



New Indo-Pacific Strategy

The US is banding together with nations like India, Australia, Japan and South Korea to ensure that the sovereignty of Indo-Pacific nations is protected. The United States has bolstered its military presence in the South China Sea and has put nations around the world on notice that the sale of key infrastructure and technology companies to China threatens their national security. China claims almost all of the strategic South China Sea with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam pushing competing claims to parts of the resource-rich maritime region. The United States, Japan and India do not have any territorial claims in the sea but want to ensure freedom of navigation there.

The Concept of 'Indo Pacific'

- First time, the term '**Indo Pacific**' was used by the **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** on Indian soil in **2007**. Then, he said that there is a **connect between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean**.
- After about ten years, the President of the United States used this term during his visit to East Asia. He repeatedly used this term instead of 'Asia Pacific'. The motive is to ensure that **all the countries in the region are working in a direction to make it an open, free, inclusive, prosperous and rule based Indo Pacific system**.
 - China is giving a tough competition to U.S in all sectors. In the trade war with China, U.S. wants to pump up as much as banding together of other nations as possible.
- India considers two important aspects within the scope of this term:
 - One, **centrality of the ASEAN** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which is necessary to take forward the notion of Indo-Pacific.
 - Second, **respect for international laws**, especially the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, 1982 (UNCLOS) at the time of disputes, particularly over the South China Sea.

Significance of the Indo Pacific Region

- It is a very rich region in terms of natural resources (fisheries, oil, gas) as well as mineral resources.
- About 3.5 trillion dollars international trade flows through the South China Sea.
- Trade of some of the major economies like China, Japan, Korea or the west coast of the United States goes through the South China Sea.
- About 50% of India's trade is conducted through the South China Sea.

India's Role in the Indo Pacific Region

- India has been one of the major players in the region. India conducts **many naval exercises** with the United States, countries of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.
- Last time in 2015, with the United States, India issued a **strategic vision for the Indian ocean and the Pacific**, in which maintaining the security in the South China Sea, was also mentioned.
- **ONGC Videsh Ltd** is prospecting for oil and gas in the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam. India imports 82% of its oil. It needs oil from wherever it can get. Therefore, explorations at the South

China Sea is very important for it.

- The international community including India wants freedom of navigation, freedom of over flights in the region, especially the South China Sea.

Claims Made by China in the South China Sea

- The Chinese regime claims that it has historical ownership over nearly the entire region, which gives it the right to manufacture islands, declare defensive perimeters around its artificial islands, and to chase ships from other nations out of the South China Sea. The International Court of Arbitration rejected the claim in 2016.
- China considers disputes in the South China Sea as territorial disputes and therefore considers that UNCLOS does not have a locus standi to pass the judgement over disputes.

What other littoral countries in the dispute are doing to counter China?

- It was Phillipines only that took the case to the International Court of Arbitration in 2016. But it has been seen recently that it is ready to provide its islands to China provided China invests in its region.
- None of the states in dispute is willing to or is capable of confronting China.
- Economically, China is leading the region. Also, in general, China has a record of making countries fall into line with it either through warnings or by giving bribe in the form of investment.

Should India collaborate with US in the South China Sea?

- To show its presence and to not allow China to do which is not as per the UNCLOS, it is necessary for India to have its ships in the South China Sea.
- Participating in the exercises like Malabar that desist China from doing something unconventional.
 - The Malabar exercise started in 1992 as a bilateral one between the Indian Navy and the US Navy in the Indian Ocean. Japan became a permanent member of the Malabar exercise in 2015.
- India shall not get sucked in with US, but rather have more and more naval exercise in other countries' seas in their respective exclusive zones, close to the areas in the South China Sea which China claims.
- India's assets are not that large to be there permanently in the sea but in the name of maritime exercises, it can show its presence there to the world.

India needs to have maritime alliances like Quad (India, Australia, the US and Japan) with different countries including US to protect its interests in the South China Sea without provoking China.