

Geopolitical Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region: Strategic Alliances and Alignments

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ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region has an intricate part of the global scenario, with significant implications for international security, trade, and governance. This research experiments the growing technique landscape in this region, focusing on the formation, evolution, and of strategic alliances and alignments among key regional and global actors. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical developments, current trends, and future projections, this study investigates to clarify the complex interplay of interests, power dynamics, and geopolitical rivalries shaping the region. By scrutinizing the strategic calculations of major players such as the United States, China, India, Japan, and regional blocs like ASEAN, AUKUS, and QUAD. This research research aims to identify the drivers behind the formation of alliances and alignments and assess their implications for regional stability and security. Key areas of investigation include the role of maritime disputes, economic interdependence, military capabilities, and ideological competition in shaping strategic choices and alignments. The study also delves into the impact of emerging trends such as the rise of China, the escalation of great power, competition, and the growing influence of non-state actors on regional dynamics. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and inform policymakers, scholars, and practitioners the evolving challenges and opportunities for strategic engagement and cooperation in this critical geopolitical theater

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region has originated as a major point of global geopolitical competition, with strategic interests of main powers converging and diverging in complex ways. This study purpose to extend the evolving pathways of strategic alliances and alignments within the Indo-Pacific, delving into the motivations, implications, and potential results of these strategic maneuvers. Over the past decade, the Indo-Pacific has witnessed an important power dynamics, driven by economic development, military modernization, and shifts in diplomatic priorities. The rise of China as dominant regional actors, coupled with its assertive behavior in territorial conflicts and maritime claims, has spurred a strategic recalibration among key players in the region. Concurrently, historical alliances, for instance, the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Australia alliances, have undergone revaluation, adapting to new security challenges and opportunities. Against this backdrop, the Indo-Pacific has become a theater for great power competition, characterized by a complex interplay of cooperation, competition, and dispute. Regional actors, including India, Japan, Australia, and Southeast Asian nations, are increasingly engaging in multilateral forums and security arrangements to safeguard their interests and counterbalance the impact of major global powers. It seeks to provide a comprehensive explain of strategic alliances and alignments in the Indo-Pacific, examining their drivers, challenges, and implications for regional stability and global security. By expressing the evolving geopolitical arena, this study purpose to contribute to a deeper, realizing of the Indo-Pacific's importance in the 21st-century geopolitical order.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Analyze the historical evolution of strategic alliances and alignments in the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on key players, for instance, the United States, China, India, Japan, and regional blocs like ASEAN, AUKUS, QUAD.
2. Evaluate the drivers behind the formation of strategic alliances and alignments, including maritime disputes, economic interdependence, military capabilities, and ideological competition, and assess their implications for regional stability and security.
3. Examine the effectiveness of various strategic approaches, including multilateral institutions and diplomatic initiatives, in managing tensions and promoting cooperation among diverse stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, through case studies and comparative assessments.

Research Questions:

1. What are the underlying motivations driving the formation and evolution of strategic alliances and alignments among key players in the Indo-Pacific?
2. How do diverse factors such as maritime conflict, economic interdependence, military capabilities, and ideological competition interact to form the strategic behavior of major actors in the Indo-Pacific?
3. What are the critical determinants influencing the effectiveness of multilateral institutions and diplomatic initiatives in managing tensions and growing cooperation among stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific?

Research Variables:

1. Independent Variable: Geopolitical changes and power dynamics.
2. Dependent Variable: Establishment and development of strategic alliances and alignments.
3. Control Variable: Economic interdependencies, Military capabilities and strategies, Diplomatic engagements and negotiations.

Research Hypothesis:

The Changing geopolitical arena in the Indo-Pacific region will lead to the establishment of new strategic alliances and alignments among nations, driven by economic, security, and geopolitical interests.

METHODS

Methodological Approach: The study adopts a descriptive research approach with a cross-sectional design. It employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods from diverse sources.

Sources of Data: Data for the study were gathered using both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (narrative) methods.

Secondary Data: A various array of secondary data, including books, publications, articles, journals, periodicals, and newspapers sourced from official and academic websites on the internet, were also utilized.

Data Editing: Extensive processing and verification were conducted on all the data to ensure their reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Conceptual Framework of Alignments and Alliances:**

The intricacies of the Asia-Pacific region, and subsequently the Indo-Pacific, have consistently presented complexity. Few things illustrate this complexity as clearly as the growing interwoven network of alliances, alignments, and strategic partnerships in the area. Historically, the term "alliances" has been employed to describe any security-based relationship between states, involving an anticipated mutual aid and cooperation in policies. "Alignments" should be regarded as the broadest term for state cooperation, assuming a convergence of interests, encompassing alliances, strategic partnerships, and other forms of expedient cooperation. Alignment arises from shared characteristics. Miller has delineated five primary factors such as similarity in cultural background, economic parity or absence of economic disparity, past participation in international ventures, and the propensity for association. A perception of mutual threat and influence exerted by a superior authority. Nevertheless, the growing perception of shared peril and the influence exerted by the powers appear to be the primary factors at play. To the initial three points, Miller outlined, there should be no alignment between the US and Vietnam due to cultural disparities, economic inequality, and a historical absence of association. Alignments serve three major functions like offering small and middle powers of potential assistance and a safety net from a major power, enhancing the predictability of state interactions, and contributing to regional stability. This definition is comprehensive, as it encompasses various security arrangements, including collective security and multilateral organizations. This definition also merges different types of security cooperation, such as war coalitions and

formal alliances. Another approach to defining alliances is as sustained cooperation among governments in response to significant external threats, stemming from a combination of four key factors. A mutual preference for the current state of affairs, consensus among states in favor of maintaining the status quo, acknowledgment that security cannot be achieved through expansionism, and recognition of the exorbitant costs of warfare and arms all contribute to defining alliances. The distinction between alliances and strategic alliances has not been thoroughly examined. Seppälä (2004) suggested that alliances represent cooperation between companies primarily at the operational level, while strategic alliances denote a higher level of collaboration leading to the pursuit of strategic objectives. Strategic alliances, according to Seppälä, a deeper partnership aimed at achieving strategic goals, positioning them at the apex of a hierarchical approach that includes cooperation, partnership, alliances, and strategic alliances. While there isn't a universally accepted definition for either concept, there are commonalities. Both alliances and strategic alliances entail voluntary agreements for mutual cooperation, emphasizing trust, partnership, and risk management while preserving individual autonomy. They involve the formation of partnerships among enterprises to achieve strategic objectives and enhance market competitiveness. This shift in enterprise relations facilitates the development of new business models, reducing duplication of efforts and expenses while fostering efficiency. In brief, there is no universally agreed-upon definition for alliances or strategic alliances. However, an analysis of these concepts underscores key themes such as enterprise agreements, partnerships, cooperation, and autonomy. It is recommended to view alliances and strategic alliances as avenues for acquiring distinct advantages such as access to exceptional financial and human resources, bolstering market influence, enhancing competitive edge, securing better strategic positioning, and seizing opportunities for market expansion. The hierarchical structure of alliances suggests that strategic alliances occupy the highest tier, representing the most robust form of cooperation and partnership capable of realizing strategic objectives. The term "strategic alliance" will be employed in subsequent sections of this article. Although many experts and political analysts have defined the alliance & strategic alliance from various perspectives. Alliance denotes a collaborative effort among two or more enterprises aimed at achieving objectives and gaining a competitive edge. An alliance represents a distinct cooperative agreement among enterprises, distinct from short-term transactions and unrelated contracts, focusing on strategic activities. Participating enterprises retain independence and are free to compete with each other (Pellicelli, 2003). A strategic alliance is a partnership aimed at consolidating strength to achieve mutual benefits and long-term competitiveness in markets (Yi Wei, 2007). Alliances can be described as a mutual dependency among enterprises, facilitating the attainment of competitive advantages through information and resource exchange. A strategic alliance is a cooperative agreement, whether short-term or long-term, among local or foreign enterprises, enhancing performance efficiency and achieving synergy effects (Cobianchi, 1994). In a strategic alliance, partners invest in long-term performance collectively (Faulkner, 1995). A strategic alliance involves modifying basic business

practices to reduce duplication of activities and expenses while enhancing conditions for efficiency improvement (Frankel, Whipple, and Frayer, 1996). A strategic alliance encompasses both short-term and long-term cooperation among enterprises, possibly involving partial or contractual ownership, to fulfill strategic objectives (Forrest, 1989). It is a partnership wherein two or more enterprises seek strategic goals while remaining independent and sharing benefits resulting from strategic activities (Yoshino and Rangan, 1995). Strategic alliances are temporary relations with independent enterprises aiming to remove restrictions while pursuing strategic goals. Each partner may influence activities, management, and policies, while maintaining independence in terms of expenses, risks, and profits (Douma, 1997). Strategic alliances represent a collective intent among partners to plan future activities toward achieving strategic goals.

The Development of Alignments and Alliances in Asia:

The post-Cold War era has presented three key challenges for the Western world. Initially, the end of the Cold War disrupted the foundational basis of US-led alliance systems in Europe and Asia. Subsequently, concerns about US disengagement shifted from political willingness questions of capability due to America's relative decline. Additionally, the occurrence of a war involving a major nuclear power on European soil marks a significant shift, prompting a strengthening of NATO in Europe, while reactions in Asia and the Indo-Pacific have been less pronounced due to the blurred lines between "friends and foes" compared to Europe. For many years, it has been evident that the world is transitioning away from the era of American dominance that has prevailed since the Cold War's end. Structural factors like population growth, and economic development, particularly in India and China, have boosted their significance. Additionally, there's a growing lack of confidence in the United States, leading to heightened international apprehension about its reliability. Consequently, the era of unchallenged American dominance is drawing to a close. What will emerge in place of this unipolar order is uncertain. While the United States and China jointly possess half of the world's wealth, the notion of them forming opposing blocs akin to the Cold War seems improbable. United States itself viewed as an unpredictable superpower. Whereas Donald Trump rejected alliances, Joe Biden advocates for them. Washington's stance on free trade has shifted from championing it to supporting protectionist measures with bipartisan backing. Simultaneously, doubts about the strength of America's democratic institutions tarnish its global reputation, leading even long-standing treaty allies to hesitate in fully aligning their futures with the United States. China had a promising position to capitalize on the decline of trust in the United States, but its recent actions have diminished its global reputation. The Chinese Communist Party's mishandling of its economy raises doubts about its role in global growth and its ability to surpass the United States economically. Additionally, Xi Jinping concentration of power has made the political system more fragile. Consequently, countries are exploring new security alliances and economic opportunities. Rather than embracing the idea of a "new Cold War" between Beijing and Washington, many seek autonomy or partnerships beyond these two dominant powers. The emerging multipolar world, with numerous power centers, presents a complex scenario. India, the

European Union, and some of its member states are carving out distinct roles, while countries like Brazil, Nigeria, and Indonesia are gaining significance. This complexity surpasses anything seen in the last century, challenging policymakers worldwide to devise innovative approaches and strategies. The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity will diminish the appeal of fixed alliances worldwide. Multipolar systems are inherently dynamic, resulting in frequent shifts in alignment, rendering traditional alliances less appealing as leaders seek greater flexibility in international relationships. Although some fixed treaty alliances, such as NATO, may persist due to path dependency and the need for collective defense against common threats, they are likely to become the exception rather than the norm in the future. Alliances, characterized by formalized and comprehensive commitments, encompassing military, economic, technological, and diplomatic dimensions, face challenges from the growing trend of issue-specific alignments. Unlike alliances, alignments are more adaptable, allowing countries to align with different partners on different issues. This shift towards issue-specific alignments may strain existing alliances, particularly those with weak foundations, potentially leading to their collapse, as seen in the case of the strained U.S.-Thailand alliance due to divergent threat perceptions and governance issues. As new alignments emerge alongside traditional alliance networks, regional and global arrangements will become more complex. China and Russia, for instance, although not formal allies, share aligned interests in various areas, as do Japan and Australia. However, these alignments should not be misconstrued as comprehensive alliances, as they are often specific to certain issues. Despite suggestions for a "Pacific NATO," such comprehensive alliances are unlikely to materialize in the foreseeable future. As the global landscape shifts towards multipolarity and alignments become more adaptable, many countries' approaches to international engagement are poised for transformation. Traditional large multilateral alliances encompassing diverse interests will face challenges in coordination. Instead, smaller, issue-specific small groups are expected to gain prominence, offering quicker progress on targeted goals. This shift towards is anticipated to yield higher returns on investment. Short formations hold appeal for several reasons. Firstly, they focus on specific topics or objectives, facilitating progress on particular issues. Secondly, with fewer members, unite countries or leaders with aligned agendas more efficiently. Thirdly, their flexibility allows for agile responses to evolving situations, contrasting with the rigidity of annual meetings and slow institutional processes. These factors streamline agreement forging and initiative implementation within mini-lateral settings compared to multilateral ones. Although existing multilateral institutions like formal treaty alliances will persist, they may gradually lose relevance rather than disappear entirely. Outdated multilateral frameworks will vie for attention and resources against newer, more dynamic mini-lateral counterparts. Signs of decline may include less frequent meetings and the delegation of attendance to lower-ranking officials. Surviving multilateral groups must demonstrate tangible value beyond ceremonial gatherings for senior leaders. Scholars have characterized the emerging blend of mini-lateral and multilateral groupings as hubs and spokes, webs, or latticework. These network analogies capture the layering of

new mini-lateral architecture over existing multilateral frameworks. This complex interplay will not result in a single hegemonic order or a binary bloc system but rather a nuanced array of interconnected arrangements, with various coalitions collaborating to advance diverse objectives. For effective collaboration in security matters, countries require clearly defined roles, missions, and a certain level of joint planning, training, and interoperability. Consequently, security remains an arena where established alliances such as NATO and key U.S. partnerships in Asia retain their relevance. However, new coalitions are emerging where common security threats, such as the perceived threat from China, prompt collaboration among countries like Australia, Japan, India, and the United States. Despite the Quad's self-description as a non-security entity, it effectively functions as the foremost security coalition in Asia. In the realm of economics, multiple coalitions are taking shape. The G7 is increasingly assuming the role of the coordinating body for some of the world's leading industrialized economies, facilitating negotiations on issues like the global minimum tax and coordinating economic sanctions against Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. Multiple mini-lateral arrangements exist in the technology sector, yet no overarching coalition has materialized. While the United States and the European Union operate a Trade and Technology Council, the Biden administration advocates for enhanced coordination on semiconductor supply chains, exemplified by the Chip 4 alliance involving Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Similarly, the Quad features its own supply chain working group, emphasizing technology matters. While various groups like these, or potential new concepts such as a coalition of leading "techno-democracies" (T-12), may prosper in the future, policymakers are more likely to seek amalgamation of these coalitions or concepts to streamline the complex task of coordinating technology policy among numerous countries with diverse interests. Coalitions with broad memberships tend to concentrate on governance issues, whether at domestic or international levels. Despite the Biden administration's efforts to construct a democratic coalition, progress through initiatives like the Summit for Democracy has been limited. Even on global concerns like climate change, establishing sizable and stable coalitions has been slower than anticipated. As coalition size increases, so does its unwieldiness, making governance-focused groups involving numerous countries inherently challenging to organize and align towards consensus. A move towards a multipolar world and away from competing alliance blocs may appear favorable for several Southeast Asian countries. However, the reality suggests that these states are poised to face challenging situations in the foreseeable future. While ASEAN values, the emergence of coalitions is shifting the focus towards different principles. Rather than adhering to traditional institutions with fixed membership and procedures, new coalitions are forming to swiftly address changing circumstances. Established multilateral groups like ASEAN, which cover various issue areas, seem to belong to the past, while flexible coalitions targeting specific issues are seen as the future direction. Southeast Asian nations must balance the advantages of ASEAN membership while avoiding its limitations. Certain ASEAN members, especially larger or more active, diplomatic players, may receive enticing incentives to join emerging coalitions. However, as other Southeast Asian countries may be left

out or opt not to join these coalitions, ASEAN's unity and centrality could be jeopardized. This dilemma presents Southeast Asian leaders with a challenging strategic decision: either adapt to the era of coalitions at the risk of ASEAN unity, or passively watch as new alignments erode ASEAN's centrality. Just as businesses abide by the principle of "adapt or perish," many international institutions will face a similar fate in the years ahead.

Indo-Pacific Alignments and Partnerships:

1. QUAD:

The leaders of the Quad consisting the United States, Japan, India, and Australia convened in Tokyo on May 24, 2022, marking their fourth gathering and the second in-person meeting. Under President Joseph Biden's leadership, the Quad, initially reactivated in 2017 to counterbalance China's increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region, has undergone significant evolution. Transitioning from a ministerial-level assembly to a summit of leaders, it has expanded its purview. The Biden administration and relevant stakeholders aspire to transform this informal dialogue into a primary forum for strategic consultation, policy alignment, and practical collaboration in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, it serves as a mechanism for shaping a burgeoning regional order aligned with interests, values, and vision of the United States and its allies and partners. The Quad originated following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami to coordinate humanitarian aid and disaster relief. After the relief mission ended in early 2005, the Quad framework gained renewed attention, transitioning into a formal security dialogue led by then-Japanese Prime Minister in 2007. Initially, the group aimed to bolster maritime security and foster cooperation among the four democratic nations amid China's rising influence. Despite early efforts, the Quad faced challenges, including China's suspicions and internal disagreements among its members, leading to its dissolution shortly after its inception. In 2017, under the Trump administration, the Quad was revitalized, primarily through Abe's advocacy, aligning with Japan's "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy. The group's agenda expanded to include political, economic, and security dimensions, with a focus on countering China's influence and promoting regional stability. Through diplomatic efforts, the Quad evolved into a leader-level summit format under the Biden administration, emphasizing practical cooperation across various domains, such as cyber security and infrastructure, to address shared challenges and shape the Indo-Pacific region's future.

Managing the Equilibrium with China:

Since its inception in 2007 as a quadrilateral security dialogue, the Quad has aimed at "balancing China," serving as both an implicit and explicit objective driving its formation. Japan, once a leading economic power in Asia, now finds its status overshadowed by China's growing power and economic influence, exacerbated by strained diplomatic relations stemming from historical issues such as visits to Shrine and territorial disputes. The Abe administration sought to establish the Quad formally, hoping to create a China-balancing group based on shared democratic values. India, China's strategic partnership with Pakistan and border

disputes have long been contentious issues. India perceives China as a major security challenge and seeks support from the Quad members to counterbalance China's influence in the region. Australia, despite benefiting economically from China's rise, has grown wary of its economic dependence and perceived "malign influence." Concerns about China's influence prompted Australia to advocate for the Quad's establishment, aiming to keep the U.S. engaged in the region and to counter China's dominance. Under the Trump administration, the U.S. shifted its China policy towards containment, initiating trade, tariffs, and technology wars. Viewing China as a strategic competitor, the U.S. revamped its Indo-Pacific strategy, emphasizing the need to bolster alliances and partnerships like Quad to counterbalance China's influence effectively.

Advancing tangible collaboration:

Quad aims to bolster practical collaboration among its four members and provide regional benefits to counterbalance China. Since 2017, the Quad has taken various measures to enhance cooperation in key areas:

- **Maritime Security:** Since the inaugural senior official-level Quad dialogue in 2017, maritime security has been a priority. Natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami and the 2011 earthquake in Japan highlighted the humanitarian risks in the maritime Indo-Pacific. Additionally, escalating maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, involving China and other parties, have destabilized the region. The Quad members have coordinated their stances on these disputes, conducted joint maritime exercises, provided assistance to Southeast Asian countries, and launched initiatives to promote maritime domain awareness. These efforts aim to counter China's maritime claims and activities, offer regional maritime benefits, and garner goodwill from neighboring countries.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The Quad collaborates to present an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2019, the United States, Japan, and Australia established the Blue Dot Network to evaluate infrastructure projects worldwide based on transparency, sustainability, and economic impact. This initiative seeks to mobilize private investment and counter China's influence in infrastructure development. Under the Biden administration, the Quad announced new infrastructure partnerships during the first-ever Quad Leaders' Summit in 2021, focusing on coordinating efforts, addressing regional infrastructure needs, and promoting sustainable development.
- **Technology and Supply Chain Security:** Following the Trump administration's trade war with China, the Quad intensified its focus on technology and supply chain security. This included imposing sanctions on Chinese tech companies, banning Huawei and ZTE's 5G services, and launching initiatives like the Clean Network to exclude Chinese companies from global supply chains. The Biden administration continued these efforts, establishing a critical technology working group and launching initiatives to enhance semiconductor supply chain security. The Quad also aims to collaborate on secure supply chains for vaccine production and clean energy, as well as in

areas like climate change, public health, space, and cyber security, to strengthen the grouping's cohesion, reputation as a provider of regional benefits, and ability to compete with China.

2. AUKUS:

This is a security agreement involving Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, primarily aimed at sharing technology in the Indo-Pacific region. This partnership is widely seen as a strategic response to and a deterrent against Chinese expansionism and aspirations in the region. Its key feature is the collaborative development of nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. In addition to nuclear capabilities, the alliance also facilitates joint research and implementation of technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber operations, and missile technology. Expanding upon the existing cooperation of the Five Eyes alliance, a network for sharing intelligence among Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand, the agreement outlines a timeline where submarines from the UK and US will temporarily station in Australia by 2027. Australia aims to procure several submarines from the US by the early 2030s, with new submarines, based on British design and known as SSN-AUKUS, slated to arrive in the late 2030s. This initiative will establish Australia as the seventh country worldwide to possess nuclear-powered submarines, and the second, alongside the UK, with whom the US has shared this technology. The projected expansion of submarine deployments will elevate the allies' submarine fleet in the western Pacific Ocean by up to 25 percent compared to 2021 levels. The proposed transfer of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, a non-nuclear state, sparked controversy. Upon finalizing the this pact, three parties sought oversight from the International Atomic Energy Agency, tasked with monitoring atomic energy usage, to enforce safeguards and uphold nonproliferation standards. However, the Chinese government claimed the transfer would undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968). Additionally, the deal drew strong criticism from the French government. In 2016, Australia had agreed to purchase 12 diesel-powered submarines from France for \$65 billion; this deal was terminated the conclusion of the this pact. The French foreign minister labeled the announcement as "a stab in the back," prompting French President Emmanuel Macron to recall French ambassadors from the US and Australia in response to the agreement. Given the Janus-like character of this as a non-alliance or *de facto* 'virtual alliance,' it's valuable to briefly analyze how this new formation aligns with Australia's strategic posture in Indo-Pacific. This represents a range of security alignments, including 'security communities' like ASEAN and 'strategic partnerships' like the Sino-Russian relationship. It's important to note that a formal military alliance is the highest security commitment between nations and can be highly provocative to excluded parties. Not every alignment of security interests requires a formal alliance treaty. This, as a 'non-alliance' form of security alignment, also reflects a shift in Australian foreign policy towards. Following the precedent set by the Quad grouping, this adds to Canberra's mini- lateral engagements, allowing for targeted security cooperation among a small number of like-minded countries. Similar to the Quad, this has been mischaracterized as an 'alliance,' emphasizing the need for closer examination of such

arrangements. For Australia, prioritizing mini-laterals like this and the Quad is an effort to extend its middle power influence in the absence of robust national capabilities, with this assisting in this regard. Although Morrison has faced criticism for his investment in AUKUS, the Australian government sees it as a response to the deteriorating security situation in the Indo-Pacific. The submarine and technology aspects of this, coupled with anticipated Anglo-American support, are seen as worth the potential backlash from China and some Southeast Asian neighbors. However, closer alignment with 'Anglosphere' partners doesn't preclude cooperative engagement with Asian nations. Australia's membership in the Quad and strategic partnerships with Japan and India demonstrate its commitment to regional engagement. Furthermore, Australia participates in other mini-lateral arrangements like the Five Power Defence Arrangement, emphasizing the country's approach of seeking security through various forms of cooperation and groupings.

Responses and Reactions from China Towards AUKUS:

China responded predictably to the announcement of it, with editorials in Chinese newspapers criticizing the move just one day after its announcement on September 16, 2021. State-run China Daily urged Washington to abandon ideological bias and return to multilateralism, while The Global Times accused Australia of aligning with the US against China and threatened repercussions if it continued. Chinese officials, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi, denounced this for undermining regional peace, intensifying the arms race, and promoting a Cold War mentality. Despite these statements, China has reacted moderately, recognizing this as an attempt to curb its military expansion. It has strengthened ties with Russia as a counterbalance and criticized this countries' plans for hypersonic cooperation. If China continues its military build up, it may respond by the increasing military presence in Australia with British support and enhancing alliances in the region.

The Broader Ramifications of AUKUS:

It has sparked significant debate and controversy domestically in Australia and across the Indo-Pacific region. I will outline three key issues in order of importance. From a defense-technology standpoint, it has the potential to serve as a model for enhancing inter-allied cooperation. Monique Taylor suggests that successful integration of defense industries and supply chains among its partners could enable seamless collaboration and interoperability. Streamlining existing processes, such as reforming the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), is essential to expedite intra-allied projects. Additionally, navigating the tension between commercial and strategic interests in public-private partnerships is crucial. According to Tom Corben and William Greenwalt, it presents an opportunity to redefine how allies share defense technologies, with implications beyond the immediate partnership. Perceptions of it in the region are crucial, as how it is managed can influence perceptions of regional stability among external actors. While Beijing has condemned it as reflective of a "Cold War mentality," efforts to stir opposition in Southeast Asia have seen limited success. Despite initial concerns over

nuclear proliferation and messaging missteps from Canberra, countries like Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan have welcomed it for its contributions to maritime security and regional stability. However, ongoing strategic narrative management and diplomatic messaging from Canberra are essential moving forward it will undoubtedly deepen Australia's integration into US regional defense strategy. It extends beyond providing defense assets and capabilities, sparking criticism in Australia regarding potential forfeiture of sovereign decision-making in regional crises involving the US. Critics, such as former Prime Minister Paul Keating, argue that this arrangement could lead to a loss of Australian sovereignty. Abhijit Singh notes that AUKUS signals a clear intent to balance Chinese power, intensifying Australia's commitment to the US-led bloc against China. However, this commitment comes with complexities, as the new capabilities of it are intertwined with US-led "integrated deterrence," potentially drawing Australia into Sino-US conflict scenarios. As Australia and the US advance their Force Posture Initiative, Australia's role as an extension of US military deployment in the region becomes increasingly apparent, raising questions about its involvement in potential conflicts.

3. ASEAN:

ASEAN, formed on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok, consisted of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand as its original members. As the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gains more economic prosperity and prominence globally, inquiries regarding its alignment with superpowers have become more frequent in a tense and bipolar international order. Nevertheless, since its establishment in 1967, neutrality and non-alignment have been fundamental values of the union and are unlikely to be compromised as the region progresses. However, it is improbable that these power shifts will affect ASEAN's alignment. Situated as a rapidly growing region in the Asia Pacific, ASEAN serves as a crucial area for both the United States and China, enabling them to benefit from both major superpowers. China stands as ASEAN's largest economic trading partner, exchanging over \$500 billion USD worth of trade as of 2019, while the United States leads in foreign direct investment (FDI) at \$24.5 billion USD as of 2019, with military presence in Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. The substantial economic support from both sides is significant. Despite being established out of security concerns in 1967, with founding members banding together against the rise of communism in Vietnam, ASEAN's focus has shifted towards economic matters since then. However, its core principles of non-interference, non-aggression, and neutrality remain unchanged. The signing of various declarations and treaties, such as the Bangkok Declaration in 1967 and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976, underscores ASEAN's commitment to operate independently of superpower influence and uphold values of non-interference and non-aggression. Sovereignty of each member state is highly valued, reflecting a historical aversion to foreign intervention. The 'ASEAN Way' of non-alignment and non-interference has guided member states' foreign policies, contributing to

regional peace and security. While member states refrain from intervening in each other's domestic affairs, they condemn inter-state aggression, as seen in their response to Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in 1979. This commitment to neutrality is evident in the South China Sea conflict, where ASEAN claimants have managed to unite despite differing geopolitical concerns and superpower alignments. ASEAN's steadfast dedication to neutrality and non-interference allows member states to safeguard their sovereignty and pursue their national and economic interests independently. As ASEAN continues to grow economically on the global stage, aligning with a superpower is deemed unfavorable and unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

ASEAN Amidst an Expanding Web of Security Collaborations:

The evolving security landscape in the post-Cold War era has advanced ASEAN to adapt its regional communication and cooperation. As a result, ASEAN has founded new systems to enhance its organisational capacity introducing growing security challenges, many of which are transnational. This has led to the proliferation of various ASEAN-led planning , including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM plus. Enhanced joining of other regional powers in system has expanded engagement beyond the trade and investment to encompass deeper political and security ties. Given Southeast Asia's geographical centrality in the Indo-Pacific, efforts to develop a more ASEAN-centric system have intensified amidst the escalating strategic rivalry between the US and China. While ASEAN member states remain wary of China's strategic intentions, particularly its militarization in the South China Sea, some express concerns over the US Indo-Pacific strategy as a response to China's assertiveness. This visit follows earlier visits by US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Vice President Kamala Harris to ASEAN countries, where they voiced opposition to China's actions in the South China Sea and pledged support to allies and partners against Chinese assertiveness. Driven by their geo-strategic interests, ASEAN member states seek to balance their relations with the US and China to varying degrees, aiming to benefit economically from China while relying on the U.S security presence. However, this nuanced approach makes it challenging for ASEAN to present a unified voice on regional security issues. AUKUS involving actors external to the region, will further pressure ASEAN member states to choose sides, potentially impacting ASEAN's primacy in the region. Additionally, its implications for existing multilateral security arrangements in Southeast Asia, such as Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), are yet to be determined. The FPDA, established in 1971, commits its five members to consult in the event of an armed attack on Malaysia or Singapore, but it is not a binding defence treaty. Malaysia, a claimant in the South China Sea dispute, has experienced recent incidents of Chinese military aircraft flying over the disputed waters off its eastern state of Sarawak.

Table 1. A List of Key Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific Region (Listed by the Author)

State	The countries with which it has strategic collaboration agreements (excluding alliances).
United States	Australia, India, Singapore, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand
China	India, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri-Lanka, Thailand
India	Japan, China, Singapore, United States, Vietnam, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea
Japan	India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Australia, ASEAN, South Korea, New Zealand
Australia	Japan, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, ASEAN, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea
Indonesia	USA, Japan, China, Australia, Vietnam
Vietnam	USA, Singapore, Japan, India, China, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Russia, Thailand
Singapore	Australia, China, USA, India, Japan, Vietnam
Thailand	Australia, USA, China, Vietnam
Myanmar	China
Malaysia	Japan, China, India, Vietnam, Australia
Philippines	Australia, China, Vietnam, Japan
Sri-Lanka	China
Pakistan	China, Russia

Table 1 delineates the strategic partnership agreements inked by several Indo-Pacific nations. It vividly demonstrates that the majority of middle and small powers boast multiple agreements, typically involving at least two major powers. It also illustrates how strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific have

been leveraged to foster alignments, trust, and enhanced cooperation without formal institutionalization. These states are actively striving to prevent the emergence of regional hegemony by creating overlapping networks of alignments, shared interests, and interactions. The table enumerates the strategic partnerships of selected major powers in the Indo-Pacific, alongside chosen South and Southeast Asian states. Highlighted in bold are the states that have entered into multiple agreements with numerous major powers. ASEAN and individual member states have also independently entered into strategic partnership agreements, which explains why they may occasionally appear in the same list.



Figure 1: The Relationship Between the USA and China Impacts the Indo-Pacific Region and Select Countries. In Bold (the USA and Italic China) on the Figure Shows Strong Alignment.(Compiled by the Author)

Table 2. The Strategic Behaviour Classification for Forming Partnerships
(Compiled by the Author)

	Intent coherence: Explicit and distinct	Purpose for alignment: Ambiguity and inclusive sought.
Signalling through processes, such as diplomacy via discourse or narrative.	Narrative of strategy	Strategic maneuvering for risk management.
Signalling through outcomes, like military or economic actions.	Balancing or joining the popular trend.	Hedging

Table 3. Contrast Among Bilateral, Mini-Lateral, and Multilateral Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific Region

Bilateral	Minilateral	Multilateral
Restricted	Restricted (flexible)	Inclusive
Official Partnership	Unofficial Coalition	Official Partnership
Deeply Structured (longer term)	Focused/Problem- specific strategy	Deeply Structured (longer term)
Utmost Impact	Moderate Impact	Restricted Impact

(The United States + Japan + South Korea)
(Japan + India + Australia)
(China + India + Russia)
(Japan + India + Vietnam)
(North Korea + China + Russia)

Box 1. Trilateral Dynamics are Observed in the Indo-Pacific Region (Prepared by the Author

Table 4. Analysis of Potential Impacts of Indo-Pacific Economic Cooperation can be Explored Through Four Distinct Scenarios. (Prepared by the Author)

Scenario	Members
Indo-pacific 1	USA, Japan, India, and Australia FTA
Indo-pacific 2	Indo-Pacific 1 + South Asia + Southeast Asia
Indo-pacific 3	CPTPP + India + Korea + China
Indo-pacific 4	Indo-Pacific1 + ASEAN + NewZealand + Bangladesh + Sri Lanka + Pakistan + China + Korea + Kenya + Oman + Tanzania + Mozambique + South Africa + Mauritius + Russia + Chile + Mexico + Canada

Table 5: The Count of Preferential Trade Agreements with in the Indo-Pacific Region.

	Bilateral agreements	Multilateral agreements	Bilateral agreements, multilateral agreements, and agreements involving at least one party as a preferential trade agreement (PTA).
Intra-regional agreements	39	2	4
North-North agreements	14	0	0
North-South agreements	15	1	4
South-South agreements	10	1	0

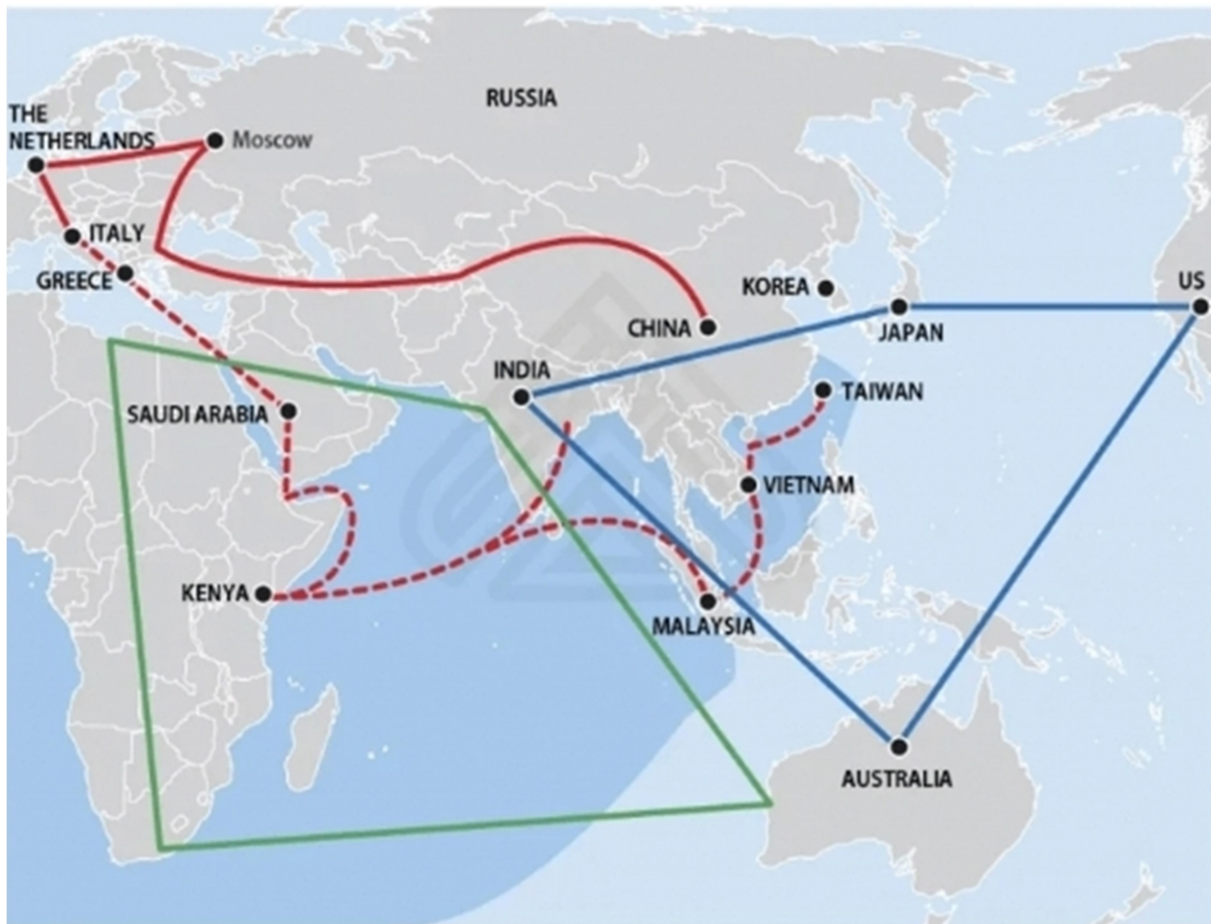
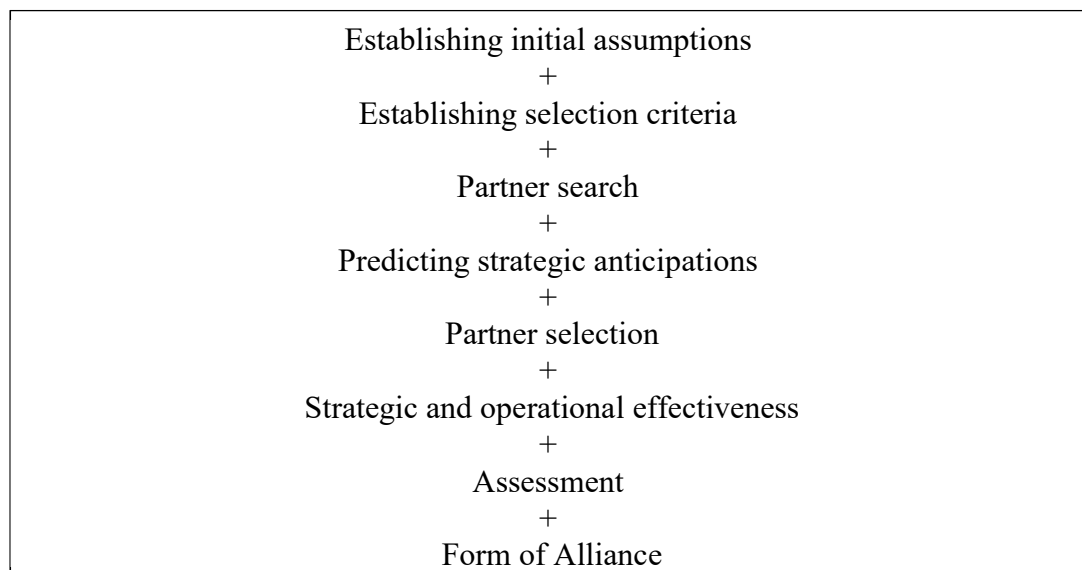


Figure 2. The Indo-pacific: International Engagement and Trade Axis

Red line (china's belt and road initiative), blue line (us indo-pacific region), green line (eu indo-pacific region)



Box 2. Procedure of Alliance Formation in the Indo-Pacific

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Indo-Pacific region has an intricate part of the global scenario, with significant implications for international security, trade, and governance. Focusing on the formation, evolution, and of strategic alliances and alignments among key regional and global actors. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical developments, current trends, and future projections, investigates to clarify the complex interplay of interests, power dynamics, and geopolitical rivalries shaping the region. By scrutinizing the strategic calculations of major players such as the United States, China, India, Japan, and regional blocs like ASEAN, AUKUS, and QUAD. Research result identify the drivers behind the formation of alliances and alignments and assess their implications for regional stability and security. Key areas of investigation include the role of maritime disputes, economic interdependence, military capabilities, and ideological competition in shaping strategic choices and alignments. The impact of emerging trends such as the rise of China, the escalation of great power, competition, and the growing influence of non-state actors on regional dynamics. By analyzing case and conducting comparative assessments, provide insights into the effectiveness of diverse strategic approaches and their implications for regional order and stability. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and inform policymakers, scholars, and practitioners the evolving challenges and opportunities for strategic engagement and cooperation in this critical geopolitical theatre.

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