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THE INDO-PACIFIC

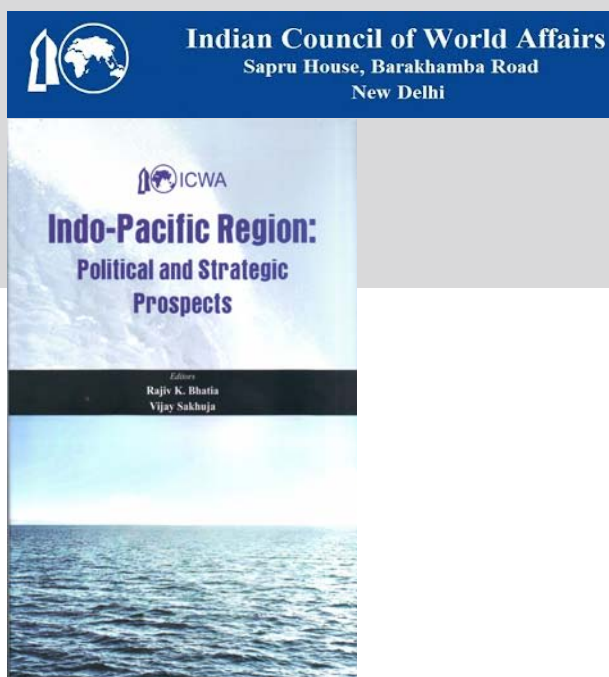
POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

IPCS in collaboration with the CCUS&LAS, SIS, JNU



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INDO-PACIFIC REGION: POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

Rajiv K Bhatia & Vijay Sakhuja

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The essays in the volume analyse the emerging concept of Indo-Pacific as an over-arching geopolitical imagination. It addresses new challenges in political, economic and maritime domains. The essays provide perspectives from different regions and countries.

The IPCS in collaboration with the Centre of Canadian, United States and Latin American Studies (CCUS&LAS), School of International Relations, Jawaharlal Nehru University organised the book discussion on 07 April 2014 at the School of International Studies.

The discussion was led by Prof Chintamani Mahapatra, Chairperson CCUS&LAS, Dr Srinath Raghavan, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Studies (CPR) and Prof Vijayalakshmi at the CCUS&LAS.

Rapporteured Edited by

Shreya Upadhyay

THE INDO-PACIFIC

POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

D Suba Chandran

Director, IPCS, New Delhi

This ICWA-edited volume attempts to understand the new developments in the Indo-Pacific from different regions and countries: Japan, US, China, Sri Lanka, Russia, Tanzania etc.

From an Indian perspective, the following questions are important:

- What are the major issues that India needs to look at in the 'Indo-Pacific' concept? Can India have its own pivot?
- Has India done any strategic thinking regarding its position in the Indian Ocean?
- How can India define the term 'Indo-Pacific' to suit its own geo-political interests?

Professor Chintamani Mahapatra

Chairperson, Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies, School of International Studies, JNU

The book is a compilation of papers presented by scholars in the Asian Relations Conference-IV (ARC-IV) held in 2013. The first Asian Relations Conference took place in March 1947, in which Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru floated the idea of developing a cooperative mechanism in Asia-Pacific. Nehru had



the idea of India playing a major role in the Asia-Pacific. During World War II, the Japanese also talked about developing a cooperative sphere in Asia. In 1948, the US set up an Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council. In 2007, the US navy brought out a maritime strategy for the Asia-Pacific. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has also talked about a broader Asia without using the term Indo-Pacific.

No one, however, conceptualised the idea of the Indo-Pacific even as it kept appearing in debates. While speaking at Honolulu in October 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used the term 'Indo-Pacific' to describe a newly emerging integrated theatre. Since 2011, the term has been used repeatedly. In 2012, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh used the term during the Indian-ASEAN Summit. In its 2013 Defence White Paper, Australia mentioned the idea of the Indo-Pacific, recognising the arc of trade routes, energy flows and strategic connections between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. However, the term has not been accepted by everyone in the region. While China is apprehensive about the term, there is a lurking fear among the ASEAN nations that they could be marginalised if the new concept comes into being.

The compilation is not an academic book but it covers different perspectives from different regions. The main argument has been that the oceans connect each other and that India's future lies in harnessing the power of the Indo-Pacific. It is the economic centre of power. Several chapters talk about how the largest amount of energy to be consumed is in this region. Some chapters also talk about how mutual assured destruction (MAD) is being replaced by the concept of mutual economic dependence (MED). As China looks to Indian Ocean, India is looking east and engaging in the Asia-Pacific. With the US 'pivot' to Asia and East Asia becoming more important, APEC is being replaced by the Indo-Pacific. In Japan, Indo-Pacific is seen as a way of connecting people. The chapters also talk about India's rise in the Asia-Pacific, making the term Indo-Pacific more acceptable. However, there are concerns regarding American activism in Asia and the Pacific.

There are also talks about a US-China Cold War and Sino-Indian competition threatening the stability in the region. India is a de-facto player in the Asia-Pacific. For India, it is important that it is not boxed in in South Asia. India's growing energy demands takes it to the Pacific. Thus, critical thinking is required in this regard.

Dr Srinath Raghavan

Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi

Language is very important while discussing strategic thinking. For example, when using the term 'globalisation', it is automatically thought of in terms of its meaning. The Indo-Pacific has strategic implications. Much of the current description of geo-politics comes from strategic thinking. Thus, conceptual history is important. The following questions must be answered:

- What is driving the construction of the 'Indo-Pacific' today?
- What constitutes the Indo-Pacific?
- Why is this terminology beginning to take hold?

The term is being used because India's strengths and role in the global economy are being recognised, albeit late. With the incremental efforts of naval modernisation, India today has naval power that can provide security. As India's continental borders are lost in disputes, it is looking at the maritime domain to deal with these issues.



Oceans do not have clear cut boundaries. The Indo-Pacific has been bunched together citing its economic value. However, the economy is dynamic, with the western part of Asia being rich in natural resources in comparison to the more industrialised east. How this will matter when shale gas and alternate forms of energy become more popular is something that needs to be studied. The security problems that India faces in the east are very different from the west. It is still to be seen if the Indo-Pacific is going to be the destiny of India and the world. Oceans have played a supporting role but control over land still remains the most important aspect. The Eurasian landmass still holds importance.

India needs to get real about the kind of maritime power it is. There needs to be recognition of strengths and an acknowledgement of weaknesses. While there has been a maritime turn in India's strategic thinking, India cannot forego its continental strategy in favour of maritime interests.

Professor KP Vijayalakshmi

Professor, Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies School of International Studies, JNU

The term 'Indo-Pacific' is a vantage point for International Relations theorists and area studies. The book has been able to tap that. It is important to see who is driving the debate for 'Indo-Pacific' and the actual activity of nations. India till now is only discussing trade and not so much security. It is the US that is thinking in terms of 'containing' China and talks about managing Sino-Indian rivalry in the region.

For the US, the terminology of the 'Indo-Pacific' matches its national objective. It is important for the US to secure a highway for international commerce. What is to be seen how the US is beginning to act on these factors. The US is revisiting its alliances in the region. It wants Australia, India etc to act as

regional stabilisers, and China is a problem for US' objectives. Thus, the Indian Ocean is gaining importance. There is movement beyond States, inclusion of people-to-people interactions and cultural mingling of societies.

India has its own way of looking at the region. A central plank of India's foreign policy has been to keep itself away from the great power discussion. Even today India and China as emerging powers are allowing themselves to be dominated by the American way of thinking. It thus becomes important to assess India's capabilities or strategic thinking when talking about an increased role in the Indo-Pacific. If it is going to be a theatre of rebalance, there are several questions in Indian minds that need to be pondered:

- What are the advantages and problems attached to rebalance?
- When the US talks about the term 'Indo-Pacific', is it innocent? What are the driving interests for the US in the region?
- If the US and India have divergent perspectives, can they cooperate?
- Will Sino-Indian rivalry be a reality or fictional? If this rivalry is based on Chinese forays in strategic affairs, how can India and the US deal with it?
- How can India develop the capability to devise a strategic sway in the Indian Ocean? Will it prefer to be protected by the US or act on its own?
- Why has the Indo-US strategic partnership failed to provide a joint doctrinal underpinning in the Indian Ocean?
- What are the self-imposed constraints for India on joining alliances, if any?

Questions/Comments

- The Indo-Pacific as a concept has been in existence in India since historical times. Indians travelled to the Far East through the seas. This led to trade and political and cultural relations between India and most of Southeast Asia. A book was published describing the concept of the Indo-Pacific in the





1940s. Over the years it has been co-opted by other nations as their formulation. Indian scholars need to realise that India has the capability to carry the concept forward. It is important to have clear goals in this regard.

- South Korea is reluctant with respect to the concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ as the only way to counter China. There is a consensus that more multilateral initiatives should be put in place. In such a scenario, how does India look at the concept?
- Does the concept served India’s national interests? Does India have the capability to play a more important role in the region or is it a mere pawn in the Indo-Pacific chessboard?
- Will it not be better to sort out regional issues bilaterally rather than trying to play a more dominant role in the region? How is India going to respond to it?
- Is the Indo-Pacific concept better suited for economic advantages, rather than strategic?
- What is the immediate plan of action (preferred and/or suggested) vis-à-vis the concept of the Indo-Pacific? Will it be institutionalised? Why or why not?
- How far can India proceed with its continental strategy as a game plan and mode of force projection since it are fighting two unending wars vis-à-vis its neighbours? In that light, why is India going ahead with an experimental maritime concept such as the Indo-Pacific?

Remarks by the Editors

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia

Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi

The Indo-Pacific is a contested topic in the current context of power equations. The idea has been there for ages and after twists and turns has come back. The phrase ‘Asia-Pacific’ earlier excluded India but East Asia today has embraced India. The Indo-Pacific region serves India’s interests. It takes it beyond just West Asia, South Asia or Central Asia. The geo-political concept helps to understand that the security and development of India is linked with the Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific concept has been inclusive of China yet is wary of the emerging power. The region does not want India and China to be embroiled in a conflict; however, it also does not want India and China to develop a G-2 sort of proximity. The book is thus an attempt to look at fresh ideas in the academic community to forge a policy vis-à-vis the region.

Dr Vijay Sakhuja

Director (Research), Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi

The book is a compilation of articles that attempt to study the emerging concept of the Indo-Pacific as an over-arching geopolitical imagination. The geographic constructs and geopolitical imaginations have dictated the formation of informal dialogue mechanisms and multilateral structures. During the Cold War, power bloc politics subsumed these geographical definitions and transcended sovereign national boundaries. In the contemporary discourse, new formulations like the Asia-Pacific, East Asia and the Indian Ocean have defined the new politico-security thinking.

The volume addresses new challenges in the political, economic and maritime domains. The chapters deal with the new concept of the Indo-Pacific and debate its viability. 'Indo-Pacific' as a concept has different perceptions. The official documents of the US and Japan do not mention the Indo-Pacific. The term needs to be defined based on India's capabilities. It is important that all concepts are defined within the security discourse. It is also important to analyse the opportunities and risks related to it. The island states of Africa and Southeast Asian countries have still not fully grasped the implications of this construct.

Can the concept be institutionalised? Can it be socialised? The book has put the concept on the table and opened it for debate. As of now there are a few schools of thought. It is important to bring about a convergence of these thoughts to comprehend its meaning holistically.

