



Indo-pacific maritime security: Challenges and cooperation

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Abstract

Security has always been at the heart of every state policy, be it diplomacy, economic, political, societal or environmental. With the advancement in modern day science and technology, knowledge gathering and their application in either solving societal problems or utilising it for warfare system pose a serious dilemma. The paper analyses the region which has come into strategic relevance today - the Indo-Pacific Region - within the context of maritime security and the vulnerabilities it is facing. There are various dimensions within which maritime security can be understood. The degree of cooperation among state actors in solving the many security concerns will also be observed based on common interests such as maritime humanitarian crisis and unresolved tension areas as seen in territorial disputes. Apart from the traditional security threats which have occupied international politics for a long time, the emergences of non-traditional threats have made deep inroads in maritime security domain. In this context, the paper explores the interplay of discord and collaboration within the region.

Keywords: Security, state policy, diplomacy, societal, undermined, technology, gathering, dilemma, relevance, maritime, security, pacific region, threats, disputes, crisis, domain

Introduction

In its nascent stage, when the Indo-Pacific concept was first developed, it remained primarily a maritime concept. With the overlapping interests of various state actors across continents and globalization, the region has gradually gained prominence in both the maritime and continental domains. However, with the rapid turn of events in the international order, the seas have come to re-occupy a predominant area of interest. Economic gravity has rapidly shifted to the Indo-Pacific Region ^[1] indicating the region's significance in navigation, trade, resources and security. The maritime domain is one of the four global commons, the other three consisting of air, space, and cyberspace ^[2]. By definition, global commons refer to areas of the planet that lie beyond the control of any single nation and are accessible to all nations ^[3], and in terms of maritime domain it implies the freedom to use the geographic expanse falling under it - the oceans, littorals, waterways, and seafloor. Bueger presented a comprehensive analysis on four important dimensions of examining maritime security:

a) sea power - focuses on how states behave and use their naval power beyond their territorial waters

b) marine safety concerns the safety of the maritime sector including shipping companies and their personnel from potential threats including piracy, terrorism, criminals activities, and trafficking in persons, illicit goods or weapons; c) the notions of 'blue economy' and 'blue growth', initially introduced during the 2012 Rio World Summit aimed at interlinking different economic development related to oceans and establish sustainable management approaches; and d) human resilience pertains to nourishment, habitation, sustainable livelihoods and secure employment. In the recent decade, the region has become increasingly contentious. 90% of raw materials and merchandise pass through various waterways where 75% of these commodities transit through international chokepoints ^[4]. The focus of this paper is on the region's maritime security, the challenges it faces, and areas where state actors

can actively cooperate to minimize conflicts. The paper delves into the security threats faced by the two strategic zones that form the Indo-Pacific Region i.e. a) the Indian Ocean Region and b) the Pacific Ocean Region.

Maritime Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

The region's maritime security issues range from piracy, drug trafficking, gun running, human security, environmental disasters, territorial disputes, power contestation among the dominant, great, middle powers across the region, militarization of the seas, nuclear threat, security of the sea lanes of communication, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) among the many other issues.

China's Maritime Silk Road

In almost all major security concerns revolving around the Indo-Pacific Region, China happens to take either centre stage or play a supporter role to any state actor(s) resisting West-led policies. China has been firing up its modernization of nuclear armaments, ballistic and cruise missiles, air and naval strength, as well as space and cyber warfare capabilities ^[5]. Its activities in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Western Pacific, and Indian Ocean raise red flags in the region's security. China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is no less contentious in matters of security. The MSR, first proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, stressed strengthening maritime collaboration with ASEAN member states which was followed by the publication of 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st -Century Maritime Silk Road' in 2015 marking it as the inaugural official document of the Belt and Road Initiative ^[6]. Although China's MSR project was presented to create more connectivity, cooperation, and peace, promoting maritime security, research, and ocean based prosperity, it has also come to signify China's rapid expansion into the two oceans (i.e. the Indian Ocean and

Pacific Ocean). The Indian Ocean Region accounts for 80% of China's energy imports making it a strategically and economically significant geography^[7]. Seen in this light it is only natural for China to undergo upgradation of its naval capacity as seen in the development of port infrastructures across the region such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar and Karachi in Pakistan, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, and Djibouti in Africa. These projects are funded largely by China's state-owned enterprises^[8]. All of these projects have created diplomatic, political and economic turbulences in the neighbourhood.

South China Sea

As per United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, approximately 4/5th of global trade by volume and almost 3/4th by value is conveyed via maritime routes, with about 3/5th of this traffic traversing through Asia and one-third navigating through the South China Sea^[9]. The contention encountered by countries surrounding the South China Sea arose out of what is known as China's Nine Dash Line as these lines cover 90% of the South China Sea, thus covering the impacted nations' control over their Exclusive Economic Zone in terms of territorial autonomy^[10].

The disputes can be traced back to 1974 when China seized control of the Paracel Islands previously part of South Vietnam. Subsequently in 1988, China advanced towards the coral reefs of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea where it gradually started constructing buildings on the Mischief Reef. This move was sharply opposed by Philippines basing its claims on the area as being a part of its territorial waters. Tensions transpired over the Scarborough Shoal in 1997 between China and Philippines^[11]. Currently, up to 70 contested reefs and islets are under dispute, with China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Taiwan all establishing over 90 outposts on these disputed features. China's extensive activities in the Spratly and Paracel Islands such as the creation of artificial islands, extensive dredging; presence of Chinese Coast Guards on the controlling the Scarborough Shoal; control over the air space above the disputed zones through its air defence identification zone (ADIZ); establishing new administrative regions centred in Sansha City have aggravated the situation^[12].

East China Sea

The nations bordering the East China Sea include South Korea, Japan, Taiwan (part on China), and China. The Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands dispute between China and Japan has been the main contention in the East China Sea. Given the East China Sea's narrow span of 360 nautical miles, China and Japan find themselves in a predicament as both assert their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights extending 200 nautical miles, leading to potential overlapping claims^[13].

In 1971 China declared the Senkaku Islands as part of Chinese territory. Ever since then incidents in the sea have been on a regular basis. China issued a statement in 2013 about an air defence zone encircling the East China Sea. Its advancement into the South China Sea and the East China Sea can be comprehended in relation to its Near Seas defence and Far Seas protection strategies^[14].

Militarization of the Indo-Pacific region

Militarization and security are closely intertwined aspects. However the interpretation of security has its own biases as regional powers tend to frame their respective policies grounded on 'threat perception', securing their national interests^[15]. The growing power contestation among the dominant power, great power, and middle powers has led to an inconvenient truth regarding the region's stability. State actors having overwhelming influence and huge military capability as in the case of the U.S., China, and India, implement their respective national interests by establishing bases, and ports across both the oceans - Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The region has the first, second, and fourth largest military-ranked countries - U.S., China, and India. The U.S. has maintained an enduring military presence in the region, with a network of military bases, naval forces, and air assets in addition to multiple defence alliances and partnerships with countries like Japan, the Philippines, India, Australia, and South Korea^[16]. Japan maintains a well-equipped and technologically advanced Self Defence Force (SDF). Japan recently disclosed its most extensive military expansion since World War Two through a \$320 billion initiative aimed at procuring missiles capable of targeting China and prepare it for prolonged conflict. This positions Japan as the world's third-biggest military investor trailing only the United States and China^[17]. Japan's military capabilities are largely focused on defence, but it plays a crucial role in regional security, working closely with the United States. The Indian Navy commands a significant naval force in the vicinity, and has strong ties to both the U.S. and Japan and uses its navy to strategically monitor key sea routes. Australia contributes to regional security through its defence forces and direct cooperation with the U.S. and other regional allies on various security initiatives. South Korea maintains a strong military presence, particularly in response to security concerns related to North Korea.

As for China, its maritime military strategy may also be understood through its Maritime Silk Road project. Although China's first overseas military base was inaugurated in Djibouti, there are other ports developed which can be utilized as a part of its naval expansion into the Indian Ocean Region citing examples of its port development at Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Gwadar and Karachi in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh. The Chinese government entered into a decade long pact with Djibouti to establish a naval facility acting as logistical center for the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) vessels involved in counter-piracy near the Yemeni coastline^[18]. The deployment of Chinese military in the Indian Ocean Region is viewed unfavourably owing to its disputes with most of its neighbours. Militarization of the Indo-Pacific seas also includes submarines and surveillance systems of the concerned countries. With the acute militarization and power struggle in the region, there is also the addition of sophisticated maritime warfare system. The danger lies in the actual usage in the event of an all-out war at sea.

The power struggle in the Indo-Pacific

In the hierarchy of dominant, great, and middle powers there is a visible power transition process in the Indo-Pacific Region. The behaviour of state actors can be observed through threat perception, hedging, and alliance systems.

This entails the importance of recognizing the region as the nexus of trade routes, energy supplies, diplomatic ties, and strategic links between the two oceans. Loosely interpreted, such linkages often lead to overlapping strategic and economic interests among competing powers - China, the U.S., and India towards the region ^[19].

Nuclear threat

At present nine nations globally hold nuclear weapons. These include Russia, the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea ^[20]. Indo-Pacific hosts at least six to seven nations possessing nuclear weapons. The present threat emanating from North Korea and the involvement of the U.S. in the region is of utmost concern to the international community and the region's peace.

Security of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) in relation to the freedom of navigation, important maritime chokepoints

A sea lane of communication refers to the pathway utilised by a vessel to navigate from one point to another. In peacetime, these routes function as commercial trade passages, while in conflict, they serve as strategic corridors. The length of these pathways fluctuates based on factors such as landmasses, choke points, reefs, hazardous areas, and the positioning of ports and harbours. Definitions of the sea lane of communication also differ depending on who observes it - i.e. economists, politicians, and military. The important component of the sea lane of communication is the choke point - a strategic, narrow passage that connects two larger areas. These are commonly referred to as straits or canals, witnessing substantial commerce due to their advantageous positioning. Important maritime choke points in the Indian Ocean region consist of the Straits of Bab-el-Mandep, Malacca, Hormuz, Singapore, Lombok, Sunda, Mozambique Channel, Suez Canal, Cape of Good Hope, and Pacific Ocean Region (Panama canal, Taiwan Strait). Roughly 2/5th of the world's petroleum output, transits via these choke points, in the Indian Ocean Region en route to destinations across Africa, Asia, and Europe, amounting to an estimated 9.84 billion tons of cargo. Hence, threats to SLOCs mean disturbances to the normal functioning of maritime activities.

Humanitarian and Natural Disasters

Countries situated around the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean are vulnerable to typhoons, hurricanes, and tsunamis. The effects on human safety and security are directly related to these occurrences. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is often called the 'World's Hazard Belt'. Natural disasters can be grouped under Climatological, Geological and Tectonic, and Hydrological. As per the UN ESCAP, approximately half of the natural disasters transpiring in this region stem from climatic and seismic factors. Refugees, Migrants, and human smuggling are other crucially interrelated concerns of the humanitarian crisis. Asia and the Pacific region are characterized by frequent humanitarian crises and climate-induced emergencies, crippling insecurity, and economic instability.

Drug trafficking and gun running

Myanmar has overtaken Afghanistan as the world's top opium producer in the world based on a new UN report.

Climatic conditions favour the growth of opium. Globally known as the 'Golden Triangle' located in South Asia (Afghanistan) and Southeast Asia (Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos), the countries have thrived on this illegal trade through the sea routes for decades through sea routes in Laos, Thailand, India, and Vietnam. Strife-torn states in South Asia and Southeast Asia have developed a dependence on drug trafficking as a means to procure arms and ammunition. The relationship between drug trafficking and the spread of small arms is widely recognised.

Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

Fish and fishing are two very important sources of sustenance and employment for majority of the nations across the region. The acute rise in competition over this precious source of food is causing much agitation among environmentalists and governments over concerns about the declining fish population and the rise in illegal fishing activities. The cases of Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka are among the many examples of conflict over fishing grounds and territorial waters commonly known as Exclusive Economic Zones.

Maritime Pollution

Pollution of water bodies occurs where there are heavy maritime activities on off-shore oil rig drillings, oil transport routes, oil spills, plastic debris, micro plastic, ocean acidification, chemical pollution, toxins, etc.

Piracy

Indo-Pacific region has experienced issues related to piracy and maritime crime over the years. Somalia and Malacca Strait have been historically prone to piracy affecting international shipping and security. Piracy is most active around choke points where maritime traffic is heaviest. In the recent past, these incidents have extended to the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. According to the International Chamber of Commerce International Maritime Bureau, there has been a 10% rise in piracy incidents worldwide targeting shipping compared to 2022. The Singapore Strait and Southeast Asia form two out of the three primary hot spots for piracy.

Areas for Cooperation towards Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific Region

The core objectives of cooperation among state actors in the maritime domain are to uphold a rules-based system, freedom of navigation, preservation of maritime, environment, and natural resources, human security, cross-border security, protection of maritime infrastructure, regulating fishery, and promoting research and development for better surveillance.

Dealing with China

Given the current state of affairs, it cannot be denied that major security concerns in the Indo-Pacific stem from China's national interests in the region. However, state actors are cautious not to provoke further tensions as it would be harmful to the region's security fabric. There exists a proliferation of security groupings to check any revisionist tendencies in regions such as the South and East China Seas, and the Indian Ocean Region particularly involving China and its neighbourhood. State actors have

reached out to China to participate in bilateral and multilateral platforms where concerned parties can peacefully negotiate terms and agreements and avoid maritime clashes. Countries in the region have also been pursuing a hedging policy due to China's rapid expansion. While this is a precautionary measure, it must not send China into isolation as it would be counterproductive. Instead, upholding laws such as the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) concerning disputes between China and Southeast Asian countries and the UN High Seas Treaty will help foster a secure environment apart from frequent dialogues between governments and military establishments. Despite the setbacks in settling territorial disputes among state actors, it is imperative that international and regional agreements, treaties, laws are upheld with a firm resolution on promoting cooperative environment.

Joint military exercises

From the security perspective joint maritime exercises are meant to enhance cooperation among participating countries. It is a multi-level approach to threat assessments. Given the increase in both traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region, it is a reliable measure to strengthen partnerships and also deter any form of aggression or terrorism. Joint maritime exercises in region have seen considerable exchanges in the past decade.

A few examples can be cited: Multilateral level exercises - Malabar, Milan, Aman-21, Super Garuda Shield, RIMPAC, COBRA-GOLD, SAMVEDNA, IMX- International Maritime Exercise, INDO-PACIFIC DEPLOYMENT, LA-PEROUSE 21, Multinational Field Training Exercise FTX/ EXERCISE FORCE 18, AMAN-YOUYI, SAMA-SAMA LUMBAS etc. There are also joint maritime exercises at the bi-lateral level such as YUDH ABHYAS (India-U.S.), MAITREE (India-Thailand), GARUDA SHAKTI (India-Indonesia), SEA GUARDIAN (China-Pakistan), joint maritime exercise between U.S. Army Pacific and Japan JGSDF, etc. On the operational side, joint exercises enable maritime forces, both navies and coast guards to understand each other's methodologies, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) and enable familiarisation with each team's equipment and technological capabilities. Such exercises also help in strategizing one's own performance. In addition to military drills, non-combat joint maritime exercises are also directed towards checking anti-piracy, humanitarian and disaster relief management - these are an essential part of cooperation with countries in times of emergencies such as natural disasters or man-made catastrophes. Awareness and training in rehabilitation, mitigation, reconstruction process, search and rescue, medical evacuation, and anti-piracy are important components e.g. the (ASEAN) joint military exercise, code-named ASEAN Solidarity Exercise 2023 (ASEX 2023). Collaboration on maritime surveillance systems such as VMS - Vessel Monitoring System, AIS - Automatic Identification System for tracking ships, ISR - Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, and CVE - countering violent extremism are effective mechanisms.

Measures to check on border security for refugees, migrants, displaced, stateless people

International bodies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Inter-governmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (APC) work towards sustainable long-term solutions to check people in crisis across the region. Promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and country partnership is key to addressing these conflicts.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) maritime domain

Sustainable Development Goal number 14 emphasises preservation and responsible utilisation of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The ocean-related goals address issues such as rising sea levels, climate-related disasters, jeopardised livelihoods, and threats to food security. Persistent resource exploitation, heightened energy demands, plastic pollution, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are some of the most pressing concerns.

ASEAN initiatives on Indo-Pacific Region

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), introduced in 2019, comprised of four priority areas among which the first two goals focussed on maritime cooperation and connectivity aligned with its 'Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity 2025 in addition to other areas of concern such as resolving friction in the South China Sea, sustainable utilization of marine resources and check on transnational crimes.

The ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO), launched in 2023 outlines its major objectives pertaining to AMO's responsibility to collaborate with ASEAN member countries in maritime sector, identify prospects for financial and technical aid to member states and advocate for shared principles grounded in international law and ASEAN values.

The ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF), first convened in 2023, like its other initiatives demonstrates a strong commitment to address shared interests including sustainable infrastructure, resilient supply chains, digital transformation, and creative economy alongside sustainable and innovative financing. It prioritised involvement of public, state-owned, and private enterprises of the region. Additional institutional mechanisms comprises the East Asian Summit (EAS), ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM Plus, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Maritime Forum, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment (AMME).

Mini-lateral platforms in maritime security

While there is no agreed definition of mini-laterals, they have certain characteristics

- a. they are ad hoc;
- b. voluntary;
- c. issue-specific;
- d. often without a formal institutional architecture to address a specific threat
- e. formed among countries with shared interests. Mini-lateral arrangements such as Japan Australia India (JAI); Australia United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) a trilateral security partnership or alliance; and Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD) formed by Australia, Japan, India, and the United States are

considered as practical mechanisms among supporters of the status quo in the Indo-Pacific Region. While AUKUS is a military alliance focused on maintaining a military balance of power, on the other hand, the QUAD seeks to strengthen the security architecture in the region. Both QUAD and AUKUS reinforce each other.

It will be worthwhile to observe some major initiatives the QUAD countries have taken pursuant of maritime security:

- a. Japan and the U.S. jointly reached an agreement on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region (FOIP) comprising three pillars aimed at adherence to fundamental rules such as rule of law, freedom of navigation, promotion of economic prosperity and dedication to peace and stability. Japan's first National Security Strategy, 2013, gives priority to the 'Sea'. Considering Japan's national interest in maintaining freedom in maritime navigation and overflight, and its unending dispute with China regarding Senkaku Islands, Japan's security strategy encompasses deepening relations through defence cooperation, technology cooperation, upholding the rule of law, and greater investments in economic connectivity with its newly launched USD 200 billion worth economic initiative - Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiative aimed at financing connectivity infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific and also expanding options outside China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- b. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD) published its National Defence Strategy of the United States of America (NDS). The U.S. identifies the Indo-Pacific Region among its primary security interests and has laid down certain lines of effort in maritime security comprising the adherence to international law and standards, preventing conflict and coercion, protection of maritime freedom, bolstering U.S. maritime military capabilities, offering capacity building support to allies and partners, utilizing military diplomacy to mitigate risks, and backing the establishment of robust inclusive and regional security. In the interest of bringing better economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region, the U.S. launched several initiatives including the Blue Dot Network (BDN) in collaboration with Japan and Australia, the Build Back Better World (B3W), Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act (BUILD Act), the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA Act) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF). C) Australia's security strategy envisages its strategic defence interests in terms of secure sea lanes, fostering stability in the Indo-Pacific region, upholding rules-based global order. Its June 2018 Edition of Defence White Paper further reinforces its major defence objectives with firm resolve to deter, deny, and defeat armed attacks on or threats to Australia's national interests, contribute militarily in support of the region's maritime security and work towards coalition operations in line with Australia's interests. Taking this perspective, Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy falls in line with Japan and the U.S. D) India, in its Annual Report 2014-15 released by the Ministry of Defence, considered itself to be a maritime nation for the first time. In October 2015, India introduced 'Ensuring Secure Seas: India's

Maritime Security Strategy' (IMSS-2015), marking the first official use of the term 'Indo-Pacific' in an official document. In November 2019, India launched the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) outlining seven pillars for collaboration in the maritime domain with Indo-Pacific nations in the areas of security, ecology, resources, capacity building, disaster risk reduction, science and technology and academic cooperation, facilitating trade and connectivity.

India's maritime efforts aimed at enhancing surveillance and precision-strike capabilities encompass the establishment of Indian Navy's Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems (CSRS) network, Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC IOR), and a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) for Island states. Other significant undertakings by India towards Indo-Pacific maritime security strategy include its Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

Maritime domain awareness involves the comprehensive understanding of any element and activities occurring in the maritime domain and those areas which have the capacity to directly affect maritime security, safety, economy, and marine environment. The integration of regional fusion centres along with the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), an initiative of the QUAD, is directed at gathering commercially accessible data via automatic identification systems and radio-frequency technologies, providing near real-time, integrated, cost-effective maritime domain awareness.

Platforms for naval cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), Pacific Island Forum (PIF), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Regional Cooperation on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia.

Upholding important Maritime security laws enshrined in

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 regarding the jurisdictional boundaries over ocean areas such as the EEZ; International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) CODE; International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS); United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

Maritime security confidence-building measures (CBMs)

Encompass formal or informal, unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, military or political, state-to-state or non-governmental, relevant for tackling and progressing towards resolving prolonged political standoffs. It operates via exchanging crucial security information and official dialogue, engaging in collaborative maritime drills, endeavouring to diminish mistrust, and broadening shared interests. Track II level discussion diplomacy is another way

of approaching regional concerns. According to Montville, Track II Diplomacy entails unofficial, informal interaction among representatives of opposing groups or nations, aimed at devising strategies, shaping public opinion, coordinating human and material resources to potentially resolve conflicts.

Recommendation for greater investment and cooperation from Regional Reliable Maritime Powers (RRPMs)

Specifically Australia, Japan, India, and the U.S. in enhancing Indo-Pacific maritime security especially in areas of anti-piracy missions, humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts, and checking the rise of weapons of mass destruction. Given the shared interests in the region's maritime security, RRPMs hold a pivotal role and responsibility. Their assistance to poorer states in capacity building, training, and self-reliance is crucial. In addition to the above-mentioned RRPMs, Indonesia and Singapore are also key states due to their geographic location and influence on maritime security.

Conclusion

From observations, the pattern among regional powers coming together for comprehensive security is laudable. That being said, there is a proliferation of threats from multiple sources as well. Sustainable and resilient commitments are key to keeping a check on security threats. It is evident that competition in the Indo-Pacific region involves both regional and global actors partly resulting from the persistent policy of favouring a stable Indo-Pacific. However, the existing imbalance remains a significant concern. Mini-laterals, though effective in tackling security threats, may not always be feasible in certain cases depending on: a) the diverse regime types in the region; b) the acute division between supporters of China and U.S.-led allies; c) mini-laterals can aggravate the threat perception instead of solving it. While some of these arrangements are the outcome of threat perception owing to the rapid advancement of great powers like China in the region, some groupings have arisen out of the fear of power transitioning effects on the region's security hence applying the hedging strategy. The positive outcome of all these arrangements is that collective security is actively in place as a result of the proliferation of security groupings. And the deterrence it has on revisionist powers remains strong. Among the many areas of cooperation, institutional collaborations, technology and knowledge sharing form a crucial part. The objectives of maritime security such as freedom of navigation, non-discriminatory access to market, and resources, upholding international maritime laws, and availability of port infrastructure for cooperation and mutual benefit have become essential for a strong rules-based order.

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