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BALANCE OF THREAT AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE US-LED MINI-LATERAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA-PACIFIC

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper argues that the emergence of China has influenced the distribution of capabilities in the global as well as regional political structure and consequently, the US with strong apprehensions realized to transform its traditional Hub-and-Spoke model (bilateral approach) in the region. Based in existing qualitative as well as quantitative data, the critical commentary has been drawn while using the integrative review technique. For theoretical apprehensions, Stephen M. Walt's theory of balance of power is employed that gives a quite realistic depiction of the evolution in the US-Asia-Pacific strategy where the balance of threat has surpassed the balance of power. The paper finds that the US and allies perceive China's assertive behavior and increased defense budget as a threat to the status quo (liberal order) as well as the threat of the area expansion in the region. Therefore, the US and allies particularly Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea have increased the defense cooperation with each other in order to balance the threat against China. With an aim to maintain and sustain hegemony and interests in the region, the US led bilateral alliances are shifting towards the Trilateral (Australia-US-Japan, US-Japan-ROK and Australia-UK-US) and Quadrilateral alliance system (Australia,

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India, Japan and the US). Hence, the Asia-Pacific has been observing the emergence and functioning of a new mini-lateral security alliance system under the leadership of the US.

## INTRODUCTION

For more than half of the century, the United States (US) has remained a leading power responsible for maintaining the peace and stability by employing multiple means and modes in the Asia-Pacific. It has played a critical role in shaping the economic and geopolitical contours of the region through trade and alliance partnership. In the global politics, the alliances have vital significance as they are viewed as an integral part of the statecraft. After the end of World War II, the Great Britain, though won the war along with allies yet became too weak to act like a hegemonic power. Due to poor financial condition, it became very difficult for the overstretched Great Britain to maintain control and stability in the world politics. The distribution of power led the transition from Pax-Britannica to Pax-Americana as the US with strong economy and powerful military started to assert its power across the globe in post-World War II (Barlas, Yılmaz & Güvenç, 2020). Since the demise of Pax-Britannica, the US realized the strategic, political and economic significance of the Asia-Pacific and under a Grand Strategy; the various nations of the region were engaged for the greater cooperation. During the early period of Cold War in Asia-Pacific, the Hub-and-Spoke model focusing on the bilateral defense relations, initiated by the US, came into existence under the San Francisco System with aim to counter and contain the possible threat from the USSR. It followed the Hub and Spoke alliance arrangement in the region that means the US operates as a Hub whereas other states including Japan, Philippine, South Korea, Thailand and Australia as Spokes (Park, 2011). During the Cold War, the USSR was an influential power, to some extent counter hegemonic force that posed considerable threat to the interests of the US but it remained unsuccessful in grasping the regional leadership in the Asia-Pacific.

With the end of the Cold War, the US has competently established its hegemony and explicitly advocated for liberal norms, values and rule based international liberal order. In the post-Cold War era, it became a priority for the US and other nations such as Japan, South Korea, ASEAN and others to engage with each other for maximizing their security and economic interests. Nonetheless, the US smoothly gained and enjoyed the hegemonic status in the region by developing good ties with the regional allies. The hegemonic US not only manipulated the tangible or material incentives rather also endeavored to ideologically influence the regional peripheral states (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990).

The US was least concerned in bringing the change in the Hub and Spoke security arrangement in the Asia-Pacific after the demise of the USSR. However, since the last decade, the rise of China has alarmed the bell for the preponderant US and to some extent, has impacted its dominant role in the region. Keeping in view the challenge of China, Hillary Clinton in her famous article in 2011, in *Foreign Policy* with the title, *America's Pacific Century*, expressed that for the future politics, the Asia-Pacific will become the center of gravity (Clinton, 2011). One of the explanations of withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan was the US intentions to fully focus on the Asia-Pacific in order to contain China's influence and sustain the status quo in the region.

Likewise, the US Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) has argued that neither the Central Asia, nor Afghanistan and Middle East is their priority anymore rather the Asia-Pacific at the top, the Europe at second and Western Hemisphere will remain at third level (Biden, 2021). Therefore, the US government has viewed China as a vital threat to its primacy and it started to transform its existing or traditional strategy of Hub and Spokes to contain China and sustain its hegemony in the Asia-Pacific (Wilkins, 2019).

The paper follows the descriptive and analytical style and employs the qualitative and somewhat quantitative mode, while referring the Chicago Council Survey data and Pew Research Center. With the help of integrative review technique, the secondary qualitative data has been critically examined. The scheme of the paper has been divided into six parts, preceded by the Part I that is introduction, Part II identifies the US interests in the Asia-Pacific and core argument, Part III covers the theoretical framework that is balance of threat and its application, Part IV comprises of the US traditional approach or Hub and Spokes security architecture as well as the emergence of new trend of unilateralism in the Asia-Pacific and finally, part VI concludes the argument.

### *The Interests of the US in the Asia-Pacific*

The sole objective of the US in the Asia-Pacific remains to maintain its predominance in the region which reflected in the Hub and Spoke structure and time after time, the US openly expressed its core interests as well. Some of the enduring vital interests of the US in the Asia-Pacific are outlined here;

- Maintaining and sustaining the primacy or hegemony in the Asia-Pacific
- Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile delivery systems (Przy setup & Saunders, 2017)
- Ensuring the security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and maritime checkpoints
- Advancing the US influence and promoting the core liberal values including democracy and liberal order
- Preserving the diplomatic, military and economic access to the region
- Enhancing the effectiveness and efficacy of its allies in the region

For achieving the strategic interests and maintaining superiority in the region, the US has sufficient military existence in the region and military bases are located in various regional countries. Nevertheless, the US has particularly focused on its allies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, and Thailand including the islands like Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean and Guam in Pacific that act as its military facilities.

**Figure 1:** US Military Presence in Asia-Pacific

With the focus on the power, interests, order, ideals and community, the US has remained consistent in pursuing a grand strategy towards the Asia-Pacific that is a synthesis of realist and liberal thinking. The American-led order has encouraged the political and economic transition of the regional countries but at the same time, such transition has gradually started to undermine the US interests. For instance, extra ordinary economic development, active diplomacy and military modernization of China is bringing serious political and economic implications for the US strategic interests. The increasing political role, defense spending, economic rise and diplomatic engagement of China with the Asia-Pacific nations pose significant threat to its national interests (Ikenberry, 2014). Rising of any power including China in the Asia-Pacific clearly signifies the threat to the US interests in the region and therefore, it remains focused to prevent the expected rise and signaled to follow the minilateralism in its foreign policy. Hence, the core argument holds that the US has been actively transforming the bilateral alliances to the minilateral (multilateral) alliances in order to balance the threat and contain the influence of China as well as sustain its primacy in the Asia-Pacific.

### ***Balance of Threat Framework***

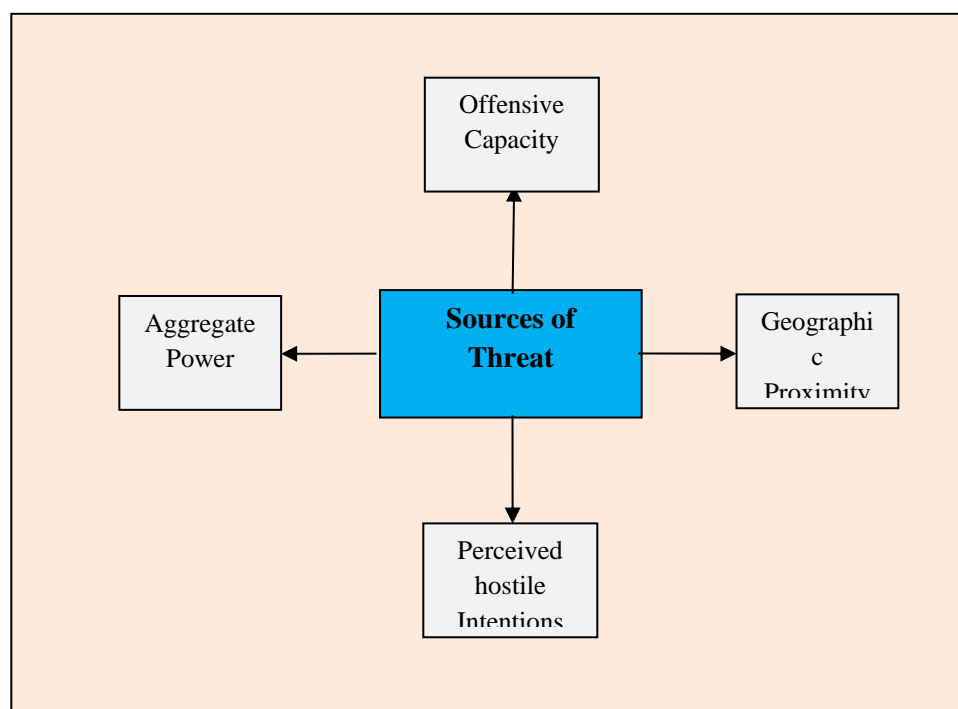
Stephen M. Walt proposed the balance of threat theory in his in his eminent book, *The Origins of Alliances* (1987). Walt challenged the basic premise of the concept of balance of power and argued that just power variable could not extensively apprehend the behavior of the state in forming the alliances. He assumed that the balance of threat perspective should be viewed as a refinement of the traditional theory of balance of power (Walt, 1985 & 1987). Although Walt never disregarded the role of power in shaping the alliances, yet he considered that power could not be taken as an exclusive or ultimate variable as

it does not provide a sufficient and comprehensive apprehension of the phenomenon. On the basis of that same motive and rationale, Walt endeavored to plausibly amend the traditional theory of balance of power and brought the concept of the balance of threat where it is assumed that threat plays a vital role in determining the alliance formation. While putting the argument of threat, Walt clearly separated the concept of power from the threat. Walt (1985) has also outlined few assumptions of the balance of threat theory:

- In case of any external threat, states will always align with others (allies) to counter and manage that threat
- An emerging power is viewed as a threat and the countries form alliance against it in order to ensure their survival and security
- If the aggregate power of a threatening state is greater, the greater will be chances for other state to align against it
- The geographic distance plays a crucial role in shaping the inter-state relations as if a powerful state is nearer, the chances of making alliance against that state will be higher
- The greater a state's offensive capabilities, the greater the tendency for other to align against it (Walt, 1987)

The theory of balance of threat emphasizes on the four core factors or variables such as “aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capacity and perceived hostile intentions” recognized as the sources of threat (Keohane,1988). These variables are very useful in perceiving, assessing and evaluating the threat purportedly caused by other states.

**Figure 2:** Sources of the Evaluation of Threats



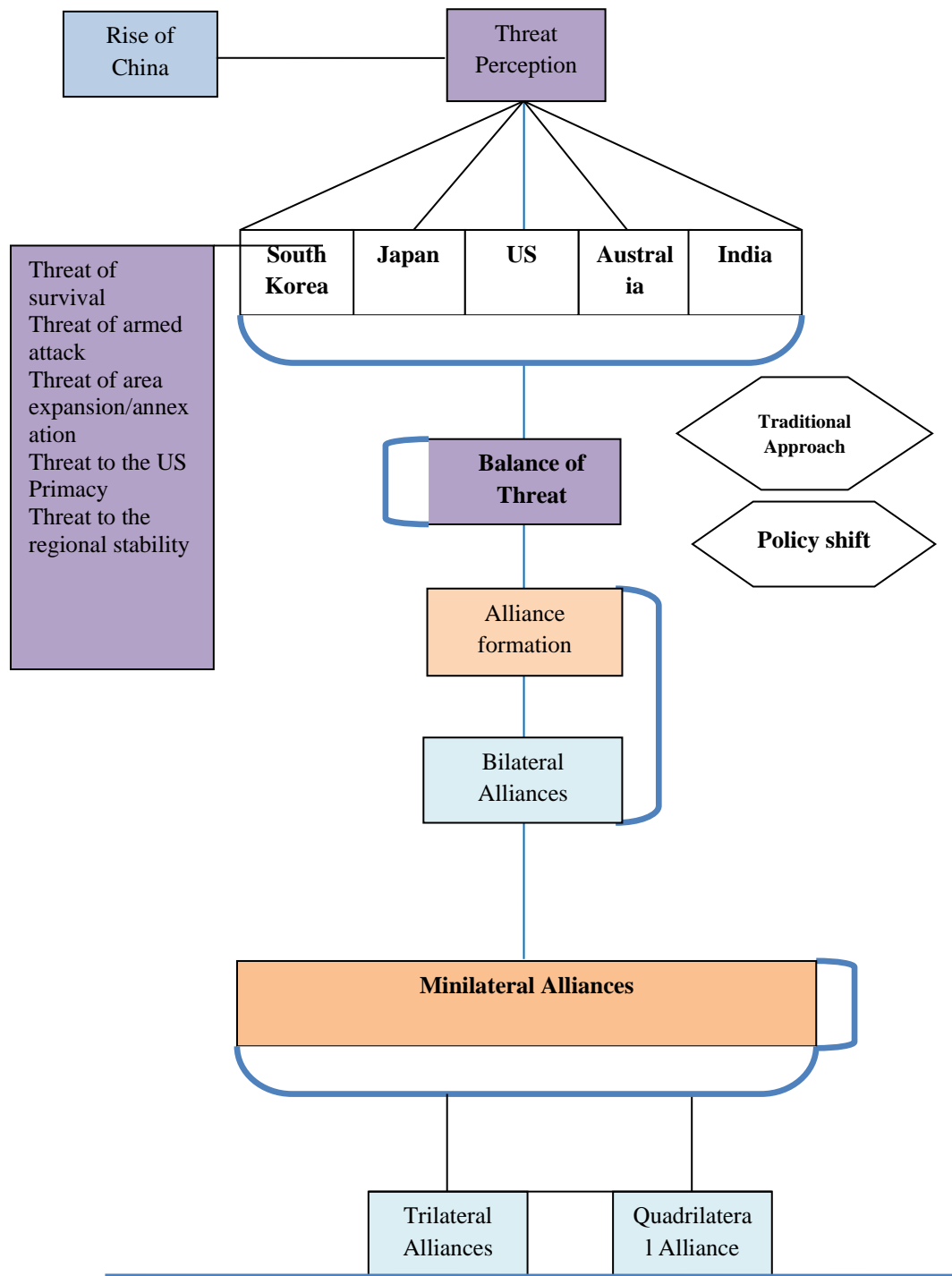
By aggregate power, it means a state's size, population, industry, economic capabilities and other resources, geographic proximity means that a state's capacity to cause threat for other state may be impeded by distance. So the states which are close may receive a greater threat than other states which are far away from each other. Offensive capacity is all about having inherent military capacity and ability to threat territorial integrity of any other state at an acceptable cost and the number of military personnel and weapons come under this category. The perceived hostile intentions are aspects which are related a state's perception of other state. The perception about the hostile intentions of a country may be in the form of modernizing military, or increasing the defense spending and such steps linked with the dangerous ambitions (Walt, 1987, Walt 1988, Gause, 2003, Dwivedi, 2012& Watson, 2001).

### ***Application and Relevance of Balance of Threat in Asia-Pacific:***

As far as application of this framework is concerned, Walt expressed that before the WWI and WWII, the fear of the German expansionism was highly perceptible amongst European countries and that threat inspired them to form alliance against it. Likewise, during the Cold War, it was the threat of the Soviet Union that pushed the European countries to go under the umbrella of the US and ensure their survival and security. In contemporary times, the example of Iran nuclear crisis also validates the Walt's framework of balance of threat as the US and Israel have formed an alliance against Iran considering its military capabilities and intentions as a threat to the hegemony of Israel in Middle East along with the US interests in the region. The figure illustrates the balance of threat framework;

The balance of threat framework of Walt has been employed in this study in order to comprehend the transformation of the US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific with focus on the particular countries. Since the anarchy is the enduring feature in the global politics, therefore, the possibility of external threat always persists. In this backdrop, the rise of China has caused the serious threat for the US hegemony as well as for the national interests of the regional states in the Asia-Pacific (Layne, 2008). With strong aggregate of power, geographic proximity, and offensive military capabilities (transformation) along with the hostile intentions, China is perceived as a central peril for other states. The external threat is being perceived by the regional actors including the US, Japan, India, Australia and South Korea and in order to secure their national interests against the uncertain intentions of the rising China, they have been developing trilateral and quadrilateral security seeking alliances under the US leadership. Moreover, while realizing the geographic proximity, the neighboring and regional states of China such as Japan, South Korea, India and others have explicitly reaffirmed and reinforced the US presence in the region.

**Figure 3:** Rise of China, Balance of Threat and US’ Minilateral Architecture in Asia-Pacific



Traditionally, the US was contented with the bilateral defense arrangements with some of the regional countries; however, the emergence of China led to the change in the US and allies threat perception (Noh, 2014). The most important driver for bringing the shift in US policy remains the US as being a hegemonic power; it determines the threat perception and engaged the alliances accordingly. States, being rational actors, tend to counter the perceived external threats by extending the security cooperation with other states and in this regard,

the alliances are the finest means of security against adversaries. The US Allies share the threat of armed attack, area expansion, and regional instability while these threats directly and circuitously may negatively influence the US primacy in the region. On the basis of some common priorities and threats, the regional states including Japan, South Korea, Australia and India have stoutly aligned with each other under the US leadership. Apprehending the political, military or strategic threat from China, allies emphasized on the indispensability of the US led liberal order for preserving and ensuring the peace and stability in the region (Jung, Lee & Lee, 2021). Hence, the US has been transporting a big shift in its Hub and Spokes strategy and resultantly, a mini-lateral security structure emerging in the Asia-Pacific.

### *Hub-and-Spokes Architecture in the Asia-Pacific*

The anarchic structure and external threat play a significant role in determining the formation of alliances in the global politics. One of the core purposes of an alliance is to strengthen the security of the allies along with the promotion of their national interests in the global world (Wight, 1978). Walt defined an alliance as “a formal or informal arrangement of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”. This definition covers the formal and informal treaties and commitments respectively, as the states might be interested in developing cooperation with each other but reluctant to sign any formal treaty (Walt 1987). Considering the threat from the USSR during the early 1950s, the US apprehensively developed the political-military and economic ties with few the Asia-Pacific allies while following the San Francisco System.

**Figure 4:** The US’ Collective Defense Arrangements of in Asia-Pacific

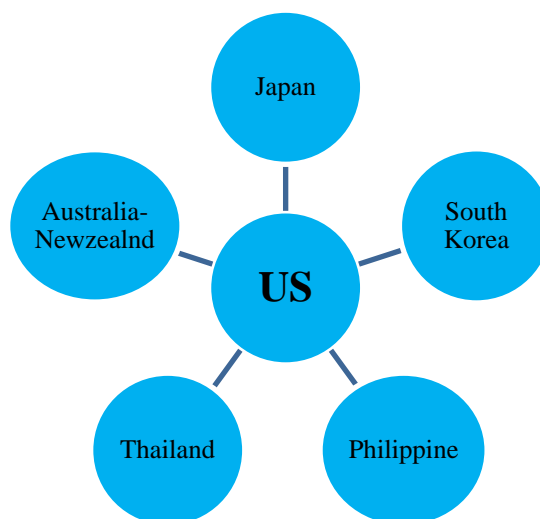


In the backdrop of security threats, the US finalized the defense agreements, one after another, with their allies in Asia. For instance, a defense agreement with Japan in September 1951 (later matured in 1960), with the Republic of Korea in October 1953, with the Australia and New Zealand (ANZUS) in



September in 1953, with the Philippine in August 30, 1951 and South East Asia-Treaty in September 8, 1954. These treaties majorly signed at bilateral level by the states, recognized that in case of any armed attack against any of the two states, it would be declared as threatening to their own peace and safety and further, they will mutually act against the attack in accordance with its constitutional processes. The term Hub-and-Spokes became very popular for understanding and describing the US alliance system in Asia (Mabon,1988).

**Figure 5:** US as a Hub and Allies as Spokes in the Asia-Pacific

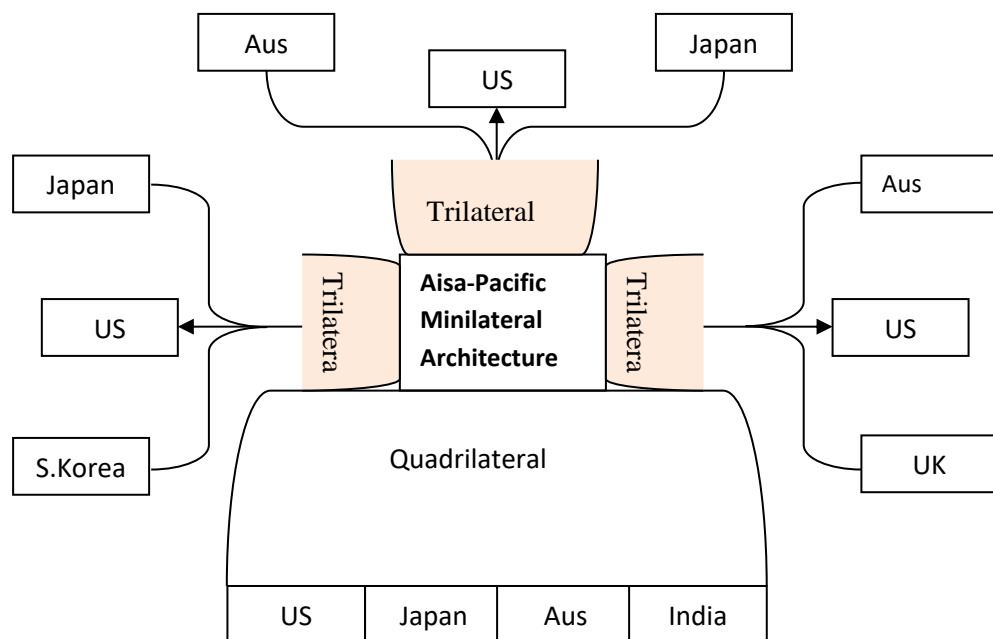


The Hub-and-Spoke model has multiple apprehensions and one of the explanations is that the system emerged because it was what the dominant actor, the US desired at that time. Additionally, the subjective explanation emphasizes on the social identity theory that considers that on the basis of their sense of shared identity, the US remained at ease to form a multilateral alliance with their European allies. On the other hand, the factor of shared identity was missing in Asia and even the Asian Allies were considered as different or inferior therefore, the US could not develop any multilateral alliance with them (Hemmer & Katzenstein, 2002). It is also argued that Asian norms prioritize the non-intervention aspect of state sovereignty which diminished the chances of developing a NATO type multilateral alliance (Acharya, 2010). Furthermore, some of the Asian states did not ignore the historical memories; for instance, the role of Japan remained quite controversial with respect to atrocities that it committed during the WW II. The Asian states realized the inclusion of Japan in any collective defense arrangement would not be a good idea (Izumikawa, 2020). The US preferred the Hub-and-Spokes system than a multilateral alliance because it maximized influence over its allies. Initially, the US-alliance network was formed to counter the threat from the USSR but with the swift rise of China, a new life was breathed into the US-alliance network in the Asia-Pacific and the Hub-and-Spokes system has been transformed into minilateral alliance system.

### *The US and Minilateral Security Architecture*

At the beginning of the post-Cold War period, the US stance on multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific was that it ‘was an idea whose time had not yet come’ (Evans 1994). Although the US endorsed multilateral security dialogue in Asia, yet it did not follow words with deeds to any great extent (Harding, 1994). Beyond doubt, the bilateral alliances of the US with Asia-Pacific nations have boosted the confidence of the allies in maintaining peace and stability in the region. However, the emerging regional political, diplomatic and security challenges and threats have motivated the US to reaffirm the bilateral alliances as well as develop the mini-lateral security cooperation among the regional states especially focusing on the important strategic partners such as Japan, Korea, India and Australia. The common priorities and fear amongst the regional states have stimulated them to get stoutly aligned with each other against the common threat and the US is the leading actor in this regard.

**Figure 6:** The US and Minilateral Security Architecture



The former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton in her article “America’s Pacific Century” indicated the intentions and objectives of the US and outlined six priorities; Reinforcing bilateral alliances, Deepening relations with emerging powers, Re-engaging with multilateral regional institutions, expanding commerce and investments, forging a large military presence and advancing democracy and human rights in the region (Clinton, 2011). The mentioned points have already been implemented as the transformation in the traditional approach of the US towards the alliances is discernible and identifiable. Moreover, a series of foundational documentations was also published around the Asia-Pacific policies. For instance, the US administration published first foundational document, December 2017 National Security

Strategy, the second document, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report 2019-Preparedness, Partnership and Promoting a Networked Region was published by the department of defense and third document, Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision was published by the Department of State. The China factor remained a key focus in the mentioned documents and the US perceived it as a revisionist state in the region posing threat for the US interests and shared vision of the allies. Therefore, the given geopolitical environment demands the proactive and prominent role from the US, allies and partners located in the region for safeguarding the shared vision (Paskal, 2021). Nevertheless, the minilateralism in the Asia-Pacific has been considered as the most rationale and feasible strategy by the states balancing the threats as well as competing for regional superiority (Swanstrom & Panda, 2021). The new challenges such as rising regional security threats, North Korea's Nuclearization, terrorism and assertive behavior of China in the region have made the US and allies to realize that the early 1950s bilateral alliances are essential but cannot serve their interests in the contemporary geopolitics. Howbeit, together these problems particularly the rise of China has worked as a causal variable that compelled the US to bring the change in its traditional bilateral policy in Asia-Pacific.

### ***The US and Trilateral Alliances***

In the backdrop of the emergence of China, the approach of the US became evident to extend the bilateral alliances to the trilateral alliance and in this regard, the US deeply engaged with the likeminded countries in the region. The trilateral alliances particularly US-Japan-Australia, US-Japan and South Korea and Australia-UK and US (AUKUS) have great strategic significance for regional security order.

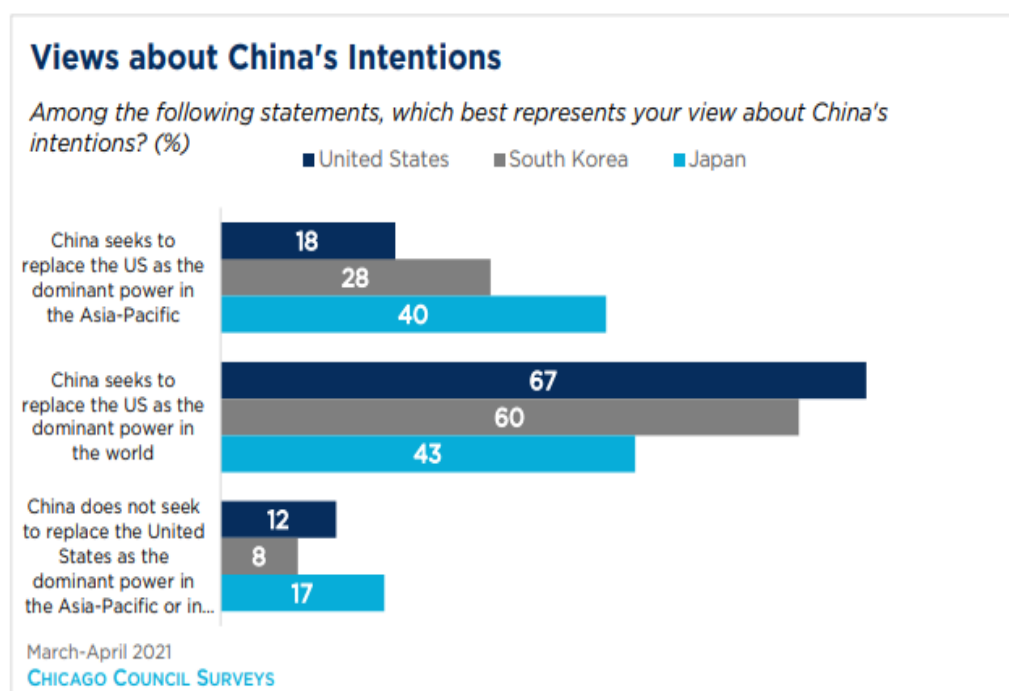
### ***US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Alliance:***

In post-Cold War, the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) is one of the most active and significant trilateral security alliances emerged in the Asia-Pacific region established in 2002. Although each state has its own priorities and interests, however, maintaining the existing liberal international order and promoting the elemental principles such as democracy, human rights, free trade and freedom of navigation are the integral part of TSD framework. With the support of US, this platform also provided opportunity to the Japan to strengthen its strategic ties with Australia (Shearer, 2017). The threats from North Korea as well as the sprouting power of China in the region have been particularly considered by this trilateral cooperation. In addition, under the support and leadership of the US, the signal has been conveyed to the rising China (Green, 2014). In 2016, the three countries advanced their cooperation and signed a Trilateral Intelligence Sharing Agreement (TISA) with aim to share classified data with each other. In January 2017, Japan and Australia signed an enhanced Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) aspired to exchange not only the foodstuff rather cooperation was extended to the exchange of the ammunition during exercises, relief operations as well as the peacekeeping operations (Tatsumi, 2015). In the same year, the defense ministers as well as foreign ministers met and detailed joint statements were

also issued. It is plainly argued that the trilateral security cooperation worked well for all of the participants. Since the threat perceptions were the common phenomenon amongst them and they rationally not only balanced the threat rather also showed assertiveness and advocated for their interests based regional order.

#### ***US-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Alliance:***

The trilateral partnership between the US and its two allies, Japan and South Korea (Republic of Korea), has long been a strategic goal of the US foreign policy. However, it remained reluctant to intervene in the tricky relationship between Japan and South Korea. The Korean War influenced the behavior of the policy makers and made it clear to them Japan and South Korea (ROK) are interlinked with respect to security (Snider, Sohl & Soeya, 2016). Despite the historical conflictual bilateral relations between the Japan and ROK, the US cautiously and deliberately continued its efforts to bring them closer. In 1999, a Trilateral Coordination Oversight Group (TCOG) was formed by the US-Japan and South Korea (ROK) in order to counter the North Korean intentions in the East Asia with a solid consensus based policy. The North Korean nuclear challenge and offensive intentions became the reason for the emergence of the US-Japan-South Korea (ROK) shared trilateral cooperation. The Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group helped to institutionalize this three-way cooperation, at least in as dealing with North Korea. Close security cooperation among Tokyo, Washington, and Seoul has already paid rich dividends in pressurizing North Korea both to keep its Agreed Framework commitments and stop testing missiles, as well as helping in setting the stage for direct North-South dialogue by demonstrating to Pyongyang that a divide-and-conquer strategy would not work (Cossa, 2000). The three-way relationship among the US, Japan, and ROK will have a profound impact on the geopolitical environment and will help define the nature of the US-Japan-China relationship and other regional triangles and broader multilateral configurations. Despite diplomatic and historical issues between Japan and South Korea (ROK), trilateral cooperation has provided a successful framework for coordination in the security domain and perception of common threat pushed them to align with the US. The Chicago Council Survey (2021) recorded the views of the public of these three countries, the US, South Korea and Japan about the China's intentions in the Asia-Pacific and global world. It was perceived that the rise of China has been posing a threat to the dominant role of the US in the Asia-Pacific (especially Japan was much concerned) as well as in the global world (the US and South Korean public was concerned).

**Figure 7:** Views of Public about China's Intentions***Australia, United Kingdom and US-AUKUS:***

The announcement of AUKUS, a new security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the US, on 15 September 2021 rang alarms in the major capitals of the world. The formation of the AUSKUS meant the cancellation of a submarine deal between the France and Australia that was premeditated in 2016. Therefore, it was a great shock, generally for the world and particularly for the France and Europe. The negotiations around the formation of this trilateral security alliance were furtive until the final official declaration. This trilateral security alliance intended to provide at least 8 submarines to the Royal Australian Navy using American technology. However, this deal would be a long-term commitment as it is not possible to make the submarines ready before 2040 (Tsuruoka, 2021). Unequivocally, the US signaled to increase the defense cooperation with the allies and particularly raise the capacity of Australia's military. The AUKUS leaders' joint statement clarified that the purpose of this partnership was not to target any single state rather it emphasizes on the international rule-based order, peace and stability and mutual strategic interests of the states. Nevertheless, the tacit aim of the AUKUS is all about to balance the threat against the China and militarily empowering Australia seems a quite rational strategy in the prevailing geostrategic environment of the Asia-Pacific. Hence, the Australia with nuclear submarine along with the US Navy would be helpful in deterring the Chinese aggression and expected hostile intentions in the region (Swanström & Panda, 2021).

***US and Quadrilateral Alliance***

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a multilateral forum of four maritime democracies including India, Japan, Australia and the US, was formed in

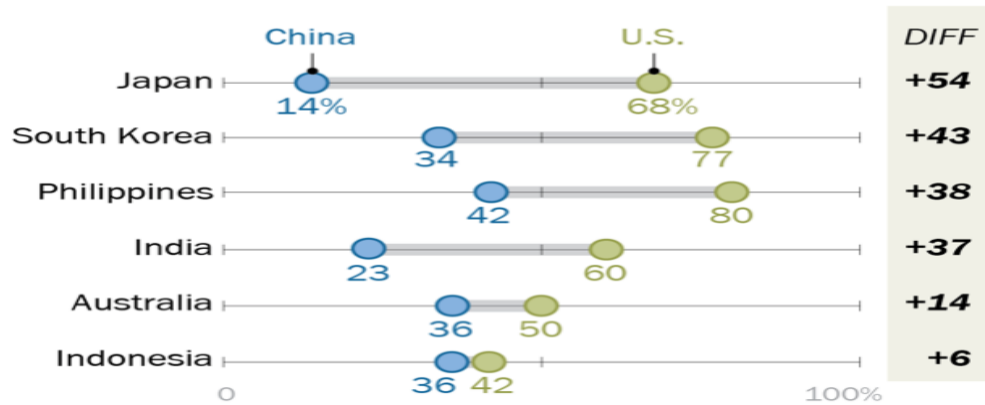
2007 and resurged in 2017 after rejoining of Australia. In 2008, Australia had expressed concerns and reservations about the impact of Quad on the Sino-Australian relations and withdrawn from further dialogue and likewise, India also remained apprehensive about the possible regional implications of the Quad that might negatively influence its own foreign policy. Therefore, the reservations of these countries surpassed the enthusiasm and the idea of the Quad disappeared from national diplomacy (Envall, 2019). Nevertheless, under the evolving strategic landscape, the Quad 2.0 was rejuvenated in 2017 which provided an opportunity to these four states to maximize their cooperation. The explicit mandate and motive of the Quad revolves around seven themes such as, a rules-based order in Asia-Pacific, the North Korean threat and non-proliferation, freedom of navigation, respect for international law, enhancing connectivity, maritime security and terrorism (Panda, 2017). On the basis of commonality of ideological and national interests; the four countries have been ambitiously engaged in bilateral and trilateral cooperation with each other.

With the framework of balance of threat, it is presumed that the implicit aim of Quad remains to counter and contain China's influence as it has been posing threat to the status quo in the Asia-Pacific. The US perceives China's modernization of its military as a preparation to curtail its sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The Defense White Paper (2016) explicated about the geopolitical shifts in the region and resultantly, it became essential for Australia to focus on its security. Moreover, the US took a bold step and its Pacific Command was renamed with to Indo Pacific Command (Copp, 2018). China was also accused that it was achieving strategic interests through economic coercion and trapping the smaller countries in debt (Chellaney, 2017; and Blumenthal, 2018). Therefore, the four committed democracies joined hands in a Track II dialogue to discuss their common security concerns in this region especially countering the Chinese threat (Lohman, (2015). The convergence of the interests such as traditional rivalry of Japan with China, fear of Australia in response to rise of China, India's quest to become a regional power by undermining the Chinese interests and the long-term strategic interests of the US to maintain its hegemony in the Asia-Pacific, led these countries to cooperate with each other. Apart from this Quad platform, each partner country has good bilateral relations as well. Pew Research Center (2019) conducted a survey in order to record the favorable opinions of the masses of Asia-Pacific nations about the US and China. It was found that the partners in Quad, Japan 68%, India 60% and Australia 50% have favorable opinion about the US in the Asia-Pacific whereas only 14% Japanese, 23% Indians and 36% Australians perceive China as a positive player in the region.

**Figure 8:** Views about the US in the Asia-Pacific

### Views of the United States are generally positive in the Asia-Pacific

*% who have a favorable opinion of ...*



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes. Q8a-b.

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Under the Trump administration, China was declared as a revisionist power which has been endeavoring to overturn the regional as well as global order through military and economic means. The first time an Indo-Pacific (Asia-Pacific) strategy was also proposed with aim to constrain the influence of China in the region and consequently, the US China bilateral relations turned to worse. The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) under the Trump Administration had emphasized on the security dialogue among the US, India, Australia, and Japan for strengthening the relations promoting a rules-based order in Asia-Pacific (Madan, 2017). Although the Biden administration had clear ideological differences from his predecessor but on the chapter of China, the policy was not different. The Biden Administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance indicated that that China's military, economic and technological power has been posing a great challenge to the US interest and the existing stable and open international system (Zongyou & Yunhan, 2022). Despite the fact that the threat perception is different for the different allies but they are balancing it keeping in view the emergence of the revisionist China.

### CONCLUSION

The assertive behavior of China and the hostile intentions of Nuclear South Korea have posed a serious challenge to the US primacy in Asia-Pacific. Since the US has great stakes in the region, and therefore, it has started to bring a change in its regional strategy in the context of the systemic competition in the region. For instance, the hub-and-spoke structure worked during the Cold War but in order to counter the China, the US has been re-aligning its allies and consequently, the minilateral security structure is coming into existence in the Asia-Pacific. The Chinese rise is not mere threat to the US strategic interests rather the regional counties such as Australia, India, Japan and South Korea have also major reservations regarding this shift in the distribution of power.

The convergence of interests especially the plausible threats to the US hegemony and the strategic interests of the regional nations have caused them to think in the same direction for balancing the threat. The US took initiative and started to re-assert itself in the region by transforming its conventional strategy of bilateral alliance system. Although, the US had good bilateral relations with these countries but emergence of the trilateral alliances such as US-Japan-ROK, US-Japan-Australia and Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) and additionally, the Quadrilateral alliance (Quad) will lead to a broader political, defense and diplomatic cooperation amongst these nations. Hence, the balance of threat has become the reason for the emergence of the new security minilateral architecture in the Asia-Pacific.

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