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# DIFFERING VISIONS OF INDO-PACIFIC BY WESTERN ACTORS: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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ORGANISED BY CENJOWS  
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**BY DR SWASTI RAO, ASSOCIATE FELLOW, MP-IDSA**  
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The Indo-Pacific is emerging as a crucial geopolitical arena in the 21st century, similar to how Europe shaped international politics in the 20th century. The future of this region will determine whether the world moves towards peace and economic growth or experiences major power conflicts. If the Indo-Pacific continues to promote cooperation and economic development, the region could bring about global prosperity and stability. On the other hand, conflicts between major powers could lead to a much darker global future.

One distinctive feature of the Indo-Pacific is the absence of a cohesive security structure, unlike Europe, which has NATO. The rivalry between the U.S. and China defines the region, yet many countries in the Indo-Pacific prefer not to choose sides, prioritizing their own national interests. These countries maintain a delicate balance between both powers, participating in various strategic groupings that reflect the complexity of regional dynamics.

A major geopolitical shift in the region is the alignment between Russia and China, further solidified by the prolonged conflict in Ukraine. This partnership has pushed more Western nations to strengthen their presence in the Indo-Pacific for strategic balance and economic security. The war in Ukraine has tightened Russian-Chinese relations, and while some speculate that a return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency could change the course of the conflict, this also remains unlikely due to the probability of the U.S. lend-lease aid to Ukraine. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific remains a hub of global economic activity, making it central to the West's economic interests.

Additionally, defense cooperation between Russia and North Korea poses security concerns for the U.S., further complicating the situation in the Indo-Pacific. In response, the U.S. has strengthened its alliances and relationships in the region, countering China's rise through efforts such as mending relations between Japan and South Korea and

addressing North Korea's nuclear threat. The U.S. also collaborates on hybrid threats with frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD).

The U.S. holds a strategic advantage over China due to its strong network of allies and partners, allowing it to address global and regional challenges more effectively. However, the U.S. faces challenges in the economic realm, especially after withdrawing from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). To compensate, the U.S. has introduced initiatives like the Build Back Better World (BDN) and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). In terms of security, the U.S. continues to develop strategic partnerships, such as AUKUS and bilateral security agreements with countries like Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, aiming to maintain a balance of power in Asia.

The United Kingdom, though aligned with the U.S., pursues an independent role through defense initiatives like AUKUS and the Five Power Defense Arrangements. European countries, particularly France, play a significant role in the region as a resident power, while Germany and other countries are more focused on economic ties. The European Union (EU), seeking multipolarity, is shifting from a geo-economic actor to a security player, although this transition comes with uncertainties.

NATO's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific has sparked debates over India's potential engagement with the alliance, but formal ties are unlikely. However, informal cooperation may be beneficial, particularly in addressing hybrid threats.

For India, the variety of actors in the Indo-Pacific presents both opportunities and challenges, reinforcing the idea that a stronger India in the region aligns with the West's broader interests. In summary, the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical dynamics will heavily influence the global order in the 21st century.