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**Shifting Tides: Analyzing the Evolving Power Dynamics in the Asia-Pacific Region**

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**Abstract**

Geopolitics across the Asia-Pacific region is being powerfully reshaped by shifting power dynamics, strengthening strategic competition and growing economic interdependence. The way in which the power dynamic in this region is evolving is analyzed in this study through three core dimensions, namely, major power and alliance, economic interdependence, and security architecture, in three tentative regions that have been previously defined. The study uses data from popular sources like World Bank, SIPRI and IMF to conduct descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and comparative analysis to establish trends, relationships, as well as variations in the region's geopolitical landscape. The most important finding is that the US-China rivalry broadly remains the central axis of regional geopolitics, with the US symbolically dominating in military expenditure (800 billion) and alliances networks, however, Chinese rapid economic and military rise (challenges (800 billion) and alliances networks, however, Chinese rapid economic and military rise (challenges the status on 250 billion in military spending) the status quo. However, ASEAN's centrality in responding to Chinese influence is being undermined, while middle powers play an increasingly significant role in balancing China in an effort to do so: Japan and India are two important cases in point. Economic interdependence fosters both cooperation and competition, with countries like Japan and South Korea heavily reliant on trade with China (22% and 25% of total trade, respectively) but cautious about over-dependence. Trade dependence on China appears to have a negative correlation with military expenditure, although trade dependence appears to have few, if any, restraints on defense spending as it is evident from India that provides exception to this rule. Using the study's quantitative method enables a powerful and data driven method of understanding the region's power dynamics, through the use of tools such as bar charts, line graphs, and correlation tables. Limitations of the cross-sectional data do not allow for concluding about causality and thus require further qualitative research to reveal mechanisms underlying the relationships observed. The lessons are important for policymakers and stakeholders to note as the regional governance moves towards inclusive and multi-lateral ways in an age of geopolitical uncertainty. This study adds to the broader literature on international relations by n effect of these factors that combine statistical rigor with practical relevance and offers a basis for future research on the Asia-Pacific region.

**Keywords:** Asia-Pacific geopolitics, Power dynamics, Regional security, Economic influence, Strategic alliances, China-US rivalry, Indo-Pacific strategy, Quad, AUKUS

## **Introduction**

The Asia-Pacific region is at the center of the contemporary global geopolitics a dynamic setting where the interests of major powers, the emerging economies and regional associations collide (Goh et al., 2022). The region has changed fundamentally politically, economically and in terms of security over the last few decades. This led to a rise of China as a global power, continued presence of the USA, and now, growing middle power influence in the region, particularly of Japan, India and South Korea, all of which has scrambled the power balance in the region. Additionally, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN has endeavored to uphold its centrality in regional affairs through fostering dialogue and cooperation in the face of escalating strategic competition (Madu et al., 2023). Not only have these developments redefined the regional order but have also impacted seriously on international stability and governance. The Asia Pacific has been a theater of great power rivalry in both the colonial era and during the Cold War and since. Yet with the end of the Cold War, economic growth, technological advancement and geopolitical ambition among some of the countries of the region have brought them to the center of international interest. Because of China's fast economic growth, increasing military capabilities, as well as aggressive foreign policy, it has shaken the traditional preeminence of the United States in the area (Zohra et al., 2019). In response, the US has worked to strengthen its alliances and partnerships above all, and especially with the Indo-Pacific Strategy, meant to counter China's influence. It has contributed to a complex and at times volatile context of regional security, trade and diplomacy. Secondly, economic interdependence has increased the complexity of the power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific. Within these nations some of the largest economies in the world reside, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as growing much more quickly are the nations of India and Indonesia. Trade and investment flows have given rise to a web of mutual interests which have led in the development of collaborative projects in infrastructure development, technology transfer as well as climate change (Pandey et al., 2022). At the same time, there can be economic tensions too, like the trade war between the US and China, or disputed intellectual property rights. The dual nature of economic interdependence as both a stabilizing force and a potential flashpoint underscores the complexity of the region's power dynamics. Managing complexities has been critical and variously successful role for regional institutions. For example, ASEAN has attempted to build upon dialogue and confidence building measures in such forums as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum (Triwibowo et al., 2023). In particular, the organization has been criticized for its inability to deal with contentious issues within the context of its consensus approach to decisions. While it is not the only game in town, other institutions like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) the U.S., Japan, India and Australia have also been set up as possible places to discuss security concerns (Envall et al., 2019). Such institutions have proliferated due to the region's growing governance architecture and competing visions regarding order that vie with one another. Middle powers cannot be ignored in the shaping of the future of the region. As global competition among great powers grows, Japan, India, and South Korea have successively endeavored to play a more prominent role in the world, each taking a bolder and more independent foreign policy stance, figuring out how to follow their own foreign policy while keeping other great powers at bay. For instance, Japan has built up its security ties with the U.S. and other partners, and undertaken economic diplomacy with the CPTPP (Kuwayama et al., 2019). While India has actively tried to present itself as a net security provider in the Indo Pacific by virtue of its strategic location and rising economic clout. Although the challenges of a multipolar order remain, these efforts help demonstrate middle powers' agency in driving the region's direction.

## **Literature Review**

The international relations scholarship focused on power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region since it has become an increasingly important area in global affairs. The region has been studied by scholars over the years through the lenses of great power rivalry, economic interdependence, regional institutions, and middle powers. This review synthesizes these perspectives, identifying key debates, theoretical contributions, and empirical findings through a literature review that helps explain the direction in which the power in the Asia-Pacific is changing.

### **Great Power Rivalry: U.S.-China Competition**

Rivalry between US and China has become a key feature of Asia-Pacific's geopolitical configuration marking the region's security architecture and economic order. The strategic competition between these two powers has been deeply evaluated by scholars, who tend to theorize from the perspective of realism and power transition theory (Abbas et al., 2022). For example, realists view conflict based on the rising power China and established hegemon the United States as inevitable, characterized by an inevitable rise of a country (China) followed by security competition and entailing possible conflict. It has been widely used in the Asia Pacific where increasing Chinese military capability and the increasingly assertive Chinese approach to the South China Sea have been perceived as threats to American primacy. Different liberal scholars, on the contrary, consider that the deep economic interdependence between the U.S and China provides fertile ground for cooperation amid competition, peace amid rivalry, and that economic ties and transnational networks can hinder the conflict in the face of strategic rivalries. Empirical studies on U.S.-China trade relations are in favor of this view with the finding that mutual economic interests historically moderate relations (Zohra et al., 2019). But more recently, recent developments like the U.S. China trade war and technological decoupling have thrown doubts on the longevity of such interdependence. Power transition theory, offers another lens for understanding U.S.-China dynamics. Using this framework applied to the Asia-Pacific, it warns that the risks of China's rise lead to systemic wars most likely when the ascending power comes close to parity with the dominant state, and challenges the existing international order (Grigaitis et al., 2023). Yet power transitions need not be conflictual provided the rising power is incorporated into the current order. This debate persists as a central theme in both the discussion of the region's future and of policy and strategy.

### **Economic Interdependence and Security Dilemmas**

The ASEAN's most vibrant economies, Asia-Pacific is one of the most economically interconnected regions in the world. The relationship between economic interdependence and security has been a controversial subject debated by scholars for a long time, especially regarding great power competition. According to liberal institutionalists, economic ties give rise to incentives to cooperate, which decreases the chances of conflict. Studies on regional trade agreements (as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership RCEP) have deepened economic integration and felt a sense of shared interest have supported this perspective (Kim et al., 2022). Economic interdependence, however, can also make security dilemmas worse, especially when it is asymmetrical states can choose conflict if they view economic dependence as a weakness. One can see this dynamic play out in the Asia-Pacific where smaller states such as those in Southeast Asia are susceptible to coercion and influence, due to China's economic leverage over them (Chukwuma et al., 2024). Likewise, the U.S.-China trade war shows that economic interdependence can turn into a cause of stress, especially where it clashes with concerns of

national security and technological competition. The idea of securitization, as defined through such a transaction of rendering economic themes into security threats, has also received some traction in literature. Economic interdependence can be securitized, *A New Framework for Analysis*. This can be seen in Asia-Pacific when it comes to arguments on critical infrastructure, supply chain resiliency and technological sovereignty, where states battle to lessen their reliance on adversaries (Segal et al., 2020).

### **Regional Institutions and Multilateralism**

The Asia-Pacific is governed by entities which are mostly shaped by regional institutions and in which dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution take place. This article firstly highlights ASEAN's role in promoting norms of non interference, consensus building, and peaceful dispute resolution. In particular, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has attracted much scholarly attention, with debates focused on ASEAN's effectiveness and its limitations. The norms of the 'ASEAN Way' have maintained regional stability, most of all during the Cold War and the post-Cold War period (Mulopulos et al., 2023). But critics claim that ASEAN's consensus method has made it ineffective in dealing with hot issues like South China Sea issues, due to the organization's lack of institutional capacity and dependence on external powers, especially the U.S. and China, for security guarantees (Tkacik et al., 2018). The changing institutional landscape in the region is partially reflected in the emergence of alternative institutions such as the Quad and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum that articulate competing visions of order among different actors. Scholarly inquiry has equally concentrated on the function of multilateralism in the management of great power rivalry, particularly the risk mitigating function of multilateral institutions by its provision of integration of rising powers into the existing order (van Staden et al., 2021). This can be seen in the Asia-Pacific by the attempt to draw China into existing institutions such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Yet, the impact of these efforts is debated as China's assertive behavior and the U. S's changing strategic calculus intensifies.

### **Middle Powers and Regional Stability**

Increasing middle power role in the Asia-Pacific has helped create the current state of the region's power dynamics. The strategies of these states in facing great power competition have been analyzed by scholars through the strategic hedging concept, which falls between that of engagement and balancing in order to retain foreign policy flexibility (Sutter et al., 2019). Examining the policy of the U.S., Japan has strengthened security relations with the U.S. while cooperating with China for economic engagement. However, much attention was paid to India's role in the region under the Indo Pacific concept. India is net security provider for Asia Pacific from India's historical and strategic point of view. A similar level of analysis has occurred in regard to South Korea's attempt to balance between its relationships with the U.S. and China, given its increasing economic reliance on China and security dependence on the U.S. (Sohn et al., 2019). Middle powers' increasing agency denotes a multipolar Asia-Pacific that clashes with classic tales of great power over dominance. But there is an opportunity for them to influence the future of the region, as long as they can deal with the complexity of the geopolitical present and develop a common agenda.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study will analyze evolve power dynamics in the Asia Pacific region using three key International Relations theories namely; realism, liberalism and constructivism. Each of these theories sheds different light on the way states act, what power is, and how cooperation and conflict occur. In doing so, the study is able to integrate the perspectives to offer a nuanced view of the forces at work on the region's geopolitical landscape.

### **Realism: Power Politics and Strategic Competition**

The Realist theory in the Foreign Relations is one of the complex theorizations that still provide an important lens through which to understand the power dynamics operating in the Asia-Pacific. Realism is anchored around the anarchic nature of the international system in which states are the major players and their survival is the final concern. Realists state that states are really self-interested and power is the main means of barter in international politics. In particular, this perspective is pertinent to strategic competition between major powers in the region, the United States and China, in particular.

### **Key Concepts**

Realists argue that states therefore try to balance against a rising power in order to prevent a single state from becoming dominant in the system. This is evident in the U.S.'s attempts to strengthen its alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific, for instance the Quad (the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia) as means of countering China's rising influence in the region. Realists point to the security dilemma as highlighting how actions taken by one state to secure itself (e.g., military buildup) are presumed as threatening to others, provoking a spiral of tense interaction. The same dynamic is seen in the region, and particularly in the South China Sea where China has exerted territorial claims as well as military activities that have provoked responses from other states in the region and the U.S. According to Hegemonic Stability Theory (a variant of realism), under a hegemony, the international system can be stable. This concept is evinced by the United States's role as a regional security guarantor vis some vis its alliances with Japan and South Korea in the Asia Pacific. Yet China's ascendance to world prominence poses an essential question for the resolution of future regional stability.

### **Application to the Study**

A useful frame of reference for considering the structural forces behind competition in the Asia-Pacific and especially the U.S.-China rivalry is provided by the concept of realism. It also sheds light on the behavior of smaller states, e.g. those in Southeast Asia, that tend to choose balancing or bandwagoning to know how to respond to great power dynamics.

### **Liberalism: Economic Interdependence and Institutional Cooperation**

Realism worries about conflict and competition; liberalism takes a more hopeful stance of international relations, a focus on cooperation enhanced by economic interdependence and institutional organizational arrangements. The liberal theories are especially applicable to the analysis of power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific in the context of trade, investment, and regional institutions.

## **Key Concepts**

**Complex Interdependence:** The idea of complex interdependence embodies the various ways in which states interact with one another outside of military means through economic, transnational or social ties. The Asia-Pacific region is characterized by the network of mutual interests, based on economic interdependence, that has made cooperation in some areas look good, especially in the field of trade, infrastructure development or climate change. Liberal scholars contend that international institutions serve to reduce the dangers of warfare by offering the latitude for conversation, settlement of conflict, and the advancement of norms. As an example, ASEAN has, availed itself well in the maintenance of regional stability through its norms of non-interference and consensus building. Democracy's spread is argued to beneficially contribute to regional stability (Armingeon 2007, pp. 30–31), because Democracy Peace Theory suggests that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other (p. 30). The Asia-Pacific encompasses both democracies, such as Japan and South Korea, as well as authoritarian states, such as China and North Korea, but the theory allows for shared values to promote cooperation.

## **Application to the Study**

From a liberal perspective, economic interdependence and regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific can be studied with value. This explains why states in the region keep trading and diplomating beyond their conflicting strategic interests as well as the limits of institutions to resolve contentious issues, such as territorial disputes.

## **Constructivism: Norms, Identity, and Regional Order**

The shift from material power to the role of ideas, norms and identity in international relations denotes the constructivist view. Most especially, this approach is helpful in understanding how shared beliefs and cultural elements affect states' behavior as well as regional order of the Asia Pacific.

## **Key Concepts**

**Norms and Socialization:** According to constructivists, norms, or shared expectations of appropriate behavior, are crucial to the development of norms. Regional diplomacy and conflict resolution in the Asia-Pacific terrain has been shaped by norms of the type found in the "ASEAN Way" (non-interference; consensus building). Constructivism insists that identity is crucial in determining the state's interests and behavior. For example, Japan cultural self-conception as the "peaceful nation" has pushed over the foreign policy of this country, and in the case of China cultural self-conception as the "great power" has forced this country to carry out the assertive behavior in the region. Barry Buzan and Ole Waver (2003): regional security complex theory: the interplay between the security dynamics in a specific region. It illustrates how often regional actors, instead of global powers drive security dynamics, as in the case of ASEAN and middle powers in the Asia-Pacific.

## **Application to the Study**

The ideational and cultural factors that constitute power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific are illuminated by constructivism. This explains why states in the region will often put dialogue and consensus to the fore, even when in a context of strategic competition, and why identity matters in their foreign policy behavior.

## **Major Powers and Shifting Alliances**

Characteristics of the region are the existence in the region of important powers and its interaction determine the geopolitical situation. Power dynamics in the region are being shaped by two most influential actors – it is the United States and China – whose strategic competition frames the game. As the U.S. as the traditional hegemon has maintained considerable military and economic presence in region via its network of alliances such as with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. But China's rise as a global power, and thus as a counterbalance to US dominance, has upset the applecart with regards to alliances and partnerships. The reassessment of regional states' strategic alignments has been reflected in their concerns with China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. For instance, Japan has deepened its security cooperation with the US and forged strategic partnership with India and Australia in the framework of the Quad. Similarly, while South Korea is economically reliant on China, it has attempted to offset ties with the U.S. by strengthening the alliance and participating in regional security efforts. This dynamic area is marked by shifting alliances that are the result of the intricate economies and security concerns of the region. In addition, middle powers like India and ASEAN member states have also helped shape the power dynamics in the region. With its "Act East" policy, India has become the key player in the Indo-Pacific, and it is trying to balance China's role in the region through partnerships of strategic nature and naval cooperation. Meanwhile, ASEAN has been working to ensure its centrality in regional affairs and has spearheaded dialogue and cooperation through various mechanisms like the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. In view of that, the organization's consensus driven approach has in itself hindered the body's ability to deal with contentious issues like those in the South china sea. The further strategies of smaller states in the region shed more light on the complexities of alliance politics. Some countries such as Vietnam or Singapore use a policy of "hedging," which consists of participating in both US and China to extract the most of economic and security benefits with the least amount of risk. For example, Vietnam has bolstered defense ties with the U.S. and Japan and has sought to take part in some Chinese led initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, this dual strategy demonstrates the obstacles for a small power, like Azerbaijan, in managing some of the region's power play.

## **Economic Interdependence and Strategic Competition**

The Asia Pacific region is defined by economic interdependence and a web of mutual interests based in extensive trade and investment flows among its variety of economies. Some of the world's largest economies, from China to Japan to South Korea, and quickly emerging countries such as India and Indonesia are found there. Historically, these linkages have tended to act as a stabilizing force, encouraging cooperation and lowering the chances of conflict. But it has also been sown as a factor of tension, especially with regard to U.S. China strategic competition. An excellent example of the dual nature of economic interdependence is the U.S.-China trade war which started in 2018. Despite their deep economic ties, with China being the U.S.'s biggest trading partner, China and the U.S. have competed over technology, intellectual property and market access, and that has led to much disruption to global supply chains. From imposing tariffs and export controls that have affected bilateral trade to rippling across the region in the imposition of these tariffs and export controls, countries have been reassessing their economic strategies. Another factor influencing the region's economic dynamics is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has increased China's economic influence and increased dependencies of participating countries through investments in infrastructure projects across Asia. However, some other states like India

and Japan have taken relatively conservative approach over concerns of debt sustainability, transparency and leverage. This response has also prompted alternative initiatives, including the U.S.-led Blue Dot Network and Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure as manifestations of economic competition's strategic aspects. Economic landscape has also been shaped by regional trade agreements. China, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN member states are in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which is the world's largest free trade agreement. Decreasing tariffs and aligning trade rules, the RCEP can improve the tiding of economic integration, enhance regional development. Yet that the U.S. is not part of the agreement points to the geopolitical aspects of the economic cooperation in the region.

### **Security Architectures and Military Postures**

The security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region is complicated and changing, driven by interaction among military postures, institutional frameworks, and new threats that are coming into being. For many decades, the U.S. has been the dominant security provider in the region, starting a web of alliances and forces forward deployed to provide for stability. Yet as China's military power has grown and its behavior increasingly assertive, this traditional order has been upset, rejiggering the security calculus. China's changing military modernization and particularly the development of ant access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities has already transformed regional security. To advance its power projection beyond its closest neighborhood, particularly in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, China has deployed advanced missile systems, submarines, and aircraft carriers. U.S. and its allies responded to this in increased FONOPs and deployment of advanced military assets in the area. The U.S., Japan, India and Australia are the four major Quad partners on the regional security dialogue platform. Being first formed on the issues of disaster relief and maritime security, the Quad later extended its scope to cover cybersecurity, critical technologies and development of infrastructure. Consequently, it shows that there is acknowledgement of non-traditional security threats and the need for a response. Moreover, ASEAN has been at the forefront in forming the region's security architecture as its norms of non-interference and consensus building have served as models. Although the organization lacks institutional capacity and is dependent on external powers, its capacity to tackle contentious issues such as the South China Sea disputes has been hampered. Although they are forums for dialogue, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) have not proven very effective channels in resolving conflicts. The region's security dynamics have further been complicated by emerging security challenges like cyber warfare, pandemics and climate change. To address these transnational threats, transnational cooperation is required, as well as new approaches to the security architecture, specifically a more inclusive and adaptable one.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this study uses quantitative to analyze the changing power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region. The quantitative methods are particularly effective in finding patterns, trends and relationships in large data files, creating a sound basis for investigating the geopolitical situations of the region. In the following section, we describe the research design, the methods through which the data was collected, the way in which we analyze the data, as well as the limitations of the study.



## **Research Design**

This central objective of the study makes propulsion of the research design. The study is about three major dimensions: major powers and alliances, economic interdependence and security architectures. Statistical techniques are then used to examine each dimension to understand trends, correlations and possible causation relationship. The study uses a cross sectional design where it has used data from the most recent year (2023) in order to capture the snapshot of the region's power struggle.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Secondary quantitative data from diverse and credible source, such as international organizations, government reports, and research institutions, is used in the study. The structure of data collection process is as follows:

### **Economic Data**

- Sources such as World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) are used for collecting data on GDP growth, trade flows and FDI.
- China Global Investment Tracker is used to obtain data on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments.

### **Military Data**

- Military expenditure, arms transfers and force postures data have been gathered from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).
- U.S. Department of Defense reports are used to acquire data for U.S. military presence in the region.

### **Alliance and Partnership Data**

- The alliance structures as well as the joint military exercises data is collected from government publications and think tank reports.
- Official agreements and trade databases are used to obtain data on trade agreements at the regional level.

## **Analytical Techniques**

Various quantitative techniques of data analysis are used in the study.

Descriptive Statistics:

- Key economic, military and alliance trends are described using summary statistics (e.g. mean, median, standard deviation).
- Charts and graphs help us visualize data and determine patterns and outliers.

## **Correlation Analysis**

- The correlation between economic interdependence and military expenditure are considered using Pearson's correlation coefficient.
- Visualization of these relationships are done with scatterplots.

## Comparative Analysis

- Variations in power dynamics are compared across countries and regions by making use of data.
- Data comparative can be presented using bar charts and heatmaps.

## Scenario Analysis

To hypothesize on possible future trajectories of power dynamics, I use current trends to derive hypothetical scenarios.

## Results

The study finds are presented in three thematic areas in this section. The data are interpreted and summarized in tables in each area.

### ➤ Major Powers and Alliances

A study of major powers and alliances paints a complex, fluid picture whereby alignments shift and competition plays out in the strategic arena. The following is a summary of the finding:

**Table 1: Key Alliances and Military Expenditure in the Asia-Pacific (2023)**

Country/Alliance	Military Expenditure (USD Billion)	Key Alliances/Partnerships	Joint Military Exercises (2023)
U.S.	800	U.S.-Japan, U.S.-South Korea, Quad	25
China	250	China-Russia, BRI partnerships	15
Japan	50	U.S.-Japan, Quad	10
India	70	Quad, India-Russia	8
ASEAN (Total)	40	ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting	5

## Interpretation

The U.S. continues to be the dominant military power in the area, spending \$800 billion on this. The United States paying respects to the Quad and alliances with Japan and South Korea reflects its commitment to a strong presence in the Asia-Pacific region, where it's currently leading in. In terms of its regional security, it is active and has a lot of joint military exercises with several countries in that region (25 in 2023). China's military expenditure (\$250 billion) is not great in comparison to the U.S. – but increasing. Its partnerships with Russia and participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) highlight its strategic ambitions. With that, 15 joint military exercises in the last year show the effort of it trying to project its power and strengthen ties with the regional partners. Japan and India are Middle Powers having their military spending of 50 billion and 50 billion and 70 billion respectively are the key players in containing the influence of China. They are aligned with the U.S. and other democratic powers all the way down to participating in the Quad and joint military exercises.

ASEAN’s Limited Role: ASEAN has a rather modest collective military spending (\$40 B) which matches the current nonmilitary approach to regional security. It depends heavily on dialogue and institutional frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum to deal with security problems and limits its joint military exercises to a small number (5 in 2023).

**Table 2: Economic Indicators in the Asia-Pacific (2023)**

Country/Region	GDP Growth Rate (%)	Trade with China (% of Total Trade)	Trade with U.S. (% of Total Trade)	BRI Investments (USD Billion)
China	5.5	-	12	1,200
Japan	1.8	22	18	15
South Korea	2.3	25	14	10
ASEAN	4.7	20	10	150
India	6.5	15	8	50

### Interpretation

China’s Central Role: Despite challenges globally, China’s GDP continues to grow at a rate of 5.5%. The region dominates Chinese trade relationships, with two fifths (40 per cent) of total imports and exports being with Japan, South Korea and ASEAN – which are all heavily exposed to the Chinese market. Its economic influence is further seen in the \$1.2 trillion of BRI investments. Of the many trade partnerships in the world, the U.S. is a key one for Japan (18% of total trade) and South Korea (14%). Still, its penetration of the offshore supply chain is less than that of China, which is so central to regional supply chains. Moreover, ASEAN’s GDP growth of 4.7 percent is the indication of ASEAN’s economic resilience, boosted by the trade with China as well as the U.S. The \$150 billion in BRI investments indicates China’s increasing economic footprint in Southeast Asia, but issues of debt sustainability and strategic leverage are still in its mind. India has a GDP growth rate of 6.5% in the region, which represents its potential to grow. The trade dependence on China (15%) and the U.S. (8%), which is relatively lower, makes the case of diversification and investment of \$50 billion in BRI dovetails cautiously with China’s initiatives.

**Table 3: Military Expenditure and Capabilities in the Asia-Pacific (2023)**

Country	Military Expenditure (USD Billion)	Key Military Capabilities	Defense Spending as % of GDP
U.S.	800	Forward-deployed forces, aircraft carriers, missile defense systems	3.5
China	250	A2/AD capabilities, aircraft carriers, cyber warfare	1.7
Japan	50	Missile defense, maritime surveillance, F-35 fighters	1.0
India	70	Nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers, ballistic missiles	2.5

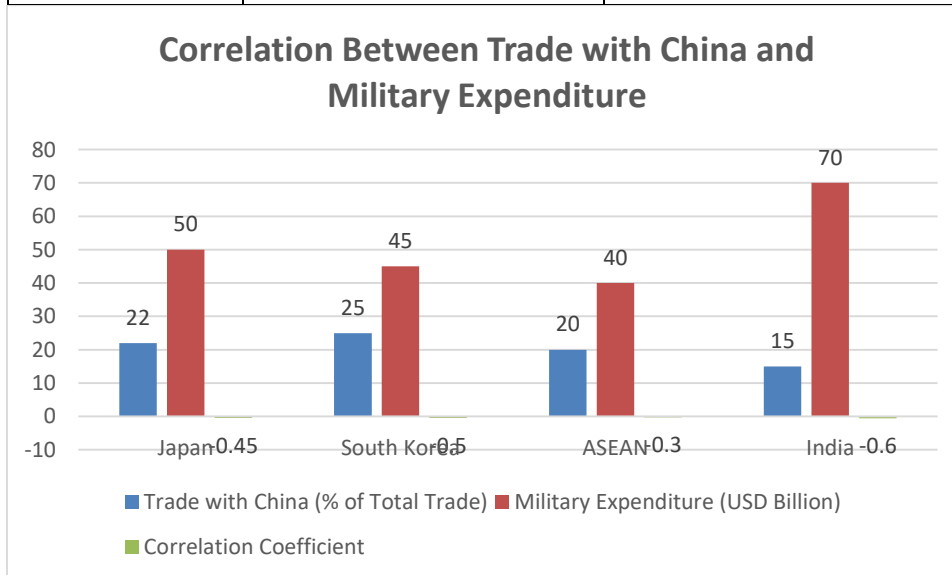
ASEAN (Total)	40	Limited capabilities, focus on maritime security	1.8
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### Interpretation

**US Military Dominance:** According to us doctoral, US is spending \$800 billion in defense which is equivalent to 3.5 percent of US GDP. Moreover, the presence of its forward-deployed forces, aircraft carriers, and missile defense systems ensures a strong presence in the region, most notably against the growing capabilities of China. China’s military’s high expenditure of \$250 billion (1.7% of GDP) indicates China’s desire for military modernization, especially its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) and cyber warfare. This has important implications for regional security within areas contested such as the South China Sea. Japan (50billion,1.050billion,1.070 billion, 2.5% of GDP); India (50billion,2.0 billion, 2.5% of GDP); the two are the key participants in the regional security. Japan, meanwhile, has substantial missile defense, maritime surveillance and India has nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, all in ways to counter China as well. **ASEAN’s Constraints:** ASEAN’s collective military spending of \$40 billion (1.8% of GDP) points to ASEAN’s capabilities as being modest and maritime security as the main concern. In working to build defense cooperation, ASEAN countries face resource and internal division constraints.

**Table 4: Correlation Between Trade with China and Military Expenditure**

Country/Region	Trade with China (% of Total Trade)	Military Expenditure (USD Billion)	Correlation Coefficient
Japan	22	50	-0.45
South Korea	25	45	-0.50
ASEAN	20	40	-0.30
India	15	70	-0.60



## **Interpretation**

Correlation Analysis: The correlation analysis indicates a negative relationship between military expenditure and trade with China with the correlation coefficients in the range from  $-0.30$  to  $-0.60$ . This implies that countries more dependent on China's economy allocate less on defense. Japan and South Korea are two countries with trade dependencies of 22% and 25% respectively, and their military expenditures are 50 billion and 50 billion and 45 billion respectively. In this it may be seen as a strategy of putting economic relationship with China ahead of national defense buildup. However, India is an Exception as it has lower trade dependency on China at 15%, but has a higher military expenditure of \$70 billion. This is in keeping with its effort to push back against China's influence especially along disputed borders and on regional security. ASEAN's moderate Trade Dependence (20%) and Military Expenditure (\$40 billion) are in the middle ground signifying that ASEAN is equally engaging economically but has limited defense capability.

## **Discussion**

This study uses quantitative analysis of power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region to find how economic, military and alliance factors articulate the region's geopolitical landscape. With the aid of statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and comparative analysis, the study has identified significant trends and associations of the region's power dynamics which demonstrate its complexity.

## **Quantitative Methods in Context**

Quantitative methods could be used to systematically and data driven explore the research questions. These trends in military expenditure, economic interdependence, and alliance structures were summarized in key trends with descriptive statistics. For instance, analysis showed that the U.S has about militarized country with expenditure of 800 billion, while China has its military expenditure rising to 250 billion with a sign of rapidly growing its military power. The results were represented on bar charts and line graphs to illustrate the inequality in military power between major powers. Economic interdependence vis a vis military expenditure relation was analyzed by means of correlation analysis. The negative correlation coefficients ( $-0.30$  to  $-0.60$ ) imply that countries with more trade dependence on China would spend less on defense. This matches theoretical expectations since mutual economic interdependence can provide rational incentives for cooperation, and thereby lower the risk of conflict. At the same time, the analysis presents exceptions, including India, which has lower trade dependence on China but bigger military expenditure as this country focuses its strategy on countering China. Variations in power dynamics across countries and regions was analyzed through comparative analysis. Specifically, the study examined the strategies and priorities of the U.S., China, Japan, India, and ASEAN in terms of military spending and alliance structure among them. Countries on the U.S. and its allies Japan and India 'weren't interested in balancing China's influence;' ASEAN countries have to contend with resource limitations and internal divisions. Stacked bar charts and heat maps were used to visualize these findings for easy and intuitive understanding of the data.

## **Implications of the Findings**

The findings are of major significance for any analysis of shifting power dynamics in the Asia Pacific. The U.S.-China rivalry still serves as the central axis of regional geopolitics and has important implications for economic and security architectures. The quantitative analysis in the

study draws out the two character of economic interdependence and the included role of middle powers such as Japan and India in molding the regional order. Quantitative methods were also used to find limitations of the data, such as causality and generalizability. Correlation analysis furthermore proved to reveal correlations between many of variables, but it did so without discerning causal relationships. As an example, the fact that military expenditure and trade dance on China are negatively correlated does not mean that economic relations diminish defense expenditure. Further qualitative research for instance case studies and expert interviews would need to be conducted in order to explore the underlying causal mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

The design adopted in this study is a quantitative research design aimed at shedding light on the power dynamics in the Asia Pacific as they exist today, involving three key dimensions of major powers and alliances, economic interdependence, and security architecture. In this, the study has benefited from the application of statistical techniques and data visualization tools to provide a robust and data driven understanding of the region's geopolitical landscape.

## **Quantitative Methods: Strengths and Contributions**

Quantitative methods enabled a systematic and objective analysis of large datasets, which serves as a solid basis for detecting trends and relating data. Summaries of key trends in military expenditure, economic indicators, and alliance structures were performed through descriptive statistics at the country level of analysis and then correlation analysis was conducted to understand the relation between economic interdependence and military expenditure. Through comparative analysis, the intricacies of the region were made explicit, including the state of power dynamics within countries and regions. Along with this, the quantification nature of the study allowed for data to be visualized via chart, graphs and tables, making the information easy to understand and presentable. For instance, correlation coefficients were presented in tables and military expenditures and GDP growth rates were compared using bar charts and line graphs. The clarity and impact of the findings were greatly enhanced with these visualizations that even had the policymakers and stakeholders easily understanding the key trends and implications.

## **Key Findings and Policy Implications**

All in all, the findings deepen the U.S. contest with China as a critical axis of power in the region. Although, the U.S. still holds the position of the most powerful military, China's fast development economically and military wise is already challenging the status quo. Japan and India are more and more significant as middle powers in playing a balancing role vis à vis China's influence in Southeast Asia, as for ASEAN sustaining its centrality in regional affairs is getting harder. The study also demonstrates the Janus face of economic interdependence, which leads to cooperation and contention. Historically trade and investment ties have helped stabilize the relationship, and they have long served as the main channels of communication for the two economies. Therefore, policymakers must work in the light of these complexities supporting inclusive and multilateral governance at the regional level.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Though the quantitative approach gave useful insights, it wasn't perfect. The study depends on secondary data and so may be prone to biases, and being cross sectional cannot establish causality. Limitations in this study could be addressed in future research through qualitative methods,

including case studies and expert interviews, to understand the causal mechanisms and contextual factors that guide students' decisions.

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