Indo-Pacific Region

What is the issue?

- “Indo-Pacific” is today a buzzword that has been interpreted differently by various countries in their outlook or vision documents.
- India will have to manage its relations with China and Japan for its vision for a stable Indo-Pacific.

What is the global shift?

- Global engines of economic growth have shifted to Asia, first to the Asia-Pacific, and now, to the Indo-Pacific that includes South Asia.
- One could argue that the natural evolution of trade, investment and energy flows favour the broader definition of the Indo-Pacific as against the narrower confines of Asia and the Asia-Pacific.
- The term “Indo-Pacific” is certainly more inclusive and better accommodates the growing aspirations of a wider constituency.

What is the situation in the Indian Ocean?

- When **Sri Lanka** proposed the notion of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace in 1971, it was more about the presence of Western powers and establishment of foreign bases.
- **China** then stood with countries like India in opposing bases in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- That is a far cry from its strategy now of actively foraying into the Indian Ocean and seeking bases in Gwadar and Djibouti and special arrangements elsewhere.
- **India** earlier opposed the presence of foreign powers in the Indian Ocean.
- But now, it carries out joint exercises with these foreign powers to promote interoperability.
- It welcomes the presence of the US, Japan and other partner countries in the Indian Ocean as a counter to the growing Chinese presence.

What is the situation in the Pacific Ocean?

- In the Pacific Ocean, the debate was never about the presence per se of great powers.
- There, the **US** military presence on land and sea was taken for granted after

World War II.

- The **French and British** too, as in the Indian Ocean, continued to have their colonies.
- The debate was about nuclear tests in places such as French Polynesia.
- As a legacy state of the Soviet Union, **Russia** has never ceased to be an Indo-Pacific power.

What are the contradictions?

- There are many contradictions in the context of the emerging construct of the Indo-Pacific.
- **The US**, like India and many others, advocates freedom of navigation and over-flight, and respect for the rule of law and international norms.
- It adheres to many tenets of UNCLOS without having ratified the treaty.
- The US Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) of 2018, which embraces the Indo-Pacific as against Asia Pacific, describes China as a strategic and economic competitor.
- Yet, it also has an entire section that seeks to "promote US values in the Indo-Pacific region".
- **China** now justifies its increasing forays in the IOR by claiming that it has always had a historical right to the Indian Ocean.
- The credibility of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China is eroded due to the absence of a key neighbouring country like India.

What are the facets to the emerging uncertainty?

- The world today is undergoing a fundamental transformation.
- Traditional and non-traditional **security threats** have grown in magnitude.
- The **spectre of terrorism**, especially cross-border terrorism, continues to challenge peace and prosperity.
- **Geopolitical considerations** are increasingly driving trade and investment decisions.
- **Geo-economic forces** unleashed by China's economic rise are redefining the geostrategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific.
- The **US-China trade war** has been disruptive. It has coincided with the waning of the global economy.
- **Nationalism and regionalism** are on the rise. There is less multilateralism but greater multi-polarity.
- The old consensus is fraying and a balance is yet to emerge.
- The economic success in the Indo-Pacific region has not been matched by stable security architecture.
- The region has some of the highest **military expenditures**.
- Rampant trade, territorial disputes and geo-strategic contestations places

limitations on the region’s ability to engage in a process of give and take.

What could India do?

- India will have to manage its relations with China, no matter the challenges.
- Ties with Japan would remain a key component of India’s vision for a stable Indo-Pacific and a cornerstone of its Act East policy.
- The Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan will be further strengthened during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit.
- However, India at this juncture does not have to make a binary choice in the Indo-Pacific between a development-centric agenda with ASEAN centrality and a security-centric outlook revolving around the Quad.
- Both are likely to remain parallel tracks with some overlap for the foreseeable future.

Source: Indian Express

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