



# Climate, Energy And Politics: Regional Co-Operations In The Indo-Pacific And The New World Order

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## Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region's rising significance in the new world order is shaped by complex geopolitical dynamics, economic growth, and strategic competition. This study highlights the Indo-Pacific's pivotal role in global affairs, influencing trade, security, and alliances. It emphasizes the emergence of regional cooperation initiatives like ASEAN, Quad, and APEC as critical mechanisms to address shared challenges and promote stability. The Indo-Pacific's interactions with major powers, including the United States and China, influence the evolving new world order. As the region's importance grows, sustaining and enhancing regional cooperation will be vital for shaping the trajectory of the new world order.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, Regional Cooperation, Climate, Energy, Politics, New World Order

## Historical Background

The Indo-Pacific has a long history of maritime trade dating back to ancient times. The Indian Ocean served as a vital trade route connecting the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Ancient maritime powers like the Indus Valley Civilization, ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the civilizations of Southeast Asia engaged in flourishing trade networks. Throughout history, various empires rose and fell in the region, contributing to its development. Notably, the Indian Ocean saw the rise of maritime empires like the Maurya, Gupta, Chola, and Srivijaya Empires, which played crucial roles in trade and cultural exchange. Starting from the 15th century, European powers, such as Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Britain, sought to establish colonies and trade outposts in the Indo-Pacific. This period of colonial rule significantly impacted the region's economies, societies, and political structures. The Age of Exploration in the 16th and 17th centuries saw European explorers, like Vasco da Gama, Ferdinand Magellan, and James Cook, navigate the waters of the Indo-Pacific, further connecting the region to the rest of the world. The Spice Trade was a crucial driver of Indo-Pacific development during the medieval and early modern periods. Spices, such as pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg, were highly sought after in Europe, leading to the establishment of extensive trade networks. Various Asian empires, such as the Ming Dynasty in China and the Mughal Empire in India, played essential roles in facilitating trade and cultural exchange in the Indo-Pacific. The colonial legacy had a profound impact on the region and struggles for independence and decolonization movements shaped the post-colonial landscape in many Indo-Pacific countries. After World War II, many countries in the Indo-Pacific gained independence, and efforts towards economic development and

modernization gained momentum. From the latter half of the 20th century, rapid economic growth, globalization, and technological advancements have transformed the Indo-Pacific region. Countries like Japan, South Korea, China, India, and the ASEAN nations have emerged as major economic powers. Regional organizations, such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), have been established to foster economic cooperation and address shared challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific faces various contemporary challenges, including geopolitical tensions, environmental issues, economic disparities, and climate change. At the same time, it offers tremendous opportunities for regional cooperation, trade, and cultural exchange.

### **Dimensions of Regional Cooperation**

Regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is essential for addressing common challenges, promoting stability, and fostering economic growth in the region (Rahman, 2020). Given the vast diversity of countries, cultures, and interests in the Indo-Pacific, regional cooperation plays a crucial role in building trust, resolving disputes, and advancing shared goals. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten Southeast Asian countries. Founded in 1967, ASEAN aims to promote political and economic cooperation and regional stability. It fosters dialogue, resolves conflicts peacefully, and engages in economic integration through initiatives like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation): APEC is a forum of 21 Pacific Rim economies that promotes economic cooperation and trade liberalization. It facilitates dialogue among its member economies to address regional economic issues, sustainable development, and connectivity. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) is a regional organization that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It focuses on enhancing connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an initiative that brings together India and five Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) to promote cultural, economic, and people-to-people ties. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an organization that brings together countries bordering the Indian Ocean to enhance regional economic cooperation, maritime security, and sustainable development. Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, aimed at promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. It focuses on cooperation in areas such as maritime security, infrastructure development, and economic resilience. Some Indo-Pacific countries, like Australia and India, are members of the G7 and G20 groups, which allow them to engage with other major economies on global economic and security issues.

### **Climate issues in Indo-Pacific Regions**

Climate issues in the Indo-Pacific region are of significant concern due to their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. The Indo-Pacific is a vast and diverse region comprising numerous countries with different levels of economic development and varying degrees of exposure to climate-related risks (Simons, 2023). The region is experiencing rising sea levels, which pose a direct threat to low-lying coastal areas, small island nations, and densely populated coastal cities. This can result in coastal erosion, increased flooding, and the loss of habitable land, leading to displacement and migration of communities. Indo-Pacific is prone to a range of extreme weather events, including tropical cyclones, typhoons, and heavy rainfall. These events can cause extensive damage to infrastructure, agriculture, and human lives, disrupting economies and livelihoods. The region is home to some of the world's most diverse and ecologically significant coral reef systems. However, rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification due to climate change are causing coral bleaching events, which threaten the health and survival of these vital ecosystems. Climate change impacts on agriculture and water resources can lead to reduced crop yields and water shortages, affecting food and water security in the region. This can exacerbate existing challenges related to poverty, malnutrition, and access to clean water. The Indo-Pacific region is recognized for its rich biodiversity, but climate change poses a significant threat to many species and ecosystems. Rising temperatures, habitat loss, and changing precipitation patterns can lead to biodiversity loss and disrupt delicate ecological balances. The Himalayan region, which falls within the Indo-Pacific, is home to numerous glaciers

that serve as a crucial water source for downstream communities. Glacial retreat due to global warming can impact water availability, affecting millions of people who rely on these water resources. The adverse effects of climate change, such as sea-level rise and extreme weather events, can force people to migrate from vulnerable areas to more secure locations. This can lead to environmental migration and result in social and economic challenges. Indo-Pacific region includes both developed and developing countries, each with varying levels of commitment to climate action. International cooperation is essential to address climate change effectively, as it requires concerted efforts and contributions from all countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to sustainable practices. Efforts to address climate issues in the Indo-Pacific region involve a combination of adaptation and mitigation strategies. Countries in the region need to strengthen their resilience to climate impacts while also taking measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to cleaner and renewable energy sources. International cooperation and support play a crucial role in assisting vulnerable countries in the Indo-Pacific in their climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

### **Geo-political tensions in Indo-Pacific Regions**

The Indo-Pacific region has been witnessing heightened geopolitical tensions due to the competition for influence and power between major players like the United States, China, Japan, India, and others. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the India-China border have the potential to escalate into larger conflicts, impacting regional stability (Padmapati, 2023). The Indo-Pacific is one of the world's busiest maritime regions, with a significant portion of global trade passing through its waters. Ensuring freedom of navigation and addressing issues like piracy, illegal fishing, and maritime territorial disputes remain critical challenges. North Korea's nuclear ambitions and ballistic missile tests continue to be a major security concern for the region. Efforts to denuclearize North Korea and maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula are crucial for regional peace. Many countries in the Indo-Pacific region are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and disruptions to agriculture and water resources. Addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development are pressing issues. The most prominent aspect of political tension in the Indo-Pacific is the competition for influence between the United States and China (Shahid, 2023). The U.S. has been a longstanding power in the region and has sought to maintain its presence and alliances to uphold a rules-based international order. On the other hand, China's rising influence and assertiveness in territorial disputes, such as in the South China Sea, have led to tensions with its neighbors and the U.S. The U.S. has also expressed concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its impact on regional dynamics (Bhaumik, 2023). The Indo-Pacific region is home to some of the world's largest economies and trade partners. Ensuring smooth economic integration, addressing trade imbalances, and promoting regional economic cooperation are essential for sustainable growth. As the region becomes more interconnected and reliant on digital infrastructure, cybersecurity threats are increasing. Protecting critical infrastructure and data from cyberattacks is a significant challenge for governments and businesses in the region. Some countries in the Indo-Pacific region face issues related to human rights abuses, political repression, and ethnic tensions. Addressing these concerns and promoting respect for human rights remains a critical priority. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Indo-Pacific region's public health, economies, and social stability. Building health security and improving pandemic response mechanisms are essential to prevent and mitigate future health crises. The region is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons. Enhancing disaster preparedness and response capabilities is vital for minimizing the loss of life and property during such events.

### **Energy and Security in Indo-Pacific Region**

The Indo-Pacific region is rich in energy resources, including oil, natural gas, and coal. As demand for energy continues to grow in the region, there is increasing competition among countries to secure access to these valuable resources. This competition can lead to tensions and disputes over resource-rich areas. Several countries in the Indo-Pacific region have overlapping maritime claims, leading to conflicts over the exploration and exploitation of energy resources in contested waters. The South China Sea, for example, is known to have significant oil and gas reserves, but conflicting claims by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan have

resulted in disputes and heightened geopolitical tensions. Energy resources and infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region have become elements of geopolitical rivalries. Major powers like the United States and China often compete for access to energy resources and seek to influence the development of energy-related projects to further their strategic interests.

The Indo-Pacific region faces challenges related to energy security and transitioning to sustainable energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and combat climate change. It's important to note that the geopolitical landscape and critical issues in the Indo-Pacific region are constantly evolving, and new challenges may have emerged since my last update. Governments and international organizations in the region continue to work together to address these issues collaboratively. The Indo-Pacific region has several longstanding territorial disputes that contribute to political tension. For example, the South China Sea disputes involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan have been a significant source of contention. Similarly, historical issues between Japan and South Korea have periodically strained relations in the region. Countries in the Indo-Pacific region have forged alliances and partnerships to balance against perceived security threats and to enhance regional cooperation. The U.S. has deepened its engagement through alliances like the Quad, which involves the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia. This move has been seen as a response to China's growing influence and assertiveness (Pornchai et al, 2023). North Korea's nuclear program remains a significant security concern for the entire Indo-Pacific region, and its actions have heightened tensions and led to responses from the international community, including the United Nations. Taiwan's political status continues to be a contentious issue in the Indo-Pacific (Wilson, 2018). China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has increased military activity around the island, leading to responses from the U.S. and other regional actors to uphold the status quo and Taiwan's security. The Indo-Pacific region's political tensions also impact the role and effectiveness of international institutions and norms. The United Nations, regional organizations, and mechanisms for conflict resolution are often tested in their ability to manage and de-escalate tensions. The political tension in the Indo-Pacific has implications for the broader world order. It affects the balance of power, the concept of multilateralism, and how countries navigate their interests in an increasingly interconnected and competitive global arena. Given the dynamic nature of international relations, it is essential to keep in mind that the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific may have evolved since my last update (Majumdar, 2023). New developments, agreements, or conflicts might have emerged that further shaped the region's political dynamics and its place in the global order.

The Indo-Pacific region contains crucial energy transit routes, including the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Suez Canal. These chokepoints are essential for global energy trade, and any disruptions or conflicts in these areas can have significant ramifications for world energy markets and supply. There is competition among countries to invest in energy infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific, including pipelines, ports, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals. Infrastructure development can lead to strategic dependencies and influence regional dynamics. The pursuit of energy resources and consumption in the Indo-Pacific region also intersects with global efforts to address climate change. Balancing energy security with sustainable energy transitions remains a challenge for many countries in the region. Energy conflict in the Indo-Pacific can have ripple effects on the broader world order. It can exacerbate existing geopolitical tensions, influence alliances and partnerships, and shape the balance of power among major actors in the region and beyond. To manage energy conflicts in the Indo-Pacific and address related challenges, regional cooperation, international agreements, and diplomacy play crucial roles. Energy security is closely linked to broader economic and geopolitical interests, making it a complex and multifaceted issue that requires careful navigation by countries in the region and the international community. However, it's important to note that the energy landscape and geopolitical dynamics may have evolved since my last update, so it's essential to consider more recent developments to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation.

### **Strategic Power-Play in Indo-Pacific**

The region is witnessing a strategic competition for influence among major powers, with the United States and China at the center. Both countries seek to assert their interests and influence in the region, leading to a complex

geopolitical landscape (Wilson, 2018). The United States has increased its engagement in the Indo-Pacific and rolled out the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy (Fry, 2019). This approach aims to strengthen alliances, promote economic connectivity, and uphold a rules-based international order in the region. The US also seeks to counter China's assertiveness and safeguard its interests and those of its allies. Russia, while geographically not part of the Indo-Pacific, has interests in the region (Naupa, 2017). It has engaged with several countries in the region through arms sales, energy cooperation, and strategic partnerships. Russia's involvement in the Indo-Pacific can be seen as part of its broader efforts to project power and influence on the global stage. Russia and China have developed closer ties in recent years, including through military exercises and economic cooperation. Both countries share some common interests in countering what they perceive as US-led initiatives in the region. For countries in the Indo-Pacific, navigating the strategic competition between major powers poses challenges. Many nations seek to balance their relationships with both the US and China to maintain economic benefits and security partnerships. Various multilateral forums and organizations play a role in shaping the Indo-Pacific world order, such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and APEC. These forums serve as platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution. The Indo-Pacific world order is constantly evolving due to geopolitical, economic, and security developments. Regional countries and major powers need to adapt their strategies to address emerging challenges and opportunities. The role of Russia and the United States in the region may have evolved, and new developments may have influenced the dynamics among major powers and regional actors.

## Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific has become a focal point of global geopolitics due to its strategic location, economic significance, and the presence of major powers with diverse interests. The region's world order is characterized by a mix of competition, cooperation, and complex interactions between various countries and international actors. China's rise as a global economic and military power has been a defining factor in the Indo-Pacific world order. Its assertive actions in the South China Sea, expansive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and growing influence in regional affairs have drawn attention and concern from other major powers. Regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific plays a pivotal role in shaping the new world order. The collaboration among diverse nations in the region not only fosters economic prosperity but also fosters stability and peace. As the Indo-Pacific continues to assert its significance in global affairs, regional cooperation remains a key driver in defining the contours of the new world order.

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