



## A multipolarity, scripted by the middle powers

### New Cold War: The Indo-Pacific versus Eurasia

1. It is clear that the U.S. continues to view China as its principal adversary on the world stage and that it will use the Quad to challenge China in the Indo-Pacific, possibly as part of a “new Cold War”.
2. This new Cold War was given concrete shape during the Trump presidency when the ravages of the pandemic made the President and his officials demonise China.
3. The U.S.’s hostility for Russia goes back to the latter’s war with Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, followed by allegations of Russian cyber-interference in the U.S. presidential elections of 2016. Mr Biden continues this hostility for Russia.
4. U.S. animosity has encouraged China and Russia to solidify their relations. Besides significantly expanding their bilateral ties, the two countries have agreed to harmonise their visions under the Eurasian Economic Union sponsored by Russia and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
5. This idea has now been subsumed under the ‘Greater Eurasian Partnership’ to which both are committed. Both have condemned the Quad for “undermining global strategic stability”.

Thus, the new Cold War is now being reflected in a new geopolitical binary — the Indo-Pacific versus Eurasia.

### Middle Powers:

The final shape of this divide will be determined by four nations, namely Japan, Iran, Turkey and India, which, as “middle powers”, have the capacity to project power regionally, build alliances, and support (or disrupt) the strategies of international powers pursuing their interests in the region.

1. On the face of it, their alignments are already in place: Japan and India are deeply entrenched in the Quad and have substantial security ties with the U.S.
2. Iran, on the other hand, has for long been an outcast in western eyes and has found strategic comfort with the Sino-Russian alliance. Turkey, a NATO member, has found its interests better-served by Russia and China rather than the U.S. and its European allies.
3. The main reason is that, despite the allure, the four nations are not yet prepared to join immutable alliances.



## Reluctant allies

### JAPAN

1. Japan has an ongoing territorial dispute with China relating to the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. Thus, the security treaty of 1951 with the U.S. has been crucial for Japan's interests.
2. But there is more to Sino-Japanese relations: in 2019, 24% of Japanese imports came from China, while 19% of its exports went to China, affirming the adage: Japan depends too much on the U.S. for its security and too much on China for its prosperity.

### INDIA

1. India's ties with China have been caught in a vicious circle: as threats from China at the border and intrusions in its South Asian neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean became sharper, it moved closer to the U.S.
2. China has a point: while the Quad has made India a valuable partner for the U.S. in the west Pacific, neither the U.S. nor the Quad can address the challenges it faces at its 3,500-kilometre land border with China.
3. The 'revenge of geography' and concerns relating to the U.S.'s intrusive approach on human rights issues ensure that India will need to manage its ties with China largely through its own efforts while retaining Russia as its defence partner.

### IRAN

1. The crippling sanctions on Iran and the frequent threats of regime change make it a natural ally of the Sino-Russian axis. However, its strategic culture eschews long-term security alignments.
2. This will surely assert itself after sanctions are eased when the Islamic Republic of Iran will seek to redefine its strategic space and exercise independent options.

### Turkey:

1. The "neo-Ottomanism" of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan — celebrating Turkey's glory through military and doctrinal leadership across the former territories of the Ottoman empire — has been achieved through a steady



distancing from its western partners and increasing geopolitical, military and economic alignment with Russia and China.

2. But Turkey still wishes to keep its ties with the U.S. intact and retain the freedom to make choices. Its “New Asia” initiative, for instance, involves the strengthening of east-west logistical and economic connectivity backed by western powers and China.

**Defining characteristic: Multipolarity based on Strategic autonomy**

The four middle powers, whose choice of alignment will impart a political and military binary to world order, are reluctant to make this a reality. While Cold War advocates in the U.S. will continue to promote ever-tighter alliances, these nations could find salvation in “strategic autonomy” — defined by flexible partnerships, with the freedom to shape alliances to suit specific interests at different times. These four middle powers will thus make multipolarity, rather than a new Cold War, the defining characteristic of the emerging global order.