



Europe In Indo-Pacific

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This article is based on “**India’s new Europolitik**” which was published in The Indian Express on 22/12/2020. It talks about the need for strategic engagement between India and European countries in the Indo-pacific narrative.

The rise of China has been redrawing the balance of power in Asia. With the recent border clashes and China’s aggressive posture in the Indian ocean, has created serious geostrategic challenges for India.

Therefore, in order to assertively counter China, strengthening international coalitions becomes an important priority for Indian foreign and security policies. In this context, the US becomes an even more important security partner for India.

However, to cope with the uncertain political trajectory of the US, India needs to strategically collaborate with European powers, especially in **Indo-pacific theatre**.

Recent Engagement With European Powers in Indo-Pacific

Three recent developments underline India’s changing strategic perceptions of Europe.

- One is India’s support for France’s membership of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
- Second, India’s backing for a larger European role in the Indo-Pacific. India has welcomed the interest of Germany and Netherlands in building a new geopolitical architecture in the Indo-Pacific.
- Third, security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is also emerging as an important theme in India-UK relations.

Significance of Indo-European Cooperation in Indo-Pacific

- **Multi-Polar World Order:** India is looking beyond the bipolar geopolitical competition between the US and China and works towards the establishment of a Multi-polar world.

- **Welcoming Role of Extra-Regional Players:** India is breaking out of its past approaches to the Indo-Pacific defined by such binaries as “**regional vs extra-regional**”.
- **Departure From Post-Colonial Mindset:** India has also begun to shed the postcolonial mental block against regional security cooperation with post-imperial Europe.

The bipolar **Cold War** dynamic (the East-West dimension) and the North-South framework (developing world versus the developed) prevented India from taking a more nuanced view of Europe’s political agency after **World War II**.

Associated Challenges

- **Difficulty in Consolidation of Approaches:** Despite the European Union(EU) being a major player in multilateral forums, there are many differences in uniting all aspects of foreign policy.
 - For example, after Brexit, the UK wants to follow an independent foreign policy (not getting influenced by other EU countries) and define a new international role for itself.
- **Left-Over Conflicts:** France and Britain still have lingering disputes leftover from the era of decolonisation in parts of the Western Indian Ocean.
- **Direct Confrontation With China:** Quad alliance, coming together of democratic countries, their joint naval exercises is seen by China as its encirclement.
 - Similarly, the European Powers getting engaged in Indo-pacific may antagonise China.
 - Also, given the economic cooperation with China, it is unlikely that the EU would start expending energy on an Indo-Pacific strategy immediately.

Way Forward

- **Geo-Economic Cooperation:** India can pursue EU countries to engage in Indo-pacific narrative, geo-economically if not from security prism.
 - It can mobilise massive economic resources for sustainable development of regional infrastructure, wield political influence and leverage its significant soft power to shape the Indo-Pacific discourse.
- **Finalisation of Indo-EU BIT Treaty:** India and the European Union have been negotiating a free trade deal, but it is pending since 2007.
 - Therefore, for closer convergence between India and the EU, both should engage in finalisation of the trade deal as soon as possible.

- **Collaborating With Important Players:** French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India in early 2018 unveiled an expansive framework for revitalising the strategic partnership.
 - India's partnership with France now has a strong regional anchor in the Indo-Pacific narrative.
 - Also, France with its territories in the Western Indian Ocean and the South Pacific as well as a historic naval presence can be quick to see the challenges arising from China's maritime expansion.
 - Further, India should supplement its partnership with the US with a network of multilateral groups with other middle powers, such as the **India-Australia-Japan forum** and the **trilateral dialogue with France and Australia**.

Conclusion

If the intensification of security cooperation with the United States has become an important milestone in India's foreign policy in this decade, integrating Europe into India's new strategic calculus ought to be a major objective in the upcoming decade.

Drishti Mains Question

Regional security cooperation with the European countries has now become a strategic necessity. Comment



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This editorial is based on **“Nepal in turmoil”** which was published in The Hindu on December 18th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.