

INDIA AND THE INDO- PACIFIC

Weekly Focus

The changed global and regional geo-strategic environment has shifted the worldview from a **Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus**. The repositioning of global economic and military power towards Indo-Pacific has resulted in significant political, economic and social changes in the Indian Ocean Region which will impact India's maritime environment in tangible ways.

Given the **increasing salience of the Indo-Pacific in global discourse**, it becomes important to understand- what the term 'Indo-Pacific' exactly means and how it emerged in the global scenario? How different countries interpret the region? What factors are driving the global shift towards the Indo-pacific? What is India's vision and strategy for the Indo-Pacific? What challenges does India face and what is the way forward to build upon India's Indo-Pacific construct? In this edition, we will attempt to answer these questions.

WHAT IS THE INDO-PACIFIC?

- The Indo-Pacific is a **geopolitical construct** that has emerged as a substitute to the long-prevalent **"Asia-Pacific"**, which represented the eastwards shift of global developments from Euro-Atlantic dimension.
- It is an **integrated theatre that combines the Indian Ocean** and the Pacific Ocean, and the land masses that surround them.
- Though still an evolving concept, it is both a **strategic as well as an economic domain** comprising important sea-lines of communication. And since it is primarily a maritime space, the Indo-Pacific is also associated with **maritime security and cooperation**.
- **Geographical interpretations of the Indo Pacific region**- Different countries interpret the region differently. Countries like the US describe the Indo-Pacific as a region that starts at the Western shore of the Americas and ends at the shores of the Indian subcontinent. While for India and Japan, the concept is much broader in expanse, **extending to the shores of African continent**.
- **Major stakeholders** in the Indo-Pacific include- India, U.S.A., Australia, Japan, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and other maritime nations that occupy the strategic positions in the Indian and Pacific Ocean including small island countries.
 - Indo-Pacific is also considered significant for countries with overseas territories in the region such as France (with New Caledonia, French Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean and islands of Mayotte and La Réunion in the Indian Ocean).



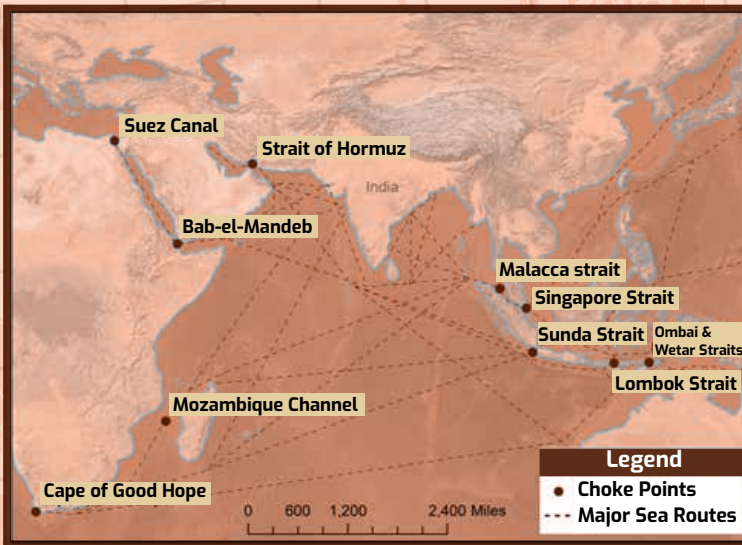
KEY DOCUMENTS AND EVENTS SHAPING THE IDEA OF INDO-PACIFIC

Date	Country	Publication
May, 2013	Australia	Australia released its Defense White Paper identifying the Indo-Pacific as the new theater and highlighted the strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Rim.
September, 2013	China	Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the One Belt One Road project (now the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)).
October, 2015	India	The Indian Navy released the Indian maritime security strategy, identifying the shift to the Indo-Pacific.
December, 2015	India and Japan	India and Japan issued the first joint statement on the Indo-Pacific and the world.
2016-2017	Japan	Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe presented the Indo-Pacific vision. It was followed by a report on free and open Indo-Pacific strategy in 2017 .
2017-2018	U.S.A.	The United States first identified in the Indo-Pacific as the new theater in its national security strategy in December, 2017 and then renamed the U.S. Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command in May, 2018.
June, 2018	India	India Prime Minister Modi presented India's Indo-Pacific vision at the Shangri-La Dialogue .
2018-Present		Prominent groupings and countries such as the ASEAN, France and Germany have released policies/documents centered on Indo Pacific. The term has also found its place in numerous official dialogues such as the Joint Declaration of the 15th India-European Union Summit .

WHAT FACTORS ARE DRIVING THE GLOBAL SHIFT TOWARDS THE INDO-PACIFIC?



- **Important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC):** SLOC is a term describing the primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces. With the presence of **key choke points**, from the Mozambique Channel and Bab-el-Mandeb in the west to Lombok Strait in the east, the region plays a significant role in shaping the new power dynamics and ensuring smooth trade flows.



- **Flourishing Trade and Economy:** The Indo-Pacific Region shares 44% of the world surface area; includes 65% of the world population; accounts for **62% of the world GDP**; and contributes to 46% of the world's merchandise trade. The region not only represents a **lucrative market** but also orchestrates **global supply chains**.
- **Rise in non-traditional threats:** Due to its vastness, the region faces multiple risks which are difficult to assess and address, like incidents of **piracy, illegal fishing, trafficking, terrorism and environmental hazards**, among other things. Dealing with these threats **requires integrated and collaborated efforts** of all nations.
- **Richness in Natural resources:** The expanse of Indian and Pacific Ocean combined has vast reserves of marine resources including- Offshore Hydrocarbons, Methane hydrates, Sea Bed minerals, Rare earth metals, fisheries etc. Sizable coastlines and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of littoral countries have created a **competitive environment** for exploitation of these resources.

- **China factor:** In the previous few decades, China's aggressive foreign policy, rapid economic expansion, military modernization and power projection has raised several red flags among regional and extra-regional countries. Some concerns in this regard are:



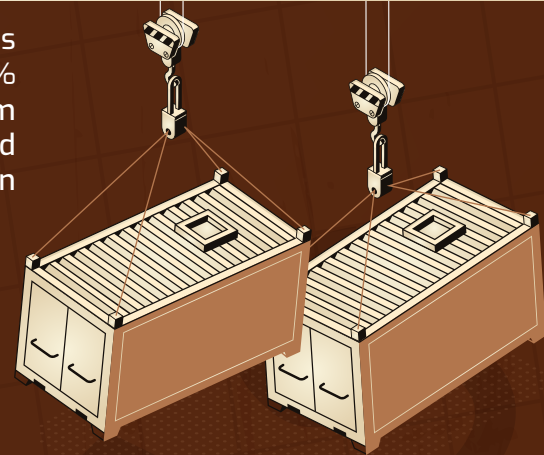
- **Issues related to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** Major concerns of several countries, including India, are that the BRI is **neither open nor transparent**, and engages in **irresponsible financing, creating unsustainable debt burdens** for communities. This opens up the possibility of using these projects for **strategic military placements and tools of coercion**.
- **China's disregard for International Rules and Customs:** China refused to accept the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration which had rendered its nine-dashed line claim of "historic rights" to the waters of the South China Sea (SCS) as **invalid under UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.



- On the contrary, in clear violation of the ruling, China adopted illegitimate methods to bring SCS under its control such as aggressive patrolling of the claimed region, militarizing the islands and extension of the existing features through the land reclamation process.
- **Increasing Militarization of Indian Ocean Region (IOR):** China has established commercial ports across the Indo Pacific, such as Gwadar port (Pakistan), port in Hambantota (Sri Lanka) etc., in addition to its overseas naval base in Djibouti. While these ports are strategically important due to their **location near key choke points**, there have also been speculations about their potential use for military reconnaissance and surveillance activities.

INDIA'S INTERESTS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

- **Peace and security in the Indian Ocean:** Nearly 50% of India's trade is centered in the Indo-Pacific Region and the Indian Ocean carries 90% of India's trade and its energy sources. India wants to assure freedom of navigation, secure choke points, resolve conflicts peacefully and address non-traditional security threats in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Geo-political aspirations:** To expand its own presence in the region, especially in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia and maintain its role as a net security provider.
- **Countering China:** Ensuring that China does not gain a significant strategic foothold in the region.
- **Enhancing Trade and Investment Cooperation:** by encouraging greater flow of goods, services, investment and technology between India and other countries in the region.
- **Promoting sustainable development:** In the coming times, climate change is set to adversely affect India. Thus, India favors sustainable development of the region through development of blue economy.
- **Other Interests:** include- Combating marine pollution, Regulating illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, deep sea mineral exploration and effective disaster risk management.



WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF INDIA'S VISION FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC?

Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue, 2018 highlighted the following elements:

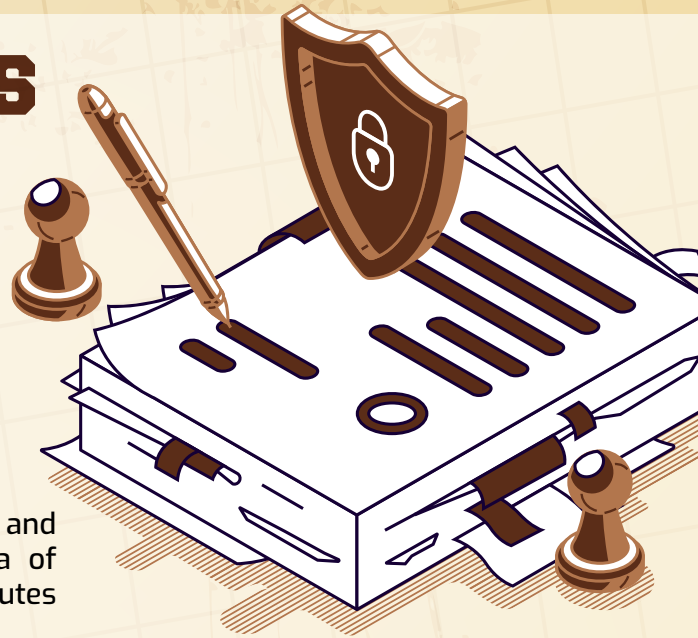
- **A free, open, inclusive region**
- **Southeast Asia at the centre of Indo Pacific:** With a key role played by ASEAN.
- **A common rules-based order for the region:** Such an order must follow principles such as **faith in dialogue**, believe in **sovereignty and territorial integrity and equality of all nations**, irrespective of size and strength.
- **Equal access to common spaces on sea and in the air, as a right under international law:** It would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.
- **Circumventing power rivalries through partnerships:** Nations must ensure that competition does not turn into conflict and differences do not end up becoming disputes. India envisions partnerships on the basis of shared values and interests and extends its support to regional architecture and groupings as one of the pillars of the new order.

IS INDIA'S VISION DIFFERENT FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?

It is crucial to understand that India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or a grouping that seeks to dominate or is directed against any country.

The same cannot be said for other countries such as the US whose Indo-Pacific strategy, while calling for a free and open Indo-Pacific, does not **explicitly express inclusivity**. It implicates that US might not be open to participation of China and adds a 'containment' dimension to the idea of Indo-Pacific.

WHAT CONSTITUTES INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION?



Although, India looks forward to expanding its diplomatic and political presence across the Indo-Pacific, its primary area of concern remains the Indian Ocean. Let's discuss the core attributes of India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Strengthening and preserving traditional roles in IOR

- **Security Provider:** India has been the **primary security provider** and strategic partner to most of its **smaller neighbors** like Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.
- **First Responder:** Due to its strategic position, India's navy is among the first to reach nations requiring **humanitarian assistance or medical aid** in times of crisis and disasters. For example-
 - **Operation Vanilla:** Indian Navy provided humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to Madagascar.
 - **Mission Sagar:** Indian Navy provided Food Items, COVID related Medicines and Special Ayurvedic Medicines with Medical Assistance Teams to Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros.
- **Early warning and weather forecasting services:** The **Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)** has been designated by UNESCO as a Regional Tsunami Service Provider (RTSP) to provide tsunami warnings to countries on the Indian Ocean Rim.
- **Developmental Assistance:** India provides developmental aid to the region through financial and technical contributions in projects, Lines of Credit (LOC), concessional loans and grant assistance.
- Also, **Indian economy is pertinent to trade and investment flows in the region.** Major trade agreements that India has signed and implemented so far include South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), India-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and India-Japan CEPA.

Naval Strategy



- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** Via this, the Indian Navy aims to create a reliable and broader strategic situational awareness of developments in the IOR through intelligence, conduct of surveillance and reconnaissance. Institutions that support MDA activities include-
 - **Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC):** It generates India's coastal MDA picture by fusing information it receives from various sources.
 - **Information Fusion Center for the India Ocean Region (IFC-IOR):** It aims to provide regional MDA by building a common coherent maritime situation picture and acting as a maritime information hub for the region.
 - **Other initiatives** of India to strengthen regional MDA capabilities include – non – military **white shipping agreements** and **coastal surveillance radar chains on IOR islands.**
- **Expanding and maintaining India's naval presence:**



- In an effort to boost its presence and visibility, the Indian Navy launched its **Mission Based Deployments (MBDs)** in 2017 by **deploying ships and aircrafts in key locations** (see infographic). For example, recently the MBD allowed the Indian Navy to respond swiftly to **flood-hit Madagascar and a cyclone in Mozambique**.
- **Joint Exercises:** It results in **constructive engagements in operational terms** and **enhance the skills of naval forces** in a number of diverse areas. Major Exercises conducted include **Malabar Exercise** (United States, Japan and Australia) and **Varun** (France).



Foreign Policy and Initiatives

- **Separate divisions under Ministry of External Affairs:** Created for a more focused approach-
 - **Indo-Pacific Division (IPD):** Established in 2019, IPD deals with matters relating to the Indo-Pacific, India-ASEAN relations, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).
 - **Indian Ocean Region Division (IOR):** Established in 2016, it focusses on island nations of Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.
- **Utilizing its Soft Power:** This has been achieved with the help of Indian Diaspora and cultural exchanges. A noteworthy example in this direction is Ministry of Culture's **Project Mausam**. It aims to understand how the knowledge and manipulation of the monsoon winds has shaped interactions across the Indian Ocean and led to the spread of shared knowledge systems, traditions, technologies and ideas along maritime routes.
- **Policies aligning with the vision of Indo Pacific :** such as Act East Policy, **SAGAR**.
 - **Vision 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** is a holistic policy that aims to pursue and promote India's geo-political, strategic and economic interests on the seas, particularly in the Indian Ocean.
- **Initiatives:**
 - **Indo Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI):** It is an open global initiative which draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms to **focus on seven central pillars** conceived around- Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport.
 - **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS):** It was initiated by India and is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the IOR by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues.
 - **Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC):** It was launched by India and Japan in 2017 and has four key components: development and cooperation projects; quality infrastructure and institutional capacity; capacity and skill development; and people-to-people partnerships.
 - **Environmental initiatives:** India has played a significant role in spearheading global efforts towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, clean energy, disaster management etc. in the region through initiatives **like International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**.

Partnerships

- **QUAD:** It includes **Australia, India, Japan, and the United States**. Although the vision and purpose of the grouping remains unclear, the political willingness to come together and discuss issues of global and regional interest underlines the convergence in strategic interests and shared challenges.



- **ASEAN:** India has emphasized the **ASEAN centrality** in its Indo-Pacific framework. Currently, there are around 30 Dialogue Mechanisms between India and ASEAN, cutting across various sectors. Recent efforts to amplify India-ASEAN partnership are visible through the following developments-
 - India upgraded its bilateral relationship to the level of **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Indonesia in 2018**.
 - India and Indonesia recently agreed on a plan of action to develop and manage the **Sabang Port** located close to the strategic Malacca Strait.
 - India has concluded a **logistics support agreement with Singapore** and provided the city-state access to its missile testing facility in Odisha.
 - India **sold Myanmar its first ever submarine**.
- **Regional groupings:** Through its regional partnerships, India collaborates on **multitude of subjects** such as economic cooperation, maritime security, sustainable development, blue economy, connectivity, technology, cultural relations, environment & disaster management etc.
 - Major groups that India is a part of include- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Mekong Ganga Cooperation and Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation (FIPIC).
- **Emergence of Minilaterals:** India recently conducted a **trilateral dialogue with France and Australia** discussing economic and geostrategic challenges and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is already an India-U.S.-Japan trilateral and also an India-Australia-Indonesia trilateral is taking shape. In smaller partnerships, it is easier to strike convergence in interests.

WHAT CHALLENGES DOES INDIA FACE IN THE REGION?

- **Limited Naval Capacity and Lack of military bases:** With a meager allocation of 15 percent of India's military budget, the navy has limited capacity and resources to strengthen its efforts. And the lack of India's overseas military bases creates a **fundamental and logistical challenge** in India's ability to sustain continued presence under its MBD.
- **Challenges to trade:** Tariff and non-tariff measures (NTMs) act as a major impediment to trade in this region and impede regional cooperation. Further, **poor infrastructure connectivity** also multiplies the problem for India.
- **Slow pace of developments:** The failure to realize concrete Indo-Pacific deliverables despite an early start has underlined the need to better understand each other's priorities and challenges in the region. For example- since the release of the AAGC, there has been very little movement on this initiative.
- **Balancing Continental and Maritime Strategies:** Overemphasizing the Indo-Pacific runs the risk of **antagonizing China** since Beijing sees the Indo Pacific essentially as a strategy to contain it. While the US and Australia are physically distant from China; India has to **secure its continental margins** with China and suitably allocate resources for the same.
- **Challenges to MDA:** An emerging challenge for MDA is tracking movements below the surface level (submarine deployments) and grey shipping (via the military) and dark shipping (via vessels that purposely hide their identity) at the surface level.
- **Disapproval from within:** New engagements in the Indo-Pacific might appear in contrast with India's traditional positions on non-alignment and portray that India is acting under western influence. This may create political friction within the country.
- **Barriers to fruitful partnerships in the region:** This includes lack of definitional consensus and differences in priorities with each nation having different political appetite and available resources for the Indian and Pacific Oceans (for example within the Indo-Pacific, Australia's and Japan's priorities lie in the Pacific, while France is focused primarily on the western Indian Ocean).

HOW CAN INDIA USE THE INDO- PACIFIC AS A TOOL TO ADVANCE ITS STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND RESPOND TO A CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT?

- **Issue based Coalitions and Partnerships:** A successful Indo-Pacific collaboration does not lie in a convergence of policies but through coordinated and issue-based partnerships framed by a **model of burden sharing**.
- **Enhancing engagements with non-traditional players:** India should now look to other non-traditional players with great potential such as Micronesia to address shared interests in the region.



- India shares a myriad of common interests especially related to climate change, clean energy and blue economy with the **Pacific Island countries**. Hence, FIPIC can be used effectively to expand India's outreach beyond IOR.
- **Strategic use of Island Territories:** India in collaboration with its Indo-Pacific partners, must utilize the potential of island territories to extend its reach, sustain its presence and generate better MDA.
 - Island territories such as **France's Réunion Island, U.S. military facilities in Diego Garcia or Guam, Australia's Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Japan's Okinawa Island** along with India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands can provide critical access to key choke points and entry/exit points for the Indian Ocean.
- **Debt solutions for vulnerable countries:** Supportive financial mechanism can be built to align with specific needs of the Indo Pacific countries and to help them overcome debt burdens.
- **Innovative mechanisms such as QUAD+:** The Quad-Plus Dialogue assembles officials and experts from the Quad countries along with a rotating external partner to explore areas of common interest. These "Plus" partners have included the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan, France, and Sri Lanka. These dialogues provide a valuable opportunity to gain experience in forming functional coalitions to tackle pressing regional challenges.
 - Recent **Quad Plus talks with South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand**, convened to address challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis in the Indo-Pacific region, are a step in the right direction.



CONCLUSION

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new geographic space—bringing together the Indian and the Pacific Oceans—represents the new strategic reality of the twenty-first century. As such, the Indo-Pacific is now a theater of opportunity to increase India's profile and role globally. The geopolitical advantage has put India in a pre-eminent position in the region and this must be put in greater use, with adequate care, to serve national interests. New areas of cooperation will have to be identified to give greater content and strength to regional and bilateral partnerships. This will provide traction for growth, development and security for India and the countries in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole.

TOPIC AT A GLANCE

Indo-Pacific

- A **geopolitical construct** substituting "Asia-Pacific"
- Represents an **integrated theatre that combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean**
- Has **strategic and economic domains** and is associated with **maritime security and cooperation**
- **Geographical interpretations of the Indo Pacific region:**
 - **For India and Japan-** From the Western shore of the Americas to the **shores of African continent**
 - **For US-** From the Western shore of the Americas to the shores of the Indian subcontinent
- **Major stakeholders** in the Indo-Pacific- India, U.S.A., Australia, Japan, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, France and other maritime nations in the Indian and Pacific Ocean.

Key Events shaping the Indo-Pacific-

- December, 2015- **India and Japan issue the first joint statement on the Indo-Pacific** and the world
- 2016-2017- Japan presents the Indo-Pacific vision and **report on free and open Indo-Pacific strategy**
- 2017-2018 – USA identifies in the Indo-Pacific as the new theater in its national security strategy and **renames the U.S. Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command**
- June, 2018- India Prime Minister presents India's Indo-Pacific vision at the **Shangri-La Dialogue**.

Factors driving the global shift towards the Indo-pacific

- **Important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC):** presence of key choke points, like the Mozambique Channel, Bab-el-Mandeb, Lombok Strait
- **Flourishing Trade and Economy:** Accounts for 62% of the world GDP and contributes to 46% of the world's merchandise
- **Rise in non-traditional threats** (piracy, illegal fishing, etc.)
- **Richness in Natural resources** (Offshore Hydrocarbons, Sea Bed minerals, fisheries etc.)
- **China factor-**
 - Issues related to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
 - China's disregard for International Rules and Customs
 - Increasing Militarization of Indian Ocean Region

India's interests in the Indo-Pacific

- Peace and security in the Indian Ocean
- Expanding its presence in the region, especially in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia
- Maintain its role as a net security provider
- Countering China
- Enhancing Trade and Investment Cooperation and Promoting sustainable development
- Other Interests: Combating marine pollution, Regulating illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, deep sea mineral exploration and effective disaster risk management

Key elements of India's vision for the Indo-Pacific (PM's Shangri La Dialogue, 2018)

- A free, open, inclusive region
- Southeast Asia at the centre of Indo Pacific
- A common rules-based order for the region
- Equal access to common spaces on sea and in the air, as a right under international law
- Circumventing power rivalries through partnerships



Strengthening and preserving traditional roles in IOR

- Security Provider and First Responder
- Early warning and weather forecasting services
- Providing Developmental Assistance
- Maintaining trade and investment flows in the region

Foreign Policy

- **Separate divisions under Ministry of External Affairs:** These include Indo-Pacific Division (IPD) and Indian Ocean Region Division (IOR)
- **Utilizing its Soft Power:** with the help of Indian Diaspora, cultural exchanges. E.g. Project Mausam
- **Policies aligning with the vision of Indo Pacific:** such as Act East Policy, SAGAR

India's policy towards the Indo-Pacific Region

Naval Strategy

- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** through institutions like- Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) and Information Fusion Center for the India Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and initiatives like white shipping agreements and coastal surveillance radar chains on IOR islands.
- **Expanding/maintaining India's naval presence:** through Mission Based Deployments (MBDs) and Joint Exercises

Initiatives

- Indo Pacific Oceans' Initiative
- Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
- Asia Africa Growth Corridor
- International Solar Alliance
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

Partnerships

- QUAD and ASEAN
- Regional groupings: E.g. - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation (FIPIC).
- Minilaterals: E.g. Trilateral dialogue with France and Australia

Challenges faced by India

- Limited Naval Capacity and Lack of military bases
- Challenges to trade: Tariff and non-tariff measures (NTMs) and poor infrastructure connectivity
- Slow pace of developments of initiatives
- Balancing Continental and Maritime Strategies
- Challenges to MDA: submarine deployments, grey shipping and dark shipping.
- Disapproval from within due to divergence from traditional positions on nonalignment
- Barriers to fruitful partnerships: Lack of definitional consensus and differences in priorities

Way Forward

- Issue based Coalitions and Partnerships framed by a model of burden sharing.
- Enhancing engagements with non-traditional players such as Micronesia
- Strategic use of Island Territories
- Debt solutions for vulnerable countries
- Innovative mechanisms such as QUAD+

