

Potential and Opportunities for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific between India, Germany and the EU



Programme Overview

Ensuring a free, open and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific has become a major policy priority for countries of the region. The Indo-Pacific region generates 60 per cent of global gross domestic product and is linked to Europe through transregional production networks and supply chains. With an economy slated to be the world's third largest by 2030, a population projected to be the world's largest by 2027, and two strategic coastlines at the heart of the Indian Ocean, India holds the potential to be the European Union's most important partner as Europe seeks to balance its relations with China while securing the expansion of its engagement with the countries of the Indo-Pacific. While the Indo-Pacific is not a region that is of immediate geopolitical relevance to Germany, the interconnected nature of global commerce ties it inexorably to geopolitical concerns with any disruption of the latter directly standing to impact the former. The German government has billed the guidelines as a coherent effort to reorient its foreign and security policy approach to the strategically important region that has become increasingly vital to the country's national interests. As Germany's former Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas put it "The Himalayas and the Strait of Malacca may seem far away. But our prosperity and geopolitical influence in the coming decades are also based on how we work with the states of the Indo-Pacific."

Both Germany and the EU's Indo-Pacific policy document acknowledges that the region is increasingly characterized by and consequently, susceptible to shifts in power equations with there being divergent interests and aspirations of countries comprising it. As an advocate of the rules-based international order, their interests lie in its participation in the region's growth and the protection of regional structures. The need for the maintenance of freedom of navigation, territorial sovereignty has been underlined as well. Towards this end, for instance, the navies of India and Germany carried out a joint exercise in the Gulf of Aden near Yemen in August 2021,

earlier this year in January 2022, a German frigate FGS Bayern made a port call to Mumbai as part of its seven-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific region. India has similar interests like Germany and the EU in a free and open Indo-Pacific and security of its maritime trading routes. Therefore, how does the German and the EU Indo-Pacific policies stand to impact the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region? What are the potential areas that India and Germany alongside the EU can work together to ensure a stable and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific? How would they gain from this cooperative arrangement?

Against this background, the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi in collaboration with the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is holding a series of roundtables. The first in the series will look into the potential areas of cooperation between India, Germany and also the EU in the maritime domain to ensure a stable, free, open and a rules-based Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is essentially a maritime geography, and hence there is great potential for countries to work together in the maritime sector. Some of the areas where collaboration can take place are maritime domain awareness, marine economy, capacity building in third countries or region like Southeast Asia, helping island nations of the Western Indian Ocean in preparing for natural disasters and humanitarian assistance. Experts from India, Germany, other EU countries and the ASEAN will come together to discuss about the above possibilities as well as how can both India, Germany and the EU benefit from this partnership and reap strategic advantage in the Indo-Pacific region.

Glimpses



Introduction

Ever since Germany has released its guidelines on the Indo-Pacific, there has been an optimism in India. The guidelines mention India quite a few number of times and also underscore the need for a bilateral partnership between India and Germany in the Indo-Pacific region. Though India and Germany possess the same political mind-set, there needs to be discussion if the two countries can come together for an operational collaboration, can the two countries come up with a sustainability agenda in the maritime domain especially in the Indian Ocean? Can Germany be a strong catalyst in boosting an India-EU partnership? Against the backdrop of the Ukraine war, will Germany have the wherewithal to invest in the Indian and the Pacific oceans? The rules based order is currently under threat. The Indo-Pacific region is a hub of trade and an area of opportunity for multilateral cooperation among equals.

Both, Germany and the EU's Indo-Pacific policy documents, acknowledge that the region is increasingly characterized by and consequently, susceptible to shifts in power equations with there being divergent interests and aspirations of countries comprising it. As an advocate of the rules-based international order, their interests lie in its participation in the region's growth and the protection of regional structures. The need for the maintenance of freedom of navigation and territorial sovereignty has been underlined as well. Towards this end, for instance, the navies of India and Germany carried out a joint exercise in the Gulf of Aden near Yemen in August 2021. Earlier this year in January 2022, the German frigate FGS Bayern made a port call at Mumbai as part of its seven-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific region. India has similar interests like Germany and the EU in a free and open Indo-Pacific and security of its maritime trading routes. Therefore, how do the German and the EU Indo-Pacific policies stand to impact the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region? What are the potential areas that India and Germany

alongside the EU can work together in to ensure a stable and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific? How would they gain from this cooperative arrangement?

Against this background, the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi in collaboration with the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung hosted a webinar on September 21, 2022 where experts from India, the EU countries shared their views and observations on the prospects and potential of maritime cooperation in areas like marine governance, maritime domain awareness and capacity building between India, Germany and the EU. The webinar had two sessions focussing on ‘Safeguarding the Marine Environment in the Indo-Pacific Region’ and ‘Maritime Domain Awareness and Capacity Building in the Indo-Pacific’.

The section below lists out the key issues and points brought up in the two panels. The summary mainly points out the ongoing measures or initiatives that are being taken in the areas of marine governance, maritime domain awareness and capacity building by India, Germany and the EU; the challenges they face, followed by some policy recommendations.

Safeguarding the Marine Environment in the Indo-Pacific Region

When there is talk of maritime governance, there are three issues that need to be discussed- transnational challenges, management of the commons (regulatory gridlock), blue economy and sustainability. There is a shift in priority being accorded to marine governance. Initially discussions on maritime security used to circle around China, the rise of China, its actions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, but now issues of marine governance are being accorded equal importance as well.

The developments in the Indo-Pacific region in 2021 were dominated by a combination of geostrategic and geo-economic interests. The importance of ocean governance in the domains of security, economic development, environment, resource resilience, and ecology, with specific reference to the Indo-Pacific, was stressed upon at various fora, given that some states have continued to push for increasing their spheres of influence in and around the oceans. The EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy outlined ocean governance as one of the seven priority areas. India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), with its seven pillars, gained resonance and support from some key players, including Australia, Japan, France, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The emphasis was

on using existing institutions and frameworks for strengthening ocean governance instead of creating new ones. At the same time, there is recognition that extant frameworks and institutions have shown limitations in taking the ocean governance agenda forward. The implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategies of different players will get tested for delivery and effectiveness. As seen in the recent past, shocks due to unexpected developments and actions may continue to cause disruptions. Against this backdrop, it will require a special effort to accord the much-needed priority to ocean governance. A new thrust on ocean governance, with appropriate and inclusive framework for cooperation, can itself be a major contributor to enhancing stability, safety, security, development, and well-being in the region and beyond.

Challenges

- While governments are doing well in constabulary challenges and other issues, but on the aspect of governance, there is very little movement given that there are a lot of challenges. Firstly, the UNCLOS is not a pertinent tool to deal with a number of issues particularly in the EEZs. The UNCLOS does little to resolve the disputes in the EEZs. Though UNCLOS does talk about marine governance, part 12 of the UNCLOS specially discusses this, but UNCLOS is effective only when it comes to national jurisdiction and not in the high seas. It is true that UNCLOS does set out a framework for ocean governance, but as mentioned above, there is no implementing mechanism, especially for issues relating to the high seas. Many countries have not aligned their domestic policies along the lines of the rules laid out in the UNCLOS and India is also a case in point. In South Asia ocean governance is a very complex issue.
- Secondly there are resource constraints, capacity constraints, more important is the lack of investments, capitals in blue economy. The know-how and political will is there, but this is also the area which is the most resource and technology demanding.
- The Indian Ocean is most impacted by marine environmental degradation and is also more prone to natural disasters. The Indian Ocean warms up faster, it creates deoxygenation, and the impact of sea-level rise is increasingly being seen, for instance in wave driven floods, climate driven migration among others. The battle against global warming is already underway in the Indo-Pacific. The area is frequently assaulted by violent weather events,

leaving numerous fatalities in their wake. According to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, in 2021 alone, over 57 million people were affected by climate disasters in the Asia Pacific region.

- Additionally, the aspect of maritime safety- safety of fishing, safety of shipping is sometimes neglected when one speaks of the Indian Ocean. This is an area where India, Germany, EU can work together.

Policy Recommendations

- In the traditional security threat realm, that is with regards to the growing Chinese presence in the maritime space, Europe is sometimes seen as not a very promising player, but the marine environment and the non-traditional security threat area is where Europe has enough experience and can make substantial contributions. EU is the official ambassador for promoting sustainable governance since 2016 of Ocean Chapter 17, of the SDG goals of the UN and a lot is being done by individual countries as well to maintain environmental standards.
- There is a need for a shared vision, joint vision in terms of what is perceived as biodiversity, sustainability in the maritime domain. There is agreement on what constitutes maritime security, but there is not much agreement on marine environment and marine space. There needs to be policy focussed discussion, and capacity building in marine governance, working together in the EEZs. We need to look at the transfer of technology in blue economy. India and Germany need to work together in climate change, climate induced challenges in the maritime domain. A comprehensive management framework for marine conservation is needed. Europe has marine conservation spatial zones, which South Asia lacks. The gaps in the knowledge economy, especially in South Asia, need to be addressed as well.
- There is a need to address the knowledge gap, ocean literacy, involve the younger generation, enhance scientific understanding, especially on deep sea mining, ocean geo-engineering. There is a need to bring in donors and private investors. The message that needs to go out is blue economy can be made profitable for the industry and every infrastructure should be climate proof. There are successful examples as well like blue financing for ocean protection, Blue Bonds in Seychelles, using of insurance tools for protecting Mexico's coral reefs.

- There is a great degree of convergence between the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative on Blue Economy. There is a need for joint action.
- The Indo-Pacific Ministerial Meeting is a great first step and this should be continued to address joint concerns and for coming up with plans as well as actions for implementation. There is also the Maritime Security Dialogue. So platforms already exist and there is acknowledgement of the importance of the Indo-Pacific. Other initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing Platform (IORIS) under the CRIMARIO project are also important. A lot can be done at the bilateral level and also at the trilateral level, involving Japan for instance, which is doing a lot of projects under the BIMSTEC. We have to involve organisations and go beyond the state level also like for instance the NGOs.
- There is no need for creating new platforms, rather we need to centralise this existing information for creating awareness, identify the projects and strategic areas where attention can be focussed. Also, there is a greater need to coordinate and enhance the information sharing. Partnerships can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes and in this context the existing platforms are important, but the emphasis should be on actionable programs and measuring their outcomes and this is where the challenge lies. The most important threat to the maritime environment is from the global threat of climate change. The climate change threat is more transnational and it is both at the local and global levels.
- Connectivity appears to be the area where most potential exists for work to be done together. It is an area where investment can be attracted, the public and the private sectors can also work together. There is also the scope for triangular cooperation, that is cooperating with a third country. EU has bilateral partnerships with countries like Japan and now India on connectivity, but there is also the Global Gateway, which provides the opportunity and platform of bringing in other countries and talk of triangular cooperation. Connectivity is a great tool to enhance cooperation, as it depends mostly on private funds rather than public. But at the same time, it targets the required strategic areas which are of interest to the government and the public.

- There is a need for funding commitment from India, EU and Germany. There is a lot happening on paper in terms of the Quad, the IPOI, but it is not clear as to what is actually happening on ground. There is a need to make environmental solutions attractive and that is where blue economy comes into play. Additionally, the need for accountability and law enforcement is very important as well.
- Lastly, it is necessary to look beyond the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy. India needs to engage directly with the agencies in Europe that deal with fisheries, marine safety, pollution, governance etc. So, an inclusive dialogue would be a good way forward. Also the private sector should be brought into these discussions.

Maritime Domain Awareness and Capacity building in the Indo-Pacific

2021 has been a watershed year for the Indo-Pacific region, with major policy, framework, and posture adaptations made by many countries and regional groupings, both within and outside the region. With clear recognition of the all-round importance of the region in the coming decades, the hardening of big power rivalry and competition, and the emergence of new approaches tailored for the post-pandemic world, many new formal and informal partnerships and arrangements were initiated. In order to ensure maritime security, nations are required to drive engagements that are well informed. To harness such actionable information, countries collaborate in sharing intelligence and technology. For instance, the trilateral security arrangement between India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, signed in 2013 as a maritime security framework, can be considered an MDA framework as it focuses on carrying out anti-piracy operations, naval Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, and surveillance of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). At the Quad Leaders' Summit in Tokyo in May 2022, the Indo Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA) was announced. Through this initiative, the Quad nations will enhance their maritime surveillance and information sharing across the Indo-Pacific and will allow the partner nations to monitor the waters to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. For this, the partner nations will have to pool their information and jointly develop and deploy their existing and emerging technologies to provide a "common operating picture which will integrate three critical regions – the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region – in the Indo-Pacific".

The implementation documents released by Germany focus on ASEAN, Australia and Japan and also setting up a new information fusion centre in Singapore. The India-EU Maritime Security Dialogue does talk about maritime domain awareness, capacity building among the focus pillars. The port call by the German frigate 'Bayern' has opened potential doors for enhanced cooperation between New Delhi and Berlin. The fourth pillar of the IPOI covers capacity building and this is also covered in the EU strategy. India has been very active in capacity building and capability development, both in the Eastern and the Western Indian Ocean and the EU has been active in this sphere, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean. In all the Indo-Pacific strategy documents that have been released by Germany, the EU has listed India as a priority partner and looks at the Indian Ocean as a gateway to the Indo-Pacific. A new initiative started by the EU- Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the Indian Ocean, uses existing EU states' naval and assets to enhance the EU's image as a maritime security contributor.

Challenges

- To the German government, when it comes to the Indo-Pacific, the question of China is very central. Given that China is a concern, then the area east to the Strait of Malacca should be prioritised. The biggest challenge will be when Germany will have to look to the East of Malacca, the South China Sea, East China Sea and the South Pacific.
- The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is mostly dependent on the presence and resources deployed by France. How much will Germany and other European countries contribute to the Indo-Pacific to strengthen their own presence as well as France's remains to be seen. The EU Indo-Pacific Strategy was released before the Russia-Ukraine War and now due to the war and the resultant resource crunch, will the EU be able to focus its attention to the Indo-Pacific remains to be seen as well.

Policy Recommendations

- Minilaterals seem to be a more fruitful mode of cooperation, for instance the Quad which is being projected essentially as a non-security grouping, looks at involving the ASEAN in various initiatives it is taking and therefore here, given the EU and Germany's enthusiasm to work with the ASEAN, the Quad seems like a credible platform to come together on and work with the ASEAN countries. Germany also needs to come on board in the IPOI as there is ample scope.
- The expansion of the focus area of CRIMARIO 2 to Southeast Asia and South Pacific provides greater opportunity for collaboration. These are the priority areas underlined by India as well.
- India's initiative called the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) can be a future area of cooperation as well as Indian Ocean is very prone to natural disasters.
- There are different threats that countries face and there is a need to remember that cooperation in the Indo-Pacific needs to happen in segments as there are small and big nations here and the small nations are, most of the times, intimidated by bigger powers. So, the interests of the smaller nations also have to be kept in mind.
- There has to be a common agenda when it comes to MDA. Germany has to look at the Indo-Pacific as an Indo-Pacific power and leave Europe behind. France has an advantage here as it has been present in the region for long and their understanding of the Indo-Pacific is different from that of other European nations.

Programme

Programme Flow

Opening Remarks 1500 hours to 1510 hours

Abhijit Singh (Senior Fellow and Head of Maritime Initiative, Observer Research Foundation)

Pankaj Madan (Deputy Head- India Office, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung)

Session 1: Safeguarding the marine environment in the Indo-Pacific (1515 hours to 1615 hours IST)

The marine environment or the marine economy is also another very important area of interest and concern for countries of the Indo-Pacific. Often news of illegal and unreported fishing, over-exploitation of fishing resources, dumping of marine plastic debris circle around us. What can India, Germany and the EU do in this regard? What are the potential and particular areas of cooperation under Blue Economy? Can Germany be a viable partner for India in its Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative which, in one of its pillars, focusses on marine economy and Blue Economy?

Speakers

Abhijit Singh (Senior Fellow and Head of Maritime Initiative, Observer Research Foundation)

Eva Pejsova (Senior Japan Fellow, Brussels School of Governance)

Stefania Benaglia (Associate Researcher at CEPS. She is also a Senior Expert in the Public Diplomacy Project of the European Union Delegation to India)

Kapil Narula (Honorary Adjunct Fellow, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi)
Moderator: Céline PAJON (Research Fellow, Head of Japan Research, Coordinator of the Program on Pacific Islands, Center for Asian Studies, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI))

Session 2: Maritime Domain Awareness and Capacity building in the Indo-Pacific (1615 hours to 1715 hours IST)

This session will look at what India, Germany along with the EU can do in these two potential areas? Can the three work towards helping in the capacity building of countries in Southeast Asia and the littorals of the Western Indian Ocean like Sri-Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles? Can we expect Germany to soon place a liaison officer in India's IFC-IOR like France? While France has been a long time trustable partner of India and has a lot of assets and presence in the Western Indian Ocean which makes it even more worthy as a security partner of India in the Indian Ocean, what can Germany bring to the plate? How are Germany and the EU planning to implement the objectives laid forward in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies?

Speakers

Sarabjeet Parmar (Senior Fellow, National Maritime Foundation)

Marianne Péron-Doise (Associate Research Fellow at French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS))

Dr. Christian Wirth (Research Fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg)

Dr. Ankita Dutta (Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi)

Moderator: Admiral Girish Luthra (Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai)