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THE INDO-PACIFIC

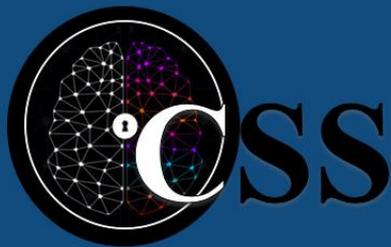
CONSTRUCT AND SUBSCRIPTION

CSS DIALOGUE REPORT

Indo-Pacific: Construct and Subscription

As a geographical concept, the Indo-Pacific has existed for a long time, however, it has over the years, been redefined along both political and strategic lines. Across the globe, powers have sought to increase their own influence in the region, either overtly or covertly. As great and rising powers alike seek to build on objectives of control and strategic influence, the Indo-Pacific is slowly being transformed into a region that could be the seat of greater competition and even conflict. In this regard, a race for strategic influence has spanned all sectors of state power: hard, sharp and soft; diplomatic, information, military and economic; seeking to exert and maintain influence over air, sea, land, space, cyber, technology and innovation. Nonetheless, the space itself has been defined in complex and distinct ways by each stakeholder involved. While some states see it merely as a geographical condition, others see it as a strategic reality and even others see it as a construct that will evolve and soon disappear. However, it must be acknowledged that through whatever lens it may be perceived, the region itself is one that is defining strategic competition, and thus also a geopolitical reality of critical importance. It is therefore important, that both constructions and subscriptions of the Indo Pacific are assessed so as to understand the perceptions and possible actions of old and new stakeholders alike.

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DEFINING A CONSEQUENTIAL REGION

The United States and the Indo-Pacific

Miriyala Samyukta¹

Defining the Indo pacific and US perception of the Indo pacific

Indo-Pacific is the fusion of two regions comprising the tropical waters of Indian ocean, the western and the central Pacific Ocean. It comprises of important bio-geographic regions like the Indonesian archipelago, the South China Sea, the Philippine Sea, north coast of Australia, Papua New Guinea, Micronesia in the Central Indo Pacific region. The eastern Indo pacific region comprises of Marshall Islands and the western Indo-pacific region comprises of Indian Ocean, Africa's east coast, Gulf of Aden, Persian Gulf, Arabian sea, Bay of Bengal, Madagascar, Andaman Islands, Maldives etc.

'Indo-Pacific' was mentioned prominently in top-level U.S. strategic documents such as the 2017 National Security Strategy, (The White House, 2017), the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2019) and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2018). A free and open Indo pacific region is the vision of the US administration during the Trump administration while new likely US President Joe Biden is proposing secure and prosperous Indo-pacific.

Key players

The Indo-Pacific was meant to bring India and Indian Ocean into focus and also address future challenges by reinventing this geographical construct. ASEAN countries claim to be at the centre of the Indo-Pacific architecture. They have increased trade with China over USA. The closer geographical proximity with China is one advantage for promoting trade and commerce through land and maritime routes. Few countries have clashes with China over issues like territorial disputes, Taiwan issue, the South China Sea dispute etc. However, the countries do not stand against China owing to these reasons. They are readily accepting investments from China and accommodated its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in their countries.

China is a key player in the region. There is a growing footprint of China across the length and breadth of the region while the US alliance partners are apprehensive about Chinese activities in the region. With various strategies like 'string of pearls', investments and infrastructure projects in other countries to the recent Belt and Road Initiative connecting different countries

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across different regions, thereby improving trade, transport and commerce, China has been continually increasing its foothold in the region.

Chinese scholars believe that the geopolitical changes brought about by China's rise are the main reason Washington is devoting efforts to boost Indo-Pacific alliances, and the Indo-Pacific strategy is intended to hedge against China's foreign and security policy behaviour (Chen, 2018).

Against the backdrop of the relative weakening of the United States' dominant position and the increasing shift of geopolitical and economic gravity to the Indo-Pacific, the aim is to reshape alliances and partnerships to respond to China's rise. (Chen, 2018)

Interests of the United States

US has key interests in South China Sea, Philippine sea region and Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific is of great value to the United States for its trade routes and navigation possibilities. The Indo-Pacific region connects USA to the east coast of Africa, covering the Indian ocean region and the South East Asian region. America's annual two-way trade with the region is \$2.3 trillion, with U.S. foreign direct investment of \$1.3 trillion in the region — more than China's, Japan's, and South Korea's combined." (M. Cronin & McGrath, 2019)

Given increase in China's focus on the Indo-pacific region, United states also prioritizes the Indo pacific region to counter China and keep a check on its influence. QUAD group consisting of India, Japan, Australia and the US is of significant importance. It is aimed at maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region in a democratic manner and also counter Chinese domination in the region. The countries in this QUAD grouping are geographically located in the Indo Pacific region (with US operating bases in Diego Garcia, Guam and Japan). This increases the importance of Indo-Pacific region to USA.

Foreign policy initiatives like 'Pivot to Asia' policies were a priority to the Democrat government. The Trans Pacific Partnership, pivot to Asia, and other initiatives were started by the Obama administration. The democratic party prioritized Asia and Indo pacific region and showcased the same in their actions. After President Trump came to power, the US withdrew from the Trans Pacific Partnership and the pivot to Asia has been crushed by his 'America First' policy. With governments changing in USA, their priority towards Asia may differ but their priority towards the QUAD grouping and Indo-Pacific shall remain to be of High importance.

In 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump issued a joint statement that prioritized Indo Pacific for both the countries. They agreed that close strategic ties between USA and India are important for the stability of the Indo Pacific region. In their statement, they shared that the countries would "deepen and expand their strategic partnership on common objectives" that include "combatting terrorist threats, promoting stability across the Indo-

Pacific region, increasing free and fair trade, and strengthening energy linkages". (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017)

The " Indo-Pacific " used by Trump means that India, the United States, and other major Asian democracies, especially Japan and Australia, will join in curbing China in the new framework of growing "Cold War" influence. (Chen, 2018)

Ambitions for the region and current actions in the region

In November 2019, the US government has released a document titled 'A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision' which spoke about US intentions and ambitions towards the Indo pacific region. The then Secretary of Defence Patrick M. Shanahan, stated that America's "enduring commitment to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific in which all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules, norms, and principles of fair competition." (Secretary of State, 2019). These opening remarks of the document explains the commitment and vision America holds towards the Indo-Pacific region.

In this first Indo pacific strategy report, US makes it clear that it will rely on its five partners – India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal. United states asserted that it will not accept policies or actions in the region, that threaten or undermine the rules based international order. No one nation should be able to dominate the region. (Secretary of State, 2019)

There is also a rising involvement of the US in the new growth areas of Asia. The US conceptualized the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) during the US India Strategic Dialogue in 2013. This Indo-Pacific economic corridor is sought to increase the prospects of investments and development, for trade and transit between the countries. (Secretary of State, 2019)

In 2019, the U.S. State Department published a document formalizing the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", to be sustained among members of "the Quad". The America's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP) has been initiated and the focus of FOIP is to foster maritime capacity building and funding regional inter interconnectivity projects like the East-West Economic Corridor and the Maritime ASEAN Economic Corridor. FOIP functions on three pillars - security, economics, and governance. (Mehta 2019)

In recognition that "economic security is national security," the idea is to promote infrastructure investment in the Indo pacific vigilantly abiding to the principles of transparency, market-based financing, open infrastructure, and debt sustainability. (Secretary of State, 2019) Further, new development finance partnerships with Japan, Australia, Canada, and the European Union; the BUILD (Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development) Act; and the recent announcement of \$10 billion in U.S.-Japan energy investment, a U.S.-ASEAN

Smart Cities Partnership, and a five-nation effort to provide Papua New Guinea with electricity. An Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative will help shine a spotlight on some of China's opaque and coercive investments. Moreover, the authorized but not appropriated — Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) awaits funding and implementation to broaden existing programs such as the Maritime Security Initiative. (Secretary of State, 2019)

Current defence activities in the region include more than 2,000 aircraft; 200 ships and submarines; and more than 370,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, DoD civilians, and contractors under the USINDOPACOM program (US Indo Pacific Command) assigned within its area of responsibility. (Secretary of State, 2019)

The defence ministers of the United States, Japan, and Australia announced a “strategic action agenda”(Secretary of State, 2019). This is also an attempt to counter BRI. United States is telling the region that it either needs to step up to the challenge of competition with China, preferably with the United States, or risk losing independence and even sovereignty.

Conclusion

Scholars are opinionated that the Indo Pacific could be the region for 21st century Cold War between USA and China. The Indo Pacific is a region of diverse countries and ample opportunities. USA has been attempting to regain its foothold in the region. The success of US initiative mentioned above will give a boost to USA support in the region. However, strong presence of China in the region is here to stay, challenging United states of America to up its game in the Indo Pacific region.

The Indo Pacific report asserts in its opening line that the Indo-Pacific is the most “consequential region for America's future,” but doesn't seriously contend with how the United States is planning to ensure that limited resources will be allocated to match that assessment. (Panda, 2019) The report has an optimistic and futuristic tone and thus lags in addressing the threat perception between USA and other parts of the region. The future effectiveness of the Indo-Pacific strategy is uncertain, not least as the United States, Japan, India and Australia have yet to improve coordinating and joint adoption of policies and strategies. (Chen, 2018)

TOWARDS A FREE AND OPEN STRATEGY

Japan and the Indo-Pacific

Joseph Punnen²

The term “Indo-Pacific” is a concept that has been articulated by the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the last few years. In his Policy Speech to the Diet in January 2019, Prime Minister Abe emphasized “Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP)” as the aim of Japan’s foreign policy. The concept of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy, in its current form, was articulated in November 2016, in a joint statement issued by India and Japan during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Tokyo. The statement referred to “improving connectivity between Asia and Africa through realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific as vital to the entire region”. The foreign policy of Japan can be observed through the annually released Diplomatic Bluebook, especially since the 2017 edition of the Bluebook, it has portrayed the idea of FOIP at the core of Japan’s foreign policy for the region. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2016)

From a Japanese perspective the origin of the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” can be traced back to the speech in August 2007, during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to India where he addressed the Indian Parliament, in his speech, titled “The Confluence of the Two Seas” (Shinzo Abe,2007), the Prime Minister talked about “an arc of Freedom and Prosperity, which will be formed along the outer ring of the Eurasian continent”. This was arguably the first, if somewhat oblique, reference to evolving a cohesive strategy for the entire Indo-Pacific maritime space.

During Prime Minister Abe’s subsequent visit to New Delhi in December 2015, the two countries announced the “Japan and India Vision 2025”. The joint statement stated that, “*Under the new and renewed enhanced partnership Japan and India will be able to promote the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015). Following this, in August 2016, during his speech to Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Nairobi, Kenya, Prime Minister Abe said, “*Japan bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.*” (Shinzo Abe,2016)

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ can be best captured to represent the rise of China and India, as well as the resulting great-power competition and deepening economic links across the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are often seen as mere (albeit new) geopolitical realities. In other words, the fear of the rising China and their influence in Asia has prompted Japan to side with

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India and its enthusiasm about the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept. As a result, the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ is not a neutral description, but is a manufactured super-region designed to hedge against a perceived Sino-centric regional order. Thereby encouraging the great power competition in the region and aggravating the regional security dilemmas. It is the China factor that led Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to advocate the EAS (East Asian Summit), an Asian regional concept that would allow Japan to redraw the geopolitical map of East Asia so as to include Australia, New Zealand and India as additional counterbalances against China. In this sense, the ‘Indo-Pacific’—or what Abe termed ‘a broader Asia’—is a continuation of Japan’s expanded EAS (ASEAN + 6) regional initiative.

Japan sees the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy to connect the two continents of Asia and Africa as well as connecting the Pacific and the Indian oceans. Japan hopes to evolve a paradigm that views this geographical span as a single strategic space, upon which it may be able to apply its foreign policy strategies to good effect. According to an official document issued by the Japanese government in 2017, titled *Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017*, claims that under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, “*Japan will enhance ‘connectivity’ between Asia and Africa to promote stability and prosperity across the regions. Japan will secure the safety of Japanese nationals playing active roles overseas, through cooperation with developing countries in improving their anti-terrorism measures and security situation, etc. Based on the concept of ‘sustaining peace’, Japan will proactively contribute to realizing peace and stability in the international community through cooperation in areas such as peace building, assistance for refugees, and countermeasures against violent extremism, etc., while strengthening the nexus between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. In addition, Japan will support the efforts of countries with which Japan shares universal values, including the rule of law, and cooperate in the fields of reinforcing the capacity of maritime law enforcement, establishing legal systems, etc.*” (Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

As a result, Tokyo established the three pillars for the FOIP strategy, the first being the promotion and establishment of fundamental values such as rule of law and freedom of navigation, secondly the pursuit of economic prosperity through the improvement of connectivity and thirdly the commitment for peace and stability via capacity building on maritime law enforcement capabilities. Personally, being a follower of constructivism, I believe that the ‘Indo-Pacific’ is defined to enable the United States and its allies to strengthen and expand their existing framework and alliance networks in order to counter the China-centric regional order in Asia.

As part of Japan’s FOIP activities, it has been involved in several port developments across both Asia and Africa. In the case of the African continent, it has received significant assistance from Japanese companies, especially in the African states of Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania. (C. Pajone, 2017)

Japan has been actively involved in several port development projects, in both Asia and Africa. The African continent in particular has been the beneficiary of significant Japanese assistance. Most Japanese companies have significant presence in East and South Africa, especially in Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania and these five countries are the top five recipients of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the sub-Saharan region. (Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017) In Mozambique, Japan has spent over USD 320 million for the development of Nacala Port and it is considered as the best natural harbour on the east coast of Africa and the port is expected to be a regional hub and is expected to boost the economy of Southern Africa. (Mozambique Port of Nacala, n.d.) Japan has also invested heavily in Madagascar, Zambia and other states, their investments are essentially aimed at expanding the port facilities.

In the region around the middle east, Japan has entered into an agreement with India to assist and help in the development of Chabahar Port in Iran in 2017. Japan provided a loan of USD 660 million to Oman for the development of Duqm Port in 2007. The port is said to hold strategic influence, as it would allow oil tankers hailing from the West Asian countries to bypass the Persian Gulf and the troubled chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz. (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2007)

Whereas in India, Japan has committed to provide a loan of USD 4.5 billion for the development of Delhi-Mumbai Economic Corridor which includes the development of the Dighi Port in Mumbai. In Myanmar, Japan has invested heavily as well, especially towards the Yangon port area which involves various power projects, customs modernisation projects, human resource development, etc. In Sri Lanka, Japan is involved in the construction of the Galle Port, which is situated just over 110 Km away from the Hambantota Port which is funded by China and it will be interesting to observe the manner in which these ports are developed with contrasting models and how they evolve as maritime trade hubs. Japan has also made other key investments in other regions as well, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia.

Another important aspect is Japan's proactive contribution to peace in the Indo-Pacific and the country has stressed on the need to ensure peace and stability in the region and it has been stated in Japan's first National Security Strategy in 2013. However, the military actions outside its territory were severely hampered due to its pacifist constitution, preventing Japan's military involvement in third party conflicts and collective self-defence activities. However, in the past decade, Japan has been making some amendments to its constitution, to allow its military to participate in drills and other exercises outside its territories. For the first time in 2009, the country sent its Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces (JMSDF) to the Gulf of Aden as part of international efforts to fight piracy.³ It further expanded to include the Indian Ocean and the

³ This was a major departure from Japanese policy in the post-war period, as military elements (the JMSDF) were allowed to be part of operations far from the Japanese coast. A new domestic law also gave the JMSDF the mandate to protect non-Japanese ships in the region and allowed the JMSDF to participate in anti-piracy operations anywhere in the world, without the approval from the diet.

South China Sea and was allowed to carry out surveillance and intelligence gathering activities. And moreover, Japan has established a military base in Djibouti for ‘anti-piracy’ operations in 2011 by the JSDF. (S. Maslow & R. Mason, 2018) This is a major shift for a country that has been earlier reluctant to send its forces outside its own territory, even for disaster relief operations.

Japan is one of the architects of the ‘quadrilateral’ initiative which was led by the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, even though it was not viable in 2007, its re-establishment in 2017 was primarily due to the efforts of Japan. (The Wire, 2017) (A. Panda, 2014) Japan is also a permanent member of the annual India-US MALABAR series of naval exercises since 2015. Japan’s entrance as a permanent member to such an exercise has a series of implications. In the eyes of China, it is seen as a containment policy whereas for other democratic states it is merely to maintain Free and Open Seas and to maintain status quo in the region, especially around the South China Sea and Japan’s participation could lead to possible great-power collaboration in the region. (Times of India, 2015)

In essence, Japan has been practicing the policy of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” for over a decade and will continue to do so. They have accomplished several facets of their FOIP strategy and have made inroads into several areas and once can observe that Japan is trying to see the Indian and Pacific Oceans as one strategic littoral space. However, they are proceeding with caution and does not want a flare-up in the region which is against their interests nor for its neighbours. Given Japan’s history especially its actions during the second world war, some countries may hinder or may come in the way of Japan’s plans. Japan is often referred to as a ‘reactive power’ wherein most of their actions such as FOIP are in response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, with Japan having articulated the “confluence of the seas” concept in 2007, it has since then been pursuing a policy premised on an interconnected Indo-Pacific region, well before its articulation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. Therefore, while Japan has been a pioneer in viewing the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single entity, the initiatives that seek to operationalise this concept have serious competition from those of the Chinese. How this competition will play out, and what it will entail for regional countries, is something that only time can tell.

A STRATEGIC RE-ORIENTATION

Australia's Position in the Indo-Pacific

Zeus Hans Mendez⁴

For Australia, the Indo-Pacific is not only a construct that it is one of the biggest proponents of, on its own, but the very notion of an Indo-Pacific serves to bolster its own identity and security simultaneously. Essentially, Australia has been one of the earliest and most vocal champions of the Indo-Pacific concept; with usage dating as far back as the mid-1960s. Today it has yet again gained more prominence in Australian policy circles. Nonetheless, much as it has been seen elsewhere, the concept itself is debated. For the US and even Japan, it seems to be a concept that emerges out of the need to counter China, while for India and Indonesia it is more of a geographical condition that could result in a possible strategy. While for China itself it is quote unquote an “attention grabbing idea that will dissipate like ocean foam” (Birtles, 2018). This is in fact a Chinese response made to one of Australia's own comments on the Indo-Pacific.

In Australian policy and strategic circles, similar disagreements exist. These include propositions by analysts like Hugh White who see the Indo-Pacific as a concept that will eventually collapse under the weight of Asia's shifting power relativities due to possible spheres of influence that may soon develop (White, 2017). Other academics see it more as a geographic reality that merely reflects the substantial growth in maritime traffic (Wesley, 2011). Nonetheless, in Australian strategic policy circles, a bipartisan consensus has seemingly formed around the concept, which sees it as a condition and a strategy. This was first seen in Australia's 2013 defence white paper, then reproduced in the 2016 defence and 2017 foreign policy white papers and overtly reinforced in its 2020 defence strategic update. However, Australia is still crafting its role within the region and this is because for years it was unable to lift itself out of the debates of it being a “dependent ally” or it being a “middle power” (Taylor, 2020). The proponents of the first tag sided greatly with the US, while the proponents of the second sought to build Australia's role on its own, the reason behind Australia building ties with China as well.

Australian strategists have believed that the safety of their indefensible continent depends upon a favourable global and regional configuration of power. Australia in their view is safest when the world's rivalries are playing out far from its shores. However, as stated in its 2020 strategic update as well, the country recognizes the fact that strategic competition, primarily between the United States and China, will be the principal driver of strategic dynamics across the Indo-

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Pacific and increasingly in their own immediate region. This fact is highly symbolic of the path that Australia has now picked, one which has reoriented much of its strategic policy. This reorientation has meant that Australia now seeks to assume a more active role in defending its place within the evolving Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics. This is clearly apparent in its portrayal of the US-China dynamics.

While for many years, the Australian government chose to adopt a neutral stance in the Indo-Pacific, balancing between US and China, it has seemingly changed its course of action drastically now. This is echoed across its newly released 2020 Defence Strategic Update and Force Structure Plan, a paper that shows how Australia will navigate what its Prime Minister calls a “poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly future” (Morrison, 2020). This has played out in the language the paper uses and the actions that it will follow up on. The initial 2016 publication of Australia’s Defence White Paper showed a balanced approach and the same neutrality was also maintained in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. This has changed today, with Australia actually officially recognizing the threats it faces from China.

This change can only be addressed by looking at the wordings and the actions of the Australian government; initially looking at Australia’s 2016 and 2017 positions and the drastically altered one of 2020. Now, while on the one hand, Australia mentions in its 2016 white paper that it welcomes and supports the critical role of the United States in ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region, it also states that it “welcomes China’s growing participation in United Nations peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and anti-piracy operations;” going further to say that “Australia will expand its defence relationship with China over the coming years.” (Department of Defence, 2016) This is a clear indication of Australia’s desire in 2016 at least to continue maintaining a neutral stance between China and the US.

Within its latest 2020 paper though, it is clear that the Australian government sees the stability of the Indo-Pacific as well as its own immediate neighbourhood as being threatened. In this paper, it mentions that “Since 2016, major powers have become more assertive in advancing their strategic preferences and seeking to exert influence, including China’s active pursuit of greater influence in the Indo-Pacific.”(Department of Defence, 2020) This is one of the few instances that Australia has in fact called out China. The paper also states that Australia is concerned by the potential for actions, such as the establishment of military bases, which could undermine stability in the Indo-Pacific and its immediate region. Nonetheless, this is but one dynamic in Australia’s role and relation to the Indo-Pacific. In this as well actually, while Australia does call out China on its actions, it is not directly confrontationalist. Scott Morrison in a speech last year, said once again that his government is committed to further enhancing their relationship with China. The shift seems to be a product of 2020 very specifically.

Neutrality for a long time has in fact been at the crux of Australia’s evolving Indo-Pacific strategy and perception as well. In its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, Australia mentions that it will commit to working with ‘major Indo-Pacific democracies’, including ‘in small

groups, to promote ... a balance in the region favourable to its interests' (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017). These interests mean the desire for stability which in Australia's opinion, for many years, requires regionalism and collaboration. Much of Australia's foreign policy statements has seen it seek to enforce global rules and norms on regions, subscribing to the need for regional collaborations more than anything else. It played a key role in the East Asian Summit, in the ASEAN formation and the APEC formation as well. The then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull made this a central theme during his June 2017 keynote address to the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, when he called upon the world's leaders to collectively work towards an Indo-Pacific region 'where might is not right, where transparent rules apply to all—the big fish, the little fish and the shrimps' (Turnbull, 2017). Australia is clearly wary of the fact that as its economy declines, it will be put aside as the other powers grow. It could also be seen as the reasoning behind its motivation for cooperation with India, ASEAN countries or the QUAD today.

The Australian continent is part of the geographical divide between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Australia is thus inextricably invested in the security of both regions. If the Indo-Pacific is accepted as the new organising principle of the foreign policies of Australia, India, Japan and the US at least for the region, then the four coming together informally in the Quad is also a logical outcome. Australia's participation would have symbolic value in highlighting its own need to "relocate" Australia in the region. In other words, Australia seemingly sees the need to redefine its geostrategic setting at the nexus of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. It seems that through the bolstering of regionalism and its plurilateral collaborations such as in the QUAD, Australia seeks to find a new and more prominent role in the newly-defined Indo-Pacific.

This new role will not only include cooperating regionally but also seeking to establish more of a regional leadership role. In its 2020 update, Australia has clearly stated that "to help countries in our immediate neighbourhood respond to the challenges they face, Australia will continue to play an important regional leadership role, going further to say that Australia's strategic weight, proximity and resources place high expectations on it to respond to instability or natural disasters" (Department of Defence, 2020). While this is more representative of its regional leadership role vis a vis Papua New Guinea and other such nations, Australia is also expanding cooperation with Southeast Asian Nations and East Asian Nations.

Indonesia actually plays a key role in this regard. Collaboration between the two was at a nascent stage for many years, but in 2006 it was revitalized to be considered at the same status as a security partnership of sorts. The Lombok treaty signed between the two includes a clause that states that "The Parties, consistent with their respective domestic laws and international obligations, shall not in any manner support or participate in activities by any person or entity which constitutes a threat to the national stability, sovereignty or territorial integrity of the other Party, including by those who seek to use its territory for encouraging or committing such activities, including separatism, in the territory of the other Party" (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2006) This was followed up in 2014 by the Joint Understanding on a code

of conduct between Indonesia and Australia in implementation of the agreement between Indonesia and Australia on the Framework for Security Cooperation. With India there have been recent meetings and developments including the Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement. It has also increased cooperation with France, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea on defence, military exercises, and regular drills.

What's interesting though, is that at least until 2016, Australia still saw the region through a very neutral non-antagonistic lens. According to its 2016 paper, "over the next two decades, not only will half of the world's submarines be operating within the broader Indo-Pacific, but also at least half of the world's advanced combat aircraft armed with extended range missiles and supported by highly sophisticated information networks, will be operated by Indo-Pacific countries. This militarization however, was seen as mentioned earlier through a very neutral lens. Because in 2016, the white paper states that as countries in the Indo-Pacific continue to develop their military capabilities, opportunities will emerge not for conflict or to safeguard against but in fact quote unquote "for increasingly sophisticated practical military cooperation." It goes further to say that the more advanced technologies being brought into service will improve the ability of regional countries, including Australia, to share situational awareness, communicate and cooperate in response to shared security challenges. In 2020, Australia seems see the region a little differently. It states that Major power competition, coercion and military modernisation are increasing the potential for and consequences of military miscalculation. It also acknowledges the fact that "while still unlikely, the prospect of high-intensity military conflict in the Indo-Pacific is less remote than at the time of the 2016 Defence White Paper."

This has meant that today, Australia is also showing signs of modernizing its naval equipment's at the very least; inducting new Hobart class air warfare destroyers, Hunter-class frigates and ships for Amphibious warfare like the HMAS Canberra and HMAS Adelaide. The 2020 Force Structure Plan released on the 30 June 2020 accounted for up to 8 vessels optimised for mine countermeasures and hydrographic survey roles potentially based on the Arafura design. The Government also announced that 6 evolved Cape class patrol boats from Austal to be built in Henderson, Western Australia will be acquired for A\$350 million on 1 May 2020. Additionally, Australia is attempting to upgrade its Air force to a 5th Generation one (Airforce, n.d). The 2020 strategic update also highlights a 40% increase in defence funding over the next few years; almost 270 billion Australian dollars (PTI, 2020); A form of deterrence.

This is also seen across Australia's defence planning and strategic positions and statements. In many initial statements from a few years ago, the country's strategic planning had often assumed a ten-year strategic warning time for any major conventional attack against Australia. For those who don't know, Strategic warning time for conventional conflict is the time a country estimates an adversary would need to launch a major attack against it, determined by indications of preparation and mobilisation of resources and capabilities. Today though, it acknowledges the fact that coercion, competition and grey-zone activities directly or indirectly

targeting Australian interests are currently occurring. In this regard, according to Australia's strategic perception of the Indo-Pacific region, growing regional military capabilities, and the speed at which they can be deployed, mean that Australia can no longer rely on a timely warning ahead of conflict occurring.

None of this however yet points towards complete coherence in Australia's foreign policy strategy. Australia is yet to fully commit to a detraction from China, which will become critical to defining the Indo-Pacific both for itself and the growing prowess of the Quad. Only if it is significantly threatened or its government actually chooses to openly align with the Quad nations, will Australia's foreign policy become more coherent. It is on this path for sure and the 2020 strategic is definitely symbolic of this, but Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy is seemingly still only now developing. Nonetheless, it is increasing its military preparedness as per the 2020 paper in order to shape Australia's strategic environment, deter actions against our interests and, when required, respond with credible military force. This military force is unlikely going to be used against its current security partners and it seems to have set course for contention with China. Additionally, in September, along with Quad cooperation, Australia also held its first Trilateral dialogue with India and France with a focus on Indo-Pacific.

In conclusion, for Australia, the Indo-Pacific today has become an arena for increased competition and even possible conflict within which its government now feels that it has to secure a significant position. What this position will look like 5 or 10 years from today is anyone's guess, but at least for the time being it is safe to assume that Australia will increase security cooperation with Japan, US, India and a few ASEAN countries as well. For all its rhetoric on a rules based regional order, it would seem like Australia will soon turn back completely to securing its relationship with the US, lending strategically wherever necessary, while simultaneously building on other bilateral relationships in the Indo-Pacific as well.

IN THE MAKING

French Presence and Power in the Indo-Pacific

*Swati Batchu*⁵

Coverage of western presence in the Indo-Pacific has overwhelmingly revolved around activities of the United States and its rivalry with China in the South China Sea. Yet, Europe is growing increasingly aware that the future of the world economy and security now lies in Asia. The Indian and Pacific Oceans, and Choke points like the Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, etc., are major economic junctions for goods reaching Europe. Such choke points are also at greater risk of sea piracy and other illicit activities and represent another prominent security challenge in addition to tensions in South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. It is these shifts in geo-strategic priorities that has encouraged France, much like other European powers like Germany, to reorient its economic and security policies to place greater focus on the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. The French administrations began, much in line with the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia, to slowly but surely carve out its own space in the Indo-Pacific by forging new military alliances and actively participating in regional forums in the 2000s. These have been through greater engagement in military exercises, bilateral and trilaterals, support for ASEAN, etc. However, the Indo-Pacific is now a much more crowded space and one is yet to see how well France will be able to distinguish itself from other western powers and regional powers.

Evolving Conception of the Indo-Pacific

The ambit of French goals and ambitions in Asia were visible in earnest in the 2008 French Defense white paper that pointed to redirecting defence strategy to a “strategic arc of instability” that stretched from the Atlantic to South Asia (Major, 2008). Yet, French participation in the Indo-Pacific began in earnest during French President Francois Holland's tenure when the term “Asia-Pacific” was more in fashion with the country's strategic documents. This was followed up in the 2013 and 2015 white paper and strategic document respectively that emphasized on greater focus on the Indian Ocean and Asia as a whole by building deeper connections with India and Australia (Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2015). The first official use of the term “Indo-Pacific” only came in 2018 when President Macron spoke on the country's strategy in the region on a visit to the Australian Garden Island Military Base (Grare, 2020). For France, the idea of engagement in Asia or the “Asia-Pacific” has thus been in place for a long time, yet it was a relative late adopter of the concept of the “Indo-Pacific”. Its definition of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area is also much more extensive

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than most of its contemporaries and includes African states like Djibouti to the French Polynesia.

With a shift in regional dynamics and rising tension there is also a clear shift in France's Indo-Pacific strategy. The larger focus of the earlier generations of defense and strategy document was a focus on France's military capabilities and commitments in the region. This rather security centric approach of French strategy has witnessed diversification as of late. The latest 2019 strategic document addressing Security in the Indo-Pacific has now dedicated full sections to multilateral efforts in the region and use of military resources towards Environmental Security (Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019). This points to a clear change in focus of the French contingent.

Aspects of French Presence

France's territorial claims and the large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) they create provide the country with significant stakes in the region and serve as one of the primary basis for the French presence. France has islands scattered across both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. In the Southern Indian Ocean, the islands of La Réunion and Mayotte, the Scattered Islands, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories are part of French assets in region. France's physical presence in the Pacific Ocean is situated around the islands of New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, and the Clipperton Islands. These islands house French citizens and military bases and contribute significantly to the country's 9 million Sq. km EEZ, which is the second largest in the world. This is particularly important given the strategic importance of the larger area of the Indo-Pacific to national security and economics. The region is also home to 1.6 million overseas French citizens and supplies 66 billion in exports and 95.9 billion in imports, making up 17% of total imports, to the French market (Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019). Much of this trade passes through crucial choke points and areas which are mired with security issues. Thus, rising insecurity in the region poses a major concern for French goals and plans for the region. Lastly, while French territories may be underperforming economically currently, they can also become an economic asset for mainland France.

Given these stakes French presence in the region has a few primary goals – 1) Respond to the changing status quo in the South China Sea, 2) Deal with issues of terrorism in South East Asia, 3) Address receding multilateralism, 4) Countering illegal activities in the region, and 5) North Korea's nuclear threat (Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019). These goals have translated into the use of diplomatic and military resources in the area to monitor the region. There are currently five regional commands of the French armed forces in the region. These are the Commander of the French Armed Forces in the South of the Indian Ocean (COMSOP FAZSOI), in New Caledonia (COMSOP FANC), French Polynesia and the Pacific Ocean Maritime Zone (COMSOP FAFP/ALPACI), United Arab Emirates and the Indian Ocean Maritime Zone (COMSOP FFEAU/ALINDIEN), and finally in Djibouti (COMSOP FFDJ).

These commands often run military exercises with neighboring states and conduct anti-parity operations on sea.

Interaction with Regional Players

Strategic partnerships have become a central focus of strategy in the Indo-Pacific. As is the case with other countries, the rhetorical shift from “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific” signifies the country’s acknowledgment of the importance of India as a strategic partner and the Indian Ocean as a critical body at the centre of its efforts. To this end, France is working with India on multilateral and bilateral fronts. India and France have been conducting bilateral military exercises for multiple decades that involved all three branches of their armed forces. These exercises are the Shakti, Varuna, and Garuda conducted by both country’s army, navy, and air force, respectively. In 2018 both signed an agreement that gave the other access to each other’s military facilities. This agreement paved the way for Coordinated Patrol Exercise in 2020 aimed at ensuring security of trade routes with France. In previous iterations India conducted such patrols only with its maritime neighbours thus this initiative is also a sign of the strengthening relationship that both are experiencing as India welcomes France into the fold (Rajagopalan, 2020). Coordination on weapons procurement is extensive and France is looking to build on this as well. Beyond security coordination the two countries have partnered up to engage in port construction, energy exploration, and connectivity projects in and around the Western Indian Ocean including Seychelles, Comoros, and Madagascar (Ratna, 2019).

Macron has also worked on creating stronger ties with Australia through frequent bilateral visits and expressed interest for a new “Delhi-Canberra-Paris” axis in the Indian Ocean. The axis materialized in 2020 as leaders of the three countries discussed regional strategies for a “free, open, and inclusive” Indo-Pacific (MInistry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2020). The creation of this trilateral is no doubt a response to rising Chinese assertiveness in the region and Macron has acknowledge as much as well stating that “We’re not naive: If we want to be seen and respected by China as an equal partner, we must organize ourselves... This new Paris-Delhi-Canberra axis is absolutely key for the region and our joint objectives in the Indo-Pacific region.” (Pradhan, 2020). As a response to Chinese assertiveness France has also conducted Freedom of Navigation operations in South China Sea. Yet it is important to recognize that France’s stance on China as the other significant western power in the region is much more measured. This measure of restraint in rhetoric and action sets it apart from the United States which has called China a revisionist power using military and economic coercion.

France’s mellower tone defines the contours of its engagement with regional actors and the partnerships it generates. France seems to be opting for a carrot and stick approach by bolstering military presence and cooperation while using softer langue and keeping diplomatic routes open. Looking at the 2019 Defense policy brief “France and Security in the Indo-Pacific” UNCLOS violations in the South China Sea are condemned as a “progressive weakening of the law of the sea that could lead to the rise of interstate tension” but China is

never mentioned by name as the perpetrator (Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019). The brief more generally repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a multilateral approach to issues of the region. This sentiment was reiterated in the 2020 Delhi-Canberra-Paris trilateral meeting as well. For as long as it is possible and in circumstances that are favorable to it, France is looking to include China into conversations about the region rather than castigate and alienate it. Macron stated, for example, that “I think the Chinese rise is very good news for everybody because it’s good for China itself.” (Doherty, 2018). France can thus be seen to provide a certain middle ground approach to affairs in the Indo-Pacific that might states might find appeal in. As the US-China rivalry heats up few would want to be trapped between the two countries (Pant, 2019). Particularly for some ASEAN states the sticky reality is that they depend on China greatly for economic stability, yet they require American military strength to keep Chinese military assertiveness at bay.

Conclusion

France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific is both dynamic and distinct owing to active diplomatic and security collaboration between states and its emphasis on multilateral cooperation that does not alienate any regional power, including China. French presence in the region is anchored on its military and diplomatic strength and the presence of a large number of French territories, an extensive EEZ, and a significant French overseas population show that France has a real stake in the region’s safety and prosperity. Countries of the Indo-Pacific may thus perceive France as a reliable and consistent partner in the region. Particularly so because foreign policy under the Trump administration has become very transactions and developed an uneasy comfort with unilateralism. However, it is yet to see if France will become an equal to the US in the region and if France’s approach to regional issues will continue to be appealing to Indo-Pacific powers. As China ramps up its assertiveness, frustration may very well push countries who can afford it to accompany sharp rhetoric with actions increasing regional tensions and discrediting France’s desire to keep China within the loop. Thus, France’s approach to the Indo-Pacific will need to consistently create results so as to prove that multilateralism can indeed be a viable tool against Chinese aggression.

TOWARDS A RULES BASED ORDER

German Strategy in the Indo-Pacific

*Rayan V Bhagwagar*⁶

The Germans have for a long time been a mere economic powerhouse, the greatest in modern-day Europe. It is said that the German economy pushes the European economy, and no one would be wrong in claiming so. The German social market economy accounted for a third of all European (union) trade in the year 2018. In the past, it has been seen that the Germans shy away from imposing their political interests on regions outside of its own and perhaps the global community in a broad sense. However, the Bundesregierung (the German Federal Cabinet or Federal Government) has decided to make inroads into the region which can indeed be called the future of the world. The Indo-Pacific is home to a lot of the major economies of the world – from India to Indonesia, to China, to Japan. It is also a strategically very important region, with several maritime chokepoints such as the Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait. The Malacca Strait alone is the transit point for almost a million vessels carrying 25% of the world's trade, annually. The region (Indo-Pacific) as a whole account for 40% of the global GDP.

Shifting geopolitical power structures in the Indo-Pacific also have direct impacts on Germany: the economies of the European and Indo-Pacific regions are closely connected through global supply chains. To this extent, the Bundesregierung on September 1, 2020, released a strategic document that would act as the guiding light for German policy in the Indo-Pacific. The document discusses both traditional and non-traditional security issues, while also emphasising the importance of economic and trade partnerships, as well as political cooperation in the region. Germany is one among eight other democracies to release a strategic document for the region alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, France, India, Australia, Japan and South Korea.

The Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany stated on September 2, 2020, regarding the adoption of the aforementioned strategic document which will act as the guiding light for all German policy decisions in the region:

“The political West also lies in the East. We are sending a clear message today: the Indo-Pacific region is a priority of German foreign policy... The Himalayas and the Malacca Strait may seem a long way away. But our prosperity and our

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geopolitical influence in the coming decades will depend not least on how we work together with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. That, more than anywhere else, is where the shape of the international order of tomorrow will be decided... We want to help shape that order – so that it is based on rules and international cooperation, not on the law of the strong. That is why we have intensified cooperation with those countries that share our democratic and liberal values. In so doing, we are strengthening the idea of a multipolar world in which no country has to decide between poles of power” (Federal Foreign Office, 2020)

The document covers a plethora of issues covered in detail. It covers seven broad strategic policy fields:

- Strengthening multilateralism
- Tackling climate change and protecting the environment
- Strengthening peace, security, and stability
- Promoting human rights and the rule of law
- Strengthening rules-based, fair, and sustainable free trade
- Rules-based networking and the digital transformation of regions and markets
- Bringing people together through culture, education and science

Through this document, Germany does not aim to name adversaries; nor does this document revolve around containing the threats faced from any single state. The German strategy for the Indo-Pacific does not revolve around any single state but around the many i.e. the entire region. The Germans have been very cautious with their first-ever strategic document for the region, focussing more so on the enforcement of a rules-based multilateral world order, rather than joining a binary side in what could evolve into a cold war between the Americans-plus-allies and the Chinese, if precautionary measures are not taken.

Germany is an economic powerhouse. Globalisation and free-market trade have brought it to a position of economic might in the European and global arenas. It has a lot of economic interests and investments in China, with major brands such as Deutsche Telekom, BMW, Siemens, Allianz SE, Daimler AG as well as Volkswagen AG operating within China. As such, upsetting the Chinese Communist Party could have several economic repercussions on German companies operating in the People’s Republic of China. Therefore, while critics may suggest that the Germans have taken a weak foot forward with the document which fails to tackle growing Chinese assertion in the economic, political and military/strategic-security fields across regions. The Germans have, however, been rather calculative in the wording of their strategy. As has been the case over decades, the Germans have placed the principles of multilateral cooperation among democracies that respect human rights and liberties as the foremost frontier of all foreign policy coming from Berlin. In an interview, the German Ambassador to India – Walter J Lindner – says that “We are trading partners with China, but they also know that we have our values”. He was also quoted saying that “FM Heiko Maas told the Chinese FM that we are not agreeing with what is happening in Hong Kong and minorities in China”. The Ambassador also highlighted the fact that the two nations have different

political systems: “We’re a democracy, they’re not, India is a democracy, they’re not”. He also stated that through its vision of the Indo-Pacific, Germany is “focusing on those countries with whom we share our values”. (Lindner, 2020).

The new regional strategy again and again emphasises that Berlin wishes not only to intensify cooperation with current partners, but also build on new partnerships across the region. In the future, it aims to step up its cooperation with Indo-Pacific states in third countries on an equal footing and in a spirit of shared global responsibility. This is particularly expedient in the case of overlapping interests and in forums such as the G20 and requires a willingness to cooperate on the part of partner countries (Federal Foreign Office, 2020). This new strategic vision envisages on building a multilateral order – a partnership among equals.

At the same time, Berlin wishes to enforce the longevity of a multilateral and rules-based order. To that extent, the Germans will support several initiatives to create a more inclusive world governance system. The system of the United Nations, including its specialised agencies and jurisdiction, is and remains the central player for multilateral activity at global level. Stakeholders from the Indo-Pacific have a key role to play in the reform of the United Nations: to date, one state in the region, China, has had a voice as a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council. Berlin will cooperate with India and Japan to ensure that the project to reform the United Nations Security Council and strengthen its ability to act is brought to a successful conclusion. Last month, the foreign minister of the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) held a virtual-summit, stressing on the importance of working with like-minded countries and groups to begin negotiations on the reform of the ancient body that is the UN Security Council. The G4 released a joint statement which said that “there is a clear need for an enhanced role of developing countries and of major contributors to the UN to make the Council more legitimate, effective and representative” (Lakshman, 2020).

The vision of the Bundesregierung also aims to promote the Alliance for Multilateralism, a Franco-German initiative, more strongly in the Indo-Pacific, by considering issues that are of particular importance to the region. The initiative is a network of countries united in their conviction that a rules-based multilateral order is the only reliable guarantee for international stability and peace and that common challenges can only be solved through cooperation. The Alliance aims to renew the global commitment to stabilize the rules-based international order, uphold its principles and adapt it, where necessary (Alliance for Multilateralism, 2020). With multilateralism as the guiding light of all foreign policy, Germany recognises that a multilateral world order would imply that all states pursue their respective socio-political-economic and security interests. However, it is important for the states to practice cooperation and coordinate with fellow member states in the international. In the Indo-Pacific, particularly in times of increasing power rivalries and tensions, multilateralism has a crucial role to play in the area of peace and stability.

German belief in a rules-based world order implies their strict involvement in enforcing internationally agreed law and conventions such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas, of which China is a signatory-member and also a constant violator. The Federal Foreign Office also criticises, through this document, the disinformation spread by ‘authoritarian actors and states’. Berlin sides with its American and European allies by supporting a substantive and legally binding Code of Conduct between China and the ASEAN Member States for the South China Sea, through tangible projects on international maritime law and the enforcement of existing conventions.

Berlin also envisages the enforcement and strengthening of the non-proliferation treaty. The treaty was signed in 1968 with the ultimate aim of nuclear disarmament. However, since this aim is too far over fetched, the treaty’s primary focus is to prevent non-nuclear weapons states from acquiring nuclear warfare technologies and capabilities. The treaty is signed by 190 states across the world. The Bundesregierung is committed to work in dialogue with China – a nuclear power and a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty – to promote its willingness to engage in verifiable arms control and confidence building. Since 2003, North Korea withdrew its membership of the treaty and has apparently developed nuclear capabilities. This has come at a great domestic cost for the country, with millions of children malnourished and adults starved. However, the Germans will remain critical of North Korean developments and will actively take part in monitoring and enforcing sanctions on the rogue state.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was created in 1949 with the aim of guaranteeing the freedom and security of its member countries by political and military means. Current members of NATO outside of Europe include of the United States and Canada. One can also include the overseas territories of the British and the French in the Indo-Pacific region. Germany does not hold any overseas territories and does not deploy military assets in the Indo-Pacific on a regular basis. However, the German Navy has recently deployed a liaison officer at the Information Fusion Centre at Singapore. The apparatus improves maritime information cooperation and coordination with like-minded states with similar interests i.e. securing the sea lines of communication, the high seas and making the commute of global trade safer. Along with the United Nations, the Bundesregierung is also pushing for reforms in NATO: an inclusive expansion. The aim is to expand relations with the partners across the globe, which includes Indo-Pacific players such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, each of which with whom bilateral cooperation programmes are in place. Germany also supports NATO’s practical cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, in particular in the spheres of cyber defence, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief assistance, counterterrorism, arms control and peace & security. The intensive exchange with partners in the Indo-Pacific region, which takes the form of joint training measures and exercises, as well as cooperation on standardisation and logistics, improves interoperability between the partners and NATO (Federal Foreign Office, 2020).

The German strategy in the Indo-Pacific can be seen as the country's first full step into the region. While it has not named any adversarial or opposing actors and/or states, it has made clear its preference to have extensive and intensive cooperation with states which hold similar democratic values, morals, principles. The Germans have been very calculative in determining a strategy which aims to enforce a truly multilateral, rules-based world order. It does not name China as a threat, but the Germans do believe that Chinese assertive diplomatic and political behaviour is a force that hampers the peace in Southeast Asia and is also raising alarms in capitals across Europe. Berlin has managed to balance its economic interests in China and those in the larger Indo-Pacific region, while avoiding the Sino-American rivalry.

RE-ESTABLISHING INFLUENCE

The United Kingdom, A Global Britain Strategy and the Indo-Pacific

*Grace Cheema*⁷

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union presents it with a slew of new opportunities to pursue a more independent foreign policy and re-establish itself as a global power. Under the banner of “Global Britain”, London now seeks to re-order its position in the world and reinforce its global presence through strategic alliances and economic partnerships. This comes at a time when the regional security landscape in the Indo-Pacific has been intensifying, creating the space for regional actors, many of whom are its conventional allies, to welcome greater UK engagement under the ‘Global Britain’ strategy. Intrinsic to this strategy is the adoption of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ framework in place of the much older ‘Far East’ framework. Historically, Britain’s Far-East framework, which ascertained more focus on the Middle East than the Asia-Pacific, operated concurrently with two dilemmas: of overextension against global ambitions and of playing a European role against that of a global one.

Although successive governments remained committed to maintaining a balancing act, the deep impact of these dilemmas ultimately culminated in the Wilson government’s 1971 decision to withdraw from the Far East, particularly from Singapore and Malaysia. Yet despite the withdrawal, there remained substantial British presence in the region through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), which was signed the same year as the withdrawal, through access to islands like Diego Garcia in British Indian Ocean Territory as well as through the numerous basing arrangements that the UK retained in places such as Brunei and Singapore. The current ‘Global Britain’ strategy seems to resolve at least one of these dilemmas while also recasting the UK’s defence posture in line with the changing geopolitical realities of the Indo-Pacific.

Stakes in the Indo-Pacific

The UK’s subtle pivot towards the Indo-Pacific can be understood in the light of four facets of its foreign policy engagements. First, and perhaps the most evident, is the uptick in the UK’s resolve to protect the rules-based order and freedom of navigation. The erosion of the rules-based international order was identified as one of the four main drivers of UK’s security priorities in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). In this light, the 2015 SDSR goes on to identify the Asia-Pacific as a region wielding “considerable influence on the future integrity and credibility of the rules-based international order” (Gov. of UK, 2015). This

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can be understood in part as the manifestation of the shift that took place in the UK's strategic thinking following the rise of military coercion in Crimea and the South China Sea in 2014. As a conventional maritime power, China's militarization of the South China Sea had a profound impact on the country's strategic posture.

Second, a core tenet of the post-Brexit 'Global Britain' strategy is to lay the foundations for deeper economic engagement with surging economies. The motivation behind UK's repositioning towards the Indo-Pacific then becomes apparent considering the region's economic potential. Asia's purchasing power, which is expected to grow eight times between 2010 and 2030 (FutureNavics, 2013) is critical to the UK's objective of increasing exports to 35% of its economy (MacLellan, 2018). Of particular importance is the South China Sea which serves as an entry point for the UK to the economies of several Asian states and through which almost 12% of its sea-borne trade passes (China Power Team, 2017).

The third factor is the increasing pressure from the United Kingdom's allies to extend support in protecting the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. Many actors on the Indo-Pacific stage, such as the United States, Japan and Australia, are allies of the United Kingdom and have welcomed and encouraged its engagement in the region, creating the space for the Royal Navy to increase its presence in the region. Fourth, a post-Brexit landscape is expected to allow the UK to shed some of the passivity in its foreign policy that was attributed to its EU membership. For instance, despite the critical importance of ASEAN states for the UK's economy, its relations with these states remained piecemeal in nature and lacked a comprehensive framework largely because its interactions with ASEAN in dialogue partnerships and joint working groups were delegated to the EU level (Grare, 2019). Departure from the EU allows the UK to establish itself as an independent player on the global stage in its own right.

Presence in the Indo-Pacific

The period from 2013 to 2017 saw rapid developments in the Indo-Pacific security complex with tensions rising to a new high. Yet the UK's deployments in the Indo-Pacific were notable for their marked absence at a time when some of its closest defence partners faced high risks. This changed in 2018 with the deployment of three Royal Navy ships to the region: HMS *Albion*, HMS *Sutherland* and HMS *Argyll*. In August 2018, the HMS *Albion*, a 22,000 ton amphibious warship carrying a contingent of Royal Marines, conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) near the disputed Paracel Islands on its way to Ho Chi Minh City, making the UK the only other non-claimant state to do so openly (Kelly, 2018). One month later, the HMS *Argyll* conducted exercises with Japan's largest warship, the JS *Kaga*, in the Indian Ocean. It also took part in joint exercises with the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force. Additionally, HMS *Argyll* undertook an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercise alongside Japan and the USA in the Phillipine Sea in early 2019. The exercise was followed by a second of its kind with HMS *Montrose* two months later. This marked the deployment of

a fourth British warship to the region within a year, demonstrating an almost unbroken presence of the Royal Navy. At the same time, statements from the UK's then defense secretary, Gavin Williamson, indicated the resolve for a "permanent presence" in the Asia-Pacific as well as the vision for a "littoral strike group" and a new permanent base in the region (Williamson, 2019). In light of the mounting pressure on the Ministry of Defence, it is expected that HMS *Queen Elizabeth* will also be deployed to the South China Sea during its global maiden voyage in 2021.

It must be noted that while some of the United Kingdom's security engagement is tied to its commitments and obligations as a member of various relevant treaties and alliances, none of these treaties come with an automatic commitment of its forces to the region. However, they do impose certain expectations on the United Kingdom to be involved in the regional security complex (Patalano, 2019). These include its role as a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Five Eyes (FVEY) arrangement, the Five Powers Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and the UN Command overseeing the Korean War armistice. These arrangements, in addition to the Commonwealth of Nations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) initiative, serve as the main entry-point institutions for the United Kingdom in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the United Kingdom's forces frequently participate in annual joint exercises of the FPDA, a regional grouping of Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK. Although the FPDA was initially established for conventional defence of peninsula Malaysia and Singapore, the organisation has gradually expanded its focus to include threats, both conventional and non-conventional, extending into the South China Sea. In support of the arrangements, the UK, as its only extra-regional actor, also maintains a naval facility at Singapore and stations military personnel at the FPDA's Integrated Area Defense Headquarters in Malaysia.

Defence cooperation through the FPDA and intelligence cooperation through the Five Eyes arrangement are particularly crucial for the security partnership between Australia and the United Kingdom. Australia, which is especially keen on British involvement in the region and is therefore a critical node-of-access for the UK, signed a Defense and Security Cooperation Treaty with the country in 2013 which underpins their defence relationship. This was strengthened further with the initiation of the ministerial-level 'Defence Industry and Capability Dialogue' between the two countries in 2017. In a \$26 billion contract, Australia agreed to purchase nine Type 26 frigates from the UK defense contractor BAE Systems in 2018, thus corroborating their defence-industrial partnership (Kentish, 2018). Besides the United States and Australia, British policy in the Indo-Pacific is also anchored by its relationship with Japan which is critical for the UK's access to Northeast-Asia. The two countries, which maintain a Two-Plus-Two Dialogue between themselves, agreed on a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2017. They also share a Trilateral Cooperation Agreement with the United States aimed at promoting greater maritime partnership amongst the three countries.

In addition, the United Kingdom is also expanding its ties in South and Southeast Asia. Besides Singapore and Malaysia, the country also shares strong security ties with Brunei where it has stationed a battalion of the Gurkha Infantry. In November 2015, the UK signed a Defence and International Security Partnership with India. The two countries also engage in the Ajeya Warrior biennial exercises, the Konkan annual exercises as well as in the Indradhanush exercises.

Another area with potential for greater security partnership in the Indo-Pacific is that of arms exports. Between 2013 and 2017, Indonesia accounted for the third largest share in the UK's total arms exports (Wezeman, et al, 2018). Notably, India was the United Kingdom's second-largest arms importer between 2012 and 2016, though the import levels have dropped since (Brattber et al, 2018).

The Way Ahead

While the United Kingdom has recognised the importance of the Indo-Pacific and re-invested its ties in the region, its bilateral relationships with most of these states remain intermittent and piecemeal in nature. British government policy in the region lacks a wider overarching strategy. For instance, while both France and the United States presented policy papers on their national strategy for the Asia-Pacific region at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue, the UK did not do so (Shang, 2020). This absence of a larger government policy for the region in part explains the inconsistency in British deployments. Moreover, the dilemma of overextension still plagues British defence policy. This implies that the United Kingdom's forces, which still suffer from shortfalls in their budgetary allocations, remain unable to substantially extend their focus beyond the Euro-Atlantic zone which remains its priority theatre. Besides, even beyond the Euro-Atlantic, the Middle East still warrants greater priority in the UK's security focus than the Indo-Pacific. The UK's ability to deploy to Asia will be limited by a crisis in the security hotspots of either of these regions. For instance, HMS Defender's operations in the Asia-Pacific were curtailed in August 2019 when it had to be redirected towards the Gulf to counter Iran's actions instead. Yet given the trajectory of present intentions, the United Kingdom's role in the Indo-Pacific is expected to expand, albeit in a cautious and principled manner. Much of this will depend on how the UK balances its relationship with China and maps out its role as a security actor in the post-Brexit space.

BALANCING BETWEEN OBJECTIVES

Vietnam and the Indo-Pacific

*Medha Nibhanupudi*⁸

Vietnam has published numerous defence policy documents, including National Defence White Papers, in 1998, 2004, 2009 and the 2018 Law on National Defence. The defence papers place emphasis, on what has come to be called the ‘Three No’s’ policy- alliances with one country against another are not to be permitted; no military alliances; and no permission to be granted to foreign countries to open military bases on Vietnamese soil or use Vietnam to carry out military activities against other countries. The most recent National Defence White Paper was published in 2019. In contrast to the previous defence papers, the White Paper published in 2019 does not rule out the possibility of world wars, establishes a fourth no-one wherein Vietnam would not use or threaten to use force in its international affairs (except in circumstances relating to self-defence). While previous defence papers have mentioned the policy, the latest paper etches it in stone as an another immutable ‘No’ (Grossman, 2020).

The 2019 Defence Paper also introduces a ‘depend’ clause- “Depending on situations and specific circumstances, Vietnam will consider developing necessary, appropriate defence and military relations with other countries.” Further, in spite of the ‘three noes’, the document states that Vietnam “is willing to welcome vessels of navies, coast guards, border guards and international organisations to make courtesy or ordinary port visits or stop over in its ports to repair, replenish logistics and technical supplies or take refuges from national disasters” (Ministry of National Defence, 2019). This is can be considered as Vietnam’s willingness to collaborate militarily with other actors in the international system.

While policy paper does not explicitly state that China is Vietnam’s major security concern, it makes an implicit reference to China when it refers to complaints of “unilateral actions, power-based coercion, violations of international law, militarisation, change in the status quo, and infringement upon Vietnam’s sovereignty” (Ministry of National Defence, 2019). The shift towards a policy of “Four Nos and one Depend” outlines Vietnam’s revised analysis of its geopolitical environment and offers Vietnam greater policy space and flexibility while allowing it to stay rooted to its traditional approach of cooperation and self-resilience (Grossman, 2020).

Vietnam’s Perception of the Indo-Pacific

(Tuan Anh To, 2020) argues that the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ has not been frequently used in Vietnam because the term is defined and perceived differently by States and groups such as the US, India, Japan, Australia and ASEAN and states that Vietnam associates the term Indo-Pacific with “increasing linkages and interdependence of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.” (Tuan Anh To, 2020) contends that Vietnam agreed with the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in joint

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statements put forward by the Vietnamese Prime Minister with his counterparts in Japan in June 2017, in India⁹ in March 2018, and in Australia and Malaysia, in August 2019, because the term placed emphasis on cooperation, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and development while being ambiguous in its scope.

Among the numerous definitions and constructs of the Indo-Pacific, Vietnam adheres officially ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) definition of Indian and Pacific oceans "not as contiguous territorial spaces, but as a closely integrated and interconnected region", with "ASEAN playing a central and strategic role". ASEAN aims to promote peace and development without picking sides in great- power rivalry (Tuan Anh To, 2020). However, the usage of the term 'Indo-Pacific' in the 2019 defense paper that states, "Vietnam is ready to participate in security and defense cooperation mechanisms ... including security and defense mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific region," should be considered as Vietnamese support for the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States. In addition, statements¹⁰ made by Vietnam's foreign ministry are in line with the policies of the United States and other regional actors that stress on pursuing actions within the framework of the UNCLOS and international law (Grossman, 2020).

Vietnam vis-à-vis China

Vietnam, in line with its traditional approach, continues to avoid allying itself with one power against another. Vietnam continues to bear the brunt of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. On 3rd April, 2020, a Vietnamese fishing vessel was sunk by Chinese coast guard ship in disputed waters near the Paracel Water, following which Vietnam lodged an official protest with China. On 13th April, China deployed its Haiyang Dizhi 8 geological survey ship, to Vietnam's EEZ and on the 18th April 2020, China established two new administrative zones, namely Xisha on the Paracel Islands and Nansha on Spratlys Islands of the South China Sea, including areas inhabited by Vietnamese for decades. Vietnam protested China's actions on the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands as a violation of its sovereignty (Grossman, 2020). Despite Chinese assertiveness and its own protests, Vietnam continues to pursue its strategy of "cooperation and struggle" by compartmentalising its relations and preventing Chinese behaviour from disrupting bilateral relations. For example: Vietnam conducted its annual joint coast guard patrols with China in the Gulf of Tokin in April 2020. While China and Vietnam reached an agreement on the delimitation of the Gulf of Tonkin in 2000, Vietnam is not obligated to participate in the joint patrols (Grossman, 2020).

Vietnam's strategy of hard and soft power in the South China Sea comprises of - 'internationalising' disputes, resolving the matter through multilateral bodies, particularly regional multilateral frameworks such as ASEAN, "detering" Chinese military and pursuing diplomatic channels with China. Vietnam raises international attention about incidents in the disputed waters and adjoining maritime features. In addition, Vietnam engages in diplomatic efforts, direct dialogues through numerous channels, confidence building mechanisms and

⁹ In addition, in a visit to India in 2018, the then-President Tran Dai Quang's placed emphasis on the need to maintain and sustain freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, as well as peaceful and legal settlement of disputes and stated the need for "a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region."

¹⁰ In 2018, Vietnam indicated its support for the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US when it stated "Vietnam welcomes initiatives and connecting efforts in the region that contribute to this goal."

pursues efforts to improve the capabilities of its military¹¹ and has been more than willing to challenge China's claims in the South China Seas (Thu, 2020). In March 2020, Vietnam submitted documents to the UNSC protesting China's actions, marking a rare instance where Vietnam chose to escalate diplomatic action beyond regional multilateral bodies. As the Chair of ASEAN, Vietnam iterated that Chinese aggression in the South China Sea would threaten negotiations on the Code of Conduct (Reuters, 2020).

Vietnam in the Quad-Plus

While there is yet to be a security framework involving the Quad-plus members, Vietnam has participated in Quad meetings (which were also attended by Quad-plus members) conducted in March 2020 to share their practices in combatting the pandemic (Rajagopalan, 2020).

Vietnam's Balancing Act with the US. Vietnam continues to pursue its strategy of cooperation and struggle simultaneously with Beijing and the US alike. With a shift in US policy towards the South China Sea where the former rejected China's claims and stated it would uphold the sovereign rights of counterclaimants, Vietnam has not explicitly made any reference to the United States by implied in its statement, that it "welcomes countries' positions on the East Sea [Vietnam's term for the South China Sea] issues which are consistent with international law and shares the view, as stated in the statement issued on the occasion of the 36th ASEAN Summit, that the UNCLOS [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out (Grossman, 2020)."

Cooperation between Vietnam and the United States on security issues has gained momentum. In 2017, the US transferred one of its two Hamilton-class coast guard cutters to hone the capabilities of the Vietnamese Coast Guard (LaGrone, 2017). In 2019, the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Philip Davidson and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper visited Vietnam on separate visits to emphasis on the growing strength of U.S.-Vietnam security ties. In July 2020, US and Vietnam signed an agreement on cooperation on fisheries in the South China Sea which includes improving capabilities of Vietnam's law enforcement against illegal "intimidation," a measure that should be seen in light with China's aggression against Vietnamese fishermen in its waters. Vietnam is also displaying symbolic signs of support for the US (Anh, 2020). It invited US aircraft carriers to conduct port visits at Da Nang, twice over the course of three years. The United States invited Vietnam for the second time to participate in 2020 Rim of the Pacific exercises.

The interests of the United States and Vietnam align in other areas, apart from the South China Sea, that are relevant to the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. Vietnam is wary of the BRI, that the Indo-Pacific Strategy terms "predatory economics to coerce other nations." China's activities along the Mekong River in Laos and Cambodia, as a part of the BRI, have severely impacted Vietnam's Lower Mekong Delta, which produces significant amount of rice and is a freshwater fishing hub. Vietnam is engaged in efforts with support from the US through the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) (Grossman, 2020).

Vietnam and Japan

Relations between Japan and Vietnam have gained momentum since 2018. In 2018, on a visit to Vietnam, the Japanese Chief of Joint Staff discussed collaborations between their defence departments and a wide range of areas such as personnel training, developing information technology networks, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, UN peacekeeping operations, military medicine. A defence agreement that was signed in 2018, Japan agreed to transfer shipbuilding technology to Vietnam and share best practices to hone the capabilities of Vietnam's defence industry. Japan and Vietnam signed agreements to conduct joint coast guard operations (Jha, 2020). In Aug 2020, Vietnam agreed to purchase six coast guard patrol boats worth \$345 million from Japan in its efforts to improve its maritime capabilities. In Oct 2020, Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga visited Vietnam in his first overseas summit and the countries signed defense agreements that would allow Japan to export defense equipment and technology to Vietnam, economic agreements and anti-terrorism measures. The countries also agreed to cooperation diversifying their supply chains. In the talks, Vietnam and Japan stated that peace and stability should be promoted and protected through the rule of law and not unilaterally through force or threats. Although China was not named, it is certain that they were referring to China (Yamaguchi, 2020).

Vietnam and India

Following the withdrawal of US ban on sale of weapons and military equipment to Vietnam in 2016, relations between the two countries have developed significantly with Vietnam according India the "comprehensive strategic partnership" status. In 2016, India granted a \$500 million line of credit for cooperation on defence to Vietnam. Agreements on joint production of military hardware under strengthening cooperation on multilateral defence and security frameworks. India has also set up a satellite tracking station in southern Vietnam that would grant Vietnam access to Indian satellites covering the South China Sea and China. Vietnam granted India access to oil exploration blocks in disputed waters. India and Vietnam have also joint conducted naval exercises in Vietnam in 2018 and 2019. Vietnam was invited, in 2020, to participate in India's 'Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative' (Basu, 2020).

Vietnam and Australia

Strategic relations between Australia and Vietnam are improving as Australia is increasingly engaging in the Indo-Pacific. Their relations were elevated to the level of strategic partnership in 2018. Their partnership in defense, as a part of bilateral level engagement, includes education and training, personnel exchange and naval ship visits. In Vietnam-Australia Defense Policy Dialogue held in 2019, the states discussed the role of ASEAN in the regional security framework and various issues in the South China Sea. They also discussed the future of their bilateral defense relations (Basu, 2020). While Vietnam has emerged a key actor in voicing its concerns against China in the Indo-Pacific, particularly the South China Sea, it continues to and is expected to balance itself between competing actors in the Indo-Pacific. Vietnam, no doubt prefers to settle issues through diplomatic and legal means. China's actions that continue to undermine diplomatic efforts will be addressed through greater cooperation and assistance that the Fourth No addresses.

COUNTERING DOMINANCE

Indonesia's policies in the Indo-Pacific

Kritika Karmakar¹²

The interpretation of the Indo-Pacific varies from nation to nation, and these changing definitions constantly keep the countries located in the region in a constant state of limbo, whilst affecting the policies formulated by them. Given Indonesia's strategic location in the Indo-Pacific, it becomes important to understand Indonesia's perspective and policies regarding the region; as it directly impacts its relations with other countries and key actors present in the area. Around the beginning of the 20th century, Indonesia widely followed its policy of 'archipelagic outlook' (wawasan nusantara) (Scott, 2019). As per this policy, Indonesia largely focused on maintaining its own islands and its relations with the other regional nations along with its involvement in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). But since 2001 Indonesia has started taking more sub regional initiatives in the region, where its actions could not be overshadowed by China or the US, such as the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Southwest Pacific Dialogue (SWPD), the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Pacific Island Development Forum.

However, since the 2010's this trend seems to have been reversed. Indonesia is seen to be taking part in regional politics more actively as well as attempting to initiate dialogues and calls for the participation of more nations for conflict resolution and settlements of territorial disputes. This is primarily due to three reasons. Firstly, Indonesia aims to protect its energy security interests as well as its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), passing through those waters. Secondly, the nation is threatened by China's increasing assertiveness in the region. Over the past decade, there have been multiple occasions where Indonesia found China to be too close to its territorial waters. This invariably causes economic and security concerns for Indonesia. The country's increased presence in the regional politics is a tactful way to maintain cordial relations with the giant as well as an attempt to avoid any direct conflict. Additionally, the surging US- China regional competition in the Indo-Pacific, does not serve the national security interests of Indonesia. The US- China tensions in the waters, could potentially lead to escalating hostility, which might bring Indonesia in the direct line of fire, given its geographical location.

In 2013, Marty Natalegawa, the foreign minister of Indonesia introduced the concept of Indo-Pacific treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (IPTFC) at the Indonesia conference which was hosted by CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies). The IPTFC highlighted three main points- the trust deficit between actors, unresolved territorial disputes; and managing change in the region (Georgieff, 2013). Natalegawa, stressed on the importance of having more open and free communications among regional actors so as to come up with an amicable solution to the disputes. This idea was pitched to all the members of the EAS (East Asia summit) by Natalegawa. However, none of the members showed any interest in the proposal.

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Nevertheless, the following year, in 2014, Indonesian president Joko Widodo won the elections and introduced the concept of Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) or the “Poros Maritim”. This notion was conceived in light of the complex web of traditional and non-traditional security threats that surrounds Indonesia. Jokowi presented the GMF which built on concepts of maritime culture, resources, infrastructure, diplomacy, and defence at the East Asia Summit in November 2014. This was also mentioned in Indonesia’s defence white paper, which was released in the end of April in 2016. Three years later, the doctrine was codified and expanded through a Presidential Regulation on National Sea Policy (Laksana, 2019). As per the National Defence White Paper, the GMF would aim for the attainment of Minimum Essential Forces (MEF) and would use ‘defence industrial development’ as a tool to achieve this goal (Saha, 2016).

Additionally, one of its main objectives is to introduce the induction of drones and satellite technology to bolster MEF. Even though, many experts speculated that the mere inclusion of satellite and drone technology is not sufficient, the proposal of the GMF was so grand, that it was also compared to the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) by multiple agencies. However, the concept of the GMF seemed to fade away during the second presidential term of Widodo, as the Indonesian government did not come up with any policies surrounding it. This eventual dying out of the idea has been speculated to be a result of Indonesia’s domestic politics. Moreover, the fact that the GMF could not fully leverage China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative. Even though, president Xi has suggested the possible actualisation of the project by Indonesia, cooperation from the Chinese side has been stymied, as China continues to maintain an assertive stance regarding its territorial claims in Indonesia’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (Chalk, 2017).

On the contrary, Indonesia made some substantial progress during its chairmanship of the IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) from 2015- 2017. Being the chair, gave Jokowi an opportunity to present the GMF in front of the regional actions, and promote it more than just a domestic policy. During the 60th Anniversary of Asian African Conference Summit that was held in Bandung from 21-25 April 2015, Joko Widodo pointed out the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and stated that it could serve as a bridge between the development of both Asia and Africa (Prasetyo, 2016). Indonesia's proposal to host the IORA’s Leader Summit led to the signing of the Jakarta Concord, which was a huge step taken by the regional organization and was successful in promoting peace and cooperation among members of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In March of 2019, Indonesia hosted the High-Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation, which saw the participation of 18 EAS member countries. The theme for the dialogue was "Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous and Inclusive Region" which kept in mind United Nations Sustainable Developmental Goals along with objectives of maritime security, connectivity and infrastructure.

In her opening remarks, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi affirmed that Indonesia wants to "facilitate dynamic and interactive deliberations toward deeper and more inclusive cooperation among stakeholders in the Indian and Pacific Oceans region" (YASMIN, 2019). This step indicated that Indonesia regarded at least the member countries of EAS as key components of “Indo-Pacific” (HARUKO,2020). The High-Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation, also served as a good opportunity for India and Indonesia to strengthen their ties on the issue, as Indonesia called for an inclusive and transparent Indo- Pacific region (Chaudhury, 2019).

Additionally, India's engagement with Indonesia is of immense strategic value as Indonesia views India as a gateway to southeast Asia, along with being an important facet to Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy doctrine. The budding relations between the two nations can be seen by the fact that Indonesia has played an instrumental role in convincing the Indian delegation to sign off the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which would serve as a good opportunity for India to bolster its "Act East" policy (IZZUDDIN & MOHAN, 2019).

In 2018, Indonesia introduced the Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept (IPCC) which substantially reinforces the earlier Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The IPCC also emphasized on issues of maritime security, connectivity and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific. Along with creating an international system based on international law and peaceful resolution of conflicts; following up on transnational issues in the region and creating an open and equitable economic system in the Pacific and Indian oceans. (Oktaviano, Mahroza & Risman, 2020) This concept was pitched against the FOIP (Free and Open Indo-Pacific). But according to the foreign minister of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi, the IPCC differs from the FOIP, as it includes all countries in the EAS (including China) (Suryadinata, 2018). Indonesia, however, took a different route towards the execution of the IPCC and sought for ASEAN's support. At the 34th Summit in June 2019, hosted by Thailand, ASEAN finally adopted a document titled "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as an initiative that reinforced the ASEAN-centred regional architecture (HARUKO, 2020).

The outlook envisions the Indo-Pacific as a region that is integrated and interconnected where ASEAN would play a key strategic and central role. The outlook also outline the ASEAN's hope to 'generate momentum for building strategic trust and win-win cooperation in the region' (de Haan, 2019). It stresses on the importance of negotiations and dialogues in order to reach peaceful resolutions. But it is important to note that, ASEAN has a different understanding of the region. It views the "Indo-Pacific" as an aggregation of two regions- Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean. Additionally, the AOIP puts the Asia-pacific region first and the IOR second, notwithstanding the word order of "Indo-Pacific" (HARUKO,2020). Considering this slightly different understanding of the Indo-Pacific by ASEAN clubbed with the fact that Indonesia plays a leading role in the regional organisation, it could mean that in the ASEAN's actions would also increase Indonesia's sphere of influence by "looking west" towards the Indian Ocean (Dharma Agastia & Perwita, n.d.).

Indonesia's role as a lead drafter of ASEAN outlook, sheds light on its leadership qualities at the regional front. But there are a few factors that could possibly have influenced Indonesia's decision to undertake the initiative. Firstly, the current administration of Indonesia under Jokowi, has openly expressed their desire to develop Indonesia as one of the primary powers in the region. This would be an elevation from its current status of as a middle power in the geostrategic theatre of the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, it has been speculated that Indonesia might have been uncomfortable by the visions proposed by the current regional powers and would aim to provide an alternative of ASEAN- centrality for the indo-pacific. The archipelagic nation of Indonesia, does not wish to side with either of the power blocs, meaning that it would not bandwagon either with America's FOIP or China's BRI (Saha, 2019). This willingness to remain a neutral power in the region was also expressed was evident when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in January 2017 put forth the "Indo-Pacific Strategic Proposal" to

Indonesian President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo. This was not well received by Indonesia, which preferred to remain unaligned in the struggle between the two major powers (Suryadinata, 2018).

In conclusion, over the past two decades Indonesia has shown great leadership initiatives at the regional and sub regional level- be it at ASEAN or the IPCC. It stills maintains its position on ASEAN centrality and doesn't shift towards any particular power bloc. However, most of its policies have been directed towards safely navigating its way around China's increasing dominance in the region. One reason for doing so, is Indonesia's weak naval force. Yet, in the recent years the nation has been focused on modernizing its military to a great extent. This step taken towards strengthening its military and naval forces, to a certain degree contradicts its earlier position on peace and trust building in the region. This is evident by the 20 percent increase in defence expenditure of Indonesia as of 2020 (Abke, 2020). And these expenses are only expected to increase by 2022. This move seems to be at odds with most of Indonesia's policies so far, especially with regards to countering China.

Apart from that, Jokowi's policies in recent years seem to have become more and more aggressive, which does not sit well with the previous initiatives that were introduced by the nation. Indonesia's main interests have always been to maintain its sovereignty and resolve its territorial disputes, especially with regards to the Natuna islands, which in the recent past has come under immense military attention. In order to safeguard its islands, Jokowi's GMF policy was focused on developing Indonesia's Blue Economy. This not only included upgrading its seaport and naval capacities but also its sea lanes of communication. Besides, the archipelago country has also established collaborations with other nations to enhance its maritime capabilities. For example, Indonesian government have signed the official agreement with Denmark for the maritime collaboration in 2017 and had signed with China as a strategic partnership on defence technology since 2005 (Zulkifli, Basar & Abdul Rahman, 2020).

This race to equip and bolster its military modernisation process, whilst preaching the need for peaceful and open negotiations among states to resolve disputes by the Jokowi administration, not only contradict each other but also raise questions about the true stance of Indonesia regarding the Indo-Pacific.

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