

## **India-France-Japan Interest in Indo-Pacific**

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*India, Japan and France have called for a 'rules-based multilateral regional order' in Indo-Pacific, based on democratic values, and without the hegemony of a single political actor. The countries support maritime domain awareness and protection of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the region.\**

### **The Evolving Concept of Indo-Pacific**

In August 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe first proposed to India's parliament that 'the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity.' In the same year, Australia, India, Japan and the US formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The 2007 Quad was short lived, and in 2008, Australia moved out of the group. After a gap of 10 years, Quad was revived as Quad 2.0, when senior officials from Australia, India, Japan and the US met along the sidelines at the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Manila (November 2017).<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, the US expanded its alliance with Australia from a Pacific partnership to an Indo-Pacific partnership.<sup>2</sup> Later, in October 2012, Australian White Paper titled: "Australia in the Asian Century" envisioned the Western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Pacific Ocean as "one strategic arc".<sup>3</sup> In January 2013, Australia's new National Security Strategy explained that the use of the term "Indo-Pacific" complemented the term "Asia Pacific" and that the "Asia Pacific" was a commonly used geopolitical construct, whereas the "Indo-Pacific" emphasized "the growing significance of the geographic corridor,

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\* *Workshop on "Indo-Pacific" organized by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) of India and the Embassies of Japan, and France in India, 19 January 2021. The participants - Mr Harsh V Shringla, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Mr Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India, Mr Satoshi Suzuki, Ambassador of Japan to India and Mr Henri Verdier, Ambassador for Digital Affairs, Government of France.*

<sup>1</sup> Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects," *International Affairs*, Vol. 96, Issue 1, (2020): 151, accessed on March 30, 2021, <https://www.dipublico.org/115739/international-affairs-volume-96-issue-1-january-2020/>.

<sup>2</sup> He and Feng, "The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects," 151.

<sup>3</sup> Wada Haruko, "The Indo-Pacific Concept Geographical Adjustments and their Implications," Working Paper, No. 326, (March 2020): 6, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, accessed on 22 March 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24283>.

traversing the Indian Ocean through to the Western Pacific Ocean and of India.”<sup>4</sup> Australian scholars have been at the forefront in promoting the Indo-Pacific concept. In the think tank community, Rory Medcalf and Michael Wesley from the Lowy Institute are advocates of Indo-Pacific. However, some university scholars like Mark Beeson, Andrew Phillips and Nick Bisley have been critical to Australia’s turn to the Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup> There are several reasons behind Australia’s enthusiasm for the Indo-Pacific concept. Strategically, Australia seems anxious about the potential rise of China, the decline of the US and the implications of both for the rules based international order. From this perspective Indo-Pacific is seen as extending the strategic competition between the US and China in the Asia Pacific into a broader Indo-Pacific domain, in which India is perceived as a natural balancer of China. This is not the first attempt to undermine China’s regional influence by expanding the scope of the battlefield. The extension of the EAS from the ‘ASEAN Plus Three (APT) to include India, Australia and New Zealand was an early attempt by Japan and some Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states to undermine China’s influence in regional affairs. The Indo-Pacific concept has a similar purpose but with a much broader scope.<sup>6</sup>

The US has been an ardent proponent of Indo-Pacific political construct. In October 2017, the then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson during a speech in Washington described “Indo-Pacific as the entire Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and the nations that surround them.” The speech also pointed to India and the US role in the region as “the Eastern and Western beacons” of the Indo-Pacific respectively.<sup>7</sup> The term ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP) was repeatedly used by former President Donald Trump during his visit to Asia (Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines) in November 2017.<sup>8</sup> In December 2017, the US National Security Strategy mentioned the term Indo-Pacific eleven times to describe the region.<sup>9</sup> The US National

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<sup>4</sup> Haruko, “The Indo-Pacific Concept Geographical Adjustments and their Implications,” 6.

<sup>5</sup> He and Feng, “The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects,” 161.

<sup>6</sup> “The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects,” 162.

<sup>7</sup> Haruko, “The Indo-Pacific Concept Geographical Adjustments and their Implications,” 3.

<sup>8</sup> Kai He and Mingjiang Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 96, Issue 1, (2020): 1, accessed on March 30, 2021, <https://www.dipublico.org/115739/international-affairs-volume-96-issue-1-january-2020/>.

<sup>9</sup> He and Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond,” 1.

Security Strategy defined Indo-Pacific “stretching from the West coast of India to the Western shores of the US”. This description of Indo-Pacific coincides with the area of responsibility of the US Pacific Command (USPACOM).<sup>10</sup> Sequel to this, in June 2018, the US Pacific Command in region was renamed as the ‘Indo-Pacific Command’, and in June 2019, the US ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy Report’ was issued. During the same month, ASEAN adopted an ‘ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific’ as its annual summit.<sup>11</sup>

The Indian and Pacific Oceans comprise of trading routes and Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), which make them significant to regional and global players. C. Raja Mohan sees ‘the seas of the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as single integrated geopolitical theater, called as the Indo-Pacific. The definition of Indo-Pacific by oceans is suggestive of the significance of the ‘maritime domain’ in strategic thinking.<sup>12</sup> The placing of India in Indo-Pacific is another facet of the construct. India, no doubt is a littoral state of the Indian Ocean and has geopolitical influence, but it needs to be understood that the Indo – in Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian Ocean (and not India).<sup>13</sup>

### **India’s Vision of Indo-Pacific**

In May 2013, the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during a public speech in Japan used the term Indo-Pacific.<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi has categorically pointed towards India’s emerging role in Indo-Pacific region. Prime Minister Modi’s speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue (Singapore, June 2018) described Indo-Pacific as a region “from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas, constituting the Indian and Pacific oceans, and surrounding countries.”<sup>15</sup>

India’s SAGAR doctrine is a strategy encapsulating the idea of “Security and Growth for all in the Region.” Under the strategy, India’s endeavour is to secure end-to-

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<sup>10</sup> Haruko, “The Indo-Pacific Concept Geographical Adjustments and their Implications,” 3 - 4.

<sup>11</sup> He and Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond,” 1.

<sup>12</sup> Jagannath Panda, “India’s Continental Connect on Indo-Pacific and Quad 2.0”, *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, East - West Center, Number 441, September 26, 2018, accessed on March 24, 2021, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/indias-continental-connect-indo-pacific-and-quad-20>.

<sup>13</sup> Dhruva Jaishankar, “Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific” Impact Series, *Brookings Institution India Centre*, New Delhi, October 2019, 14-15, accessed on March 14, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Acting-East-India-in-the-INDO-PACIFIC-without-cutmark.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> He and Feng, “The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects,” 151.

<sup>15</sup> Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, accessed on March 25, 2021, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>.

end supply chains in the region with no dependence on a single country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi floated the SAGAR idea at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok, in November 2019. During the Summit, Prime Minister Modi also announced the “Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative,” under which India aspires to create a regional architecture on seven pillars: maritime ecology, maritime security, maritime resources, disaster risk reduction and management, capacity building and resource sharing, science, technology and academic cooperation and trade connectivity and maritime transport. India has worked on these principles through geographical and thematic initiatives. Indian Foreign Secretary H.V Shringla, at the Quad Summit held in March 2021 said, “while navigating through political and security concerns along with ensuring stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific, India has not just mainstreamed the concept but has also encouraged others to do the same.”<sup>16</sup> The Indian Navy has extended its operational outreach in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The zones identified for patrols include ‘the Gulf of Aden, the Northern Arabian Sea, the waters around Lakshadweep and the Maldives, the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Seychelles and Mauritius, the Northern Bay of Bengal, the waters around Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Strait of Malacca. India is also a part of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) that has representation from 21 countries.<sup>17</sup>

India’s interest in the region is to safeguard the SLOCs as its trade traverses from Russian oil fields of Sakhalin (North Pacific Ocean) to Mangalore (Southern India) via Malacca (Southeast Asia).<sup>18</sup> To ensure the safe passage of its oil and trade supplies, India has established the Far Eastern Command (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).<sup>19</sup> India also funds the ‘Tripartite Technical Expert Group-TTEG’ which administers the Malacca

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<sup>16</sup> Sohini Nayak, “Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral,” Special Report, No. 133, March 2021, *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*, accessed on April 7, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/maritime-opportunities-await-the-india-japan-france-trilateral/>.

<sup>17</sup> Jaishankar, “Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific,” 17-19.

<sup>18</sup> Manjeet S. Pardesi, “India, US in East Asia: Emerging Strategic Partnership,” Paper, RSIS Commentaries no. 54/2011, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 2011, accessed on March 24, 2021, [https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publications/rsis/1526-india-us-in-east-asia-emerg/#.W79rb\\_kzbZ4](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publications/rsis/1526-india-us-in-east-asia-emerg/#.W79rb_kzbZ4).

<sup>19</sup> Abhijit Singh, *The Nautical Dimension of India’s Act East Policy*, report (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2018), 12, accessed on March 24, 2021, [http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PR180409\\_The-Nautical-Dimension-of-Indias-Act-East-Policy.pdf](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PR180409_The-Nautical-Dimension-of-Indias-Act-East-Policy.pdf).

Strait.<sup>20</sup> Thus, India's interest in Indo-Pacific entails strategic as well as political gains. India is also active in networks such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) as well as the trilateral arrangements, including India-US-Japan, India-France-Australia, and India-Indonesia-Australia.<sup>21</sup>

### **Japan Support for Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Region**

Some analysts argue that Japan's strategy and cooperation with other countries in Indo-Pacific is a hedging strategy employed to counter China. Japan is trying to protect its interests in the East China Sea against repeated intrusions by China around its claimed Diaoyu Islands. This area, which Japan claims as its Senkaku Islands, also hosts the Sea of Japan, spread across to the Pacific Ocean and the Pacific Coast of the US and Canada.<sup>22</sup>

Japan operates base in Djibouti (located at Southern entrance to Red Sea en-route to Suez Canal) and has a Self Defence Force (SDF) contingent of 180 troops stationed at the base (occupying 12-hectare area).<sup>23</sup> Japan was one of the first countries to ideate the notion of an "open and free" Indo-Pacific region. In 2007, the then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called Indo-Pacific as the "seas of prosperity, governed by freedom, rule of law, and the market economy, and free from force or coercion".<sup>24</sup> In August 2016, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) held in Kenya announced the FOIP Vision. The FOIP Vision called for a "coordinated whole-of government approach with stable legal framework,

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<sup>20</sup> Adil Rashid, "Maritime Security Dynamics in Indian Ocean: Pak-China-India" in Major Powers' Interests in Indian Ocean: Challenges and Options for Pakistan (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2014), 121, accessed on March 28, 2021, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Indian-ocean.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> "Harsh Shringla, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific." Observer Research Foundation (ORF), *YouTube*, January 29, 2021, accessed on March 28, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEQk5wfsGQ>.

<sup>22</sup> Nayak, "Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral."

<sup>23</sup> Nobuhiro Kubo, "Japan to Expand Djibouti Military Base to Counter Chinese Influence," Reuters, accessed on April 15, 2021, <https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-japan-military-djibouti-idUSKCN12D0C4>.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Reeves and Joanne Wallis, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities for Engagement (Introduction)," Vol. 15, no. 4, *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, October 28, 2020, accessed on March 20, 2021, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-strengths-weaknesses-and-opportunities-for-engagement-introduction/>.

freedom of navigation and a free trade. The vision focus is shared prosperity, improved connectivity, infrastructure buildup and peace, and stability.”<sup>25</sup>

### **French Interest in Indo-Pacific**

France has overseas territories in Indian Ocean namely Mayotte (located between Madagascar and Mozambique), La Reunion Islands (between Madagascar and Mauritius), Scattered Island (between East coast of Africa and Madagascar) and the French Southern and Antarctic lands in the Southern Indian Ocean, and New Caledonia, Wallis-and-Futuna, French Polynesia, and Clipperton in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

The territories of Reunion and Mayotte serve as bases for the country’s naval patrols in the Mozambique Channel (western Indian Ocean). French naval base ‘Pointe des Galets’ on La Reunion Islands hosts three patrol vessels, a transport ship and a frigate. The base is in proximity to SLOCs off the Southern and Eastern coasts of Africa. Mayotte is home to the 270 Detachement de Legion etrangere de Mayotte (Foreign Legion Detachment in Mayotte, or DLEM). The DLEM is able to act as a ready reaction force and contributes to regional security by conducting maritime surveillance in the Mozambique Channel and humanitarian assistance operations in region. In Djibouti, the Fifth Overseas Inter-arms Regiment (5<sup>e</sup> Regiment Interarmes d’ Outre-Mer) of the French Army is based.<sup>27</sup> France military presence in Horn of Africa helps it to keep an eye on the Suez Canal (connecting the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea) and the Bab-el-Mandeb (strait between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, connecting Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden).<sup>28</sup> Thus, the French naval presence in Indo-Pacific carries strategic significance. French President Emmanuel Macron in a speech at the Garden Island Military base in Sydney, Australia (2018) declared the inclusion of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ in France’s foreign policy. France’s EEZs measure 4.5 million square kilometres; and 90 percent of the EEZs are located in the Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>25</sup> Teruaki Aizawa, “The Philosophy and Practice of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP),” *Ocean Policy Research Institute*, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, accessed on March 22, 2021, [https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis\\_en/\\_1\\_1.html](https://www.spf.org/oceans/analysis_en/_1_1.html).

<sup>26</sup> France: National Involvement in the Indian Ocean Region, *Future Directions International (FDI)*, December 5, 2011, accessed on April 8, 2021, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/france-national-involvement-in-the-indian-ocean-region>.

<sup>27</sup> France: National Involvement in the Indian Ocean Region, *Future Directions International (FDI)*, December 5, 2011, accessed on April 8, 2021, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/france-national-involvement-in-the-indian-ocean-region>.

<sup>28</sup> Nayak, “Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral.”

France military deployment in Western Indian Ocean (strength 4,100) and the Pacific Ocean (strength 2,900) is to ensure the protection of the EEZs in region.<sup>29</sup>

France also has multilateral presence in the Indo-Pacific region. France has membership of Indian Ocean Commission-COI (*Commission de l'Océan Indien*), other member states are Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros and Madagascar.<sup>30</sup>

#### Quad + France's Interest

Given the presence of different yet overlapping multilateral arrangement India has with members of Quad – such as Australia, Japan, United States – and those outside Quad such as Indonesia and France, is consistent with India and other Quad members' geopolitical objectives in the Indian and Pacific ocean.

France's association with South East Asia dates back to its colonial enterprise in the erstwhile Indochina (1884-1954).<sup>31</sup> These countries, of Indochina, at present consist of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Exit of France from Vietnam itself came as a result of a violent standoff between its forces and Ho Chi Minh's forces.<sup>32</sup> However, the decision to invite France in the Quad-plus configuration may be meant to complement the existing capabilities of India, United States, Japan, and Australia. Addition of France, primarily, may possibly compensate existing power deficit of other countries in the region such as that of Philippines, and Vietnam to counter Chinese presence in Spratly Islands.

It is, however, too early to presciently foretell how public perception may play out to involvement of French involvement within this region. Insight of realpolitik among public and policymakers may dampen and replace national –bitter – memories associated to colonial legacy of France in interest of putting up a collective action with erstwhile colonial power against China's maritime claims in South China Sea. However, the complicated history of the region merits cognizance to analyze the limitations of such an approach also.

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<sup>29</sup> Nayak, "Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral."

<sup>30</sup> France: National Involvement in the Indian Ocean Region, *Future Directions International (FDI)*, December 5, 2011, accessed on April 8, 2021, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/france-national-involvement-in-the-indian-ocean-region>.

<sup>31</sup> "Effects of French Colonial Rule," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed on April 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam/Effects-of-French-colonial-rule>.

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

## **India, Japan and France Cooperation in Maritime Domain**

India is a member of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), while Japan and France are dialogue partners in IORA.<sup>33</sup>

### India and Japan Commonality of Interest in Indo-Pacific

India and Japan, both are Asian maritime powers; India in the Indian Ocean and Japan in the Pacific Ocean. Both the Asian players are part of Quad. India's SAGAR vision for the region and Japan's FOIP vision converge on maritime security, connectivity and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Prime Minister Modi once remarked that with countries of Northeast Asia, India puts special emphasis on Japan. He said: "a joining together of the world's third largest economy and, demographically, the second largest market could end up in the creation of the globe's most formidable economic power house, outmaneuvering even the US and China, within the next 12-15 years."<sup>34</sup> Japan has offered to assist India in building of infrastructure to connect Northeast (India) with Southeast Asia. Accordingly, an 'Act East Forum' has been set up, and Japan has extended loan of US \$ 350 million.<sup>35</sup>

India and France through various cooperative initiatives have enhanced maritime domain awareness. The navies of both countries conduct joint exercise 'VARUNA' off the Goa coast and Djibouti (May 2019).<sup>36</sup> The French Navy has also proposed to conduct the first Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) joint Exercise.<sup>37</sup> Other cooperative initiatives between the two countries include 'White Shipping Agreement-2017,' the 'Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region,' the 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' and the 'Indian Ocean Rim Association

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<sup>33</sup> "Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India, India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific," Observer Research Foundation (ORF), *YouTube*, January 29, 2021, accessed on March 28, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHXM12\\_Ccy0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHXM12_Ccy0).

<sup>34</sup> Bart Gaens and Olli Ruohomaki, "India's Look East – Act East Policy: Hedging as a Foreign Policy Tool" (Briefing Paper 222, Finnish Institute of International Affairs-FIIA, May 6, 2017), 6, accessed on March 25, 2021, [https://storage.googleapis.com/upi-live/2017/10/bp222\\_indias-look-east--act-east-policy.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/upi-live/2017/10/bp222_indias-look-east--act-east-policy.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Vibhanshu Shekhar, "India's Relations with ASEAN: Posture Versus Reality," *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, East - West Center, Number 412, February 13, 2018, accessed on March 28, 2021, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb412.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=36519>.

<sup>36</sup> "Harsh Shringla, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific," Observer Research Foundation (ORF), *YouTube*, January 29, 2021, accessed on March 28, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEQk5wfsGQ>.

<sup>37</sup> Harsh Shringla, Foreign Secretary, Government of India, India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific.



(IORA)’. The ‘White Shipping Agreement’ allows India to monitor vessels across the region, and to exchange information on maritime traffic.<sup>38</sup>

Japan and France collaborative frameworks in Indo-Pacific include the ‘Japan-France Indo-Pacific Working Group’, the ‘Japan and France Two Plus Two Ministerial Meetings’ and the ‘Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue’. The dialogue encompasses cooperation in maritime security, climate change and infrastructure development. In 2019, the Japanese and French navies participated in ‘La Crosse Naval exercises held in Indian Ocean. The other participating countries in the exercise were Australia, Cambodia and the US.<sup>39</sup>

Japan, France and India have a coordinating mechanism known as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). ACSA allows sharing of defence supplies and services. The coordinating mechanism can be useful for strengthening of trilateral cooperation between the navies of Japan, France and India. The three countries can further develop projects within forums like the IORA as they are ideal for discussing the more technical, normative and developmental aspects.<sup>40</sup>

### **China and the Indo-Pacific Region**

The China Defence White paper released in July 2019 used ‘Asia Pacific’ to describe the region, and the term Indo-Pacific did not appear at all. In practice, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) foresees China’s economic and strategic outreach across both the Pacific and the Indian oceans. China has secured political allies along the periphery of Indian Ocean and will emerge strong economically. Why, then, China is reluctant to the Indo-Pacific concept? The prominence of the Indo-Pacific concept in the US, Australia, Japan,<sup>41</sup> ASEAN<sup>42</sup> and India’s foreign policy lexicon shows a collective strategic orientation.<sup>43</sup> Thereby, the answer could be that the unanimous political orientation of the US and allies on Indo-Pacific makes the political construct a US led initiative.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific.”

<sup>39</sup> Nayak, “Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral.”

<sup>40</sup> “Maritime Opportunities Awaits the India-Japan-France Trilateral.”

<sup>41</sup> He and Feng, “The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects,” 151.

<sup>42</sup> Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond,” 1 - 2.

<sup>43</sup> He and Feng, “The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects,” 151.

<sup>44</sup> Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond,” 1 - 2.

China's naval presence in Indian Ocean stretches from the maritime territory of 'Yellow Sea to East China Sea, and down to the Strait of Taiwan towards the South China Sea'.<sup>45</sup> China has a military facility in Djibouti.<sup>46</sup> China's military modernization and active presence in the Indian Ocean as articulated by India's Former Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sunil Lanba: "Since 2008, there has been permanent presence of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean region in the form of anti-piracy escort force. The 31<sup>st</sup> anti-piracy escort force is presently in the Gulf of Aden. So, at any given time, there are 6 to 8 Chinese navy ships in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. Also, two years ago, they commissioned their first overseas facility, or base, in Djibouti. The stated aim of this deployment is to protect their trade, which is flowing through this area, from piracy. That included deployed submarines for anti-piracy operations, which is the most unlikely platform to be used for this role. There is no doubt they are spending a huge sum of money in developing their military capability. They are modernizing their forces, they are modernizing the command structure. No navy has grown so rapidly in the last five years. So, the Chinese navy is a force, and it is a force which is here to stay."<sup>47</sup> Thereby, China's naval power in the Pacific as well as Indian Ocean has provoked counterbalancing strategies.<sup>48</sup> The regional and global players' concerns are to ensure freedom of navigation and to prevent the domination of a single power in region.

Some geopolitical analysts like Kaplan and Medcalf see the 'Indo-Pacific' as economically driven and the global players' tilt towards the region to secure energy supplies and to counter the transnational challenges of terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, etc.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, China's economic growth, no doubt, has alarmed the world quarters, however, still China's image is not that of a 'common enemy'. China's economic prowess has attracted the regional countries and has been a source of economic integration. Thereby, China's image is far from being a threatening power to region's

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<sup>45</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Obama Administration's Strategic Rebalancing to Asia: Quo Vadis in 2017" *Pacific Focus, Inha Journal of International Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2 (August 2018): 186-187.

<sup>46</sup> Nobuhiro Kubo, "Japan to Expand Djibouti Military Base to Counter Chinese Influence," *Reuters*, accessed on April 15, 2021, <https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-japan-military-djibouti-idUSKCN12D0C4>.

<sup>47</sup> Jaishankar, "Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific," 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> "Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific."

<sup>49</sup> Chengxin Pan, "The Indo-Pacific and Geopolitical Anxieties about China's Rise in the Asian Regional Order," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 68, Issue 4, (March 2014): 462, accessed on March 24, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.884054>.

security. This could be the reason that why there is still no NATO in Asia – no military alliance or hard balancing against China.<sup>50</sup>

### China and Southeast Asia

China's relationship with Southeast Asia dates back to millennia. This relationship has multiple facets from the past, which shape China's existing policy towards the region: maritime expeditions; nine-dash line; and hierarchical relationship with regional countries under principle of *tian-xia* customarily translated as "all under the heaven."<sup>51</sup> Ancient Chinese ruler have come to see themselves anointed by Heaven as the rulers of earth, with Chinese culture and civilization as the supremely ascendant civilization on Earth. This view as a result projected hierarchical interaction with other states: often associating ideas of barbarian culture with outside cultures.

The maritime expeditions of China date back to 15<sup>th</sup> century, preceding century earlier than the arrival of first European expeditions in Malacca strait in 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Yongle Emperor (Ming Dynasty), under Admiral Zheng He.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese admiral had taken almost seven voyages, during Ming Dynasty, to present Malacca Strait – including Indonesia and Malaysia – Vietnam, Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), India, Brunei, Thailand, Bengal, Oman, Yemen and as far as Eastern coast of Africa.<sup>53</sup> Courtesy of these voyages, envoys of nearly 30 states, accompanying Zheng He, paid tribute before the court of Chinese emperor in 1415 CE.<sup>54</sup> China, in modern history, has come to establish its claim of the nine-dash line in the South China Sea based on the historical voyages that were taken by Chinese Admiral Zheng He.<sup>55</sup> China underscores this claim that since it was the first maritime power to have surveyed the maritime waters,

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<sup>50</sup> He and Feng, "The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects," 152.

<sup>51</sup> Yan Xuetong cited the ancient classic The Book of Odes to explain these terms: "The term all under heaven was virtually synonymous with the world. The title Son of Heaven referred to the person who ruled over all people on the earth as the representative of Heaven. The emperors of China's feudal times called themselves Son of Heaven, which shows that they thought of themselves as rulers of the world. The idea that 'under heaven's canopy there is nowhere that is not the king's land; up to the sea's shores, there are none who are not the king's servants' illustrates that the contention for the power of Son of Heaven was, from another point of view, a contention for world-leadership."

<sup>52</sup> Howard W. French, "Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power," (Toronto: Knopf, 2017), 116-134.

<sup>53</sup> "Zheng He," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zheng-He>.

<sup>54</sup> French, "Everything under Heavens," 116-150.

<sup>55</sup> "Everything under Heavens," 116-150.

including shoals, reefs and Islands, with vivid details, the right to claim, therefore, lies with China, than with the neighboring states in Southeast Asia.<sup>56</sup>

Courtesy of an extended Chinese colonial rule in its South, over millennia starting in seventh century BCE, present day Vietnam has also formed a highly hierarchical relationship with the former. This colonial experience ranged from shaping culture and lives of Vietnamese society from micro facets to aspects of governance.<sup>57</sup> The Chinese exercise was aimed at civilizing the barbarian people south of the Yangtze River. Consequently, China, viewed people in South, i.e. in recent day Vietnam, as barbarians. The present day adoption of the name Vietnam is a derivative of two words, *Viet*, which means, “south” and *nam*, means “barbarian.”<sup>58</sup> The word Viet is equivalent of the Chinese word, *Yue*, which also means “South”: the ancient Chinese rulers referred to the people with the same term.<sup>59</sup> Traditionally, in pre-colonial era and to some extent in recent decades, Vietnam also understands limitations of its power in confronting China as an established power in the region. While Vietnam resisted China’s colonial rule to preserve its sovereignty, from tenth century CE onward, Vietnam remained intertwined in a hierarchical relationship by honoring China with tributes; it also internalized China’s ascendancy of culture and power.<sup>60</sup> A near similar dynamic in bilateral relationship between China and Vietnam have lasted after decolonization from France, second Indochina war and reunification of Vietnam. China also seeks to counter Vietnam’s influence by balancing it against Cambodia, as it had done during the Khmer Rouge’s takeover of Cambodia.<sup>61</sup> The trend continues at present as Beijing maintains close ties with both, Cambodia and Laos to keep Vietnam’s influence in check in its immediate region.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Everything under Heavens,” 274-320.

<sup>57</sup> “Everything under Heavens,” 150-210.

<sup>58</sup> “Everything under Heavens,” 154-155.

<sup>59</sup> “Everything under Heavens,” 150-210.

<sup>60</sup> “Everything under Heavens,” 150-210.

<sup>61</sup> Marwaan Macan-Markar, “Laos’ New Leader to Play Balancing Act Between China and Vietnam,” *Nikkei Asia*, last modified January 20, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Laos-new-leader-to-play-balancing-act-between-China-and-Vietnam>.

<sup>62</sup> Johanna Son, “Laos and Cambodia: The China Dance,” *Reporting ASEAN - Voices and Views from Within Southeast Asia*, last modified September 30, 2017, <https://www.reportingasean.net/laos-cambodia-china-dance/>.

China also lays claim to different islands, especially, the Spratly islands in South China sea vis-à-vis Philippines, and it also claims Senkaku islands in East China sea, especially part of the Ryukyu Islands forming part of the Okinawa chain held by Japan. The Senkaku islands were annexed by Japan after the Sino-Japan War of 1895.<sup>63</sup>

China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan also happen to have overlapping Air Defence Identification Zones (ADIZ) in the East China Sea; similarly the exclusive economic zones of both China and Japan have an analogous characteristic as the ADIZ and overlay each side's respective claims. These elements in conjunction with existing dispute over the Senkaku islands can trigger a limited conflict, in future, between China and Japan.<sup>64</sup>

#### Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)\* and China

China, in 2020, successfully materialized a trade agreement, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, with Japan, South Korea, ASEAN states and Oceanic states (Australia and New Zealand).<sup>65</sup> The partnership will allow China and the member states to integrate and establish their supply-chain in an integrated, “harmonized and predictable set of regional trade rules” across the Asia-Pacific region. As per the Peterson Institute for International Economics estimate, the RCEP could increase global national income by US\$ 186 billion annually by 2030 and add 0.2 percent to the economy of its member states.<sup>66</sup>

China's overall trade with ASEAN countries has increased from 14 percent to 14.7 per cent on a year to year basis in 2020 to US\$ 297.8 billion.<sup>67</sup> Europe which was previously the largest trading partner of China had its trade share reduced by 5 percent in the first half of fiscal year 2020 down to 14 percent at US\$ 284.1 billion.<sup>68</sup> The existing quad members also have significant trade with the RCEP states: including Japan,

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\* RCEP signed on November 15, 2020 along the sidelines of 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN virtual Summit.

<sup>63</sup> French, “Everything under Heavens,” 150-210.

<sup>64</sup> French, “Everything under Heavens,” 150-210

<sup>65</sup> Samuel Scoles, “15 Asia-Pacific Countries Sign World's Largest FTA; A Closer Look at RCEP's Key Outcomes and Implications,” White & Case LLP International Law Firm, Global Law Practice, last modified November 24, 2020, <https://www.whitecase.com/publications/alert/15-asia-pacific-countries-sign-worlds-largest-fta-closer-look-rceps-key-outcomes>.

<sup>66</sup> Scoles, “Asia-Pacific Countries Sign.”

<sup>67</sup> Staff Writer, “ASEAN becomes China's top trade partner as supply chain evolves,” Nikkei Asian Review, last modified July 15, 2020, accessed on April 15, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/ASEAN-becomes-China-s-top-trade-partner-as-supply-chain-evolves>.

<sup>68</sup> “ASEAN becomes China's top trade partner as supply chain evolves.”

Australia, and India. Half of Japan's trade accounts for total trade value with RCEP states.<sup>69</sup> 61 per cent of Australia total trade accounts for trade with RCEP states and India's 71 percent of total exports account for trade with RCEP states.<sup>70</sup>

### **Institutionalization of Indo-Pacific?**

Indo-Pacific has been used by political leaders in their speeches, statements and official documents. Despite the frequent use of term Indo-Pacific, and the apparently tangible institution-building efforts towards the concept, it still has to go a long way in establishing itself. The reason behind lack of institutionalization stems from the fact that, so far, no multilateral institution has officially reified the concept of Indo-Pacific. The Quad 2.0 seems the closest embodiment; however, even if that grouping is successful, it is only a model of 'minilateral' security cooperation among four countries; and it cannot manifest the geographic meaning of the 'Indo-Pacific' in a general sense.<sup>71</sup> Another explanation for the lack of institutionalization of Indo-Pacific involves a 'wedging strategy' conducted by China. According to this line of argument, China is intentionally and strategically using its BRI to dissuade other countries from engaging in any possible anti-China institution building in the Indo-Pacific - China being the largest trading partner of most Asia Pacific countries. However, there are at least two analytical problems with this argument. On the one hand, it overestimates the strategic function of China's BRI. If China's BRI does have a wedging role, it seems to have been unsuccessful, even counter-productive, so far, because all four of the Quad countries have to some extent openly criticized the initiative. On the other hand, the argument misunderstands ASEAN's reservations about the Indo-Pacific concept. ASEAN's previously lukewarm attitude towards the Indo-Pacific concept is actually rooted in its concern that any wider institution building will threaten its own established central role in the regional architecture.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> M. K. Bhadrakumar, "India's Farewell to ASEAN As It Boards RCEP Train," Indian Punchline, November 14, 2020, <https://www.indianpunchline.com/indias-farewell-to-asean-as-it-boards-rcep-train/>.

<sup>70</sup> Bhadrakumar, "India's Farewell to ASEAN As It Boards RCEP Train."

<sup>71</sup> He and Feng, "The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects," 151 and 152.

<sup>72</sup> "The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects," 152.

## Recommendations

- Indo-Pacific is a geographic depiction of a strategic concept. India, Japan and France agree to its basic line of construction and are aiming to become leading stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. Working with one another, and with other countries outside of this trilateral as well, they have taken on the task of ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains open. As regards Pakistan's inclusion in the security apparatus of Indo-Pacific, Pakistan needs to develop political ties with the regional countries. Pakistan needs to pursue its 'Vision East Asia' policy vigorously with focus on economic and security cooperation with the region.
- The amalgamation of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region is reflective of convergence of interest, a "confluence of thought" and an "alignment of mental maps". The security partnership developed between India, Japan and France stands out due to the absence of differences between the three countries. Seeing Pakistan's political orientation and the emerging power equation in Asia Pacific, Pakistan is seen as an ally of China. Pakistan's political ties with China, amidst the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are central to country's foreign policy. However, Pakistan needs to diversify its policy outlook and for that efforts to develop relations' with other East Asian economies should be considered.
- The challenge in maritime security is to articulate internal and external coordination in a coherent framework where one country can look for areas in which it can achieve maximum impact. Maritime security is not just about political issues but about identifying spheres where the entire region can be mobilized. For Pakistan to remain relevant to Indo-Pacific construct, Pakistan Navy needs to enhance collaboration with regional navies. To start with cooperation in maritime areas like fisheries, HADR operations and peacekeeping can be undertaken, and later participation in naval exercises. For Pakistan engagement in Southeast Asia may need to be configured through two different lenses: security related engagement with the regional countries, and increase of regional trade, with prime focus of scaling up exports from Pakistan to the region. In security related cooperation, it would be of interest, that Pakistan should adopt a China sensitive policy in Southeast Asia: with particular caution to be exercised in engagement with countries such as Vietnam, Philippines, and Japan in

South China and East China Sea. However, Pakistan may host China + ASEAN states for naval exercises, maritime exercises or anti-piracy patrols in Indian Ocean, especially near Arabian Sea and Horn of Africa. This may either be incorporated, as a separate element, in AMAN 2022 exercises. This may enable Pakistan's security apparatus especially its navy in sharing knowledge regarding anti-piracy and counter-terror tactics with navies of the ASEAN region. Furthermore, this may be of relevance as Pakistan will seek to upscale its economic trade with Southeast Asian states and mutual trust building may keep in check possible hostility from India through appropriation of good-will based resources with regional navies.

- Pakistan's foreign ministry in conjunction with the commerce ministry should depute a time bound research group to study the landscape of Southeast Asian markets and identify goods and services through which Pakistan can capitalize on its share of the market. This should be done strategically in a manner, which should not tip Pakistan's import bill to outweigh its export bill. The study should approach ASEAN as a region and identify in respective markets demand-side related elements which suppliers and industry stakeholders from Pakistan can help meet. Pakistan may also explore possibility of inviting development of supply-chain industries consistent with the vision of RCEP. Under such an arrangement Pakistan stands to benefit by undertaking manufacturing of products that may be shipped to global market and Pakistan through this move may also upscale its export bill.
- Pakistan should also enter in talks with China and regional countries on possibility of accommodating its entrance in RCEP by 2028-30.