



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Containing China: The Indo-US Defence Cooperation

Sher Ali Kakar¹

Research Officer Balochistan Think Tank Network, Quetta

Article Info

Abstract

Article History:

Received:

May 26, 2022

Revised:

June 02, 2022

Accepted:

July 05, 2022

Keywords:

*Asia-Pacific,
China, India,
Quad, Nuclear
Deal, Strategic
partnership*

The rise of China has challenged the US global dominance, which it has held since the fall of the erstwhile USSR three decades ago. The United States is engaged in strategic efforts to contain the rise of China and retain its supremacy in the world. To this end, it has strengthened relations with regional countries, particularly India, which has emerged as a top US ally in the region. The US and India have considerably cemented their strategic partnership in recent years based on shared concerns about a rising China. This paper argues that the US wants India as a security provider to counterbalance China, while India seeks the US and western support to enhance its military capabilities to counterweigh China and become a regional hegemon, creating an imbalance in the region. Against this backdrop, this research paper is an attempt to recount important developments in India-US defence relations, focusing on bilateral deals, nuclear collaboration, and maritime cooperation vis-à-vis China's growing power and influence in the region. Besides, the study examines the implications of Indo-US defence cooperation on regional stability, particularly for Pakistan, which is already facing security challenges arising from Indian strategic intentions. This research has been conducted using a qualitative method of analysis and using both primary and secondary sources of data collection.

¹ The author is a Research Officer at Balochistan Think Tank Network, Quetta, Balochistan, and can be reached at sheralikakar28@yahoo.com.

Introduction

The rise of China is one of the defining events of world politics in the twenty-first century. China's inclusive economic growth, combined with military clout and active diplomacy, has put an end to an era of a unipolar world in which the United States has maintained unrivalled hegemony since the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991. China has significantly narrowed the power gap with the US, and the Sino-US great power competition is on the rise, affecting every aspect of global politics.¹

For the US, balancing China and maintaining its position as a global hegemon has been the major strategic challenge of this century. Presently, China is the second-largest economy in the world, and its military technology is progressing rapidly.² In order to counterbalance China, the US has formed security alliances with like-minded countries. India, which already has tense relations with China, has become a frontline state in the US-led global efforts to push back China.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the convergence of the Indo-US threat perception of China began to develop as the US shifted its perception of China from a "strategic partner" to a "strategic competitor."³ The US is pursuing its foreign policy objectives of containing China and retaining its supremacy worldwide, while India seeks access to western technologies and to balance China in the region.⁴

The US has shifted its policy toward India, providing access to modern military technologies in order to position it as a potential player in the region against China's growing influence. On the other hand, India has presented its role as a potential state in the US grand strategy of containing China. Meanwhile, India intends to boost its military capabilities, benefiting from the US's tolerance towards its strategic designs. The US backing of India in enhancing its military capabilities is leading to a regional imbalance and creating security challenges for Pakistan.

¹ Suisheng Zhao, "The US-China Rivalry in the Emerging Bipolar World: Hostility, Alignment, and Power Balance," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2021.1945733>.

² Kanehara Nobukatsu, "President Biden's Desired Strategy for Engagement with China," *Asia-Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2021.1921359>.

³ Muhsin Puthan Purayil, "The Rise of China and the Question of an Indo-US Alliance: A Perspective from India," *Asian Affairs* 52, no. 1 (2021): 62–78, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03068374.2021.1882139>.

⁴ Alexander Nicoll Jessica Delane, "India-US Relations Acquire New Momentum," *Strategic Comments* 21, no. 3 (March 16, 2015): iii–iv, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2015.1049016>.

The Indo-US nuclear deal, military and logistic, and technology transfer agreements, the India-US joint vision for the Indo-Pacific, India's role as a net security provider, and the Quad alliance are developments in relations between Washington and New Delhi in recent years.⁵ The available literature lacks adequate data to cover the strategic partnership between India and the US and its implications for regional stability. Hence, this research attempts to recount recent developments in Indo-US defence relations and their implications for regional stability.

Account of India-US Defense Cooperation

The past two decades have seen a deepening of India-US relations. At the beginning of the 2000s, the US renewed its ties with India and began cooperating in different domains, particularly the defense sector, becoming a key area of their bilateral ties. The emergence of China as a key regional country in Asia, as well as a challenge to the existing international global order led by the US, is the palpable factor that led to the redefining of the US-India relationship at the turn of this century.⁶

The Indo-US rapprochement signifies a redefined relationship in the post-Cold War era. With increasing economic and military strength, India has become a top US ally in the region. During the period of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, strategic partnerships between the two countries began to develop. President Obama gave new momentum, and the strategic partnership between the two sides reached a new level during this period. Between 1947 and 1999, only three US presidents visited India. However, in less than two decades, from 1999 until 2016, four US presidents visited India. Such an increased emphasis on strong relations with India, particularly in the last two decades, has not only fueled India's growth but also highlighted New Delhi's growing strategic importance in Washington's evolving Asian strategy. For the US, the defense partnership with India is a key aspect of its foreign policy objectives. In order to modernize its defense sector and fill technological gaps in its military infrastructure, it is deepening its relationship with the US. The US and India share their concerns about the rise of China, which is central to their defense cooperation. India's ambitions to modernize its defense sector is often assessed with China's growing military might in mind, with the 1962 Sino-Indian war the genesis of troubles.⁷

⁵ Muhsin Puthan Purayil, "The Rise of China and the Question of an Indo-US Alliance: A Perspective from India." *Asian Affairs* 52,1 (2021).

⁶ Jane Holl Lute, "Charting a Future for India-US Relations in the New World Order | ORF," accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/charting-a-future-for-india-us-relations-in-the-new-world-order/>.

⁷ Vivek Mishra, "Strategic Analysis India-US Defence Cooperation: Assessing Strategic Imperatives" 42, no. 1 (2018): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2017.1420121> .

In a bid to boost the Indian defence capabilities, the US has signed multiple defence agreements with India. In 2002, the two countries signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), deemed a foundational step in deepening Indo-US ties. Apart from this, the 2005 New Framework for defence collaboration, renewed in 2015 played a crucial role in boosting collaboration in the defence domain. Since the signing of these agreements, the two sides have signed multiple additional foundational agreements aimed at strengthening defence cooperation. In 2016, they signed the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), a significant move in military-military ties. The agreement enables the two countries' militaries to replenish each other's military and naval facilities for 'specific type of activities', which can then be reimbursed.

LEMOA was followed by the signing of the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in September 2018, that allows the two sides to share intelligence and provide impetus to interoperability between the two sides. In October 2020, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) on Geospatial Cooperation were signed between the two countries that the US has signed only with its closest allies. It is the most significant agreement the two countries have signed so far. The deal provides India access to a range of sensitive geospatial and aeronautical data that is deemed significant for military action. With the signing of the deal, a troika of "foundational pacts" was completed for deepening military cooperation between the two countries. Moreover, the two countries established a highest-level institutional mechanism known as 2+2 dialogue in 2018. It is the format of dialogue where the defence and foreign ministers or secretaries of the two countries meet with their counterparts.⁸ The dialogue is held annually with the aim to boost defence ties.

In addition, defence trade between the two countries has touched new heights in recent years. India seeks to transform its defence sector into one with advanced technology. In this light, it has planned to spend about \$100 billion on new procurements over the next decade.⁹ In 2016, India was declared as a major defence partner of the US, and it was followed by the strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status in 2018 that allowed India to receive license-free access to military and dual-use technologies. India has become the first South Asian country to acquire such stature. Under these frameworks, India received sophisticated weapons and monitoring equipment from the US. The arms trade between the two countries has reached a new high, growing from 200 million at the advent of this century to over three billion dollars last year. The significant US sales to India include MH-60R

⁸ Journals of India, "Four Fundamental Pacts India-USA 2+2 Dialogue," accessed April 26, 2022, <https://journalsofindia.com/four-fundamental-pacts-india-usa-22-dialogue/>.

⁹ Congressional Research Service, "India-U.S. Relations," 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

Seahawk helicopters (\$2.8 billion), Apache helicopters (\$796 million) , and the Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasure (\$189 million). Besides, India is the only non-treaty ally of the US which has been offered a Missile Technology Control Regime Category 1 Unmanned Aerial System – the Sea Guardian UAS manufactured by General Atomics. See table 1.¹⁰

Table: 1 Major Defence Equipment Exported to India

<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Cost</i>
CBRN support	2017	(\$75 million)
C-17 transport aircraft	2017	(\$366.2 million)
6 x Apache AH-64E helicopters + associated missiles, engines, and other equipment	2018	(\$930 million)
MK 45 5" naval guns + projectiles	2019	(\$1.021 billion)
C-17 support	2019	(\$670 million)
MH-60R helicopters + associated equipment	2019	(\$2.6 billion)
large aircraft self-protection suites	2019	(\$190 million)
Harpoon missiles	2020	(\$92 million)
air defence systems	2020	(\$1.867 billion)
Harpoon Joint Common Test Set (JCTS)	2021	(\$82 million)
P-8I and associated support	2021	(\$2.42 billion)

Source: Forum on the Arms Trade¹¹

Table 2. Foundational Agreements

<i>Agreements</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Description</i>
General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSMOIA)	2002	It allows the two sides to take specific measures for ensuring security standards for safeguarding critical information shared by the US with India.
The New Framework for Defence Cooperation	2005	It provides an institutional mechanism for areas of cooperation which includes intelligence exchange, joint exercises, technology transfer, sharing of non-proliferation practices etc.

¹⁰ US Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation With India - United States Department of State,” accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>.

¹¹ Forum on Arms Trade, “US Arms Sales to India - Forum on the Arms Trade,” accessed February 21, 2022, <https://www.forumarmstrade.org/usindia.html>.

Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMO)	2016	The Memorandum provides access to military and naval facilities of each other for 'specific type of activities'
Communications, Combability and Security Agreement (COMCASA)	2018	It is one of the four foundational agreements that the US has signed with its close allies. The agreement facilitates interoperability between militaries and the sale of high-end technology.
Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)	2020	The agreement gives India access to sensitive geospatial and aeronautical data that is deemed vital for military action.

Source: Journals of India ¹²

The Indo-US Nuclear Collaboration

In 2004, the US and India signed the “Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP)” which visualized strategic partnership through expanding cooperation in strategic areas such as technology, civil nuclear and civil space cooperation, and dialogue on missile defence. The signing of NSSP thus led to the conclusion of the nuclear pact between the two countries, which through a process of negotiations, was announced in a joint statement in July 2005 by the US President, Bush, and the Prime Minister of India and came into effect in 2008. The deal aims to resume civilian nuclear technology trade with India. The framework for nuclear cooperation is a clear example of a shift in US behavior toward India, as well as a rapid shift in US nuclear non-proliferation policy. With the signing of the deal, the US lifted a three-decade old US ban on nuclear trade with India. Moreover, it allows India to seek US assistance for the civil nuclear program and to expand bilateral cooperation in energy and satellite technology. China`s growing capabilities in the region led the US to boost its strategic relationship with India.¹³

In addition, the nuclear deal opens the way for India to apply for Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) membership. In the course of the Indo-US nuclear agreement, the US sought to give an NSG waiver to India. On September 6, 2008, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, despite India's dubious proliferation record, agreed to exempt India from its full-scope safeguards condition. In

¹² Journals of India, “Four Fundamental Pacts India-USA 2+2 Dialogue,” accessed April 26, 2022, <https://journalsofindia.com/four-fundamental-pacts-india-usa-22-dialogue/>.

¹³ Jayshree Bajoria and Esther Pan, “The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal | Council on Foreign Relations,” accessed February 7, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-india-nuclear-deal>.

addition, the US has been lobbying for India to be granted full the NSG membership.¹⁴

The Indo-US Cooperation in Maritime Domain

The maritime domain has become the main area of India-US defence cooperation in recent years. For the US, India's role is crucial to its maritime interests. Currently, the US faces a dilemma in keeping its engagement in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is deepening ties with regional countries in order to advance its interests in the region, particularly India. In order to retain its influence in the Pacific, the US is trying to boost India's defence capabilities, making it the "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean. The US and India are in pursuit of their shared objective of checking the rise of China. The US is collaborating with India in the modernization of its naval program to make it a potential ally against China's rise.¹⁵

In the maritime domain, the interests of the US and India are converging in the backdrop of China's growing naval power, which is declining the existing power structure in the region. In the entire Indian Ocean Region (IOR), there was no naval port of China till the year 1999. However, the last two decades have seen the increasing advancement of China in the region. In 2010, China's navy (PLAN) conducted 25 port calls in the region aimed at defending its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). By 2010, it imported 67% of its oil and is projected to grow to 80% by 2035. 80% of this is transited through the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, 95% of China's trade with Europe, Africa, and the Middle East is transited through this region. China perceives the US military presence in the IOR as a direct threat to its interest in the region.¹⁶

China has secured the sea routes for its economic interests as well as expanded its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, it is engaged in building a blue-water navy and bolstering its offshore capabilities. China is pursuing its foreign policy objectives of a parallel status against the standing US-led order. In turn, the US and India, which have common maritime challenges arising from China's regional rise, are engaged in strategic efforts to maintain the territorial status quo. Although India and the US have different geostrategic and geoeconomics approaches in the region,

¹⁴ Opinion | No Exceptions for a Nuclear India - The New York Times, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/05/opinion/sunday/no-exceptions-for-a-nuclear-india.html>.

¹⁵ Sufian Ullah, Realignments and Evolving Nuclear Capabilities Inthe Indian Ocean: Effects on Security Environment *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs* 13, no. 4 (2021): 262–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18366503.2021.1883820>.

¹⁶ Christopher K. Colley, "China's Ongoing Debates about India and the United States | Wilson Center," Wilson Center, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/chinas-ongoing-debates-about-india-and-united-states> .

challenges arising from China's growing military and economic might are the shared concern of both Washington and New Delhi.¹⁷

China has taken over crucial strategic ports and bases in the Indian Ocean and expanded its naval presence. It has signed a 40-year lease to control Pakistan's Gwadar port, taken possession of Hambantota for 99 years, and the Maldivian island for 50 years. Apart from this, China is taking strategic initiatives with the aim to enlarge its military presence in the region, thus directly challenging the US stronghold in the region. Moreover, in the South China Sea, China's military maneuvering is upsetting the power balance, as it is declining the US ascendancy in Asia and threatening its interests of maintaining regional stability in favor of its foreign policy, which also includes protection of its allies.¹⁸ The US threats perception is visible in its 2018 National Defence Strategy: "As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States".¹⁹

In the South China Sea, a major concern for the US is the freedom of navigation as via this region, billions of dollars of commerce flow. Besides, about 50% of the global maritime commerce and 90% of energy imports of East Asia passes through the region.²⁰ Hence, any trouble that occurred in the sea lanes would have devastating impacts on the global economy as well as the US economic interests and naval presence, which are crucial to the US retaining its status as a global hegemon.

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy

The US has renewed its attention toward the Asia-Pacific region in the wake of mounting challenges posed by China's initiatives on infrastructure development and economic growth combined with political influence in the region. The Obama administration announced the US rebalancing strategy for the Asia Pacific in November 2011, and India was given a special place. The strategy aimed at curbing the growing military might of China in the region.

¹⁷ J. Susanna Lobo, "Balancing China: Indo-US Relations and Convergence of Their Interests in the Indo-Pacific," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 17, no. 1 (2021): 73–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2021.1952618>.

¹⁸ Lobo.

¹⁹ US Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," 2018, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

²⁰ Peter Dutton, "A Maritime or Continental order for Southeast Asia and the South China Sea?," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 3 (2016), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26397957.pdf>.

The US anti-China overtones were perceived counterproductive to India's relationship with China. The Indian government fell back on non-alignment and called for greater strategic autonomy in its dealings with the US and China. In a bid to strengthen India as a regional ally against China, the US expressed its resolve to elevate New Delhi's strategic profile in the Asia Pacific and the IOR, besides putting its weight behind the Indo-Pacific regional construct.²¹ Furthermore, in 2015, Obama, during his visit to India, announced the Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean, a framework for cooperation between the two countries in Asia-Pacific and the IOR. It was the first time that the two countries openly expressed their intention to work in collaboration to secure their shared interests in the region.²²

President Donald Trump, in 2017, officially announced the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, a new maritime strategy aimed at economic integration and defence cooperation with Asia-Pacific nations. The strategy is composed of substantial policy frameworks such as financial commitment to the regional countries with the aim of halting the progress of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and extending the US network of allies to maintain its supremacy in the region and also obstructing China's relations with countries along the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Australia, Japan, and India are also advocating this strategy due to their shared interests in the region. The strategy has assumed importance in some regional countries, particularly India, which has emerged as a key advocate of the strategy and an important strategic partner of the US.²³

The United States, which once referred to the vast expanse of territory that stretches from Australia to India as the Asia Pacific, is now terming the region as Indo-Pacific as part of its regional policy framework based on limiting China's objective.²⁴ The US Indo-Pacific strategy during the Trump period represents the US renewed focus on the region. It underscores the growing geostrategic importance of the region for the US, as well as Washington's increasing alarm over China's perceived threat to US interests

²¹ Sobia Hanif and Muhammad Khan, "US Security Strategy for Asia Pacific and India's Role on JSTOR," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2018): 1–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48539119>.

²² Observer Research Foundation, "US-India Joint Strategic Vision for AsiaPacific and Indian Ocean Region | ORF," accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-for-asiapacific-and-indian-ocean-region/>.

²³ Wu Shicun, "Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response - ICAS," accessed April 25, 2022, <https://chinaus-icas.org/research/indo-pacific-strategy-and-chinas-response>.

²⁴ Maria Siow, "What Is the Indo-Pacific Region and Why Does the US Keep Using This Term? | South China Morning Post," accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3146363/what-indo-pacific-region-and-why-does-us-keep-using-term>.

in the region. In the US national security lexicon, the word Indo-Pacific signifies the US thinking toward the region. The region's maritime importance combined with India's growing significance as a continental and maritime power.²⁵

On February 11, 2022, the current US Administration announced its long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy that insists focus on alliances and a firmer presence in South Asia in the backdrop of China's increasing influence at regional as well as at global levels. The US authorities have stressed that the strategy is not only aimed at focusing on China. However, most of the provisions of the strategy, including the role of India, seems ostensibly aimed at responding to China's economic growth, military might and its Belt and Road Initiative. "This is not our China strategy. This — you know, we very clearly identify China as one of the challenges that is — that the region faces and, in particular, the rise of China and China's much more assertive and aggressive behavior"²⁶. The strategy has stressed the importance of supporting India as a partner in this regional vision and cement this bilateral partnership furthermore. The role of India has been recognized by the US as a rising regional and a power net security provider in the Indian Ocean, keeping in view its significant role in the ASEAN and the Quad.²⁷

The Indo-Pacific strategy signifies the US's renewed focus on the region. Recent years have witnessed increased reciprocity between geopolitics, geostrategy, and geoeconomics in the Asia-Pacific region²⁸. India finds a prominent place in this strategy as the US continues to boost its strategic partnership with India and work together in the face of increasing challenges arising from China's efforts to promote a new international order. For the US, India is of the utmost importance for the application of its strategic interests in the region.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is part of a US-led global effort to deter China's growing military expansion and economic power. It

²⁵ Andrew Scobell, "Constructing a U.S.-China Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 127 (2020): 69–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766910>.

²⁶ "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials Previewing the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific Strategy | The White House," accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/11/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-previewing-the-u-s-s-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

²⁷ Vivek Mishrapremesha Saha, "Decoding the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy | ORF," accessed February 21, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/decoding-the-biden-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

²⁸ Mahrukh Khan, "US Indo-Pacific Strategy: Implications for South Asia | Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad," accessed April 29, 2022, <https://issi.org.pk/us-indo-pacific-strategy-implications-for-south-asia/>.

was formed as an informal alliance with the goal of collaborating on disaster and relief efforts following the occurrence of a tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2007. Later, it emerged as a security pact by expanding its objectives and creating a mechanism that aimed to check the rise of China in the region. China's BRI, which aims at infrastructural development and finance, is perceived by the US and its allies as a growing power projection of Beijing across Asia and beyond. For that reason, the US and its allies are attempting to limit China's increasing economic leverage and its military expansion. In order to put a halt to Beijing's effort to transform the present US-led regional order, the Quad was established in 2007, which comprises the US, Japan, Australia, and India. After being dormant for nearly a decade, the alliance was reactivated during Trump's presidency as the US refocused its attention on the region.²⁹

The Quad nations are pursuing their shared goals of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific and, based on a US-led regional order, maintaining the territorial status quo. The Quad countries are concerned about China's commercial and naval activities. Hence, the alliance has become an accelerated mechanism. China claims it is all part of the South China Sea and has termed it "internal waters" irrespective of the fact that its parts are claimed by Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. In addition to this, China is building artificial islands in the South China Sea, a region crucial to US strategic interests and a significant route for Indian trade³⁰. As China continues to expand its influence in the region, the US-led order in the region is declining at a rapid pace. Events in the East and South China Seas, combined with the geostrategic and economic implications of the BRI, are perceived by the US and its allies as threats to the existing order. In this light, All the Quad members have common geostrategic interests in the revival of the Quad.³¹

After withdrawing from Kabul last year, the US announced to focus on the Asia Pacific region to further its foreign policy objectives of retaining great power status. To this end, Washington is making efforts to accelerate the Quad mechanism. In February 2021, in his first diplomatic address,

²⁹ Wooyeal Paik and Jae Jeok Park, "The Quad's Search for Non-Military Roles and China's Strategic Response: Minilateralism, Infrastructure Investment, and Regional Balancing," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 127 (2020): 36–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766908>.

³⁰ Manoj Joshi, "How Beijing's New Maritime Rules in the South China Sea Will Affect India and Others | ORF," Observer Research Foundation, September 6, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/how-beijings-new-maritime-rules-in-the-south-china-sea-will-affect-india-and-others/>.

³¹ Sheila A. Smith, "The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know | Council on Foreign Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>.

President Biden asserted that "America is back."³² It is evident that the US seeks to counter the Chinese global influence by accelerating its alliance formation.

China`s Response in Asia-Pacific

Beijing continues to grow its economy and bolster its military capabilities. China sees the Asia-Pacific region as highly important for retaining its influence and securing maritime interests. Taking account of New Delhi`s strategy and its ambitions in the region, Beijing is in pursuit of its policy framework that is based on exploiting tools with the growing challenges to its interests in the region. Presently, China is responding through its "String of Pearls" policy and "two-ocean strategy" that points toward its swiftly increasing presence in the areas stretching from Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Indian Ocean, and beyond³³.

In an effort to secure the Sea Line of Communication (SLOCs) and make certain a desirable environment for furthering geopolitical objectives, China is endeavoring to deepen ties with regional countries. Under the framework of String of Pearls, the "Road" denotes the Maritime Silk Road, whereas the "Belt" signifies the land route for connecting with the region across Eurasia. Furthermore, China has launched infrastructural development projects and finance and investment initiatives to boost economic development in the region, thus providing a prolific counterbalance to India in the region.³⁴ In addition and in order to further its maritime objectives, the Maritime Silk Road has emerged as the first-order strategy aimed at synergizing Beijing`s "geo-economic and geopolitical" outcomes. In 2017, China built its first naval base IOR in Djibouti, Africa. While its initiatives to develop a port in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Gwadar, Myanmar, and the Maldives are evident examples of Beijing's response to extend its presence maritime domain.³⁵

For China, the successful implementation of BRI is crucial to its broader geopolitical objectives in the region that ranges from the South China Sea to the Western, Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, China`s "two-

³² RFE, "Biden Says 'America Is Back' As He Strikes New Tone In U.S. Foreign Policy," February 5, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/biden-foreign-policyspeech-731086730.html>.

³³ Hongsong Liu and Ahmed Bux Jamali, "India`s Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Pragmatic Balancing between the United States and China," *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (April 1, 2021): 5–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/PAFO.12178>.

³⁴ Feng Liu, "The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness: China`s Responses to the Indo-Pacific Challenge," *International Affairs* 96-1 (2020), p. 11. Hongsong Liu and Ahmed Bux Jamali, "India`s Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Pragmatic Balancing between the United States and China," *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (April 1, 2021): 5–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/PAFO.12178>.

³⁵ Liu and Jamali.

ocean strategy” can be viewed as Beijing's maritime approach to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Thus, China is actively engaged in making arrangements to counter energy security challenges.

The US-India Axis and Regional Stability

The growing synergy between the US and India has put the regional stability at risk as the US continues to boost India's defence capabilities. The US defence cooperation and arms exports to India are exacerbating South Asia's already volatile security environment. India's great Power ambitions and its role as a US "net security provider" are leading to compounding regional insecurities. Furthermore, the Indo-US defence cooperation has direct implications for Pakistan.

The US support for India is enabling it to strengthen its conventional and nuclear capabilities. India is presenting itself as a counterweight against China, but it tends to advance its military capabilities and achieve its strategic ambitions of becoming a regional hegemon. Indian strategic intentions are causing regional insecurity while also casting doubt on India's role as a reliable US partner. India has been benefiting from the immense tolerance of the US-led western bloc support. Supporting India in its military build-up is an obvious disregard for the commitment to the non-proliferation regime. Despite India's dubious proliferation record, the US has provided India with access to advanced military technologies, thus questioning the US role as a responsible world power.

Though the US Indo-Pacific strategy is primarily based on maritime cooperation and aims to boost India's maritime capabilities against China, this could have serious implications for Pakistan. The US initiatives, which aim to boost the Indian naval capabilities against China, would aggravate Pakistan's security dilemma. Besides, the Indian ambitions to produce more warheads for its sea-variants of delivery system would lead to an intensified arms race in the region. In addition, India's ambitions to acquire ballistic missile sub-marines systems represent a possible revision to the country's already dubious policy of no-first-use (NFU) of nuclear weapons³⁶. Also, the US-India defence cooperation could lead to substantial changes in India's defence domain. Enriching India's domestic stockpiles through the nuclear deal and cooperation in the domain of space technologies will enable India to acquire a sophisticated delivery system, thus destabilizing the strategic balance in Asia.³⁷

³⁶ Liu and Jamali.

³⁷ Syed Shahid Hussain Bukhari, *Pakistan's Security and the India-US Strategic Partnership : Nuclear Politics and Security Competition* (Routledge , 2021), <https://www.routledge.com/Pakistans-Security-and-the-IndiaUS-Strategic-Partnership-Nuclear/Bukhari/p/book/9780367546533>.

The US is engaged in bolstering allies against China in the region, thus making the region a flashpoint of great power politics. In this context, the role of India as a key strategic ally of the US could lead to an intensification of Sino-Indian rivalry. Furthermore, the “foundational” defence agreements between Washington and New Delhi have direct implications for the strategic stability of South Asia. These bilateral security agreements and the US backing of India could destabilize strategic stability in South Asia.

The US and India are the only countries that have openly opposed CPEC, a flagship project of China's BRI initiative. The US and India are opposed to China's BRI, as both countries see it as Beijing expanding economic might and influence in the region and beyond. The US and India's attempt to sabotage CPEC and BRI will lead to regional instability and halt the progress of economic development in the region. In addition, these efforts would have direct impact on Pakistan's national security.

Conclusion

Strategic alliances, security pacts, and geopolitical shifts have become prominent features of global politics, as China's growing political and military clout and economic transformation are threatening the supremacy of the United States in the world, and the US is trying every possible option to balance China. Against this backdrop, the US has expanded its ties with India and seeking New Delhi's role as a security provider to counterweight China. India, which was a strong supporter of non-alignment in the past, has emerged as Washington's top ally in the region.

India has become one of the US's main arms and technology importers. The two countries are collaborating in the maritime domain vis-à-vis China's growing naval capabilities in the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. The emergence of Quad and India's active role in this security pact signifies the importance of New Delhi in US strategic calculus. The US's support for India in building conventional and nuclear arsenals is an obvious shift in US policy towards India, as well as a disregard for its commitment to the non-proliferation regime. India, which presents itself as a counterweight against the Chinese rise, is engaged in bolstering its military capabilities and becoming a regional hegemon. The US and western support for India has put regional peace at risk, as India is trying to create an imbalance of power in the region. India's dual-standard role demonstrates that it is not a reliable US partner but is instead working to achieve its strategic goal of becoming a regional power. It is evident from New Delhi's unwillingness to join the US and western world efforts to isolate Russia in the international community.