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G Minus Two Indo-Pacific Strategy Reflects India's Expanding Strategic Autonomy Through Middle-Power Partnerships Amid Regional Geopolitical Changes

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Recent Developments:

- Strategic affairs expert **C. Raja Mohan** has highlighted the emergence of a "**G Minus Two**" **Indo-Pacific architecture**, under which **India** and other **Asian middle powers** are deepening strategic partnerships while preserving **strategic autonomy** amid evolving **United States–China relations**.
- **Recent high-level engagements** involving **India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Australia, and ASEAN partners** indicate a gradual shift towards flexible **minilateral cooperation** instead of rigid alliance structures. Recent diplomatic interactions also reflect increasing emphasis on resilient supply chains, maritime security, and defence industrial cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

Understanding the G Minus Two Indo-Pacific Framework:

Meaning and Concept:

- **G Minus Two** refers to a strategic framework in which **major Indo-Pacific middle powers** cooperate without allowing the regional order to be determined exclusively by **the United States and China**.
- **The framework** rejects the concept of a **G2 condominium**, under which **Washington and Beijing** alone shape the strategic future of Asia.
- **The approach** promotes a flexible network of **bilateral, trilateral, and minilateral partnerships** instead of creating either a formal military alliance or an isolated third geopolitical bloc.
- **The framework** seeks to preserve **strategic autonomy**, strengthen **regional resilience**, and diversify economic and security partnerships without forcing countries to choose between competing great powers.

Background Behind the Emergence of the Strategy:

Strategic Drivers:

- **Asian strategic thinkers** have long expressed concern that an exclusive **United States–China power-sharing arrangement** could marginalize the interests of other regional countries.
- **Changing priorities in United States foreign policy** have created uncertainty regarding long-term American commitment to the Indo-Pacific, encouraging regional powers to strengthen independent cooperation.
- **The rapid expansion of high-level diplomacy** among **India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and ASEAN members** has accelerated the evolution of this framework.

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- **The strategy** recognizes that **continued engagement with the United States** remains essential for maintaining regional strategic stability because no individual middle power can independently balance China's military capabilities.
- **The architecture** also accepts that complete **economic decoupling from China** is unrealistic because of deep regional trade integration and complex manufacturing value chains.

Major Features of the G Minus Two Architecture:

Strategic Characteristics:

- **The framework** combines **strategic flexibility**, **economic resilience**, and **security cooperation** without establishing legally binding alliance obligations.
- **Partnerships** remain issue-based and country-specific, allowing members to cooperate according to shared interests.
- **The architecture** complements rather than replaces existing institutions such as **ASEAN**, **QUAD**, **East Asia Summit**, and the **Indian Ocean Rim Association**.
- **The framework** encourages simultaneous cooperation with both major powers wherever national interests permit while reducing excessive dependence on either side.

Major Opportunities Under the Framework:

Economic Security and Supply Chains:

- **Middle powers** can reduce vulnerabilities arising from concentrated manufacturing and strategic dependence on single-country supply chains.
- **Cooperation in semiconductors, critical technologies, critical minerals, and advanced manufacturing** strengthens regional economic resilience.
- **Japan's Economic Security Strategy, India–Japan semiconductor cooperation, and Australia's critical mineral partnerships** illustrate this approach.

Maritime Security:

- **Expanded maritime cooperation** enhances the security of **Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)** across the Indo-Pacific.
- **Closer partnerships with Indonesia** improve security around the **Strait of Malacca**, one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints.
- **Joint naval exercises, maritime domain awareness, and coast guard cooperation** improve regional deterrence and maritime stability.

Alternative Industrial Networks:

- **Countries** can diversify production networks by utilizing each partner's comparative advantages.
- **Australia** provides **critical minerals**, **New Zealand** contributes agricultural innovation, while **India** strengthens manufacturing and digital capabilities.

Defence Cooperation:

- **Minilateral logistics agreements, joint military exercises, technology co-development, and defence exports** improve regional defence preparedness.
- **India's defence cooperation with Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam** strengthens regional deterrence while promoting indigenous defence manufacturing.

Financial and Technological Resilience:

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- **Local currency settlement mechanisms** reduce excessive dependence on global reserve currencies.
- **Cross-border digital payment systems** and **financial connectivity initiatives** improve regional financial resilience.
- **Cooperation** in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and **digital governance** expands trusted technological ecosystems.

Significance for India:

Strategic Advantages:

- **The framework** enables **India** to preserve **strategic autonomy** while simultaneously strengthening relations with both Western and Asian partners.
- **India** gains greater diplomatic flexibility by avoiding exclusive alignment with any major power bloc.
- **The approach** supports India's vision of a **free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.

Defence Industrial Development:

- **Technology partnerships** accelerate **Make in India, Aatmanirbhar Bharat**, and domestic defence manufacturing.
- **Joint development projects** with **Japan** and expanding defence exports strengthen India's indigenous defence ecosystem.

Economic Opportunities:

- **Diversified supply chains** increase investment inflows and reduce external economic vulnerabilities.
- **The strategy** supports India's ambition to become a trusted global manufacturing and logistics hub.

Neighbourhood and Regional Diplomacy:

- **Stronger partnerships** with **ASEAN countries** deepen India's **Act East Policy** and **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**.
- **Defence cooperation** with **Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam**, and other Southeast Asian countries strengthens India's regional credibility.

Global Governance:

- **Expanded partnerships** strengthen India's position in global institutions and reinforce its aspirations for a **permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council**.
- **Closer cooperation** also enhances India's influence within organisations such as the **International Energy Agency, G20**, and **Indian Ocean regional institutions**.

Challenges and Limitations:

Strategic Challenges:

- **Managing relations simultaneously** with both **the United States** and **China** requires continuous diplomatic balancing.
- **Differences in national interests** among middle powers may limit policy coordination.

Economic Challenges:

- **China** remains the largest trading partner for many Indo-Pacific economies, making complete supply chain diversification difficult.
- **Infrastructure financing, technology gaps**, and **investment constraints** may slow implementation.

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Security Challenges:

- **China's expanding naval presence, grey-zone activities, and regional territorial disputes** continue to generate security uncertainties.
- **Absence of binding institutional mechanisms** may reduce the effectiveness of collective responses during crises.

Way Forward:

Strengthening Regional Partnerships:

- **India** should deepen cooperation with **Japan, Australia, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, and ASEAN** across defence, trade, technology, and connectivity.
- **Existing minilateral frameworks** should be expanded through practical projects instead of treaty-based alliances.

Economic Modernisation:

- **Domestic economic reforms, logistics improvements, manufacturing competitiveness, and ease of doing business** should remain national priorities.
- **Supply chain resilience initiatives** should be integrated with **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes, National Logistics Policy, and PM Gati Shakti.**

Technological Leadership:

- **Investment in semiconductors, critical technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and digital infrastructure** should be accelerated.
- **Robust data governance frameworks** should safeguard India's strategic digital assets.

Defence Preparedness:

- **Joint research, co-development, co-production, and defence exports** should continue to strengthen indigenous defence capabilities.
- **Maritime domain awareness, naval interoperability, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief cooperation** should receive greater emphasis.

Important Facts to Remember:

- **Core Idea:** Cooperation among **middle powers** without exclusive dependence on **the United States or China.**
- **Nature:** Flexible **bilateral, trilateral, and minilateral** partnerships rather than treaty alliances.
- **Primary Objective:** Expand **strategic autonomy**, strengthen **economic resilience**, and enhance **regional security.**
- **Important Maritime Chokepoint: Strait of Malacca.**
- **Key Strategic Partners for India: Japan, Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, and ASEAN.**

India's Foreign Policy Principle Supported: Strategic Autonomy through **multi-alignment** rather than bloc politics