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Q5(d)

Discuss the rationale behind replacing the "Asia-Pacific" strategy with the new term "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Define Asia-Pacific as an older economic-security frame
- Define Indo-Pacific as a maritime frame that includes the Indian Ocean and India
- **Give the rationale:** China's rise, sea lanes, **Quad**, FOIP, India's Act East

Revision summary

Asia-Pacific centred East Asian production, APEC and U.S. Pacific alliances, with India at the edge.

Indo-Pacific is a maritime theatre from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.

- **Rationale:** energy and trade sea lanes, China's naval and port reach, India's Act East, Abe's FOIP language and the **Quad**.

U.S. official strategy made the label bureaucratic.

The term keeps ASEAN centrality in Indian usage while re-ranking Delhi as a hinge power.

Introduction

Asia-Pacific named a rim of East and Southeast Asia plus the Americas, organised around APEC, U.S. hubs-and-spokes alliances, and China-centred production. **Indo-Pacific** names a wider maritime system from the eastern African littoral through the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific. The new term is not a fashion. It is a **strategy label** for a changed map.

Body**What was incomplete in 'Asia-Pacific'**

The older term under-weighted the **Indian Ocean**, energy routes through the **Malacca** strait, and **India** as a resident power. It fitted a world in which Japan, the Asian Tigers and then China were the growth story, and in which Washington's alliances ran through Tokyo, Seoul and Canberra without needing Delhi. **ASEAN** sat at the centre of that vocabulary. The vocabulary did not disappear. It was too small for Chinese naval reach, for African and Gulf energy, and for India's Act East.

Rationale for Indo-Pacific

- **First**, geography of trade and energy: a large share of world oil and goods moves on waters India can affect. Second, **China's maritime rise** - South China Sea pressure, dual-use ports in the Indian Ocean, and the Belt and Road at sea - made a purely Pacific frame look like a half-board. Third, **India's** willingness to be named as a net security partner, not only as a NAM

spectator. Fourth, **Japanese** language under **Shinzo Abe** (confluence of the two seas; later **Free and Open Indo-Pacific**) gave allies a phrase. Fifth, the **Quad** - Australia, India, Japan, the United States - needed a theatre name that included the Indian Ocean. Sixth, the United States officially shifted documents and commands toward an Indo-Pacific strategy, making the term bureaucratic fact.

The strategy is **inclusive in Indian official speech** (ASEAN centrality, IPOI) and **more oppositional in some U.S. versions** (a China-challenge frame). That ambiguity is part of the term's success: several states can inhabit it.

What the rename does

It relocates India from the edge of Asia-Pacific charts to a **hinge**. It justifies minilateral naval practice and quality infrastructure as public goods. It does not dissolve ASEAN or APEC. It **re-ranks** who must be in the room when sea lanes and China are discussed. For PSIR, the rationale is strategic geography plus a coalition, not a poetic preference for two oceans.

Flow diagram

Asia-Pacific -> East Asia APEC hubs
Indo-Pacific -> Indian Ocean plus Pacific
Indo-Pacific -> Quad FOIP Act East
China maritime rise -> Indo-Pacific

Conclusion

Asia-Pacific described an East Asian economic rim and U.S. Pacific alliances. Indo-Pacific adds the Indian Ocean and India because China, energy routes and the **Quad** made the older map too narrow. The new term is a strategy, not a synonym.

Facts & figures

Abe FOIP

Japanese Free and Open Indo-Pacific language that allies and India adapted.

Quad

Australia, India, Japan, United States - the minilateral that needs an Indo-Pacific theatre, not only a Pacific one.

Malacca and IOR

Chokepoints and Indian Ocean routes that Asia-Pacific charts treated as background.