



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES**  
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**INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC AND SECURITY STUDIES PROGRAMME**

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Seminar on

**Asia-Pacific Power Dynamics: Strategic Implications And Options For India**

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***Concept Note***

In the emerging geopolitical discourse today, the Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a major centre of geostrategic interest. Accompanying this change in perception is a change in scope, with strategists not just considering the typical Indian Ocean, but also the western, and sometimes even central Pacific Ocean. The Asia-Pacific ranges from East Africa to the western and central Pacific, including Japan and Australia. Asia-Pacific concept reflected a new reality shaped by the rise of China and India, a revitalized Japan, along with the continued primacy of the United States and also signifies the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean thus creating a single strategic system. There are several reasons for the growing importance of Asia-Pacific region as a geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic space today.

First, with all the countries focusing more on the sea and adopting maritime oriented geo-strategies, it becomes evident that seas would continue to remain a vital part of the well-being of many national economies, commerce and security landscapes. This is demonstrated by a growing demand for resources—both living and non-living, expanding maritime trade, rising maritime boundary disputes and political tensions. Second, the region's strategic and economic significance has also been growing exponentially. Especially with the rise of Asian powers like China and India, trade has surged. In fact, Asia-Pacific in a sense is all about the growing centrality of these two emerging powers to global geopolitics. Incidentally, the Asia-Pacific incorporates some of the busiest sea lanes in the world and has important choke points. Undoubtedly, the rising energy and investment flows along with above factors make Asia Pacific an important area to examine and study the developments of strategic relations and power dynamics.

Finally, the growing economic and military power of China has unsettled many regional countries prompting them to encourage other major regional and external powers to engage in the region. Many are apprehensive that their political and strategic interests may be under threat with the rise of powerful China and its assertive maritime behaviour. It is in fact these concerns that have aided in

advancing the concept of 'Asia-Pacific' and 'Indo-Pacific', which is evident with the U.S. pivot to Asia and the direct mention and discussion in Australia's Defence White Paper (2013). Incidentally, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh too referred this terminology last December 2012, when he moved to enhance India's relations with ASEAN.

Consequently, within this region, emergence of strategic cooperation between countries and systems of alliances form has acquired strategic importance. The U.S. that seeks to maintain their pre-eminence is nesting the system of alliances with its traditional allies such as Japan, Australia, South Korea and Philippines apart from seeking to associate with the rising powers like India. Apparently the U.S. is attempting to offer a degree of solidity to Asia-Pacific geopolitics so as to ensure that no other nation challenges its power in the region. On the other hand, China in the hope to consolidate its position in the region evidently creating and shaping strategic partnership with countries like North Korea, Cambodia, Myanmar and Pakistan in economic as well as security terms. Put simply, the different nations have different preference and perception about the region and it can be inferred as the US desires for a multipolar Asia though like to have a unipolar world but whereas China wants a multipolar world but a unipolar Asia; and notably revitalized Japan and India desire a multi-polar Asia as well a multi-polar world.

Further, there are a number of competing political priorities, conflicting economic interests and changing security perspectives of regional as well as extra-regional powers. Although today it is not any single group aimed against another in countering due to economic matrix and consequences, but rather there is a sense of apprehension about others and this adds for subtle diversity involved in emerging Asia-Pacific affairs. The region that has most economically and politically powerful nations is also an emerging theatre of conflict, where conflicts can break out over sovereign disputes and the posture of powerful nations. The conflict in South China Sea and East China Sea are a good case in point. The possibility of China and the US facing off in the Asia-Pacific region has become even more real with the Chinese ASBM and the US ABM, though the Chinese and the US administrations maintained that it had no intention of going that far.

In this context, the important questions are what is India's role in the changing geopolitical power dynamics in Asia-Pacific region? And where does India stand in the emerging systems of alliances formation? Asian countries vary in the extent to which they seek to formalize Asia-Pacific alliances. While it is expected that the U.S., Japan and Australia would be more proactive in seeking formal arrangements, India is likely to be less willing, albeit still keen to work with other countries in the region to ensure peace and stability. For New Delhi, a degree of ambiguity and equivocality serves its interests in the region. Perhaps any direct and vocal engagement with one group will not only run the risk of antagonising China; but it will also diminish the freedom of action that India associates with its non-alignment policy. Its hesitancy notwithstanding, India may invariably find itself a part of this collective security framework, within which it will need to work with countries such as the U.S., Japan and Australia. Notably, the US pivot to Asia entails a strategic realignment that would accord an important role to India and the Asia-Pacific in the near future. But undoubtedly India is an important stakeholder in the Asia-Pacific region and as a responsible actor, it will have to employ some astute diplomacy by demonstrating that it can work equally well with China given the latter's respect for Indian concerns.

It is in this context that the International Strategic and Security Studies (ISSSP), National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, is organising the above seminar. We hope the seminar will facilitate a debate on the concept of Indo-Pacific region, the emerging strategic trends in the region and ramifications in policy formulations among a number of Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean countries, particularly India and its relevance for regional stability and security. The conference aims to bring together scholars, experts and analysts to deliberate on the issues related to the Asia-Pacific region and the complex relationship matrix among the relevant countries. The conference will be divided into four sessions.

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#### **SESSION 1: ASIA-PACIFIC: PERSPECTIVES FROM CHINA**

The rise of China has brought the Indian Ocean region and Western Pacific Ocean region into the framework of changing geo-politics. Undoubtedly, China has taken a lead in the economic and technological domain, and triggered apprehension among the regional powers. But does this imply that most of the Asia-Pacific littorals would side with Beijing during any global conflict/tensions? A majority may have welcomed China's rise economically but it has also led to a degree of dismay among the same group of countries. Beijing's military rise and its assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea and East China Sea have raised hackles in various world capitals. The tensions have got more complicated with the inclusion of the United States and its allies such as Japan, Philippines etc. In this context, how does China perceive the Asia-Pacific region? What does China's assertiveness in South and East China Sea signify for the region? Will China's close relationship with some Asian littorals like Cambodia transform into a military base for the former? How would China deal with countries like Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia if they sign a maritime security pact underwritten by the USA, to assure integrity of their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)? How would it react if their vessels are chased away after warning salvos by joint live fire manoeuvres all across the Paracel and Spartleys by the combined navies of the Littoral Maritime Security Pact (LMS) pact and the US Navy? Does China expect any strong opposition (in military terms) from concerned countries like the USA, India or Japan in the near future? Finally, while things are already tense with the U.S. and in the SCS, would Beijing launch any operations along the LAC against India?

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#### **SESSION 2: ASIA-PACIFIC: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE US AND RUSSIA**

The region has been under the influence of and attracted the attention of the major powers for its strategic and economic significance. In particular, the changing geo-political scenario compels external stake holders such as the US and the Russia to respond accordingly as China looms large over their strategic calculations. In this context, it is important to understand how major powers react to the emerging geopolitics in the region, categorisation of concept 'Asia-Pacific' and its implications. Particularly, how will the US respond if there is a confrontation between China and other littorals including its closest ally Japan? What counter-action would the US undertake if China's Second Artillery Corps places their strategic missile forces at a higher state of alert? Would the US utilise its ASAT

capabilities and destroy China's space based assets before they become more aggressive in their assault in the South China Sea (SCS)? Will the US or Russia oppose China's move to establish the 'Third Island Chain Strategy' under the pretext of providing sanctuary to their energy and trade Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)? If so, will they look for any military help from India or other regional powers? What are the factors that may influence the US to work towards bringing about a consensus on Asia-Pacific? To what extent Russia's attempt to re-engage in the region would impact on the notion of Indo-Pacific? What compels the Russia to consider itself a major stakeholder in the region?

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### **SESSION 3: ASIA-PACIFIC: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTHEAST AND EAST ASIA**

Southeast and East Asia has been one of the main theatres of global politics for more than a century. Regional powers, either individually or collectively have played a prominent role in influencing the geopolitics of the region. The emergence of Asia as the fulcrum of 21st century world politics requires a greater understanding of their perception of the Asia-Pacific. In this context, it is essential to understand: How does Southeast and East Asia perceive the changing geopolitics and arise of Asia-Pacific region concept? What would be its possible reactions to this new formulation? How would these countries react if China undertook random seize and search operations of vessels bound for their ports, and the frequency of such events continue to rise? Is China using aggressive measures to bully neighbours for its own gain? Will these countries flex their military muscles against China? Will they allow batteries to be established in their country as the US ABM program matures? What would be the reaction of these countries if and when China forms an Island chain that runs an arc from the north of Japan, east of the Mariana Trench passing through the Makkasar and the Lombok Straits extending to the Chagos archipelago? Particularly will Japan, South Korea and Australia oppose China's move to establish the 'Third Island Chain Strategy' under the pretext of providing sanctuary to their energy and trade SLOCs? What are the possible responses and options that Southeast Asia and East Asia would bring about?

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### **SESSION 4: ASIA-PACIFIC: PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIA**

India is an emerging power and an important stakeholder in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, it is well served to analyse India's role in the region in the new regional categorisation of the Asia-Pacific. Specifically how does India perceive the region? What are the consequences of changing geopolitics in the region for India? How far the US pivot to Asia-Pacific would determine the dynamics among India, China, US, Japan and other states in the region? To what extent would an alliance formation serve India's interests? From New Delhi's perspectives, how much of a threat is China's technological advancement in the Asia-Pacific region? Can the tensions in South China Sea spill over to Eastern Indian Ocean (say Bay of Bengal) or the Line of Actual Control?