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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

A G Minus 2 Strategy for the Indo-Pacific

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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THE LIFT LINE

The safest place to stand in a great-power storm is not behind one giant, but shoulder to shoulder with your fellow middle powers, and that is the logic of a G minus two.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

A “G minus the two great powers”, India, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, South Korea and the ASEAN states building cooperation without being trapped between the US and China, is a precise expression of India’s doctrine of **strategic autonomy** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/strategic-autonomy/>). For the exam it packages unilateralism, ASEAN centrality, supply-chain resilience and multi-alignment into one usable frame.

GS Paper 2: **bilateral** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/bilateral/>), regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; effect of great-power policies on India’s interests; the Indo-Pacific.

For **Prelims**, carry the vehicles: SAGAR and its elevation to MAHASAGAR, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, the Quad, I2U2, the Supply Chain Resilience (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/resilience/>) Initiative, IPEF and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. For **Mains**, argue why middle-power coalitions expand India’s room to manoeuvre without forcing a bloc choice, consistent with India’s official **multi-alignment** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/multi-alignment/>) stand.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Indo-Pacific risks hardening into a bipolar US-China contest in which smaller and middle powers become arenas rather than actors. The “G minus 2” idea responds directly: middle powers should build independent frameworks, minus the two great powers, so they can shape the region on their own terms.

India's own doctrine already runs this way. **SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region) was launched in Mauritius in March 2015; a decade later, in March 2025, again in Mauritius, it was elevated to **MAHASAGAR** (Mutual and Holistic [Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions](https://ujivari.com/vocab/holistic/)). The **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**, proposed at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok in November 2019 with seven pillars, gives the vision an operational architecture. India's framing throughout is **strategic autonomy and multi-alignment** [\(https://ujivari.com/vocab/multi-alignment/\)](https://ujivari.com/vocab/multi-alignment/), not membership of any bloc.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Minilaterals expand strategic space

Small, purpose-built groupings let middle powers act without waiting for consensus among giants. India already sits in several: the **Quad** (India, US, Japan, Australia), whose foreign ministers held their eleventh meeting in New Delhi on May 26, 2026; **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, US, first summit July 2022); and the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative** with Japan and Australia (2021). Each is issue-based, and together they weave a lattice of cooperation that no single power controls.

ASEAN centrality is the anchor

A durable G minus 2 needs a stable core, and **ASEAN centrality** provides it. The **ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP, 2019)** offers an inclusive, non-bloc template; the Philippines chairs ASEAN in 2026. Middle powers should reinforce ASEAN's convening role rather than build structures that bypass it.

LAYER	VEHICLE	WHAT IT SECURES
India's doctrine	SAGAR to MAHASAGAR; IPOI (7 pillars)	Maritime security and growth framing
Minilaterals	Quad; I2U2; SCRI	Issue-based coalitions of the willing
Economic resilience	IPEF (India in pillars II-IV)	Supply chains, clean economy, anti-corruption
Regional core	ASEAN centrality; AOIP	Inclusive, non-bloc convening space

Supply chains and maritime security are the content

The substance of middle-power cooperation is concrete: **supply-chain resilience** to reduce single-country dependence, and **maritime security** to keep sea lanes open. On the rules, the **South China Sea Arbitration award** of July 12, 2016 (Philippines v. China, under UNCLOS) is the reference point for a law-based order that middle powers have a shared stake in upholding.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

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Use the **hedging-versus-bandwagoning** frame. Bandwagoning means aligning fully with one great power for protection, and paying in autonomy; hedging means keeping options open across powers. A G minus 2 is structured hedging: middle powers pool weight so that hedging becomes a strategy, not just an evasion. For India specifically, it operationalises strategic autonomy: engage the US through the Quad, keep channels to China, and simultaneously build a middle-power lattice that reduces dependence on either. The test of the strategy is whether it enlarges choices; if a coalition forces a binary choice, it is a bloc, not a G minus 2.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Bipolar US-China pull -> risk of middle powers as arenas -> response: G minus 2 lattice (India, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, ASEAN) -> minilaterals (Quad, I2U2, SCRI) + ASEAN centrality (AOIP) + IPEF supply chains + maritime security under UNCLOS -> India anchors it via SAGAR to MAHASAGAR and IPOI -> expanded strategic space, multi-alignment preserved

WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Thicken the minilateral lattice.** Deepen the Quad, SCRI and issue-based coalitions so cooperation does not depend on great-power consent.
- 2 **Reinforce ASEAN centrality.** Support the AOIP and ASEAN-led mechanisms as the inclusive core rather than bypassing them.
- 3 **Operationalise MAHASAGAR and IPOI.** Convert the doctrine into concrete maritime security, capacity-building and blue-economy projects across the region.
- 4 **Prioritise supply-chain resilience.** Use IPEF pillars and SCRI to cut single-country dependence in critical goods.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about the Quad, ASEAN's role in the Indo-Pacific, India's strategic autonomy, and the significance of the Indo-Pacific to India. This editorial ties those to the middle-power coalition idea.

Practice question: "For a middle power, minilateralism is the practical face of strategic autonomy."

Examine how India can use a coalition of Indo-Pacific middle powers to navigate US-China rivalry without joining a bloc. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>)

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