign policy changed after 1990 as the country became more involved in UN peacekeeping operations. So, Dhaka stepped up its diplomatic work in regional and global forums within the unipolar framework to protect international law, as the constitution says it should. Since then, Bangladeshi leaders have said that the sovereignty and safety of a small country like Bangladesh depend on multilateralism and following international laws. Multilateralism will play an increasingly important role in the Indo-Pacific Region’s hedging strategy, just as it did for Bangladesh and a number of other South Asian countries.

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