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SINO-US RIVALRY IN INDO PACIFIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Indo-Pacific, a term that has been adopted by the United States in its strategic language underbrush, reflects an attempt to check the ever-expanding attention by China within its locus. The strategy here is to intervene and limit in this case China's aspirations especially concerning its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative that still remains a major focus in Washington's policy. In essence, the goal is to limit China's global strategy of using economic interdependence, especially to Asia. China however continues to take the advocate of regional economic integration in a bid to reach a long-term objective of world dominance all in the name of maintaining the orthodox Asian pacific construct. Pakistan's struggle to make great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region is both geopolitical and economic and emerges in an increasingly complex context. Pakistan will need to navigate the tumultuous attempt it fuels to safeguard its interests. This paper attempts to contextualize the factors contributing to Pakistan's negative strategic environment and how these factors influence the range of available strategic options. More specifically, it proposes to answer two crucial questions:

1. What is the shift from 'Asia Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific' doing to the strategic balance of the region?
2. Why is this transformation of importance to Pakistan's strategic Objectives?

KEYWORDS: US-CHINA Rivalry, Indo-Pacific, Security, Implications on Pakistan

Introduction:

Countries across the world, notably Pakistan, have varying ideological and geographical interests towards geostrategic alterations. Pakistan's geographical position makes it a geo-strategic nexus when it comes markets for investment and resources and economy. This country is at the crossroad of the Indian Ocean and South Asian, Middle East, and Central Asian, which brings with it both opportunities and challenges. Despite the fact that this region has always been of great importance in global politics, its participation in the actively changing international relations has

never been as intensified as it is now. The current world order is in a flux in light of economic development and global power struggles such as the US-China war which have adverse effects on Pakistan.

Pakistan's geopolitical position is sensitive to the developments in the Indian Ocean region and the power dynamics within it. These developments are fundamentally based off of the US & China tensions and rivalry. The US has also started keeping a check on China while containing Russia in a bid to control their presence on the world stage. Such a containment strategy involves significant assistance from India. It is also pertinent to note that India's close bilateral relations in defence with the US strengthens India's role as a 'Net Security Supplier' in the Indo-Pacific Region. Given the tensions between the two nations, Pakistan sees this cooperation as an added burden to its already existing security concerns and an obstacle to enhancing its diplomatic relations. Pakistan particularly regards the ever more consolidated US-India ties as detrimental to its security and its attempts at expanding diplomatic relations with Iran. While the US continues promoting its 'Free & Open Indo-Pacific' concept and talks about principles of sovereignty, free trade, open sea lanes and access in principle, its war strategy has been essentially directed against China. The current state of affairs is further worsened due to the fact that Israel was able to establish relations with the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, and Sudan through the Abraham Accords. With such an advancement, Israel is able to safeguard its interests with respect to Iran and interact more efficiently within the Persian Gulf. The security of Afghanistan is closely interconnected with the stability of South Asia in general. The revival of Taliban has an instant impact on Pakistan and offers both economic opportunities as well as security challenges. As India continues to consolidate itself at the center of the Indo-US collaboration, Pakistan will continue to have border conflicts with India. In spite of these challenges, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has several promises for Pakistan. In the wider context of US-China rivalry, Pakistan's positioning towards China has become an important element of its foreign policy. Important strategic assets such as Gwadar Port, expanded Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the protection of SLOCs underline Pakistan's geopolitical importance in the Indian Ocean. The local ecosystem however is still beset by numerous other challenges. Pakistan has a challenging and complex geopolitical position as a result of the Abraham Accords, the growing Indo-US strategic partnership, alliances like QUAD and AUKUS, and insecurity in Afghanistan. This study aims to comprehend the impact of these interconnected events on the country as a whole by looking at how they affect Pakistan's strategic goals and regional position.

The Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific Power Rivalry between the United States and China:

It has been brought to my notice that there are a growing number of people who refer to the region comprising the Coasts of Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as Indo Pacific region, which is a geography influenced term but has also taken political overtones sometimes. Since the last seven decades, the United States has been a key player in the Indo Pacific region, making the term a politically infused one rather than a purely geographical one. It is noteworthy that this term has altered throughout times taking into consideration the constantly shifting international environment. There has been a continued narrative about China and the US trying to outdo each other in terms challenging strategy and the Indo pacific region taking central stage, thus in a broad sense the term has changed its meaning from be about a geo strategy to the China does on balance. Americans' policy over Indo Pacific illustrates this shift with greater clarity, the region is a part of but not limited to: geography, economy and politics for the US.

The Indian Ocean contains eleven strategically important shipping routes that are crucial in connecting countries all over the world allowing for trade of goods. Nearly 100 thousand boats that are loaded with goods traverse through the Indian Ocean annually. The Indian Ocean houses countries that possess around 67% of the global oil reserves, around 40% gold reserves, 60% of uranium deposits and around 35% of natural gas for the Indian ocean region The diamond reserves from this region are estimated at around 80% of the world's total sources, Muhammad Umer Hayat said in 2020. The strategy of 'Free and Open Indo Pacific' entered the limelight when the US government through Mike Pompeo announced the initiative in July 2019. Modi's government too has painstakingly sought to redirect India's gaze towards the east through Delhi's 'Act East' Policy and associated initiatives that gradually began with 'Look East' Policy. These developments eloquently outline the message that the Indo-Pacific region attracts more economic interest and power than ever before and more so as the hurry is palpable. The Indo-Pacific Strategic Report by the US Department of Defense outlines that this particular geography 'is the single most consequential arena for America's future', hence the US classification. The US classification reflects the vast strategic and economic importance of this region. The value of direct foreign investment in the Indo-Pacific region is estimated at \$1.3 trillion while two-way trade amounts to \$2.3 trillion every year. The region has one of the largest GDP contributions at 60% and thus is imperative for the US to defend its trade routes for the promotion of its economic investments The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy rest upon principles such as peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference, and nondiscriminatory trade. Such principles, in turn, rest upon solid relations, openness

and investments. The strategy focuses on commitment to global norms and standards, especially in respect to free movement of ships and aircraft. Of relevance in this regard is the meaning of the terms "free" and "open." "Free" means exercising sovereignty without restraint, while "Open" means fostering development and linkages. The growth of China as a center of economic, military, and political attraction in its own interest is now one highlight of the United States focus on the Indo Pacific region. The study raises questions about the 2015 militarization of Chinese-controlled Spratly Islands, the A2AD capabilities of China, and the Chinese influence over the sovereignty of the host countries where its investments are made. Queries have also been posed concerning the One Belt One Road Initiative by China, as well as the "Polar Silk Corridor" and the plans that they have in respect of the Arctic which remain indeterminate. These trends are further exacerbated by Russian efforts to enhance its economic, diplomatic and military engagement in the region. The United States has viewed the oil supplies that Russia sent to Asia, in conjunction with the claim of possessing an enlarged section of the Arctic, as a threat to its interests within the region. To better reflect the significance of its strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific, the Pacific Command of the US changed its name to Indo-Pacific Command. This command has jurisdiction over 370,000 strong and also supervises 2,000 aircraft, 200 naval vessels and submarines. As the United States seeks to expand its position, it seeks to build up networked relations to face the challenges posed by Russia and China. Other such bilateral agreements include the U.S-Japan-South Korea, U.S-Australia-Japan and the U.S-India-Japan trilateral partnerships, as well as activities aimed at strengthening regional institutions, while in that time China has been quite suspicious about super powers interference in the Asia Pacific region. Since the time of Mao, he has resisted such external forces as being detrimental to the stability of the region. During the Cold War, China spoke out against US-Soviet rivalry leading to critical instability in the area. The international security setup evolved after the Cold War took place, but it still focused on the balance of power among regional powers. China started advancing its interests and influence on a global level which shifted the equilibrium in favor of China around 2010. This posed a challenge for the strategic vision and goals of the US and modified the geopolitical map of Indo Pacific. Nonetheless, the changes in the strategic environment encourage great power competition in various forms along with forming Alliances and providing business prospects in the Indo – Pacific, and the region will be fundamentally important in ensuring stability in and growth of the world (Department of Defense, 2019). During the last two decades, China's ocean policy has undergone large development in line with its growing set of security concerns and international ambitions. In 2003 China's first defense white paper outlined the navy's narrow function. At present, however,

priorities have changed as President Hu Jintao in 2004 expanded on the tasks of the PLA's navy to include maritime mankind's interests. Such a shift in emphasis should have been expected in view of the fact that about 85 percent of Chinese oil comes through the Indian ocean and out of the Straits of Malacca. Later white papers displayed such a tendency. The 2006 white paper on the Other Security Report propelled this shift in strategy which aims at addressing safety issues when using international waterways This means that the first time the Chinese navy operated at a distance exceeded 1000 nautical miles from the Chinese coast was in 2008, when they stopped the hijackers in the Gulf of Aden. In order to create a navy that could have any operational capabilities around the globe, the white papers from 2010, 2013, and also the one in 2015 started to gradually expand the scope of interests of the navy. The Chinese National Defense in the New Era, published in 2019 along with maritime security in BY, highlighted China's commitment of peace and stability in the region via multilateral engagement through Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It makes China's stance look as one of a warrior nation and not aggressive, but looking for optimal partnerships to further its goals. One of the military projects of America in the region that the publication criticizes heavily is the THAAD systems basing in Republic of Korea which China considers as provocative. It highlights Japan's and Australia's active militarization of Indian Ocean and presents that as also part of the puzzle. While sounding as a catalytic aggression of America through its partnerships and deployments in close proximity to China, it portrays itself as a defensive national defense policy.

In contrast to, China's rise in the Indo-pacific has led the US to intervene in the militarily." This precise quote framed the timeline of Sino-US relations during the last decade in the appropriate context. Its implementation cycle commenced with the issuance of the US National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2017. The Trump administration determined the Indo-Pacific region to be of great importance and the area of US-China geostrategic rivalry. As outlined in the NSS, these great or major power competitions will create a direct threat to other states if they continue to capture the world order with authoritarian rule. To ensure their survival from the direct threat posed by China, globalists were able to see a rise in pan nationalism. Furthermore, in the NDS of 2018, China was identified as a strategic competitor and aggressor which makes United States interests and surpassing China a matter of great urgency. Thus, ensuring that Chinese power does not assault US military presence. While Indo-pacific policies complimented the Trump administration's policy with regard to China's military industrial complex. The changes and threats posed during this time fuel China's interests further. The Indian Ocean, which has historically endowed less importance as compared to the Pacific, seems to have gained relevance. The US

involvement in the region further deepened after Britain abandoned the Suez Canal in 1967. Subsequently, there was also the oil crisis of the 1970's and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which were also among the reasons. Clinton referred to this region as an 'Indo-Pacific' and she outlined this new strategy in 2011 during her tenure as Secretary of State. America has always added a nuance where it equally divided the control of Indian Ocean between CENTCOM and PACOM for the nations that bordered the complex water space. This today has understated – the struggle for Indo- pacific has become more competitive as the US and other allies are attempting to claw back Chinese expansionist policies. The cold war of influence between the superpowers has aggravated and the battle for the future geopolitics is hotting up. Economic security, military conquest and global supremacy are all on the table.

QUAD:

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or QUAD, has once more emerged as an important partnership in containing China's rising power, a trend that has existed for over a decade now. It aimed at checking China's aspirations in the region, and this recalls the vision held by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He proposed a new order referred to as Free and Open Indo-pacific as a counter strategy to the Belt and Road initiative which he considered as an over aggressive quest for continental linkages. Abe pointed out that there is a need for free access to the region which has already been supported by a strong government and a strong alliance with the US, Australia and India. In 2012, Abe such information that Asia's Democratic Security Diamond vision together with the Oceania endorsed should strive towards this goal; the base of such goal was laid down by the speech of Mr. Abe in the Parliament of India where he recommended to embrace such concepts as "the Indo-Pacific strategy" and "Free and Open Indo-Pacific". He argued how the two Oceans of Indian and the Pacific were geostrategic ally relevant to issues of movement and flow, security and peace. Japan was in a good position to lead these common set of goals because it was amongst the first maritime democracies in the globe. Abe at that time suggested that China was turning the southern China Sea into a 'Beijing Lake.' China's planned push into the area was Japan's greatest concern." After a decade of inactivity, QUAD resurfaced at the highest possible level during its maiden conference in February 2021. The alliance today adheres to the same fundamental ideas as FOIP, emphasizing the resolution of common strategic issues. In order to coordinate responses to disasters during the 2004 tsunami, the four countries—Australia, Japan, India and the United States—formed QUAD. Since then, it has grown into a larger coalition including a military component. The strategic landscape of the region has become even more complex due to recent geopolitical developments. President Joe Biden hosted the first-ever in-person QUAD leaders' meeting during the UN General Assembly's session on

the 24th of September in 2021 at the White House. Following the G7's Build Back Better World (B3W) agenda, the summit focused on cooperative projects like Covid-19 vaccine distribution and construction of infrastructure, but it also underlined a common goal to oppose China's influence and maintain a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Security and stability issues in the area have increased as a result of the U.S.'s complete expulsion from Afghanistan & the Taliban's following takeover in 2021 (Abe). In light of this, QUAD has become a strong alliance with a realistic perspective on upcoming difficulties. Its development is indicative of an increasing understanding of the Indo-Pacific's significance as a theater for strategic conflict as well as collaboration.

AUKUS:

The Indo-Pacific region's strategic environment has changed as a result of the introduction of the AUKUS defense pact between the US, Australia, and the UK. Australia will obtain nuclear-powered submarines as part of this collaboration, which will represent a significant change in its arsenal for defense. Esteemed regional partners will be better fortified and China's clout will be kept at bay with the help of this agreement, particularly when it comes to the South Chinese Sea. The AUKUS has been one of the pivotal Australia breakthroughs that they have wished for as it enables them to achieve their long-term strategical endeavor. The agreement carries notable repercussions in the diplomatic realm as it compelled Australia to cancel its 2016 contract with Paris on diesel submarines. France saw the decision as a blow to its core national interests and described it as a betrayal. This in turn has placed the strained relationship between Western countries on the surface and France's role in the Indo-Pacific on the limelight. Given its possession in the Pacific as well as its relations with Japan and India, Paris is also a crucial actor in that space. The establishment of 'Paris-Delhi-Canberra Axis' back in 2020 speaks volume of France's strategy to be proactively involved in the Indo Pacific region. France has the potential to spearhead the coalition to fully contain China, in contrast, the initiative is quite clear in France's desire to limit politics. The US Australian cooperation over the latest development marks yet another milestone which is significant because it is the first time in over twenty years since sharing nuclear submarine capabilities has taken place with an allied state. The US takes defending its Indo-Pacific interests and putting an end to China's aggressive agenda very seriously, as evidenced by this action. AUKUS has presented difficulties even though it was a big step towards improving regional safety for its members' The difficulties of preserving regional unity among countries with similar strategic objectives are highlighted by the diplomatic breach with France. However, France's response, which calls for close cooperation with India and Japan, raises the possibility that it would attempt to fortify its position by forging new alliances. A more complex

web of alliances is anticipated in the Indo-Pacific as a result of these developments, all of which are meant to maintain stability and limit the growing power of China in one of the most important areas of the world (The AUKUS Agreement).

Indo- US Alliance:

The United States had historically referred to the region as simply "Asia-Pacific" until 2011, even though then-Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton had coined the phrase "Indo-Pacific" in 2010. The concept of India as a 'net security provider,' first proposed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Mr. Gates at the 2009 Shangri-La Dialogue, laid the groundwork for a change in U.S. perceptions of the area. The Obama administration modified the phrase "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Asia-Pacific" before deciding on "Indo-Pacific" in 2017 since it no longer accurately reflected the strategic objectives of the United States. This modification represented a dramatic change in the United States foreign policy, demonstrating a rising focus on India's expanding regional importance. The core of U.S. strategy during the Obama administration was the "Rebalancing Asia" policy, which aimed to strengthen ties with significant Asian countries in response to China's growing influence. But President Trump's 2017 use of the term "Indo-Pacific" elevated India and signaled a broader shift in U.S. policy that positioned India as a major player in the region's geopolitics. This shift is particularly noteworthy because Indian and American objectives over the Indian Ocean have become increasingly aligned, mostly due to China's increasing influence. The formal agreement between the United States and India to exchange sensitive satellites and mapping data was signed in October 2020, demonstrating the two nations' increasing collaboration in the face of China's difficulties. U.S. During their strategic talks in New Delhi, Secretary of State Pompeo & the Secretary of Defense Mark Esper talked about China's increasing danger to their national security & regional stability. The Basic Exchange & Cooperation Agreement on Geographic Collaboration (BECA), as it is known, demonstrates how U.S.-Indian cooperation is changing in response to mutual worries about China's regional aspirations. Over the years, India and the US have been fortifying their military connections, especially through a number of important agreements meant to increase collaboration and exchange vital information (Robert D. Kaplan, September 13, 2011). India has access to important topographical, nautical, along with aeronautical data that is necessary for operation of drones and missile targeting thanks to one such arrangement.

With countries with whom it has strong defense connections, the United States has signed three fundamental military accords. By establishing uniform norms and procedures, these agreements aid in the development of a structure for military cooperation. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA), which was signed in 2016 following ten years of discussions, was the first of these agreements

between the United States and India. The U.S. gains access to important Indian installations in the Indo-Pacific area because to this deal, which permits both countries to utilize one other's military facilities for logistics support and refueling. India has access to the extensive worldwide network of the U.S. military in exchange, expanding its strategic reach. The second foundational agreement, the Communication Compatibility & Security Agreement (COMCASA), was signed by the two nations in 2018. During cooperative operations, this agreement allows their military forces to communicate securely. The Executive Director of India's National Maritime Foundation, Dr. Khurana, stressed that these agreements were made at a pivotal moment when the geopolitical and strategic objectives of both countries coincided, especially in Asia. As India's economy has grown quickly, so too has its geopolitical significance in the region. Indeed, India's economy recently overtook France as the sixth largest in the world. The nation is a major actor in regional maritime safety due to its geographic location, which includes a 7,500-kilometer coastline that stretches deep in the Indian Ocean. In order to increase its shipping capacity, India has been making significant investments in its marine infrastructure, constructing 12 large ports and more than 200 smaller ports as part of the massive Sagar Mala Project. However, India's expanding influence within the Indian Ocean has sparked anxiety, particularly in neighbor Pakistan, which sees India's ambitions as a direct threat to its strategic and financial stability. India's maritime development is also viewed as an attempt to limit China's rising influence in the area, a move that the United States supports wholeheartedly as part of its overall Indo-Pacific strategy. Alex N. Wong, the US Deputy Secretary of State for the Department's Bureau for East Asian & Pacific Affairs, emphasized India's role in supporting regional stability, noting that India's proactive approach is consistent with US objectives. The United States has even designated India as a "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean, recognizing its essential role in sustaining regional security (Axel Berkofsky, 2019).

India has established itself as a competent regional player through direct deployments, capacity building, and military diplomacy. India has been given a major strategic position in the Indo-Pacific area as part of the U.S. effort to offset China's ascent. In addition to protecting its own interests, India is also advancing the security in the Indian Ocean Region by strengthening its naval capability and collaborating closely with regional allies. Since a sizable section of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC, travels through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India views as a part of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, India has been adamantly opposed to the project. This act undermines India's territorial integrity and sovereignty claims. In response to China's assertions and concerns over these regions, India nullified the Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and also declared Ladakh as a

Union Territory. This decision confirms India's position but further has more implications on the geopolitical construct in the Indian Ocean Region. Indian government has been trying to adopt assertive maritime postures as demonstrated through its responses in the Indian Ocean Region. The commissioning of India's first nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine, INS Arihant, was a major milestone event in India's maritime history. The deployment of a submarine in the Indian Ocean demonstrates India's resolve to secure its maritime boundaries, however, this development heralds the first instances of nuclear capability being established in the region, which raises questions on the stability of the region. Currently, India's primary objective has shifted from solely defending its borders to also projecting power within the Indian Ocean Region. In recent years, India has established various monitoring and tracking stations on strategically important islands across the Indian Ocean. INS Arihant is expected to be followed by 4 more SSBNs, that are to be commissioned over the next two decades. This expanding naval presence is aimed at limiting competitors, especially Pakistan, from turning challenging India's supremacy in these oceans. India's goals, however, go farther than its neighborhood. The development of a navy complex in Duqm, Oman, which enables entry into the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, was a key step taken by New Delhi. In addition to enhancing the position of India in the region, this station also offers logistical and repair services to its warships. These measures are part of India's larger plans to reclaim dominance over the Indian Ocean and reduce the stranglehold of their opponents especially China and Pakistan. Besides, India has been strengthening its ties with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia that are normally seen to be close allies to Pakistan. During the Modi's leadership, these relations have matured into strategic allies which have further isolated Pakistan economically and politically. Up until 2027 the Indian Navy has plans to build an arsenal comprising three aircraft carriers and five nuclear submarines all amounting up to a total of 200 vessels. Doing so puts Pakistan's maritime security interests at risk, and this is happening alongside the rapid push to improve and expand India's influence as a regional power. With the U.S. seeing China as one of its global rivals, they too appear to be raising concerns regarding China's ever-growing power. However, many still remember the US trepidations of China encouraging the claims nigh their peaceful rise. Though China sought to convince the world regarding a more 'peaceful' rise China, its naysayers including US, remained unconvinced. With geopolitics in a constant state of change from Europe towards Asia Pacific, it seems like Indian Ocean has started turning into one of the most sought-after regions and it appears to be turning into one of the most militarized one. In a most puzzled of theories, both China and US have argued their oceans pose the greatest threat to security, with US claiming China's development in respect to other regions will destroy

international equilibrium while recasting role their rhetoric and military strategies. This issue is deepened by the lack of a political denominator that would explain China's engagement in the region. Ideally, there should be a clear goal and strategy for building and expanding security or military relations in the region. As a result of India's involvement, the Indian Ocean has become a new theater in the global superpower competition, especially in relation to curtailing China's influence. In this new world Democratic order, India has been able to carve a niche for itself as a net security provider in the Indian ocean areas. India is not only safeguarding its own interests but also helping create a more robust security architecture in the region through building partnerships, and martial base, and developing capacity. IOR is best described in its current form as 'Unstable, Unpredictable, and Militarized'. With respect to the maritime dimension, different geostrategic conflicts are emerging and changes in the distribution of power are happening out of the blue. Even with the US-Iran confrontation and the Shattered Middle East, there is a strengthening of strategic relations and naval cooperation between the US and India through pacts such as the LEMOA. China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean is also contributing to this mix by altering the security environment. The sprawling BRI and CECPC are significant drivers of this transformation. A new trend toward the reconfiguration of regional alliances has also manifested in the form of recent multi-billion-dollar contracts between China and Iran for the development of oil and infrastructure.

In the Indian Ocean, the struggle for dominance of key islands is also intensifying. Military bases & maritime monitoring facilities have sprung up on islands such as the Maldives, as well as Mauritius, the Seychelles, Djibouti and Duqm (Oman). The Indian Ocean is now a fiercely contested and military body composed of water as a result of these developments and the region's increasing military nuclearization. At first, India viewed its participation in Chabahar Port and its strategic partnership with Iran as a means of avoiding the economic corridor between China and Pakistan and thwarting China's expanding influence. India wanted to maintain its position as a significant buyer of Iranian oil while securing a conduit to Central Asia through Chabahar. However, because of U.S. sanctions, this cooperation did not entirely help Iran's economy India was considerably restrained from the China-Iran 25-Year Strategic Partnership Agreement, the signing of which altered the situation quite significantly. The agreement strikes a deal wherein Iran and China jointly oppose the US strategy aimed at weakening Iran's regime and protests against the economic sanctions imposed by it. As per these developments, India has stepped up its maritime engagement with East Asia. One important move was India agreeing to acquire Indonesia's Sabang Port located near the Malacca Straits, one of the most important maritime choke points in the world. India is willing to leverage Indonesia's wish to form

new partnerships because of the country's wishes to contain China's Belt and Road Initiative. In addition to East Asia, India has been seeking strategic influence along the periphery of Africa. Together with Japan, India initiated the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in 2017, a \$40 billion infrastructure and development initiative. This initiative aims to counter China's increasing investment in Africa and give African nations seeking to diversify their relationships an alternative. In addition to providing infrastructure, this corridor will allow access to Africa's abundant natural resources, especially uranium, which Japan and India both require for their nuclear power projects. With 54 votes in the UN Assembly, Africa holds enormous geopolitical weight, and by putting money into the African continent, India aims at enhancing its diplomatic position while also safeguarding its energy and interests in security (Yasir Hussain, December 12, 2018).

India has more in mind for Africa than just business alliances. India has attempted to build a military presence in strategic areas as part of its SAGAR (Security & Growth for All in the Region) plan. India's attempt to acquire two islands in the Seychelles in order to establish naval bases was one such action. But when the specifics of the agreement were exposed, the Seychelles public reacted negatively, and this scheme collapsed. India has taken other calculated actions in Africa in spite of that defeat. To monitor maritime activities around the region, it established a listening post near Madagascar which served as an early warning system. Thanks to this technology, India is now capable of monitoring critical waterways such as the Bab el-Mandeb strait, which is a key link between the Indian Ocean and the Red Water. India is likely adjusting its maritime strategy by taking actions necessary to secure vital trade routes as well as counterbalance China's presence. By building partnerships and the ability to compete in naval power and finance infrastructure development, India is cementing its position as a strong actor in the Indian Ocean region. As a result, competing interests of so many regional and global players contribute to the fragile and volatile nature of the geopolitical landscape. These conflicts of power continue turning the Indian Ocean into a more important and strategic theatre with even wider implications.

Abraham Accord:

The Year 2020 marks the date which can be considered a turning point with respect to the geopolitical approach that was taken by Israel alongside the Bahrain, the UAE, Sudan and Morocco due to the signing of the Abraham Accords. Israel's approach can have serious repercussions regarding the strategic environment of the region, Israel's presence in the Strait enhances the prospects of a collaborative effort regarding the military sphere, on the other hand Iran's goal to restrict oil supplies increasing the tension between the two states adds to the dilemma further. The western borders of Pakistan might fall into deeper instability, given the way Iran, Pakistan, Russia and

China interact with the region and the greater Indo pacific environment, heightened Stability and accuracy concerns alongside these major power states are crucial. Indian ocean security during this sensitive time is packed promises, the aligning policies of India, the United States, Israel, along with the growing wave of support from other foreign powers in the Arab region certainly enhances the level of activity Israel maintains in the region. The Middle East's political and security environment has historically been shaped by the rivalry between Israel and Iran, but it is currently spreading to South Asia. With Gwadar Port providing direct access for the Indian Ocean, Pakistan is in a vulnerable position. Gwadar is a major access point for Pakistan's shipping lines communications, which are vital for its commerce routes and maritime safety. If tension in the Straits of Hormuz rise, this might have an influence on these routes, putting Pakistan's capacity to secure its regional interests at risk. India's expanding connection with Israel provides another degree of difficulty (Madagascar, July 18, 2007). The two countries have significant military, economic, and scientific links, which are expected to strengthen further. Israel's foreign minister has hinted at the prospect of signing an accord on trade with India in the near future. This strategic alignment among India and Israel is alarming for Pakistan, especially as both nations receive considerable support from the US. India's access to superior Israeli defense technologies, combined with its rising military capabilities, represent a direct danger to Pakistan's security interests, particularly in the Indian Ocean Zone. India's geopolitical position is further strengthened by the renewed Indo-US partnership, which makes it an even more powerful opponent for Pakistan. With its Fifth Fleet, which is based in Bahrain, the US already has an important position in the Indian Ocean. The U.S. led counterterrorism naval task forces, which offer security and logistical support to allies, are likely to back Israel if it chooses to increase its naval activities in the area. Iran and Pakistan would be severely disadvantaged by such a scenario, making it more difficult for them to retain their dominance in the Indian Ocean. The balance of power in the region are changing as a result of rising military cooperation and strategic alignment amongst the United States, India, and Israel (Widakuswara, August,1 2020). These changes in relationships and alliances point to a larger reconfiguration of influence in the Indian Ocean Region, where the lines separating South Asia and the Middle East are becoming increasingly hazy. As external powers continue to increase their influence in ways that jeopardize Pakistan's security and economic stability, the country is currently confronting new difficulties on several fronts. An increasingly militarized Indian Ocean, wherein strategic rivalry is escalating, is the result of the U.S., Israel, and India's increasing regional engagement. These events highlight how security issues in South Asia, the Middle East, and the larger Indo-Pacific area are

interconnected, necessitating that regional entities adjust to the changing geopolitical environment.

Afghanistan: A Renewed Conundrum

Countries from all over the world have fought for influence in Afghanistan, which has long been a hotbed of violence and instability. Afghanistan was employed as a defensive zone during the so-called "Great Game" between Russia and Great Britain, which left its citizens in a state of great instability. Later on in the Cold War, it emerged as one of the most important battlegrounds. Following 9/11, a temporary order was put in place by the US and NATO forces to reduce tensions in the area. But without making sure that important Afghan actors shared power, the Taliban swiftly filled the void left by the sudden departure of American soldiers in 2021. The Taliban's return comes with additional difficulties, especially in regards to the regime's international recognition. Before Afghanistan to go forward, it must overcome many political and legal obstacles, but the existing state of affairs only heightens concerns about humanitarian disasters. Due to its heavy reliance on foreign aid, the nation's economy is currently in danger of collapsing. Afghanistan is on the verge of economic catastrophe as a result of the fall in foreign aid, which accounted for about 40% of its GDP. Only 5% of families have enough food to eat alone by September 2021, according to data from the World Food Program. In addition to making the humanitarian situation worse, such poor circumstances make it more likely that terrorist organizations will gain ground. The international world is already concerned about Daesh's (ISIS) presence in Afghanistan since the group could grow more active if the Taliban government fails to secure foreign backing. Afghanistan's instability directly affects regional powers such as Pakistan, China, Russia & the Central Asian republics. Tensions in the area might easily be rekindled in Afghanistan by the strategic rivalry between the United States and Chinese in the Indo-Pacific. Given the possibility of instability extending to its Xinjiang area, China views security in Afghanistan as essential to preserving the Belt and Road Program. China's economic and security interests may be threatened by Afghanistan's chaos. Russia has a big interest in keeping Afghanistan stable as well. Peace in Afghanistan is crucial for Russia's larger geopolitical objectives because the area presents Moscow with a possible energy route and a thriving economic market (The Taliban in Afghanistan, September 15, 2021). The present Taliban regime seems to be more in line with Pakistan's security goals, and Islamabad has historically been leery of any Indian intervention in Afghanistan. The threat presented by Pakistan's Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP), a militant organization that has carried out multiple attacks on Pakistani territory, is still one of the country's biggest domestic issues. Islamabad hopes the Afghan Taliban may utilize its power to lessen terrorist activities along their shared border and promote peace with the TTP.

Afghanistan's future is essentially still up in the air, torn between fears of more instability and hopes for regional cooperation. The nation's problems, which range from financial crisis to the danger of terrorism, have a significant impact on both the surrounding countries and the global community.

Implications for Pakistan:

Excluding its modernization, South Asia still remains one of the most underdeveloped regions. And a population of around 2 billion living there together with a web of both traditional and non-traditional threats makes the strategic context very volatile. This uncertainty adds to several issues faced by Pakistan as one of the major stakeholders in this region. In fact, the country is grappling with a range of security issues fully integrating India's growing geo political clout as well. One core problem for Pakistan is its dependence on local and global military for its defense. The geolocation of Pakistan is strategically located at the convergence of major regions of the world particularly in the Indo Pacific region. The central concern is the Indian Ocean where the SLOCs which are key to global oil trade is situated. This further adds to the strategic importance of Pakistan in the set of exclusive economic zones that have extended to 290,000 square kilometers. But maritime border disputes with India have the potential for conflict asymmetries with India. Yet Pakistan has not actively participated in the larger Indo Pacific power game but the growing contest between USA and China greatly influences it. The Pakistan-China Economic Corridor, which is a main pillar of the Belt and Road Initiative, occupies a central place in Pakistan's strategy regarding the major geopolitical competition. They consider Pakistan as a crucial asset because the CPEC links the land-based infrastructures to marine routes in the Indo-Pacific region, which China seeks to dominate. As a result, Pakistan becomes an important country in the U.S.-China competition due to its geographical position. America today sees India as a partner to China, which is its foremost regional friend, and a potential ally in military operations in the Asia-Pacific Theater. The tense situation has aggravated by India's growing degree of engagement with the Quad, which includes the US, Japan, Australia and India. India's increasing militarization, notably through participation in carrier group exercises and Canberra's recent involvement in AUKUS are growing indicators in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-US: CPEC Strategy Pakistan Policy for China Policy China Counter Geo Economics securing China Political Space in South Asia China Pakistan Geopolitical Economic Interests Explaining Pakistan brought foreign policy economist politics power departing US and NATO from Afghanistan has key regional balance of power impacts. Power Balance Afghanistan Geo Economics Security Region branded as multiple challenges to stability Alongside over \$9.5 billion frozen Afghan bank assets the international geopolitical tussle surrounding the Taliban's quest for diplomatic

recognition exacerbates regional instability. These trends are troubling for Pakistan, which has strong historical and cultural links to Afghanistan. Pakistan's security is further threatened by the possibility that extremist organizations like Daesh & Al-Qaeda would establish themselves in Afghanistan.

The success and safety of CPEC, which is continually endangered by regional instability, are Pakistan's top priorities as the scenario in Afghanistan develops. Any possible battle between the United States and Iran or the fallout from the Abraham Accords, both of which include Israel and Iran, could potentially have an impact on the Arabian Sea's northern region, which is crucial to Pakistan's marine security. Pakistan's interests will be immediately impacted by an increase in this area. An autonomous Indo-Pacific strategy must serve as the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy in light of these quickly shifting geopolitical conditions. The country is significant because it gives China another way to get oil from Iran, especially if U.S. allies block China from crossing the Straits of Malacca. Pakistan's strategic location at the core of the global power struggle means that its decisions will have a significant impact on both regional security and its international reputation. Given the challenges ahead, Pakistan's ability to strike a balance between its interests and those of other countries is more crucial than ever.

Conclusion:

South Asia is one of the least developed and integrated regions in the world, but having one of the quickest rates of development. Even though 25% of the world's population lives in this region, the ecology is delicate and complex due to a variety of ongoing and emerging issues. Because of this situation, Pakistan, a significant regional actor, faces numerous challenges. An unpredictable external environment exacerbates the country's ongoing security issues. One of its primary concerns is its dependence on both regional and global powers to ensure its security.

Pakistan is important in the larger Indo-Pacific region due to its strategic location at the intersection of several important global sites. Indian Ocean is where more emphasis is laid as the majority of the world's oil trade takes place. The country's marine status has been further enhanced by the increase of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to 290,000 square kilometers. Tensions are exacerbated, however, by unsolved issues regarding maritime borders with India. Nonetheless, while Pakistan has not entered in an active way to the broader Indo-Pacific competition, it is still affected by the intensifying antagonism between US and China. Iran Pakistan is at the center of this multilateral geopolitical struggle. US-Iran Competition Meanwhile, a number of US allies in the middle east have a broader interest in the region. It aims to develop strategic relationships and economic options, including the new economic corridor linking China and Pakistan (CPEC) which has China and Pakistan almost as its

origin. Therefore, the US and China appear to be in competition over these countries. The US strategy indicates that India is used as a counterweight to an expansionist China and is viewed as a developed regional power. The struggle is further deepened by India's increasing role in the Quad- a grouping of US Australia Japan and India Included in the anti-China shift was Andrew Shearer's endorsement of AUKUS, a treaty allowing Australia to acquire nuclear submarines, and the addition of Australia into the Malabar naval exercises. Hence, this raises the stakes higher for Pakistan as it continues to fortify its CPEC vision. The US's attempt to curb China's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region alongside India's deepening relationships with Australia is certainly antagonizing to Pakistan. In addition, the extent of the fallout from the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, which has fostered a vast 'vacuum' along with the Western alliance, adds another layer to the problem. Now with the additional challenge of the Taliban seeking international leverage, the blockade of 9.5 billion in Afghani liquid assets deepens the uncertainty surrounding the region. In particular, militants such as deash and al Qaeda pose a threat towards Pakistan due to its long standing cultural and historical relationship with Afghanistan At the core of China and Pakistan's relationship is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which faces security threats amidst the instability in the region. Efforts must be taken to ensure maximum protection to CPEC. Furthermore, Pakistan's maritime security is also vulnerable due to the ongoing conflict between Iran and the US, coupled with the issues that surfaced from the Abraham Accords between Israel and Iran. Any modifications made in this space could have a direct impact on Pakistan's geopolitics. Consequently, the ongoing global shifts in geopolitical dynamics warrant a formulating an autonomous Indo Pacific policy for Pakistan. In case conflicts within the Malacca Strait endanger China's reach to key commercial areas, Pakistan becomes important in assisting in the provision of an alternative route for the shipment of Iranian crude oil for the Chinese. The decisive steps carried out by Pakistan which has assumed a central position in the eye of the world of powers has global ramifications which include the Pakistan's standing outside the world. Looking ahead, Pakistan's efforts to find a middle ground between the obligations of superpowers and its own national goals will be crucial.

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