

*Research Article*

## **A South Asian identity constructed by the Indo-Pacific discourse: India**

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**Abstract:** It has been estimated that by 2050, four of the top five economies in the world will all be in Asia, with India, Japan and Indonesia all taking a spot alongside China in surpassing the United States, and revealing a global shift toward the Asian axis. While the Asia-Pacific discourse that has emerged since the Cold War promotes a China-centered understanding of Asia, a South Asian country, India, is emerging as a second rising power on the Asian continent and is taking a central position in the region. The continuing discourse will play an active role in the construction of a South Asian identity and its acceptance in the international arena. The present study first focuses on critical geopolitics. Then, through an analysis of the formal and practical geopolitical discourse in India, as an accepted research approach in critical geopolitics, an attempt will be made to reveal the ongoing construction of a South Asian identity. This study addresses the countries in the region as a whole, examining the South Asian identity that is being constructed with India at the center, and including also India's formal and practical discourses. The study aims to reveal how India is trying to construct a South Asian identity through the Indo-Pacific discourse.

**Keywords:** critical geopolitics, discourse, India, South Asia, Indo-Pacific.

## Hint-Pasifik söylemiyle inşa edilen bir Güney Asyalı kimliği: Hindistan

**Öz:** 2050 yılı istatistikleri incelendiğinde dünyanın ilk beş ekonomisinden 4'ünün Asya ülkelerinin oluşturduğu görülmektedir. Çin'in ABD'yi geride bıraktığı istatistiklerde Hindistan, Japonya ve Endonezya yer almaktadır. Bu durum dünya küresel sisteminin Asya eksenine doğru kaydığını göstermektedir. Soğuk Savaş sonrasında ortaya çıkan Asya-Pasifik söylemi, Çin merkezli bir Asya anlayışını hatırlatırken; Bir Güney Asya ülkesi olan ve Asya kıtasının Çin'den sonra ikinci yükselen gücü olarak kabul edilen, Hint-Pasifik söylemiyle bölgesinde merkezileşmeye başlayan bir Hindistan vardır. Bu söylem, Güney Asyalı kimliğinin inşasında ve uluslararası arenada kabul görmesinde etkin bir rol oynayacaktır. Çalışma öncelikle eleştirel jeopolitik üzerine odaklanacaktır. Daha sonra eleştirel jeopolitiğin araştırma yöntemi olan söylem analizi ile Hindistan'daki formel ve pratik jeopolitik söylemleri analiz ederek inşa edilmeye çalışılan bir Güney Asyalı kimliği ortaya konulmaya çalışılacaktır. Çalışma, bölgedeki ülkeleri birbirinden ayırmadan bir bütün olarak ele almaktadır. Hindistan'ı merkeze alarak inşa edilmeye çalışılan bir Güney Asyalı kimliği incelenecektir ve bu inceleme yapılırken Hindistan'ın resmi ve pratik söylemlerine yer verilecektir. Çalışma, Hindistan'ın Hint-Pasifik söylemleri ile nasıl bir Güney Asyalı kimliği inşa etmeye çalıştığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** eleştirel jeopolitik, söylem, Hindistan, Güney Asya, Hint-Pasifik.

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### Introduction

The geopolitics concept was first defined by Rudolf Kjellen in the 19th century and as the state of geography shaping politics, although it is Sir Halford Mackinder that first comes to mind when it comes to geopolitical theory. According to Mackinder, "Whoever rules the Eastern Europe will rule the Heartland, whoever rules the Heartland will rule the World Island, and whoever rules the World Island will rule the World" Over the centuries, geopolitical theories have attracted criticisms from different quarters, leading to the emergence of several critical geopolitical approaches. Critical geopolitics seeks to translate the realities of geography into a political discourse and to construct identity over that space/area. In doing so, it explains it through Michael

Foucault's knowledge-power relationship. It is the construction of an area and identities on that area by using/producing knowledge by power. In the construction of this identity, power is based on the language used by official state institutions in their discourse and that used in practice by institutions, organizations and politicians in the country.

In the light of this perspective, this study will first analyze the Indo-Pacific discourse by comparing it with that of the Asia-Pacific. While the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific discourse is constructed around China, the Indo-Pacific concept is considered a construct of a rising Asia that includes South Asia, with India at the center. Thus, the role of South Asia will be emphasized for an Asia that shapes the international relations of the future. For this purpose, an assessment will be made by taking into account the discourse and strategies of India, which is growing rapidly after China's population and economy. After Narendra Modi was elected Prime Minister in 2014, India underwent a change in the language of its foreign policy discourse and developed proactive foreign policy strategies with a view to raising its reputation as an effective actor in international relations.

The historical timeline for the study will begin with India's independence, although the position of the South Asian identity in global politics and the changing Indian discourse language will be emphasized and discussed from the period after Modi came to power. It is obvious that 2023, when the famine-drought-food crisis begins to emerge alongside the energy crisis, will be a period when humanity will have to face up to the issues that it has been trying to resolve through policies for many years. While seeking solutions to these issues, it is clear that the role of South Asia and India will gradually increase against the dominant regional powers in the international conjuncture.

### **The concept of geopolitics and the classical understanding**

The term "geopolitics" is a melding of the words "geo", referring to space, and "politics", referring to administration – together meaning the political management of geography. Although Agnew traces the origin of the word back to the 1750s by basing it on "political geography" (Agnew et al. 2003), geopolitics was first defined as a concept by Rudolf Kjellen in 1899 in his "Study on Sweden's Political Boundaries", referring to the role of land and resources in shaping state policies (Doods 2007). Geopolitics are defined under the influence of the periods in which they emerge, and were based on the views and thoughts of kings, statesmen, soldiers and geographers around them in the years when colonial activities began. With the Industrial Revolution and then globalization, geography and politics underwent significant changes in content, with radical changes occurring in the material and spiritual dynamism of countries, and

economic factors becoming the focus of political concerns and preferences. Not content with the utilization of the economic and human elements of geography, politics started to look for new meanings in geography for the creation of doctrines. Following this line of thought, Geographical determinism and its desire to give direction to humanity led to the expansion of geopolitical science.

A link has existed between geography and human behavior throughout human history, as recognized by Strabo – one of antiquity's most important geographers – who's eight -volume "Geography" presented a geographical and political analysis of the three continents of the inhabited world, Asia, Europe and Africa, as well as geographical advice to rulers for political purposes (Strabo's Geography 2023).

According to Strabo, geopolitics lies at the heart of every argument presented as a geographical fixity or necessity. Geopolitics is handled differently from political geography, as unlike political geography, which is stable, geopolitics is dynamic, being under the influence of environmental determinism, which focuses more on physical features and geographical location and the effects of these features on countries. While political geography addresses human and social issues, geopolitics can be conceived as a political tool that continues and even gives direction depending on developments in the contemporary world.

It is Ellen Churchill Semple, a student of Friedrich Ratzel whose name is synonymous with geopolitics, that first comes to mind when environmental determinism is mentioned. Semple claimed that geographical factors were an invariable source of historical science in her work entitled "Influences of Geographic Environment", and that the geographical characteristics of such civilizations as Britain, Rome and the Greek Empire were at the roots of the political developments of their periods, defining geographical location as "the permanent effect of natural obstacles" (Semple 1923).

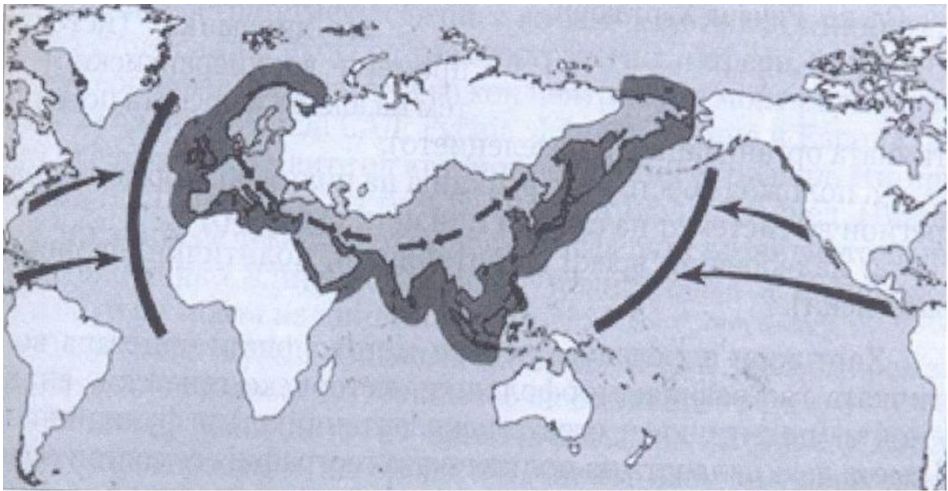
Political geography focuses mostly on the impact of geographical factors on people and political behaviors and is considered a sub-discipline of Geography. The concept of geopolitics, on the other hand, can be considered an endeavor of political power to direct will by attributing certain meanings to geographical areas. Geopolitics does not exist as a static idea, but rather analyses the state in terms of its relationship with the geographical factors around it. It focuses on the problems arising from space and spatial connections, unlike political geography, which deals with the state as a natural phenomenon constituted by its size, shape or borders.

An examination of the close relationship between geopolitics and states based on historical processes reveals that states seek to maximize their power

over space to support the management and maintenance of their regional existence (Herb 2008). This Classical Geopolitical Theory is referred to also as Domination Theory in the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical context, however, classical theories will not be discussed in detail in the present study, but will be touched upon as a basis for critical geopolitics.

Among the classical theories, it was the Containment Policy – known also as Rimland – that dominated in the Cold War period, envisaging the encircling of Eurasia – considered the heart of the world – by both land and sea.

Map 1. Rimland Borders.



Source: Nicholas John, SPYKMAN, *America's Strategy in World Politics, The United States and the Balance of Power*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1942, s.180.

The strategic lines denoting Rimland in Map 1 highlight the maritime region that is today referred to as the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific, the two of which will be examined within the present study.

The new environment that emerged after the Cold War was a period in which the old certainties in social and political theory were no longer so certain, arousing curiosity about where the world would go politically. While the signposts denoting which intellectual direction to follow in modern times are unreliable, the proposed positivism and natural sciences models have been widely criticized. While searching for direction in political geography, it has become more difficult than ever to come up with a coherent explanation of the current conjuncture (Dalby 1991).

Positivism has been criticized for taking the world as it is, without question, and for its assumption that humanly constructed social life forms, including both the construction of science and contemporary political arrangements, are a naturally given reality. This has led to the emergence of post-modern and post-structuralist understandings based on Critical Theory. It should first be noted that critical theory, at the time of its emergence, was not limited to international relations, being rather a critique of positivism that took a multi-disciplinary perspective. This situation is considered the common point of the criticisms raised by post-positivist approaches that have been heavily influenced by such thinkers as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

The concepts underlying post-structuralist approaches: discourse, knowledge and power. The concepts of sovereignty, identity and foreign policy, as the main roles chosen by post-structuralist approaches in the discursive construction of the modern state, are the main pillars of these theories on which critical geopolitics bases its debates.

### **Critical geopolitics and discourse**

Critical geopolitics started by questioning the importance and impact of post-modernist theories and the classical state-centered geopolitical understanding followed in foreign policy practices in the 1980s. Geopolitics thus emerged as an analytical approach that includes extremely subjective and deeply ideological objects, beyond being an objective science based on objective geographical facts.

There are three points in the critical geopolitics. The first of these three points where critical geopolitics looks at geopolitical understanding; geopolitics is a discursive and contextual matter. In other words, it is an approach to the interpretation and making sense of politics. Second, geopolitics is an ocular-centered information system, in that it relies on the knowledge/power perspective to function. Finally, there is the subjectivity of geopolitics. In other words, it is used as a strategic power by states and policymakers (Toal 1996).

Critical geopolitics shed light on the identity-building role of geography on territory (Dalby 1991). Depending on the policy being drawn up, governments make "spatializations" on space, initially by destroying the historical, cultural and social images and meanings associated with the space, known as "de-spatialization" in critical geopolitics. New meaning is created through field distortion, involving the disruption of understandings associated with the geographical space that is accepted without question, and this construction of new meaning is referred to as "re-spatialization". The relationship between discourse and language plays an important role in spatialization.

To better understand the interaction between discourse and language it is necessary to look to the emergence of post-positivist approaches in general international relations theories based on a nation-state building process. For this reason, the emerging mainstreams emerged as state-centered or by accepting it as the main actor. The two world wars in the 20th century and the Cold War era that followed spurred the creation of alternative theories. In international relations theories, and in rationalist theories examining such material elements as the state, post-positivist approaches have emerged that address such elements as non-material culture, identity and discourse. The means of analysis followed in the post-structuralist approach, which is among the post-positivist approaches, has played an active role in the emergence of critical geopolitics. Identity, discourse, language and knowledge/power relations, which are the tools of post-structuralism, have brought along critical discourse analysis.

Studies of language have a long history, having started out in such fields as religion, belief systems and philosophy. In the 19th century, language studies continued on a very different basis than in the past, with those that started with Saussure forming the basis of the current that would later lead to structuralism. Saussure approached language with a philosophical perspective, and claimed that besides examining language as grammar, it is a reflection of another structure and thought.

According to the post-structuralist approach, language is not an objective reality, being rather political. In this regard, the discourse in which language with such a role is used will certainly be subjective and political. Accordingly, the role of language and discourse in critical geopolitics is focused on the interpretation of the knowledge and discourse attributed as reality in a specific geography. While classical geopolitical reasoning constructs, manages and regulates space through language, critical geopolitics tries to deconstruct the hegemonic determinations of spatial imaginations related to it by establishing a relationship between geography and power (Muller, 2008). In the article "Geopolitics and Discourse" co-authored by Gearoid O'Tuathail and John Agnew, while statesmen see geopolitics as a discursive practice, it is a study of spatializing international politics through people and places (Toal and Agnew 1992).

The Foucault effect can be clearly identified in an analysis of the discourse surrounding critical geopolitics. In the work "Rethinking Geopolitics" co-authored by O'Tuathail and Dalby, three critical geopolitical typologies are presented: Formal/official geopolitics, and practical and popular geopolitics. Formal geopolitics are the geopolitics addressed by various strategic research institutions and think tanks in academic literature, and define the practices of statesmen and bureaucrats in foreign policy as practical geopolitics. Popular

geopolitics, on the other hand, are the geopolitical arguments put forward in popular cultural works such as books, magazines, movies and TV series, as well as through other media. Such concepts such as identity, danger and security are constructed based on these arguments (Toal and Dalby 1998). Formal and practical geopolitics will be taken as the basis in the present study.

John Agnew, who made important contributions to critical geopolitics as one of the founders of the school of thought, deals with geopolitical discourse through hegemony. The hegemonic powers have organized their security and economic policies around the characterizations of places, places and the peoples defined by them. According to him, the term geopolitical discourse refers to how the geography of international political economy is “written and read” in the practice of foreign and economic policy at different periods of the geopolitical order – “written”, referring to the way geographical representations are incorporated into the practices of the political elites, and “reading” referring to the ways these representations are transmitted (Agnew and Corbridge 1995).

### **Spatialization of the Indo-Pacific: Asia-Pacific vs. Indo-Pacific**

The border problems in the South Asian region started after World War II. A decolonization process began after 1947, leaving religion-based segregation in its wake, and the remnants of colonialism have dragged countries to war in their efforts to gain independence due to border problems. The Asia-Pacific is a broad concept, covering the region up to the Western Pacific and including East Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania, and was shaped on the basis of economy towards the end of the Cold War period. Other actors with political interests in the region are the United States and Japan.

APEC is an important body in Asia-Pacific discourse, having been established in 1989 with the goal of furthering economic development and welfare in the Asia-Pacific region and strengthening ties within the Asia-Pacific community. APEC has 21 members, known as “Member Economies”, being Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong (China), Taiwan (China), Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam, the United States and Vietnam. APEC members are home to some 40 per cent of the global population, 56 per cent of the global GDP and around 48 per cent of world trade volume (Asia-Pacific Forum for Economic Cooperation 2023).

The importance attributed to Asia emerged in the 19th century, the so-called classical era of geopolitics. Eurasia is a region geopolitically integrated with Mackinder's Heartland Theory. The Indo-Pacific was analysed by the German



geopolitician Karl Haushofer through the Sea Power Theory. Classical geopolitical theories are highly criticized today as legitimizing policies that were developed by successive empires to establish dominance. Today, there is an identity and space that is being constructed with the Indo-Pacific concept. From this perspective, geographies constructed by discourses are encountered. In this study, the role of India in the region being constructed through the Indo-Pacific discourse is analyzed.

The Asia-Pacific as a global region excludes the Indian Ocean, although there are factors suggesting that India and the Indian Ocean cannot be overlooked in the Asian region, such as the prediction that India's population will surpass that of China in 2030 (India Population Forecast 2023), and that India will be among the world's largest economies by 2050. In addition, the Indian Ocean can be seen to have achieved a global level in terms of its maritime trade volume. The Asia-Pacific region excludes India, as when the Asia-Pacific concept emerged toward the end of the Cold War, India decided to remain neutral and joined the Non-Aligned Movement. The Asia-Pacific was initially focused on such East Asian countries as Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines, but in an effort to be more active in the region, India entered the arena in 2014, after Modi came to power India's "Look East" policy was duly transformed into an "Act East" policy as it adopted a more proactive foreign policy approach in the region (Palit 2016).

The importance of the Indian Ocean for the "Act East" policy should not be underestimated as its geopolitical and geostrategic position will support the continued rise of India in the region, bolstered by its maritime strategy.

Factors contributing to the importance of the Indian Ocean: The Bab'ül Mandeb Strait connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea via the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden via the Arabian Sea, to the west of the Indian Ocean, The Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea, and further to the Indian Ocean, The status of the East Indian Ocean as a gateway to the Gulf of Bengal and the Pacific Ocean, The Strait of Malacca, The South China Sea via the Strait of Malacca, The Sunda and Lombok Straits, and the Luzon Strait connecting the South China Sea to the Philippine Sea, and onward to the Pacific Ocean (Haider 2005).

Almost half of the world's maritime trade is carried out through the Indian Ocean and about 20 per cent of this trade comprises energy resources. It is estimated that around 40 per cent of the world's offshore oil production is obtained from the Indian Ocean, as its coastal states boast 65 per cent of the world's oil and 35 per cent of its gas reserves within their borders. Exceeding the

Pacific and Atlantic, approximately 3/4 of the oil and gas trade to non-regional states passes through the Indian Ocean.

Regional organizations such as QUAD aim to increase the role of Western allies in the Indo-Pacific and to contain China, while the South Asian countries of Japan, Australia and India seek a more open and accessible Indo-Pacific policy. The most important obstacle here is the South China Sea (SCS). The South China Sea is an important factor in China's maritime trade and is seen by China as the nationalisation of the Asia-Pacific. In contrast, the Open and Free Indo-Pacific aims to take the region in very different directions. This includes an international maritime space that excludes China and recognises equal rights for the countries of the region. The overall objective of the Indo-Pacific is the discourse of an alliance to contain China. This is a policy in response to the Asia-Pacific.

### **The Indo-Pacific discourse in practical and formal geopolitics**

The language adopted in the discourse of state institutions can be defined as formal geopolitics, while the language adopted by leaders and think tanks falls within the scope of practical geopolitics. In this section, the use of the Indo-Pacific discourse in formal and practical geopolitics will be analyzed for the cases of India, Japan, Australia and the United States. Each of the QUAD countries uses the Indo-Pacific discourse as a tool in the construction of their regional policies. Australia, for example, redefines itself within the region rather than defining the region through the Indo-Pacific discourse, while India integrates itself into maritime trade, especially in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, through its neighbourhood policies and maritime strategy. Japan, on the other hand, refers to the Indo-Pacific discourse "as a union of two seas", while for the United States, this discourse is put forward on the rebalancing strategy in Asia.

It can be said that India's maritime strategy has become more apparent with the development of Indo-American relations. India's position, aside from its importance for Eurasian geopolitics, is highly strategic for the United States. Through its policies applied to India, the United States is better able to maintain its relations with South Asia, Southeast Asia as well as Central Asia. India is a growing regional power with the ability to maintain direct control over the Indian Ocean, and so maintaining a good relationship with India is of vital importance for the regional policies of both the United States and Europe, bolstered by the trade and energy transmission routes across the Indian Ocean.

The changing conjuncture and the increasingly closer Indo-Western relations support the increased harmonization of the interests of both sides. In this period, Mahanian theories continue to be prominent in India, as is the case

in all Asia-Pacific countries. According to Mahan, whoever controls the Indian Oceans can control Asia completely, and India lies at the center of this theory based on its geopolitical position. This has led India to adopt a different foreign policy understanding that is based on Mahan's Maritime Dominance Theory, and to put forward a Mahanian Vision policy (Scott 2006).

The adoption of the "Act East" policy was a turning point in India's maritime strategy, and its official and practical geopolitical discourse underlined India's status as a maritime power. This discourse was developed in response to the contestation of the South China Sea and China's consideration of it as an inland waterway. The Indo-Pacific discourse highlights the active role of not only China but also the coastal countries to the Indo-Pacific Ocean, and for this reason, they prefer an open and free political discourse for the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific strategies of the United States and European nations are based on this.

"The Geopolitics", an online review, attributes the Indo-Pacific a central role for the 21st century: "The Indian Ocean is fast becoming the 'centre stage' of the twenty-first century and continues to serve as a meeting point. This role is crucial for all regional and global countries to achieve their military objectives" (The Geopolitics 2023).

The Indo-Pacific discourse is not only a linguistic study, in that it stems from the constructive and constitutive effects of discourse and has the effect of changing the meanings attributed to such factors as resource allocation, security and power in the region. The Indo-Pacific discourse creates a new rising power in the region to balance China's growing influence and emergence as a global power, and it is India in particular that is considered central to this rising power. The Indo-Pacific discourse aims to securely unite the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean economically and geopolitically, with an antithesis put forward by the countries in the region to counter China's unilateral targets for the region. For example, the straits in the Indian Ocean can be considered India's Pearl against China's Pearl Strategy.

In 2007, the "Widened Asia: Indo-Pacific" concept put forward by Captain Dr. Gurpreet in his article on India-Japan relations began to be adopted in contemporary official geopolitics. In 2010, Hillary Clinton's article "America's Pacific Century" highlighted Indo-Pacific strategy, while in 2013, Australia defined its geography as the Indo-Pacific, and US President Donald Trump in 2018 changed the name of Asia-Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command (Panda 2019).

Indo-Pacific strategy, especially developed by the United States, aims to balance China's power and seeks to position China as a regional power by uniting Indian Oceania and the Pacific Ocean, thus securing India a position as a

regional ally to the United States. The Indo-Pacific discourse thus supports the rise of the region as a natural space within the greater Asian geography. The Indo-Pacific discourse will also answer the question of redefining the region and who will be included and who will be excluded from this definition. Based on a discourse analysis of critical geopolitics, the Indo-Pacific discourse will determine who is a friend and who is an enemy.

In 2015, India and Japan issued their first joint statement on the Indo-Pacific concept, and this was followed in 2016 by an announcement made by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on their Pacific Vision. In 2017, US President Trump used the Free and Open Indo-Pacific rhetoric while announcing his Asia policy, and mentioned the inclusion of the Indo-Pacific in the National Security Strategy, and this was followed by announcements from Japan, India and France on their respective Indo-Pacific Visions.

In the 2017 Shangri-la Dialogue, the “Indo-Pacific” concept was mentioned only a few times, but such mentions had risen to 92 by 2018 (Choong 2019). The Indo-Pacific concept to be constructed by Australia, India, Japan and the United States under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is based on four pillars: rule of law, non-use of force, freedom of navigation and open sea principles, and the quartet has given the Indo-Pacific discourse the most space in formal and practical geopolitics, leading QUAD to be referred to unofficially as the Indo-Pacific Quad.

The goal of the spatialization/reconstruction of the area covered by the Indo-Pacific discourse is to balance the Chinese threat, to ensure maritime security and open & free maritime trade, and to increase cooperation in defense. The exclusion of China from the Indo-Pacific construction efforts is particularly noteworthy. In the redistribution of power in South and Southeast Asia, is it ethical to exclude China or to include it in a cooperative alliance? Would China perceive this exclusion as a threat or would it seek to be included in the cooperation? Although China's territorial proximity to South Asia is not perceived as a threat to China for the time being, this may change when such sensitive issues as the South China Sea start to be addressed. While the answers to these questions determine the space/area definition of the Indo-Pacific discourse, it is obvious that this discourse continues to be used in official and practical geopolitics, and with growing importance.

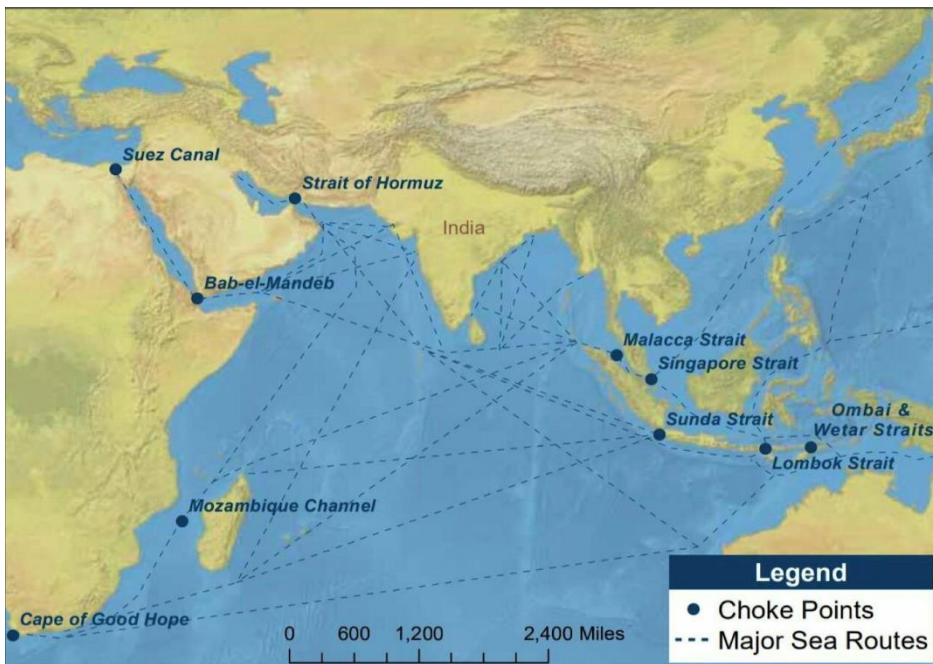
### **India's role in the construction of the Indo-Pacific**

India, one of the world's leading economies, tipped to become the world's most populous country and democracy by 2030, is also supported by the United States in terms of its style of governance. The presence of a democratic India in the

region in contrast to socialist China is an important factor for the United States. India is actively engaged not only with its neighboring countries, but also with major powers seeking to take on an active role in the Asian region. India has been conducting military exercises in the Indian Ocean with both the United States and Japan. With the MILAN exercises, it carries out the Far East Naval Command. It plays an active role with such allies as the United States and Japan in the MALABAR exercises, with France in the VARUNA exercises, with Russia in the INDRA exercises and with the United Kingdom in the KONKAN exercises, while developing strategies to elevate it to the position of regional power. It is engaged not only in economic and commercial co-operation with the countries in the region but also in security-oriented co-operation with the West.

Under the premiership of Modi, India has redefined its identity as a protector and supporter of South Asian countries: Emerging Regional Power and Global Power of Tomorrow. This foreign policy concept has its basis in the Raj tradition – which was a British strategy aimed at protecting the Indian territory by dominating the coastal areas and waterways linked to the Indian Ocean. Today, however, the goal is to exert control over regional maritime trade.

Map 2. Major transit routes in the Indo-Pacific.



Source: Darshana M Baruah 2023.

An analysis of the above map reveals the importance of India's role in securing the maritime transport routes in the Indo-Pacific region.

Based on its Indo-Pacific discourse, India is preparing to assume an active role not only in its region, but also the world. At the logo presentation of the 2023 G20 Summit, India declared its desire to take on such a role with the motto "One World, One Family, One Future". In his opening speech, Prime Minister Modi explained that the world looks for hope under the leadership of cooperative leaders, and emphasized the importance of the G20 Presidency meeting both for the world and for India itself. He said that India would follow a friendly approach to the development of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, referred to as the North-South divide in literature and as the Global South by Modi during the G20 Presidency Meeting. Instead of a "First World-Third World" discourse, a "One World" discourse was preferred, and was one of the slogans of India's 2023-G20 Leaders' Summit. Promising that the summit would be free of such conceptual definitions, Modi said that it was an opportunity to show India's willingness to act as a global integrator for countries outside the Western world.

India is seen as a reliable state in the Indo-Pacific, and while China's rise is perceived as a threat, India's rise is not. Due to the geopolitical importance of the Indian ocean, having a reliable quarterback is important for both the region and the world as a whole to counter such negativities as smuggling and maritime terrorism, and India can be expected to play a most active role in this regard. India's involvement in the reconstruction of the Indo-Pacific ensures a secure environment, based on international norms and rules, for economy and maritime trade, and its membership of many organizations in the region supports its ability to play an active role. Its efforts in coordination with the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as well as QUAD and AUKUS, ensure it can play a key role in the maintenance of stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

According to Kwon, the Indo-Pacific is meant to build a transition of power in the Asia-Pacific region. Although Indo-Pacific would seem to overlap with the Asia-Pacific concept, their political meanings differ. The Asia-Pacific represents an area where economic prosperity and security guarantees are inherently interdependent, while the Indo-Pacific, in contrast, is a conceptually open and free economic-security nexus. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are forced to balance their economic dependence on China and their dependence on the United States for the provision of security, and it can be argued that this dilemma has influenced the content of the new Indo-Pacific discourse and imbued its meaning with challenges or changes to the status quo. In this sense,

the Indo-Pacific concept is based on the realization of China's assertive discourse in the Indian and Pacific Oceans as an anti-discourse by the United States. In other words, the China factor is the pivotal area surrounding the Indo-Pacific (Kwon 2021).

There are some differences in India's Indo-Pacific strategy, including India's preference for a discourse that does not seek to exclude or criticize China. Developing an Indo-Pacific discourse based on inclusiveness and cooperation, Modi is aware of the need to cooperate with China, and to be protected from the Chinese threat, and so the spatialization policy that India is trying to build with the Indo-Pacific is tied closely to the United States. On the one hand, China's infrastructure projects with India's neighbors have aroused concern on the Indian side, and have led India to launch various projects with Japan in the region, although India aims to advance these projects without adopting an "anti-China" rhetoric. India has played an important role in promoting connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region and can work with both regional countries and regional organisations without antagonising China. Despite Japan and Australia's existing alliances with the US, India's long-standing policy of Non-Alignment has been an advantage for maintaining a peaceful relationship with China. Now that India is pursuing a more active foreign policy, on the basis of its positive relations with Russia, Central Asian Republics, Iran and Europe, the construction of the Indo-Pacific region under the Indian umbrella seems more feasible and will lead to a better understanding of India's importance in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of India is to change the balance in the Asian region through an Indo-Pacific discourse to counter the focus on China and the Asia-Pacific, and to reconstruct the region with an understanding centered on India, especially in South Asia (Indian Continent). As the largest populated democracy in the region, India can become the most important ally of the United States in the future as a partner in the quadruple Indo-Pacific alliance known as QUAD with also Australia and Japan, surrounding the South China Sea.

As such a process has the potential to escalate India-China tensions, New Delhi takes a cautious approach to the "Indo-Pacific" concept, and considers the Indo-Pacific to be a natural extension of its worldview rather than a strategy. That said, the Indo-Pacific will also help China expand its sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean and strengthen its strategy implemented with the "Belt and Road Initiative". Undoubtedly, the Indo-Pacific is a strategic conceptualization based on a geopolitical base and has not yet matured or been exhausted. The two-

dimensional result that emerges in the light of these data for the United States, India and China is the basic that will shape the Indo-Pacific.

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