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## Research Article

# Indo-Pacific: Bangladesh's Strategic Move to Geopolitics and Climate Security Concerns

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**Abstract.** Bangladesh's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region is shaped by a delicate balancing act between global powers, notably the United States and China, while simultaneously addressing climate change and its security implications. This article explores the evolving nature of Bangladesh's foreign policy, focusing on its engagement in the Indo-Pacific, its climate diplomacy, and its leadership role in multilateral forums like the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). Drawing from Realist and Constructivist theoretical frameworks, the analysis underscores Bangladesh's emphasis on securing national interests while promoting climate justice and regional stability. The article further examines the challenges Bangladesh faces due to climate-induced migration, security issues in the Bay of Bengal, and the emerging opportunities through blue economy initiatives. Future recommendations focus on strengthening multilateral engagement, expanding climate adaptation policies, and leveraging technology to enhance climate resilience. Bangladesh's strategic adaptability and leadership in both geopolitical and environmental arenas are crucial for its future security and prosperity.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh's Foreign Policy, Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics, Climate Security, Realism and Constructivism

## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, located at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, faces complex challenges in shaping its foreign policy. Geopolitically, the country must navigate its relationships with major powers like the United States and China while maintaining regional stability. Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook, a response to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, reflects its careful balancing act (Markey & Siddiqui, n.d.; Rozario, 2023). At the same time, the country faces severe climate vulnerabilities, from rising sea levels to climate-induced migration, which shape its international diplomacy and security concerns (Bangladesh's foreign policy priorities and challenges, n.d).

With growing global attention on the Indo-Pacific, Bangladesh's strategic position has become critical. However, domestic environmental crises continue to demand attention, pushing climate issues to the forefront of its foreign policy agenda. Bangladesh has emerged as a leader in advocating for climate justice, utilizing multilateral platforms to address the disproportionate effects of climate change (Rahman, 2024). This article seeks to explore Bangladesh's foreign policy in the context of these intertwined geopolitical and environmental challenges. It provides an in-depth analysis of Bangladesh's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, its leadership in global climate forums, and the implications of climate change on its national security. By applying theoretical lenses such as Realism and Constructivism, the article offers insights into how Bangladesh navigates these challenges and outlines key recommendations for strengthening its foreign policy and climate resilience.

## Literature Review

In *'The Strategic Adjustments of China, India, and the US in the Indo-Pacific Geopolitical Context'*, Binh Nguyen, Hiep Tran, Co Nguyen, and Vuong Nguyen examine the strategic competition between the U.S., China, and India in the Indo-Pacific. The region's critical maritime "choke points" influence global trade and geopolitics. The U.S. promotes the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (FOIP), India pursues the *Indo-Pacific Initiative*, and China uses the *String of Pearls* and *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). These strategies heighten competition and impact the broader international order (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Another study, "Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific: Priorities and Challenges" by Dhanasree Jayaram and Aanehi Mundra, examines the growing climate vulnerabilities in the Indo-Pacific and their implications for regional, national, and ecological security. The research emphasizes the importance of integrating climate action into national security strategies and highlights the barriers to effective collaboration, such as limited climate finance and geopolitical tensions. (Jayaram & Mundra, 2024)

In *'Bangladesh in India's Maritime Strategy Towards the Bay of Bengal'*, Sayantan Halder explores Bangladesh's key role in India's maritime strategy in the Bay of Bengal, emphasizing its importance in India's broader Indo-Pacific engagement. Halder argues that strengthening strategic ties with Bangladesh is

essential for India's regional influence, particularly in the face of potential competition with China (Haldar, 2023).

In *'India's Role in the Indo-Pacific Region: An Overview of Strategic Geopolitical Convergences'*, Sayantani Sen Mazumdar analyzes India's balancing role in the Indo-Pacific, a region of significant economic and security challenges. The chapter examines India's efforts to foster strategic dialogue among regional powers to promote collective security, economic prosperity, and transcontinental integration, aiming for a peaceful and prosperous "win-win" scenario (Mazumdar, 2024).

In *'Energy Security and Geopolitics: Bangladesh Perspective'*, Brigadier General Md Hakimuzzaman explores the link between energy security and geopolitics, focusing on Bangladesh's unique challenges. The study highlights the 4As of energy security—affordability, accessibility, acceptability, and availability—along with sovereignty and resilience. Hakimuzzaman stresses the importance of balancing, rebalancing, and multi-collaboration strategies over bandwagoning, given the influence of global initiatives like the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS). He advocates for integrating energy security into Bangladesh's National Security Policy (Hakimuzzaman, 2021).

In *'The Emerging Regional Power Dilemma in the Indo-Pacific Region: Bangladesh and Sri Lankan Perspectives'*, Shahab E. Khan examines the challenges faced by Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as emerging powers in the Indo-Pacific, amid the growing influence of the U.S. and China. The article highlights the need for a rule-based system to benefit Indo-Pacific countries economically and advocates for enhancing the strategic autonomy of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka through economic, technological, and institutional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal (Khan, 2021).

In *'Bangladesh's Role in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: A Proposed Strategy'*, Shrabony Akter and Julian Rafah explore how Bangladesh can enhance its role in the Indo-Pacific region. They highlight the country's strategic location and suggest that Bangladesh should engage in regional diplomacy, trade, and maritime security to strengthen its influence and contribute to regional stability (Akter & Rafah, 2023).

In *'Blue Security in the Indo-Pacific'*, Ian Hall, Troy Lee-Brown, and Rebecca Strating introduce the concept of "Blue Security," offering a holistic framework for maritime security in the region. The book examines various challenges, including piracy, climate change, and resource depletion, while advocating for a comprehensive approach that integrates national, regional, and environmental concerns. Through case studies of 18 Indo-Pacific states, the authors explore how these countries manage maritime security threats and their evolving capabilities (Hall, Lee-Brown, & Strating, 2025).

In *'The Implications of Indo-Pacific Strategies for Bangladesh: Challenges and Options'*, the authors explore Bangladesh's strategic shift from land-based to maritime focus, positioning the Bay of Bengal as its 'third neighbor'. They contrast Chinese and American soft power, with China focusing on infrastructure and the U.S. on military assets. The study highlights Bangladesh's choice to pursue regional leadership rather than align with specific geopolitical blocs, reflecting its nuanced approach to Indo-Pacific strategies (Asian Studies, 2023).

After reviewing the existing literature regarding Indo-Pacific we see there is a gap in exploring how Bangladesh's foreign policy reconciles its geopolitical and climate security challenges. This study aims to fill that gap by addressing the following research questions.

### ***Research Questions***

1. How does Bangladesh's "Indo-Pacific Outlook" influence its diplomatic relationships with major global powers, particularly the United States and China?
2. What are the implications of climate change on Bangladesh's foreign policy, specifically regarding security challenges and migration management?
3. In what ways can Bangladesh leverage multilateral engagements and regional partnerships to enhance its resilience against climate-induced security threats in the Indo-Pacific region?

### ***Research Objectives***

- To analyze the influence of Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook on its relationships with major powers.
- To assess the implications of climate change on Bangladesh's foreign policy and security.
- To explore strategies for leveraging multilateral engagements to address climate-induced threats.

### ***Methodology***

This study employs a qualitative research approach, analyzing primary and secondary data related to Bangladesh's foreign policy and climate security strategies. A comprehensive literature review is combined with policy analysis to investigate Bangladesh's diplomatic engagements, climate policies, and international relations in the Indo-Pacific. Data is collected from government publications, international organizations, policy think tanks, and academic journals, supplemented by content analysis of official foreign policy documents and climate action reports from Bangladesh.

The research also uses case studies, focusing on two key areas: (1) Bangladesh's diplomatic relations with the United States, China, and ASEAN nations within the Indo-Pacific strategy, and (2) the impact of climate change on migration and urbanization, particularly in cities like Dhaka. These case studies help illustrate the practical implications of Bangladesh's foreign policy choices.

## **BANGLADESH'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE INDO- PACIFIC REGION**

### ***Economic Diplomacy and Strategic Neutrality***

Bangladesh's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific is defined by a careful balance between global powers. The nation's 'Look East' policy, aimed at enhancing economic ties with China, Japan, and ASEAN nations, aligns with Bangladesh's broader economic development goals (Rozario, 2023). China has been a key partner in this process, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has facilitated

massive infrastructure investments, such as the construction of the Padma Bridge (The Diplomat, n.d). At the same time, Bangladesh seeks to maintain favorable relations with the United States, whose Indo-Pacific strategy emphasizes democratic governance, human rights, and maritime security (Markey & Siddiqui, n.d.).

Despite its economic ties to China, Bangladesh has refrained from taking a firm stance in the Sino-American rivalry. The country's foreign policy remains neutral, reflecting its historical commitment to non-alignment. By maintaining strategic neutrality, Bangladesh is able to secure the economic and military support needed for its development without being drawn into regional power struggles (IISS, n.d).

## 2.2 Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook



In April 2023, Bangladesh formally outlined its 'Indo-Pacific Outlook,' which reaffirms the country's commitment to peaceful cooperation, maritime security, and economic connectivity in the region (Rozario, 2023). Bangladesh has expressed support for a free and open Indo-Pacific while advocating for inclusivity and multilateralism. The emphasis on maritime cooperation is particularly relevant, as Bangladesh's strategic location in the Bay of Bengal places it at the center of discussions surrounding security and resource management in the Indian Ocean.

Bangladesh's involvement in BIMSTEC highlights its role in regional security initiatives, particularly in combating piracy, securing sea lines of communication, and addressing illegal fishing (White House, 2022). Although the country's military capabilities are limited, its strategic position makes it an essential player in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific

## CLIMATE SECURITY AS A FOREIGN POLICY SECURITY



### ***Climate-Induced Migration and Urbanization***

Bangladesh is acutely vulnerable to climate change, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events threatening large portions of its population. The country is one of the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world, and it ranks high on the Global Climate Risk Index. Climate-induced migration is already a major issue, as coastal communities are forced to abandon their homes due to flooding and land erosion (Mian, 2024). These displaced populations often migrate to urban areas like Dhaka, exacerbating existing problems of overcrowding, inadequate housing, and limited resources.

Unplanned urbanization poses significant security challenges. As Rahman (2024) notes, the influx of climate migrants to cities is contributing to increased crime, resource conflicts, and public health crises. Without adequate infrastructure to support these populations, urban areas are becoming sites of growing social unrest.

### ***Bangladesh's Global Climate Diplomacy***

In the international arena, Bangladesh has become a leading voice for climate justice. As the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), Bangladesh has called for greater financial assistance from developed countries to help vulnerable nations adapt to climate change (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024). The country has also emphasized the importance of sustainable development within the Indo-Pacific framework, advocating for the protection of marine resources and the development of the blue economy (The Daily Star, 2023).

Bangladesh's active role in climate diplomacy aligns with its broader foreign policy objectives, as the country seeks to mitigate the impacts of climate change on its population while pushing for greater international cooperation on climate resilience and adaptation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal a nuanced and adaptive foreign policy approach adopted by Bangladesh in the context of the Indo-Pacific region, shaped by its geographical location, socio-political dynamics, and the increasing impact of climate change. Bangladesh's foreign policy exhibits a pragmatic balancing act between the major global powers, particularly the United States and China, while simultaneously leveraging its unique position in regional security and economic cooperation. The study also underscores the increasing role of environmental challenges in shaping Bangladesh's diplomatic strategies, particularly in its advocacy for climate change action and its efforts to secure international support for climate adaptation.

One of the key findings is that Bangladesh's foreign policy, while influenced by the rivalry between the United States and China, prioritizes neutrality to protect its sovereignty and economic interests. Bangladesh has managed to maintain cordial relations with both countries, recognizing the economic, military, and diplomatic benefits of aligning with these global powers without fully committing to either side. This balancing act ensures that Bangladesh can secure development aid, trade benefits, and investment, while safeguarding its autonomy in decision-making. As a result, the country's foreign policy is marked by strategic engagements with both global powers in areas such as trade, infrastructure development, and security cooperation. However, this neutrality comes with its own challenges, as Bangladesh faces pressure from both the U.S. and China to align with their respective strategic priorities.

The issue of climate change emerges as a central theme in Bangladesh's foreign policy discussions. As one of the most climate-vulnerable countries globally, Bangladesh faces existential threats due to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and the displacement of coastal populations. These environmental challenges are not only a domestic concern but have profound implications for the country's international relations. Bangladesh's participation in global climate forums, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and its leadership role in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), reflects the country's active pursuit of international cooperation and financial support to address climate change impacts. The findings indicate that climate change is not merely an environmental issue for Bangladesh but a central aspect of its diplomatic engagement, as it seeks to secure climate adaptation resources and advocate for financial aid to support vulnerable populations.

The research also highlights the emerging security concerns stemming from climate-induced migration. Rising sea levels and environmental degradation have forced rural populations in Bangladesh's coastal regions to migrate to urban centers, putting pressure on the country's already strained infrastructure and social systems. This internal displacement has prompted Bangladesh to seek regional cooperation and international support to manage the security risks posed by migration, while also emphasizing the need for sustainable development practices in coastal regions. Bangladesh's involvement in multilateral organizations such as SAARC and BIMSTEC



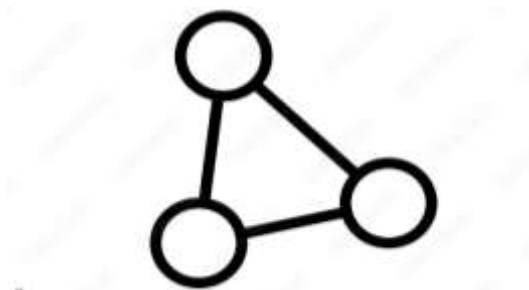
reflects its strategic approach to managing these challenges through regional cooperation. These platforms allow Bangladesh to address issues such as disaster management, climate adaptation, and the protection of its coastal security in collaboration with neighboring countries.

The country's emphasis on maritime security and the development of a "Blue Economy" also reflects its strategic vision for addressing both economic and security concerns in the region. The Bay of Bengal, with its rich maritime resources and strategic location, plays a pivotal role in Bangladesh's foreign policy. By focusing on maritime security and the sustainable utilization of ocean resources, Bangladesh aims to ensure its long-term economic stability while securing its maritime borders. The "Blue Economy" initiative highlights the country's recognition of the importance of preserving its maritime resources while contributing to regional economic integration and security.

Furthermore, the findings show that Bangladesh's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by domestic socio-economic realities, particularly poverty, inequality, and population pressure. These internal factors are inextricably linked to Bangladesh's international strategies, as they drive the country's efforts to secure foreign investment, development aid, and climate finance. Bangladesh's foreign policy, therefore, functions as a mechanism to address both internal and external challenges, including the need for poverty alleviation, resource management, and the protection of vulnerable populations.

So, the research indicates that Bangladesh's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region is a complex interplay of geopolitical considerations, climate change impacts, security concerns, and socio-economic realities. Bangladesh has managed to carve out a pragmatic position in the region, balancing its relations with major global powers while advocating for climate justice and addressing internal challenges such as migration and poverty. As the country faces the dual threats of environmental degradation and geopolitical tensions, its foreign policy will likely continue to evolve in response to these pressing issues. By maintaining a strong focus on climate adaptation, maritime security, and regional cooperation, Bangladesh seeks to secure its long-term stability and promote sustainable development in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

## THEORETICAL EXPLANATION OF THIS PHENOMENA



Bangladesh's foreign policy decisions in the Indo-Pacific region and its climate security efforts can be analyzed through various theoretical lenses. Two theories, in



particular, provide critical insights into the country's approach: **Realism** and **Constructivism**.

### ***Realism and Bangladesh's Geopolitical Balancing***

Realism posits that states act in their own self-interest to ensure survival in an anarchic international system, where power and security are the primary concerns. This theory is applicable to Bangladesh's foreign policy, particularly in its strategic balancing between global powers like China and the United States. Realists argue that Bangladesh's primary objective is to secure its national interests by maintaining neutrality in the Sino-American rivalry. By not aligning too closely with either power, Bangladesh ensures that it can benefit from economic investments (particularly from China through the Belt and Road Initiative) while simultaneously receiving development aid and security support from the United States (Markey & Siddiqui, n.d.).

From a realist perspective, Bangladesh's foreign policy emphasizes sovereignty, autonomy, and survival in a competitive Indo-Pacific region. The country's neutral stance allows it to avoid being drawn into regional conflicts while protecting its territorial and economic interests in the Bay of Bengal. In this sense, Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific strategy reflects a classical realist approach to international relations, where economic growth and national security are paramount (Rozario, 2023).

### ***5.2 Constructivism and Bangladesh's Climate Diplomacy***

Constructivist theory, on the other hand, highlights the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping state behavior. Bangladesh's active participation in global climate diplomacy can be explained through a constructivist lens. As a member of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), Bangladesh positions itself as a moral leader in advocating for climate justice and equity (Rahman, 2024). Constructivists argue that Bangladesh's identity as one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations drives its diplomatic efforts to influence international norms regarding climate action and adaptation.

Through multilateral platforms, Bangladesh is attempting to reshape global climate governance by advocating for greater financial assistance and technological support for developing countries. This engagement is not only about securing resources but also about building a global narrative that highlights the ethical responsibility of developed nations to address climate change (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024). Constructivism thus provides a framework for understanding how Bangladesh leverages its identity and the global norm of climate justice to influence international policy.

## **FUTURE RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION**

### ***Future Recommendations***

Given the complex geopolitical and environmental challenges that Bangladesh faces, several future recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of its foreign policy and climate security strategies.

### **Strengthening Multilateral Engagement in the Indo-Pacific**

Bangladesh should continue to deepen its engagement in multilateral forums such as *the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)* and *the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)*. These platforms provide opportunities for Bangladesh to advocate for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and contribute to maritime security efforts. Bangladesh should also seek to play a more active role in ASEAN-led initiatives, such as the *ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)*, to enhance regional cooperation on security and economic connectivity (IISS, n.d.).

By positioning itself as a proactive participant in regional security initiatives, Bangladesh can increase its influence in shaping the Indo-Pacific discourse, particularly concerning maritime safety, trade routes, and resource management. This strategy will also allow Bangladesh to diversify its diplomatic relationships beyond the United States and China, thus reducing its dependency on any single power.

### **Enhancing Climate Adaptation and Migration Policies**

Bangladesh needs to adopt a more integrated approach to climate-induced migration and urbanization. The unplanned migration from rural coastal areas to urban centers like Dhaka has placed tremendous strain on infrastructure, housing, and social services (Mian, 2024). A more comprehensive national migration policy is needed, one that not only addresses the root causes of migration but also ensures that urban areas are better equipped to handle population influxes. This could include developing secondary cities as alternative urban centers, decentralizing economic opportunities, and investing in climate-resilient infrastructure.

Internationally, Bangladesh should continue to lead initiatives within the CVPF and push for stronger climate financing mechanisms. Engaging with global institutions such as the *Green Climate Fund (GCF)* and the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* will be crucial in ensuring that Bangladesh receives the necessary financial support for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts (The Diplomat, n.d.).

### **Expanding Blue Economy Initiatives**

Bangladesh's strategic location in the Bay of Bengal provides significant opportunities for the development of the blue economy—sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem health. Bangladesh should explore partnerships with regional and global actors to develop its marine industries, including fisheries, shipping, and offshore energy production. The *Bangladesh Maritime Strategy*, introduced in 2022, should be expanded to include more focused investments in sustainable fishing practices, marine conservation, and renewable energy generation (The Daily Star, 2023).

The blue economy can become a critical part of Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific strategy, helping to create new economic opportunities while promoting

environmental sustainability. This would also align with Bangladesh's broader goals of achieving sustainable development and addressing climate vulnerabilities.

### **Leveraging Technology for Climate Resilience**

Bangladesh's research on the use of digital platforms and virtual reality in refugee repatriation demonstrates the potential of technology in addressing climate-induced displacement and broader migration issues (Rahman, 2024). Future foreign policy initiatives should prioritize technology-driven solutions to climate adaptation. This could involve leveraging data analytics, geospatial technologies, and artificial intelligence to monitor climate impacts and implement early warning systems for extreme weather events.

Bangladesh should also seek to collaborate with global tech companies, international organizations, and academic institutions to build capacity in climate resilience technologies. This approach will ensure that Bangladesh remains at the forefront of innovation in climate adaptation and disaster management, providing a model for other climate-vulnerable nations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Bangladesh's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific era is characterized by a strategic balancing act between major global powers, a focus on economic development, and a strong leadership role in global climate diplomacy. The dual challenges of navigating geopolitical rivalries and addressing climate-induced security threats necessitate a comprehensive approach that aligns national interests with global priorities.

Bangladesh's commitment to multilateralism has enabled it to strengthen partnerships with regional and international actors through platforms like BIMSTEC and SAARC. These partnerships are instrumental in promoting regional stability and fostering cooperative responses to shared challenges such as disaster management, maritime security, and climate-induced migration. By expanding its diplomatic engagements, Bangladesh ensures its voice is heard in shaping policies that impact the Indo-Pacific region.

The emphasis on the blue economy highlights Bangladesh's vision to integrate sustainable maritime resource management with economic growth. This approach not only addresses pressing environmental concerns but also creates opportunities for long-term economic benefits, technological innovation, and regional collaboration. Additionally, Bangladesh's leadership in advocating for global climate action exemplifies its proactive role in addressing one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Strengthening national climate policies and leveraging green technologies will further solidify its position as a climate leader in the Indo-Pacific region.

As Bangladesh evolves as a pivotal player in both geopolitical and environmental arenas, its adaptability in foreign policy will be crucial. Balancing economic aspirations, regional stability, and climate resilience requires a nuanced approach that ensures its security and prosperity in the face of interconnected global challenges. By maintaining a strategic focus on multilateralism, sustainability, and

innovation, Bangladesh can continue to navigate the complexities of the Indo-Pacific era effectively, fostering a future of stability and shared growth for itself and the region.

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