

# Indo-Pacific Power Players: How Geopolitical Alliances Determine the Region's Destiny

Hugh S Tuckfield

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AUTHOR

Hugh S Tuckfield

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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region is witnessing a dynamic interplay of geopolitical alliances, with major actors forging strategic partnerships to navigate the complexities of the geo-strategic landscape. Strategic alliances are formal or informal agreements between states that are designed to promote their shared interests and objectives. These alliances are often formed in response to common threats or challenges, and they can be used to deter aggression, promote cooperation, or achieve other strategic goals.

In this policy brief we explore strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific designed to contribute to security, peace, and stability. The specific effects of strategic alliances will vary depending on the specific alliances and the context in which they operate. Strategic alliances can contribute to security, peace, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region in different ways. For example:

- **Strategic alliances can help to deter aggression from other states.** By forming alliances with other states, a country can increase its military power and make it more difficult for other states to attack it. This can help to deter aggression and maintain peace in the region.
- **Strategic alliances can help to promote cooperation on security issues.** By working together, countries can share resources and expertise to address common security challenges. This can help to build trust and confidence between countries, which can contribute to peace and stability in the region.
- **Strategic alliances can help to promote economic development.** By working together, countries can develop trade and investment links. This can help to boost economic growth and prosperity in the region, which can contribute to peace and stability.

In this brief from the International Relations Research Program of the IPSC, we aim to provide an analysis of the geopolitical alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. It is specifically tailored for policymakers, international organizations, and advisors seeking a deeper understanding of the intricacies and implications of these alliances.

## Key Insights

1. The **Indo-Pacific** continues to strengthen its position in the world both in terms of economics and trade, as well as security.
2. The **United States** maintains its position as the leading power in the Indo-Pacific but is challenged by **China's rising power** which manifests as aggression, coercion and growing military capabilities.
3. Strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific constitute a **robust network of bilateral and multilateral alliances, regional institutions, and economic partnerships** to promote **peace, stability, and prosperity** in the Indo-Pacific.
4. Strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific are not static. They are constantly evolving in response to the changing security environment.
5. Strategic alliances serve to **deter aggression, promote stability, and uphold the rules-based order** in the Indo-Pacific.
6. The **future** of the Indo-Pacific will depend on the **balance of power** between the United States, China, and India, and how middle and smaller powers respond in the balancing process.
7. Strategic alliances to deter Chinese aggression can be strengthened through increased **military cooperation**, expanded **economic cooperation** and the promotion of **democratic principles** and values that include supporting **human rights, good governance, and the rule of law**.
8. The United States and its allies need to **engage China in dialogue** to try to resolve any disagreements peacefully through high-level strategic dialogue and working groups on specific issues such as trade and commerce.
9. **NATO** has already taken steps to increase its engagement with the Indo-Pacific, and it is likely to do more in the future.
10. The Indo-Pacific is becoming increasingly interconnected with the **Euro-Atlantic** region.
11. **NATO's expansion to the Indo-Pacific is not inevitable**. There are challenges that NATO would need to overcome before it could expand to the region, including

opposition by some countries to NATO expansion, the need for consensus, and the high cost of expansion.

## Historical Context of Geopolitical Alliances in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region has a rich history of geopolitical alliances that have shaped its contemporary landscape. Historical alliances, such as the United States-Japan security alliance, have been instrumental in maintaining stability and addressing security concerns. These alliances have evolved over time, adapting to changing geo-strategic circumstances and reflecting the shifting power dynamics in the region. Understanding the historical context helps us comprehend the motivations and objectives of current geopolitical alliances in the Indo-Pacific.

### Major Alliances in the Indo-Pacific

Several major alliances play a crucial role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. These alliances exhibit varying degrees of security cooperation, economic integration, and shared regional interests.

#### United States-Japan Alliance

On January 11, 2023, Secretary of State Blinken, Secretary of Defense Austin, Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi, and Minister of Defense Hamada convened the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) in Washington, D.C where they 'reiterated their commitment to champion a free and open Indo-Pacific region, heralding the U.S.-Japan Alliance as the cornerstone of regional peace, security, and prosperity.'<sup>1</sup>

In the meeting, the Ministers agreed that China's foreign policy is aimed at remaking the international order to benefit China and is using its growing political, economic, military, and

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2"). (2023, January 11). Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3265559/joint-statement-of-the-2023-usjapan-security-consultative-committee-22/>

technological power to achieve this goal. This behavior is a serious concern to the Alliance and the entire international community, representing the greatest strategic challenge in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. At the same meeting, they renewed their commitment to advance their partnership with Australia 'by building on outcomes from the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in August 2022 and Trilateral Defense Ministers Meeting in June and October 2022 and by taking advantage of the expanding activities under the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation signed in October 2022'.

They 'reaffirmed their strong support for ASEAN's unity and centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' and 'emphasized the importance of further deepening their cooperation with the Republic of Korea and exploring opportunities for multilateral and trilateral exercises and other activities, including in areas such as ballistic missile defense, anti-submarine warfare, maritime security, search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief.'<sup>2</sup>

This long-standing alliance between the United States and Japan is deeply rooted in shared values, security concerns, and economic ties. The alliance has served as a cornerstone for regional stability, bolstering deterrence capabilities and promoting collective security. The United States and Japan engage in extensive military cooperation, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.S.-Japan security alliance is one of the most important and enduring alliances in the world. It was founded in 1951, following the end of World War II, and has been instrumental in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region ever since.

The alliance is based on the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, which was signed in 1960. The treaty states that the United States will "continue to maintain its forces in and about Japan as necessary to fulfill the United

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<sup>2</sup> UD Department of Defence Fact Sheet Joint statement of the Security Consultative Committee ("2+2") Retrieved from <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jan/11/2003143683/-1/-1/1/FACT-SHEET-JOINT-STATEMENT-OF-THE-2023-US-JAPAN-SECURITY-CONSULTATIVE-COMMITTEE.PDF>



States' commitment to the security of Japan." In return, Japan agrees to "refrain from maintaining or possessing any war potential except as provided for in this Treaty."

The alliance has been strengthened and expanded over the years. In 1996, the two countries signed a Joint Declaration on Security, which outlined a new framework for cooperation in areas such as missile defense, peacekeeping, and disaster relief. In 2015, Japan's parliament amended its constitution to allow the country to exercise collective self-defense, which further expanded the scope of the alliance.

The U.S.-Japan security alliance is a strong and resilient alliance. It has weathered many challenges over the years, including the Cold War, the rise of China, and the September 11 attacks. The alliance is based on shared values and interests, and it is essential to the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Strengths of the alliance:**

- The alliance is based on shared values and interests, including the rule of law, democracy, and free trade.
- The alliance is strong and resilient, and it has weathered many challenges over the years.
- The alliance is backed by the military power of the United States, which is the most powerful military in the world.

### **Weaknesses of the alliance:**

- The alliance is sometimes seen as being too dependent on the United States.
- The alliance can be seen as being too focused on military security, and it can neglect other areas of cooperation, such as economic and cultural cooperation.
- The alliance can be seen as being too inflexible, and it can be difficult to adapt to changing circumstances.

The United States has five other major alliances in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Australia-New Zealand-United States Security Treaty (ANZUS)

This treaty was signed in 1951 and is between the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. It provides Australia and New Zealand with a strong deterrent against aggression. There is a debate whether ANZUS is still relevant in the much-changed security environment of the Indo-Pacific and whether ANZUS can deal with non-traditional security threats including cyberwarfare. But cyberwarfare is considered in other alliances and treaties, including:<sup>3</sup>

- **The ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism (ACCT):** The ACCT is a regional treaty that was adopted in 2007. The treaty includes provisions on combating cyberterrorism.<sup>4</sup>
- **The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF):** The ARF is a forum for dialogue and cooperation on security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The ARF has discussed cyberwarfare on several occasions, and it has established a working group on cyber security.<sup>5</sup>
- **The Shangri-La Dialogue:** The Shangri-La Dialogue is an annual security summit that is held in Singapore. The Dialogue has discussed cyberwarfare on several occasions, and it has called for greater cooperation on cyber security in the region.<sup>6</sup>

## The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA)

The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) are a series of bilateral defence relationships established in 1971 by a series of multi-lateral agreements between

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<sup>3</sup> Platte, J.E., 2023. Bilateral Alliances in an Interconnected Cyber World: Cyber Deterrence and Operational Control in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. *Asian Perspective*, 47(1), pp.75-99.

<sup>4</sup> ASEAN CONVENTION ON COUNTER TERRORISM, Retrieved from <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ACCT.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum, Retrieved from <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/about-arf/>

<sup>6</sup> IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Retrieved from <https://www.iiss.org/events/iiss-shangri-la-dialogue/#:~:text=The%20IISS%20Shangri%20La%20Dialogue%20is%20Asia's%20premier%20defence%20summit,Singapore%20on%20%E2%80%93%20June>

Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, all of which are Commonwealth members that once belonged to the British Empire.<sup>7</sup>

## **Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK)**

This treaty was signed in 1953 and is between the United States and South Korea. It provides for mutual defense in the event of an attack on either country.<sup>8</sup>

## **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)**

This treaty was signed in 1976 and is between 10 countries in Southeast Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. It provides for a code of conduct for relations between the countries in the region.<sup>9</sup>

## **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**

This informal security dialogue was established in 2007 and is between the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. It is focused on cooperation on maritime security, counterterrorism, and disaster relief.<sup>10</sup> Quad partners collaborate across six Leader-level Working Groups on Health Security, Climate, Critical and Emerging Technology, Space, Infrastructure and Cyber.<sup>11</sup> The Quad has no formal treaty or structure, and it is not explicitly focused on military cooperation. The Quad's focus on maritime security is reflected in its

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<sup>7</sup> Keating, G., 2006. The Five Power Defence Arrangements: a case study in alliance longevity. Australian Defence Force Journal, (170), pp.48-61.

<sup>8</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea; October 1, 1953, Retrieved from

[https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H\\_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty\\_1953.pdf](https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty_1953.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia [https://asean-aipr.org/wp-](https://asean-aipr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Treaty-of-Amity-and-Cooperation-in-Southeast-Asia-1976-TAC.pdf)

[content/uploads/2018/07/Treaty-of-Amity-and-Cooperation-in-Southeast-Asia-1976-TAC.pdf](https://asean-aipr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Treaty-of-Amity-and-Cooperation-in-Southeast-Asia-1976-TAC.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> QUAD LEADERS' VISION STATEMENT - ENDURING PARTNERS FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC

JOINT STATEMENT 20 May 2023 Retrieved from <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/quad-leaders-vision-statement-enduring-partners-indo-pacific>

<sup>11</sup>Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Quad Working Groups, 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/quad-2023/quad-working-groups>

activities, which have included exercises and operations to promote freedom of navigation and to counter illegal fishing. The Quad is open to other countries joining.

The Quad, consisting of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, has emerged as a significant geopolitical alliance in the Indo-Pacific. Born out of shared concerns about regional security and maritime issues, the Quad seeks to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

## **AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and United States)**

AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is based on a security agreement, and it is intended to strengthen the ability of each government to support security and defense interests, building on longstanding and ongoing bilateral ties. It will promote deeper information sharing and technology sharing; and foster deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains.<sup>12</sup> This trilateral security partnership was announced in September 2021 and is focused on cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines, cyber, and artificial intelligence. AUKUS's focus on technology is reflected in its goals, which include developing new capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber, and quantum computing. AUKUS includes only three countries, and it is not open to other countries joining.

Set out below is a table summarising and comparing the features of the QUAD and AUKUS.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Quad</b>	<b>AUKUS</b>
<b>Formality</b>	Informal partnership	Formal alliance
<b>Focus</b>	Maritime security, counterterrorism, and disaster relief	Technology, particularly nuclear-powered submarines

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, AUKUS: The Trilateral Security Partnership Between Australia, U.K. and U.S Retrieved from <https://www.defense.gov/Spotlights/AUKUS/>

<b>Membership</b>	Australia, India, Japan, and the United States	Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
<b>Openness</b>	Open to other countries joining	Not open to other countries joining

## ASEAN and ASEAN-led Mechanisms

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plays a central role in shaping geopolitical alliances and fostering regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. With its principle of non-alignment and consensus-based decision-making, ASEAN serves as a platform for dialogue and collaboration. ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), promote security dialogue, conflict resolution, and regional integration.

## Emerging Alliances and Partnerships

The Indo-Pacific is witnessing the emergence of new alliances and partnerships that reflect evolving geopolitical dynamics. In addition to the formation of the QUAD and AUKUS, India has extended its Look East Policy and unofficially has developed the “Necklace of Diamonds” as a counter to China’s “String of Pearls” strategy.

## India's Act East Policy

India’s Act East Policy was unveiled by Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in 2014 held in Myanmar. The Act East Policy is the successor of the Look East Policy. The Look East policy focused on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and economic integration. The Act East Policy is Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the wider Indo-Pacific region with four pillars:

- **Economic engagement:** The Act East Policy is designed to increase trade and investment between India and the countries in the region.

- **Security cooperation:** The Act East Policy is designed to increase security cooperation between India and the countries in the region.
- **Cultural engagement:** The Act East Policy is designed to increase cultural engagement between India and the countries in the region.
- **People-to-people contact:** The Act East Policy is designed to increase people-to-people contact between India and the countries in the region.

India's Act East Policy aims to strengthen its engagement with Southeast Asian nations and the wider Indo-Pacific region. Through strategic partnerships, India seeks to enhance connectivity, economic cooperation, and security collaboration. By actively participating in regional forums and initiatives, India strives to play a more prominent role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific.

India's **Act East Policy** can in part be argued to be a response to China's "**String of Pearls**" strategy of encircling India, wherein China has engaged in the construction of ports, airfields, and other infrastructure in countries around the Indian Ocean, and building a China-Pakistan economic corridor through disputed territory between India and Pakistan. Alternatively, the Act East Policy can be argued as merely an extension of the Look East Policy. Either way, security elements of the Act East Policy and China's String of Pearls are in competition with each other, while others such as trade and investment can coexist, albeit still in competition.

## India's Necklace of Diamonds

India's counter strategy (but not an officially promulgated strategy or policy) to China's "String of Pearls" is known as the "**Necklace of Diamonds**" and is aimed at creating and fostering a competitive network of alliances with military, security, and economic aspects. India's "Necklace of Diamonds" involved expanding India's naval bases and improving relations with strategically placed countries to counter China's String of Pearls strategies. The

strategy mainly involves use of joint defence exercises, naval port calls, reciprocal visits by military delegations, combined trainings, and economic cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

India's "Necklace of Diamonds" is designed to encircle China, effectively serving as a counter-encirclement strategy based on dual initiatives. The first initiative involves India amplifying its naval capabilities and fostering relationships with strategically significant nations to counterbalance China's maneuvers. The second initiative is investing in the development of new naval bases, refurbishing existing ones, and enhancing diplomatic ties with other nations to encircle China.

### **India's Strategic Outposts**

This strategy is essentially a counter-encirclement approach aimed at surrounding China. It involves the expansion of India's naval bases and the enhancement of relations with strategically significant nations to counterbalance China's maneuvers.

**Changi Naval Base, Singapore:** In 2018, an agreement was inked by Prime Minister Modi with Singapore, granting the Indian Navy direct access to the Changi Naval Base. This base serves as a critical refueling and rearming point for the Indian Navy as it navigates the South China Sea.

**Sabang Port, Indonesia:** In the same year, India secured military access to the Sabang Port, situated at the entrance of the Malacca Strait. This strait is a globally recognized choke point, with a substantial portion of trade and crude oil destined for China passing through this region.

**Duqm Port, Oman:** Following the Sabang Port, India gained another strategic foothold in 2018 at the Duqm Port, located on Oman's southeastern seaboard. This port plays a crucial role in India's crude imports from the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the Indian facility is strategically positioned between two significant Chinese points of interest-- Djibouti in Africa and Gwadar in Pakistan.

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<sup>13</sup> Necklace of Diamond Strategy- Developments, Challenges and Facing China's String of Pearls, published 28 October 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.iasepress.net/in-depth-necklace-of-diamond-strategy-developments-challenges-and-facing-chinas-string-of-pearls/>

**Assumption Island, Seychelles:** In 2015, India and Seychelles agreed to develop a naval base in this region, providing India with military access. This base holds strategic significance for India, especially as China is keen to expand its presence on the African continent via the maritime silk route.

**Chabahar Port, Iran:** In 2016, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement to construct this port. The Chabahar Port offers access to Afghanistan and serves as a vital trade route to Central Asia.

### **India's Strategic Collaborations**

In addition to securing direct access to strategically located naval bases, India has engaged in strategic collaborations. These include:

**Mongolia:** Prime Minister Modi made history as the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Mongolia. Both nations have agreed to establish a bilateral air corridor utilizing India's credit line.

**Japan:** In a joint declaration, India and Japan have committed to constructing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).

**Vietnam:** India maintains strong ties with Vietnam, having sold the country the Brahmos Missile and four patrol boats.

**Central Asia:** Prime Minister Modi made a landmark visit to all five Central Asian countries in a single trip, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to do so. Trade with Central Asian countries has doubled within four years following his visit.





Figure 1 China's String of Pearls and India's Diamond Necklace Strategies

## Australia's Regional Engagement

Australia's regional engagement in the Indo-Pacific is characterized by its commitment to security alliances, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges. As an island continent, Australia recognizes the importance of a stable and prosperous region. It actively collaborates with regional partners, contributes to peacekeeping efforts, and promotes trade and investment in the Indo-Pacific.

In recent years, China has increasingly been aggressive towards Australia in several ways, including:

- **Economic coercion:** China has imposed economic sanctions on Australia, including tariffs on Australian exports and restrictions on investment. These sanctions have had a significant impact on the Australian economy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Economist, Australia has faced down China's trade bans and emerged stronger, May 23rd 2023  
Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/asia/2023/05/23/australia-has-faced-down-chinas-trade-bans-and-emerged->

- **Cyberattacks:** China has been accused of carrying out cyberattacks against Australian government and private sector organizations. These cyberattacks have caused significant damage and disruption.<sup>15</sup>
- **Military intimidation:** China has conducted military exercises in the South China Sea, which is a disputed area that Australia considers to be its strategic backyard. These exercises have been seen as a way of intimidating Australia and its allies.<sup>16</sup>
- **Diplomatic pressure:** China has put diplomatic pressure on Australia, including by withdrawing high-level officials from Australia and canceling high-level visits. This pressure has been designed to force Australia to change its policies.<sup>17</sup>

## South Korea's Regional Diplomacy

South Korea, located at the crossroads of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, seeks to strengthen its ties with ASEAN and other regional actors. Through active regional diplomacy, South Korea aims to expand economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and security dialogues. By leveraging its soft power, economic prowess, and diplomatic initiatives, South Korea aims to foster regional stability and integration.

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[stronger?gad=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw8NilBhDOARIsAHzpbLA8h8JTLBSxs29NJ1VrEVzj8aM1HcCMINSsWBBA8NdXRxJlYClCHu8aAsHzEALw\\_wcB&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/28/china-targeting-australia-military-planes-aggressive-irresponsible-us-defense-says), The Diplomat, China-Australia Trade War Shows No Sign of Abating, 15 February 2023, Retrieved from <https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/02/china-australia-trade-war-shows-no-sign-of-abating/>

<sup>15</sup> Financial Review, Chinese hackers use G7 ruse to target Australian government officials, 19 June, 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.afr.com/technology/chinese-hackers-use-g7-ruse-to-target-australian-government-officials-20230615-p5dgqq>

<sup>16</sup> The Guardian, China's Targeting of Australian Military planes 'aggressive and irresponsible', US says, 28 July 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/28/china-targeting-australia-military-planes-aggressive-irresponsible-us-defense-says>, The Guardian, War of words: Australia can expect a hostile response from China to strategic defence review, 23 April 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/apr/23/beyond-the-drums-of-war-why-australia-view-of-china-needs-a-wider-lens>

<sup>17</sup> Financial Review, China's diplomatic blitz leaves Australia as a bystander, 3 April 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.afr.com/world/asia/china-s-diplomatic-blitz-leaves-australia-as-a-bystander-20230402-p5cxfo>

## NATO in the Indo-Pacific

Since the recent NATO meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on July 11-12, 2023, there has been comment and speculation regarding NATO's intentions towards the Indo-Pacific. NATO's expansion to the Indo-Pacific is not inevitable. While NATO is strengthening dialogue and cooperation with its partners in the Indo-Pacific region – Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand, NATO notes that:

*In today's complex security environment, relations with like-minded partners across the globe are increasingly important to address cross-cutting security issues and global challenges. The Indo-Pacific is important for the Alliance, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. Moreover, NATO and its partners in the region share a common goal of working together to strengthen the rules-based international order.<sup>18</sup>*

There are significant challenges that NATO would need to overcome before it could expand to the region. These challenges include opposition by some countries to NATO expansion, the need for consensus, and the high cost of expansion. These include:

### **Opposition by some countries to NATO expansion:**

There are some countries in the Indo-Pacific that are opposed to NATO expansion. These countries may be concerned that NATO's expansion would increase tensions in the region or that it would be seen as a threat by China. For example, India has been critical of NATO expansion in the past, and it is not clear whether it would be willing to join NATO if it were invited.

### **Need for consensus:**

For NATO to expand, it would need the unanimous consent of all NATO member states. This means that even if a country in the Indo-Pacific were to express interest in joining NATO,

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<sup>18</sup> NATO, Relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific region, 17 July 2023, Retrieved from [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_183254.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_183254.htm)

it would not be able to join unless all NATO member states agreed. This could be a difficult hurdle to overcome, as some NATO member states may be reluctant to expand NATO to the Indo-Pacific.

### **High cost of expansion:**

NATO expansion would be a costly undertaking. NATO would need to invest in new infrastructure and capabilities to support its operations in the Indo-Pacific. This could be a significant financial burden for NATO, especially at a time when the organization is already facing budget pressures.

In addition to these challenges, there are also some strategic considerations that NATO would need to consider before expanding to the Indo-Pacific. For example, NATO would need to carefully consider the implications of expanding to the region for its relationship with China. NATO would also need to consider the impact of expansion on its relations with other regional organizations, such as ASEAN.

## **Implications and Challenges of Geopolitical Alliances**

The geopolitical alliances in the Indo-Pacific have important implications for regional security, stability, and cooperation.

### **Security and Stability**

Geopolitical alliances contribute to regional security and stability by fostering trust, cooperation, and shared norms. They play a crucial role in deterring potential aggression, addressing security challenges, and promoting conflict resolution mechanisms. However, the presence of competing alliances and power rivalries can also contribute to increased tensions and potential security dilemmas.

### **Balancing Competing Interests**

Managing competing interests within geopolitical alliances is a critical challenge. Alliances often involve diverse actors with varying priorities and perspectives. Striking a balance

between the interests of major powers and those of smaller states is crucial to maintaining cohesion and ensuring that the broader regional interests are not overshadowed.

## **Impacts on Regional Cooperation and Integration**

Geopolitical alliances can both facilitate and complicate regional cooperation and integration efforts. While alliances contribute to security cooperation, they can also create exclusive groupings that may hinder broader regional cooperation. Balancing the interests of alliances with those of regional organizations, such as ASEAN, is essential to fostering an inclusive and integrated Indo-Pacific.

ASEAN has been a key facilitator of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia since its founding in 1967. ASEAN has helped to promote security cooperation among its member states, and it has also played a role in promoting economic cooperation and integration in Southeast Asia.

The United States-led "Quad" alliance, which includes the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, has been seen by some to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the Quad has also been seen by some as complicating regional cooperation efforts, as it could be seen as an exclusive grouping that excludes China.

The China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been seen by some to promote regional cooperation and integration. However, the BRI has also been seen by some as complicating regional cooperation efforts, as it could be seen as an attempt by China to exert its influence in the region.

## **Geo-Strategic Competition and Power Dynamics**

The presence of multiple geopolitical alliances in the Indo-Pacific contributes to geo-strategic competition and power dynamics. As major powers engage in power projection, economic competition, and influence-building, smaller states must navigate these dynamics to protect their interests and maintain autonomy. Managing power asymmetries and promoting equitable partnerships are essential for maintaining a stable and balanced regional order.

## **Geo-strategic competition and power dynamics:**

In the Indo-Pacific geo-strategic competition and power dynamics manifests in several ways:

- The United States and China are the two major powers in the Indo-Pacific, and they are engaged in a geo-strategic competition for influence in the region. This competition is manifested through military exercises, arms sales, and economic investments.
- The United States alliances in the Indo-Pacific, including with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India. These alliances are designed to deter China from aggressive behavior and to promote a rules-based order in the region.
- China has also been building its own alliances in the Indo-Pacific, including with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. These alliances are designed to counter the influence of the United States and its allies in the region.

## **Smaller states navigating power dynamics:**

- Smaller states in the Indo-Pacific are caught in the middle of the geo-strategic competition between the United States and China. These states must navigate these dynamics carefully to protect their interests and maintain autonomy.
- Some smaller states have chosen to align themselves with one of the major powers, while others have chosen to remain neutral. There is no easy answer for smaller states, and they must carefully consider their options before deciding.

## **Managing power asymmetries and promoting equitable partnerships:**

- The Indo-Pacific is a region with a high degree of power asymmetry. The United States and China are the two major powers in the region, and they have a significant advantage in terms of military power, economic resources, and diplomatic influence.
- Smaller states in the Indo-Pacific need to find ways to manage these power asymmetries to protect their interests and maintain autonomy. This can be done through building alliances, promoting economic cooperation, and engaging in diplomacy.

- Equitable partnerships are also essential for maintaining a stable and balanced regional order. Partnerships should be based on mutual respect and benefit, and they should not be used to coerce or dominate smaller states.

## Outlook and Policy Considerations

As the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve, policymakers, international organizations, and advisors should consider several key factors:

### Opportunities for Further Alliances and Partnerships

Exploring opportunities for further alliances and partnerships can enhance regional cooperation and stability. Identifying common interests, shared values, and complementary strengths can lay the foundation for collaborative initiatives and mutually beneficial relationships.

### Strengthening Existing Alliances and Mechanisms

Consolidating existing alliances and mechanisms is crucial for ensuring their effectiveness and relevance. Regular dialogues, joint exercises, and capacity-building efforts can enhance interoperability and trust among alliance members. Additionally, nurturing ASEAN-led mechanisms can provide avenues for inclusive regional dialogue and cooperation.

### Enhancing Cooperation and Dialogue among Major Powers

**Promoting sustained cooperation and dialogue** among major powers is vital for managing power rivalries and minimizing potential conflicts. Confidence-building measures, strategic dialogues, and crisis management mechanisms can facilitate de-escalation and promote stability. Similarly, middle powers need to promote sustained cooperation and dialogue among themselves and engage with small powers frequently and with intentions for shared prosperity, peace, and stability.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Policymakers, international organizations, and advisors should consider the following recommendations:

1. Foster inclusive and comprehensive **regional dialogue** that involves all stakeholders, including smaller states, to ensure their voices are heard and interests are considered.
2. Prioritize conflict resolution and **diplomatic negotiations** to manage disputes and prevent escalations that could destabilize the region.
3. Strengthen economic **cooperation and connectivity** initiatives to promote shared prosperity and development in the Indo-Pacific.
4. Promote transparency and **respect for international law** to maintain a rules-based regional order that upholds the rights and interests of all actors.

Geopolitical alliances play a crucial role in shaping the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical landscape, security environment, and regional cooperation. By analyzing these alliances through the lens of international relations theory, we gain insights into the motivations, implications, and challenges associated with these alliances. Balancing competing interests, fostering cooperation, and maintaining a stable regional order require continuous engagement and dialogue among all actors involved. With careful consideration and strategic decision-making, policymakers, international organizations, and advisors can contribute to a more secure, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.



## Talking Points

Here are suggested talking points based on the Policy Brief.

1. The Indo-Pacific region is witnessing a dynamic interplay of geopolitical alliances, with major actors forging strategic partnerships to navigate the complexities of the geo-strategic landscape.
2. The United States, Japan, Australia, and India have formed the Quad, an informal security dialogue focused on cooperation on maritime security, counterterrorism, and disaster relief.
3. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have announced AUKUS, a trilateral security partnership focused on cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines, cyber, and artificial intelligence.
4. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plays a central role in shaping geopolitical alliances and fostering regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
5. India's Act East Policy aims to strengthen its engagement with Southeast Asian nations and the wider Indo-Pacific region.
6. Australia's regional engagement in the Indo-Pacific is characterized by its commitment to security alliances, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges.
7. South Korea, located at the crossroads of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, seeks to strengthen its ties with ASEAN and other regional actors.
8. Geopolitical alliances contribute to regional security and stability by fostering trust, cooperation, and shared norms.
9. They play a crucial role in deterring potential aggression, addressing security challenges, and promoting economic development.
10. However, geopolitical alliances can also be seen as a source of tension and instability, as they can lead to arms races and increased militarization.
11. It is important to strike a balance between security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and to ensure that geopolitical alliances are used to promote peace and stability, not conflict.

12. We emphasize the importance of cooperation and dialogue in the Indo-Pacific and should work to build trust and understanding between all regional actors.
13. We promote the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and other principles that are essential to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Be prepared to answer questions about the specific challenges and opportunities facing the Indo-Pacific region and articulate the government's/organization's vision for the future of the region.

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