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<http://www.humanitics.org/>**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Vol. III, Issue II, February 2020****Title- GEOPOLITICS IN INDO-PACIFIC: OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF INDIA****Mr. Amol Lokhande**Assistant Professor of Defense and Strategic Studies
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Email.-ap.lokhnade@tccollege.org**Abstract:**

In the 21st century the Indo-Pacific region is a new arena of great power projection. From the geographical location India's role as a chief actor in the region has been significant. India's strategic location and its increasing influence on international politics make it a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region. It becomes a determining factor in formulation of foreign policies including of Russia, America, Japan, Australia, and its immediate and non-immediate neighboring countries. In recent times, apart from the Indian Ocean, the region of the Western Pacific Ocean has also come to be known as sensitive in terms of Indian security and strategy. India's efforts to make the Indo-Pacific concept more comprehensive and clearer can be viewed from many angles. In terms of maritime security challenges and opportunities India has already started their diplomatic tactics to gain leading space in this region through Act East, Look East policy as well as creating strategic partnership with Asia Pacific countries. The vulnerable global political situation has further accelerated the dynamic geopolitical turn, which were already in making, India to develop its maritime space essentially. Motive of this paper is to examine what are the opportunities for India in view of maritime and geostrategic.

Key words: Geostrategic, Covid-19, Indo-Pacific**Introduction**

Indo-pacific is a geopolitical region that consists Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean along with surrounding countries. This region has opportunely gained its importance in twenty-first century. In Indo-Pacific region presence of major giant economic and military stakeholder countries like India, China, Japan, and Australia make this region more competitive whereas maintaining peace and stability for

sustainable development is very challenging. Recent activities of China in Indo-Pacific region such as artificial islands in South China Sea, are very suspicious, provoking and unarresting to national interests of other countries. America and China are the next superpowers to hinge on Indo-Pacific policies. Due to economic and strategic importance major countries have started focusing upon their foreign policies from the Indo-Pacific perspectives. China's big project OBOR, India's Act East policy and Island diplomacy, USA's Free hand Open Indo-Pacific are name a few. As one of the major economic and military powers India's roles in this region will be decisive. India is facing major challenges from other countries such as China which more actively spreading its famous projects such as a string of pearl and OBOR.

Importance of Indo-Pacific region

The Indo-Pacific region includes the Indian Ocean and parts of the Pacific Ocean region. Starting from the continent of Africa, this vast maritime area extends to the South China Sea, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, and Australia, including East and South Asian countries. The region is home to some of the world's most populous nations, as well as some of the world's most important superpowers. With wealth of natural resources, the Asian region has become a commercially important manufacturing region for the world today. Considering maritime borders, the region plays an important role in connecting Asia with Europe and the United States. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific region has become strategically and economically important for other regional powers of the world as well as for the United States and the European Union. At present, 70 percent of world trade goods are imported and exported from this region and ports connected to Indo-Pacific region are included in the world's busiest ports. This sector contributes to 60 percent of the world GDP. This sector remains sensitive to both consumer and producer nations regarding energy trade. It is known that a total of 38 countries are included in the Indo-Pacific region, which accounts for 44 percent of the world's surface area and 67 percent of the total world population. Experts believe that the region has all necessary components to create regional business and investment opportunities that benefit the country. Some recent developments indicate heightened geo-economic competitions in the region, including the world's fastest growing economies, rising military spending and naval capabilities, and fierce competition for natural resources.

India and Indo-Pacific arena

The Indo-Pacific region has always been very important for India. Prime minister Narendra Modi pointed out in his speech in 2015 that world should gather for Indo-Pacific Oceans' initiative in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14—which calls on the world to sustainably use maritime resources. By pushing Indo-pacific in international platform to maintain its balance of power making it accessible to all littoral countries. Blue Economy will be game changing for India in upcoming days as India looking to be economic power for not only in Indian Ocean but also in Pacific Ocean has the capability to meet that vision. China's maritime intrusion in Indian ocean region to utilize untapped maritime and land resources of African countries are the obstacle to India's vision. Newly act east policy is great call by India to reach out emerging economy of southeast and east Asia. Through collaborative initiative India can expand its strategic relationship to this country. Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malesia have economic, socio-cultural relationship which will be triggered to launch maritime strategic bonding with this country. India's strategic location among this giant ocean leverage the promotion, protection, and safety of India's overseas and coastal seaborne trade and her Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), and the ports that constitute the nodes of this trade and support to marine scientific research.

Brown Economy to Blue Economy:

For the last two-decade India's transitions from Brown Economy to Blue Economy evolving

through various maritime policy notably IORA, SAGAR policy and continues maritime exercise has made India's strong appearance in Indian ocean. India's maritime interest has been surrounding majorly around Indian ocean and its littoral country for a long time even though it's relationship with east and southeast nations were more stable. Indian maritime diplomacy gains a lot of success in Indian Ocean in terms of developing ports, bilateral security, and economic treaty with various coastal countries in Indian ocean. Chabbar port has strengthened India's economic interest as well as strategic vision. Country like Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Madagascar are already in good dialogue with India to strengthen their maritime relationship and flourish through untapped blue resources in upcoming years. On same parameter India has started to expand its blue strategy toward Pacific Region through ASEAN, QUAD platform.

Quad Alliance

Quad was born to prevent Chinese expansionism. Initially, it was doubtful whether the concept of 'quad' would come true; because no one was willing to engage in a direct confrontation with China or vent its anger. In the last four or five years, tensions between the United States and China have risen sharply. In many parts of the world the interests of the two went against each other; So, Trump adopted a policy of taking China by the horns. For this, he decided to revive Quad once again. As far as India is concerned, our policy so far does not seem to be to hurt China. Due to investment from China or military progress and economic development being our goal, there was a tendency to avoid conflict with China. Therefore, India's policy framework was aloof from China and its role of suspicious in Indo Pacific region. But recent development in China's anti India policy has forced India's diplomatic desk to look at China as enemy and expand its policy outreach beyond Indian Ocean to Pacific region. India started its expansion by joining Quad alliance fully to Counter China's aggression in LAC and Indian Ocean. Its motive is to restrict China's expansionist policy in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean and to work for cooperation and world peace in the region. China's expansion policy such as OBOR, String of pearls, Debt trap etc., will be countered by India through Quad progression. Also, Quad will be important to India to mark its strategic foot in Pacific arena. Eventually this will increase India's bargaining power with China.

Hurdles in India's strategy to Indo-Pacific

China: a threat or a challenge:

China is a threat to Asia-Pacific countries and to Indian interests in the Indian Ocean. The port of Hambantota (Sri Lanka), a few hundred miles from the coast of India is under Chinese control. China is supplying military equipment such as submarines to India's neighbor Myanmar, frigates to Sri Lanka, and equipment to Bangladesh and Thailand even though Quad is committed to rules-based international order, respecting principles like freedom of navigation in the seas, respect for territorial integrity, and the peaceful resolution of disputes but it's caliber and aggressiveness are in suspicious posture after AUKUS alliance started making strategic buzz. Only time will prove how India is going to get its fair share in Pacific region through Quad. New Delhi's recent decision not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the region's flagship free trade arrangement could complicate the country's future engagements in the region. On the military-strategic side too, India's performance in the region is less than desirable as compared to China.

ASEAN:

Many of ASEAN nations have been in China's favor due to huge trade and investment in their countries. It will be challenging to India to spread and strengthen its strategic relationship in Deep with ASEAN nation. Claim and artificial island in South China Sea by China has created instability among

concerned states which eventually leading to not to involve with India strategically. India's strategic and military engagements in the region also fall short. Beijing is a major defense supplier to several regional States including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. This growing trade gap that India and China have with these countries will be a major determining factor in shaping the region's strategic realities.

Conclusion

India's geographical location on confluence of two giant Ocean could be the basis for any policy that connects the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean. Four of the ten countries in ASEAN share maritime and land borders with India. as well it extends up to two thousand kilometers in the Indian Ocean That is why India has the capability to respond to China's expansion policy in this area. Similarly, small countries in the region are also worried about China. If these countries want to protect their sovereignty from China, they have India as their main base. With this opportunity strong naval capabilities, multilateral diplomacy, economic integration with nations is necessary for India to meet the challenges within the Indo-Pacific region. India shall stick to its vision i.e., IORA, SAGAR - Security and Growth of all in the region.

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