

**MS RESEARCH THESIS**

**INDIA-US STRATEGIC COOPERATION: CHALLENGES FOR  
CHINA IN INDO-PACIFIC REGION (2016-2023)**



**RESEARCHER**

Mehr Bibi

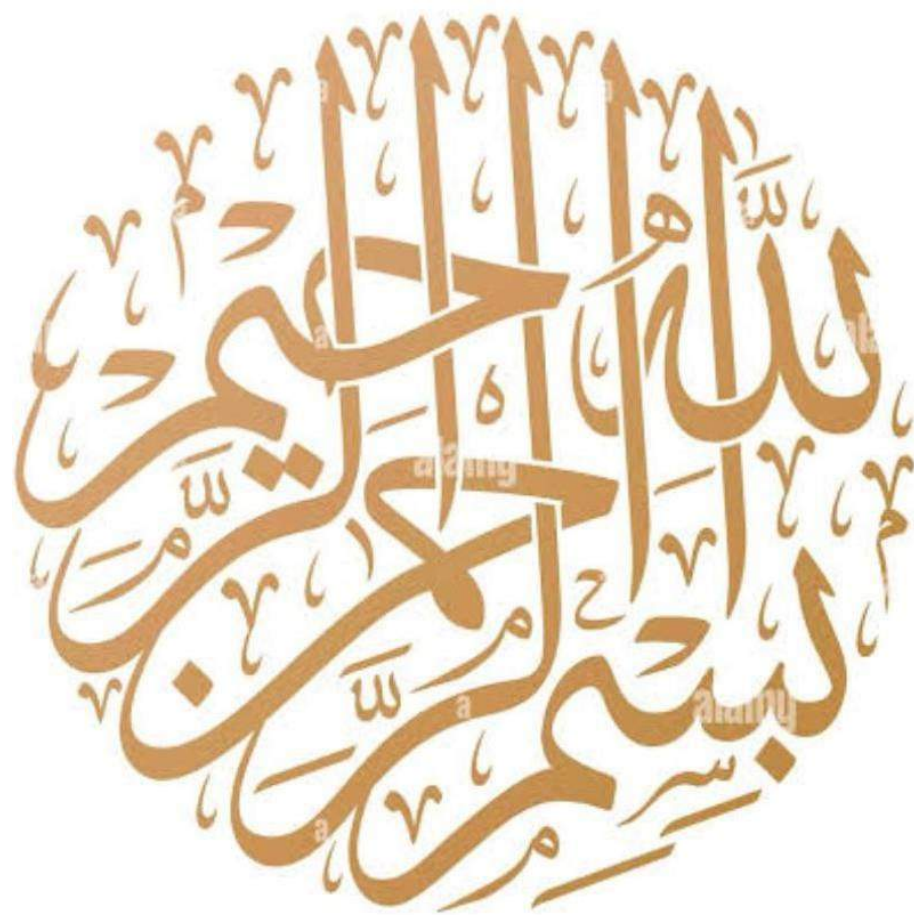
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## **SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATE**

The thesis entitled **“India-US Strategic Cooperation: Challenges For China in Indo-Pacific Region (2016-2023)”** submitted by **Mehr Bibi**, registration number **216-FSS/MSIR/F-22** in partial fulfilment of MS degree in International Relations has been completed under my guidance and supervision. I am satisfied with the quality of student’s research work and allow her to submit this thesis for further process as per IIUI rules & regulations.

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation, I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**India-US Strategic Cooperation: Challenges For China in Indo-Pacific Region (2016-2023)**” is my original work. This research work was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Noor Fatima and submitted to the Department of International Relations in satisfaction of the requirements for the MS degree in International Relations. I have properly referenced and cited the sources of information in my thesis. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree or qualification.

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**Dated: \_\_\_\_\_**

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## ***DEDICATION***

***Dedicated To My Parents***

***Muhammad Hanif And Parveen Bibi***

*With love, respect and deep appreciation, I dedicate this research work to my parents, whose unconditional love, sage guidance and fervent prayers have been a constant source of motivation and directing me throughout my academic journey.*

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*Thank you so much for your invaluable backing, which has enabled me to accomplish this remarkable feat.*

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>AUKUS</b>	Australia-United Kingdom-United States
<b>A2/AD</b>	Anti-Access/Area Denial
<b>ADIZ</b>	Air Defense Identification Zone
<b>AIF</b>	American India Foundation
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>ATGMs</b>	Anti-Tank Guided Missiles
<b>APAC</b>	Asia Pacific
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AAGC</b>	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
<b>BOP</b>	Balance of Power
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>BECA</b>	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement
<b>B3W</b>	Build Back Better World
<b>BRICS</b>	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
<b>CPEC</b>	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
<b>CBMs</b>	Confidence Building Measures
<b>COMCASA</b>	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party

<b>CBRN</b>	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CII</b>	Confederation of Indian Industry
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona virus Disease of 2019
<b>CTJWG</b>	Counterterrorism Joint Working Group
<b>DTTI</b>	Defense Technology and Trade Initiative
<b>EEZ</b>	Exclusive Economic Zone
<b>EABO</b>	Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FMCT</b>	Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty
<b>FOIPS</b>	Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy
<b>GSOMIA</b>	General Security of Military Information Agreement
<b>GCTF</b>	Global Cooperation and Training Framework
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>G20</b>	The Group of Twenty
<b>G7</b>	Group of Seven
<b>5G</b>	Fifth Generation
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HADR</b>	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
<b>HTCG</b>	High Technology Cooperation Group
<b>HA/DR</b>	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response
<b>ISRO</b>	Indian Space Research Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund

<b>IPRI</b>	Islamabad Policy Research Institute
<b>IOR</b>	Indian Ocean Region
<b>IPS</b>	Indo-Pacific Strategy
<b>IPR</b>	Intellectual Property Rights
<b>IMEC</b>	The India-Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor
<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency
<b>ISR</b>	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
<b>IFC-IOR</b>	Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region
<b>IBM</b>	International Business Machines
<b>ICCR</b>	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
<b>IORA</b>	Indian Ocean Rim Association
<b>IPEF</b>	The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
<b>ISA</b>	Industrial Security Annex
<b>iCET</b>	Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology
<b>IIT</b>	Indian Institute of Technology
<b>INDUS-X</b>	India-U.S. Defense Acceleration Ecosystem
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>IP</b>	Indo-Pacific
<b>JSTOR</b>	Journal Storage
<b>LAC</b>	Line of Actual Control
<b>LOs</b>	Liaison Officers
<b>LEMOA</b>	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

<b>MTCR</b>	Missile Technology Control Regime
<b>MDP</b>	Major Defense Partner
<b>MDA</b>	Maritime Domain Awareness
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NIDS</b>	National Institute for Defense Studies
<b>NSSP</b>	Next Steps in Strategic Partnership
<b>NPT</b>	The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
<b>NSG</b>	The Nuclear Suppliers Group
<b>NSS</b>	National Security Strategy
<b>NSSP</b>	Next Steps in Strategic Partnership
<b>NDS</b>	National Defense Strategy
<b>NAVCENT</b>	United States Naval Forces Central Command
<b>NEA</b>	National Endowment for the Arts
<b>NASA</b>	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
<b>NISAR</b>	NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar
<b>Open RAN</b>	Open Radio Access Network
<b>PLA</b>	People’s Liberation Army
<b>PRC</b>	People’s Republic of China
<b>PGII</b>	Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
<b>PLAN</b>	People’s Liberation Army Navy
<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing Power Parity
<b>QSD</b>	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
<b>QUIN</b>	Quad Investors Network

<b>ROK</b>	Republic of Korea
<b>RCEP</b>	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
<b>RDP</b>	Reciprocal Defense Procurement
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>SCRI</b>	The Supply Chain Resilience Initiative
<b>SLOC</b>	Sea Lines of Communication
<b>STA-1</b>	Strategic Trade Authority-1
<b>SOSA</b>	Security of Supply Arrangement
<b>SAGAR</b>	Security and Growth for All in the Region
<b>TAC</b>	The Trans-African Corridor
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>USCC</b>	The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar
<b>USIBC</b>	The US-India Business Council
<b>UNCLOS</b>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
<b>UAVs</b>	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>WMDs</b>	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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## ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region, a critical maritime domain stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, has become a focal point of geopolitical competition, particularly among major powers. China's rapid economic growth and military expansion in recent years have raised concerns about its intentions and ambitions in the region. In this scenario, American policy makers are more concern about the rise of China. As a sole superpower US took pre-emptive measures to contain China's influence because US perceives threats from the rising China. So, the United States has accelerated its strategic cooperation with India to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region and maintain its dominant status in the global order. This partnership has two-fold implications: firstly, fuelling great-power rivalry and secondly, creating strategic instability in Indo-Pacific, which is one of the conflict theatres between the great powers. Washington is supporting New Delhi in developing and modernizing its conventional and nuclear capabilities to help India become a regional hegemon. India also has a pivotal interest in developing its strategic relations with the US is to ultimately see itself elevated to a great power status in the region. The focus on containing China is driven by a combination of security, economic and ideological factors that have led the US and India to view China as a strategic challenge that requires a coordinated response to protect their respective interests and values in the region. The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy has aggravated the security dilemma in the region, leading to increased great power rivalry between the U.S. and China. The United States is pursuing "integrated deterrence" against China on all fronts, including accelerating the implementation of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, military build-up, maritime domain awareness, strengthening partnerships like Quad and promoting NATO's involvement in Asia-Pacific affairs. This has heightened tensions and the risk of conflict in the region. China is also actively working on strengthening win-win cooperation and expanding its influence in the Indo-Pacific, which has become the power centre of world geopolitics. China is developing sophisticated technology, developing Industry, manufacturing sectors and has the capacity to develop sophisticated weapon system. China has also the ambition to become the centre of Asian Geo-politics. The recent growth in economy of China leading her to find great power status in the future. With its modernizing military, China has contested the US domination and understanding the traditional US security system in Indo-Pacific. Its war fighting capabilities enable it to threaten American interests in this Area. But China faces a complex web of strategic, territorial and geopolitical challenges as it seeks to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea regions. In response to the changing geopolitical landscape in Asia, both China and the United States attempt to alter the regional order in their own favour, both in the economic and security realms. This research is based on qualitative research methodology, using primary and secondary data resources. Regarding the theoretical framework "Balance of Power" theory is applied in this research. By analyzing the evolving strategic partnership between India and United States and geopolitical alignments in this crucial area, the study delves into the complexities and challenges for China's regional influence in Indo-Pacific.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of this century, leaders in both India and the United States have consistently worked to strengthen their economic, political, and strategic ties. A core aspect of this relationship is the growing military-to-military cooperation between New Delhi and Washington. A key driver of this process is the uncertainty surrounding China's rise, and the rapid increase in China's influence and presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and South Asia that has provided an opportunity for the United States and India to work together. The rise of China poses a serious geo-political challenge to the United States facing in this part of the century. China is advancing its technology, developing its industrial and manufacturing sectors and has the capability to create sophisticated weapon systems. It also aspires to become the centre of Asian geopolitics (Colley, 2020).

China's recent economic growth positions it to achieve great power status in the future. With its modernizing military, China has challenged the US dominance and the traditional US security system in the Indo-Pacific region. Its warfighting capabilities pose a threat to American interests in the region (Colley, 2020). This research employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing primary and secondary data sources. And the study focuses on the challenges and implications of India-US strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific. In this research, the theoretical framework of "Balance of Power" is applied, which examines states' behaviour in the international system. Both the US and India perceive threats from a rising China and aim to contain its influence, leading them to adopt a counterbalance strategy, which has resulted in the signing of a defense agreement. Thus, the Balance of Power theory is essential

for maintaining the independence of countries and promoting equilibrium, which fosters peace and order (Paul, 2004).

The Biden administration views China as the main challenger, if not a direct threat, to its political, economic and military influence in the region. It has pledged to take diplomatic, economic and military measures, ideally in collaboration with allies and partners, to counterbalance China's growing influence. The Biden administration has taken various steps to unite its Asian and European allies and partners, provide economic alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), revamp regional institutional frameworks and shape the regional order to its advantage (Zongyou & Yunhan, 2021). The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was unveiled during the recent G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi. The project mainly serves as a US diplomatic strategy to counteract China's influence in the Middle East. The project, if completed, could serve as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a vast infrastructure project that has raised apprehensions about Beijing's extensive influence across multiple continents (Khan A. M., 2023). Consequently, China-U.S. relations have further deteriorated under Biden's leadership, trending towards confrontation.

India is a preferred ally for security cooperation, particularly in efforts to uphold maritime security and counter Chinese influence in South Asia and Southeast Asia. The USA aims to support India's goal of becoming a prominent global power, emphasizing its alignment with the visions of the USA, Japan and Australia for the Indo-Pacific region (Malik, 2014). With the competition between India and China for influence in South Asia escalating, foreign investment plays a crucial role in shaping regional dynamics. This discussion gains significance as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) expands, extending its reach to nearly every South

Asian nation. India will need to leverage foreign aid and investments strategically to bolster its position as a leading player in South Asia (Tambi, 2023).

India is increasingly concerned about China's expanding influence in South Asia, particularly its alliance with Pakistan, India's main rival. Furthermore, China's prominent Belt and Road Initiative project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is viewed by New Delhi as a geopolitical strategy aimed at curtailing India's influence in the region. In response, New Delhi has implemented a comprehensive strategy to address China's influence in its immediate neighbourhood. This strategy encompasses a range of policy measures, including engaging neighbouring countries, aligning with like-minded allies and partners, and employing a reciprocal approach to counter China's actions (Khan, 2023).

As Asia's other rising power, India holds the potential to serve as a significant counterweight to Chinese influence, both regionally and globally. This is why Washington has been actively pursuing closer ties with New Delhi. President Joe Biden has ambitious plans to solidify the U.S. position in the Indo-Pacific region, spanning South Asia, East Asia and the Western Pacific, through various diplomatic, economic and security measures. India's role could prove pivotal in the outcome of these initiatives (Grossman, 2024).

The strategic partnership between the U.S. and India is built on shared values such as a commitment to democracy and supporting the rules-based international system. The United States and India share common interests in advancing global security, stability and economic prosperity through trade, investment and connectivity. President Biden and Prime Minister Modi have met bilaterally twice, reaffirming their dedication to a resilient, rules-based international

order that protects sovereignty, upholds democratic values and fosters peace and prosperity for all (U.S. Relations With India, 2022).

President Biden and Prime Minister Modi have also participated in multiple engagements of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) with Japan and Australia. The United States backs India's rise as a crucial global power and an essential partner in endeavours to uphold the Indo-Pacific as a region characterized by peace, stability and increasing prosperity. The robust people-to-people connections between these nations, exemplified by the four million-strong Indian American diaspora and active educational exchanges, constitute a significant pillar of strength for their strategic partnership. The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, involving the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense alongside their Indian counterparts, serves as the primary recurring dialogue mechanism between the United States and India. The fifth US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was held in New Delhi in 2023, featuring a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar and Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh (Joint Statement on the Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, 2023 ).

Apart from this dialogue, the United States and India have engaged in numerous bilateral dialogues and working groups covering a wide array of areas, including cooperation in space, health, energy and high-technology trade. These encompass the U.S.-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group, formed in 2000, alongside initiatives such as the Strategic Clean Energy Partnership, Climate Action and Finance Mobilization Dialogue, Cyber Dialogue, Civil Space Working Group, Education and Skills Development Working Group, Trade Policy Forum, Defense Policy Group and Counter-narcotics Working Group ( Vijayalakshmi , 2017).

## **1.1. Rationale of the Study**

The growing strategic cooperation between India and the United States has garnered global attention due to its potential implications on China, a major global power. The international geopolitical landscape is undergoing significant changes. The rise of China as a dominant player has led to concerns and realignments among other major powers. India's deepening ties with the US are a notable development in this context. India's strategic cooperation with the US could be viewed as an attempt to balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This study aims to understand how the India-US partnership affects regional stability and security dynamics, particularly in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific, where China has been expanding its influence. The military dimension of India-US cooperation can significantly impact the security dynamics in the region. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the India-US strategic cooperation and its challenges for China, considering political, economic, military and diplomatic dimensions. It will contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving global order and the roles that these three major powers play within it.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

India and the United States have been strengthening their strategic cooperation in recent years. This cooperation encompasses various areas including, defense, security, trade and technology. Because the rise of the China poses a serious geopolitical challenge to the United States facing in this part of the century. However, both countries have been increasing their collaborative approach to counterbalance China's influence, so the defense cooperation with India is one of the initiatives to balance China. This research attempts to explore the challenges of India-US strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region and

also explore the reasons behind the US soft nuclear policy towards India. The purpose of this study is to examine the objectives of the India-US strategic collaboration in Indo-Pacific and its major implications for China and for regional security dynamics, resulting from Indo-US defense cooperation. China has the ambition to become the centre of Asian Geo-politics but China's interest in the region countered by US' strategic policies. As a sole superpower US took pre-emptive measures to contain China's influence.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

1. To explore the objectives of the India-US strategic collaboration in Asia-Pacific region.
2. To examine the challenges of India-US strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
3. To analyze the China's rise is bringing a shift in US' foreign policy towards India.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

1. What are the objectives of the India-US strategic collaboration in Asia-Pacific region?
2. What are the challenges of India-US strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region?
3. How is China's rise bringing a shift in US' foreign policy towards India?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The study on "India-US Strategic Cooperation: Challenges For China in Indo-Pacific Region (2016-2023)" holds great significance as it sheds light on evolving dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and their challenges for China's regional influence. By examining the India-US strategic cooperation, the research provides valuable insights into the factors that have shaped

Indo-US defense collaboration in the context of countering China's military expansion in the region thereby enhancing our understanding of the changing geopolitical dynamics in Asia Pacific and the broader implications for regional security and stability. It aims to investigate how these collaborations manage a rising global power and affect trade patterns, investment flows, and economic growth in the region, which can influence China's economic strategy. It also explores how this cooperation affects the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on international relations but also offers practical implications for policymakers and analysts in comprehending the India-US strategic alignment and its impact on China's future alliances and engagements. Practically this study would be significant for Chinese officials to understand U.S policies to contain China's emergence. It would also examine how China perceives the growing strategic partnership and the possible implications on its military strategy, regional influence and overall geopolitical calculations. The research can inform policymakers and defense strategists in formulating effective policies and strategies to manage the various challenges and to maintain regional stability. So this study holds significant relevance in the context of geopolitical dynamics and global security.

### **1.6. Delimitations of the Study**

The present study delimits its scope to the study of India-U.S strategic cooperation and its challenges for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region within the timeframe of 2016-2023. The study faces limitations in terms of official Indian and American documents as well as access to archives in India. Therefore, it would rely solely on open-source material i.e. books, journals, online reports and published material related to Indian and US strategic thinking. This research explores the primary objectives for the Indo-US defense cooperation in the context of countering China's military expansion in the region. The study also focuses on the major



security implications faced by China in the context of India-US strategic collaboration. Any previous studies were excluded from the scope of this research.

## **1.7. Literature Review**

Stephen J. Blank in his book, “Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation” tends to explain that how India’s growth and rise in the current world order increases the prospects of Indo-US strategic partnership. Blank highlights the cooperation in defense, economics and security to justify the Indo-US partnership as an inevitable arrangement for expanding future nexus. He also addresses the internal obstacles and hurdles that could impede this cooperation (Blank, 2005).

Sujsheng Zhao said in his article, “The U.S.-China Rivalry in the Emerging Bipolar World: Hostility, Alignment and Power Balance” that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the convergence of the Indo-U.S. threat perception of China began to develop as the U.S. shifted its perception of China from a “strategic partner” to a “strategic competitor”. The United States is advancing its foreign policy goals of limiting China's influence globally while maintaining its own supremacy. Meanwhile, India aims to access Western technologies and establish a balance against China in the region. As part of this strategy, the U.S. has adjusted its approach towards India, offering access to advanced military technologies to enhance its role as a significant player in countering China's expanding influence. In turn, India is positioning itself as a pivotal state in the broader U.S. strategy of containing China. Meanwhile, India aims to strengthen its military capabilities, leveraging U.S. support for its strategic ambitions. The United States' backing of India in enhancing its military strength is causing regional imbalances and presenting security challenges for Pakistan. Recent developments in U.S.-India relations

include agreements such as the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal, military and logistical cooperation, technology transfers, the joint vision for the Indo-Pacific, India's role as a security provider and collaboration within the Quad alliance (Zhao, 2021).

The Book, “The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia's Evolving Balance of Power” by Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi. This book revolves around the theme of rise of China and the relative decline in the US' power causing transition of power in international politics. It centres on the assertion that, “Facing an assertive China in the Asia-Pacific, US President Barack Obama announced in late 2011 his strategy of pivoting towards the region”. This policy aims primarily to counterbalance China's increasing influence in the region, with India playing a crucial role. In this context, the book analyzes how India's foreign policy adapts to the shifting balance of power in the region. The book also examines India's perception of China's expanding military and economic influence as a strategic challenge. It argues that instead of simply endorsing the U.S. pivot, Indian foreign policy has displayed indications of pursuing a three-pronged hedging strategy i.e. deepening ties with the U.S., seeking to stabilize relations with China, and enhancing regional defense partnerships as a localized form of balancing with other regional powers (Pant, Joshi, & butts, 2015).

Mukesh Shankar Bharti said in his research article, “The Indo-US Strategic Cooperation and How China’s Influence Challenges to India-US Alliance in the Indo Pacific”, that there is a rivalry between India and China in various dimensions and perceptions of threats. China and India have common interests in the Indo-Pacific. The Doklam standoff and clash at the Pangong Lake between Indian and Chinese armies create severe security problems in South Asia. The U.S. has been facing a tough challenge in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific Region from the Chinese policy. Thus, China’s expansionism policy in the Indo-pacific region brought India

and the U.S. closer strategic partners. India relies on the U.S. for security reasons in the Indo-Pacific and its neighbourhood. Further, India has severe security threats from its neighbourhood in the northern and Himalayan frontier borders. China's BRI is a geopolitical tool to acquire more areas to make an extensive presence. India understands that bilateral cooperation with the U.S. can curb China's strategic aspiration in South Asia. Washington has high hope for India to cooperate in Asia as well as in the Indo-Pacific. In this prospect, researcher investigates the bilateral cooperation of both countries (Bharti, 2022).

Sumit Ganguly and M.Chris Mason in the book, "The Future of US-India Security Cooperation", explore the evolving strategic relationship between the United States and India. The book starts by exploring the historical context of US-India relations, spanning from the Cold War era to the present. It emphasizes the alignment of strategic interests between the US and India, particularly in addressing common security threats like terrorism, maritime security, and China's rise. Ganguly argues that both nations would gain from enhanced collaboration in defense technology, intelligence sharing and joint military exercises, while also considering potential challenges and areas needing improvement. His analysis is deeply rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical landscape of South Asia and beyond. He examines the implications of US-India cooperation for regional stability, the balance of power in Asia and the broader international order. Ganguly provides a thorough analysis of the historical context, current challenges and future prospects of this vital partnership, assessing its impact on regional and global security dynamics (Ganguly & Mason, 2021).

The 2018 study group report published by the Council on Foreign Relations is titled, "The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future", highlights that both nations are collaborating together to ensure the following goals, Advocate for non-proliferation as a crucial

objective, collaborate to combat international terrorism and uphold a balanced power dynamic for a peaceful and stable Asia, while also cooperating in managing the global economy. The report underscores Kissinger's observation from years ago that India and the United States don't maintain "conflict of interests in traditional lines". Hence building on the same lines India and United States partnership is Indispensable (Blackwill, Chandra, & Clary, 2011).

The Book, "Our Time Has Come: How India is Making Its Place in the World" by Alyssa Ayres. She examines India's active pursuit of strategic partnerships with other countries to counterbalance China's influence. Ayres emphasizes India's strengthening relationships with the United States, Australia and Japan through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) framework, which aims to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region and curb China's growing influence. The book also explores the economic aspects of India's strategy to counter China (Ayres, 2017).

Vikas Slathia in his thesis, "United States-India Strategic Partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in the Twenty First Century", analyzes the prospects of how both India and United States can achieve their national objectives by building on a strategic partnership. He outlines the roles of other significant actors in the region, such as China, Russia and Pakistan. However, Slathia primarily argues that this partnership hinges on short-term gains and rhetoric rather than practical considerations. Historical analysis suggests that the United States may not be a dependable ally during times of war or significant threats from China or Pakistan. Consequently, the author holds a pessimistic view regarding the sustainability of the bilateral relationship and advocates for India to adopt a policy of "multilateralism" to achieve its strategic objectives (Slathia, 2006).

Kunduchi P. Vijayalakshmi in his article, “India-US Strategic Partnership: Shifting American Perspectives on Engaging India”, explores the evolving dynamics of the relationship between India and the United States, focusing on shifts in American perspectives towards engaging with India. In recent years, there has been a noticeable alignment of interests that has strengthened ties between India and the US. One major catalyst for this alignment is China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Economic factors also significantly contribute to shaping the partnership between the two countries. India's rapidly expanding economy and substantial market potential have made it an appealing destination for American businesses, resulting in substantial increases in trade and investment flows. On the security front, both nations confront shared challenges such as terrorism and maritime security threats. The signing of foundational defense agreements, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), underscores the deepening security collaboration between India and the US. Moreover, the article examines the role of leadership and personal relationships in fostering the partnership between the two countries. High-level visits and engagements between political leaders have been instrumental in fostering trust and facilitating cooperation on various mutual interests. This research article emphasizes the importance of the India-US strategic partnership amid evolving global dynamics (Vijayalakshmi, 2018).

Tanvi Madan in her book, “Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War”, argues that China’s influence on the U. S -India relationship is neither a recent nor a momentary Phenomenon. Based on documents from India and the United States, the author demonstrates that American and Indian perceptions of and strategies towards China had a substantial impact on U.S.-India relations from 1949 to 1979. “Fateful Triangle” enhances our

comprehension of the diplomatic history between the U.S. and India, emphasizing China's pivotal influence, reevaluates the origins and execution of Indian foreign policy and nonalignment and provides historical context for the interactions among these three countries. The book argues that history proves such a partnership is not predetermined but also not unachievable. A mutual desire to counterbalance China has drawn the two countries closer in the past and could do so again. However, history indicates that shared perceptions of an external threat from China are necessary but insufficient for forging a close and lasting alignment between India and the United States. Such alignment requires consensus on the nature and urgency of the threat, as well as a coordinated strategic, economic and ideological approach to addressing it (Madan, 2020).

The article, “Geostrategic Implications of the Indo-American Strategic Partnership” written by Stephen Blank, explores the evolving dynamics between India and the US and their implications for global geopolitics. The article highlights the deepening Indo-American strategic partnership, emphasizing their shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region aimed at offsetting China's expanding influence. This alignment has fostered greater collaboration in maritime security, defense technology advancements and joint military drills. Moreover, the article examines India's strategic significance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its potential as a crucial ally for the United States in the area. Beyond security cooperation, the partnership also encompasses economic relations, with both nations striving to bolster trade and investment opportunities. The author also analyzes how technology and innovation play a crucial role in advancing the relationship, particularly in cyber security, space exploration and renewable energy. While acknowledging challenges and potential obstacles, Blank contends that the strategic partnership between India and the US has the capacity to redefine the global order and enhance stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and globally (Blank, 2007).

Another research paper, “Indo-US Strategic Partnership and its Security Implications for Asia Pacific Region” explains that due to unprecedented rise of China in the economic, political and social domains world is shifting its strategic focus from the European Politics to both continental and maritime domains of Asia resulting in a challenge for the US and its allies. The United States, China and India are intertwined in a strategic mix of cooperation, competition and containment. The US aims to position India as a competitive offshore balancing power against China, following a strategy of balancing without containment. An active conflict is not anticipated due to the deep economic, political, social and cultural integration among these powers. Close strategic coordination between the US and India is mutually beneficial. India could serve as an offshore balancing power for the US to maintain its influence in the Asia-Pacific region against China and its allies. In return, India gains significant opportunities to strengthen its military capabilities through access to sophisticated US technology, co-production and co-development frameworks. This access to advanced military hardware would significantly enhance India’s power projection capabilities, posing security concerns for its neighbours and adversaries. Additionally, the growing Indo-US relationship aimed at balancing and containing China has serious regional strategic security implications (Ali, Afridi, &Naazer, 2016).

The article, “From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-U.S. Strategic Competition” authored by Muhammad Saeed delves into the evolving geopolitical dynamics between the United States and China within the Indo-Pacific region. Saeed examines the escalating strategic competition between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, marked by geopolitical manoeuvring, military build-ups and economic rivalries. The author explores the role of other significant regional players, particularly India, in shaping Indo-Pacific dynamics and counterbalancing China's assertiveness. India has increasingly asserted its

influence, seeking to strengthen strategic partnerships with like-minded nations to counteract China's growing power. The analysis also considers the implications of this US-China competition for regional stability and security, highlighting the challenges faced by smaller countries caught between the competing interests of these two superpowers (Saeed, 2017).

According to Sher Ali Kakar in his research article, “Containing China: The Indo-US Defense Cooperation”. 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 now engaged in strategic efforts to contain China's rise and maintain its supremacy in the world. To this end, the US has strengthened its relations with regional countries, particularly India, which has emerged as a key ally in the region. In recent years, the US and India have significantly bolstered their strategic partnership based on shared concerns about China's rise. This paper posits that the US aims for India to serve as a security provider to counterbalance China, while India seeks support from the US and Western allies to strengthen its military capabilities and assert regional hegemony, potentially leading to regional imbalance. In this context, this research paper seeks to analyze significant developments in India-US defense relations, emphasizing bilateral agreements, nuclear cooperation and maritime collaboration in response to China's increasing power and influence in the region. Besides, the study explores the impact of Indo-US defense cooperation on regional stability, with a particular focus on Pakistan, which already confronts security challenges stemming from India's strategic ambitions (Kakar, 2022).

Professor Dr. Guihong Zhang in his article, “US-India Strategic Cooperation: Implications for China and Pakistan,” examines the evolving dynamics between the United States, India, China and Pakistan. Zhang outlines the evolution of the US-India relationship from natural allies to strategic partners, emphasizing their growing collaboration in defense, economy



and technology. This shift has significant ramifications for China and Pakistan, both of which have intricate relationships with the US and India. The strengthening ties between the world's largest democracies could potentially encircle China geopolitically, affecting its ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, increased military cooperation between the US and India could shift the regional balance of power, heightening tensions and competition. The article underscores the necessity for China and Pakistan to adjust their foreign policies and strategic approaches in response to these developments to protect their interests and sustain regional stability (Zhang, 2005).

According to Zahid Ali Khan in his vis “Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Deal: The Gainer and the Loser”. The Indo U.S deal is the clear manifestation of the U.S ultimate desire to recognized India as the leading power in the region (Khan,2013).

“Indo-US Nuclear /Strategic Cooperation: Chinese Response”, has written by Sadat Hassan, analyzes that the rising significance of China represent a major change in Asian affairs. The United States is concerned about the growing influence of China in the region. The U.S. National Security Commission warns that competition between the United States and China could intensify as China strengthens. The U.S. has leveraged unresolved border disputes and complex relations between China and India to bolster its ties with the latter. This strategic partnership between Washington and New Delhi carries significant implications for China (Hassan, 2011).

Another Paper, “Will India Be a Better Strategic Partner Than China?” Written by Dan Blumenthal says that America agreed to recognize India as a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology and pledged to support its civilian nuclear program and urge others to do the

same. This agreement surprised observers in the strategic community and Congress. Even supporters of closer ties with India struggled to understand why the United States made a seemingly significant concession on non-proliferation rules in exchange for vague promises of support from India (Blumenthal, 2005).

According to the “Report to Congress on U.S.-India Security Cooperation”, the United States and India are natural partners destined to have a closer relationship due to shared interests and values. The report further states that a strong bilateral partnership is in the U.S.'s interest and anticipates that India's significance to U.S. interests will continue to increase in the long run (Pacifici, 2011).

Dr. Liu Zongyi’s article, “Where Will it Go?”, on the China-India relationship notes that the two biggest emerging powers are concerned not only with the speed of growth in China and India but also with the development of relations between the two. Following its relative decline in power after the Iraq War, the United States is highly concerned about challenges from emerging powers. There is no doubt China is the biggest challenger among them (Detlef, 2012).

Another author in his paper “Rising India Through China’s Eye” said that India has been viewed as viral state to Pakistan and a power confined to South Asia only. However, due to India's remarkable improvement in national strength over the last decade, the world has started to take notice of India's rapid growth, which has shifted the focus to assessing China's perspective on India's rise, including its origins, drivers, threat perception and China's response to dealing with this emerging competitor (Kumar, 2012).

In the paper “India-US Relations: Progress Amidst Limited Convergence”, Zurich notes that the relationship between the United States and India has seen substantial progress over the

past decades. This improvement can be attributed to increased defense trade and military exchanges, expanding civilian commerce and concerted efforts to address mutual concerns, which have collectively helped to alleviate mutual suspicions (Zurich, 2012).

### **1.7.1. Literature Gap**

There is so much work that has done regarding India-U.S. strategic cooperation and its implications on China. But the existing literature lacks the contemporary developments between the two states. My research would investigate how the dynamics of India-US strategic cooperation have evolved since 2021, considering factors such as leadership changes, policy shifts and emerging challenges. There are still other several research gaps worth exploring. My research would focus on evaluating the effectiveness of Indo-US defense cooperation in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. It involves analyzing joint military exercises, intelligence sharing mechanisms, technology transfers and diplomatic engagements to understand their implications on China's regional behaviour. This study attempts to recount recent developments in India-US strategic relations and the implications of this strategy on regional stability and the potential conflicts and security challenges that may arise from it. While there has been significant research on the security and geopolitical aspects of the India-US partnership and its impact on China, but there is a gap in literature regarding the economic dimensions this could include trade relations, investment patterns and economic cooperation. There is also a need for research to investigate the China's perceptions of India-US cooperation and how Beijing responds to this partnership diplomatically, militarily and economically. My study would also explore the role of regional alliances and partnerships e.g., the Quad, in influencing India-US cooperation and their collective approach towards China.

## 1.8. Theoretical Framework

The Balance of Power (BOP) theory provides a valuable framework for understanding international relations. This theory first arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and has evolved over time. It posits that state power is in flux and states ensure their survival by preventing any single state from achieving enduring military supremacy. The central argument of the theory is that as one state amasses power, other states cooperate through a defensive coalition to mitigate the concentration of power. Thus, there is a constant rebalancing of power in international affairs. Contemporarily, the United States has been seen as a global hegemony in a unipolar international environment the economic and military rise of China could be explained via the balance of power theory. Some international relations theorists argue that a balance of power environment is preferable to a dominant state system, as it makes aggression less profitable and allows rivals to establish and maintain global power equilibrium ( Paul, Wirtz, & Fortmann, 2004).

According to Kenneth Waltz's balance of power theory, states secure themselves by preventing any single country from amassing sufficient military power to monopolize and dominate others. If one state achieves superiority, it may exploit weaker states. Scholar argues that to prevent aggression and the monopoly of force, a balance of power in the international system is essential. This balance ensures equilibrium of power among adversaries (Nexon, 2009). Kenneth Waltz said that,

*“A balance of power system can only deter war if there is a rough equality in power and resources between the major actors”* (Waltz, 2010).

This concept of Balance of Power (BOP) applies to India-U.S. strategic cooperation, aimed at balancing the region in response to China's rapid growth as a global power. The balance

of power theory is a dynamic concept, as states constantly adjust their strategies to maintain equilibrium in response to shifting power dynamics. In the India-U.S.-China context, this theory helps to explain the complex web of alliances, threats and power aggregation that shape regional geopolitics. To achieve balance, states can form alliances and engage in buck-passing threats.

Morgenthau argued that states should pursue their national interests and emphasized the importance of the balance of power as a critical mechanism for preserving stability in the international system (Nexon, 2009). Stability among states is achieved when power is distributed so that no single nation can dominate others. This theory is particularly relevant for maintaining the independence of countries by preventing any one state from becoming overly powerful, which could lead to aggression or imperialism. In a balance of power system, states act primarily out of self-interest, forming alliances and counterbalancing against rising powers to ensure their survival and autonomy. This dynamic encourages vigilance among nations, as they must monitor not only potential threats from rivals but also changes in the strength of allies. The principles of maintaining sovereignty through military alliances, trade and diplomacy remain relevant strategies for smaller nations to safeguard their independence against larger powers (Andersen & Wohlforth, 2021).

In the current global context, the Balance of Power theory remains relevant as a means to maintain the independence of countries, particularly in a world where major powers continue to jostle for influence. It serves as a mechanism to ensure that no single country or bloc can dominate the international system, thereby promoting stability and respecting the sovereignty of nations. As the global power dynamics shift, with China's growing influence and the United States' continued presence, maintaining a balance of power is crucial for preserving the independence and sovereignty of countries in the region (Giri, 2021).

So, regarding the theoretical framework “Balance of Power” theory is applied in this study, which tries to identify the behaviour of the states in the international system. Though it was used in old days nevertheless, the relevance of this theory in modern time cannot be neglected. The proponents of this theory assume that there is a natural tendency for states to seek regional and global hegemony. Other states will try to prevent hegemony by strengthening their own capabilities or entering anti-hegemonic alliances with other threatened states. US and India both states, perceive threats from the rising China and want to contain China’s influence, that’s why US and India adopted a counter balance strategy by signing a defense deal. Therefore, a Balance of Power theory is desirable to keep the independence of the countries and promote equilibrium to peace and order. Because the theory argues that when power is balanced, no single country or coalition can easily impose its will on others, thereby preserving the independence and sovereignty of states.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the balance of power is essential to counter China’s growing influence and ensure that smaller countries retain their autonomy and decision-making power without becoming overly dependent on or threatened by a major power. The Indo-Pacific region has seen rising tensions, especially between the United States and China. China’s assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, including its territorial claims and military build-up, poses challenges to the sovereignty of smaller nations in the region. The Balance of Power theory stresses the need for these countries to align themselves in ways that counterbalance China’s influence, ensuring their independence and security. Countries in the Indo-Pacific have been strengthening alliances, such as the Quad, comprising the U.S., India, Japan and Australia and AUKUS, involving Australia, the UK and the US. These partnerships are examples of states coming together to create a counterweight to potential hegemony, thus supporting the idea of

maintaining a balance of power. By collaborating and sharing resources, these nations enhance their strategic capabilities while promoting regional stability (Deb & Wilson, 2021).

The interconnectedness of economies in the Indo-Pacific can complicate traditional notions of power. Nations are finding that economic ties can enhance their independence, while excessive reliance on a single state can create vulnerabilities. The Balance of Power theory encourages countries to diversify their economic partnerships to maintain autonomy. While the Balance of Power theory may have its benefits in certain contexts, it is essential to complement it with diplomacy, dialogue and multilateral cooperation to ensure a more peaceful and sustainable world order. Finding a balance between power dynamics and collaborative efforts can be key to preserving independence while also promoting interconnectedness and shared prosperity among nations (Papayoanou, 2002).

Nations like India, Japan and Southeast Asian countries are increasingly pursuing strategies that enhance their military and economic capabilities, recognizing the need to deter potential aggressors. By doing so, they are contributing to a multipolar balance, where no single power can dominate the region unilaterally. This action aligns with the essence of the theory, preserving national independence through collective strength. Other external powers, such as Russia and European nations, have also shown interest in the Indo-Pacific. Their involvement can further complicate the power dynamics but can also serve as a stabilizing factor by providing additional support to countries in the region. This complexity reinforces the notion of balance, as various players seek to protect their own interests and maintain their independence. This theory is applicable mostly in multipolar system (Varisco, 2013).

The international system is increasingly shifting towards a multipolar world, where several major powers like U.S., China, Russia, the European Union and emerging powers like India and Brazil, exert significant influence. In such an environment, a balance of power approach is necessary to prevent any one power from dominating and to maintain international stability. Countries in Indo-Pacific region specifically, Southeast Asian states engage with both the U.S. and China to balance their relationships, ensuring they are not overly reliant on one power, which could threaten their independence (Bing, 2024).

India and the United States have been intensifying their strategic cooperation in recent years, which can be interpreted as an endeavour to offset China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries share apprehensions regarding China's growing sway and through collaboration, they aim to bolster their combined capabilities to manage and to a certain extent, restrain China's influence. India is highlighted as a significant partner in the Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS) , referred to as a “Strong India” and a “Net Security Provider”. This alliance is characterized by military cooperation, economic ties and shared democratic values. The U.S. supports India’s rise in the region, viewing it as a counterbalance to China. The partnership legitimizes India’s role as a regional power, enhancing its military capabilities through arms imports, intelligence sharing and joint exercises with the US. Although India is not a formal U.S. ally, the U.S. has intensified its cooperation with India, recognizing its role as a counterbalance to China (Deb & Wilson, 2021).

India’s approach to addressing China’s growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region involves a combination of diplomatic, economic and security strategies. Diplomatically, India has strengthened ties with like-minded countries such as the United States, Japan and Australia through forums like the Quad. These partnerships aim to promote a rules-based order, ensure



freedom of navigation and uphold regional stability. Economically, India has enhanced its trade relationships with other countries in the region to counterbalance China's economic dominance. By engaging in projects and initiatives that promote economic growth and connectivity, India seeks to diversify its economic ties and reduce dependence on China. On the security front, India has enhanced its military capabilities and cooperation with other regional powers to bolster its defense posture. This includes closer security ties with countries like the US, Japan and Australia, as well as India emphasizes maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean, where it seeks to counter China's growing influence through collaborations with smaller island nations like the Maldives and Seychelles. This focus addresses concerns over China's investments and military presence in these areas, which threaten India's traditional role as a regional security provider. Through these efforts, India aims to safeguard its interests, promote regional stability and counterbalance China's influence in the region.

India and the U.S. have expanded their relations not just in security, but also in economic and technological collaboration. This multifaceted partnership is perceived as an effort to establish a comprehensive counterbalance to China, encompassing both military and economic strengths. India has adopted a hedging strategy by cultivating strategic ties with several key powers such as the US, Russia and China. This approach enables India to adjust to evolving power dynamics, prevent excessive dependence on any single partner, and enhances its leverage in relations with China.

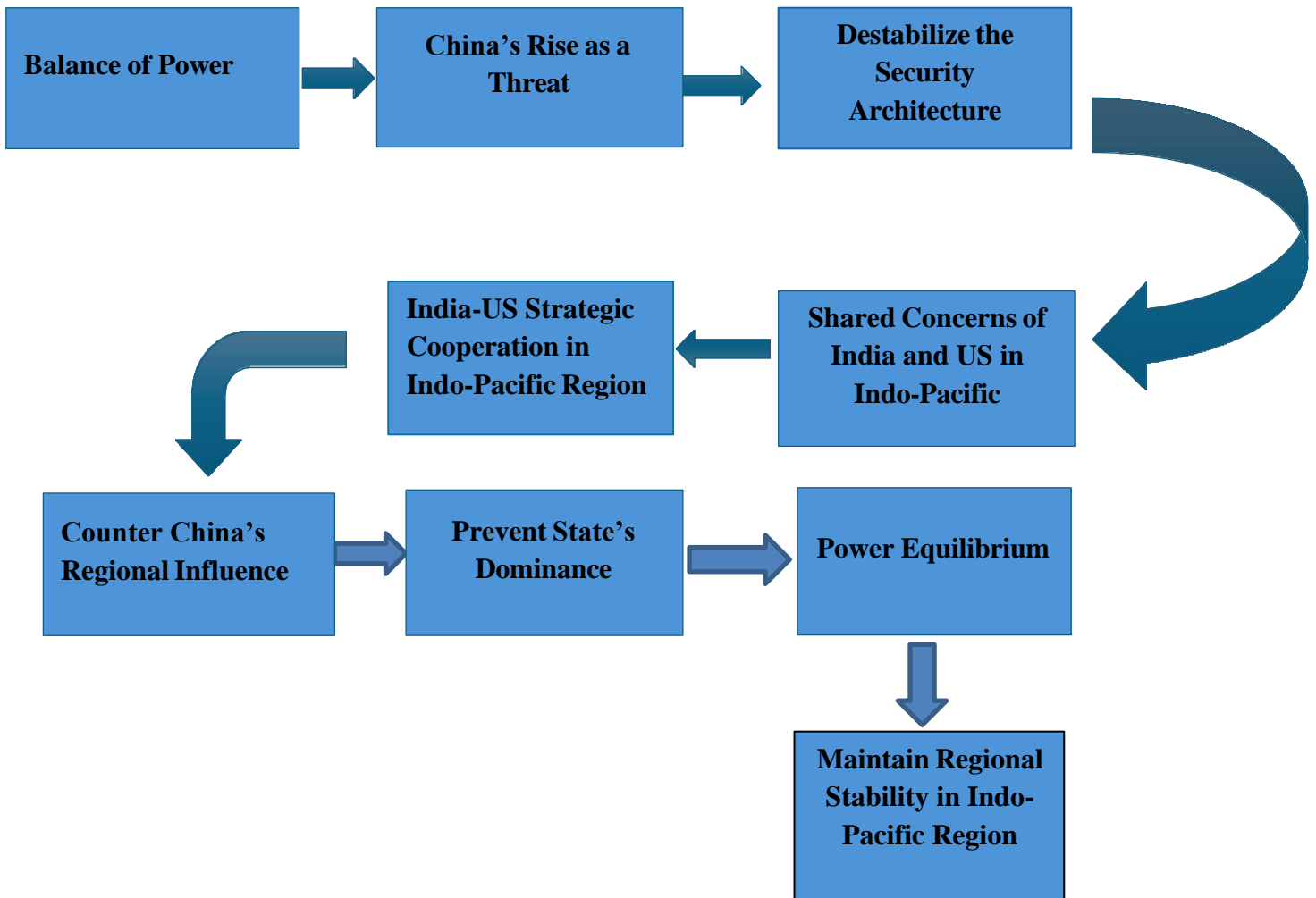
The Balance of Power theory also considers the regional dynamics. In the context of the Indo-Pacific region, the India-US partnership has led to the formation of alliances and partnerships with other countries like Japan and Australia. These regional alignments enhance the balance of power by consolidating resources and capabilities to counter China's assertive

influence (Hope, 2023). While balance of power dynamics can deter the dominance of one state, they can also spur competition and potential conflict. Hence, it is crucial for India, the US and other regional actors to prudently manage their strategic cooperation to mitigate unintended escalations and uphold regional stability (Paul, 2004).

### 1.8.1. Conceptual Framework

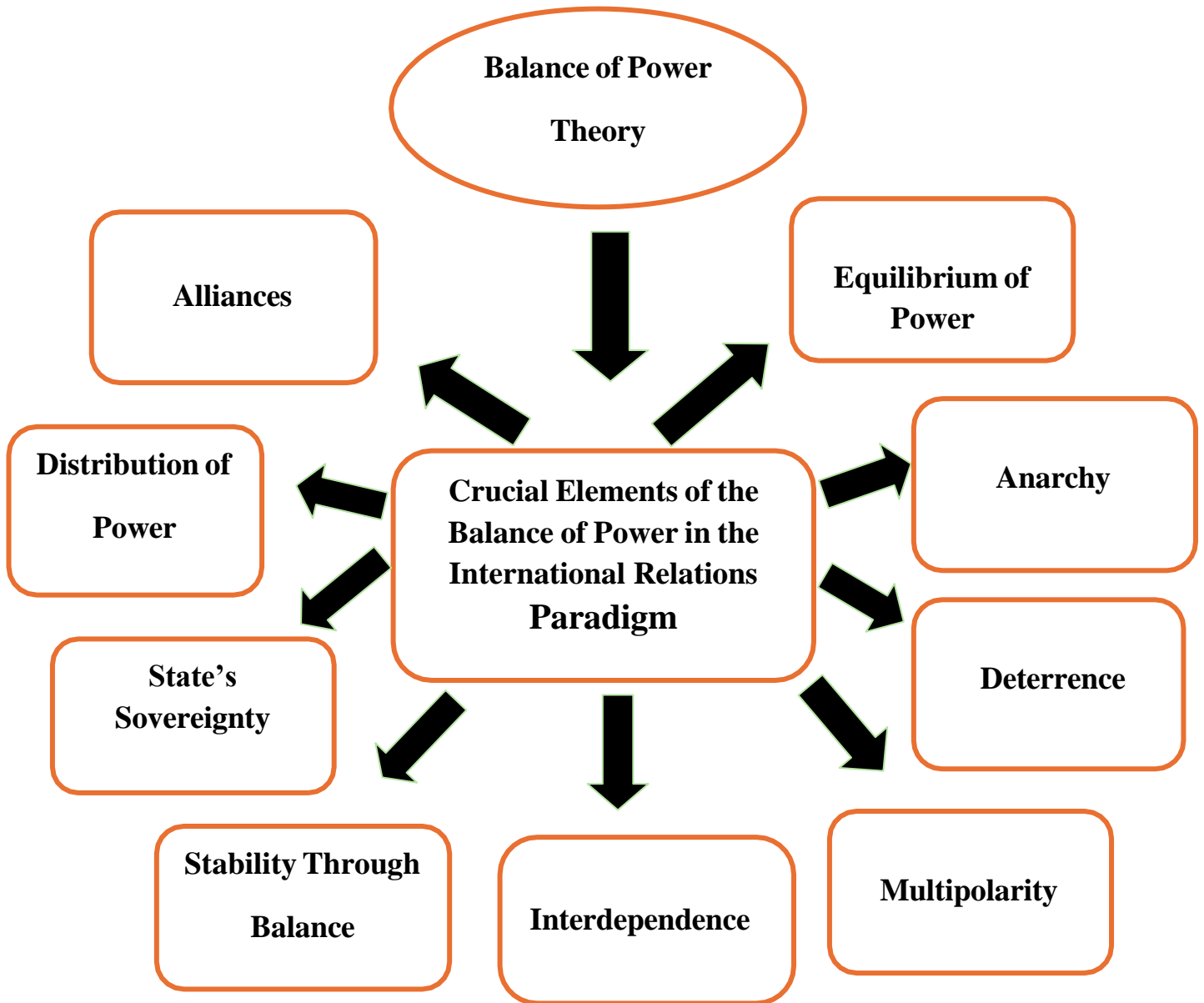
The conceptual framework for the theory's implications is described as follows:

**Figure-1**



**Source:** Researcher's own Conceptual Framework

**Figure-2**



**Source:** Researcher's own conception based on Paul (2004), Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century.

## **1.9. Research Methodology**

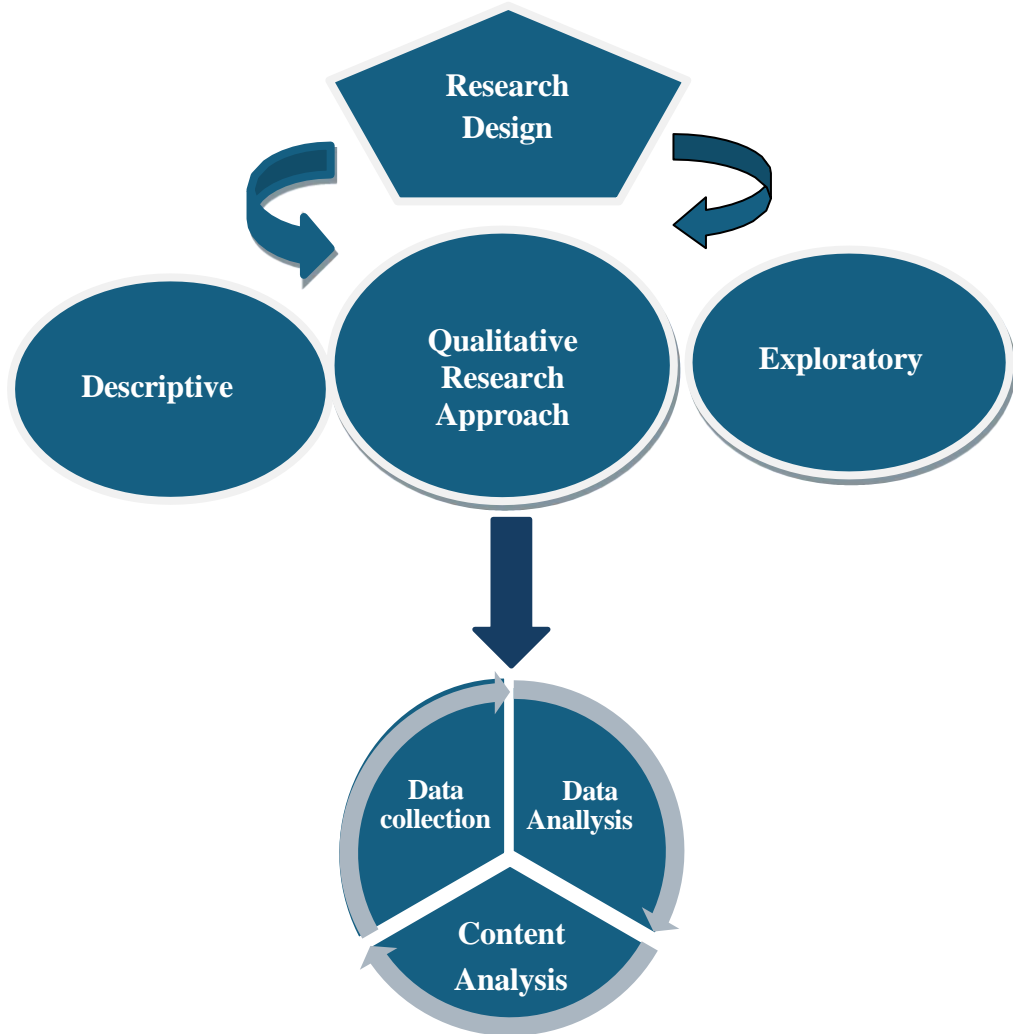
The present study focuses on the analysis of the challenges and implications of India-US strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The researcher used qualitative research design to explore the primary objectives for the Indo-U.S. strategic collaboration in the context of countering China's military expansion in the region. Furthermore, an exploratory and descriptive approach was used for the critical analysis of India-US strategic cooperation to maintain balance of power in the region. Both primary and secondary data sources were used for data collection. The primary sources included official statements, government policy papers and reports. Secondary data sources comprised books, research publications, articles, journals, reports, JSTOR, academic papers and articles from leading newspapers were also utilized in this study. Moreover, numerous websites and YouTube content were used in data collection. The overall analysis aims at understanding the Indo-US strategic cooperation and its challenges for China.

### **1.9.1. Research Design**

A qualitative methodology was used for the research design. This is based on descriptions, exploration and analysis methods. Data analysis was conducted through primary and secondary sources for the elaboration of the study. All issues related to the topic were carefully analyzed. Overall, this research methodology provided a comprehensive approach to exploring the security challenges of India-US strategic cooperation over China.

**Figure-3**

**Research Methodology Framework**



**Source:** Researcher's own Description

## **1.9.2. Operational Definitions**

### **Strategic Cooperation**

Strategic cooperation refers to a diplomatic or political relationship between two or more countries where they work together in a planned and deliberate manner to achieve common goals or address shared challenges. These goals often relate to issues of mutual interest, such as security, economic development, regional stability and addressing global challenges. Strategic cooperation can take various forms, including formal alliances, defense pacts, trade agreements and collaborative efforts. It involves a structured and coordinated effort among nations to advance their interests and enhance their collective influence on the global stage. It often requires a high level of trust and commitment among the participating parties.

### **Indo-Pacific Region**

The term “Indo-Pacific Region” is a geopolitical concept that encompasses the vast maritime area extending from the Indian Ocean to the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. This region has gained significant attention in international relations and strategic discussions due to its growing economic, political and security significance. This region is also important for geopolitical competition, security concerns and diplomatic and multilateral engagement. Indo-Pacific region includes countries bordering the Indian Ocean, such as India, China, Indonesia, Australia and countries in Southeast Asia, as well as those in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, like Japan, the United States and various island nations. It is characterized by its critical maritime trade routes, including the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, which are vital for global commerce.

## **Counterbalance Strategy**

A counterbalance strategy can be described as the diplomatic or geopolitical approach where a country seeks to counter the influence or power of another country or group of countries. This can be achieved through various means like alliances, economic measures, military build-ups, diplomacy and soft power. The specific strategy and tactics used in a counterbalance strategy depends on the geopolitical context and the goals of the country pursuing it. The term “counterbalance strategy” in the context of international relations is the idea of balancing power or influence between different states or actors to maintain stability.

## **Defence Cooperation**

Defense cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts and agreements between countries to enhance their mutual defense capabilities and security. This can include joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, arms sales, technology transfers and diplomatic agreements aimed at strengthening defense and security relationships. Defense cooperation is often pursued to address common security threats, promote stability and build trust among nations.

### **1.9.3. Data Collection**

Main reliance is given on secondary data collection. Researcher used qualitative data to interpret the complexities of the area of investigation. In this study, data were gathered through books, scholarly journals, research works, articles, reports, accessible official data, media publications, academic papers, articles of the leading newspapers, official statements, government documents, publications from think tanks and diverse analysis of people available on the internet were studied and examined for this research topic.

For the selection of books, the Central Library was visited, and online books were also consulted, collected from websites such as Google Books. For articles and journals, online databases and websites such as JSTOR, IPRI, Brookings Institution, Amazon, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, USCC (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission) and NIDS (National Institute for Defense Studies) were consulted to collect relevant data.

#### **1.9.4. Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was based on a content analysis approach. The content analysis approach is a research technique that involves the systematic examination of text based data, such as transcripts from interviews, documents and media coverage. The content analysis approach was used to identify and analyze the key themes, patterns and trends in the data collected from primary and secondary sources.

#### **1.9.5. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles, including academic integrity, were upheld throughout the research process. Proper citation and acknowledgment of sources were maintained. Bias to particular content was avoided throughout the conduct of the research and the data has been selected based on the aims of the research and not just according to the preference of a particular aspect. No plagiarism was incorporated in this study, and all findings are based on analysis of data, collected from various primary and secondary sources.



## **1.10. Organization of the Study**

The study is divided into five chapters that helps to investigate and elaborate the research findings. The subsequent sequence of the chapters is given below.

### **Chapter One**

Chapter one provides a detailed overview of the topic and presents a concise introduction to the research methodology and approach employed in this thesis.

### **Chapter Two**

Chapter two explores the India-US strategic alignment and its objectives in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Chapter Three**

Chapter three examines the challenges of India-U.S strategic cooperation for China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Chapter Four**

Chapter four highlights the China's rise is bringing a massive shift in United States' foreign policy towards India.

### **Chapter Five**

Chapter five is based on the crux of the entire research project, summarizing the whole study. This chapter serves as the concluding chapter, where findings and recommendations are discussed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **INDIA-US STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**

The relationship between the United States and India is one of the most strategic and consequential of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United States supports India's growth as a major global force and an important partner in supporting a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Bilateral relations between India and the United States have evolved into a “global strategic partnership” based on shared democratic values and growing convergence of interests on bilateral, regional and global concerns. The present Indo-US strategic collaboration aims to reshape South Asia's security architecture. India-US strategic cooperation is distinguished by diversified involvement in defense, security, trade, technology and diplomacy. The two nations share a mutual interest in maintaining regional stability, fighting terrorism and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. The partnership between the world’s longest standing democracy and its largest democracy will have profound and far-reaching consequences, shaping the future of the region and the world. The United States designated India as a “Major Defense Partner” in 2014 as the two countries' strategic collaboration grew. Additionally, both India and the US have increased their collaboration in multilateral organizations like the Quad and I2U2 Group (United States-India Relations, 2023).

India has risen to become a premier ally of the United States in the region. In the era of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, strategic partnerships between the two countries began to develop. President Obama's leadership injected fresh momentum, propelling the bilateral relationship to a new level of strategic engagement and cooperation. The defense partnership with India is an important aspect of US' foreign policy, reflecting the significance of their bilateral

relationship. India is enhancing its defense partnership with the US to bridge technological gaps and upgrade its military infrastructure. The two nations are united in their concerns about China's growing influence, which is central to their defense collaboration (Shukla, 2005).

The US is currently dealing with India to its four-pillar strategy and dealt India as a close strategic partner; Firstly, the US aims to weaken India's longstanding strategic ties with Russia. Secondly, the US seeks to counterbalance China's rising superpower status with India's support, leveraging India's significant economic and military presence in South Asia, as well as its history of tense relations with China. Thirdly, The US wants to manage India's large defense market. And fourthly, the US needed Indian cooperation to exterminate global terrorism. These are all rationale behind the US strategic closeness with India (United States-India Relations, 2023).

## **2.1. Historical Background of India-US Strategic Collaboration**

Since 1947 the US and India have maintained a strong connection, despite India's close alliance with the Soviet Union. The India-US strategic relationship has evolved substantially since its early days. During the Cold War, India maintained a non-aligned stance, with its defense ties heavily leaning towards the Soviet Union. On the other hand, in the 1950s, the US and the Soviet Union both extended offers to support India's quest for a permanent seat on the UNSC, signalling a nascent diplomatic engagement that would eventually blossom into a robust partnership (Gupta, 2005). However, the relationship underwent a significant transformation following the end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization in 1991. During the first Gulf War, India demonstrated its support for the US by providing refuelling facilities for American aircrafts en route from the Pacific to the Middle East. Indian Prime Minister Rao's visit to the US during May 1994 initiated a new phase of their relationship (Ejaz, 2012).

One of the key milestones was the signing of the US-India Defense Framework Agreement in 2005, which laid the foundation for closer defense cooperation. This agreement was followed by the landmark US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008, which signalled a significant shift in relations (Sargana, 2023). President Bill Clinton's visit to South Asia in March 2000 marked a significant effort by the US to strengthen ties with India. The trip resulted in a Joint Statement where both nations committed to enhancing their partnership in meaningful ways. A US-India Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism was established to foster cooperation in this critical area. Later in 2000, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to the US further solidified relations, as he addressed a joint session of Congress. The two leaders issued a second Joint Statement, outlining collaborative efforts on key issues such as arms control, terrorism and HIV/AIDS, demonstrating the expanding scope of the US-India partnership (Kronstadt, 2009). Washington has categorically propagated the idea of close ties with New Delhi, as evident from Condoleezza Rice's statement in a CNN interview, where she elaborated that,

*“The United States has undertaken a transformation in its bilateral relationship with India based on a conviction that US interests require a strong relationship with India. We are the two largest democracies committed to political freedom protected by representative government. India is moving toward greater economic freedom as well. We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including through the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. Finally, we have an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia”* (Sagar, 2004).

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US adapted its South Asia policy to accommodate India's strategic interests and security concerns, recognizing India's growing importance in global affairs. The US saw India's emergence as a positive force in the region and viewed India as a potential security partner in the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, US policymakers perceived India's rise as a source of strategic stability, contributing to a more balanced and secure regional dynamics

(Singh D. B., 2019). President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States stated that, "*U.S. interests require a strong relationship with India*". The 2006 version claimed that, "*India now is poised to shoulder global obligations in cooperation with the United States in a way befitting a major power*" (Kronstadt, 2009).

The US-India nuclear agreement was a hallmark of the Bush administration's efforts to bolster bilateral relations and foster a robust strategic partnership. India's geopolitical landscape underwent a significant transformation in the early 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, which freed it from the constraints of superpower rivalry and paved the way for closer ties with the US and like-minded nations like Israel. Although the relationship faced temporary hurdles, including India's 1998 nuclear tests and subsequent sanctions, it continued to move forward, driven by shared interests and a mutual desire for cooperation. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, India's backing for US-led counter-terrorism efforts significantly bolstered the partnership. In October 2001, President George W. Bush lifted most sanctions, highlighting the importance of a strong US-India relationship. Subsequent initiatives, such as the High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) in 2002 and the "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" (NSSP) in 2004, paved the way for collaboration in critical areas like civilian nuclear energy, space exploration and high-tech trade. The NSSP outlined reciprocal measures to enhance cooperation in nuclear regulatory matters, missile defense, space technology and high-tech commerce, further solidifying the partnership. This initiative paved the way for enhanced collaboration in defense and nuclear technology (Akhter, 2008 ).

The formalization of defense ties was marked by the 2005 Defense Framework Agreement, which outlined cooperation in defense technology, joint exercises, trade, technology transfer and research. Overall, these milestones reflect the trajectory of US-India relations

towards a comprehensive strategic partnership. The agreement reflected a major turnaround in US strategic perception of India as, *“a potential partner in providing peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region and in shaping a new Asian balance of power”*. The agreement underscored that the, *“defence relationship will support, and will be an element of the broader US-India strategic partnership”* (Akhter, 2008 ). The next significant milestone in cementing the strategic partnership was the agreement signed on July 18, 2005, which encompassed provisions for advancing cooperation in civil nuclear energy, civilian space exploration and high technology trade. Notably, the US recognized India as a responsible nuclear state and pledged to support India’s access to civil nuclear technology, marking a significant shift in the US stance on India (Sullivan, 2014).

The 2008 Indo-US nuclear agreement was a historic deal that ended India's three-decade-long nuclear isolation, permitting the country to access nuclear material and technology despite its non-signatory status to the NPT and NSG. The US acknowledged India's exceptional status and importance, entering into this significant cooperation. The 123 Agreement aimed to facilitate the development of nuclear power plants in India, specifically supporting the country's fast breeder reactor program's heavy water needs signifying a substantial milestone in the strategic partnership between the two nations (Mohan, 2006).

In 2009, the concept of strategic dialogue was introduced, identifying five key areas of strategic collaboration between India and the US. These dialogues aimed to address bilateral issues and focus on critical areas such as enhancing bilateral trade, strengthening India’s energy security, sharing terror intelligence, facilitating defense purchases from the US, strategic interests in the naval sphere of influence and addressing challenges to stability in the Asia-Pacific region (Singh D. B., 2019).

The US sees China's rise as a significant threat to regional and global security, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Recognizing India's importance in maintaining regional balance, the US has developed a strategic partnership with India, which China views with suspicion. In response to China's increasing assertiveness, the US and India face strategic challenges and seek to counterbalance China's hegemonic ambitions through alliances like the Quad, which includes Japan and Australia. This partnership aims to ensure a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, mitigating China's growing influence (Chacko, 2014).

President Barack Obama continued to nurture the partnership with India, initiated by the Bush administration and in 2009, he reaffirmed the natural alliance between the two nations, rooted in their shared values of democracy and free markets. He underscored their common goal of ensuring peace and security for all in the Asia region, reflecting the convergence of their strategic interests and values (Whitelaw, 2009).

In April 2009, India joined the Obama administration's "Nuclear Security Initiative", aimed at preventing nuclear materials from falling into the hands of violent extremists. Additionally, India reaffirmed its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation by maintaining its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, in place since May 1998. To demonstrate its reliability as a non-proliferation partner, India voted against Iran's opaque nuclear program in IAEA meetings in 2005 and 2009. Furthermore, India collaborated with the US to initiate negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and a nuclear weapons convention, showcasing its dedication to global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The United States and India collaborated to facilitate India's entry into prominent international export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Australia Group. While India successfully joined

the MTCR and the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018, China has persistently blocked India's membership in the NSG, motivated by a desire to curb India's growing influence and prestige on the global stage (Burgess, 2019).

The US introduced its "Pivot to Asia" policy to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In November 2011, the Obama administration announced its rebalancing strategy for the region, which accorded India a significant role. The US's rebalancing policy, dubbed the "Obama Doctrine", aimed to counter China's assertiveness by strengthening partnerships with strategic allies and like-minded nations in the Asia-Pacific, thereby promoting a more balanced and secure regional landscape. As India's military and economic influence in South Asia has grown, it has become a crucial partner for the US in implementing its rebalancing strategy. The US has sought to counter China's rising assertiveness in the region with India's support. To this end, India and the US signed the Logistic Support Agreement in 2016, allowing them to utilize each other's strategic seaports however, China has expressed concerns and unease over this agreement, viewing it as a potential threat to its own interests in the region (Chatterjee, 2005).

The India-US defense relationship is built on three pillars; defense trade, military-to-military cooperation and counter-terrorism efforts, with a focus on addressing Chinese assertiveness. To strengthen defense ties, The Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) was launched in 2012, aimed at enhancing defense trade and technology sharing between the two nations. The DTTI agreement has facilitated the transfer of America defense technology to India, enabling the co-operation and co-development of defense systems and fostering a more robust defense partnership (Dinshaw & Ganguly, 2006). As stated in the Pentagon report, which explains,



*“The United States and India are natural partners, destined to be closer because of shared interests and values and our mutual desire for a stable and secure world. A strong bilateral partnership is in U.S. Interests and benefits both countries. We expect India’s importance to U. S. Interests to grow in the long-run as India, a major regional and emerging global power, increasingly assumes roles commensurate with its position as a stakeholder and a leader in the international system”* (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2010).

In June 2015, the US and India signed a renewal Defense Framework Agreement, valid for ten years, marking a significant upgrade in their defense relations. This agreement acknowledged the importance of the Defense Technology And Trade Initiative (DTTI) and paved the way for cooperation in advance technologies, including jet engine technology, aircraft carriers and Intelligence, Surveillance, And Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, further solidifying their strategic defense partnership. In 2016, the Obama administration elevated India’s status to a major defense partner, unlocking new opportunities for co-development, co-operation and the transfer of advanced defense technologies. Furthermore, the US and India finalized the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which had been in discussion since 2004, facilitating closer military cooperation and logistics support between the two nations (Burgess, 2019).

President Barack Obama, during his visit to India in 2015, unveiled the joint strategic vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a landmark framework that outlined cooperation between the two nations in the region. This vision statement marked a significant milestones, as it was the first time the US and India publicly declared their intent to collaborate on securing their shared interests in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, demonstrating their commitment to a joint approach to regional security and stability (Tellis, 2017).

President Donald Trump took office in January 2017, and his administration sought to negotiate economic agreements with India while maintaining the strong defense relationship established by the previous administration. Prime Minister Modi quickly responded to Trump's overtures, leading to a series of high-level engagements aimed at boosting economic cooperation and defense ties (Tellis, 2017).

In June 2017, a military standoff erupted between China and India in the Himalayas, leading to a strengthening of ties between India and the US as they drew closer together in response to China's action. In a proactive move, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops occupied the Doklam Plateau in the Himalayas, aiming to construct a road that encroached on Bhutan's territory, which has long been under India's security umbrella. In response, the Indian army deployed troops to the area to halt the road construction, leading to a tense 73-days standoff between India and Chinese forces (Burgess, 2019).

The Trump administration has charted a new foreign policy course in South Asia, pivoting towards India and adopting a more confrontational approach towards Pakistan, a long standing US ally. This strategic shift is a calculated move, driven by India's growing economic and military clout, which has led the US to rebalance its priorities in the region. (Nayak, 2006) Furthermore, the Trump administration's South Asia policy emphasized India's expanded role in Afghanistan's rebuilding and development efforts, recognizing India's growing influence in the region and its potential to contribute to stability and prosperity in Afghanistan (Sharma A. , 2008).

The US Department of Defense, under the leadership of Secretary James N. Mattis, sought to strengthen and enhance defense ties with India to counterbalance China's growing

influence in the Indian Ocean and Asia. Mattis emphasized the importance of a robust defense partnership between the two democracies, stating that, “*world’s two greatest democracies should have the two greatest militaries*”. This statement was repeated by Donald Trump and Narendra Modi in November 2017 on the side lines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Manila, when the two leaders pledged to elevate India’s status as a major US defense partner. In the December 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), the U.S. committed to enhancing its strategic partnership with India and supporting India's leadership in Indian Ocean security and the wider region. In March 2018, the Trump administration introduced the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (FOIPS) and called for a “Strong Coalition of Democracies,” which replaced President Obama’s “Rebalance to Asia” strategy ( Swaine, 2018).

In September 2018, India and US held a significant 2+2 meeting, where they discussed and aligned their strategies for the Indo-Pacific region. The meeting culminated in a joint statement, highlighting their commitment to collaborate with like-minded partner countries to promote transparent and sustainable infrastructure development financing, with a focus on transparency, accountability and sustainable financing practices (Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Defence Indo-US 2+2 Dialogue, 2018).

When President Joe Biden took office on January 20, 2021, his administration’s emphasis on multilateralism and alliance-building created a conducive environment for enhanced cooperation with India. This alignment of interests have paved the way for deeper collaboration between the two nations, with key areas of focus including maintaining regional stability in South Asia , countering terrorism and strengthening economic ties. These pressing issues are expected to remain at the forefront of the India-US partnership, driving future engagement and cooperation (Kher, 2021). The US has opened up all military and technological doors to India.

This partnership aims to counterbalance China's assertiveness, with India aligning with the US on issues such as the South China Sea dispute and supporting regional security frameworks. Both countries are also cooperating on counterterrorism efforts and countering China's actions (Manhas, 2023).

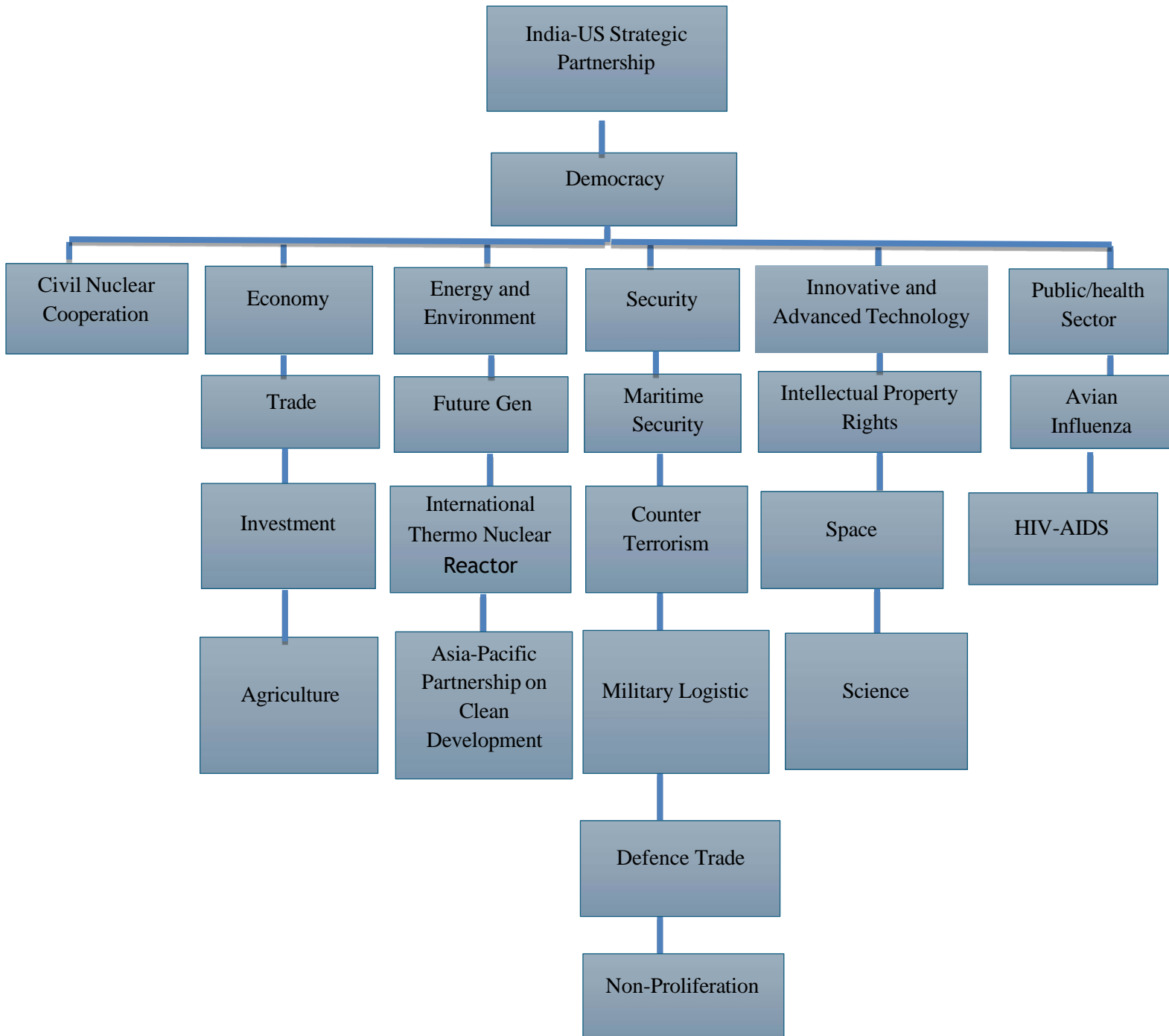
## **2.2. Objectives of Indo-US Strategic Partnership in Asia-Pacific Region**

The emerging “strategic partnership” between the United States and India is built on shared values like democracy and concerns about global terrorism. Both countries are also wary of China's growing influence in Asia and beyond. Since Narendra Modi became India's Prime Minister in 2014, the relationship has seen a significant improvement, especially in defense cooperation. This partnership encompasses politics, economics, defense, technology and security, showing a strengthening collaboration over time (Singh, Pande, Smith, Saran, Lohman, & Joshi, 2018 ).

The Indo-US partnership is stronger than ever, with both countries committed to upholding democracy, freedom, human rights and pluralism. By joining forces, they can effectively address various regional and global challenges, such as terrorism, climate change and cybersecurity threats. Both nations also engage in multilateral frameworks like the Quad, reflecting a commitment to a rules-based international order and regional stability. India's rise as a regional power helps maintain stability in South Asia, while the US provides critical support to India's security and economic growth. This partnership also helps balance the influence of other major powers in the region (Singh, 2024).

**Figure-4**

**Conspectus of India-US Strategic Collaboration**



**Source:** (Hussain, 2019)

### **2.2.1. Enhancing Regional Security Architecture**

Enhancing regional security architecture is a critical goal of India-US strategic cooperation. India and the US have been collaborating to enhance security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region through various efforts. This includes bilateral and multilateral military exercises, such as the Malabar Exercise to improve interoperability and coordination between the armed forces of both countries (Mehreen & Abid, 2022). Strategic discussions, such as the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, along with intelligence sharing, technology transfer and diplomatic engagement, focus on creating stability and tackling shared security issues. These include dealing with maritime threats, combating terrorism and keeping navigation routes in the region open and safe. Besides, both countries have been engaging with other regional stakeholders to strengthen security cooperation and uphold the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. The “2+2 Ministerial Dialogue”, initiated in 2018, addresses a historic imbalance where key defense decisions were primarily made by the U.S. Pentagon and India’s Ministry of External Affairs. This dialogue enhances predictability and coherence in security policy planning. Additionally, the United States and India cooperate through the bilateral U.S.-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and the Defense Policy Group (Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Defence Indo-US 2+2 Dialogue, 2018).

This transformation in Washington’s perception of India as a key strategic partner was undergirded by five major U.S. security interests:

1. Achieving a stable balance of power in Asia.
2. Mitigating the threat of terrorism and religious extremism.

3. The US is eager to partner with India to improve energy security in the region, especially by focusing on clean energy development.
4. Curtailing nuclear proliferation in Asia and
5. Safeguarding U.S. economic and political interests in the Asia-Pacific region (Kronstadt & Pinto, 2013).

To the United States, India serves as a crucial strategic anchor in the Indo-Pacific region, essential for preventing the rise of a Sino-Centric Asia and reclaiming strategic influence lost in the South China Sea. This is why US policy documents like the National Security Strategy (2017), National Defence Strategy (2018) and Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019) emphasize India's role as a reliable strategic partner. These perspectives are further highlighted in the US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific (2018), which rightly asserts that a diminished US prominence in the region would weaken its ability to protect its global interests. To this end, the US emphasizes the importance of alliances and partnerships, identifying India as a leading nation in South Asia capable of maintaining security in the Indian Ocean Region. One of the strategy's objectives is to accelerate India's rise. And enhance its capacity to serve as a "Net Provider of Security" in the region and a major defense partner of the US. India views its relationship with the US as crucial for counterbalancing China's influence in both land and sea domains. It seeks a strong strategic partnership with the US to acquire advanced weapons, defense technologies and operational capabilities, including in areas such as cyber security and space warfare. Furthermore, India acknowledges the significant military presence and strategic influence of the US in the Indo-Pacific region and aims to leverage this to support its own security interests (Ahuja, 2021).

### **2.2.2. Balancing Against China's Influence in Indo-Pacific Region**

India and the US are collaborating strategically to counterbalance China's expanding military, economic and political influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries share concerns about China's increasing assertiveness which has led to a convergence of their interests. This mutual apprehension has driven them to strengthen their partnership, engaging in joint military exercises like the Malabar naval exercises. China's aggressive actions, such as its territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS), are pushing India and the US closer together (Lobo, 2021).

India's chief interest in developing strategic relations with the US is to ultimately boost itself to great power status in the region. The US also supports the rise of India as a counterbalance to China. Washington has supported India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which allow India to benefit from global nuclear trade, expanding its nuclear power status and access to modern technology. India's relationship with China adds complexity to its Indo-Pacific calculus, as it seeks to balance its strategic interests with Beijing while engaging with other regional powers. To effectively collaborate to regional stability and counter China's decisiveness, India needs to improve its naval capabilities and strengthen security cooperation with like-minded countries ( Pant & Rej, 2018).

The United States is concerned about threats to maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly from China. This concern has led regional allies, such as India, to call for increased U.S. involvement. India's growing military capabilities are viewed as a counterbalance to China, though India avoids overtly supporting an increased U.S. military presence. However, China is wary of the emerging strategic relationship between the U.S. and India, fearing



encirclement by unfriendly governments. A significant factor in the deepening U.S.-India defense ties over the past four years has been Chinese President Xi Jinping's aggressive actions toward countries across Asia. Recent events like the Doklam standoff and the Sino-Indian border crisis have heightened concerns about China's hegemonic ambitions and damaged its regional standing (White, 2021). Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India, emphasized the importance of India-US strategic collaboration, stating that,

*“The transformation in U.S.-Indian ties....was intended largely to deal with the challenges posed by a rising China”* (Tellis, 2021).

India and the US are collaborating together to mitigate China's growing power and influence using a mix of diplomatic efforts, economic strategies and military approaches. This includes:

1. India and the US are enhancing their economic relationship, including trade and investment, to offset China's economic influence.
2. India and the US are partnering with like-minded countries, such as Japan, Australia and South Korea, to coordinate their strategies regarding China.
3. The two nations are collaborating to boost cyber security cooperation, including information exchange and joint exercises, to counter cyber threats from China.
4. India and the US are cooperating with regional organizations like ASEAN and the Quad to promote a concerted response to China's increasing influence.
5. Fortifying military relations and cooperation.
6. Combating China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with alternative infrastructure development plans, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), the Blue Dot Network, and the Quad Infrastructure Partnership.

7. Fostering democratic principles and human rights.
8. Ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight in the Indo-Pacific region (White, 2021).

### **2.2.3. Strengthening Defense Capabilities and Military Interoperability**

Enhancing defense capabilities and military interoperability between the US and India is crucial for maintaining stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region. Defense cooperation between the two countries has significantly expanded, including joint military exercises, technology transfers, defense trade and strategic dialogues. The Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), launched in 2012, aims to promote co-development and co-production of defense equipment while the DTTI has bolstered India's defense capabilities, concerns persist about potential regional arms competition. India was designated as a Major Defense Partner (MDP) of the United States in 2016. In terms of military cooperation India currently conducts the highest number of joint exercises with the US armed forces (Swaine, 2015).

In November 2019, a new bilateral tri-service amphibious exercise called Tiger Triumph was initiated, marking a significant step towards enhancing interoperability. Among the three domains, maritime engagement has garnered the most attention. Regular conduct of India-US Maritime Security Dialogue, Malabar exercise, and positioning of Liaison Officers (LOs) by India and the US at Bahrain, US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Gurugram (India) respectively, are some of the notable engagements in this field (Ahuja, 2021).

Over the past decade, India has actively worked to elevate its status in South Asia, positioning itself as a competitor to China both economically and militarily. Historically, India's

military modernization lagged behind, posing a significant challenge compared to China. To address this, the Modi government has heavily invested in modernizing the aging Indian armed forces. Aligning with its strategic objectives, India has increasingly oriented itself towards the US arms industry. The US has emphasized developing interoperability and operational synergy between the armed forces, particularly the navies (Ahuja, 2021).

The United States and India are enhancing defense capabilities and military interoperability through the following measures:

1. The two countries are collaborating on defense projects, including the co-production and co-development of major systems.
2. India and the US regularly participate in air and maritime exercises, including the INDUS-X initiative, which aims to accelerate and expand commercial technologies for military use.
3. Both countries are exchanging intelligence and best practices to strengthen their defense capabilities.
4. The US and India are collaborating on defense industrial projects, including the production of F-414 jet engines.
5. The Indian military is increasing its interoperability with its US partners by acquiring US defense equipment, such as Apache and Seahawk helicopters.
6. The US and India are intensifying their cooperation in various operational activities, especially in maritime security within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) ( Vergun, 2023).

Looking ahead, the United States and India have initiated an educational series aimed at preparing start-ups and young innovators to contribute to the defense industries in both countries (Miller, 2023).

#### **2.2.4. Promote Economic Prosperity in the Region**

India and the US have been increasingly focusing on economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to promote prosperity and stability essential for trade, investment and economic growth (Blinken, 2024). This includes infrastructure development, trade agreements, technology partnership and initiatives like the Quad, DTTI, US-India Commercial Dialogue, CEO Forum and Indo-Pacific Business Forum to address common challenges and foster economic growth (Kronstadt & Akhtar, 2017).

The US and India are working to offset China's growing economic influence in the region by strengthening their economic ties. Economic prosperity boosts regional influence, helping the US and India promote their interests and values while showing global economic leadership. The US sees India as a crucial partner in the Indo-Pacific, and closer economic cooperation is a vital part of this partnership. The US aims to reduce its trade dependence on China and diversify its trade relationships in the region, with India playing a significant role. The United States views India as a major market for its exports, especially in defense, technology and energy sectors (U.S.-India Commercial Dialogue, 2023).

The economic aspect of the India-US strategic partnership holds great potential. Both countries are major economies with complementary strengths. India provides a large market and a skilled workforce, while the US offers advanced technology and investment opportunities. Strengthening economic ties can enhance trade, investment and innovation, benefiting both

nations and promoting global economic stability. Furthermore, collaboration in sectors such as technology, energy and infrastructure can drive sustainable growth and create jobs in both countries. Strengthening economic cooperation in the region can improve infrastructure development, connectivity and trade facilitation, benefiting not only India and the US but also other countries in the region (U.S. Relations With India , 2022).

The US aims to provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by supporting India's regional connectivity projects, such as the India- Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which aims to boost economic development. The US backs India's infrastructure development plans, especially in energy, transportation and digital connectivity (Lobo, 2021).

### **2.2.5. Stimulate Trade and Investment Growth**

Promoting trade and investment growth is a key aspect of India-US strategic collaboration. Both countries trade across various sectors, including technology, defense, agriculture and services. Bilateral engagement is facilitated through forums like the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum. Trade between the two countries has grown steadily, with the U.S. being a major market for Indian exports and India attracting significant foreign direct investment, notably from U.S. firms like Microsoft, Dell, Oracle and IBM. For a long time, the US has viewed India as a strategic counterbalance to China. The CPEC project has prompted the US to deepen its defense, economic and strategic ties with India. Because upon completion, the project will not only bolster China's influence in Asia but also extend it into Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa, raising concerns for both the US and India. They collaborate to safeguard their economic interests by securing the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), particularly in the

Indian Ocean. India's role as one of the largest markets benefits the US military-industrial complex and its nuclear industry (Kronstadt, 2009).

In the economic realm, the India-US partnership has seen US investments in India rise significantly, from \$7.7 billion in 2004 to \$51.55 billion in 2022. The expanding Indian economy has established itself as a lucrative market for the US, playing a significant role in bolstering their bilateral relations (U.S. direct investments in India 2000-2018, 2023).

- **Bilateral Defence Trade Between India and the US**

Defense trade is a crucial element of the Indo-US strategic partnership, which has grown significantly since India was granted “Major Defense Partner” status by the US in 2016. According to the US Department of State (2021), defense trade between the US and India surged to USD 20 billion in 2020 from virtually nothing in 2008. Furthermore, several defense agreements, including the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) in 2012, enable India to jointly produce advanced weapon systems utilizing sophisticated military technology, with the US. These technologies and weapon systems will allow India to conduct discreet intelligence-gathering operations against Pakistan. During any crisis, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India will have the capability to receive real-time information with assistance from the US. The defense trade between India and the United States underscores their shared interests in maintaining regional stability and addressing common security challenges. Continued collaboration in defense trade is expected to further deepen the defense relationship and foster greater cooperation in the years to come (Trushaa, 2018).

## **2.2.6. To Promote Freedom of Navigation and Enhance Maritime Security in the Region**

India and the US are enhancing their collaboration to uphold the rules-based international order and secure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, facilitating the free flow of trade and investment. This partnership involves joint naval exercises, intelligence sharing and diplomatic initiatives aimed at promoting maritime security and stability in the region. As part of broader initiatives to uphold open sea lanes and facilitate uninterrupted trade and commerce, the bilateral maritime partnership includes technology transfers aimed at enhancing India's capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This effort seeks to foster a more stable and balanced security framework in the area (Singh, Pande, Smith , Saran, Joshi , & Lohman, 2018).

Maritime security is a critical area of collaboration between the US and India. The US-India Maritime Security Dialogue was initiated in 2016, with the second round occurring in May 2017 in the US. This dialogue aims to enhance operational cooperation between the maritime forces of India and the US. Both countries agreed to finalize a “white shipping” technical arrangement to enhance data sharing on commercial shipping traffic, along with navy-to-navy discussions on submarine safety and anti-submarine warfare. India views China as deeply invested in establishing itself as an economic superpower throughout Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) ( Khan M. , 2017).

The Indian Ocean region, due to its geo-strategic significance, has become a focal point of global strategic competition. It serves as a major trade route connecting the Middle East, Africa and Asia with Europe and the Americas, making it vital for international shipping and commerce. The Indian Ocean is rich in natural resources, including offshore oil and gas,

minerals and fisheries. Countries like India, Indonesia and Australia benefit significantly from these resources. Fishing is a critical industry for the coastal nations, providing food security and employment. The region also has large reserves of rare earth minerals and undersea hydrocarbon deposits. The US recognizes India's crucial role in this region. India's strategic position in the Indian Ocean presents both opportunities and challenges. Both India and the US have been working to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India's growing naval capabilities, particularly in international waters, could significantly benefit US strategic interests, much like the economic advantages enjoyed by US firms from India's economic growth. The Indian Navy, particularly the Coast Guard, is now viewed as a key collaborator with the US Navy and its other strategic partners in various maritime activities. The navies of both countries have increasingly cooperated on anti-piracy operations, especially in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (Singh D. B., 2019).

India plays a vital role in safeguarding US maritime interests. China's control of significant strategic ports and bases in the Indian Ocean, along with its expanding naval presence, directly challenges the US dominance in the region. Currently, the US faces a dilemma in keeping its engagement between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. To maintain its influence in the Pacific, the US is working to enhance India's defense capabilities, positioning it as the "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean. Both the US and India are united in their goal of curbing China's rise. The US is working with India to modernize its naval program, aiming to make India a strong ally in countering China's rise (Kakar, 2022).

China's assertion of maritime claims in the South and East China Seas has heightened regional tensions. In the South China Sea (SCS), a primary concern for the US is ensuring freedom of navigation through this vital region, Billions of dollars of commerce flow through



these routes. China is highly dependent on the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean for transporting energy resources from the Persian Gulf, There are concerns in both Washington and New Delhi that several port facilities financed and constructed by China along the Indian Ocean littoral, including in Burma, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Oman, could potentially be used as bases for Chinese naval vessels in the future (Kronstadt & Pinto, 2013).

United States and India have a strong interest in protecting sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) faces threats from pirates who interfere with the safe passage of merchant ships between the Gulf of Aden and the South China Sea. A U.S.-India Maritime Security Cooperation Agreement emphasizes on “comprehensive cooperation” to protect the free flow of commerce and tackle various maritime security threats, including piracy and the illicit trafficking of weapons of mass destruction and related materials (Singh, Pande, Smith , Saran, Joshi , & Lohman, 2018).

China considers its maritime interests in the South China Sea (SCS) as strategically vital, despite the fact that neither the US nor India have territorial claims there. However, both nations depend heavily on the shipping routes through the region. To ensure uninterrupted passage, they are making joint efforts. India has been vocal about the importance of freedom of navigation, aligning with the US stance ( Hanif & Sharif, 2021). The Indian Ministry of External Affairs stated in 2011 that,

*“India supports freedom of navigation in international waters, including in the South China Sea, and the right of passage in accordance with accepted principles of international law” (Patrick, 2023).*

Despite China's objections, India has kept friendly ties with Southeast Asian countries that have territorial claims in the region and has collaborated with Vietnam on oil exploration.

This shows India's increasing role in regional security, bolstered by on-going US political and military support under its Act East Policy ( Hanif & Sharif, 2021).

Here are some initiatives by India and the US to enhance maritime security and ensure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region through their strategic partnership:

1. Both nations frequently engage in joint naval exercises, like the Malabar exercises, to improve their ability to work together effectively in maritime operations.
2. Intelligence sharing between the two countries is on the rise, aiding in the monitoring of maritime activities and effectively addressing security threats.
3. The United States collaborates with partners throughout the Indo-Pacific region to enhance maritime domain awareness (MDA) using coastal radar, manned and unmanned aerial systems and maritime platforms for rapid humanitarian and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations. This effort also includes improving information sharing among security and defense institutions at the operational level.
4. Currently, the United States shares commercial shipping information with India and collaborates with other partners in the Bay of Bengal, such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, to bolster the capabilities of civilian and military maritime actors in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) . This effort aims to enhance detection capabilities, improve information-sharing and strengthen responses to emerging threats (U.S. Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region, 2018).

### **2.2.7. Promoting Regional Stability and Peace**

Promoting regional stability stands as a fundamental goal of India-US strategic cooperation. Both nations are aligned in their commitment to preserving peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This objective is essential for fostering economic growth, facilitating trade and development, averting conflicts, ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight, and promoting regional integration and cooperation (Sibal, 2020).

Presently, India and the US work closely together on regional security matters, counter-terrorism initiatives, maritime security and defense innovation, underscoring their strategic partnership aimed at fostering stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region (Mishra, 2024). According to Richard R. Verma, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources,

*“We are now jointly developing and producing some of the world’s most sophisticated systems - all in the name of promoting greater peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and beyond”* (India, US have overcome hesitations of history, says US Deputy Secretary of State citing PM Modi's remark, 2024) .

The partnership between India and the US plays a crucial role in tackling regional challenges and ensuring a stable and secure environment. This collaboration involves joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and diplomatic initiatives. Both nations aim to mitigate potential threats and uphold democratic values and freedom of navigation. Besides, this partnership promotes economic growth, infrastructure development and enhances prosperity and security for countries in the region (Singh, Pande, Smith , Saran, Joshi , & Lohman, 2018).

Several collaborative efforts are focused on enhancing stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region:

1. Protecting the vital shipping routes and promoting stability among the countries in the region.
2. Both nations uphold democratic values and collaborate to advance democracy and human rights in the region.
3. India and the US work together diplomatically to tackle regional challenges such as maritime disputes, non-proliferation and ensuring freedom of navigation. They engage in both bilateral and multilateral forums, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
4. US and India collaborate on defense and security matters, including counterterrorism, non-proliferation and regional security in the Indo-Pacific, aiming to enhance regional stability.
5. Through deepening economic ties with India, the US aims to foster regional stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.
6. Both the US and India collaborate on tackling climate change, participating actively in initiatives such as the Paris Agreement and the International Solar Alliance.
7. The US and India collaborate on educational initiatives, including the Fulbright Program (Biden, 2022).

### **2.2.8. Foster Regional Growth Through Infrastructure Development and Enhance Connectivity**

In the Indo-Pacific region, there is a significant demand for funding and expertise to improve infrastructure and connectivity. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seeks to meet this need through investments in infrastructure projects spanning Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. However, it is also viewed as a strategy for China to expand its political and military influence.

Because China has been actively involved in trade and port development in the part of the Indian Ocean, through its BRI project. Notable projects include the development of the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, which provides China with access to the Arabian Sea and reduces its dependency on the Malacca Strait for energy imports. Besides, China has been building infrastructure in countries along the East African coast, such as Djibouti, Kenya and Tanzania, enhancing its strategic foothold in the region. China's involvement has raised concerns among other powers, especially India and the United States, about its growing influence in the Indian Ocean region and its potential military and economic implications. This has led to increased competition and strategic manoeuvring by various countries to secure their interests in this geopolitically significant region (Griffiths, 2022).

So, India and the US are collaborating on various infrastructure projects, such as the Blue Dot Network, which aims to promote transparent and high-quality infrastructure development as a counterbalance to China's influence. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) for Prosperity, the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), Quad Investors Network (QIN), Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and Partnership For Quality Infrastructure are significant initiatives aimed at promoting regional growth through infrastructure development and improving connectivity (Vashisht, 2023).

Enhancing infrastructure development and connectivity through strategic cooperation between India and the US could greatly boost economic growth, stability and regional integration. This could encompass collaborative investments in critical infrastructure projects, the exchange of expertise in fields such as technology and logistics, and the coordination of policies to enhance seamless cross-border connectivity. Furthermore, this partnership could serve

to balance the influence of other regional stakeholders while promoting a transparent and sustainable approach to development (Gaens & Sinkkonen, 2023).

### **2.2.9. Cyber Security and Technological Cooperation**

The partnership would encompass cooperation across multiple areas, such as sharing information, conducting joint research and development, building capacity and engaging diplomatically to establish norms and rules in cyberspace (Nair, 2010).

Collaboration on cybersecurity between the United States and India underscores the critical necessity for strategic action in collective cyber defense. Both countries confront shared challenges like state-sponsored cyber-attacks, ransomware and intellectual property theft, highlighting the imperative for a joint approach. India and the US exchange threat intelligence and best practices to bolster cybersecurity, conducting joint exercises to enhance incident response and coordination. Moreover, the US offers training and capacity-building initiatives for Indian cybersecurity professionals. Both nations collaborate on investigating and prosecuting cybercrimes, including hacking and online fraud. India and the US also cooperate to safeguard critical infrastructure such as power grids and financial systems. They collaborate on cybersecurity research and development, including joint initiatives focused on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain. India and the US are also engaged in cyber diplomacy efforts, including dialogues concerning global cybersecurity norms and internet governance ( Jaffer, 2021). President Biden and Prime Minister Modi affirm that,

*“Technology will play the defining role in deepening our partnership”* (Joint Statement from the United States and India, 2023).

The engagement on cybersecurity issues between the US and India started in 2001 with the establishment of the Indo-US Cyber Security Forum. This forum convened stakeholders from both governments and their private sectors to discuss and collaborate on critical cyber domain issues. Later in 2011, Washington and New Delhi further acknowledged the increasing significance of cybersecurity by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU formalized the relationship between the US Department of Homeland Security and India's Department of Information Technology (Ranganathan, 2015). The signing of the MOU paved the way for an enhanced security collaboration between the two countries, expanding avenues for mutual reliance, sharing critical cyber information and cooperating on key issues related to cyber security and cybercrime (Farooq & Ali, 2022).

In June 2016, the US and India jointly announced their commitment to a framework for cyberspace cooperation. This framework outlines thirteen common principles and identifies twenty-one areas of collaboration aimed at advancing these shared goals. Importantly, the framework emphasizes a mutual dedication to the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance (Khan M. , 2017).

The US has demonstrated significant interest in India's space program and has extended cooperation by offering support for specific systems such as sensors and satellites to further enhance collaboration in this domain. In a broader context, cooperation in the space program encompasses missions related to earth's oceans, global precipitation, Mars exploration, climate change monitoring, and natural disaster tracking and deep space exploration programs. Similarly, India leverages its space program for military purposes and through its space based programmes, provides real-time command and control data and information (Foust, 2023).

The US and India have established a consistent level of cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the US. Advanced space program collaboration also presents an opportunity for the US to share technology for both military and scientific purposes. India and the US are also looking to collaborate on manned spaceflight, aiming to strengthen India's space program and enhance its precise earth-sensing capabilities. US cooperation with India has primarily involved providing subsystems for either a full satellite or a larger satellite to be launched using an Indian rocket ( Khan M. , 2017).

### **2.2.10. Countering Common Security Threats and Strengthening Deterrence Against Potential Aggressors**

The U.S. and India are collaborating to advance integrated deterrence, utilizing all instruments of power to deter aggression and counter coercion. This includes deepening cooperation and enhancing interoperability through the development and deployment of advanced war fighting capabilities (Bukhari S. T., 2022). Over the past two decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has formulated and executed a strategy aimed at reducing the United States' military influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Through the deployment of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) systems in the South China Sea (SCS), China has effectively countered the United States' formidable and technologically advanced platforms. As a consequence, they have diminished America's capability to exert influence in the air and maritime domains. This has raised doubts about the effectiveness of American conventional deterrence in the area. To counter China's active defense strategy in the South China Sea, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have developed Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations



(EABO). However, the effectiveness of EABO as a deterrent hinges significantly on security cooperation relationships with partner nations across the Indo-Pacific region ( James, 2021).

The US is supporting India's role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific region, and they are collaborating to enhance regional stability and security. In addition to, the U.S. is deploying advanced military capabilities to its allies in the Indo-Pacific, including India, to support their defense modernization efforts. The U.S. and India are enhancing their defense cooperation to respond to China's growing economic influence and assertive behaviour. There has been a significant increase in defense trade, with India acquiring advanced military equipment from the U.S., including aircraft and missile systems. This collaboration not only boosts India's defense capabilities but also strengthens their economic relationship (Sharma G. C., 2012).

India and US are looking for ways to build resilient supply chains, co-develop new technologies and co-produce existing and new systems. The U.S. and India, along with Australia and Japan, are part of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which aims to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The Quad collaborates to address the region's critical challenges, advance a rules-based international order and enhance maritime security cooperation to counter maritime threats. The U.S. and India are also working together to counter terrorist organizations and enhance cyber security cooperation by sharing best practices and technologies to combat cyber threats (Rajagopalan, 2022).

### **CHAPTER 3**

## **CHALLENGES OF INDIA-US STRATEGIC COOPERATION FOR CHINA'S REGIONAL INFLUENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

The Indo-Pacific region has become a pivotal area of interest in today's global politics. Since the end of the Cold War, it has gained strategic importance for the US. However, China's emergence as a powerful state has raised concerns for both the US and regional countries, as it shifts the strategic balance in the area. The economic, political and military interests of major powers like the US and China are now at stake. Beijing's growing influence in the region through diplomatic and military means, threatens US national interests. In response, the US has implemented policies like the “Asia Pivot & Indo-Pacific Strategy” to maintain its power and presence in the Asia Pacific and counter China's dominance (Mazumdar, 2021).

The future of geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific depends heavily on the actions of major powers in areas like the economy, diplomacy and military. India is also aiming for regional dominance, calling the Indian Ocean “India's Ocean” and expanding its influence in the Asia Pacific with its “Act East” strategy (Mazumdar, 2021). Because the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) holds immense strategic significance for great powers in the broader Indo-Pacific region due to its vital geographic location and economic potential. As a critical maritime highway connecting the East with the West, the Indian Ocean facilitates the majority of the world's seaborne trade, including energy resources, crucial for global economies. The Indian Ocean is a critical route for global trade, accounting for over one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments. The region is a major exporter of petroleum, minerals, precious metals and agricultural products. The Indian Ocean region also hosts several important choke points like

the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and Bab-el Mandeb. Control over key chokepoints can provide leverage over international trade and energy flows (Bajpai, 2019).

So, India's active involvement in the region offers the US a key opportunity to maintain its strategic presence as a Pacific nation and counter China's dominance. The Indo-US strategic partnership involves many areas of cooperation between the two countries. This partnership poses significant challenges for China in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has increased its cooperation with India due to the rising strategic threat from China, driven by China's military advancements and increasingly authoritarian behaviour (Ahmad, 2022). In a policy speech in October 2012, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns stated that,

*“There is growing confidence in both countries about future...a steady convergence of interest and values...The essence of the strategic partnership that we’re building lies in a simple truth. For the first time, for both of us, our success at home and abroad depends significantly on our cooperation”* (Kronstadt & Pinto, 2012).

The growing alignment of regional nations with India and the US poses a notable challenge to China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, as they seek to counter China's expanding footprint and assertive policies. China's aggressive behaviour and unilateral actions have pushed countries in the region to seek closer ties with like-minded partners to ensure their own security and economic interests. With India being a major power in Asia and the United States being a global superpower, their collaboration in various areas creates a formidable force. This partnership allows both countries to counterbalance China's growing influence and assertiveness in the region. So, China faces major obstacles in the Indo-Pacific region due to the India-US strategic alignment (Singh A. G., 2016).

### **3.1. Significant Challenges For China Due to India-US Strategic Alliance**

India and U.S share common reservations on the rise of China, both want to prevent it from absolute domination in Asia. The deepening strategic cooperation between India and US presents a complex set of challenges for China in the Indo-Pacific region, affecting its military, economic, diplomatic and normative interests. The United States has partnered with India to counter the rising influence of China in Asia-Pacific (APAC) region and to maintain its dominant status in Indo-Pacific region (Mehreen & Abid, 2022).

Consequently, the India-US strategic partnership poses several challenges for China in the Indo-Pacific region. Some of these challenges include:

#### **3.1.1. The Phenomenon of China's Containment**

China's most significant challenge is the strategic partnership between India and the US, which seeks to counterbalance its growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The US and India see containing China's regional influence and power as crucial to preserving their own strategic and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific. The US views China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific as a challenge to the US-led regional order. Strengthening ties with India is part of the US strategy to build a network of regional allies and partners to balance China's power and influence. Both countries aim to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region and prevent any single power from dominating the strategic landscape. Besides, the US and India share common values such as democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, which stand in contrast to China's authoritarian regime. This ideological dimension further motivates both countries to

align against China in order to uphold and promote these shared values on the global stage. Territorial disputes, military expansion and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have contributed to an increasing sense of unease among countries in the Indo-Pacific region, prompting the US and India to bolster their strategic cooperation to counterbalance China's influence. The US, as a long-standing global power, seeks to maintain its dominance in the region and uphold a rules-based international order, while India views China's expanding presence in South Asia with caution (Ciocan, 2021).

India is being propagated to play a global role to balance Beijing. The first step to block China could be acceptance of India as a power, which comes through Indian permanent status as 'veto power' in UNSC. India and U.S share common reservations on the rise of China. Both want to prevent Beijing from absolute domination in Asia. The China threat as proclaimed by India was the paramount reason behind its decision to go nuclear ( Christensen, 2011). Moreover, in United States there was a strong conviction that Beijing's rise will pose some serious challenges for the U.S hegemony in Asia. The 1998 report presented by Rumsfeld highlighted that China has been involved in the proliferation of ballistic missiles, weaponization and transfer of its nuclear related technology to Iran and Pakistan (Waltz, 2012). Likewise, the Cox Report also spotlighted on the Chinese theft of US military information and innovation (Roper, 2013).

China is and will remain the most important great-power rival for the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Trump administration has adopted a whole-of-government approach to compete with China. Washington is taking tough measures confronting China's challenges to the US economic interests, values, and security. The Indo-Pacific region is a key area where US-China strategic competition takes place. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) is a core competitive

instrument for Washington to contain China's rising power and influence among those countries along the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Similarly, India also perceives China as a strategic competitor, aligning its interests with the US to safeguard its own regional influence and security concerns (Hu, 2020).

All-in-all, the focus on containment reflects a complex interplay of geopolitical, economic and ideological factors that drive US-India cooperation to manage and respond to the strategic challenges posed by China's ascent on the global stage (Gul, Hussain, Imran, Rehman, & Haider, 2021).

### **3.1.2. Major Economic Challenges For China Arising From India-US Strategic Ties**

The deepening U.S.-India strategic partnership is creating challenges for China's economy in the Indo-Pacific by building regional partnerships and providing economic alternatives to China's initiatives. The increased competition between the U.S. and China is disrupting economic relations in the Indo-Pacific (Enfu & Jing, 2024). The U.S. has adopted a "Strategy of Disruption" against China, using economic means like tariffs and supply chain control to hinder China's industrial growth and "decouple" regional countries from China economically. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) aims to establish U.S.-led trade rules, reorganize supply chains and exclude China, though it lacks tariff concessions and market access. U.S. allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia and India have responded positively to the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) , strengthening economic ties with the U.S. and potentially reducing economic interdependence with China (Enfu & Jing, 2024).

US Increased its investment in India, driven by strategic cooperation, could divert foreign direct investment (FDI) away from China. This could affect China's economic growth, particularly in sectors reliant on foreign capital. US-India economic cooperation is creating opportunities for India to diversify its economic partnership and both India and China compete for markets and investments. U.S. restrictions like tariffs and export controls have negatively impacted U.S-China trade and specific Chinese industries like semiconductors. U.S. restrictions may also be contributing to a “chilling effect” on investment in China as global businesses weigh the risks of future U.S. actions disrupting their operations (Georgieva, 2024).

Economically, the U.S. and India are exploring ways, to work together to provide alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative like IMEC and to diversify supply chains away from over-reliance on China. This could undermine China's economic influence in the region (Mehreen & Abid, 2022). The U.S. and India are also working to build partnerships with other countries in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan and Australia, through initiatives like the Quad. This is seen as a way to create an alternative to China’s economic and geopolitical influence in the region. Furthermore, the India-US cooperation on issues like technology, supply chains and infrastructure development poses challenges for China's economic model and global ambitions. This reduces China's relative economic competitiveness (Lalwani, Vasudeva, Tolany, & Singh, 2020).

China's trade position in South Asia is also being undermined as India replaces China as the major trading partner for many countries in the region. This cuts into China's economic gains from the region. India is working to reduce China's influence in the region by increasing political, economic and cultural cooperation with countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This reduces China's ability to use these countries to contain India's influence (Barot,

2020). China's territorial disputes with countries like Japan, India and Southeast Asian nations over the East and South China Seas are creating geopolitical tensions that spill over into the economic realm. China's dependence on imported oil and gas transported through the Malacca Strait, which is also a strategic vulnerability for China (Singh A. I., 2019).

The increased military cooperation and alignment between India and the USA could lead to a more assertive stance against China's economic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Furthermore, the alliance may result in greater scrutiny of China's trade practices and investments in the region, potentially leading to increased barriers or restrictions. This could hinder China's access to key markets and resources in the Indo-Pacific, impacting its economic growth and expansion strategies. The Indo-US alliance may disrupt trade routes and supply chains that are vital for China's economy, leading to increased costs and logistics challenges. This could affect China's export-dependent industries and overall economic stability. Trade wars, tariffs and restrictions on Chinese technology companies are part of the economic strategies to contain China. The U.S. and other countries have imposed tariffs and trade restrictions on Chinese goods and technology to curb China's economic growth and technological advancements (Paul S. , 2021).

### **3.1.3. Issues at Indian Ocean and South China Sea**

The strengthening of ties between India and the United States has raised concerns for China's strategic interests in the crucial maritime regions of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The Indo-US alliance contributes to increased maritime presence and patrols, which is a direct challenge to China's expansionist policies in the South China Sea (SCS) . India and



US also enhances intelligence-sharing capabilities, leading to better monitoring of Chinese naval activities in the region (Khurana & Singh, 2016).

In the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), China faces challenges as the Indo-US alliance seeks to maintain freedom of navigation and ensure maritime security. The Indian Ocean region, which spans a vast area adjacent to Pakistan, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula and the East African coast, holds significant strategic and economic importance. The Indian Ocean is a crucial conduit for global trade, especially for energy supplies. Around 80% of the world's maritime oil trade passes through important chokepoints in the Indian Ocean, such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and the Bab-el-Mandeb. The ocean is central to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's Act East policy. The Gwadar Port in Pakistan is a centrepiece of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, facilitating access to energy resources and trade with Central Asia. So, Control over the Indian Ocean is pivotal for power projection and influence, prompting countries to establish naval bases and forge strategic alliances to secure their interests ( Baruah, 2022).

China has shown interest in developing several ports and trade routes in the Indian Ocean region as part of its ambitious infrastructure and connectivity projects. Some of the key ports include Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Djibouti in East Africa and various ports in the Maldives and Myanmar. These strategic locations provide China with crucial access to the Indian Ocean and facilitate its maritime trade and economic activities. Moreover, China is focused on enhancing trade routes such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Maritime Silk Road and the String of Pearls strategy to bolster its economic influence and connectivity in the region. By investing in and developing these ports and trade routes, China aims to strengthen its presence in the Indian Ocean and expand its trade network to secure its economic interests and fuel its growth as a global economic powerhouse. Island nations in the

Indian Ocean play a vital role in shaping the security architecture and providing access to navies for presence and patrols. Smaller South Asian states are dependent on China economically, giving China leverage in the region (Bhatti, Kharl, & Butt, 2020).

The presence of Indian and American naval forces poses a challenge to China's growing influence in the region by fuelling distrust of China's initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), leading to a more competitive maritime environment. China is heavily dependent on maritime trade routes through the Malacca Strait, which it views as a strategic vulnerability that could be exploited by adversaries. This has driven China to try to project more power into the Indian Ocean region (Choudhary, 2023). But India is actively cultivating strategic partnerships with small island nations in the Indian Ocean region to counter Chinese influence. India's role as a regional hegemon is crucial for building trust and cooperation with these states. So, India's geographic position allows it to control key maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca, through which a significant portion of China's trade and energy supplies pass and India want to disrupt Chinese shipping routes ( Dutta & Choudhury, 2024).

The U.S. has maintained a robust naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) through the U.S. Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain and the Diego Garcia military base. This presence is aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation, countering piracy and balancing the growing influence of China and other regional powers (Bloomfield, 2018).

China's growing economic and strategic interests in the Indian Ocean are evident in its "String of Pearls" strategy, developing a network of military and commercial facilities in countries around the Indian Ocean. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and investments in ports like Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka) and Djibouti (Where China has its first overseas

military base) highlight Beijing's ambitions to secure its trade routes and expand its influence. As a major power in the region, India seeks to assert its dominance in the Indian Ocean to protect its maritime interests and counter China's growing presence. The Indian Navy's modernization, the development of Andaman and Nicobar Command and partnerships with like-minded countries (e.g., the U.S., Japan and Australia in the Quad framework) are part of its strategy to maintain its influence (Chinoy, 2020).

China's increasing involvement in trade and port development within this region has raised concerns and drawn attention to its growing influence and presence in the Indian Ocean. This development has geopolitical implications, as it could potentially shift the balance of power in the region and prompt other countries to reassess their strategic interests and alliances. Various stakeholders are closely monitoring China's activities in the Indian Ocean to gauge its intentions and the potential impact on regional dynamics. Diplomatic and strategic manoeuvring are likely to intensify as countries navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape in this crucial maritime domain. Control and influence over the Indian Ocean can impact global governance, particularly in terms of maritime laws, trade rules and international norms. Great powers compete to shape the rules of the maritime order to align with their strategic and economic interests. This makes it a focal point for great power competition and strategic calculations in the broader Indo-Pacific region (He & Li, 2020).

India's construction of the Chabahar port in Iran is seen as a way to strengthen the relationship between India and Iran and counter Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean via Pakistan's Gwadar port. India has invested in Chabahar to enhance trade routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. In May 2024, India signed a 10-year agreement to develop Chabahar, committing approximately \$120 million for infrastructure and an additional \$250

million in credit. The port is crucial for India's ambitions to strengthen its regional influence and secure access to landlocked Central Asian markets. It also enables India to mitigate the growing China-Pakistan collaboration, particularly in the context of Gwadar's strategic importance for China, which seeks direct access to the Indian Ocean. Despite the potential for U.S. sanctions against Iran complicating the project, India's government remains optimistic about the port's role in enhancing regional connectivity and trade, viewing it as essential for countering China's expanding influence in Eurasia. The project could balance out the growing Sino-Pakistani alignment (Ekstrom & Aliasgary , 2021).

India has established alliances like the Indo-US partnership and the Quad bloc with the US, Japan and Australia to enhance security and cooperation in acquiring advanced weaponry to counter China's influence. The Quad's involvement in the Malabar naval exercises is crucial in thwarting Chinese dominance in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea (Smith, 2021). The US is already present in the Indian Ocean, and its partnerships with India, France, Australia and others play a critical role in its understanding and presence in the region. The US is part of multiple forums and initiatives in the region, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness, which challenge China's influence. So, In the Indian Ocean, China may face heightened competition for influence and access to key sea lanes, resources and markets. This strategic partnership can be seen as an attempt to encircle China, limiting its freedom of manoeuvre in the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2023).

China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea have antagonized competing claimants like the Philippines, Vietnam, India and others. This has led to heightened tensions, militarization of the region and challenges to freedom of navigation (Territorial

Disputes in the South China Sea, 2024). Former Indian Naval Chief Admiral D.K. Joshi stated that,

*“Freedom of navigation is India’s primary concern in the South China Sea, and India would be willing to use force to protect its interests”* (Patrick, 2023).

The U.S., Japan and the Philippines have rapidly developed a trilateral security partnership, holding high-level dialogues, joint military exercises and increasing defense cooperation. This has alarmed China, as it sees the U.S. alliance system in the Indo-Pacific expanding and integrating to counter China's regional influence. The Philippines has strengthened its partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries to bolster its maritime security and counter Chinese aggression ( Poling & Quitzon, 2024). Beyond the U.S.-Philippines-Japan trilateral, there are also indications that a broader “Quadrilateral Security Mechanism” involving the U.S., Philippines, Japan and Australia may be taking shape, further challenging China's position in the South China Sea (Singh A. G., 2024). Japan has also stepped up its presence in the region, selling military equipment to the Philippines and Vietnam to improve their maritime security capabilities and deter Chinese aggression ( Grønning, 2018) .

Overall, China's maritime claims and coercive tactics in the South China Sea are facing growing pushback from a strengthening network of U.S. alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. and its allies are conducting freedom of navigation operations and providing military support to regional partners. This constrains China's ability to dominate these strategic waterways (Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea, 2024). India has also been increasing its presence and involvement in the South China Sea (SCS), conducting oil and gas exploration with Vietnam and strengthening defense ties with other regional states. This complicates China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region (Peng, 2023).

### **3.1.4. India's Maritime Strategy Development, Challenges Chinese Dominance**

India is bolstering its naval capabilities and maritime security infrastructure to thwart China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. India has increased its defense budget for the navy, is acquiring new warships, submarines and aircraft carriers, and is working to narrow the gap with China's larger naval fleet (Dutta & Choudhury, 2024). India has expanded its areas of maritime interest to include the entire Indian Ocean, from Africa's east coast to the Lombok Strait. The Indian Navy considers this its "primary area of interest" to enhance its role as a security provider in the region ( Baruah, 2022).

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India's policy or doctrine of maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The policy was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 12, 2015 (Schöttli, 2019). Because the Indian Ocean is home to several critical sea lanes that are essential for the free movement of goods, energy resources and naval vessels. Great powers view the region as a gateway to expanding their economic influence, securing access to resources and projecting military power. The shifting geopolitical dynamics and the rise of new economic powers have further heightened competition among great powers to establish a foothold in the Indian Ocean region. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean holds significant geostrategic value in terms of counterbalancing influence and shaping regional security dynamics. The presence of major powers like India, United States, China and others reflects their interests in maintaining stability, countering security threats and safeguarding their strategic interests in the region. Besides the major powers, regional players like Australia, Japan and France have also increased their engagement in the Indian Ocean region. These countries seek to protect their own economic and strategic interests, contributing to the overall competition and cooperation dynamics in the region. Smaller littoral states in the

Indian Ocean, such as Sri Lanka, Maldives and Seychelles, often find themselves balancing their relationships with major powers, leveraging strategic partnerships for economic and security benefits (Shabbir, Bashir, & Saleem, 2023).

India is also strengthening partnerships with other Indian Ocean states to gain more influence in the region, such as inaugurating development projects in the Maldives. India is pursuing a “Necklace of Diamonds” approach and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) initiative by signing defense deals with littoral states to develop naval facilities, countering China's efforts to establish a network of ports and facilities, known as the “String of Pearls” strategy. This includes agreements with Singapore, Indonesia, Oman, Australia, Seychelles and Reunion Islands. India is also strengthening military infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to serve as strategic outposts (Arase, 2024). India is rapidly modernizing its naval capabilities, aiming to acquire three aircraft carriers, modern warships, 200+ naval aircraft, Scorpene submarines and nuclear-powered submarines by 2030. However, it still lags behind China which has 370 warships currently (Nawaz, 2023). India is also deepening its defense cooperation with the U.S. through agreements like LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA (Nawaz, 2023).

India's blue navy approach has speeded its influence in the deep waters of the Indian Ocean, covering the Arabian Sea and parts of the South China Sea to challenge China's increasing influence and presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), ensuring maritime security and protecting its strategic and economic interests. Dr. Pant, who has written about the Indian Navy's ambitions, states that,

*“The Indian Navy's ambitions with its massive naval build up in coming ten years, India hope to significantly influence Indian Ocean and the Arabian*

*Sea and counter the Chinese naval ambitions in the region. India is aiming for navy which could operate beyond its shores in deep seas with greater outreach and offensive power” (Pant, 2016).*

India views the Indian Ocean region as its primary area of strategic interest and has been enhancing its maritime domain awareness and surveillance capabilities to monitor and respond to Chinese naval activities in the region and bolster its presence and capabilities in crucial maritime chokepoints and trade routes. India is an important member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), which also includes the US, Japan and Australia. The Quad aims to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region, enhance maritime security and uphold international rules and norms, presenting a collective challenge to China's assertive behaviour. India is determined to establish itself as the dominant maritime power in the Indian Ocean to safeguard its interests in the face of China's growing dominance ( Menon K. R., 2016).

### **3.1.5. Challenges to China’s Belt and Road Initiative**

The India-US accord seeks to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, presenting a direct challenge to the BRI's expansionist goals. The US-India partnership includes collaboration on maritime security and access to strategic ports, which challenge China's influence in crucial maritime routes that are vital for the BRI. India and US engages in diplomatic efforts to raise concerns about the BRI’s debt-trap diplomacy and lack of transparency in international forums and also imposing sanctions on Chinese companies involved in controversial BRI projects, citing issues like human rights violations and environmental concerns (Reghunadhan, 2023). This alignment limits China's ability to expand its influence and leverage through the Belt and Road Initiative in the face of combined Indian and US opposition.



India views BRI as a threat to its sovereignty, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which passes through the disputed Kashmir region. India has attempted to disrupt CPEC through diplomatic pressure and by supporting insurgents in Baluchistan province of Pakistan. India has also invested in developing Iran's Chabahar Port to bypass Pakistan and create a direct trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, countering the influence of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India is also concerned about China's growing influence in its sphere of influence, such as in Sri Lanka (Omidi, 2021).

The partnership between India and the US also potentially bolsters alternatives to Chinese-led infrastructure and connectivity projects, providing countries in the region with more options and reducing dependence on China's initiatives. For example, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) , The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) that aims to connect India to the Arabian Gulf and Europe, reducing transport times between India and Europe by 40%. It is part of the broader Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII) strategy led by the U.S. and EU. The Trans-African Corridor (TAC) is another PGII project that was announced at the 2023, G20 summit in Delhi ( Monroe , 2023). The United States, along with Japan and Australia, has launched the Blue Dot Network to promote a new approach to infrastructure development that emphasizes high standards and transparency, offering a strong alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (Ashbee, 2021). In collaboration with Japan and India also promotes the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) as an alternative to the BRI, focusing on development and connectivity projects in Africa and Southeast Asia. Build Back Better World (B3W), a G7 initiative led by the US to address the infrastructure needs of low and middle-income countries and providing an alternative to Chinese financing. These alternative

visions for connectivity and development that challenge China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region (Terbaoui, 2022).

Some nations are cautious about participating in BRI infrastructure projects due to concerns about debt-trap diplomacy, fearing that excessive borrowing could lead to a loss of control over strategic assets, as exemplified by Sri Lanka's experience with Hambantota port (Lindley, 2022). Smaller countries in the region like Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka face challenges in balancing their relationships with China and the U.S./India amidst the great power rivalry (Aryal & Pulami, 2024). Through Act East Policy, India is strengthening ties with Southeast Asian nations through infrastructure projects and economic partnerships to offer alternatives to Chinese investments. The U.S. and its allies like Japan and Australia see BRI as a challenge to their vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”. There are concerns that BRI could enable China to increase its military power projection capabilities in the region. They are coordinating their own overseas infrastructure efforts as part of a trilateral arrangement to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific (He K. , 2021).

Quad also promoting infrastructure development that counters BRI projects. The Quad countries (Australia, India, Japan, U.S.) are employing an “inclusive institutional balancing” strategy to constrain, change and shape China's BRI behaviour from the inside through various institutional efforts. This allows recipient countries to maximize their economic interests amidst the balance-of-infrastructure game among great powers ( He K. , 2021). The enhanced military cooperation between India and the US, including joint exercises and intelligence sharing, deter countries from aligning too closely with China, fearing potential conflicts or security issues. This partnership has also implications for the security environment in the region, potentially exacerbating threats to BRI projects from militant groups and regional instability. Coordinated

economic policies and potential sanctions from the US can discourage countries from participating in the BRI due to fears of economic repercussions (Colley & Noort , 2022).

The strategic cooperation between India and the US also reflects a shared concern over the security implications of BRI projects, particularly in sensitive regions like the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the South China Sea (SCS). Both countries have raised concerns about the social and environmental impacts of BRI projects, including issues related to labour rights, environmental degradation and displacement of local communities. These concerns have fuelled opposition to BRI investments in both countries (Colley & Noort , 2022).

All these challenges collectively hinder the expansion and success of China's BRI by offering competitive alternatives and creating a strategic environment less conducive to China's objectives.

### **3.1.6. Military Partnership Between India and US Undermines China's Regional Influence**

The Biden Administration and the Modi Government have significantly deepened their defense and military cooperation in recent years, driven in part by concerns over China's increasing military modernization. The increasing military cooperation between India and the US presents challenges for China by potentially altering the security landscape in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has provided India with critical defense technologies and military equipment, such as strategic lift aircraft and maritime patrol aircraft, to counter Chinese assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Lalwani & Singh, 2023).

Defense cooperation with the U.S. has greatly expanded under Modi. It was about a year into Modi's second term when India's defense focus took a sharp turn toward China, when troops from the two nuclear neighbours clashed in 2020 in the Galwan Valley in the disputed northern border region of Ladakh and 20 Indian soldiers were killed (India-China dispute: The border row explained in 400 words, 2022). Viraj Solanki, a London-based expert with the International Institute for Strategic Studies said,

*“China really is India's long term strategic challenge, both on the border and in the Indian Ocean as well” (Rising & Sharma, 2024 ).*

The enhanced capabilities and interoperability of Indian and US forces could potentially outmatch China's military strength in the region. This could potentially shift the balance of power in the region, posing a challenge to China's traditional dominance and influence. The strengthening of the India-US alliance could be perceived by China as a form of strategic encirclement, limiting its freedom of action in the region and potentially increasing security concerns (Ghosh, 2016).

Through agreements like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), India gains access to advanced U.S. military technology. This enhances India's defense capabilities, thereby providing a counterweight to China's military modernization. Improved intelligence sharing between India and the U.S. helps in monitoring Chinese activities more effectively. U.S. technology transfers and joint training programs help modernize the Indian military and improving its operational effectiveness. This reduces the technological gap between Indian and Chinese forces, particularly in areas like cyber warfare, electronic warfare and missile defense systems. With increased cooperation, the U.S. and India significantly improve their maritime

surveillance capabilities. This makes it harder for China to operate unnoticed in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the South China Sea (SCS). And they also enhanced maritime domain awareness that can disrupt Chinese naval operations and logistic supply chains. India has also started engaging with the U.S. on potential Taiwan scenarios as part of the partnership (D., 2023). The US is recognizing India as a Major Defense Partner in 2016, elevating defense trade and technology sharing and also signed foundational military pacts between 2016-2020 to enable logistics support and interoperability ( Singh A. , 2024). For Instance:

1. Finalizing a deal for the joint production of F-414 jet engines in India and the sale of MQ-9B armed drones worth over \$3 billion.
2. Establishing new liaison positions to improve communication and cooperation between the armed forces.
3. Integrating defense industrial ecosystems through arrangements like the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA).
4. Expanding intelligence-sharing, military exercises and access agreements to support operational cooperation.
5. Discussions to expedite the delivery of MQ-9B drones from the U.S. to India (Singh A. , 2024).
6. The Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) plays a vital role in strengthening India-U.S. defense ties by creating opportunities for co-production and co-development of defense technologies. And defense trade also increased to the highest levels of government (Mishra, 2018).

Indo-US military advancements offset the China's growing military presence in the region. They support a rules-based order and challenging China's attempts to establish a Sino-

Centric regional architecture. The India-US partnership, along with other like-minded nations, can create a strategic encirclement, limiting China's geopolitical manoeuvrability and strategic depth. US give assistance to modernize India's military, posing a stronger challenge to China's military superiority in the region. Joint naval exercises and cooperation can enhance India's ability to secure sea lanes and counter Chinese naval expansion. The Indo-US naval cooperation strengthens India's ability to secure maritime routes and enhances its presence in the South China Sea (SCS) and Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This directly challenges China's maritime ambitions and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that includes establishing maritime routes (Paul J. , 2019). As India strengthens its defense capabilities and military interoperability with the US support, it increases its influence over neighbouring countries, potentially reducing China's influence in South Asia and Southeast Asia and India is also strengthening strategic alignment against China's interests ( Graham, 2022).

### **3.1.7. Technological Challenges For China Emerging From Indo-US Collaboration**

India and the United States have launched several initiatives to deepen their technological cooperation, with an eye on countering China's dominance in critical and emerging technologies. One of the significant challenges for China is in the field of cyber security. As the Indo-US partnership strengthens, there is an increased likelihood of collaboration in developing advanced cyber security measures. This could potentially threaten China's cyber capabilities and security (Pasricha, 2023).

Another challenge arises in the realm of advanced weaponry and defense systems. The cooperation between India and the United States in defense technology could lead to the

development of cutting-edge systems that outmatch China's current capabilities. This could disrupt the regional balance of power and compel China to invest more in its defense technology to stay competitive. Furthermore, in the field of 5G technology and telecommunications, the collaboration between India and the US may lead to the development and deployment of 5G networks that could rival China's global reach in this sector. This would pose a challenge to China's ambitions of dominating the 5G market and establishing itself as a leader in telecommunications technology. In the areas of space exploration and satellite technology, the partnership between India and the US could result in advancements that challenge China's space capabilities and aspirations. This could hinder China's plans for space exploration and its goal of becoming a major player in space technology. So, this cooperation is aimed at improving India's indigenous technological capabilities and global stature and this could hinder China's ambitions to lead in global tech innovation (White, 2021).

The two countries launched a new strategic semiconductor partnership for precision-guided ammunition and other national security-focused electronics platforms. The countries established joint task forces on 5G/6G and Open RAN technologies to drive standards development, foster R&D collaboration and conduct field trials. They are also launching the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) to enable institutional linkages across sectors, departments, businesses, start-ups and academia. Micron Technology, Inc. agreeing to invest up to \$825 million to build a new semiconductor assembly and test facility in India. Both countries are also signing deals for India to co-produce F-414 jet engines and acquire MQ-9B drones from the U.S., which will significantly boost India's indigenous manufacturing and combat capabilities. They discussed possible co-production of land warfare systems as India looks to grow its domestic defense manufacturing sector (Patil, 2023).

The U. S. is prepared to transfer advanced defense technologies to India that were previously restricted by export control regulations. They will also cooperate in quantum technologies and high-performance computing through initiatives like the Quantum Entanglement Exchange (Pasricha, 2024). They agreed to co-invest in a lithium resource project in South America and a rare earths deposit in Africa to diversify critical mineral supply chains. Their collaboration has also extended to space exploration, with India joining the U.S.-led Artemis Accords (Patil, 2023).

US support for India's technology sector can help India become more self-reliant, reducing its dependence on Chinese imports and affecting Chinese tech companies' market share. These initiatives also aim to reduce India's dependence on Russian weapons and technology and position the U.S. as a key partner for India's strategic and technological ambitions in the Indo-Pacific ( Singh A. , 2024). Collaborative advancements in critical technologies like AI, Semiconductors, defense, 5G wireless networks, artificial intelligence and cyber security between India and the US can challenge China's technological supremacy. Strengthening India's tech sector can create alternative supply chains, reducing global dependence on Chinese manufacturing and technology where China has a strong position. They may exert greater influence in shaping global technology standards and regulations (Patil, 2023).

### **3.1.8. Diplomatic Challenges For China Derived From India-US Strategic Convergence**

The complex geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region, continues to present significant diplomatic hurdles for China. The strengthening of relations between India and the US has the potential to shift the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region, where China seeks



to expand its influence. This can pose a direct challenge to China's strategic interests and its efforts to establish itself as a dominant player in the region. This partnership also impedes the China's efforts to expand its economic and trade relations in the region. So, the alliance could result in a united front against certain Chinese initiatives or positions, particularly on issues such as trade practices, regional security and human rights (III, Przystup, & Saunders, 2020). Beijing is concerned about being encircled by a U.S.-led coalition and makes China's regional ambitions more difficult to achieve. It also leads to increase competition for power and influence. This could strain China's diplomatic relations with both countries and require a delicate balancing act to avoid escalation of tension. The Indo-US partnership will also affect China's relations with the US and Russia in different degrees. U.S. try to contain China by strengthening alliances and partnerships, promoting NATO's involvement in Asia-Pacific affairs and carrying out military exercises (Manzoor, 2021).

China also faces diplomatic challenges in international forums and organizations. The increased alignment between India and the US leads to greater scrutiny of China's actions and policies in international forums, potentially resulting in more pushback or criticism from these countries. This could undermine China's efforts to shape global narratives or gain support for its own initiatives within these organizations (Wu, 2016).

China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, based on the "Nine-dash line", conflict with claims from several Southeast Asian nations, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. These disputes have led to significant tensions and international arbitration rulings against China's claims, which China has ignored. It can leave China isolated and awkwardly positioned ( Scott S. V., 2016). The long-standing border disputes between China and India, particularly in the Himalayan region, have led to military standoffs and skirmishes.

These tensions undermine bilateral relations and broader regional stability, and it has also pushed India closer to the U.S. for security assurances. This complicates China's efforts to manage its relationship with India. China's support for Pakistan may be constrained by India's close ties with the US. China views Taiwan as a breakaway province and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve reunification. Taiwan, on the other hand, sees itself as a sovereign state. The U.S. and other nations' support for Taiwan's defense capabilities further complicates this issue. The US and India can jointly exert diplomatic pressure on China by supporting other nations with competing claims in the South China Sea (SCS). This coalition-building could isolate China (Sharma S. P., 2017).

China's domestic policies, including the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong, have drawn international criticism and strained China's relations with several countries in the region. China's infrastructure projects, including dam construction and industrial activities, have environmental impacts that affect neighbouring countries, leading to diplomatic friction (Kelemen & Turcsány, 2019).

The strengthening India-U.S. partnership complicates China's regional ambitions and forces Beijing to navigate a more challenging diplomatic environment in Asia. So, it puts a diplomatic pressure on China. Divisions and recombination's among the main forces in the Indo-Pacific as the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy advances, forcing countries to "choose sides" (Enfu & Jing, 2024). The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) involving the US, India, Japan and Australia create significant diplomatic challenge for China. The Quad aims to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, which counters China's expansive maritime claims and military presence in the region. The alliance may limit China's ability to promote AIIB as a rival to existing international financial institutions and the alliance may also reduce China's influence in shaping

global governance and standards. Indo-US alliance has the potential to reshape the dynamics of global diplomacy and create diplomatic hurdles for China in advancing its interests and policies on the international stage (Liu F. , 2020).

### **3.1.9. China's Security Concerns in the Indo-Pacific**

China believes that Washington plans to use India to threaten its interests, fearing an emerging Indo-U.S. alliance as part of the American Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS). This thinking has become entrenched since the revival of Quad in 2017 and more so in the aftermath of the Galwan clash of June 2020. Beijing remains apprehensive of growing India-U.S. bonhomie, viewing the defense partnership between the two as a security challenge (Li Z. , 2018).

In its November 2022 report to the U.S. Congress, the Pentagon noted that during the Galwan standoff, China tried to minimize the seriousness of the situation to prevent India from forming a closer partnership with the U.S. In fact, Chinese officials even warned their American counterparts “not to interfere” with Beijing’s ties with India. This approach became more common in China after the Galwan clash, as India and the U.S. started working more closely on security issues (Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2023). To aid India’s efforts in tackling China’s border aggression, the United States has not only shared unprecedented levels of real-time intelligence and surveillance equipment but also conducted joint military exercises with India just about 100 kilometres from the contested boundary, irking China again (Pandit, 2020). Beijing believes that U.S. defense support to India would only serve to make the border issue “more complicated” and worsen Sino-Indian relations (Chunhao, 2023). The closer military ties between India and the US raise concerns for China about being strategically encircled in the region, limiting its ability to assert dominance.

From China's perspective, deepening Indo-US cooperation raises concerns about the security implications, especially if sensitive technologies or intelligence sharing and joint exercises are involved. This could lead to heightened security measures and responses from China. The increased military presence and cooperation enhance India's military capabilities in the region, and it could contribute to regional instability and raise tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, affecting China's strategic calculus and security concerns. This could also shift the balance of power in Asia Pacific and threaten China's influence, a region crucial for China's BRI and global connectivity goals. The growing closeness between India and the US also impedes China's efforts to expand its economic and trade relations in the region. Both India and the US have voiced concerns about China's trade practices, which leads to a united front against China on trade issues. This could potentially weaken China's position in the global economy and limit its access to key markets. And the strong naval presence of both India and the US in the region also poses a security challenge to China's naval ambitions, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS) and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Malik, 2016).

The U.S. aims to solidify its presence in the Indo-Pacific region through diplomatic, economic and security strategies, with India playing a pivotal role. India's potential to counterbalance Chinese influence regionally and globally is a security concern for China. India has also deepened its strategic collaboration with the U.S., as evidenced by their participation in the Quad Security Dialogue (QSD). This alignment reflects a shared objective of balancing China's growing influence. The U.S.-India partnership extends beyond security cooperation to economic collaboration, with India joining Biden's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). Efforts to reduce reliance on Chinese-manufactured goods have prompted closer economic ties between the U.S. and India. Moreover, the India-US alliance leads to greater coordination on

regional security issues, including maritime security and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. This could further isolate China diplomatically, limit its influence in the region and create security issues for China (Schuman, 2023).

### **3.1.10. Escalation on Chinese Border Disputes**

China faces the challenges of escalation of its border disputes, both on land and at sea, which has increased strategic instability in the Indo-Pacific region. It heightened the risk of military conflict for China and complicated the efforts to find diplomatic solutions to these long-standing territorial disagreements. The strengthening of military ties, joint exercises and increased diplomatic coordination between India and the US have likely been perceived as a threat by China, prompting a more assertive response along the disputed border areas (Ali, 2024). US and India is strengthening monitoring of waters in the Indo-Pacific region and has launched the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness to counter China's territorial claims and land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea (Wuthnow, 2017).

The U.S. has provided diplomatic, material and intelligence support to India during border crises with China, signalling it will support allies facing “gray zone coercion” from China and create serious challenges for the PRC. The U.S. has also promoted NATO's involvement in Asia-Pacific affairs to build an “Asia-Pacific Version of NATO” to contain China. It has cooperated with allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia and India to carry out military exercises in the region. And US also oppose China's efforts to assert national control over the high seas and international airspace (Wuthnow, 2017).

The border disputes between China and India have been ongoing for many years, particularly in the region of Ladakh (Ali, 2023). Unresolved territorial disputes between both

countries, along the 3,440 km unmarked border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), have led to frequent military confrontations and clashes, such as the deadly 2020 Galwan Valley incident. Militarization of the border by both sides, with increased military presence, infrastructure development and changes to the LAC, has heightened the risk of clashes (India-China dispute: The border row explained in 400 words, 2022).

China's maritime border disputes in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS), have intensified in recent years. China claims sovereignty over most of the South China Sea, based on historical rights. However, this claim is rejected by other claimant states like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan as well as the international community (Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea, 2024). These disputes over islands and maritime zones with rich natural resources and fishing areas have led to heightened tensions and the potential for military confrontation. China's land reclamation efforts and militarization of islands in the Paracel and Spratly chains have further escalated tensions, as they threaten freedom of navigation and the security of sea lines of communication (SLOC), critical for global trade. The US has challenged China's claims by conducting freedom of navigation operations and supporting its regional partners. Other countries like Japan have also stepped up their presence by selling military equipment to the Philippines and Vietnam. In 2016, the permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favour of the Philippines, rejecting China's claims but China refuses to accept the court's authority. To bolster its claims, China is using its academics to publish historical narratives and legal arguments justifying its maritime ambitions. However, this strategy contradicts international maritime law and UNCLOS (Jebb, 2023).

China's Nine-dash line assertion of sovereignty overlaps with Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea. It also overlaps with other ASEAN state's claims

like Philippine, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei on the parts of the South China Sea. Beyond the South China Sea, China also has territorial disputes with Japan over the Senkaku /Diaoyu Islands. Disputes with Taiwan also a serious territorial issue, which China views as a part of its territory. These regional flashpoints have the potential to destabilize the Indo-Pacific and undermine China's economic and political interests. Faced with these multifaceted maritime disputes, China must navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, balancing its assertive territorial claims with the need to maintain regional stability and economic cooperation. Managing these challenges will be crucial for China's continued rise and influence in the Indo-Pacific Region (Rourke, 2018).

Border escalations can lead to increased military confrontations and skirmishes, like those seen with India along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). It also encouraging destabilizing arms build-ups in the region. This threatens sea lines of communication, critical for global trade and the movement of naval forces, drawing in external powers like the U.S. and Japan. Prolonged border disputes can disrupt trade and economic relations of China with neighbouring countries. For example, tensions with India have led to calls for boycotts of Chinese goods and could affect bilateral trade agreements. Border disputes can damage China's diplomatic relations, not just with the directly involved countries but also with their allies. This can lead to a more hostile international environment and increased geopolitical isolation. Disputes over territories, like in the South China Sea, often involve complex legal arguments and international arbitration. China's rejection of unfavourable rulings can lead to accusations of flouting international law, harming its global image. Border disputes can affect China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which relies on stable regional conditions for infrastructure investments. These border escalations can deter participation and investment from other countries. China has traditionally

been cautious about using force to resolve land-based territorial disputes, fearing it could provoke unity among its rivals and lead to strategic encirclement (Scott D. , 2019).

The U.S and India is using a multi-pronged approach of military deterrence, strengthening regional partnerships and challenging China's maritime claims and actions to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. China's numerous contiguous neighbours increase the risk of border conflicts spilling over into broader regional instability (Rourke, 2018).

### **3.2. China's Strategic Response to the India-US Nexus in the Indo-Pacific Region**

Beijing continues to expand its economy and enhance its military capabilities, as China views the Asia-Pacific region as highly important for retaining its influence and securing maritime interests. Considering New Delhi's strategy and ambitions in the region, Beijing is advancing a policy framework designed to address growing challenges to its interests. Currently, China is implementing 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, and Indian Ocean Region and beyond (Liu & Jamali, 2021).

China has been actively pushing its regional initiatives such as, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), while also adopting a more assertive stance on territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea. In response, the United States is subtly shifting its regional strategy from "Rebalancing to Asia" to focusing on the "Indo-Pacific" region. Amid an intensifying trade war and other regional challenges,



China has recently moderated its proactive foreign policy. Notably, China has attempted to downplay domestic rhetoric, rebuild strategic relationships with India and Japan, and reassure ASEAN states regarding the South China Sea. To effectively respond to the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) , China could benefit from articulating a more inclusive regional vision and promoting an institutional framework that accommodates a US presence in the region (Liu F. , 2020). Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian in 2021 said that,

*“The Indo-Pacific strategy, as promoted by the US and its allies, is essentially a strategy of hegemony. China will resolutely defend its interests while working for peace and stability in the region”* (Cheng Enfu, 2024).

China has also established a military presence in the Indian Ocean, deploying naval forces for enhancing its influence among littoral states. Djibouti in Africa is home to China’s first overseas military base, established in 2017, which serves as a logistical hub for Chinese naval operations in the Indian Ocean, facilitating anti-piracy missions and other military activities. This military footprint allows China to secure its maritime interests and respond to regional crises effectively. Comoros, strategically located at the northern mouth of the Mozambique Channel, is crucial for maritime transit routes and China’s diplomatic efforts in the region aim to secure vital trade pathways. Moreover, China's efforts to develop ports in Sri Lanka, Pakistan (Gwadar), Myanmar and the Maldives clearly demonstrate its intent to expand its maritime presence. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are vital for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as investments in infrastructure projects in these countries enhance China's influence and access to the Indian Ocean region. Overall, China’s multifaceted approach in the Indian Ocean underscores its growing influence in this strategically important region. China has significantly bolstered its naval capabilities, including the development of aircraft carriers, submarines and advanced missile systems. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has increased its patrols

and exercises in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, asserting China's territorial claims and demonstrating its strategic reach (Morton, 2016).

For China, the successful implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is vital to achieving its broader geopolitical objectives across the region, from the South China Sea to the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Besides, China's "Two-Ocean Strategy" reflects Beijing's maritime approach to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Consequently, China is actively working to address and counter, energy security challenges (Kakar, 2022).

To secure the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and create a favourable environment for advancing its geopolitical objectives, China is striving to strengthen ties with regional countries. Under the String of Pearls framework, the "Road" refers to the Maritime Silk Road, while the "Belt" signifies the land route connecting the region across Eurasia. Furthermore, China has initiated infrastructure development projects and finance and investment programs to stimulate economic growth in the region, thereby offering a significant counterbalance to India (Liu F. , 2020). To further its maritime objectives, the Maritime Silk Road has become a primary strategy for aligning Beijing's "geo-economic and geopolitical" goals.

China perceives the India-US alliance as a substantial challenge in the Indo-Pacific region, potentially threatening its strategic interests. In response, China has adjusted its foreign policy by enhancing its engagement with neighbouring countries, bolstering its military capabilities and promoting multilateral platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has also criticized the formation of new alliances such as the "Squad" (Comprising the US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines) for

increasing regional risks and complicating the situation in the South China Sea (After Quad, US forms 'Squad' to counter China in Indo-Pacific, 2024). Chinese media and government officials frequently criticize India-US cooperation, portraying it as a destabilizing factor in the region. They stress the importance of a multipolar world order and often accuse the US of seeking to maintain hegemony. To counterbalance the influence of the India-US alliance, China has enhanced its diplomatic efforts by strengthening ties with countries like Russia and Pakistan (Liu & Jamali, 2021). According to renowned scholar Stephen P. Cohen,

*“Chinese policy toward Pakistan is driven primarily through its interest to counter Indian military power as the main stumbling block in the way of its grand regional ambitions” (Cohen, 2001).*

Furthermore, China has invested in soft power initiatives, including cultural exchanges, educational programs and media outreach, to improve its image and sway public opinion in the region. In addition to this, China actively promotes its vision of a multipolar world order as a counter-narrative to the perceived dominance of the India-US partner (Liu & Jamali, 2021).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CHINA'S EMERGENCE SHIFTS US' FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS INDIA**

China's rise as a global power has significantly influenced U.S. foreign policy, particularly in its approach towards India. The U.S. sees India as a crucial player in balancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Strengthening ties with India helps the U.S. to counterbalance China's growing military and economic clout. The U.S. has been also more vocal in supporting India's positions on various international issues, such as territorial disputes with China. This includes taking a stronger stance on China's actions in the South China Sea and supporting India's candidacy for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. There has been a significant increase in defense cooperation between the U.S. and India. The U.S. is also fostering closer economic ties with India to create a counterweight to China's economic dominance. These strategic shifts highlight the U.S.'s recognition of India's pivotal role in maintaining regional stability and countering China's influence. The evolving U.S-India relationship is thus a cornerstone of the broader U.S. strategy to manage the rise of China on the global stage.

#### **4.1. Overview of China's Rise as a Global Power and US' Foreign Policy is Pivoting Towards India**

China's rise in the Indo-Pacific region has been marked by significant economic, military and diplomatic expansion. Economically, China has extended its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative, investing in infrastructure and development projects throughout Asia and beyond ,creating dependencies and bolstering trade connections. Militarily, China has enhanced its naval

capabilities, constructed artificial islands in the South China Sea, and expanded its presence in strategically important areas, challenging the dominance of the United States and its allies. Diplomatically, China has increased its regional influence through multilateral organizations and bilateral relations, often using its economic power to influence political outcomes. This multifaceted strategy has made China a central player in the Indo-Pacific, presenting opportunities for cooperation but also raising concerns about regional stability and security.

China's rapid rise as a global power is significantly impacting U.S. foreign policy, leading to a strategic pivot towards closer relations with India. This shift is driven by the need to counterbalance China's growing economic, military, and technological influence in the Indo-Pacific region. India's critical location in South Asia, its strategic position between Western Asia and Southeast Asia and its emergence as an economic power grant it a significant role in global politics (Jalil, 2019).

The Indo-US civilian nuclear deal is a significant milestone, enhancing India's power and influence in regional politics. The U.S. aims to bolster India as a global or regional military power to further its own interests, which may affect the security interests of other countries. The U.S. sees India as a crucial ally in maintaining regional stability and countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Jalil, 2019).

The US pivot to India has grown to a solid bilateral relationship based on strategic and commercial reciprocal interests. Furthermore, it has fostered specific multilateral eco-strategic commitments and an enhanced Act East policy. The possible security and economic interests that two sides have decided to protect as strategic partners may include:

#### **4.1.1. The US' Specific Security & Commercial Interests**

1. The US looks for strategic partner to contain China in Asia Pacific region as well as the Indian Ocean. It is an individual as well as the collective interests of the two countries.
2. China is emerging as a global power. India could indirectly serve US interests by buying more time for the US to maintain its status as a sole superpower.
3. The US is looking to India to play a larger role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.
4. A strong bilateral partnership with India has a commercial dimension. The US military-industrial complex and nuclear industry would benefit from India being one of the biggest markets. The US aims to collaborate to safeguard their economic interests by protecting the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), particularly those passing through the Indian Ocean.
5. The US seeks to promote and defend democracy around the world (Khan & Khurshid, 2018).

#### **4.1.2. India's Specific Security & Commercial Interests**

1. India aspires to become a major global power, seeking membership in the UNSC and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). US support is crucial in achieving these goals.
2. India seeks a partner to counter the emerging Chinese security threats in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. India aims to isolate Pakistan regarding the longstanding Kashmir issue and US diplomatic support is vital for this effort.
4. The formal recognition of its nuclear status.

5. And international recognition of the Line of Control as the official border between India and Pakistan.
6. India and the US aim to jointly protect critical infrastructure from cyber-attacks.
7. In the South Asian context, India seeks to be considered separately and prefers not to be lumped together with Pakistan. The US could play a crucial role in enhancing India's influence and its unique position in the region.
8. India desires to have diverse options for acquiring cutting-edge military technology, with the US playing a crucial role in achieving this goal.
9. And lastly, to collaborate on global challenges like climate change and combating infectious diseases (Khan & Khurshid, 2018).

## **4.2. United States' Concerns Over China's Rise**

The Biden's administration is not the first American government to believe in a competitive nature of the relationship between the U.S and China. The United States has indeed defined its bilateral relations with China as a “strategic competition”, and in recent years, this competition has become increasingly intense and confrontational. China's rise over the past several decades has been a defining feature of the global economic, political and strategic landscape. There is anxiety over China's increasing global footprint and its efforts to reshape the international order, leading to perceptions of a declining U.S. influence. A majority of Americans view China as a critical threat (Wei & Zhang, 2021).

The rise of China has generated various concerns in the United States across multiple dimensions, such as:

### **4.2.1. China's Rapid Economic Growth And Influence is a Threat to Global Economic Dominance**

Since opening up to foreign trade and investment and implementing free-market reforms in 1979, China has been one of the world's fastest-growing economies, with an average annual real GDP growth of 9.5% through 2018, a pace described by the World Bank as “*the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history*” (Gumber & Shukla , 2021). This growth has allowed China to double its GDP approximately every eight years and lift an estimated 800 million people out of poverty. China has also become the world's largest economy on a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis, manufacturer, merchandise trader and holder of foreign exchange reserves. This growth has made China a significant commercial partner for the United States. China is now the largest merchandise trading partner of the U.S., its third-largest export market, and its largest source of imports (Gumber & Shukla , 2021).

China is also the largest foreign holder of U.S. treasury securities, which help fund the federal debt and keep U.S. interest rates low. However, China's rise as a major economic power has raised concerns among many U.S. policymakers. Some argue that China employs unfair trade practices, such as maintaining an undervalued currency and providing subsidies to domestic producers, to inundate U.S. markets with low-cost goods. They claim these practices threaten American jobs, wages and living standards. Others contend that China's growing use of industrial policies to promote and protect certain domestic Chinese industries or firms favoured by the government, and its failure to take effective action against widespread infringement and theft of U.S. intellectual property rights (IPR) in China, threaten to undermine the competitiveness of U.S. IP-intensive industries. In addition, while China has become a large and



growing market for U.S. exports, critics contend that numerous trade and investment barriers limit opportunities for U.S. firms to sell in China or force them to set up production facilities in China as condition of doing business there (Gumber & Shukla , 2021).

**Table-1**  
**China’s GDP Growth Rate**

Year	GDP Growth%
2024	4.6%
2023	5.2%
2022	2.99%
2021	8.45%
2020	2.24%
2019	5.95%
2018	6.75%
2017	6.95%
2016	6.85%

**Source:** ( Textor, 2024)

China's rising economic influence has led to increased engagement in global economic policies and projects, particularly in infrastructure development. Economically, China aims to counter the Indo-Pacific strategy by expanding its influence through initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and other trade agreements. These initiatives aim to foster economic integration among regional economies with China, thereby decreasing their

dependence on the United States and its allies (Liu F. , 2020). China’s Belt and Road initiative (BRI) represents a grand strategy by China to finance infrastructure throughout Asia, Europe, and Africa and beyond. If successful, China’s economic initiatives could significantly expand export and investment markets for China and increase its “soft power” globally (Khan F. , 2021).

At the APEC summit in November 2017, president Xi Jinping said the following,

*“The Belt and Road Initiative calls for joint contribution and it has a clear focus, which is to promote infrastructure construction and connectivity, strengthen coordination on economic policies, enhance complementarity of development strategies and boost interconnected development to achieve common prosperity. This initiative is from China, but it belongs to the world. It is rooted in history, but it is oriented toward the future. It focuses on the Asian, European and African continents, but it is open to all partners. I am confident that the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative will create a broader and more dynamic platform for Asia-Pacific cooperation”* (Xinhuanet, 2017).

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 5.30 percent in the first quarter of 2024, compared to the same quarter of the previous year. From 1989 to 2024, China's annual GDP growth rate averaged 8.86 percent (Morrison & M, 2019).

**Table -2**

**Economy of China (Statistics)**

Current GDP of China	\$18.533trillion(Nominal,2024est)\$35.291 trillion (PPP,2024est)
GDP Rank	2nd (Nominal,2023)1st (PPP,2023)
GDP Growth	5.2%(2023) 4.6%(2024f)
GDP Per Capita	\$13,136(Nominal,2024)\$25,015(PPP,2024)

**Source:** (International Monetary Fund, 2024)

Some experts, viewing China as an escalating threat to the US economy and the global trading system, advocate for policies to contain China's growing economic power. They propose

using punitive measures, such as increased tariffs under Section 301, to counter the adverse effects of China's industrial policies on U.S. firms or to pressure China into altering its distortive and discriminatory policies, such as the Made in China 2025 initiative. Some view responding to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a significant challenge to U.S. global economic interests. While China's financial backing of infrastructure projects in various countries could yield positive economic outcomes, U.S. policymakers have expressed concerns that China will use the BRI primarily to benefit its own firms, that the project implementation process will lack transparency, that BRI participation could burden countries with significant debts and that China will use the BRI to spread its economic system to other nations (Morrison W. M., 2019).

China's rapid economic growth and emergence as a major economic power have boosted its leadership's confidence in its economic model. Many believe that the key challenges for the United States are to convince China that it has a vested interest in maintaining the international trading system, which has been instrumental to its economic rise, and that it should take a more active leadership role in sustaining that system and that further economic and trade reforms are the most reliable way for China to grow and modernize its economy. Reducing trade and investment barriers would enhance competition in China, lower consumer costs, increase economic efficiency and stimulate innovation. However, many U.S. stakeholders worry that China's efforts to promote indigenous innovation and technology development could lead to increased state intervention (Such as subsidies, trade and investment barriers and discriminatory policies), which could negatively impact the U.S. IP-intensive firms (Morrison W. M., 2019).

The Chinese government has prioritized innovation in its economic planning through several high-profile initiatives, such as "Made in China 2025". This plan, announced in 2015, aims to upgrade and modernize China's manufacturing in ten key sectors through extensive

government support, with the goal of making China a major global player in these industries. However, these measures have increasingly sparked concerns that China aims to use industrial policies to reduce its dependence on foreign technology, potentially by restricting access for foreign firms in China and ultimately to dominate global markets. China's expanding global economic influence and its economic and trade policies have substantial implications for the United States, making them a focal point of interest for Congress. While China represents a substantial and expanding market for U.S. firms, its incomplete shift towards a free-market economy has led to economic policies viewed as detrimental to U.S. economic interests, including industrial strategies and intellectual property theft (Morrison W. M., 2019).

The collaborative defense manufacturing initiative in India supports the US "friend shoring strategy", which aims to diversify supply chains away from China. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen emphasized India's significance in this strategy during a visit to New Delhi, citing its market potential, cheap labour and large consumer base. India seeks to establish itself as a global hub for manufacturing and exports. With the political stability of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its strong prospects for re-election in 2024, there is an expectation of significant policy continuity that will favour foreign investments, particularly from the US, throughout the decade (Bhatnagar, 2023).

#### **4.2.2. China's Military Modernization and Its Growing Assertiveness**

China's military modernization in the Indo-Pacific region has shifted the balance of power in its favour. China's military modernization aims to support its broader strategic objectives, including safeguarding its sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime interests, particularly in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The modernization efforts also serve

China's ambitions to achieve global military power. China has undertaken comprehensive military reforms aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). These reforms involve restructuring command and control systems, enhancing joint operational capabilities and modernizing the organizational structure of the PLA (Gill, Lockyer, Lim, & Tan, 2024).

In terms of military strategy, China has been strengthening its presence in the South China Sea (SCS) and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), asserting territorial claims through infrastructure projects on disputed islands and escalating naval operations. In the mid-2010s, following Xi Jinping's ascent to power and China's adoption of a more assertive foreign policy under his leadership, China's global influence expanded significantly (Ulatowski, 2022).

China's assertive posture is marked by its growing military capabilities, economic endeavours such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and diplomatic efforts to safeguard its interests. While maintaining its assertive stance in the South China Sea (SCS), China has also pursued sophisticated military diplomacy. This includes heightened involvement in regional security dialogues and confidence-building measures to project a more positive image. China's military modernization is ongoing, but now with a greater focus on deterrence rather than direct confrontation (Liu F., 2020).

China is actively asserting its territorial claims in areas such as the South China Sea, East China Sea and its border with India. Concerns have arisen over China's disputes with neighbouring countries like Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines, prompting questions about its intentions in the South China Sea (SCS). China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific

aims to solidify its position as a leading regional power (Tambi & Tourangbam, 2022). According to the US Department of Defense,

*“China ‘seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and ultimately global pre-eminence in the long term’” (Beeson & Brown, 2021).*

The presence of Chinese intelligence ships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has raised apprehensions among neighbouring countries. The Indian Ocean is vital for China’s energy security, as nine of its top ten crude oil suppliers transit through this maritime route. The region serves as a critical link for trade between China and Europe, as well as for its engagements with Africa and the Middle East. Approximately 80% of China’s energy imports and 95% of its trade with Africa, Europe and the Middle East transit through the Indian Ocean, making it essential for China’s economic security (Tambi & Tourangbam, 2022).

A major aspect of China’s military modernization efforts is the expansion and enhancement of its navy. This includes the development of aircraft carriers, advanced submarines and a blue-water navy capable of projecting power well beyond its borders. China's naval deployments, comprising anti-piracy patrols and submarines, are designed to safeguard its maritime interests, protect its shipping routes and promote regional maritime security. These developments are crucial elements of China’s strategy to exert influence in the Indo-Pacific region ( Cordesman & Colley, 2016).

China's military modernization has achieved notable advancements in:

1. China has invested heavily in defense technology, focusing on anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. These developments are aimed at deterring and countering potential foreign interventions in its nearby waters, particularly by the United States.

They encompass advanced missile systems, integrated air defense networks and anti-ship ballistic missiles (Johnson, 2017).

2. Establishing overseas military bases, like those in Djibouti and exploring potential bases in Cambodia.
3. Increased military operations in the South China Sea and East China Sea.
4. China is making substantial investments in cutting-edge military technologies such as artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, hypersonic weapons and space capabilities. These developments aim to offset the technological advantages held by the United States and other regional powers.
5. Improved capabilities, encompassing hypersonic weapons, artificial intelligence and cyber warfare.
6. Improved situational awareness and surveillance.
7. Expansion of its military presence and influence in the region.
8. Challenges to the United States' military superiority and influence in the region (Maizland, 2020).

### **Regional Implications**

China's military modernization carries profound implications for regional security dynamics, stability and the balance of power. It has sparked concerns among neighbouring countries and the United States, prompting increased defense spending, strategic realignments and military modernization efforts among regional nations. This escalation in military capabilities heightens the risk of conflicts and exacerbates strategic tensions in the Indo-Pacific region (Gill, Lockyer, Lim, & Tan, 2024).

### **4.2.3. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Its Global Impacts**

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, envisioning the collaborative construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road. China's announcement of the BRI underscores its growing economic strength and its aspiration to play a leading role as a major power in a diverse world that seeks to tackle challenges in peace, development and governance (Dunford, 2021).

China's ascent and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) pose challenges to the existing “rules-based global order” and the economic, moral, political and cultural leadership traditionally held by the United States and its allies. The BRI is viewed as a means for China to expand its global influence and forge new economic prospects. It has the potential to reshape global trade routes and economic connections (Dunford, 2021).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to expand its influence across Eurasia and nearby waters, often at the expense of US interests. The BRI could undermine US dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. By investing in infrastructure projects, the BRI reduces regional reliance on US economic power and developments like ports and bases could give China strategic advantages, potentially challenging US military dominance. This project provides an alternative to the US-led international order, which could weaken US influence and draw countries closer to China. As a result, the US's sway in regional organizations like ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum might diminish. Furthermore, China's efforts could boost its soft power, potentially challenging US cultural and ideological influence (Li M. , 2020).

However, the US is actively working to maintain its influence in the region through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and the Blue Dot Network, which aim to promote



a free and open Indo-Pacific. The competition between the US and China in the region continues to intensify (Panda D. J., 2020).

China is using the BRI to create a system that serves its own interests, offering an alternative to the Western-dominated order (Ulatowski, 2022). While the BRI has great potential to boost global trade and development, it also brings significant challenges and risks (Afzaal, 2022).

#### **4.2.4. Challenges to Regional Security in the Indo-Pacific Region**

China is challenging the regional security order in the Indo-Pacific. Its aggressive territorial claims in the South China Sea, East China Sea and along its border with India, directly challenge international norms and the freedom of navigation, which are important to the U.S. for maintaining regional stability and open sea routes. China's rapid military modernization, naval expansion and strategic deployment of military assets in disputed areas are adding to the existing challenges. China's establishment of bases on disputed territories is a major development in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, China uses economic and military pressure to influence the policies and decisions of neighbouring countries (Envall, 2020).

China claims almost the entire South China Sea (SCS) , causing disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. It ignores international rulings like the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision that rejected these claims, challenging global rules. China has also built and militarized artificial islands, increasing tensions. Moreover, China has ongoing territorial disputes with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, resulting in frequent military confrontations (Shah, 2020). China has set up military bases in places like Djibouti and

is developing ports in countries like Pakistan (Gwadar) and Sri Lanka (Hambantota), which could be used for military purposes (Balasubramaniam & Murugesan, 2020).

The rivalry between the U.S. and China in critical tech sectors like 5G and artificial intelligence has major security implications. Dominance in these technologies is vital for keeping military and economic superiority (Lee, 2020).

Regarding security, China aims to expand its influence in the Asia-Pacific, making it challenging for the United States to counter Chinese activities in the region. China does this by creating divisions within regional institutions and U.S. security alliances and partnerships. China is taking several strategic actions in the South and East China Seas, such as constructing and arming artificial islands, disregarding international maritime laws with expansive claims, attempting to control navigation rights and deploying civilian vessels to assert dominance in disputed areas. These actions alter the existing situation in favour of China, often at the expense of other nations. In the East China Sea, Beijing has heightened tensions by establishing its own Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) (Rinehart & Elias , 2015).

Beijing has conducted military exercises in the Taiwan Strait to intimidate Taipei. Furthermore, China is carrying out an aggressive and sustained campaign to undermine Taiwan's democratic process and weaken popular support for the current Taiwanese government through disinformation campaigns and other influence operations (Bush & Hass, 2019 ).

These actions disrupt the current security setup in the region, which could destabilize the Indo-Pacific and trigger responses from other countries, including the United States and India.

#### **4.2.5. Concerns Over Human Rights and Governance Models**

The USA has raised concerns about human rights and governance in the Indo-Pacific, especially regarding China's increasing influence. This includes China's expanding military presence in the region and the possibility of its governance model influencing other countries in the area. The USA has been advocating for democratic values and human rights in the Indo-Pacific in several ways. This includes supporting democratic institutions and civil society organizations, promoting free trade and economic collaboration, advocating for transparent and accountable governance, providing aid for human rights and legal systems development and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region (Usaid, 2017).

The U.S. has strongly criticized China for human rights violations, especially in places like Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong. In Xinjiang, there are widespread reports of large-scale mass detentions, forced labour and extensive surveillance targeting Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities. In Hong Kong, the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020 has resulted in crackdowns on pro-democracy activists and the erosion of the region's autonomy and freedoms (Hoffmann, 2016).

China's governance model, featuring a one-party system and centralized control, sharply contrasts with democratic principles. The U.S. asserts that China's model promotes authoritarianism, which undermines democratic institutions, freedoms and human rights. This model is perceived as spreading to other nations through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), where Chinese investments often come with surveillance technologies and governance practices that lack transparency and disregard human rights (Lai, 2016).

At a broader international scale, China aims to weaken liberal democratic principles and enhance or substitute them with authoritarian governance models. The current global governance system, which includes rules, institutions and mechanisms for resolving global issues, favours liberal values such as freedom, democracy, enforceable international laws and fundamental individual rights. From Beijing's perspective, this poses a challenge because as China becomes more interconnected with the global system, its citizens are exposed to ideals that contradict the current leadership's intentions. To mitigate this risk, Beijing is striving to make the global system more authoritarian. For instance, Beijing is weakening human rights accountability mechanisms at the United Nations and encouraging other countries to resist a free and open global internet (Ikenberry, 2020).

China's expanding military activities in the South China Sea (SCS) and its assertive stance on territorial disputes with neighbouring countries are causing worries about regional stability and governance. The U.S. sees these moves as aggressive tactics that jeopardize the sovereignty of other nations and undermine the established international rules. Furthermore, the U.S. criticizes China's economic strategies in the Indo-Pacific, especially what it calls “debt-trap diplomacy”. By providing substantial loans and investments to developing countries, China gains influential power, which can result in these nations becoming politically and economically dependent. This situation may weaken their ability to govern independently and maintain their sovereignty (Brautigam, 2019).

In order to integrate into the global liberal economic system, China underwent economic reforms to marketize its economy. However, it maintained a centralized Leninist party-state approach to economic management, which hinders it from fully adopting and enforcing free trade and market-oriented institutions and regulations. Now, as a major global power, China

leverages its economic, political and military influence to compel other countries to adapt to and recognize China's unique blend of political and economic systems (Yue, 2016).

China has ramped up its diplomatic efforts to counter the perceived challenges posed by the Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) . This involves strengthening relationships with ASEAN countries by offering economic benefits and initiating infrastructure projects through the BRI. China aims to prevent these nations from aligning too closely with the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy (Zhu, 2013). Yoshinobu Yamamoto emphasized the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative (formerly OBOR) in addressing Indo-Pacific infrastructure needs, saying,

*“Although OBOR has such benevolent aspects as improving land and sea infrastructure and supplying international public goods, it also allows China to utilize that infrastructure network strategically and to exclude other countries”* (Swaine, 2015).

China’s long term strategic goal is to replace the US in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world. China’s primary aim is to reduce American presence and influence in Asia and the Western Pacific. Moreover, China seeks to diminish the roles of the United States and Western nations in regions spanning Asia, Africa, Latin America, the South Pacific and Eastern Europe. China's “Belt and Road Initiative” seeks to expand its sphere of influence globally, aligning with China's geopolitical ambitions (He B. , 2018).

There is growing concern over China’s increasing influence in international institutions and organizations, which the U.S. fears could alter global norms to emphasize state control over individual rights. China is perceived as advocating for changes in international bodies that reflect its own governance approach. To address these worries, the U.S. has undertaken diplomatic, economic and security efforts to oppose China's influence and advocate for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. These initiatives include the Quad Alliance (QSD), the Indo-Pacific Strategy

(IPS) and efforts to advocate for human rights. Through these actions, the U.S. seeks to strengthen a regional framework that upholds human rights, sovereignty and democratic governance (Tan, 2020).

### **4.3. The United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy**

In recent years, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a crucial region for the U.S. due to its strategic, economic and security importance. The shift from focusing on Asia to the broader Indo-Pacific began during President Barack Obama's second term. This vast area spans from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific and includes critical energy and trade routes. Unlike the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean hosts four out of six major maritime chokepoints: the Mozambique Channel, Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Malacca (Malik, 2014).

In a November 2011 article, Hillary Clinton emphasized the significance of the Indo-Pacific, describing it as a crucial area for global politics and a major focus for future U.S. interests and investments (Hillary, 2011). The U.S. has refocused on the Asia-Pacific region due to the rising challenges from China's infrastructure projects, economic growth and political influence. In November 2011, the Obama administration introduced a rebalancing strategy for the Asia-Pacific, giving India a crucial role. This strategy aimed to counter China's increasing military power in the area (Castro, 2018).

The U.S. anti-China stance was seen as counterproductive to India's relationship with China. In response, India leaned back towards non-alignment and sought greater strategic independence in its dealings with both the U.S. and China. To bolster India as a regional ally against China, the U.S. committed to enhancing New Delhi's strategic role in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), while supporting the Indo-Pacific regional framework. In

2015, during a visit to India, President Obama announced the Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This framework marked the first time that the U.S. and India openly declared their intention to collaborate on securing their shared interests in these regions (Hanif & Khan, 2018).

President Donald Trump officially launched the US Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2017. This new maritime strategy focuses on economic integration and defense cooperation with Asia-Pacific nations. It includes significant financial commitments to regional countries to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to strengthen the US network of allies to maintain its dominance in the region and limit China's influence with countries along the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Australia, Japan and India support this strategy because of their shared regional interests. The strategy has become particularly important to India, which has become a key advocate and a significant strategic partner for the US ( Hu & Meng, 2020).

The U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) outline Washington's goals to succeed in the Indo-Pacific region and counter its adversaries. In recent years, the U.S. has been actively involved in the IP region, with a significant \$1.9 trillion in trade (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2019).

Washington's strategic documents frequently describe the Indo-Pacific as a “Free” and “Open” region where all nations can exercise their sovereignty. While promoting this vision, the strategy strongly criticizes China's ambitions, labelling it a “revisionist power” seeking to expand its political, security and economic influence. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is central to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) , making it crucial for the policy's success. In 2018, U.S. investments in ASEAN totalled \$271 billion, making it one of the top

destinations for U.S. investments in the Indo-Pacific region, exceeding the combined U.S. investments in Japan and China (Tan, 2020).

The United States, which used to refer to the vast area extending from Australia to India as the Asia Pacific, now calls the region the Indo-Pacific. This change is part of its regional policy framework aimed at countering China's ambitions. During Trump's presidency, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) highlighted a renewed focus on this region. The shift underscores the region's growing geostrategic importance for the US and Washington's increasing concern over China's perceived threat to its interests. The term “Indo-Pacific” in US national security discussions reflects the region's maritime significance and acknowledges India's rising role as a continental and maritime power (Tan, 2020).

On February 11, 2022, the current US Administration unveiled its long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy, emphasizing the importance of alliances and a strengthened presence in South Asia amidst China's growing regional and global influence. While US authorities claim the strategy is not solely focused on countering China, many of its key provisions, including the role of India, appear to be primarily aimed at addressing China's expanding economic reach, military capabilities, and its ambitious 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 behaviour”*. The strategy emphasizes the importance of supporting India as a significant partner in this regional vision and further strengthening the bilateral relationship. The US acknowledges India as an emerging regional power and a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) , considering its significant role in ASEAN and the Quad (Ye, 2022).



The Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) highlights the US's renewed focus on the region. In recent years, there has been increased interplay between geopolitics, geostrategic and geo-economics' in the Asia-Pacific. India plays a prominent role in this strategy as the US strengthens its strategic partnership with India to address the growing challenges from China's attempts to promote a new international order. For the US, India is crucial for advancing its strategic interests in the region (Kakar, 2022).

The Indo-Pacific region, with its substantial economic potential and key maritime routes, has drawn global attention, intensifying competition among major powers, especially between the United States and China. China aims to counter the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) by offering appealing alternatives and positioning itself as a stabilizing force in the region, in contrast to the U.S.'s security-focused approach. China aims to present itself as a responsible regional power by engaging in multilateral forums and promoting shared development and security. Its military modernization could significantly affect the regional balance of power and geopolitical dynamics (Li M. , 2020).

#### **4.4. Shifts in US' Foreign Policy Towards India and Recognition of India's Strategic Importance in Balancing China**

The strategic partnership between the Washington and New Delhi is not a sudden development but the result of a gradual convergence of interests following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR). Relations between India and the US experienced a modest transformation during the Post-Cold War era. Both nations share significant mutual benefits that can form the foundation of a long-term partnership. They have major economic and security interests in common and face a shared competitor in the rising powers of China and a resilient

Pakistan. Moreover, they share common values such as promoting democracy, the rule of law, commercial enterprise, secularism, non-aggression and religious homogeneity (Khan M. , 2017).

The US has increasingly viewed India as a critical strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region. This alignment is partly driven by a mutual interest in counterbalancing China's growing influence and assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS) and the broader Asia-Pacific region. China's assertive policies and rapid growth have prompted the US to recalibrate its foreign policy towards India, fostering a closer strategic, economic and military partnership. This realignment aims to create a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region and globally, countering China's influence and ensuring a stable, multipolar world order (Ganguly, 2022).

The United States views India as a growing economy and seeks a robust trading partner. Additionally, it aims to counterbalance China. The Bush administration labelled China as a strategic competitor, and the U.S. feels threatened by China's rise, considering it a major economic and military threat (Pardesi , 2017 ).

U.S. policy towards India encompasses two significant dimensions:

1. The first factor is the U.S. adapting its foreign policy to the new international political climate after the Cold War, addressing concerns about its potential decline from its status as the sole superpower.
2. The second aspect involves India's ascent, which has increased its geostrategic significance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, potentially making it a crucial partner for the U.S. in preserving international stability and its own hegemonic position within this framework.

U.S. policy towards India reflects more continuity than change, driven not solely by the aftermath of 9/11 but also by shifts in power within an increasingly globalized world. In

this evolving context, both the U.S. and India have sought closer strategic ties with countries that share their interests. Despite not always aligning perfectly, their interests are sufficiently overlapping that since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. and India have cultivated a stronger partnership. While the aftermath of 9/11 created conditions favourable to this alliance, it was not the sole driving force (Eswaran , 2017).

If India seeks security assurances, the U.S. seeks a trusted partner to advance and safeguard its interests beyond its borders, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region and in countering China's rise. According to Thomas Donnelly and Melissa Wisner,

*“Only India stands as a natural great power partner to the US in building the next American century”* (Hussain & Hussain , 2019).

Furthermore, the U.S. requires new and thriving markets to pursue its economic interests. The formulation of national interests is a matter of significant importance in the United States. Some of the key national interests identified by the Commission on the National Interest include: (1) To prevent, deter and reduce any threat arising from nuclear, biological or chemical weapons against the country or its military personnel, whether domestically or abroad. (2) To ensure the survival of U.S. allies and enable them to prosper in a secure world order free from obstacles or threats. (3) To prevent hostile major powers or rogue states from infiltrating U.S. borders or those of its allies. (4) To ensure the viability and stability of critical global systems such as trade, financial markets, energy supplies and the environment and (5) To cultivate productive relationships, aligned with American national interests, with states that could potentially become strategic adversaries, such as China and Russia (Chenoy & Chenoy, 2007). That’s why U.S. foreign policy has increasingly focused on strengthening its partnership with India, primarily as a

strategic counterweight to China's expanding influence in Asia and globally. This strategic pivot towards India is part of the broader U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy (Ye, 2022).

China has long been economically attractive and politically stable in its neighbourhood, positioning itself as a strong contender to become a great power and a crucial player in the region. In contrast, the US has maintained its top position since the post-Cold War era, creating a new symmetry while limiting any potential challengers to its supremacy in the region. The 9/11 incident further altered the security dynamics of South Asia. Today, the necessity of curbing China's regional dominance and fostering economic cooperation in the area has shifted US strategic focus more towards India. This shift, in turn, fuels India's hegemonic ambitions, often under the banner of its Hindutva ideology (Hashmi, 2020).

Furthermore, the “Department of Defense Authorization Act for FY 2012” highlighted the importance of strengthening strategic relations with New Delhi to benefit America's national interests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The act underscores India's significance in America's strategic goals, as reflected in the following statement,

*“The relationship between the United States and India - what President Obama has called one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century - is a priority for the US government and the US Department of Defense. The United States and India are natural partners, naturally aligned to be closer because of shared interests and values, and our shared commitment to democracy, economic growth, and regional security. A strong bilateral partnership is in US interests and benefits both countries. We expect India's importance to US interests to grow in the long run as India, a major regional and emerging global power, increasingly assumes roles corresponding with its position as a stakeholder and leader in the international system” (Bukhari S. S., 2011).*

United States has come up with a policy that has two goals:

- Firstly, to maintain and prolong United States' dominance.
- Secondly, to seek coalitions with countries that have compatible interests and goals.

As the world's largest democracy, India is an ideal candidate for a new strategic partnership. In 2002, for the first time, the United States' National Security Strategy recognized India as one of the, “*main global power centres and potential allies capable and willing to promote a balance of power that favours freedom*”. The United States, traditionally dominant in the Indo-Pacific, is adjusting to new dynamics to maintain its influence and is partnering with India to counter China's rise. China's growing military and economic power is shifting the regional balance and challenging the current order. India is becoming a key player, aiming to counter China's influence and protect its own interests (Jamshidi & Noori, 2017).

#### **4.4.1. Common Values and Convergence of Indo-US Interests**

The history of Indo-US bilateral relations highlights critical reasons for rebuilding trust and strategic orientation in today's unique partnership. To understand this, it is essential to consider the foundations that have helped the relationship grow into what is now labelled as “strategic relations” (Aquil & Shoaib, 2017). According to George Pertyik, these foundations consist of five important factors: (1) Changes in the international system (2) China’s growing power (3) Terrorism as a threat to global security (4) Shared values and (5) Commonalities between the US and India (Hussain, 2019).

The Indian government doesn't have a formal document outlining its “National Security Strategy”. Instead, India's strategic interests can be understood by looking at past speeches, statements and foreign policy actions of its leaders (Slathia, 2006).

Some significant aspects of India's strategic goals include:

- India today sees itself as a leader in international politics. Among its key strategic objectives are achieving formal recognition of its nuclear status, enhancing its economic market, securing membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and obtaining a permanent position in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Zhu, China's New Diplomacy, 2016).
- Furthermore, India aims to establish itself as a pivotal strategic player both regionally and globally (Zhu, 2016).
- India's ambitions also include achieving self-reliance in critical sectors like defense, high technology and space (Subramanian, 2014).
- It also aims to maintain the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as a demilitarized zone and seeks to counter China's influence in the region (Raman, 2008).

In the United States, the “National Security Strategy” is a crucial document that outlines national objectives. It serves as a framework for US foreign policy, emphasizing security, prosperity, values and international order as key priorities. Currently, the United States seeks new and stable economic markets, in this context, India could play a vital role. India can help uphold the liberal-led international system, which aligns with US interests. In today's political landscape, the United States represents the most viable path for India to achieve its aspirations for greatness (The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2006).

#### **4.4.2. India and China’s Strained Relations Foster Closer US-India Ties**

India and China have had strained relations for years, marked by periods of conflict. Ongoing issues like border disputes in the Himalayas and memories of the 1962 Sino-Indian War still impact their relationship. Their strategic rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and

differences in political ideologies add further complexity. As the two largest emerging economies, China and India naturally compete in the global market. Trade imbalances and protectionist measures worsen relations between India and China. India perceives a threat to its economic development from international competition in capturing market to sell products across the globe (Wang, 2011).

Both countries are heavily investing in military advancements, especially along their disputed borders, which escalate tensions and raise the potential for conflict. China's construction of infrastructure projects in disputed areas like Aksai Chin and India's development of infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh are seen as provocative actions by each country, escalating tensions between them. Both nations are emerging powers in Asia and vie for influence in the region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's Act East policy frequently lead to competition for influence in neighbouring countries. China views India's increasing alignment with the United States and participation in the Quad with suspicion. In turn, China's strong alliance with Pakistan, India's longstanding rival, adds further strain to Sino-Indian relations (Wang, 2011). A natural strategic partnership has evolved over the period between China and Pakistan, Stephen P. Cohen depicts that,

*“China is seeking a balance of power by supporting Pakistan, a relationship that mirrors the one between the U.S. and Israel. China-Pakistan partnership serves both Chinese and Pakistani interests by giving India a potential two-front confrontation in case of war with either nation”* (Cohen, 2011).

The rivalry between India and China has prompted a strong strategic alliance between India and the United States, positioning India as a crucial counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region. Handling relations with China continues to be a crucial part of India's foreign policy. With ongoing border disputes and China's increasing influence in South Asia and the

Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India must adopt a careful yet resolute approach. India seeks to form alliances with other nations to offset China's influence. Through its “Neighbourhood First” policy, India aims to strengthen its presence in South Asia by improving ties with neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This strategy focuses on economic collaboration, building infrastructure and fostering people-to-people connections (Sridharan, 2017).

India is actively increasing its involvement with Southeast Asian countries through the “Act East” policy, emphasizing enhanced economic relations, security partnerships and cultural exchanges with ASEAN nations. This engagement is pivotal for India's position in the Indo-Pacific region as it aims to assume a more significant role in global governance. This involves India's pursuit of permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and active participation in multilateral groups such as BRICS, the G20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). India's foreign policy decisions are heavily influenced by its economic growth and development objectives. Moreover, India's involvement in forums like the Quad, alongside the U.S., Japan and Australia, demonstrates its determination to play a crucial role in regional security (Sridharan, 2017).

#### **4.5. Areas of Collaboration Between India and the United States**

In the context of America's grand strategy for the “New World Order”, India has become a crucial regional ally. The developing “strategic partnership” between the U.S. and India is founded on shared democratic values and concerns about global terrorism. Both countries also share apprehensions regarding the long-term impact of China's rise in Asia and globally. The U.S. and India share economic and strategic security interests that complement each other. The



U.S. aims to uphold its economic and military leadership globally, while India seeks security cooperation with America to enhance its role as a dominant regional and global power in the coming years (Farooq, Kazmi, & Javed, 2018).

Therefore, India and the United States have a multifaceted and strategic partnership that spans various areas, including defense, trade, technology and climate change. Here are some important aspects of their collaboration.

#### **4.5.1. Civil Nuclear Technology**

- India became a strategic partner of the US through a civil nuclear deal, initiated in 2002 and completed in 2009 (Paddock, 2009).
- The \$29 billion deal enhanced India's nuclear capabilities (Paddock, 2009).

#### **4.5.2. India-US Defense and Security Cooperation**

The defense and security ties between the US and India have strengthened significantly, driven by strong political commitments in both nations and shared concerns about China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States and India have broadened their defense engagements and consultations for several reasons: firstly, to bolster India's role as a positive global leader and a counterbalance to Chinese influence, secondly, to reduce China's capacity to pressure India and other countries in South Asia and thirdly, to manage and reduce the risks associated with inevitable crises between India and Pakistan, as well as India and China ( White, 2021). President Biden and Prime Minister Modi Issue Joint Statement,

*“The U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership has emerged as a pillar of global peace and security....We have made substantial progress in building an advanced and comprehensive defense partnership”* (Joint Statement from the United States and India, 2023).

**Table -3**

**Major India-US Defense and Security Agreements**

<b>Name of Defense And Security Agreements</b>	<b>Signing Year of The Agreements</b>
General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)	2002
Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)	2016
Communication Compatibility And Security Agreement (COMCASA)	2018
India was granted Strategic Trade Authority-1(STA-1),Status by the US	2018
Industrial Security Annex(ISA)	2019
Basic Exchange And Cooperation Agreement (BECA)	2020
Defense Technology And Trade Initiative(DTTI)	2021
Unmanned Aerial Vehicles(UAVs)	2021
Initiative on Critical And Emerging Technology (ICET)	2022
India-U.S. Defense Accelerator Ecosystem (INDUS-X)	2023
Reciprocal Defense Procurement Arrangement (RDP)	2023
Security of Supply Arrangement(SOSA)Negotiations	2023

**Source:** The researcher's own description is based on the data collected

Defense and security cooperation encompasses various activities such as joint military exercises involving all branches of the armed forces, training programs, arms and equipment

supply, high-level visits and subject matter experts exchanges, etc. This evolving cooperation aims to achieve interoperability, enhance capabilities and build confidence in areas like sea lane protection, joint peacekeeping operations, combating terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) ( White, 2021).

Some notable defense and security cooperation agreements between India and the United States include:

1. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002: This agreement enables the sharing of classified information between the two countries while ensuring its protection (India-US defence Agreement, 2023).
2. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016: LEMOA agreement allows the militaries of both countries to utilize each other's bases for supplies, spare parts, and services, enhancing logistical cooperation and operational efficiency (India-US defence Agreement, 2023).
3. Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018: This agreement allows India to purchase advanced communication and encryption equipment from the U.S., ensuring that both countries' militaries can communicate securely and operate together smoothly (India-US defence Agreement, 2023).
4. In 2018, India obtained Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status from the U.S., enabling it to acquire advanced dual-use technologies from American entities without needing a license (India third Asian nation to get STA-1 status from U.S., 2018).
5. The Industrial Security Annex (ISA) of 2019, facilitates the exchange of defense technology and classified information between the defense industries of India and the United States, fostering collaboration in industrial capabilities (Nisar, 2023).

6. The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) of 2020, enables the sharing of geospatial information, such as satellite data, to improve the accuracy of missile systems and other automated hardware (India-US defence Agreement, 2023).
7. In 2020, India revised Sections 127 and 128 of the Defence Acquisition Procedure, which expanded opportunities for India to collaborate with foreign partners in co-developing and producing defense equipment (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).
8. The Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) 2021: A virtual meeting between India and the U.S. was held on November 9, 2021. The DTTI Group aims to foster joint production and development of defense equipment. In this meeting, the two countries signed an agreement to collaborate on the co-development of air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (Donnell, 2021).
9. The Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) 2022, aims to facilitate the exchange of military technology and expertise, as well as to enhance cooperation in developing technological fields (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).
10. In 2023, the India-U.S. Defence Accelerator Ecosystem, known as INDUS-X, was launched to connect businesses, accelerators, incubators, investors, start-ups and universities from both countries (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).
11. The Reciprocal Defense Procurement Arrangement (RDP) of 2023, this agreement aims to facilitate the exchange and advancement of military technology. It seeks to enhance mutual defense procurement and promote industrial cooperation between the two countries (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).
12. The Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) of 2023, initiated during the U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogue in November 2023, is a bilateral agreement aimed at bolstering the defense

capabilities and ensuring supply chain independence of both India and the United States (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).

13. In 2024, the Indian Space Association, the Indian Institute of Science, Penn State University and IIT, Kanpur, organized an online workshop on developing academia-industry partnerships and building solutions in space (Kunar & Bharadwaj, 2024).

14. Both countries also committed to collaborating on India's accession to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj mentioned that,

*“We agreed on working together towards entry of India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)” (India & US sign COMCASA, Pompeo says no decision on S400, 2018).*

15. Reflections of converging interests include, the US-India Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) initiative, the signing of the 123 Nuclear Agreement, missile defense collaboration and a ten-year defense framework agreement that calls for expanded bilateral security cooperation (Farooq, Kazmi, & Javed, 2018).

### **4.5.3. Joint Military Exercises**

Another area of strategic cooperation is the joint military exercises. The US and India participate in various exercises, such as naval exercises, Marine Corps exercises and army exercises. Also, both the countries contribute to fight the threats at sea. The US and India regularly conduct service-level exercises, such as Shatrुजेत, involving the US Marine Corps and the Indian Army, Yudh Abhyas, an annual army-to-army exercise and Balanced Iroquois, a special force training exercise. Simultaneously, India participated in the Malabar naval exercise, which involved over 8,000 personnel. The exercise included US and Indian submarines, a US

carrier strike group and surveillance planes. Japan also participated in the exercise, which featured the Nimitz-class supercarrier, USS John C. Stennis, more than 20 major warships, around 50 anti-submarine warfare helicopters, long-range maritime surveillance aircraft and over 100 aircraft, including Super Hornet fighters. In response, the US is also showing interest in collaborating with India and other countries to train peacekeeping forces in Africa (Khan M. , 2017).

Vajra Prahar is an Indo-US Special Forces joint training exercise, while Tiger Triumph is a tri-service (Army, Navy and Air Force) humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercise. Both aim to strengthen military ties between the two countries by enhancing reciprocity and the mutual exchange of strategies among the Special Forces (Casolari, 2021).

#### **4.5.4. Bilateral Economic and Trade Ties Between India and the United States**

Bilateral trade between India and the U.S. has significantly increased over the years. Currently, the U.S. is one of India's biggest trading partners, with trade in goods and services amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars each year. The Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) is a bilateral agreement designed to enhance cooperation in defense technology and trade between the two nations (Smith J. , 2021).

Both countries have implemented policies to strengthen trade relations. For example, the U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) work to promote trade and investment. Moreover, initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) aims to enhance regional economic cooperation ( Teixeira & Gabriel, 2022).

Major trade areas between the U.S. and India include information technology, pharmaceuticals, textiles, machinery and agricultural products. The U.S. imports a substantial

amount of Indian pharmaceuticals and IT services, while India imports U.S. aircraft, machinery, and agricultural products. Both countries have also committed to increased collaboration in critical minerals, supply chains and trade in high-tech products ( Teixeira & Gabriel, 2022).

### **Current Trade Situation Between India and US**

- U.S. goods and services exports to India were valued at \$40.12 billion in 2023.
- U.S. goods and services trade with India totalled an estimated \$191.8 billion in 2022, with U.S. exports at \$73 billion and imports at \$118.8 billion.
- In 2022, U.S. goods exports to India reached \$47.2 billion, a 17.9 percent increase from 2021.
- U.S. goods imports from India totalled \$85.5 billion in 2022, a 16.7 percent increase from the previous year.
- U.S. exports of services to India were an estimated \$25.9 billion in 2022, 40.0 percent more than 2021.
- U.S. imports of services from India were an estimated \$33.2 billion in 2022, 14.6 percent more than 2021.
- U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in India was \$51.6 billion in 2022, a 15.1 percent increase from 2021.
- India's FDI in the United States was \$3.7 billion in 2022, up 7.0 percent from 2021 (Joint Statement on the United States-India Trade Policy Forum, 2024).

In January 2024, the 14th Ministerial-level meeting of the India-United States Trade Policy Forum was held in New Delhi, India, to discuss the current state of trade between the two countries and future possibilities (Office of The United states Trade Representative, 2020).

## **India-US Investment Index**

- In the fiscal year 2023, the United States was the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India, totalling \$103 billion.
- In 2022, the total value of U.S. investments in India was estimated at \$51.55 billion.
- In 2021, U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in India was \$44.8 billion.
- India received \$64 billion in foreign direct investment in 2020.
- In 2019, India's foreign direct investment amounted to \$50.61 billion.
- U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in India was \$46.0 billion in 2018, a 3.4% increase from 2017. U.S. investments in India are mainly in professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing and finance and insurance sectors.
- India's foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States was \$9.6 billion in 2018, a 2.0% decrease from 2017. Indian investments in the U.S. are mainly in professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing and depository institutions.
- In 2016, U.S.-owned companies in India sold services worth \$27.0 billion, while Indian-owned companies in the U.S. sold services worth \$17.0 billion (India Foreign Direct Investment 1960-2024, 2024).

### **4.5.5. Collaboration in Technology and Innovation Between India and the US**

India and the United States have a strong and growing partnership in technology and innovation. This collaboration covers various areas such as IT, defense technology, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, space exploration, clean energy and biotechnology. India and the US have a robust partnership in the IT sector. Many U.S. tech giants operate extensively



in India, while Indian IT companies have a strong presence in the US. Both countries work together on cybersecurity, digital payments and data privacy (The White House, 2024).

NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) have partnered on various missions, including the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite, which studies natural processes on Earth. Furthermore, they collaborate extensively in biotechnology and health, especially in research and development, pharmaceuticals and vaccine production. During the COVID-19 pandemic, their collaboration was notable in vaccine development and distribution. The Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), started in 2023, aims to bolster the strategic technology partnership between the two countries (The White House, 2024).

The US-India-ROK Trilateral Technology Dialogue, held in Seoul in March, further emphasizes their cooperative efforts in technology and innovation. The dialogue focused on boosting cooperation in critical and emerging technologies. Both countries are collaborating to implement Open RAN technology widely and are promoting workforce development opportunities in India. They also initiated the “Bio-5” consortium to strengthen the biopharmaceutical supply chain and encourage research and development partnerships. Furthermore, efforts are underway to develop complementary semiconductor ecosystems through joint initiatives (The White House, 2024).

The two countries have developed important cybersecurity connections, hosting a workshop under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) in December 2023, and are committed to sharing information about cyber threats and vulnerabilities (Gu, Guo, Qin, Wang, & Zhang , 2022).

India and the United States have signed a new agreement on AI and are launching initiatives like the Quantum Coordination Mechanism to foster collaboration between industries, academia and government entities. Both countries are also introducing new bilateral initiatives, including the signing of an Implementation Arrangement for a Research Agency Partnership between the National Science Foundation and Indian science agencies (The White House, 2024).

India and the US are boosting cooperation in defense innovation, including joint projects in emerging domains like artificial intelligence. They also support innovation and entrepreneurship through various programs and initiatives, such as the US-India Innovation Forum and the US-India Science and Technology Endowment Fund, which promote joint research and development projects and support start-ups in both countries. The US and India collaborate on clean energy initiatives, emphasizing renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable development. The US-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership aims to speed up the transition to a clean energy economy. Both nations are working together on critical mineral supply chains and research in advanced materials. Additionally, they are initiating new cooperation in quantum science and technology, including a workshop on post-quantum cryptography (The White House, 2024).

#### **4.5.6. India-US Counter-Terrorism Partnership**

Post 9/11, the area of counterterrorism acquired great focus for both India and the US and has become a significant area of cooperation. After the 2010 Mumbai attacks, the India-US Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative was launched to promote intelligence sharing and capacity building activities. This led to the first Homeland Security Dialogue in 2011. The two countries found useful avenues for cooperation in areas such as border monitoring technology,

including software-based imagery analysis, as well as in sensors designed to detect chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials (Khan M. , 2017).

India and the United States have been working together on counter-terrorism efforts. In December 2017, they launched the first US-India Counter Terrorism Designation Dialogue. Both countries have also committed to cooperation through the Quad Counterterrorism Working Group and other international forums (Khokhar, 2022).

The two countries maintain a longstanding Counterterrorism Joint Working Group (CTJWG), which convened its 20th meeting in March 2024 in Washington, D.C. They have mutually agreed to address challenges and mitigate the risks associated with terrorist attacks. The two countries share common goals such as managing China's influence, coordinating after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and ensuring maritime security in Asia. Their collaboration in counterterrorism and law enforcement has generated numerous initiatives, programs and working groups. Terrorism has consistently been a significant topic in nearly every high-level US-India summit (Khan M. , 2017).

#### **4.5.7. Rising Collaboration in Arms Production**

1. India is a major buyer of U.S. arms in recent years according to defense research firm IHS Janes. The U.S. and India have been strengthening their defense ties, with ongoing negotiations around various defense collaboration projects and co-production efforts.
2. Over the last 15 years, significant U.S. defense sales to India have included transport and maritime aircrafts such as the C-130J Super Hercules, C-17 Globe master IIIs and P-8I Poseidon's. They have also involved transport, maritime and attack helicopters like the

CH-47F Chinooks, MH-60R Seahawks and AH-64E Apaches, as well as Harpoon anti-ship missiles and M777 howitzers.

3. The U.S. has been collaborating with India in the missile sector to enhance its capabilities, as India has historically been weak in this area.
4. Boeing has a significant presence in India due to its sales of P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft and C-17 transport planes. In addition, Boeing has sold military helicopters to India, including the AH-64 Apache and CH-47 Chinook. In 2015, India signed a contract with Boeing to acquire 15 CH-47F Chinook helicopters. In 2018, India also signed a contract with Boeing to acquire six AH-64E Apache helicopters.
5. Boeing has delivered the sixth P-8I to the Indian Navy, with a total of 12 P-8I aircraft now in India's fleet as of February 2022. Boeing and India are in talks for an additional order of six more P-8I aircraft. Moreover, more than 37% of U.S. industries have been looking into shifting operations to India due to favourable economic policies and the growing market. Former Indian Navy Chief, Admiral Sunil Lanba, outlined the vision and strategic objectives while discussing the induction of P8-I aircraft into the Indian Navy, stating that,

*“The induction of the Boeing P8-I maritime patrol aircraft has been a force multiplier with the first lot of eight Boeings operational. We’ve signed the contract for the follow-up order for four more....with these eight aircraft, we would have total transparency in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the northern part of it” (Lanba , 2018).*

6. India has begun purchasing jet fighters from France and the U.S. India has acquired Dassault Rafale jets from France and has been in discussions with the U.S. for the purchase of various military aircraft, including F-16s and F/A-18s.

7. In June 2023, the United States and India initiated a bilateral Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) to enhance strategic technology and defense industrial cooperation.
8. Since early 90s, the Arm production industries are in private ownership. U.S. investors have shown interest in establishing defense-related industries in India, and this interest is supported by the strategic partnership between the U.S. and India.
9. The U.S. and India have been working on enhancing their defense cooperation, including co-developing and co-producing advanced weapon systems. The U.S. has encouraged India to make decisions on various offers, including next-generation Javelin anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). This is part of a broader effort to strengthen military ties and technology sharing between the two countries.
10. India has been considering the Sikorsky S-70B Seahawk helicopters for its naval requirements. The tender for these helicopters is valued at over \$1 billion, reflecting the significant investment in enhancing India's naval capabilities. The decision to select Sikorsky's aircraft aligns with ongoing efforts to upgrade India's defense equipment and strengthen its maritime security.
11. India has been considering purchasing 18 high-altitude, long-endurance armed drones from General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. The estimated cost for this deal is between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion (India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises, 2024).

#### **4.5.8. US' Support to India on the Floor of UN General Assembly**

- Barack Obama in his speech to UN General Assembly,

*“US strongly supports Indian bid for becoming permanent member in UN General Assembly”* (Jabeen, 2010).

- President Joe Biden reiterated the U.S. commitment to supporting India's ambition for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. France, the United Kingdom and Russia have similarly expressed their backing for India's bid for permanent UNSC membership (Kaura, 2022).

#### **4.5.9. India-US Cooperation in Maritime Domain**

India and the United States have significantly strengthened their cooperation in the maritime domain over the past several years. The U.S. assists India in improving its maritime capabilities through training, joint research and technology transfers. These efforts focus on upgrading India's naval forces and infrastructure. Both India and US stress the need for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, highlighting its significance. They are jointly advocating for the blue economy, which aims to sustainably utilize ocean resources to boost economic growth, enhance livelihoods and create jobs while safeguarding ocean ecosystems' health (Mishra, 2018).

One of the most prominent aspects of India-US maritime collaboration is the annual Malabar naval exercises, which frequently include regional partners such as Japan and Australia. These exercises improve coordination, foster trust between the nations and show their joint dedication to regional security. They also established a common set of maritime security

principles in the 2015 , “Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” (Mishra, 2018).

India's strategy of deploying a blue water navy is aimed at balancing China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and bolstering military capabilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Enhanced intelligence sharing and maritime domain awareness between India and the US, including the use of satellite data and other surveillance technologies, have been crucial in ensuring the security of sea lanes and preventing illegal activities like piracy and smuggling (Menon R. K., 2012). India and the U.S. also collaborate within the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) framework to enhance regional cooperation, stability and sustainable development (Panda J. P., 2014).

#### **4.5.10. Strategic Diplomatic and Multilateral Engagement**

India and the United States maintain a diverse diplomatic relationship that spans across various international forums. Their partnership is recognized as strategic, focusing on defense, security, counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation. Both countries engage in the G20 forum to tackle global economic issues, promote financial stability and foster inclusive growth. The United States acknowledged India's effective G20 presidency, which included hosting the September summit. The summit produced significant outcomes, such as initiatives to foster a new era of connectivity between Europe and Asia, the promotion of economic development and a commitment to expanding and improving multilateral development banks (U.S Department of State, 2023).

They are part of the Quad group with Australia and Japan, working towards a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The US supports India’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security

Council, and they cooperate on UN reform, non-proliferation issues and counter-terrorism efforts, including work with the UN Security Council's 1267 Sanctions Committee. As part of international climate agreements like the Paris Agreement, India and the US work together on projects to cut greenhouse gas emissions and promote clean energy (The White House, 2024).

Both countries participate in trade negotiations at the WTO and collaborate in organizations like the IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) to tackle global and regional economic issues. They work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to enhance regional cooperation and security. India and the United States also participate in regional forums like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shangri-La Dialogue to discuss security and economic issues. Throughout the pandemic, India and the US collaborated on developing and distributing vaccines, as well as implementing health security measures (The White House, 2024).

India and the US maintain strong diplomatic relations with ongoing discussions on various issues. They hold regular strategic dialogues and annual meetings between their Foreign Ministers and Secretaries of State to address bilateral and global concerns. Furthermore, the 2+2 dialogues between India and the U.S. are a diplomatic mechanism that involves regular meetings between the Defense and Foreign Ministers to discuss security and defense cooperation ( Smith J. M., 2018). The fifth India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue took place in November 2023, focusing on discussions about security in the Indo-Pacific region, the Israel-Hamas conflict and the conflict in Ukraine (Joint Statement on the Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, 2023 ).



#### **4.5.11. People-to-People Ties and Cultural Exchange**

The dynamic people-to-people ties between these countries are a significant source of strength for the strategic partnership. Over 200,000 Indian students are studying in American universities, and there is a bilateral working group focused on creating new partnerships in higher education. The Indian diaspora community in the United States, which numbers over 4 million, significantly contributes to innovation, collaboration and job creation in both countries. Academic institutions and research organizations in these countries work together on various projects, facilitating student and faculty exchanges, joint research programs and knowledge sharing (U.S Department of State, 2023).

There is a vibrant cultural exchange between the two nations. Indian music, dance, cuisine and films are popular in the U.S., while American cultural influences are embraced in India. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and India's Ministry of Culture, is collaborating on projects and festivals, celebrating Indian and American arts. Besides, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) organizes cultural events, exhibitions and performances in the U.S. (Mathews, 2022).

The American India Foundation (AIF) supports cultural exchange and development projects in India. It also facilitates collaborations between Indian and American museums for exhibitions, research and cultural preservation efforts (Menezes, Patel, & Pike, 2015).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The Indo-Pacific region has become a focal point of the new geo-politics in the contemporary era. Its significance has grown for the US strategically since the end of the Cold War. However, China's rise as a powerful strategic state has caused alarm for both regional states and the US due to the shifting strategic balance in the region. The economic, political and military interests of great powers such as the US and China are at risk. Beijing's increasing influence in the region through soft and hard power strategies is a threat to Washington's national interests. In response, the US government has adopted policies, including the "Asia Pivot & Indo-Pacific" strategy, to maintain the power structure and secure its presence in the Indo-Pacific to counteract China's dominance in the area. The differing strategic objectives of Beijing and Washington make regional cooperation and integration uncertain.

The future of geo-politics in the region largely depends on the economic, diplomatic and military activities of the great powers. India is also seeking regional dominance, declaring the Indian Ocean to be "India's Ocean" and engaging numerous states in the Asia Pacific by transforming its "Look East" strategy into "Act East". C. Raja Mohan, a leading Indian strategic thinker, points out that India's "Act East" policy aligns well with the US's Indo-Pacific strategy. In addition to, India's active role as a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region provides a significant opportunity for the US government to retain its strategic presence as a Pacific nation and counteract China's dominance. Furthermore, India-US strategic partnership is also seen to be a direct result of the convergence of US-Indian security interests at national level.

India has been seen to be a hub that carries democratic values, which would help the US to maintain social order in South Asia. Terrorism also became one of the most important political points between the two nations that allowed both nations to further converge collectiveness in the goals and objectives. Also the key revolution behind globalization is information technology which India had championed due to its leadership in IT development. This has also remarkably transformed US India relations in the domain of economics. IT is one of the fields that link Washington with India intricately, a situation that was not present during the Cold War. So, today India is quite relevant and qualifies to become fit for regional and international role and in view of US foreign policy that could lead global security and economic system compatible to western values.

India's strategic goal in strengthening its relations with the US is to achieve recognition as a major power in the region. The US, in turn, seeks India's rise as a counterbalance to China. Washington has shown support for India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which would enhance India's nuclear capabilities and access to advanced technology. In 2016, the Obama administration elevated India's status to that of a Major Defense Partner, facilitating co-development, co-production and the transfer of sensitive defense technology. Agreements like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020 have further strengthened defense ties, enabling greater interoperability and information sharing between the two militaries, which can pose a formidable challenge to China's military dominance in the region.

From a Balance of Power theoretical perspective, when one state accumulates power, other states form defensive coalitions to counterbalance the concentration of power. Similarly,

India and the US are strengthening their defense relations to create a deterrent against China's growing power. Currently, the US is India's second-largest defense supplier, following Russia. The Indo-US strategic cooperation not only enhances India's position against China but also reshapes regional alliances, creating a complex security environment that challenges China's aspirations in the Indo-Pacific region. The balance of power theory aptly illustrates these dynamics, highlighting how states adjust their strategies in response to perceived threats from rising powers. Through the lens of the Balance of Power, the Indo-US nexus shifts regional dynamics, compelling China to reassess its strategies. As India strengthens its military and diplomatic ties with the US, it alters the strategic equilibrium in South Asia, potentially leading to increased tensions between India and Pakistan, as well as between China and India. This situation may force China to bolster its alliances with Pakistan and other regional players to counterbalance India's growing influence.

The modernization of Indian defense forces with US technology and training, as well as the coordination of strategies to counter China's maritime Silk Road initiative, further complicates China's regional ambitions. Economically, the Indo-US cooperation can also impact China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by offering alternative infrastructure development projects that are more transparent and adherent to international standards. This can potentially undermine China's economic influence in the region and reduce the dependency of Indo-Pacific nations on Chinese investments. The U.S. and India also aim to limit China's technological dominance and reduce dependence on Chinese supply chains, especially in critical sectors like telecommunications and semiconductors. The U.S. has also encouraged India to play a greater regional leadership role, including by openly supporting India's claims over China's southern Tibet region. This has further strained China-India relations and the regional balance of power.

The partnership between India and US has manifested in initiatives like the US-India Next Steps in Strategic Partnership, the 123 Nuclear Agreement and a ten-year defense framework agreement. These developments have security implications for regional countries like Pakistan, which is concerned about India's enhanced military and nuclear capabilities. India views the partnership as a way to become a dominant regional and global power.

However, the success of this partnership is not guaranteed and faces several challenges. Firstly, the United States remains economically dependent on China, limiting its ability to confront Beijing. Secondly, India's aggressive posture towards its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, undermines regional stability and cooperation. Moreover, India's relationship with Russia has created tensions with the US, while its own ambitions to become a regional hegemon are viewed with suspicion by smaller states. The exclusion of India from groupings like AUKUS has also generated resentment. India's non-alignment policy and strategic autonomy also pose limitations to the extent of its alignment with US policies.

The study has highlighted that China is pursuing a multifaceted approach to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific region, leveraging its military, economic and diplomatic capabilities to shape the regional landscape. Militarily, China has been enhancing its presence in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean by building infrastructure on contested islands and increasing naval activities to assert its claims. Economically, China uses the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to strengthen ties with regional countries, aiming to create a network of economic dependencies and political alliances. Diplomatically, China combines coercion and persuasion, utilizing both hard and soft power to influence regional actors and counterbalance U.S. influence. However, China faces a complex web of strategic, territorial and geopolitical challenges as it seeks to expand its influence in this region.

From China's perspective, the strengthening US-India partnership is a major challenge that threatens to contain its influence in the Indo-Pacific. China faces an increasingly complex security environment as the U.S. works to build an “Asia-Pacific NATO”, conduct military exercises with allies and monitor the region's waters. From the geopolitical perspective, the United States has perceived growing challenge from China and is determined to maintain global supremacy by continuing to increase its military presence in the Indo-Pacific and strengthening of multilateral frameworks like the Quad (India, US, Japan, Australia) and the West Asian Quad (India, US, Israel, UAE), is perceived by China as a direct threat to its national interests in the region. This has expanded the U.S. network of partnerships to enhance its “asymmetric strength” against China. Ashley J. Tellis, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noted that the primary challenge for China is the potential encirclement by a coalition of like-minded democracies, which can constrain its strategic ambitions. Actually the U.S. has pushed an “integrated deterrence” strategy to counterbalance China which has heightened China’s security concerns. This could lead to increased tensions and strategic competition between China and the US-India axis in the Indo-Pacific.

After the Obama administration’s “Re-balancing” efforts to sustain U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific by strengthening political, security and economic ties with regional countries, the Trump administration puts much emphasis on the security aspect of its Indo-Pacific strategy. In light of the current security environment, Joe Biden's main focus on strengthening alliances and partnerships in the region to counter China's growing influence. He aims to reinforce relationships with traditional allies in Indo-Pacific such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and enhancing ties with its emerging partner India. The Biden administration has also emphasized the

importance of engaging with ASEAN countries and other regional organizations to address shared challenges and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.

China is confronted with a complex set of challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, emanating from the intensifying strategic convergence between India and the United States, which is redefining the regional geopolitical landscape. The evolving geopolitical dynamics have the potential to reshape power structures in the region and limit China's hegemonic aspirations. As a result, China will need to recalibrate its regional strategy to counter the increasing influence of the Indo-US alliance effectively. China's response to this evolving dynamic will significantly impact the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- 1.** The deepening partnership between India and the United States signifies a shift in the geopolitical landscape, with implications for regional power dynamics. This partnership also limits China's room for manoeuvrability and disrupts its efforts to establish hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. Beijing's assertive behaviour in the region, particularly its expansive territorial claims and aggressive actions, have fuelled concerns among neighbouring countries and paved the way for greater cooperation between India and the US. The deepening ties serve to balance China's influence, creating a multipolar region, rather than one dominated by Beijing.
- 2.** The rivalry among major powers in the Indo-Pacific region has intensified competition, leading to a significant escalation in the arms race in recent years. This phenomenon is exemplified by China's rapid military modernization, which has prompted the United

States to enhance its arms exports to India. Similarly, Japan has increased its arms exports to the Philippines and Vietnam, further fuelling the regional arms build-up.

3. Smaller nations, particularly in Southeast Asia, are facing increasingly challenging circumstances. Because the intensifying rivalry can destabilize the region, forcing small states to choose sides, which complicates their foreign policy and threatens national interests. Many ASEAN nations are economically tied to China, creating a conflict of interest as they navigate partnerships with the US and India while trying to maintain neutrality. Furthermore, the increasing military presence and activities of both China and the U.S. in the region, heighten security concerns and the risk for smaller states of being caught in conflicts. This enmity will also escalate economic competition, as nations manage their dependence on the U.S. for security and China for trade. This could result in disruptions to current economic relationships and multilateral institutions.
4. A critical geopolitical concern for China is the strategic encirclement it perceives from the Indo-US alliance. With India's strategic location at the heart of the Indian Ocean and the US presence in the Pacific, China finds itself surrounded by two formidable powers that can potentially limit its influence in the region. This encirclement strategy is further bolstered by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which includes Japan and Australia, creating more comprehensive security architecture against Chinese expansionism.
5. Indo-US partnership may cement a long-term rivalry between the US and China, both sides competing for influence through alliances and partnerships. This is likely to lead to the polarization of the Indo-Pacific region into two blocs, one led by China and the other by the U.S. and its allies.



6. The complex economic interdependence between the U.S. and China restricts the U.S.'s capacity to fully challenge China, as the two nations are significant trade and investment partners. This limits the scope of U.S. actions against China in the Indo-Pacific.
7. In the future, the Indo-Pacific region is anticipated to undergo considerable economic and infrastructure advancements which would be beneficial for smaller countries. However, based on current circumstances, fierce competition and rivalry among major powers could also pose significant challenges and instability in the area.
8. The United States' prominent role in international politics underscores its global responsibilities, which in turn help achieve its foreign policy objectives. In this backdrop, it brings quite an ideal opportunity for India to emerge as a great power since its strategic interests align with that of the US. The United States' ability to work with India, will be critical in determining its success in the Indo-Pacific region. Because, India's robust military and diplomatic presence makes it a stabilizing force in South Asia. The United States has also recognized India's centrality in the Indo-Pacific region, and the US sees India as a key security provider, but this perception fuels regional rivalries and escalates military competition.
9. The US-India partnership has potential for growth, but it also faces significant challenges from regional geopolitics, bilateral differences, India's own actions and the economic realities of U.S.-China relations. There are also disagreements between the U.S. and India, such as over India's relationship with Russia and the war in Ukraine. These differences could undermine the effectiveness of US-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, India's own aggressive posture in the region, including its conventional and nuclear build up, has destabilized the regional strategic balance and

impacted regional cooperation. India's actions, such as the Balakot incident and submarine intrusions, have raised concerns about its reliability as a US partner.

10. China's recalibration of its assertiveness in response to the Indo-Pacific challenge is a strategic maneuver, aimed at preserving its regional influence while avoiding direct confrontation with the United States and its allies. This recalibration reflects a more sophisticated and multi-faceted Chinese strategy, combining diplomatic, military and economic tools to navigate the evolving regional dynamics.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Major powers like the United States, China and India should engage in regular diplomatic talks and negotiations to address conflicts, build trust and find peaceful resolutions. Appoint special envoys who present a comprehensive government approach to enhancing diplomatic efforts in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, states should encourage regional and sub regional institutions and organizations like ASEAN, the Six-Party Talks, the East Asia Summit, APEC and the Asia Regional Forum to continue their efforts in securing peace, while also highlighting the need for these institutions to adapt to new risks posed by geopolitical changes and technological/military developments.
2. Negotiating and implementing arms control agreements and treaties to limit the proliferation of weapons. And also encourage multilateral security arrangements involving regional states to collectively address security threats and reduce reliance on military build-ups. Moreover, leverage blockchain technology to create a transparent and immutable ledger for arms control agreements, tracking weapons production, movement and dismantling to ensure compliance and build trust among nations.

3. Small states should pursue a policy of strategic neutrality, multilateral engagement and non-alignment to avoid becoming entangled in power struggles between major players in the region. They should also focus on economic diversification and trade relationships to bolster their resilience and reduce dependence on any single country. This approach allows them to use their strategic position to gain economic and diplomatic benefits and maintain a balanced relationship with the US and China.
4. Implement Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), such as advance notifications of military exercises, exchange of information, military-to-military communication channels, mutual visits and transparency in military activities, can foster trust among major powers and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and miscalculations. So countries should upgrading existing CBMs and establishing new ones can increase stability amid growing geopolitical rivalries and military modernization.
5. China should work towards enhancing transparency in its military capabilities, intentions and actions. This can help build trust and confidence among its neighbouring countries and alleviate concerns about its rise as a global power and military expansion. Further, engaging in open and constructive dialogue with key nations like India and the United States can help resolve outstanding issues, promote mutual understanding and contribute to regional and global stability.
6. Develop an AI-driven platform that monitors regional activities, identifying potential conflicts and security threats in real-time. The system would analyse data from satellites, maritime traffic, social media and other sources to provide early warnings of escalating tensions. So, Real-Time Conflict Monitoring and Early Warning System should be developed to mitigate confrontation among States.

7. All regional countries must uphold and respect international laws, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to provide a framework for resolving disputes and maintaining maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, promoting peace and stability.
8. Create virtual exchange programs to connect citizens, students and professionals across the region. These programs would promote cultural understanding, build goodwill among citizens, reduce prejudices and also build grassroots support for peace.
9. Establishing mechanisms for conflict prevention, such as hotlines, crisis communication channels and joint military exercises, can help major powers manage potential conflicts and prevent them from escalating into full-scale confrontations.
10. Respecting the sovereignty of nations and avoiding interference in their internal matters to reduce tensions and promote mutual respect.

By implementing these measures and working collaboratively, major powers can effectively resolve conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region and maintain peace, fostering a secure and prosperous environment for all stakeholders.

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