

# Diplomatic Briefing

## Yet another Great Game? Indo-Pacific Strategies and Southeast Asia

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AND SHORT ARTICLES ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Diplomatic Briefing** is a biannual collection of categorized opinion pieces and short articles from an extended network of scholars and regional experts, covering a wide range of issues from international relations, to sub-regional affairs, to foreign policy, to economic and trade, and beyond.

Initiated by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Cambodia and the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), the Diplomatic Briefing aspires to serve the diplomatic community, policymakers, and interested stakeholders in Cambodia and the region on analysing and debating the latest trends, challenges and issues in the global arena that may hamper key developments of Cambodia and threaten regional peace and stability at large.

The Diplomatic Briefing also attempts to serve as a platform for intellectual exchange of perspectives and insights as well as for emerging Cambodian scholars to have their research works published.

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Thanks for your time and being part of our community,

**Your CICP and KAS team**

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# I. LEAD-IN STORY

## Indo-Pacific: Another contested ground in a new sphere?



Over the course of the past decades, the Indo-Pacific has become the key strategic battleground between the United States and China. In the picture: President Donald J. Trump visits Vietnam in November 11, 2017

The US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) was proposed by President Trump at the 2017 APEC Summit in Vietnam as part of his Asia Tour.

Since then, Washington's attempts to safeguard its influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region, within the context of its increasingly tense competition with China, has since been a hot topic. IPS is derived from an earlier version of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic alliance comprised of the US, Japan, India, and Australia, and was widely believed to be a mechanism to "contain" China's rise.<sup>1,2</sup> The Chinese academic community is not convinced that the strategy will pose a serious threat in the foreseeable future; some speculate that the concept is rather merely an extension of an earlier US rebalancing strategy to Asia, which has now expanded to encompass the Indian and Pacific Oceans regions.<sup>3</sup>

Australia, India, Japan, and France have issued their own Indo-Pacific concepts and strategies in recent years. Japan has its own Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which Prime Minister Abe has imprinted at the core of Japan's Asia policy, addressing the various aspects of freedom of navigation, rule of law, regional peace and stability, and market economic cooperation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India laid out the six core principles of India's version of the

1. Bhavan Jaipragas, "Why is the US calling Asia-Pacific the Indo-Pacific? Donald Trump to 'clarify,'" South China Morning Post, Nov. 7, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2118806/why-us-calling-asia-pacific-indo-pacific-trump-clarify>.
2. Abhijit Singh, "The 'Indo-Pacific' has always been about containing the rise of China," South China Morning Post, Nov. 28, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2121907/indo-pacific-has-always-been-about-containing-rise-china>.
3. Dingding Chen, "What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy," The Diplomat, Apr. 27, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/what-china-thinks-of-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

Indo-Pacific concept during the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Australia made 74 references to the Indo-Pacific in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper.

Although none of the four Quad Indo-Pacific concepts have explicitly mentioned the China factor, Dr. Tang Siew Mun, a well-known ASEAN scholar, suggests:

[...] the [four Indo-Pacific] concepts portrayed an alternative vision of an emerging regional order that would not revolve around China, thus preventing the emergence of Chinese hegemony. Its supporters were quick to affirm that they were not trying to check China's diplomatic, economic and strategic advances in the region. But positioning their concepts as an inclusive and "China friendly" initiative was incongruent with their strategic imperatives of checking China's rising influence.<sup>4</sup>

In 2019, the French defense minister unveiled its Asia-Pacific security policy, naming it "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific." It is quite distinct from the Quad's approach, but this policy demonstrates France's visions for the Indo-Pacific.

In contrast, ASEAN delayed in declaring its position on any of the early four Indo-Pacific concepts, to avoid risking the perception that it is taking sides. ASEAN has maneuvered around other conceptions of the Indo-Pacific by developing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), a diplomatically balanced approach that neither supports nor rejects other Indo-Pacific strategies. The AOIP also enables ASEAN to cope with the fast-changing geostrategic landscape, to ensure it will not be sidelined, and to reclaim its strategic importance amidst the major power rivalry.

The Diplomatic Briefing aspires to serve the diplomatic community, policymakers, and interested stakeholders on the latest trends and challenging aspects in the global arena that may hinder key developments in Cambodia and threaten regional peace and stability at large. It also serves as a platform for the intellectual exchange of perspectives as well as for emerging Cambodian scholars to have their research work published.

This third issue provides critical debate and provocative thought on various Indo-Pacific concepts. We are immensely proud of this publication, given its increasing importance as a constructive platform for both Track 1 and Track 2 personnel including policymakers, the diplomatic community, and academia to jointly contribute to the discussion and analysis. We hope this issue will serve to stimulate deeper and more substantive discussion on various challenging issues and key foreign policy struggles. We welcome more debate, more thought-provoking insights, and more diverse perspectives to serve the Diplomatic Briefing's purpose of fostering concrete and pragmatic ideas.

Happy reading!



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pich Charadine'.

**Pich Charadine**



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Paciello'.

**Maurizio Paciello**

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4. Tang Siew Mun, "Asean found its voice with the Indo-Pacific concept. Now it has to use it or risk losing out," South China Morning Post, June 24, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/3015809/asean-found-its-voice-indo-pacific-concept-now-it-has-use-it>.

## II. INTERVIEW

### GERMANY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

#### Interview with H.E. Ambassador Christian Berger

*HE Ambassador Christian Berger is the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Cambodia. Ambassador Berger was born in Spain in 1956. After finishing high school at a Jesuite College in Bonn in 1974, draft military service, and a banking apprenticeship, he did his Master in Economics Studies at the University of Cologne. Before joining the German Foreign Office in 1986, he worked for Deutsch-Südamerikanische Bank in Hamburg for two years. His domestic assignments include two years at the Minister's private office and five years as a personal assistant for one of the two State Secretaries. He served as director of the South East Asia Division and was responsible for the sub-department of foreign trade. His foreign assignments include Malaysia and Brussels (NATO and EU). In 2000, he was appointed as Ambassador to Lao P.D.R, followed by assignments as head of mission to Ecuador and Iraq. From 2016 to 2019, he served as Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In September 2019, he was appointed as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia.*



#### Robert Hör



*Robert Hör is currently program manager for digital transformation at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia. As digital manager and political scientist by training, he is in charge of several training programs, product development, research projects and dialog formats between Cambodian stakeholders as well as regional and German experts. His research focus lies on digital maturity, startups and organizational development.*

*On 27 April, H.E. Christian Berger, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Cambodia sat down with Mr. Robert Hör, Program Manager at Konrad Adenauer Foundation Cambodia to discuss Germany's recently passed Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific and their impact on Southeast Asia. The interview was prepared by Mr. Maurizio Paciello, Program Manager at Konrad Adenauer Foundation.*

**Mr. Robert Hör:** What were the motivations behind Germany's formulation of the "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific"?

**H.E. Ambassador Berger:** Some clarifications at the beginning would be useful:

Germany is not a super power participating in "yet another Great Game". Germany's foreign policy is the result of history and geography. The lessons of history and geography have solidly embedded Germany in the transatlantic partnership and the European Union.

Consequently, deepening the European Union and crisis management in the European context as well as maintaining a fruitful transatlantic relationship have traditionally dominated the German foreign policy agenda - and will continue to do so.

But: As a medium size country whose GDP is highly dependent on exports, Germany cannot ignore developments in other regions of the world, especially those in the Indo-Pacific region with all its potential - and all its problems.

The Indo-Pacific Guidelines (IPGs) are the attempt to draw the right conclusions on the Indo-Pacific region's dramatically grown importance - economically, politically, socially, culturally.

**Hör:** Germany has had a number of regional foreign policy concepts in the past. Do the IPGs differ from the earlier concepts?

**Berger:** Yes, definitely. The approach goes far deeper.

The IPGs start by defining interests and principles, which goes beyond earlier concepts. The IPGs depart from the traditional approach of mainly describing the existing structures, actors and tasks. Instead, they draw up a list of more than 20 specific foreign policy

initiatives, including breaking them down into sub-goals and defined policy fields.

May I quote Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas: "My hope is that it will stimulate discussion in the political arena, society and academia and give rise to intensive exchange with our partners in the region." The intention to stimulate discussion, and the willingness to incorporate non-state actors into shaping up the substance of our relationship with the region also constitute a quantum leap when comparing the IPGs with earlier regional concepts.

It goes without saying that this approach is more difficult to handle. If you define interests and principles, you may encounter objections. If you define



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H.E. Ambassador Berger: "Germany has always acknowledged the enormous value of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific context." In the picture: H.E. Ambassador Berger visiting the German-funded Apsara Conservation Project at the Angkor Wat temple complex.

initiatives, you set benchmarks. If you aim to involve more actors, decision-making and implementation become more complex. And if you go into policy fields like strengthening peace, security and stability, you go beyond Germany's traditional approach in terms of substance. Again, I quote Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas: "Germany must address even more strongly the existentially security concerns of its long standing partners, be involved in coming up with responses and make a tangible contribution - by sharing experience and expertise, with responsible arms export controls that also take into account the strategic quality of relations with the country of the region, with initiatives in the field of arms control, and also by taking part in exercises and in collective security measures to protect the rules based order when implementing UN resolutions."

**Hör:** What are the practical implications of the IPGs for ASEAN and the region of Southeast Asia?

**Berger:** Germany has always acknowledged the enormous value of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific context. So, it is no surprise that the engagement vis-à-vis ASEAN tops the list of our initiatives. The expansion of cooperation with ASEAN institutions and the continuation of support to the ASEAN Secretariat, possible upgrades of the development partnership to a dialogue partnership and of the observer status at the ASEAN defence ministers' meeting plus (ADMM+) are among the bilateral elements. But to strengthen the role of the EU as a partner of ASEAN, the upgrading of the EU-ASEAN relation to a Strategic Partnership is key. Now you may say: There is one initiative where you have already delivered. And it is true: With regard to the IPGs, the decision on upgrading to a Strategic Partnership was the biggest achievement of the recently concluded German presidency of the EU. But now comes the real task: how to make best use of this new framework!



H.E. Ambassador Berger: "Maybe 'cross-fertilisation' is the best way to describe bilateral German and EU efforts in this field [the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN]." In the picture: Representatives from the EU and ASEAN meet virtually for the launch of the "EU-ASEAN Blue Book 2021: Strategic Partners" on May 9 2021.

**Hör:** You have mentioned the recently concluded German EU presidency. How do the IPGs correlate to European policies regarding the Indo-Pacific Region in general and ASEAN in particular?

**Berger:** Maybe "cross-fertilisation" is the best way to describe bilateral German and EU efforts in this field. Regarding the region in general, Josep Borell has only recently said: "The EU needs a strategic approach for the Indo-Pacific." As for ASEAN in particular, two quotes

may show how close thinking in Berlin and Brussels is:

On the occasion of the decision of the strategic partnership Minister Maas declared: “The Strategic Partnership stands for our shared belief in multilateralism; no country should be forced to decide between two poles. And it stands for jointly advocating for common EU and ASEAN interests” and Josep Borell: “Our partnership is no longer a luxury but a necessity.”

**Hör:** You have not mentioned China? How does China fit in the IPGs?

**Berger:** The German Government does not see containment or decoupling as a viable option. And China is most relevant to the German economy. But - and this is a hard task - China must be convinced that it is in its very own interest to pursue its legitimate goals in a multilateral framework, including practical contributions to further developing the rule based order as acceptable to other parties.

**Hör:** How does Myanmar fit into the EU-ASEAN relationship?

**Berger:** The EU and its member states have always recognized and respected the value added of ASEAN centrality. Consequently, the present intensive efforts undertaken by ASEAN and its member states are welcomed and supported by the EU. There have been intensive internal exchanges between the EU and ASEAN actors. At the same time, the EU has refrained from adopting a higher external profile.

**Hör:** Why does Germany put so much emphasis on multilateral structures and the rule-based international order?

**Berger:** There are at least two reasons for this: One is that strong multilateral structures simply provide more stability to the international system. The other one is that in the 21st century, there are too many problems transcending national boundaries, so they cannot be dealt with in a national policy framework. Take the increasing instability of the water flow in the Mekong river system as an example. This instability is not only due to water being retained by the dams upstream. China's share of the water in the catchment area amounts to less than 20%. Far more of the instability is due to deforestation in the lower part of the basin. If

the forest cover in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and some parts of southern Vietnam were as it was 25 years ago, the forests would act like sponges in the rainy season, retaining water and gradually releasing it. Now there were reasons why these forests have been cut and why the dams have been built. But does it not make more sense to develop long term forest harvesting concepts to replace the traditional plundering, both by big businesses and by traditional slash-and-burn practices? And do we not have renewable energy that makes dams for electricity superfluous? The Royal Cambodian Government seems to think so and has consequently shelved the Sambor/Stung Treng hydropower project.

At the same time, Cambodia alone will not be able to reverse the negative trend by implementing purely national measures. What is needed is that the riparian countries define common interests and entrust an institution like the Mekong River Commission to develop and implement a common long-term policy where no one takes the free rider position. By the way, the Mekong River Commission has non-regional members. Why not systematically approach those, including Germany, to chip in their know-how on forest policy and on renewable energy as a contribution to stabilize the Mekong River system? Why did I elaborate in such detail? Because I deem it more useful to the reader to reflect on a practical matter than to just read the well-known catchwords on the value of multilateralism.

**Hör:** You have so far focused on the bigger picture. Do the IPGs influence Germany's relationship with Cambodia, and if yes, how so?

**Berger:** The IPGs aim at combining the multilateral with the bilateral, they explicitly acknowledge the relevance of all actors irrespective of their size. And not only that: The embassies in the region have been asked to develop proposals on how to intensify the bilateral relations. In the case of present-day Cambodia, we have both a very solid base and the potential to do more together.

**Hör:** What are you referring to?

**Berger:** The base to build on is our long term development partnership. It focuses on 3 highly relevant areas.

The first one is building elements of a more modern social infrastructure. The ID-Poor system to identify and support those most affected by the COVID crisis is based on German expertise and a most welcome

short-term result of a bilateral cooperation aiming at the creation of a fully fledged social insurance scheme in the long term.



A team from GIZ is using an app to register an applicant and her family for the family emergency assistance. The app uses the same system and database as IDPoor to extend support to other vulnerable groups.

A second field of action which will become highly relevant to drag Cambodia out of the COVID slump and open new alleys for growth is our cooperation to develop policies and structures for the most promising economic sectors.

The third field of cooperation is decentralization, where Germany, at the explicit request of the Royal Government, is providing expertise for strengthening the services of local administration and improving the interaction between citizens and local administrative institutions.

The long-standing cooperation in these three fields in itself is of tremendous value. Plus, it provides us with options to go further. I have already mentioned the successful use of the ID-Poor structures for organizing and managing payments to those most affected by the present crisis. Another example: Building on

the sectoral economic policy project, I have, in close cooperation with other interested actors, initiated the development of an institutional framework to support the expansion of agricultural and agro-industrial products to the German/EU markets.

Perhaps the most special case of a complementary measure, however, was the project proposal formulated by one of my embassy colleagues, aiming at further improving the work of local police officers and their interaction with the local public. Cooperation with police forces is a totally new area of bilateral cooperation. If the project goes well, it can become the stepping stone for more.

One new feature of the IPGs is the explicit task given to the embassies to examine feasible options for all fields of our relationship. Regarding the academic field, the Embassy has started to put existing rudimentary

pieces together with the aim of activating our academic cooperation in general and creating alumni structures in particular. Another field where I see more potential is cultural cooperation. Germany has been contributing substantially and over a long period of time to the international conservation work on the temples of Angkor. I am definitely not a conservation expert. However, I think there is room for improvement in at least two ways: When analyzing the German projects, the underlying assumptions regarding the time frame seemed doubtful to me: They underestimate the fact that given circumstances like weather conditions and a permanent touristic impact demand conservation work to be of a permanent nature, not limited to specific interventions only. I have triggered a political and academic discussion in Germany with the aim of finding a new, more permanent approach to German conservation work on Angkor. A second way to improve the output of conservation efforts would consist in more interaction between the many nations participating in the restoration effort, using each other's resources and cooperating on specific projects rather than planning and working exclusively in national frameworks.

**Hör:** What is your personal outlook on the bilateral relationship?

**Berger:** COVID has slowed down the implementation of many of the projects I mentioned, but it has not derailed a single one. As for the institutional framework in the field of development cooperation, we have successfully implemented the governmental consultations last year and the bilateral negotiations this year, despite all the complications COVID has imposed for exchanges involving a multitude of actors. As for political cooperation, I have - with explicit reference to the IPGs - suggested to the Federal Foreign Office to propose to our Cambodian friends a framework for regular bilateral consultations on foreign policy issues. I am happy to disclose that preparations of this framework should be finalized soon - another significant step to broadening and deepening our bilateral relationship.

*We thank the Ambassador for kindly agreeing to answer our questions.*



A focus of the cooperation between Germany and Cambodia in the cultural sphere lies on the conservation of the temples at Angkor. In the picture: Country Director of GIZ Cambodia Mr. Thomas Waldraff paid a visit to the Auditor General of the National Audit Authority (NAA) of Cambodia to hand over the project management of the GIZ project "Support to ASEAN Supreme Audit Institutions".

# III. HIGHLIGHT

## JAPAN, CAMBODIA, AND A FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC

**H.E. Mr. Mikami Masahiro,  
Ambassador of Japan to  
the Kingdom of Cambodia**



*His Excellency Mikami Masahiro has been the Ambassador of Japan to the Kingdom of Cambodia since 2019. He served as Assistant Minister/Director-General of International Legal Affairs Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan from 2017 to 2019.*

Recently, the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is being discussed often in the context of geopolitical rivalries between the United States and China. In fact, many people seem to believe that FOIP is a recent American invention aimed at containing the growing Chinese influence in the region. The fact of the matter is that it was as early as August 2016 that Prime Minister Abe Shinzo of Japan first mentioned FOIP in his keynote speech at TICAD VI (Tokyo International Conference on African Development VI) in Nairobi, Kenya. Prime Minister Abe stated, “When you cross the seas of Asia and the Indian Ocean and come to Nairobi, you then understand very well that what connects Asia and Africa is the sea lanes. What will give stability and prosperity to the world is none other than the enormous liveliness brought forth through the union of two free and open oceans and two continents. 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. Japan wants to work together with you in Africa in order to make the seas that connect the two continents into peaceful seas that are governed by the rule of law. That is what we wish to do with you.”

### The Specifics of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”

#### 1. Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.

- Cooperation among those who share fundamental principles and the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- Strategic communication at international arena and through media, etc.

#### 2. Pursuit of economic prosperity

- Improving (a) “physical connectivity” including quality infrastructure development such as ports, railways and roads, energy and ICT; (b) “people-to-people connectivity” through human resources development; and (c) “institutional connectivity” through facilitating customs, among others.  
=> improving “connectivity” in ASEAN (e.g. East-West Economic Corridor, Sothern Economic Corridor), within South West Asia (e.g. North East Connectivity Improvement Project in India and Bengal Bay Industrial Growth Zone) and from South East Asia to South East Africa through South West Asia and the Middle East (e.g. Mombasa Port)
- Strengthening economic partnership (including EPA/FTAs and investment treaties) and improving business environment.

#### 3. Commitment for peace and stability

- Capacity-building assistance to countries in the Indo-Pacific region (e.g. strengthening capacity of maritime law enforcement and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and other human resource development).
- Cooperation in such fields as HA/DR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism, and non-proliferation).

FOIP is a vision that seeks to establish a free and open order, based on the rule of law, in the Indo-Pacific region in a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent manner, attaching importance to ASEAN’s centrality and unity. Its purpose is to bring stability and prosperity to every country, as well as secure peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. Japan has worked, and will continue to do so, with any country that shares or supports this idea. The origin of FOIP can be found in the first administration of Prime Minister Abe. In 2006, the Prime Minister delivered a speech entitled “The Confluence of Two Seas,” during an official visit to India. So, as far as Japan is concerned, the concept of FOIP has been gradually developing over many years, reflecting the growing importance of India and the African continent to Japan.



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Aerial Photograph of Sihanoukville Autonomous Port

For Japan, the vision of FOIP consists of three major pillars. The first of these is the promotion of the fundamental principles of the international community, such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade.

Second is the pursuit of economic prosperity through the enhancement of connectivity. This would include quality infrastructure development that is consistent with international standards.

Third is the commitment to peace and stability which would be achieved through initiatives such as capacity building for maritime law enforcement, disaster risk reduction and nuclear non-proliferation.

As FOIP is a broad and general concept, with many aspects to take into account, there are various ways to look at it. Here, I would like to highlight several of the characteristics of FOIP that I think are important.

Firstly, it is crucial to note two things; that FOIP combines ideas and actions, and that the three pillars are all connected and interdependent. In other words, for the achievement of a free and open Indo-Pacific, we need both principles and concrete actions. That

is why Japan attaches importance to basic principles, such as the rule of law, respect for human rights and free trade, while at the same time engaging itself with various ODA projects and the promotion of free trade and private investment in the region.

In Cambodia, we have been working hard, with the wider Mekong region in mind, to enhance connectivity and public-private cooperation. For example, Japan has cooperated with Cambodia to develop the Southern Economic Corridor, which connects Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, Bangkok and Dawei in Myanmar, and we have been supporting the development of the Sihanoukville Autonomous Port. At the same time, the Cambodia-Japan Public-Private Sector Meeting, which was established under the Japan-Cambodia Investment Agreement, has been held more than 20 times to improve the business environment in Cambodia by addressing specific issues which affect the business and investment environments in Cambodia.

Under this framework, which I co-chair with His Excellency Mr. Sok Chenda Sophea, Minister attached to the Prime Minister and Secretary-General of Council for the Development of Cambodia, JBAC (Japanese Business Association in Cambodia), the Embassy of Japan, JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) discuss with various ministries of Cambodia important issues, such as tax and customs systems, pension issues, electricity prices, transportation and logistics, and human resource development. We believe that the concrete efforts carried out under this initiative will translate ideas into concrete outcomes, bring the synergy that will attract further foreign investment and provide the foundation for economic prosperity and stability, not only in Cambodia, but for the entire region.

As a country that has long championed a free and open international order, Japan has always supported the idea of free trade. In fact, the promotion of free trade is one of the key elements of the first pillar of FOIP. When the US administration, under President Trump, decided to withdraw from the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) Agreement in January 2017, Japan

worked, together with other participating countries, towards the adoption of the TPP 11 Agreement. Furthermore, Japan has also made efforts, together with other participating countries, to realize the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, which was signed in November 2020. We hope that the RCEP will contribute to the promotion of free and fair trade and a better investment environment in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, it goes without saying that a free and open maritime order is also extremely important in promoting free trade.

Secondly, FOIP is an inclusive and transparent concept and not a containment policy directed at any particular country, including China. As long as we can make good progress toward the goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific, any country is most welcome to join in our common efforts. So, in terms of this issue, if projects under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) contribute to the achievement of a free and open Indo-Pacific by enhancing connectivity within the region while paying enough attention to international standards, such as openness, transparency, economic efficiency, and debt sustainability, they would be welcomed.



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Then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen shake hands during their meeting at Abe's office in Tokyo, Japan, October 8, 2018.

Thirdly, I would like to underline the importance of international law, in particular the law of the sea, to the achievement of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1994, is a comprehensive set of rules relating to the sea and is often referred to as “the Constitution of the Oceans.” It has been ratified by 168 parties and, even though some states, such as Cambodia, have yet to ratify it, substantial parts of its rules, especially those relating to maritime entitlements such as territorial sea, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones and continental shelves, reflect customary international law, which legally binds even non-parties of the Convention. It is true that, from time to time, the interpretation of rules is hotly disputed by individual states. This does not mean, however, that states are free to interpret the rules as they like as they always have to explain their interpretations rationally and respect legal and diplomatic processes. Trying to change the status quo unilaterally by the use of force, disregarding others’ opinions, should be firmly rejected.

Cambodia expressed its support for FOIP ahead of many other countries when Prime Minister Abe proposed this initiative to Prime Minister Hun Sen in August 2017. Shortly after that, the United States developed its own FOIP strategy. In November 2017, on the occasion of APEC Leaders Meeting in Vietnam, then US President Donald Trump mentioned FOIP and the importance attached to it was further reflected in the US National Security Strategy at the end of that year.

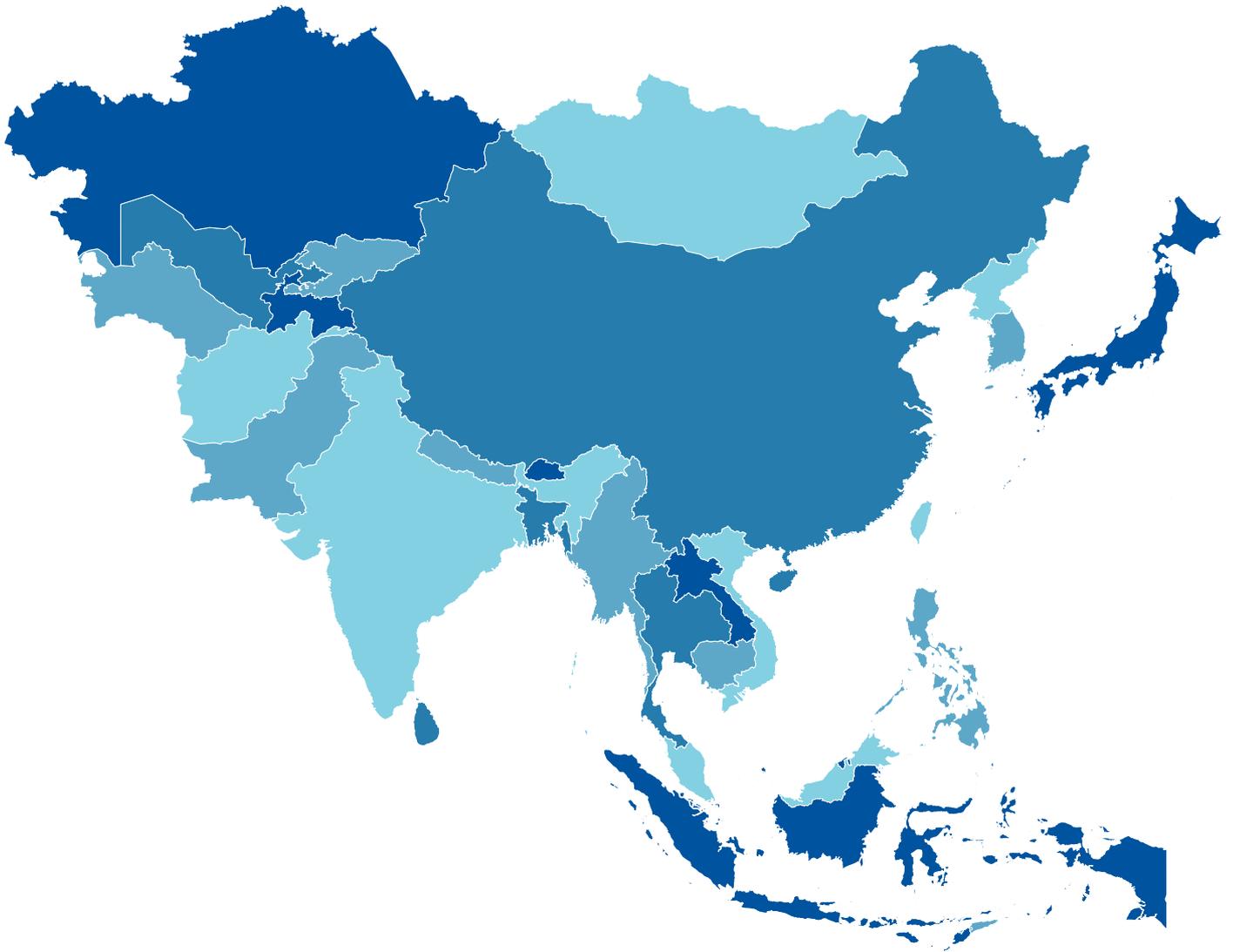
This US policy may have raised some caution on the part of ASEAN arising, as it did, in the midst of the growing competition between the US and China and, after Cambodia expressed its support for Japan’s FOIP in the middle of 2017, some discussion about FOIP ensued among ASEAN members. Finally, in June 2019, ASEAN announced its ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which shares many commonalities with FOIP. ASEAN members and Japan confirmed, at the ASEAN-Japan Summit in November 2020, that AOIP and FOIP share relevant and fundamental principles in relation to the promotion of peace and cooperation. At the summit, the Joint Statement on Cooperation on AOIP was adopted, and this was the first ever document exchanged between ASEAN and an external partner on the initiatives targeting the Indo-Pacific. AOIP sets forth the rule of law, openness, freedom,

transparency and inclusiveness as ASEAN’s principles of action and sharing these fundamental principles is the cornerstone of cooperation between ASEAN and Japan. This joint statement placed importance on a rules-based Indo-Pacific region that is free and open and embraces key principles, including ASEAN unity and centrality. Japan will continue to promote robust cooperation on a wide range of issues to achieve the common objectives of FOIP and AOIP.

There already exists a solid foundation on which to further advance FOIP and AOIP between Cambodia and Japan, and between Japan and other ASEAN countries. In 2022, Cambodia will assume the Chair of ASEAN. A number of challenging circumstances, such as the crisis in Myanmar, will ensure that this is not an easy task for any country. Despite this, I hope that Cambodia will use its own past experiences to effectively manage these difficult situations and maintain ASEAN’s unity and centrality. Japan wishes to work closely with Cambodia to achieve the best situation for all.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements on Cambodia. Japan played an active and important part in the realization of this agreement, as well as in the reconstruction of Cambodia thereafter. Also, in 2023, Cambodia and Japan will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and ASEAN and Japan will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. As we tread the path to further development, we would like to continue to walk side by side with Cambodia as a valued old friend.

*\*This article presents the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Japan or the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*





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Southeast Asia and ASEAN stand to benefit from the Indo-Pacific, yet its members are concerned that ASEAN-centrality and neutrality might be compromised in the process. In the picture: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and other heads of government and state at the 35th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in November 2019.

## IV. PERSPECTIVES

### 1. FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC: A CAMBODIAN PERSPECTIVE



#### **Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey<sup>1</sup>**

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1. This article was adapted from remarks at the webinar on "Free and Open Indo-Pacific and Future Cooperation," which was jointly organized by the Royal Academy of Cambodia and the Embassy of Japan in Phnom Penh, on 24 March 2021

The term “Indo-Pacific” has gained prominence in the regional and global security lexicon. Arguably, the concept has been primarily driven by a global power shift resulting from the rise of China and India, as well as the strategic recalibration of other states to this fundamental change. Such a social construction of the region is not new. The Pacific Rim and the Asia-Pacific were also invented in order to ensure American dominance during the Cold War and ensure its continued commitment to Asia after the war.

However, it is difficult to have a well-defined concept, and it is questionable whether a meaningful “Indo-Pacific” region does actually exist. In fact, there are many versions of the Indo-Pacific.

### Less on Normative and Functional Dimensions

Geographically, there is no scholarly consensus on which states are definitively part of the Indo-Pacific region. Its membership and boundaries are, therefore, highly contested and subject to multiple interpretations. From a normative perspective, therefore, a sense of regionalism to support a new Indo-Pacific region is absent. Moreover, no sense of regional consciousness inherently exists to give rise to Indo-Pacific intuitionism or any form of “we-feeling.”<sup>1</sup>

In terms of functional cooperation, actual economic ties between states in the Indian and Pacific Oceans are weak. Most Indian Ocean littoral states do not actively participate in the enhanced economic integration of the Asia-Pacific. Currently, the Indo-side of the Indo-Pacific is really just India. In other words, it is more about bringing India to the Pacific. This raises provocative questions: Why do we need to create an entirely new region? Why do not we just bring India into the Asia-Pacific? On top of that, India’s decision to withdraw from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has reinforced the conviction that the Indo-Pacific concept lacks a firm functional foundation.

### More on Structural Rivalry

The revival of the Indo-Pacific concept – after the first attempt by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 failed – took place in the context of an increasingly sharpened US-China rivalry. The entire Trump presidency was characterized by greater US hostility toward China. The two great powers were embroiled in many disputes and confrontations, from trade and tech wars to issues related to Hong Kong and Xinjiang as well as conformation over regional hot spots, including the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Even the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was politicized for geopolitical reasons. The Trump administration’s launch of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy in 2017 was therefore understood as its strategic offensive against China, as well as an effort to institutionalize the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad).

Over the past years, Chinese policymakers and media have warned against an attempt by the Quad to encircle China. Containment has thus become a buzzword in Beijing’s understanding of FOIP. Moscow shares a similar perception. Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi in early 2020, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made it clear that the Indo-Pacific is nothing but an invention to contain China.<sup>2</sup>

The concern that the FOIP might be a new geopolitical tool to contain China has been further reinforced by the Biden administration’s new foreign policy approach toward the region with the recent convening of the First Quad Summit, the Strategic Dialogues with Japan and South Korea, and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s visit to India. Other external powers—all US allies, including the UK, Germany, France, and Canada—have significantly increased their diplomatic and military presence in the region.

1. Thomas S. Wilkins, “Australia and the Indo-Pacific Concept – Disambiguating the idea and the region from quadrilateral strategy,” The Japan Institute of International Affairs, Policy Brief (19 July 2018).

2. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to questions at a plenary session of the Raisina Dialogue international conference, New Delhi, January 15, 2020”, Sergey Lavrov, January 15 2020, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3994885](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3994885)



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U.S. President Donald Trump meets with China's President Xi Jinping at the start of their bilateral meeting at the G20 leaders summit in Japan in June 2019.

## ASEAN and Cambodia in the Indo-Pacific: A Middle Pathway

The above developments put ASEAN in a strategic dilemma. It is obvious that Southeast Asia is an important gateway between the Asia-Pacific and Indian Oceans; hence ASEAN stands to benefit from the Indo-Pacific. Initially, however, ASEAN was concerned that this new initiative might marginalize the regional grouping and erode its centrality. More importantly, most ASEAN members do not wish to take sides in the emerging bifurcation of regional order between the US on one side and China on the other.

In this context, ASEAN took a proactive approach by adopting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in June 2019. ASEAN has also worked closely with its dialogue partners to promote its Indo-Pacific version,

notably through the Joint Statement of the 23th ASEAN-Japan Summit on Cooperation on ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific in November 2020.

Cambodia has associated itself with the Indo-Pacific under only two circumstances. First, Prime Minister Hun Sen was the first ASEAN leader to express full support for Japan's FOIP during his official visit to Tokyo in 2017. Second, Cambodia has endorsed the AOIP, especially the principles pertaining to ASEAN centrality, openness, inclusivity, and respect for sovereignty. This clearly explains the Kingdom's cautious attitude toward the concept and the importance it attaches to Japan and ASEAN.

## Way Forward

With these uncertainty, anxiety, and even mistrust over FOIP, it is imperative to, first of all, make sure that this initiative is open, inclusive, and complementary. Indeed, any regional initiative should not aim to fuel rivalry but instead complement the existing mechanisms to bring about stability, security, peace, and prosperity. In contrast, any attempt to maintain a unilateral approach to regional security will be destabilizing; and so too will attempts to contain others in the region.

Second, coexistence of major powers, especially China, India, Japan, and the US, will clearly contribute to the promotion of the Indo-Pacific concept and regional peace and prosperity. But other states and regional institutions must have a say. Rather than taking sides in the US-China rivalry and the emerging bifurcation of the regional order, other major powers, including the EU and European powers, need to work with ASEAN to promote a multipolar and multiplex Indo-Pacific regional order. In other words, their participation in the Indo-Pacific shall not reinforce the binary choice on ASEAN in an intensified US-China strategic rivalry. It is also in their interest to join ASEAN to advance

inclusivity, complementarity, multilateralism in order to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the region. In this connection, given the absence of an Indo-Pacific institution, ASEAN can provide its existing platforms including the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus.

Last but not least, the economic and strategic interconnectedness of the two-ocean region must translate into mutual benefit and the promotion of regional common goods, which include: (a) promoting economic integration and connectivity by exploring potential synergies with the existing connectivity projects, including the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025; (b) facilitating the sharing of experience, expertise, and innovation to prepare regional countries for Industrial Revolution 4.0 and to achieve the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (c) jointly addressing global challenges including counter-piracy and disaster relief, climate change, and pandemics; and (d) promoting people-to-people contacts, cultural links, and interfaith dialogue in this vast region.



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The ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific promotes the principles of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, respect for international law and ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific Region. In the picture: ASEAN representatives are seen on a screen as they attend the 37th ASEAN Summit in Vietnam in 2020.



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ASEAN has formulated its own version of the so-called “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)”. In the picture: ASEAN leaders join hands on stage during the opening ceremony of the 34th ASEAN Summit in Thailand in 2019 when the AOIP was formally adopted.

## 2. ASEAN OUTLOOK ON THE INDO-PACIFIC (AOIP): DELIBERATION, RESPONSES, AND FUTURE DIRECTION



### Pich Charadine

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With the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy in place along with the “Quad’s” distinctive versions of the Indo-Pacific concepts, ASEAN was the last one to formulate its own version of the so-called “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)” until France and recently Germany released their own respective versions as well. AOIP was formally adopted during the 34th ASEAN Summit held in Bangkok in June 2019. While there are contrasting angles as to how the term is defined, “Indo-Pacific” is now being conceived as the geographical indicator for this closely integrated and interconnected region stretching across the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions, “with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role.”<sup>1</sup> As the AOIP document puts it:

*It is in the interest of ASEAN to lead the shaping of their economic and security architecture and ensure that such dynamics will continue to bring about peace, security, stability and prosperity for the peoples in the Southeast Asia as well as in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific.<sup>2</sup>*

The AOIP, as a “defensive” document, ensures that ASEAN has its own framework and articulates a concise position on the Indo-Pacific which is independent from that of major powers, but also allows this regional group to surf along the dynamic regional order and strengthen ASEAN’s community-building process and hence, its Centrality.



Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha, chairman of the 34th ASEAN Summit, speaks at a news conference during the summit at the Athenee Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand June 23, 2019.

## A Closer Look into AOIP: Deliberation and Responses

This initiative has come a long way, with Indonesia taking the lead, and has seen strong support from many, including external players. The idea came about in January 2018 during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Retreat and the

1. Melissa Conley Tyler, “The Indo-Pacific is the New Asia,” The Interpreter, The Lowry Institute, June 28, 2019, <https://www.lowryinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indo-pacific-new-asia>.
2. ASEAN, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” 2019, [https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific\\_FINAL\\_22062019.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf).

discussion has carried on since then. However, some regional scholars even trace the initiative back to 2013, when the then-Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Dr. Marty Natalegawa proposed to have an Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, both AOIP and the latter aspired for an inclusive Indo-Pacific, with an ASEAN-led Indo-Pacific vision developed through trust and confidence-building measures. The adoption of AOIP is of particular importance, especially in light of the growing concern over the US-China trade war and its negative spillover effects on the economies of many Southeast Asia countries, as well as regional security and stability as a whole, should tensions escalate into a “multi-front war.”<sup>2</sup>

Tightening to the “consensus format” clearly signaled that it was a tough process to get ASEAN members to collectively agree on the document, with media reports branding Singapore as a “spoiler” and stirring worries from their Indonesian counterpart that the Document might not be signed off as planned during the 34th ASEAN Summit.<sup>3</sup> Singapore countered that it had tried to “reword” the draft by infusing more flavor of ASEAN core principles such as freedom of navigation and overflight. Three other members — Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Philippines—also tried to adjust the text ahead of the Summit.<sup>4</sup>

On top of the delay in reacting to other Indo-Pacific concepts, ASEAN has to be cautious so as to not be seen as going against the flow. From ASEAN perspective, the Quad’s Indo-Pacific concepts notably excluded China rather than integrating Beijing into the wider regional framework.<sup>5</sup>

The original title of AOIP was reportedly the “ASEAN Indo-Pacific Outlook”; some regional experts suspect

that the title change implied that some member states were ambivalent about embracing this homegrown concept collectively. The initial title would have hinted that the “Indo-Pacific” was being embedded into ASEAN’s “strategic culture.” The chosen title, AOIP, however, is seen as putting the “Indo-Pacific” at some appropriate distance and is regarded as an “external object” from ASEAN’s sphere instead. Although having the AOIP adopted does signify ASEAN consensus, the question of coherence comes into play as member states will internalize the document to varying degrees; some see AOIP rather more as an “ASEAN common script”.<sup>6</sup>

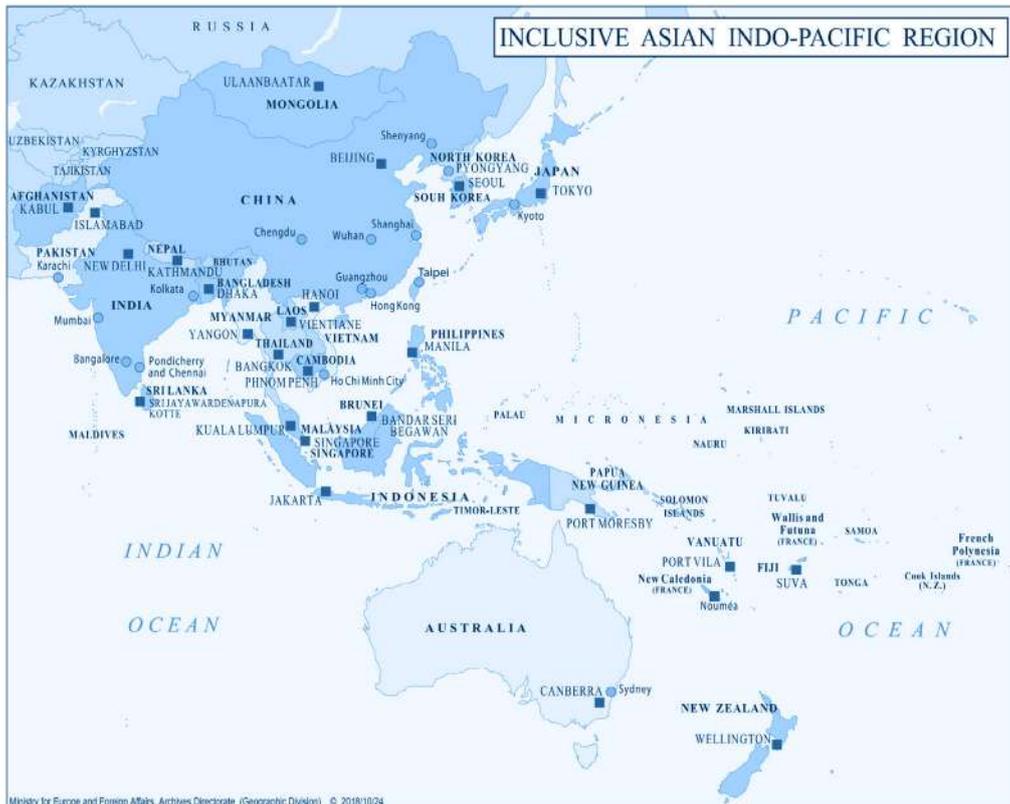
Developing a homegrown initiative is a safer diplomatic approach for ASEAN amidst escalating tensions between major powers. Therefore, instead of bandwagoning around, AOIP serves as a key document and regional standpoint against the backdrop of some Indo-Pacific concepts that explicitly exclude China. AOIP addresses four key cooperation areas including maritime security, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and economic developments. ASEAN aspires AOIP to play a central role in the wider Indo-Pacific region by utilizing existing dialogue platforms, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), and the ASEAN Plus One, to elevate a rules-based framework and the core principles of strengthening ASEAN centrality, inclusiveness, transparency, openness, and the respect for international law. In addition, AOIP intends to expand its engagement scope to other external stakeholders and development partners on those areas of cooperation as well.

## Flags of the ASEAN member states. ASEAN takes a stance on the “Indo-Pacific”

Despite positive progress, there are persisting challenges ahead. ASEAN members need to embrace the proactive engagement through “pragmatic cooperation”; develop a clear and strategic direction to efficiently move the AOIP forward; and foresee and prepare for the dynamic geopolitical landscape.

1. William Choong, “Indonesia, ASEAN and the Return of the Indo-Pacific Strategy,” Australian Institute for International Affairs, July 17, 2019, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/indonesia-asean-return-indopacific-strategy/>.
2. Dian Septiari, “ASEAN leaders adopt Indonesia-led Indo-Pacific outlook,” The Jakarta Post, June 23, 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2019/06/23/asean-leaders-adopt-indonesia-led-indo-pacific-outlook.html>.
3. Resty Woro Yuniar, “Indonesia reveals frustration with Singapore over delay in ASEAN adopting President Joko Widodo’s Indo-Pacific concept,” South China Morning Post, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3014651/vision-impaired-singapore-deliberately-delaying-indonesian>
4. Tang Siew Mun, “Asean found its voice with the Indo-Pacific concept. Now it has to use it or risk losing out,” South China Morning Post, June 24, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/3015809/asean-found-its-voice-indopacific-concept-now-it-has-use-it>.
5. Choong. “Indonesia, ASEAN and the Return.”

6. Hoang Thi Ha & Glenn Ong, “Revised Title ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’ Hints at Ambivalence,” ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/revised-title-asean-outlook-on-the-indopacific-hints-at-ambivalence-by-hoang-thi-ha-and-glenn-ong/>.



The ASEAN-countries make up the heart of the Indo-Pacific as described in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

## Future Direction: Where are We Heading?

The adoption of AOIP has been welcomed by external actors of ASEAN, particularly those that have their respective Indo-Pacific versions adopted prior to AOIP. While AOIP reaffirms ASEAN’s principles and its aspiration for a peaceful and stable regional order, analysts have argued that not much new has been added to the underlying ASEAN regional strategic discourse.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that AOIP may lessen the pressure of some member states from having to take sides or rally around the existing concepts amidst increasing tensions between major powers, the mechanisms of AOIP itself need to be developed for the policy to be digested both internally within ASEAN as well as externally in the international arena. Additionally, ASEAN must navigate itself amidst the complex regional security architecture and the implications of antagonistic power relations.

While observers have always dragged US-China friction into the AOIP narrative, the document itself hardly mentions the strategic challenges confronting the region, let alone the US-China trade war and

ASEAN’s approach to overcoming its repercussions. Unlike the strategic documents of other Indo-Pacific concepts where global threats and regional security challenges have been clearly laid out, AOIP abides by the typical ASEAN norm of a rule-based regional order and adheres to consultative dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation. Regional experts have observed how striking is the aspect of a “rules-based order” versus the “rule of law,” to an extent that some even speculated that the intention is to soften the stance toward China. One even questioned: “Does ASEAN shift towards a rules-based order because of China’s pressure to find a settlement in the South China Sea or does China share ASEAN’s practices because they do not hurt its interests?”<sup>8</sup>

Chinese Defence Minister, General Wei Fenghe, praised ASEAN’s standpoint at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue and defended the notion that there ought to be an alternative regional order to resolve regional issues through regional mechanisms with regional characteristics, and that international law is not always applicable. This perspective has raised concerns that it would mean detaching ASEAN from other Indo-Pacific

7. Hoang Thi Ha & Glenn Ong, “Revised Title ‘ASEAN Outlook.’”

8. Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, “Great Expectations: ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific Concept,” *The Diplomat*, June 17, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/great-expectations-asean-and-the-indo-pacific-concept/>.

stakeholders, which, as analysts warned, would mean challenging ASEAN's centrality and the future of the Indo-Pacific community.<sup>9</sup> Another pressing restraint in relations to the maritime context, which is one of the AOIP's key cooperation areas, whereby the Indo-Pacific ought to be perceived as a "seamless maritime space." However, the AOIP refrained from using the term "a single geostrategic theatre" as initially drafted by Indonesia. ASEAN might try to cease using any wording that has military connotations and would underpin any military alignment or alliance in the Indo-Pacific arena.<sup>10</sup>

AOIP does illustrate ASEAN's renewed commitment and unity in crafting the dynamic regional architecture. However, ASEAN needs to rethink its game plan to avoid a "more of the same" approach.<sup>11</sup> First of all, ASEAN members need to embrace proactive diplomatic engagement in order to manage and to navigate the so-called regional order on both domestic and regional fronts. Members need to capitalize on existing ASEAN platforms and mechanisms to be more proactive such that ASEAN is not merely seen as a "talk-shop." ASEAN also needs to become more comfortable with discussing hard security issues; prolonging the process will result in its irrelevance and ineffectiveness. On the domestic front, the question is to what degree would each member state be willing to place regional interests upfront and share the sentiment that the AOIP illustrates. To what extent can member states move the ASEAN mechanisms from the current approach of "functional cooperation," where everything is set on functions, to "pragmatic cooperation," where clear actions are specified to move cooperation forward?

Second, a critical question regarding the geographical parameters must be asked—what area will the AOIP cover? Although the term "Indo-Pacific" itself is widely agreed to be the region stretching from Asia-Pacific to the Indian Ocean, the exact location, boundaries and distance is unclear and unspecified in the AOIP. While it might be too much to expect from the AOIP itself to be that precise, taking into consideration the typical ASEAN way, it is worth noting for the future. Experts

also warned that it would be difficult to cooperate with potential partners in the future "without knowing who they are"—both the partners and the extended boundaries.<sup>12</sup>

Last but not least, has ASEAN been prepared for the next phase of the region's geo-economic, geopolitical, and geostrategic landscape? As Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, stressed:

*While the AOIP depicts renewed solidarity among ASEAN leaders amidst rapid geopolitical shifts that have emerged in recent years, the Outlook falls short as a meaningful initiative that could re-shape the existing regional politico-security architecture to ensure deeper institutionalization of ASEAN Centrality among member states. Beyond collective leadership, ASEAN lacks a clear, strategic direction to help shape member states' respective economic and security beyond Southeast Asia. Only through enhanced strategic clarity grounded in a deeper intellectual framework, will ASEAN be able to venture safely into the uncharted domain of the wider Indo-Pacific. In light of these realities, ASEAN needs to re-think the AOIP.<sup>13</sup>*

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9. Ibid.

10. Hoang Thi Ha, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: Old Wine in New Bottle?" ISEAS Perspective, 51, (2019), [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2019\\_51.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_51.pdf).

11. Tang Siew Mun, "Asean found its voice."

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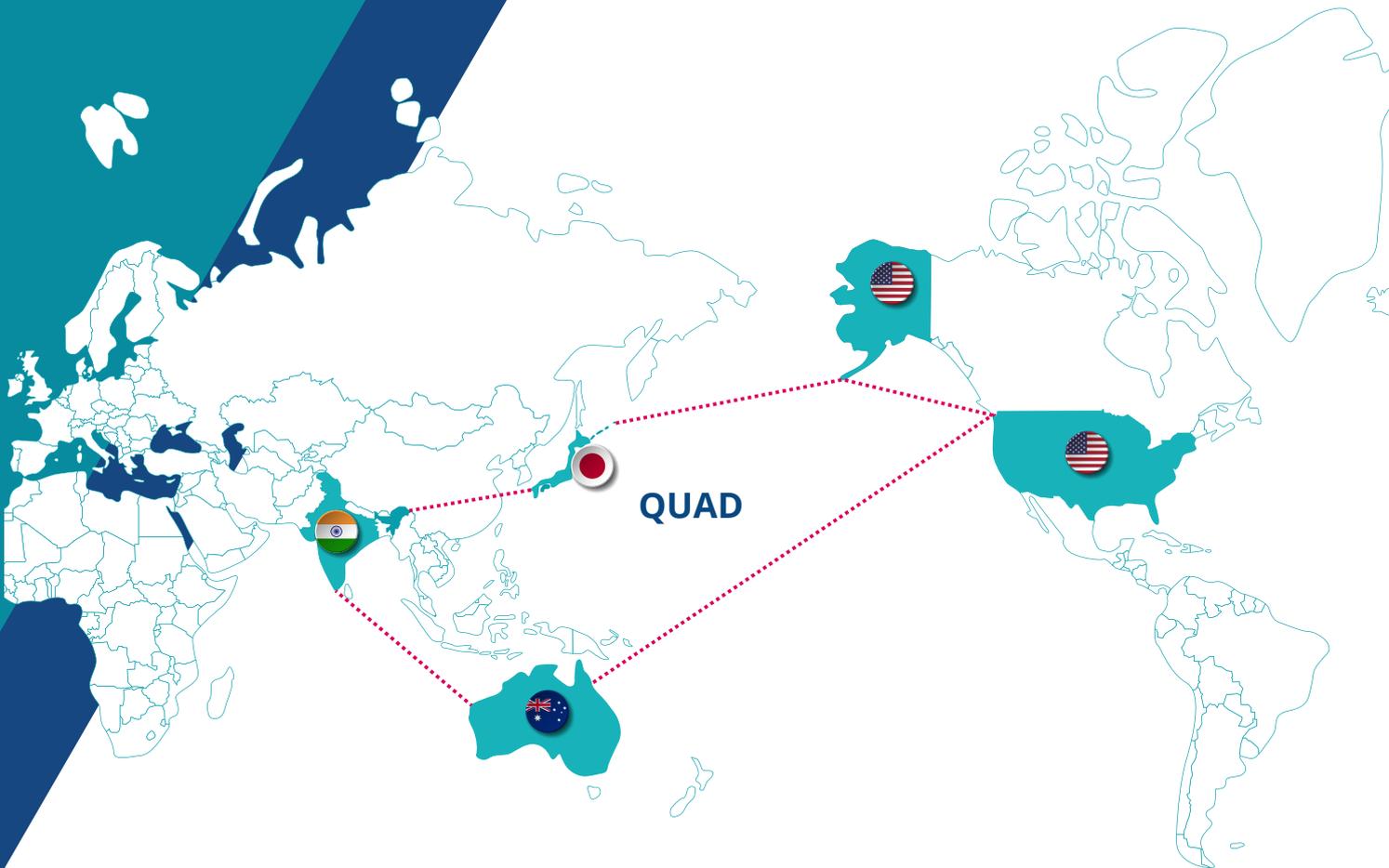
12. Ibid.

13. Pou Sothirak. "Rethinking 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,'" Bangkok Post, July 20, 2019, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1715795/re-thinking-asean-outlook-on-indo-pacific>.



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ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi delivers remarks during the Inauguration of the new ASEAN Secretariat Building in Jakarta, Indonesia, August 8, 2019.



The United States of America, Australia, India and Japan make up the countries of the so-called Quad, which has often been referred to as “con-gagement” with China by some commentators.

### 3. CONTAINMENT CONFUSION AND THE INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: US POLICY TOWARDS CHINA

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#### Dr. Bradley J. Murg

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The question of how to conceptualize American policy towards China has become a source of considerable contention as discussion over the future of the Indo-Pacific policy and US-China relations evolves. Washington's approach and the Indo-Pacific policy is now often referred to as a policy of "containment" in contrast to decades of "engagement." Other scholars and analysts have used a hybrid concept to define the current situation, combining both terms in the form of the neologism "con-gagement."



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks while facing Wang Yi, China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister, at the opening session of U.S.-China talks at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska, U.S. March 18, 2021.

Conceptualization matters in geopolitics, not simply in international relations theory, but also to provide clarity concerning a state's intentions and its probable actions when making key decisions. Evan Medeiros and others noted during the Trump administration that US policy, to some leaders in ASEAN, "looks like containment," further underscoring the importance of clarification.<sup>1</sup> Still, the term containment, unfortunately, is now regularly misapplied and misused in an ahistorical, casual manner and even appears to have been utilized by some as a type of discursive weapon against both the US and other members of the Quad mini-lateral grouping (Australia, India, and Japan), ultimately heightening tensions rather than reducing them.

In April, a spokeswoman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Hua Chunying, in response to a question concerning China's actions against its Uighur population, stated: "They want to create the so-called 'Xinjiang issue' to contain China's development and undermine China's security and stability." She went on to argue that the era when containment of China was possible was over, implying the existence of a US policy of containment against China.<sup>2</sup>

More explicitly, China's most well-known "wolf warrior" foreign ministry official Zhao Lijian was quoted in April by the Associated Press as saying: "Containment and suppression by the United States cannot stop the pace of China's scientific and technological progress, but will only strengthen China's determination and will to innovate independently."<sup>3</sup> Beijing's use of the term "contain" and "containment" has been something of a regular trope in recent years as depicted in Chinese-language media and official statements.<sup>4</sup> This counter-productive approach is

1. Demetri Sevastapolu, "Trump gives glimpse of 'Indo-Pacific' strategy to counter China," *The Financial Times*, Nov. 11, 2017.

2. Remarks by Hua Chunying, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs at press briefing in Beijing, March 31, 2021, accessed on May 1, 2021, [http://kh.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth\\_3/t1865988.htm](http://kh.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth_3/t1865988.htm).

3. Associated Press, April 9, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/tech/china-criticizes-us-sanctions-expanding-to-cover-computer-makers>.

4. A sampling of the use of the terms "contain" and "containment" includes: Liu Yangyang, "中美经贸摩擦的根子在美国对华遏制政策," in the CCP theoretical

seemingly designed to further strengthen Beijing's consistent narrative of China's victimhood and "the century of humiliation" upon which the Chinese Communist Party regularly leans to buttress its legitimacy, a topic that is well discussed in the academic literature.<sup>5</sup>

Beijing continues to attempt to have it both ways. On the one hand, it actively presents itself as a victim both historically (which is undoubtedly true, as any basic reading of 19th- and early 20th- century Chinese history clearly depicts) and contemporarily (owing to an alleged US policy of containment and Beijing's regular and visceral attacks against any state that objects to its requests or acts in a manner it deems unacceptable, e.g., Australia, Canada, Sweden, Norway). On the other, at the same time it throws around its enormous economic and military weight across Southeast Asia and depicts its future as the dominant power in the region as inevitable—its recent actions in the West Philippine Sea, necessitating the redeployment of a significant portion of the Philippine navy, being a contemporary case in point.

In light of this context and the increasing ubiquity of the term, is containment a valid description of US foreign policy towards China in general or the Indo-Pacific policy in particular? The answer is simple: No. Under the earlier Trump administration and the current Biden administration, Washington has regularly and consistently referred to China as a "strategic competitor"<sup>6</sup> and the relationship as one of "strategic competition." However, it should be recognized that the debate over whether the US should shift to a policy of containment is growing. The fact that this debate even exists within the US policy community is remarkably strong evidence that framing current US policy towards China as one of containment is an exercise in placing a non-existent cart very much before a non-existent horse.<sup>7</sup>

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journal Qiushi, May 21, 2019, [http://www.qstheory.cn/lwx/2019-05/21/c\\_1124522098.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/lwx/2019-05/21/c_1124522098.htm). Dong Lei and Jiang Tao, in their piece "中国人民的态度, 美国政客能看懂吗?" from April 30, 2021 at Sina.com went far as to state: "首先, 这次民调结果真实表达了当前中国民众对美国的不满。从特朗普任内开始, 美国转变对华政策, 奉行对中国的全面遏制, 从外交、经济、科技和意识形态等领域不断出台各种打压行径, 并且一再干涉中国内政, 一心想要阻止中国的崛起。"

5. Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
6. Jen Psaki, White House Press Briefing, April 9, 2021: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/04/09/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-and-secretary-of-transportation-pete-buttigieg-april-9-2021>.
7. Hal Brands, "Why Containment Can Stop the China Threat," and

To grasp fully why the term "containment" is a misconceptualization and one that should be abandoned, it is useful to delve into the Cold War-era historical development and operationalization of the term. Even if one granted that the US and China are engaged in a "New Cold War"—a contention recently decimated in a sharp, point-by-point analysis by former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas J. Christensen in the journal *Foreign Affairs*<sup>8</sup>—the term applied today, in a vastly different geopolitical context, is inoperable. I would go so far as to contend that in the absence of a new Cold War—a point where I entirely concur with Christensen's analysis—the employ of containment as a concept or descriptor becomes deeply problematic.

First outlined in George Kennan's famous "Long Telegram" sent from the US Embassy in Moscow in 1946, containment became a part of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, whereby the US would support any democratic government (through various political, economic, and military means) against external or internal threat from authoritarian forces, generally understood as the Soviet Union. Containment and the Truman Doctrine are inextricably linked—utilizing the former term without a sufficient understanding of the latter is problematic (due to constraints of space, a discussion of National Security Council Paper NSC-68 as an essential subsequent statement of US containment policy is not included herein).

The differences between Kennan's analysis of the Soviet Union and contemporary China are essential to note here. Ultimately Kennan expected the Soviet system would eventually collapse under the weight of its own political immaturity, achieving an internal collapse of the Soviet system—the ultimate justification for containment together with Soviet expansionism. Despite Xi Jinping's decision to abrogate the system of collective leadership and regular leadership transition model wisely established by Deng Xiaoping, no one is seriously contemplating the collapse of China in the foreseeable future and it would be an extreme leap of logic and evidence to claim that the US is capable of doing so. Consequently, containment as a policy is ultimately pointless as the primary objective

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Jacob Heilbrunn "Does America Really Need to Contain China?" in *The National Interest* provide just two examples of this ongoing debate.

8. Thomas J. Christensen, "There Will Not Be a New Cold War: The Limits of U.S.-Chinese Competition," *Foreign Affairs*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/United-States/2021-03-24/there-will-not-be-new-cold-war>.



George Kennan was a chief architect of integrating containment into the Truman-doctrine.

thereof is simply not feasible. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger himself recently remarked on the differences between the USSR and China: “The Soviet Union had no economic capacity. They had military technological capacity ... They didn’t have developmental technological capacity as China does. China is a huge economic power in addition to being a significant military power.”<sup>9</sup>

Containment was later discussed by Kissinger: “The Truman Doctrine marked a watershed because once America had thrown down the moral gauntlet, the kind of realpolitik Stalin understood best would be forever at an end and bargaining over reciprocal concessions would be out of the question. Henceforth, the conflict could only be settled by a change in Soviet purposes, by the collapse of the Soviet system, or both.”<sup>10</sup> To even the most cynical analyst, clearly US policy and Washington’s view of China, its approach, and Sino-American relations in general have not remotely reached that point.

Concomitantly, Kennan noted the importance of recognizing the Soviet goal of exporting its system. Despite its deeply revisionist tendencies towards the global system, China certainly is not a Soviet-style missionary state attempting to export its doctrines of neo-totalitarianism and increasingly worrying ethno-nationalism; it cannot be placed in the same typological box as the former USSR. Moreover, Beijing—despite the once-praised “Beijing Consensus” model of economic development—does not present a serious alternative to the system of globalized, market capitalism that has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty since the start of the Bretton Woods era in the late 1940s.

Taking these points collectively, the use of the term containment as a concept describing American policy towards China is invalid. Yet perhaps this also raises a more important point. The Cold War ended thirty years ago, and the world has since changed enormously. In this author’s view, it is time to develop a more precise, timely, and relevant vocabulary in which to discuss contemporary geopolitics in general and the Indo-Pacific Strategy in particular.

9. Henry Kissinger, quoted in “Kissinger warns of ‘colossal’ dangers in US-China tensions,” Agence France Presse, April 20, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210430-kissinger-warns-of-colossal-dangers-in-us-china-tensions>.

10. Henry Kissinger, “Reflections on Containment,” *Foreign Affairs*, 73, no. 3 (1994):118.



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Yang Jiechi, director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office for China, and Wang Yi, China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister, arrive for a meeting in Anchorage, Alaska on March 18, 2021.

## 4. FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: ITS NATURE AND FUTURE – A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

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**Zhang Zijie**

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The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy is a legacy of the Trump administration in attempting to thwart the rise of China, and the mainstream of China's strategic community believes that the Biden administration will inherit it in a manner and expand it.

## The Background of FOIP

Since the end of World War II, the US has been the major architect and leader of the Western Pacific regional order. During the Cold War, it established the hub-and-spoke system, a set of bilateral alliances, to deter the expansion of communism in the region. However, its power was significantly crippled by the 2008 financial crisis, reducing its capability to define regional order. Meanwhile, China and India withstood the crisis and experienced consistent economic growth, which provided them with more say over the regional order.



The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) and the Wasp-class Amphibious Assault Ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) sail alongside, as the Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group (ABECSSG) and Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group (KSGARG) conduct joint operations, in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations in the Arabian Sea, May 17, 2019.

In particular, the economic clout demonstrated by Beijing's proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), coupled with the security influence reflected in safeguarding its rights in the East and South China Seas, have shaken the US domination in the Western Pacific, raising suspicion as to its intentions among the US, Japan, Australia and other countries. From their perspective, China's territorial claim in the South and East China Seas, with several bases set up through infrastructure programs along the land and maritime corridors of the BRI, reveal its ambition to supplant US-dominance, spread its economic model, and reshape the regional order.

With its economic growth, India has also expressed a keen interest in regional affairs; yet in contrast to China, its rise has generally been viewed as peaceful and benign. The elevation of its "Look East" policy to "Act East" policy in November 2014 by the Modi administration demonstrates India's determination to further integrate itself into the

Asia-Pacific region as an equal partner to other actors in this regional security architecture. New Delhi is of great strategic value to the US, given its relationship with Beijing has turned thorny after a series of border conflicts and the outbreak of COVID-19.

In general, FOIP is a reflection of the aforementioned power shift in the region. It views China as the primary challenger of the extant regional order established by the US. However, given the relative decline in its economic power, the US is less capable of confronting China on its own. Therefore, FOIP exploits the strength of Japan, Australia, and India to balance Chinese power, and it seeks to advance the fan-shaped hub-and-spoke system to a more multifaceted pattern. Beyond that, with economic cooperation as a vanguard, FOIP also attempts to allure more partners, especially ASEAN countries, into this trans-regional network.

## The Composition of FOIP

FOIP is a range of dual-purpose initiatives that encompass a hard-power security branch and a more soft-power development branch, all of which are underpinned by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), which is a multilateral mechanism comprised of the US, Japan, India, and Australia.

The dawn of Quad cooperation can be traced back to the disaster relief cooperation among the US, Japan, India, and Australia after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Later, This quadrilateral cooperation subsided due to changes in the domestic politics of Australia, Japan, and India. It was not until 2017, when the Trump-administration officially forsook the “Asia Pivot strategy” of its predecessor, that the Quad re-surfaced. Currently, the Quad serves as the major functional platform for FOIP.

Flags of US, Japan, India and Australia (QUAD) as a band

The Quad identifies the Indo-Pacific as its geographical area and is aimed at establishing a rule-based as well as free and open regional order. Despite the fact that the Quad members have yet to conclude any bounding agreements, its significance as a multilateral mechanism has been acknowledged by all of its four members. This has been evidenced by the steady rise in the rank of its delegates from senior diplomatic

or military staff to foreign ministers and eventually to chief leaders of the four countries. Under this quadrilateral framework, the four countries have also established a set of trilateral dialogues, which are intended to cement the Quad mechanism even further. It is noteworthy that the Quad is open for future expansion, and countries like Canada, France, the UK, and New Zealand are on the waiting list. Just as the then-US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo suggested, the Quad is intended to develop into an institutionalized and normalized regional security framework with an emphasis on “result-oriented multilateralism”. In practice, Quad members have regularized defense cooperation through naval exercises and the sharing of intelligence and military logistics. For instance, the trilateral India-US-Japan Malabar naval exercises included Australia last year.

In addition to security-related issues, the Quad has also stepped into the economic field. In the first few years, it bore little fruit in this regard except a few principled statements reiterating the risk of government-oriented pattern sponsored by China to bring host countries into sovereign debt trap. Conversely, the Quad is dedicated to an alternative model with high standards and quality, good governance, transparency, and amity toward the private sector. Over time, the discussion of Quad has turned to be more substantive and targeted. During the 2019 ASEAN Summit, the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation launched the “Blue Dot Network” program in an effort to create a globally recognized evaluation and certification system for investments in the Indo-Pacific region. In its latest video-meeting, the Quad leaders even discussed the possibility of transferring supply chains away from China, with India as the new production hub. All these efforts are intended to reduce China’s ability to seize dominance not only in geopolitics but also in technology.

Apart from the Quad mechanism, the US government has also sponsored several other economic and military initiatives on its own. In July 2018, Pompeo announced a \$113-million project—a down payment emblematic of the US commitment to the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific—to support the digital economy, energy, and infrastructure in the region. On October 5, 2018, the US

Congress passed the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development Act with a bipartisan majority. It creates the US International Development Finance Corporation, a development bank that enables the US to better interface with Quad members' financial institutions and foreign direct investment to fund private development projects overseas, especially in Indo-Pacific countries. On the military front, on May 30, 2018, the United States Pacific Command, which is the oldest and largest combatant command of the United States Armed Forces, was rechristened as the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). The renaming of the USINDOPACOM was undertaken in an effort to incorporate the Indian Ocean in the US theater, in recognition of the importance of South Asia. Additionally, the US navy has increased its patrols in the Taiwan Strait and in the disputed waters of the South China Sea to demonstrate its disagreement concerning China's territorial claim over those areas.

## China's Perspective on FOIP

In the eyes of Chinese officials and scholars, FOIP is conceived to constrain China's surging geopolitical, economic, and technological power. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has stated that FOIP is determined to build a "new NATO," undermining peace and prosperity in East Asia. Even so, Chinese scholars still suspect the plausibility of FOIP to constrain China due to its innate drawbacks.

First of all, there are contradictions within the Quad about the priorities and ultimate objectives of FOIP. As a country with global ambitions, India is delighted to exploit the rivalry between the US and China to advance its own position in the world, but it will never settle for an affiliate of the former. At present, New Delhi gingerly assesses FOIP from the economic perspective, as it underlines the centrality of ASEAN, and skirts around any initiatives with an overtone of a military alliance. On the Japanese side, Tokyo anchors



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China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi is welcomed by Laos President Bounnhang Vorachith before the ASEAN and China emergency meeting on the coronavirus in Laos in 2020.



A key feature of China's foreign policy is the Belt-and-Road-Initiative spanning the Indo-Pacific and the old Silk Road.

its hope on the FOIP to consolidate its position in the extant geopolitical landscape. The core of its policy rationale is to subdue China's rising influence in the shadow of the US while continuing to distill profits from the former's economic growth. As for Australia, which is the most adamant supporter of the US in the region, its involvement in FOIP is mainly motivated by the concern of being marginalized in the region and estranged from like-minded western countries.

Second, China maintains active economic ties with the Quad members; Beijing is still one of the largest trading partners for Japan, India, and Australia. This is the major reason why these countries are reluctant to confront China under the auspices of the US.

They have to calculate whether pandering to the US regarding China would better serve their national interests than managing their disputes with China on their own. Consequently, the Quad is still tilted toward non-traditional security issues, such as climate change and COVID-19 vaccines, with the intention of weakening China's influence in a less provocative way.

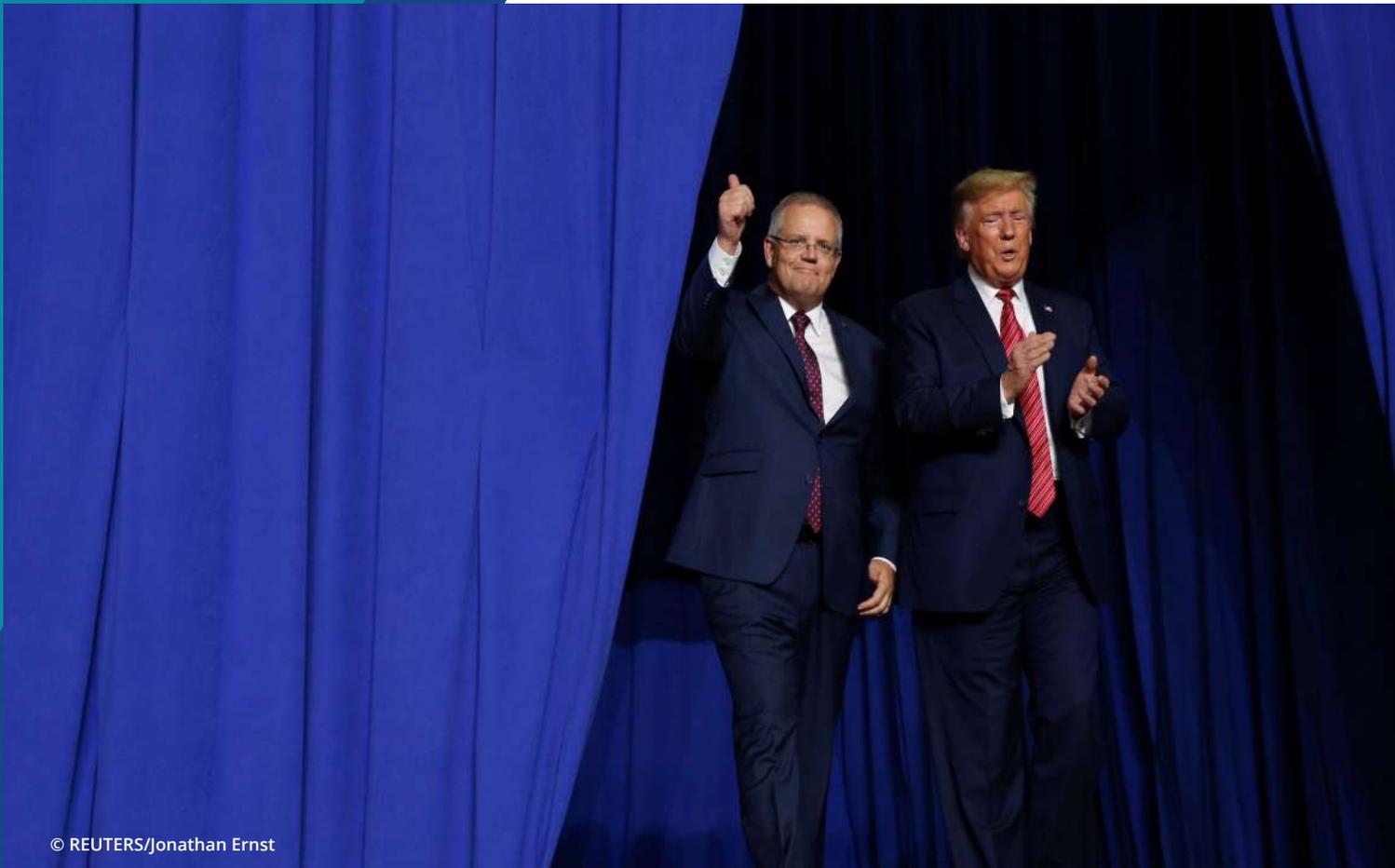
Third, the two branches of FOIP are unbalanced. Most of its economic initiatives are inadequately resourced. Aside from being nothing more than a down payment, the \$113 million promised by Pompeo means little amidst the huge infrastructure needs of the Indo-Pacific region. It even pales in comparison to the \$4 trillion in BRI investment (as of 2020). Therefore, it



is not difficult to understand why other countries lack confidence that the US has the will and ability to maintain its support for FOIP.

Finally, FOIP has the potential to create new cleavages in the Indo-Pacific, notably in Southeast Asia. The assertiveness of the Trump administration has already undermined the strategic ambiguity of ASEAN, pressuring its members to pick a side between China and the US. Furthermore, the emergence of the Quad also threatens the centrality of ASEAN since all its members are situated outside Southeast Asia, casting doubt over ASEAN's role as a negotiator between great powers in the future.

Overall, the Chinese government and academia are aware of the detriments and risks of FOIP not only to BRI but also to regional stability. Despite all those negative factors brought about by FOIP, China will continue its cooperative diplomacy and seek cooperation with all parties, including the US and its Quad allies, to construct a sustainable, inclusive, and fair new order.



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Incumbent Prime Minister of Australia Scott Morrison with former US President Donald Trump on a visit to the USA.

## 5. AUSTRALIA'S CONSTRUCTIVE DIPLOMACY IN AN ERA OF CONTEST

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### Prof. Caitlin Byrne

*Professor Caitlin Byrne is Director of the Griffith Asia Institute, a Fellow of the Australian Institute for International Affairs (AIIA) and Faculty Fellow of the University of Southern California's Centre for Public Diplomacy (CPD).*

The 2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper defined Australia as a “regional power with global interests.”<sup>1</sup> Ambitious in nature, this white paper reflected the nation’s contemporary aspirations for active engagement across key spheres—diplomatic, defense, trade and cultural—within its neighboring region the Indo-Pacific,<sup>2</sup> and more broadly on the world stage.



Australian Speaker of the House of Representatives Bronwyn Bishop shakes hands with China's President Xi Jinping after his speech in the House of Representatives at Parliament House in Canberra on November 17, 2014

Consequential shifts of the past few years, including the impacts of great power strategic rivalry, China’s rising influence in the region, and the devastating impact of COVID-19, have put pressure on the nation’s foreign policy ambitions. Apart from its devastating health and economic impacts, COVID-19 has reinvigorated old anxieties, and brought new forms of policy myopia to the fore. The demands on Australian diplomacy have shifted.

As a nation that does not have the capacity to “buy or bully its way in the world”<sup>3</sup> there continues to be much at stake for Australia in promoting its interests and values through the available diplomatic channels and interactions. Australia’s chief diplomat, Frances Adamson, advocates a form of “constructive diplomacy” as the means by which Australia should navigate the strategic dynamics of contest and competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Adamson’s constructive diplomacy emphasizes Australia’s regional focus of the Indo-Pacific. Reflecting Australia’s aspirations to “shape outcomes that matter to our country’s and our region’s future,”<sup>4</sup> her view of constructive engagement underpins the notion of normative soft power. It builds on the idea of “constructive realism,” a term used by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to describe the need to be “constructive where it’s difficult but nonetheless

1. Australian Government, “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), p. v.
2. The “Indo-Pacific” is described in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper as the geographic region “stretching from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, Northeast Asia and the United States” (p.1).
3. Peter Varghese, “An Australian world view: A practitioner’s perspective,” Address to the Lowy Institute for International Affairs, August 20 2015.
4. Frances Adamson, Address to ANU National Security College 10th Anniversary Lecture Series, 25 November 15 2020.

doable to work together on common challenges, as well as constructive in those areas where we should be working together as a matter of course.”<sup>5</sup>

Homing in on the importance of managing differences, there’s no question that China may be a primary subject of constructive diplomacy. As Adamson states, “What is important is that channels of communication be kept open. That differences are handled carefully and respectfully, while focusing on positive fundamentals and future opportunities.”<sup>6</sup>

Over the past five years, Australia’s bilateral relationship with the global powerhouse has deteriorated sharply, a trend that some suggest is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Australia’s vocal stances on a range of issues from foreign interference to the origins of COVID-19 have been met with the ire of China’s wolf warrior diplomats and accompanied by suite of targeted economic punishments.

There is limited scope for “constructive diplomacy” in a bilateral relationship where the official channels of communication are frozen, and where policy on both sides is reduced to a series of opinions and sound bites amplified by social media on an issue-by-issue basis.<sup>7</sup>

5. Paige Carfree, “Former PM Rudd warns Australia-China relationship must stay positive,” Griffith News, Sept. 9, 2019.
6. Frances Adamson, Remarks at Australia-China Reception, Ambassador’s Residence, Beijing, April 25 2019.
7. Paul Kelly, “Our China relationship needs help before it’s too late,” The Australian, September 16 2020.

However, the reality is that China will continue to be an important regional actor and critical trading partner in Australia’s future. How Australia rebuilds and sustains engagement with China for the long term will be the marker of its diplomatic tenacity. There is no straightforward approach, but more constructive forms of engagement—within and outside official spheres—are to be encouraged.

The challenge for constructive diplomacy goes beyond China, whereby, “the future and fortunes of Australians [are] inextricably linked to the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>8</sup> In this context, it includes active engagement in multilateral forums, and through other alignments and groupings that bring strategic heft. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) bringing Australia together with Japan, India, and the United States is such an example. Inevitable sensitivities surrounding the role and purpose of the Quad remain. However, recent efforts, including the agreement by leaders to establish a \$100-million vaccine partnership may prove constructive, and if translated into practical outcomes may improve the Quad’s regional appeal in time.<sup>9</sup>

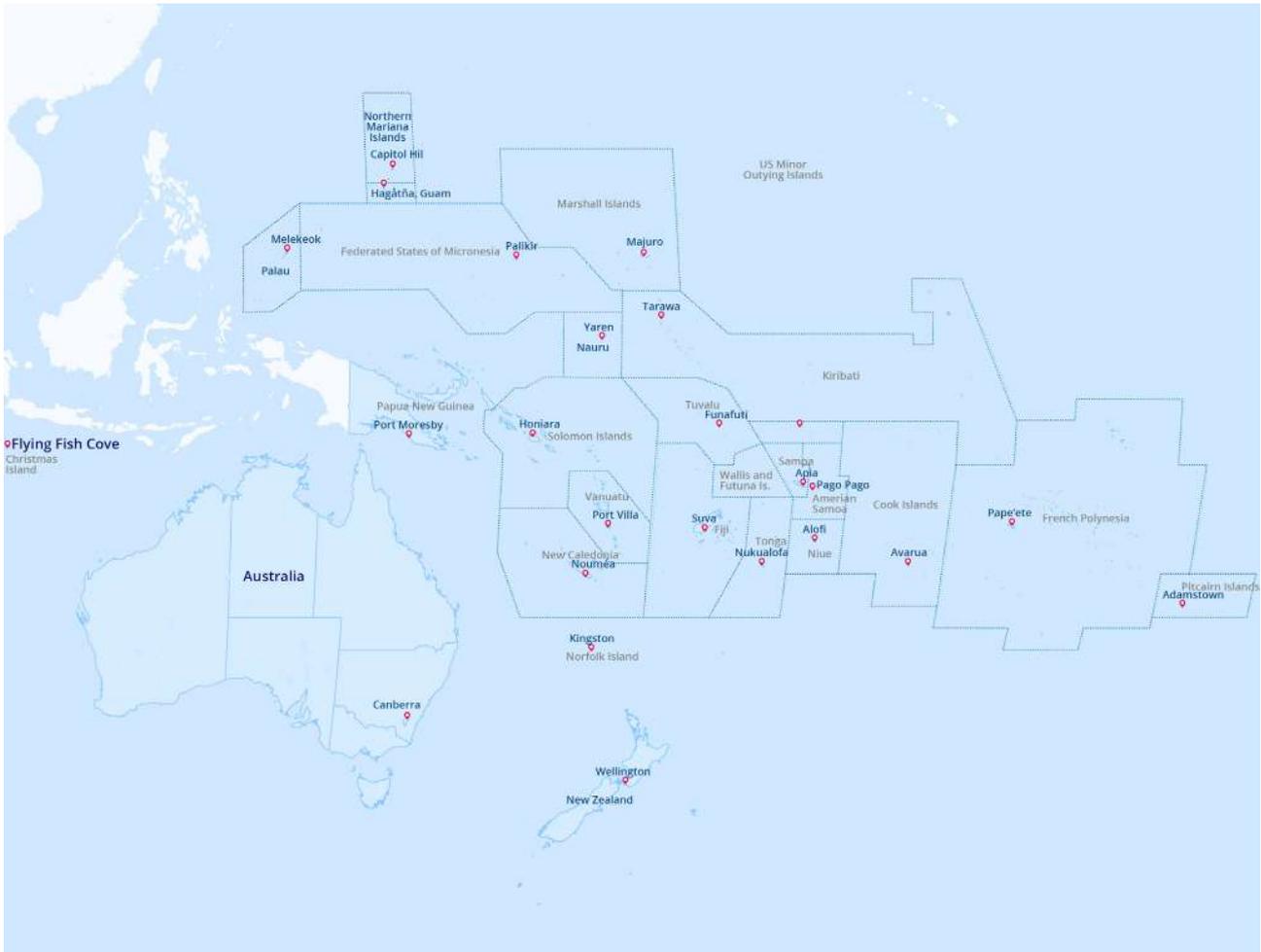
The post COVID-19 environment demands a recalibration of diplomatic efforts towards improved health, economic, environmental, and technological

8. Frances Adamson, Leaders on Asia Address, Asia Society, Melbourne, April 21 2021
9. Greg Jennett, “Australia joins US, India and Japan in ‘unprecedented’ deal for coronavirus vaccines after historic Quad meeting,” ABC News, March 13, 2021.



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Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison finds his country’s ‘constructive foreign policy’ challenged by a series of factors, among them its altercations with China as well as the Covid-19-pandemic. In the picture: Prime Minister Morrison adjusts his mask during a visit to Paris in June 2021.



Australia is earmarking large investments into Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands in order to engage with key regional institutions including the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

governance. The underlying emphasis is towards building resilience in the face of a wide range of external pressures and challenges, from cyber-crime to climate change. With significant investments earmarked for Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands region, Australia will be looking to engage through key regional institutions including the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and with other partners to advance these non-traditional agendas.<sup>10</sup> In turn, the nations of the region will look to Australia to demonstrate an authentic understanding of and engagement with regional needs and interests.

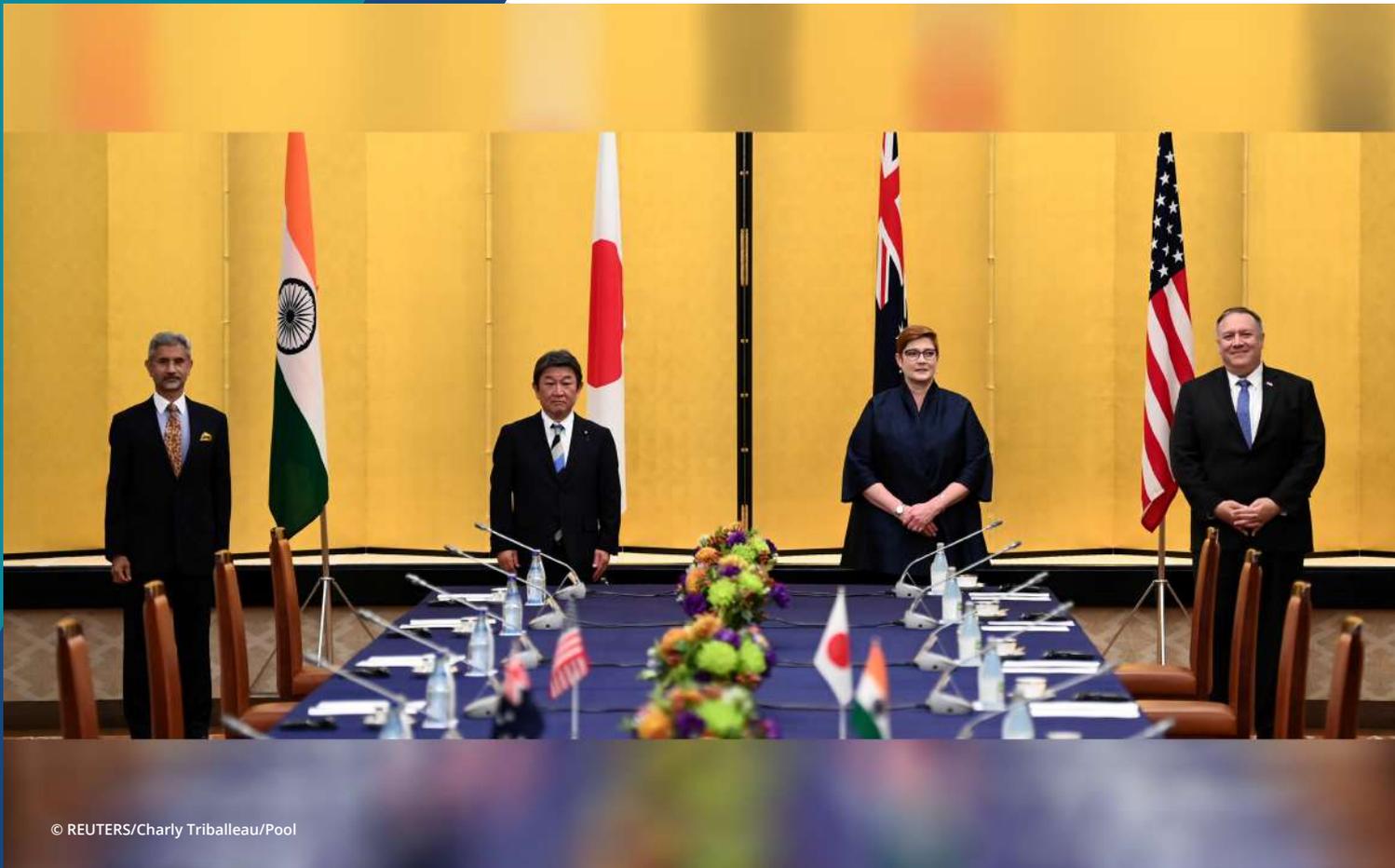
COVID-19 has accentuated the need for more constructive diplomatic engagement. But it has also brought new pressures and shifted priorities. At home, the concept remains overshadowed by a preference for hard power discourse.<sup>11</sup> Over the past decade,

Australia's conservative government has expanded and elevated national defense and security portfolios at the expense of foreign policy. Reflective of Australian publics' deeper anxiety about the world, it is also an approach that translates into electoral support.

The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper has been well and truly overtaken by the realities of global change, the scale and scope of which is nothing short of consequential. The ambitions of the self-proclaimed "regional power with global interests" are in need of recalibration. In the meantime, "constructive diplomacy," if supported by necessary investments of expertise, time, and resources, offers a useful framework to sustain Australia's engagement in the region through the next decade of uncertainty.

10. Ibid.

11. Josh Butler, "Beating the 'drums of war': Pezullo and Dutton strike ominous note for Australia," *The New Daily*, May 2, 2021.



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The Quad features increasingly strongly in India's foreign policy. In the picture: India's Foreign Minister Jaishankar, Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi, US-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Australian Foreign Minister Payne meet in October 2020.

## 6. UNFOLDING DYNAMICS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### Dr. Vijay Sakuja

*Dr Vijay Sakuja is the former Director of the National Maritime Foundation in New Delhi, India and is currently the Visiting Senior Fellow of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.*

The Indo-Pacific is a new geographic formulation that combines two large bodies of water, the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. This large maritime theater emerges with the backdrop of ancient civilization connections among the Arabs, Chinese, Indians, and kingdoms in Southeast Asia that traded across the seas and oceans, and the contemporary states of the 21st century that are benefiting from economic integration through globalization, resulting in a new regionalism in the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific maritime theater also presents a “regional security complex” marked by transformative security dynamics. While the non-traditional threats and challenges offer numerous opportunities for convergent-cooperative security options, the traditional threats and challenges are inherently conflictual in nature. The interplay of non-traditional and traditional security challenges has resulted in calls for a rules-based order in the region represented by great power rivalry and maritime contestations that are potentially escalatory in nature. However, Indo-Pacific countries are committed to maintaining peace and stability in the region by making it free, open, stable, secure, inclusive, resilient, and prosperous.

The term Indo-Pacific has resonated in India for nearly a decade, and New Delhi has internalized Indo-Pacific as the new formulation for its political-diplomatic-economic-strategic engagements. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018 is perhaps the clearest Indian articulation of the Indo-Pacific.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivers the keynote address at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue.

He laid out an all-encompassing vision for the Indo-Pacific and argued that the region should be “free, inclusive and open, stable, secure and prosperous.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, New Delhi sees the Indo-Pacific as neither a “strategy” nor an “exclusive club,” and says it is not “directed against any country.”<sup>2</sup> In this context, Indo-Pacific is an “extension of

1. “Indo-Pacific Region Not a Club of Limited Members: Modi” <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/indo-pacific-modi-asean> (accessed 30 March 2021).

2. Vijay Sakhujia, “India and the Indo-Pacific”, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt\\_papiere/Sakhujia\\_BCAS\\_2018\\_Indo-Pacific\\_5.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt_papiere/Sakhujia_BCAS_2018_Indo-Pacific_5.pdf) (accessed 30 March 2021).

India's ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which regards the world as one family<sup>3</sup>; and India remains committed to "work together, closer than ever before, for advancing our shared values and promoting a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific."<sup>3</sup>

India has already actioned the concept of the Indo-Pacific in initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), which is an open, inclusive, non-treaty-based global initiative for mitigating challenges, especially in the maritime domain.<sup>4</sup> The IPOI builds upon the Security and Growth for All in the Region initiative<sup>5</sup> which encourages states to conserve and sustainably use the maritime domain, and to make meaningful efforts to create a safe, secure and stable maritime domain. It may trigger several potential cooperative agendas at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

The seven pillars of IPOI focus on practical cooperation in "security-development-capacity building" in diverse areas such as security, safety, resource development, science and technology, resilient infrastructure, and marine environment-ecology. This cooperation can be achieved by crafting partnerships/stakeholdership among like-minded states from the shores of East Africa to western shores of the Pacific Ocean. India is encouraging other countries to not only join the IPOI but also to lead particular thematic areas under the initiative. For instance, Australia has agreed to lead the IPOI pillar on maritime ecology, Japan has chosen connectivity, and some ASEAN countries have expressed interest in leading pillars too.<sup>6</sup>

3. "Prime Minister's opening remarks at the first Quadrilateral Leaders' Virtual Summit", <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1704473> (accessed 30 March 2021).

4. "Indo-Pacific division Brief" [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo\\_Feb\\_07\\_2020.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf) (accessed 30 March 2021).

5. "Prime Minister Modi's remarks at International Fleet Review in Vishakhapatnam", <https://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-at-the-international-fleet-review-2016-in-visakhapatnam-andhra-pradesh-413019> (accessed 30 March 2021).

6. "EAM's remarks at CII Partnership Summit 2020", [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33309/EAMs\\_remarks\\_at\\_CII\\_Partnership\\_Summit\\_2020](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33309/EAMs_remarks_at_CII_Partnership_Summit_2020) (accessed 30 March 2021).

India also sees convergences between IPOI and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) that promotes “peace, security, stability and prosperity for the peoples in Southeast Asia as well as in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific,”<sup>7</sup> and Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, which seeks to promote a free and open maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region and is built on three pillars, including the promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade.<sup>8</sup>

China is suspicious of the Indo-Pacific formulation and it sees the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among Australia, India, Japan and the US as an anti-Chinese alliance. It has even labeled it as an “Asian NATO.”<sup>9</sup>

The concept of the Indo-Pacific region is in the midst of being strongly contested and can potentially create blocks led by China, supported by Russia, and the US. These political blocks will determine the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region and its pathways that will shape the future of Asian security. ASEAN member states will be under enormous pressure to make choices that can potentially add to the fast-evolving insecurity in the Indo-Pacific region.

7. “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” [https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific\\_FINAL\\_22062019.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf) (accessed 30 March 2021).

8. “A New Foreign Policy Strategy: “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy””, <https://www.asean.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000352880.pdf> (accessed 30 March 2021).

9. “Washington’s attempt to exploit QUAD to contain China will not succeed”, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215232.shtml> (accessed 04 June 2021).



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Compared to some of its member states the European Union was comparatively late in presenting its strategy for the Indo-Pacific. In the picture: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

## 7. EUROPE'S TILT TO THE INDO-PACIFIC



### Isabel Weinger

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Big mills grind slowly. This is particularly true for the European Union (EU) and its belated tilt to the Indo-Pacific. Realizing that partners in the Indo-Pacific are expecting more engagement from Europe, the Council of the EU adopted an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The content is pragmatic but promising.

The Indo-Pacific is home to three out of four of the largest economies outside of Europe: China, India, and Japan. It produces almost 60% of the global GDP contributing two-thirds of global growth, which is likely to increase in the future. The battle against climate change will be lost or won in Asia—a region that is home to both the largest polluting countries and, paradoxically, leading sustainable companies.

The EU is a major partner to the Indo-Pacific as a “top investor, top development assistance provider and big trading partner for the region.”<sup>1</sup> It has become the second-largest trading partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) after China, and ASEAN is the EU’s third-largest trading partner outside of Europe after the US and China. On April 19, 2021, the European Council adopted conclusions on an “EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” that pay tribute to the geopolitical shift in the world toward the Indo-Pacific.<sup>2</sup> Europe used to expect the Indo-Pacific to remain stable and secure for the past decades, though it did not acknowledge the region’s geostrategic importance nor has it provided much assistance to maintain regional stability. While the EU is late in the game with its Indo-Pacific strategy compared to, for instance, the US or other EU member states such as France, its strategy reflects the EU’s aim to take on more responsibility as a foreign policy actor in light of the increased rivalry between the US and China. The Council’s conclusions can be a strong political message to the EU’s partners in the Indo-Pacific, if the pragmatic agenda is implemented courageously. The question is now: what is new in this agenda and why is it relevant for the region.

1. European External Action Service, “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” EEAS 2021, April 2021, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-indo-pacific\\_factsheet\\_2021-04\\_v.5.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-indo-pacific_factsheet_2021-04_v.5.pdf).
2. General Secretariat of the Council, “Council conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” Council of the European Union, April 16, 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.



Foreign Ministers from EU and ASEAN countries take part in the 21st ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting hosted by Thailand in October 2016. Under the motto “towards a strategic partnership” the two sides discussed cooperation on a wide range of issues – political, economic, and security-related.



The geographic area defined in the EU strategy stretches from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states. Furthermore, it highlights the sea lines of communication and the maritime sphere of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

## Scope and Content

As a first step, the EU published conclusions by the Council as a ten-page outline. The next step will be for the High Representative Josep Borrell and the European Commission to elaborate the full-fledged strategy on the Indo-Pacific in September 2021. The geographic area defined in the EU strategy stretches from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states. Furthermore, it highlights the sea lines of communication and the maritime sphere of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Looking at the six titles of the Council conclusions, the focus lies on partners, multilateralism, and diversification.

The Council has picked strategic policy fields to strengthen ties between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. These are security and defense, connectivity, research and innovation. In the security arena, Indo-Pacific countries expect the EU to contribute to maritime security and promote freedom of navigation. In addition, cooperation in transnational security threats such as terrorism, disinformation, and cyber-attacks are envisaged. The most positive impact could be realized with increased cooperation regarding future-oriented development, such as high-quality connectivity (digital, transport, energy, infrastructure projects), research, innovation, digitalization. For example, more research

exchanges, joint infrastructure projects, and increased connectivity in a sustainable, green, and digital way are mutually beneficial for both regions.

## Partnerships and Multilateralism

The key aspect of the document goes beyond its relations with China. It takes into account many other actors, partner countries but also regional organizations or informal exchange formats. The Council highlights the importance of regional partnership which is primarily mentioned in the first paragraph of the document. These partners include like-minded countries that have already announced their respective Indo-Pacific approaches and consequently coined the concept of the Indo-Pacific, e.g. the US, Japan, Australia and India. Furthermore, key regional actors such as ASEAN and formats like the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) are explicitly named as important partners and forums.

Regarding the EU-China relations, the Council reaffirms China's role as a cooperation partner but also as a systemic rival, as first mentioned in the 2019 *EU-China Strategic Outlook*.<sup>3</sup> Since 1975, when Sino-

3. European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, "EU-China – A strategic outlook," European Commission, March 12, 2019, p.4, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

European diplomatic relations were established, the EU foreign policy on Asia mainly focused on China and economic cooperation. Nonetheless, when the view on China started to become more differentiated, the focus of the EU's Asia policy changed. The latest Council strategy only mentions China explicitly once, stating the intention to “take further steps toward the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China,”<sup>4</sup> although not all experts expect the EU to take these steps. In other paragraphs, the geopolitical rivalry between China and the US is mentioned implicitly when intense geopolitical competition and tensions on global supply chains and trade are described. China is included in the strategy as part of the problem as well as possible solution.<sup>5</sup>

On multilateralism, the EU supports the UN global agenda, for example the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and focuses on human rights, women's empowerment, and civil-society participation.

International alliances and codes of conduct are promoted, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the EU's own Green Deal. Other topics include ocean

governance and disaster risk reduction, as well as health cooperation, with COVID-19 and COVAX cooperation mentioned as a tool to support the Indo-Pacific partners. The EU showed its solidarity with countries in the Indo-Pacific at the end of April 2021, when the pandemic in India was extremely alarming, and EU member states provided support, such as ventilators and oxygen. Other areas of cooperation that affect people in the most direct way, such as sustainability and health, are of high value for the socioeconomic development of the region. To summarize, the strategy is partner-centered, inclusive, and picks up existing multilateral agreements and EU agendas such as the Green Deal, where the EU itself has a strong agenda.

### Values and Assertiveness

Remarkably, the strategy promotes the EU's role as a value-based partner for countries in the Indo-Pacific. The Council focuses on the protection and diversification of supply chains as well as on strengthening economic ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific. Existing free trade agreements with Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam ought to be amended according to the strategy with the new agreements with Australia, Indonesia, and New Zealand, and potentially also ASEAN and India, in addition to a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China.

4. General Secretariat of the Council, 2021, p.7

5. Eva Pejsova. “The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy in 10 Points,” *The Diplomat*, April 20 2021), <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/the-eus-indo-pacific-strategy-in-10-points/>.



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European Council President Donald Tusk (C) arrives for a family photo with other leaders during the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit just outside Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, July 16, 2016.



Ships are seen anchored in front of a refinery on Singapore's Bukom Island July 6, 2014. About a quarter of the world's seaborne oil trade passes through the Malacca Strait, a choke point on the route between the Middle East and the energy-hungry economies of East Asia. Picture taken July 6.

Stronger economic ties, such as FTAs, go hand in hand with the conditionality through preferential schemes by the EU to promote European values. The aim of those trade schemes is to “eradicate poverty, stimulate growth and jobs, promote respect for human rights and labor rights and integrate them into global value chains.”<sup>6</sup> Since the EU takes a clear position to provide reciprocity and a level playing field in economic cooperation, this is of particular interest to countries in the Indo-Pacific as well. The emphasis on principles instead of blaming and shaming other actors also provides resilience and sustainability and proves that the EU is investing in a long-term strategy instead of short-term interest-politics on the ground.<sup>7</sup>

## EU Actor-ness in Foreign Policy

Another remarkable aspect of this new EU foreign policy approach is how quickly its pragmatic approach was able to find preliminary consensus between the 27 member states. A substantial debate on a European tilt to the Indo-Pacific has only been going on for two years and was pushed during the German EU Council presidency in 2020. Only France

and former EU member state, the UK, have been active in the region for decades, with their overseas territories and as the established maritime security powers. Against this background, the French Ministry of Defense published a security strategy paper on the Indo-Pacific in 2019 and a strategic update in 2021.<sup>8</sup> Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines followed in September 2020 while the Netherlands published a policy memo two months later. To briefly compare the different approaches of the three EU member states, Germany and the Netherlands focus above all on pursuing their economic interests in the region; they do so by diversifying their trading partners, reducing dependency on China, and strengthening relations with countries on shared values. The French concept was launched by the Ministry of Defence, and therefore focuses on security and defence of their overseas-territories. The Dutch and German programs can be seen as broader than the French security and defense strategy as they cover areas such as human rights, rule of law, connectivity, climate change, cultural diplomacy, and multilateralism.

Combining these differing approaches to an EU strategy seemed impossible, or at least a few years

6. Council 2021, p.7.

7. Pejsova 2021.

8. Further information on the French approach in the article by Laurent Triophy.

away. However, the EU can only credibly assert itself as an actor in foreign policy by pooling its capacities and resources and re-committing to common values.<sup>9</sup> Unifying the various Indo-Pacific programs of Germany, France, and the Netherlands to create a single European approach creates greater coherence into the EU's activities across the region and could be taken as a restart of the German-French engine to achieve European "actor-ness" in foreign and security policies. The cross-fertilization, as coined by the German ambassador to Cambodia in this volume, when applied to a European level, would be beneficial to all, particularly in the field of foreign and security policy where one country alone has no weight. Other developments last year demonstrate a growing unity among the European countries with strategic ambitions. For example, a joint position of the so-called E3 countries (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) regarding China's maritime claims in the South China Sea in September 2020<sup>10</sup> or the new Strategic Partnership that the EU had launched with ASEAN in December 2020.<sup>11</sup> The EU is working on the adoption of a strategic compass in early 2022 to further find its role as a security and defense actor.<sup>12</sup> These examples fall in line with the strategic aim of the Indo-Pacific strategy: to show that the EU can become a credible, strategically autonomous actor.

### Diversified, Pragmatic, Multi-faceted, and Flexible

To summarize, the upcoming Indo-Pacific strategy marks a new era for the EU in its approach toward Asia, but it has yet to be put into action with deeds. First, the strategy diversifies EU relations with Asia. Second, it builds on partnerships and multilateral agreements while promoting its values of democracy and human rights, and offering new assertiveness when it comes to defending the EU's (economic) interests.

The EU does not make partners choose between rising and existing powers—even if some experts warn that the time of ambivalence has passed and that the EU strategy needs to offer real alternatives as well as a hard contribution to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>13</sup> A hard contribution means more European military presence in the waters of the Indo-Pacific, such as the German frigate that will be sent to the region in August. The flexibility of the Council's conclusions is an asset in moving away from bipolar confrontation. It promotes a multipolar world, based upon multilateralism and partnerships, reciprocity, and shared values, as well as flexible formats, including bilateral, multilateral, and multi-actor cooperation. The EU must implement its strategy with courageous actions to prove to its partners in the region that it is a long-term and value-based actor. Drafting a new strategy for the region, where the future of the international order will be decided, is only the first step; partners in the Indo-Pacific will monitor closely whether the EU achieves concrete benchmarks and tangible results.

9. Peter Hefele and Isabel Weinger, "Seitenwahl? Strategische Optionen Europas im asiatischen Jahrhundert," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, October 13 2020, <https://www.kas.de/de/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/seitenwahl>.

10. United Nations, Note Verbale by the United Kingdom No.162/20. (New York: September 16, 2020), [https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mys\\_12\\_12\\_2019/2020\\_09\\_16\\_GBR\\_NV\\_UN\\_001.pdf](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mys_12_12_2019/2020_09_16_GBR_NV_UN_001.pdf).

11. European External Action Service, "EU-ASEAN, Strategic Partnership," EEAS, December 1, 2020, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership_en).

12. European External Action Service, "Towards a Strategic Compass," EEAS, February 19, 2021. <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/towards-a-strategic-compass-2021-february.pdf>

13. Frédéric Grare, "The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy: A chance for a clear message to China and Europe's allies," European Council on Foreign Relations, April 22, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-eus-indo-pacific-strategy-a-chance-for-a-clear-message-to-china-and-europes-allies/>.



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In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron launched his country's strategy for the Indo-Pacific in his Garden Island Speech in Sydney, Australia. In the picture: Macron meets Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison in Paris in June 2021.

## 8. THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A PRIORITY FOR FRANCE



### Laurent Triponey

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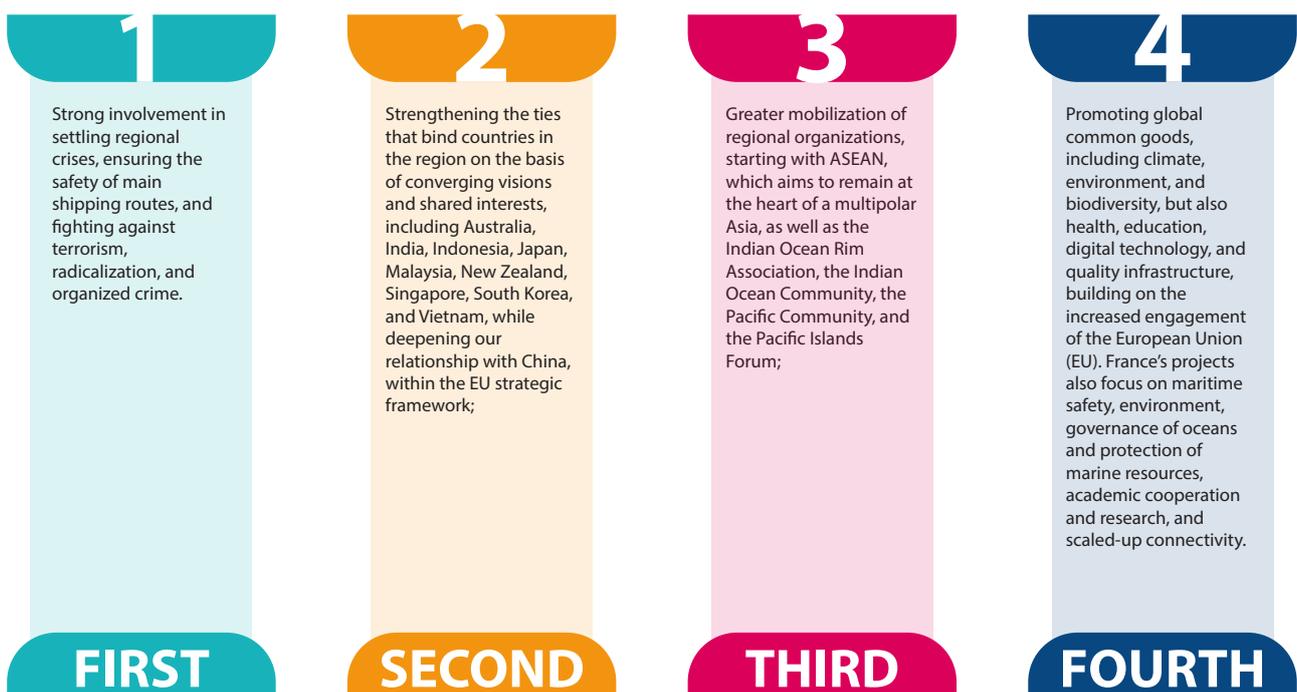
Launched by the president of the French Republic during his Garden Island speech in Sydney in May 2018, France's strategy for the Indo-Pacific has become one of its foreign policy priorities. Three years on, the strategy's implementation is producing tangible results and major progress toward France's commitments in the region.

For France, the Indo-Pacific is a geographic reality: France is present in the region via its overseas territories, and 93% of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is located in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The region is home to 1.5 million French people, and 8,000 soldiers are stationed in the Indo-Pacific (see map). Because the Indo-Pacific region has become the new strategic center of geopolitics, and is experiencing polarized tensions, France is defending the principles of freedom, openness and inclusiveness and a method—multilateral cooperation—in a context based on the rule of law and democratic principles. Partnership with ASEAN.

France's strategy for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region is to act as an inclusive and stabilizing mediating power. The strategy centers on four pillars:

### Partnership with ASEAN

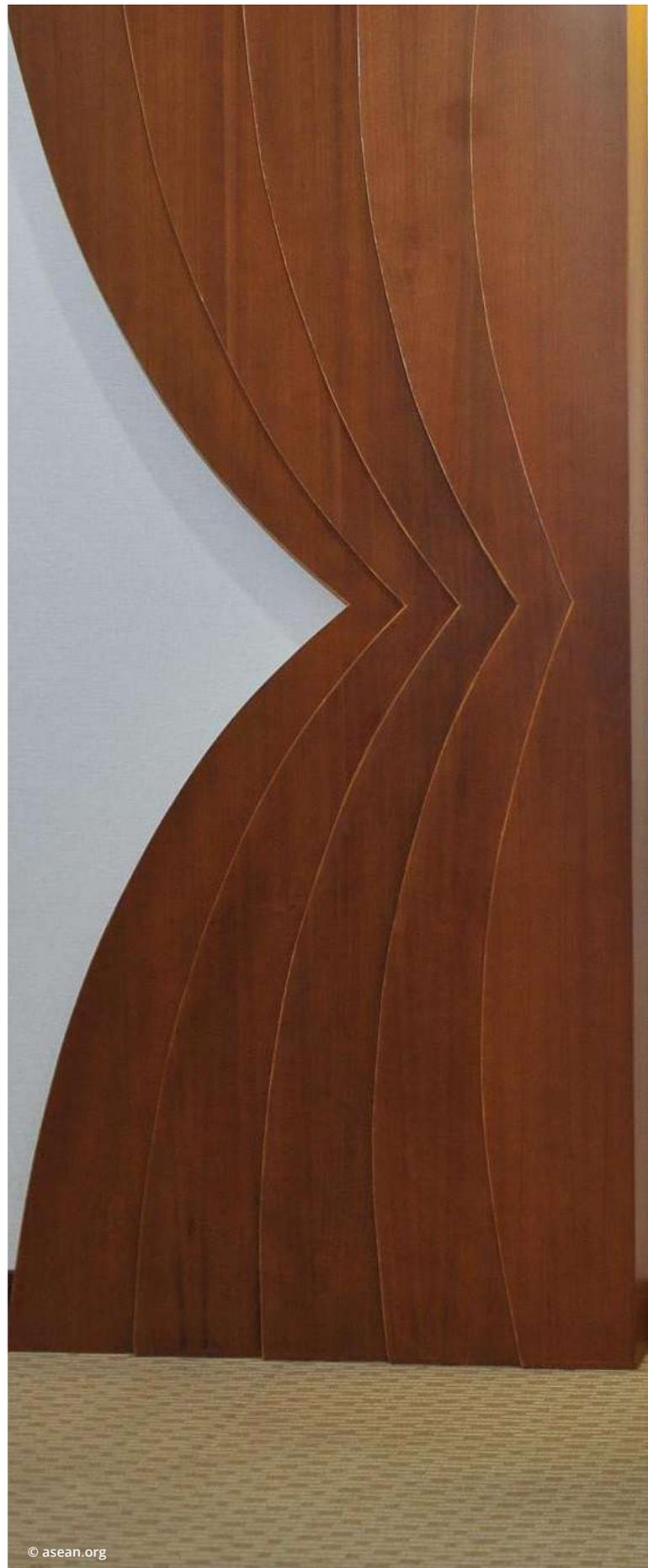
Given ASEAN's essential role in the Indo-Pacific, intensifying relations with the economic union and its members is a priority of France's Indo-Pacific strategy. Due to shared history, France already has special ties with ASEAN member states like Cambodia. With its new Development Partner status, France is committed to deepening its relationship with ASEAN. Launched officially on March 4, 2021, this partnership will cover a number of fields, including global public goods such as health and environment. This new framework will highlight the role played by all French research institutes and agencies in Southeast Asia, and particularly the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). From 2015-2020, AFD implemented 170 projects in the region, with a total value of €3.7 billion. France has decided to boost the resources it provides and its presence in the organization by posting an international technical expert to the ASEAN Secretariat. The projects and actions undertaken in the region include, in addition to the fields already mentioned above, the blue economy, biodiversity, vaccine research, technical and vocational training, the green and circular economy, connectivity and sustainable infrastructure, support to small and medium enterprises, security (including cybersecurity and the fight against cross-border crime), disaster response, human rights, tourism, and culture.



Beyond bilateral cooperation with each ASEAN country, AFD also finances regional projects. One project aims to protect biodiversity hotspots in Cambodia and Laos, while another concerns epidemiological surveillance linked to climate change, with a further dimension recently added to support the COVID-19 pandemic response. Other examples include AFD's collaboration with the Mekong River Commission, the Energy Transition Partnership programme, launched during the 2017 One Planet Summit, and the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility (ACGF).

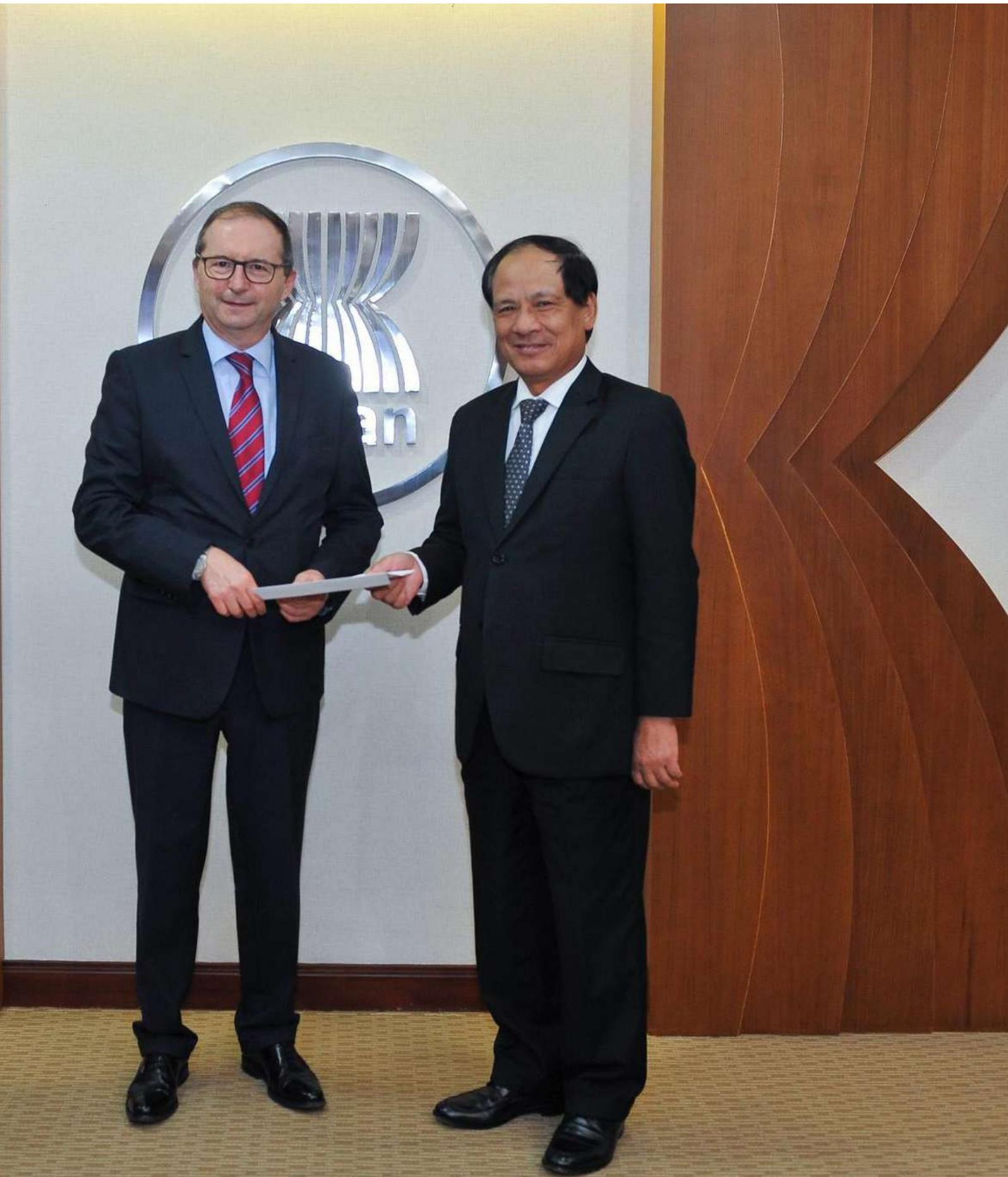
## A European Strategy for the Indo-Pacific

The EU is very active in the region, particularly when it comes to trade and investment, development, humanitarian assistance, and the promotion of norms. At the instigation of France and other member states, the EU is working on an ambitious European strategy for the Indo-Pacific that mobilizes all European instruments; this strategy should be adopted by the end of the year. The Indo-Pacific will also be a priority of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022.

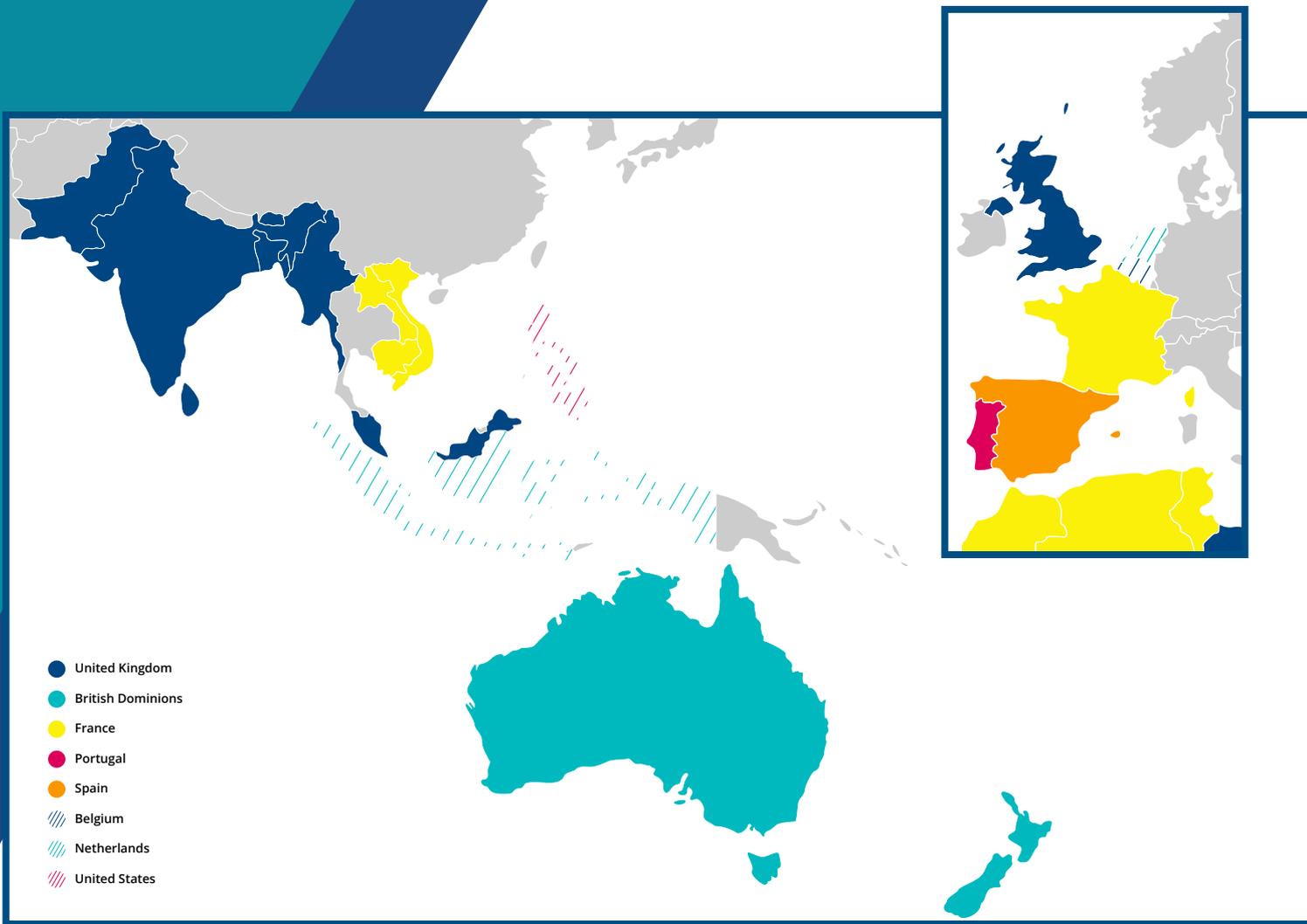


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Acknowledging it as an important regional organisation, France seeks to strengthen ties with ASEAN in 2017.



en its relations with ASEAN. In the picture: Ambassador of France to ASEAN Berthonnet visits and presents his letter of credence to Secretary-General of ASEAN



## 9. DECOLONIZATION AND THE ORIGINS OF THE INDO-PACIFIC



### Maurizio Paciello

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## Introduction: The world in 1945

If you were to look at a map of the Indo-Pacific in 1945 you would probably have found it a lot less colorful than any modern map, with most of the region being painted in British imperial-pink, Dutch ‘oranje’ or hues of French blue with some Portuguese and US blots in between.

By 1945, European empires and the “Empire of Liberty,” the United States of America, had dominated the seas and lands, people, economic and military affairs for more than a century, turning the vast region into a mere extension of western nations. Where the region’s riches and its people had spawned immeasurable wealth for its inhabitants for millennia, this wealth was all being siphoned off to faraway places, fueling the economies of countries like France and Portugal.

But that was soon to change. In the — by historical standards short — time span from 1945 to 1970, the European empires that had ruled the region for centuries vanished practically overnight and were replaced by nascent nation-states with a much more diverse set of regional and global ambitions than before.

Today, the aftershocks of the Cold War are often considered the driving historical force that shaped the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical region. Yet the Cold War did nothing to outright change the primary actors on the scene; it merely reshuffled them. Decolonization by contrast was a slowly burning revolution, the significance of which is often overlooked, especially by western powers. This revolution took different guises in different places and was not the uniform and intentional process that it would later be described as in western school books.

In this piece, we will look at the process of decolonization in Asia<sup>1</sup> and what conclusions can be drawn from this process for the geopolitical order of the Indo-Pacific then and now. For the purpose of finding these conclusions, we look at three areas of interest:

First, the imperial powers’ projections of power. We will look at why these projections were integral to maintaining the colonial order and how they were

challenged. Second, we examine the rise of different nationalisms and how political theory was harnessed to create a viable alternative to a regional order that contemporaries considered to be without alternatives. Last, but not least, is the issue of rising new powers in the region and what their ascendancy meant for the old powers.

Finally, we will look at what these conclusions may mean for the Indo-Pacific region today.

## Projections of power

When war broke out in 1939, it was not a foregone conclusion that all parts of the British Empire would heed London’s call. British control over the white settler-colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa had already lapsed to some degree between the two world wars. But while the Union of South Africa wavered, all dominions eventually joined the war effort. The non-white colonies had less choice. Despite much protest against joining the war, the British Viceroy in India declared war on Germany unilaterally without even consulting the colonial assembly.

But why did states like Australia, that were already independent in all but name, join a faraway country in a war from which they had little to gain but much to lose?

It was London’s projection of power in the region that kept the colonial hierarchy intact. The Royal Navy was still perceived as the only force capable of defending its Asian and Oceanic colonies and their trade. It also acted as a strong deterrent against uprisings against colonial rule in the Empire’s non-white colonies. Similarly, the Dutch and the French were able to cling to their colonies by credibly projecting their power while the number of their troops on the ground and ships in the harbor was most of the time not sufficient to actually withstand a concerted effort.

The turning point for the British and the Dutch in Asia came with the Fall of Singapore in February 1942, handing the British one of the worst defeats in their entire history. The British and their colonial allies had many more combatants than the Japanese and defended a strongly fortified position, called the “Gibraltar of the East” by Churchill himself. Yet, they still lost to strategic blunders, unforeseen events, and miscalculation.

1. In this piece, the term “Indo-Pacific” is understood as the region stretching from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of both Americas.



After winning the battle for Singapore in early 1942, the Japanese were able to steamroll the Indonesian archipelago in a matter of weeks, proving once and for all Singapore's importance as a regional centre. In the picture: The empty streets of colonial Singapore with the smoke from burning oil reserves in the background.

The British inability to defend Singapore, which was then and now perhaps the most important strategic bottleneck of the Indo-Pacific, severely undermined imperial cachet and power projection. Without the ability to police the trade from East Asia, Oceania and South-east Asia that has to pass the Straits of Singapore and Malacca, imperial control of these places was unthinkable. When Singapore was returned to the British in 1945, it was abundantly clear that the war in the Pacific had not been won by the British Empire. Singapore was not re-conquered in battle but returned to colonial administration as part of the general surrender of the Japanese Empire after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From then on, it was clear for all to see that the British were unable to guarantee the security of their colonies or to quell uprisings there.

For Australia and New Zealand this meant a taciturn shift toward the US as their regional guarantor of security, as the British could no longer uphold their end of the colonial agreement. While trade as well as person-to-person exchanges with the mother country remained important in the two former dominions well

into the 1980s, and in some ways remains important to this day, militarily the UK plays only a minor role in the region today.

For other parts of the empire, change would not happen so smoothly and silently. With the British unable to defend Singapore on their own, it was clear the empire could not retain control of the Indian subcontinent, although delusions persisted for a while, especially among conservative thinkers around Prime Minister Churchill. When large parts of the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in 1946, these illusions no longer persisted; either the British would quickly withdraw from the subcontinent or unspeakable violence and immense sums of money would be necessary to retain control. The British withdrawal only served to diminish power projection even further in the region. It was not long before Malaya and Singapore followed suit by achieving their independence from the British.

In the Dutch East Indies, it was also the Fall of Singapore that precipitated the end to centuries of colonial rule in a little over three months. The Japanese occupied

the vast stretch of islands practically in the blink of an eye.

Similar to their counterparts, the French were also ousted from Indochina virtually overnight<sup>2</sup> and proved unable to return there on their own. This gave impetus to a revolt that quickly escalated into the First Indochina War, as the French were, unlike the British, willing to fight. The war was fought with immense brutality and was hugely devastating, yet proved nowhere near enough to retain colonial control.

As we have seen, power projection in the region can seem much more impressive than it actually is until it is challenged. It is especially at strategic and economic chokepoints like Singapore and the Strait of Malacca or today the South Chinese Sea where power is projected. But it is also at these chokepoints where these power projections can be challenged to great effect.

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2. The French administrators of Indochina threw in their lot with the pro-Axis Vichy-regime rather than the Free France of Charles de Gaulle, as some other French colonies did. That meant that from 1941 onwards, the already weakened French in the region had to accept Japanese troops within their territories. When the Vichy regime fell in 1944-1945, the Japanese troops ousted the French administration and quickly pushed for colonial independence to prevent Indochina from falling into the hands of the Allies.

## Nationalisms and socialism

The second development that spelled the end to Europe's hold on the region was nascent colonial nationalism and the spread of socialist ideas.

Historically, the colonial powers had been able to subdue populations and geographies vastly superior to their numbers and size with little enough effort that the colonial experience still proved overall economically worthwhile and palatable to a European public. The key to make colonial rule work was divide et impera, divide and rule.

What would become India and Indonesia had not been unified entities when first contact with the Europeans was made. A splintered regional political landscape allowed European powers with only slight military advantages—if any at all—to extend their influence, quickly turning merchants into warlords in the process. Having achieved their position by only having to deal with a multitude of smaller adversaries, colonial powers never forgot to keep the regional playing field that way. It is telling, to say the least,



Colonial politicians like Soekarno in the Dutch East Indies (pictured at the proclamation of Independence in 1945) and Ho Chi Minh in French Indochina quickly seized the initiative and used the power-vacuum between the downfall of the Japanese occupation and the return of the colonial power to pursue their own nationalist and socialist visions.

that the UK that has long defied calls for meaningful political decentralization has itself tried to institute federal political systems in nearly all its colonies.

Similarly, the Dutch managed to subdue extensive territories in what is now Indonesia—at least on maps of the region, while actual control over its outlying reaches was mostly nominal. Shortly before the Japanese invasion, in December 1941, the Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger had around 1000 officers and 34,000 soldiers to control some 60 million people.

But in both cases, the forces of nationalism—European by design but actively drawn upon by Asian and African statesmen—could no longer be quelled by divide and rule. Nationalism quickly unified a diverse set of colonial subjects that often had little in common with one another or had never even shared a common government in pre-colonial times.

In British India, this process was spurred by a series of UK-educated thinkers and lawyers that often had spent considerable time in the UK or, as in the case of Gandhi, its other colonies. They coalesced in the Indian National Congress, founded by Indians and Englishmen alike. There, the thought of a united Indian identity first gained traction. The colonial regime tried in vain to stunt this development by returning to the tried-and-tested divide and rule, this time by pitting Indians of different religions against each other. While this failed in the end, its disastrous repercussions still to this day dominate the politics of South Asia in the difficult relations between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

In Indochina and Indonesia, Sukarno and Ho Chi Minh were deeply immersed in western intellectual thought, deriving from there concepts such as “nation” or “socialism.” The Japanese occupation acted as a catalyst in the development of still-embryonic nationalist movements in order to legitimize their rule as the natural alternative to European colonial overlordship. It quickly became clear that the Japanese were merely playing politics and had no interest in behaving any differently than their European predecessors. But the nationalist movements they had groomed achieved their aims in the end, even if the Japanese Empire had already collapsed by then.

After the Soviet Union was ostracized by the world powers after its inception, it turned toward those

powers that were themselves not being heard on the world stage. Socialist thought proved attractive to colonial nationalists interested in upending foreign capitalist rule and fomenting revolution in their countries. The fast but violent industrialization the Soviet Union had undergone under Stalin and that China would soon undergo under Mao was a promising model for colonies that had for a long time been denied the means to turn themselves into modern industrial powers. India looked to the Soviet economic model in principle while maintaining a degree of political pluralism, while parts of Indochina would become outright communist.

French Indochina was unique in its resistance to coalescing into any kind of federation or multiethnic entity, even though Ho Chi Minh and his peers were pressured by their Soviet comrades to extend communist rule over all of French Indochina with an eye on turning Thailand eventually. Historic regional rivalries were so strong that they even surpassed common enmity to the French colonial regime. Indeed, in the case of Cambodia, the French had been allowed in as a safeguard against regional rivals.

The new concepts of nationalism and socialism offered an alternative to colonial rule that had until then been without alternatives. Political theory is far from being merely the realm of thinkers. What is theory today can be the new regional order of things tomorrow.

## Powers old and new

The emergence of new players was the last development that changed the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region in 1945.

It was not only the Japanese that arrived as new players on the scene. By the end of World War II, Japan had surrendered, and it would take another few decades for it to again become a serious actor in the region. They had been pushed from their perch by the US, which was already a player in the Indo-Pacific because of their acquisition of the Philippines and some smaller Pacific islands. However, the end of World War II had left the “Empire of Liberty” as the last remaining western great power in the region.

The American outlook on colonialism, as nurtured by its own history as a set of former colonies, markedly differed from that of its European partners. Its



While Prime Minister Nehru of India followed a broadly socialist economic model in newly-independent India, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh led Vietnam into a communist future. In the picture: Nehru and Ho Chi Minh meet in 1954.

opposition to colonialism had manifested itself since the 19th century, when the US had actively participated in the ouster of European powers from most of Central and South America. During World War I, the US had strongly promoted a global order based on the self-determination of nations, much to the Europeans' annoyance. While there were those in the US who called for American imperialism, in general, Washington sought a different kind of control. Like the Soviet Union, the US was not dependent on foreign colonies as they controlled enough land and primary production on their own. Instead, the US needed markets for American goods.

Colonial protectionism by the other powers meant that vast foreign markets were inaccessible to the US, leaving Washington with a strong economic interest in decolonization or at least in pressuring the Europeans into colonial free trade. Early during World War II, the US and the UK signed the Atlantic Charter, which guaranteed national self-determination, even if the British government was quick to stress that this did not extend to colonial possessions.

Until 1945, the US lacked meaningful leverage against their European partners to enforce the global order they envisioned. When World War II ended in 1945,

it left Europe's economies devastated and entirely dependent on American investment, which came with conditions. The Dutch return to Indonesia was only possible through American loans, and as the Indonesian War of Independence dragged on, it was the Americans that forced the Dutch to the negotiation table and to eventually accept Indonesian independence. Similarly, the Americans at first supported the French effort to retain Indochina lest it fall to the Communists, but abandoned their partners when victory seemed increasingly unlikely.

At the same time, the Soviet Union under Stalin was reaching out to foster revolution throughout the region in an attempt to expand the list of their allies in the wake of the war. This export of ideology, weaponry, and funds proved highly successful not just in Indochina but also parts of Africa, the Korean peninsula and, probably most consequentially, China.

The ascent of the new powers not only coincided with the demise of the old empires—it was a major cause of it. The old regional order left no room for newcomers. Accordingly, when new powers arrived in the region, they crafted a new order to accommodate themselves.

## Conclusions

What brought down the European empires in the end?

Most importantly, their power projection was no longer credible. Britain, France, and the Netherlands seemed to be invincible until suddenly they were not. Once the Japanese had proven how quickly colonial regimes could be brought down, these regimes lost their authority. Militarily and economically desolate, the once-mighty Europeans were suddenly viewed as the proverbial naked emperors.

In previous decades, the seeds of nationalism had slowly blossomed in the Indo-Pacific. When before only the colonial order had seemed strong enough to keep gigantic landmasses and populations under control, national self-definition now offered an alternative future for a united people without foreign rule. Japanese encouragement and socialist thinking from Europe created a class of politicians that could credibly claim to offer this alternative order. Nationalism made the colonial ruling strategy of divide and conquer impossible as it—at first—united colonial subjects against foreign occupation.

The US had been calling for national self-determination for decades and were now able to use their economic and military influence to coax their Atlantic partners into decolonization. Given how dependent the Europeans had become on Washington and how influential the Soviet Union had become over the course of the war, colonial subjects could now turn to two new players that sported anti-colonial stances and offered different concepts for a post-colonial future, laying the groundwork for what would soon turn into the Cold War.

What can we take away from what happened in 1945 for the Indo-Pacific as it is today? The world has undoubtedly changed quite a bit. While the region is too vast, diverse, and complex to offer too many universally applicable rules, some points are as valid today as they were then.

First, the Indo-Pacific is defined by its trade. The wealth of the countries in the region means that control of regional trade routes offers the prospect of immense riches. This in turn means that trade in the region



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The Atlantic Charter turned out to be an important step in the decolonization of Asia. Churchill seated on the quarterdeck of the HMS Prince of Wales during the Atlantic Conference.

needs to remain open to all countries if its wealth is not to be exploited by one or a few powers alone. As seen in the chain reaction that followed the Fall of Singapore, regional chokepoints, especially the Strait of Malacca, are always a risk to a multilateral regional order. Policing the trade routes that pass through them and keeping them open to all players must always remain a regional priority.

Second, nations are vulnerable to foreign domination when they are weak and divided, opening avenues



Asia and Africa even though this was not intended as such by the British signatories. In the picture: US-President Roosevelt and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Pacific Conference in August 1941.

for potentially harmful foreign influence. Regional players are much better able to project power in the Indo-Pacific than foreign powers as they can quickly call on resources from a local hinterland. A balance on regional resources should be maintained as imbalance again offers a viable road to economic and military domination.

Finally, power projection can be deceptive. While the players of today might look unshakable, the empires of the past demonstrate that it may only take a few

fateful mistakes and hapless decisions to change the regional order in the blink of an eye.

The imperial order in the end was neither inevitable nor sustainable. The Indo-Pacific is a region of breathtaking wealth and diversity. The enormous potential of this diversity is best realized when all actors involved in the region retains their unique voice and regional order is based on cooperation, and shared values and principles.

# V. WRAP-UP

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live and has posed many threats to people's well-being. At the time of writing, Cambodia is fighting its most severe battle thus far against the virus as it tackles the third community outbreak. The first-ever nationwide lockdown has had different implications for different groups of people. The positive side is that Cambodia has the second-highest vaccination rate in ASEAN, having vaccinated about 12.4 percent of its total population.<sup>1</sup>

This edition examines the strategic rivalry centered around the distinctive versions of the Indo-Pacific concepts. Each concept has been laid out by respective contributors addressing the objectives, intentions, opportunities, challenges, and way forwards. Concepts of the "Indo-Pacific" share many similarities but yet hint their own reservation and affirmation toward specific context in the wider regional security realm and beyond. Many underlying issues and constraints were discussed, especially by experts and scholars who have closely monitored the dynamic sphere of regional affairs. However, apart from the security concern and strategic competition, we ought to consider more practical cooperation in the context of digital connectivity and the economic sphere, which shall be examined more fully in our next issue.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the contributors, making this publication another lively set of perspectives on hard security subjects, especially strategic competition and major power rivalry. The next edition on the topic of Economic Diplomacy and Constructive Engagement will be released at the end of 2021. If you are interested in contributing your perspective on this theme, please email us your abstract.

Thank you to our readers. We hope you find our Diplomatic Briefing a useful resource.

Stay tuned for the fourth issue!

1. The Star, "Cambodia ranks second in Asean for Covid-19 vaccinations," April 30, 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2021/04/30/cambodia-ranks-second-in-asean-for-covid-19-vaccinations>.



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Cambodian army members wear personal protective equipment as people are vac



...inated amidst the latest outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Phnom Penh in May 2021.

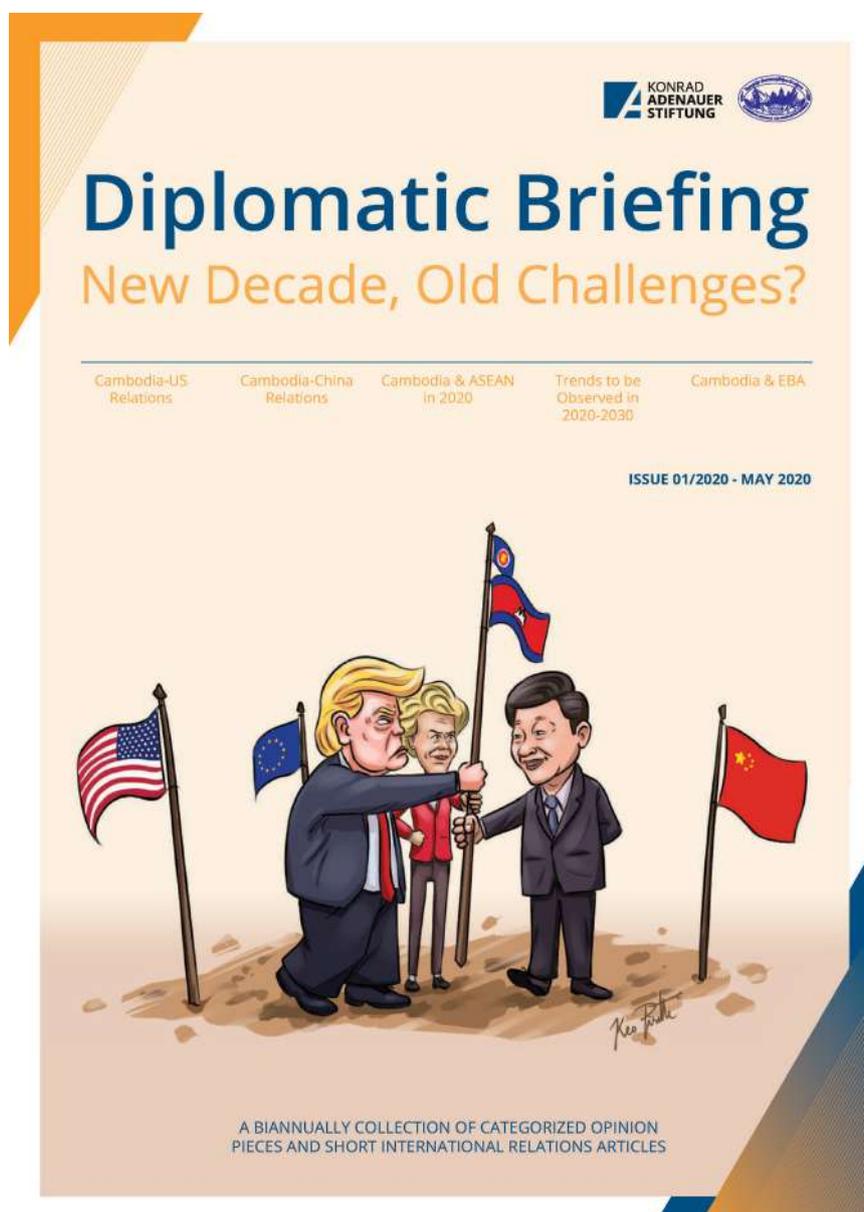
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**Pich Charadine, Robert Hör**

The world is embarking on a new decade, yet key challenging aspects remain, which certainly alert us that perhaps there is a need for a much better innovative resolution more ever than before. In the first Diplomatic Briefing foreign policy experts and diplomats share their opinions about the next decade and how we can deal with these challenges. How can we make the world a more harmonized place to be? What kind of trends will shape the future? Read more in the first volume.

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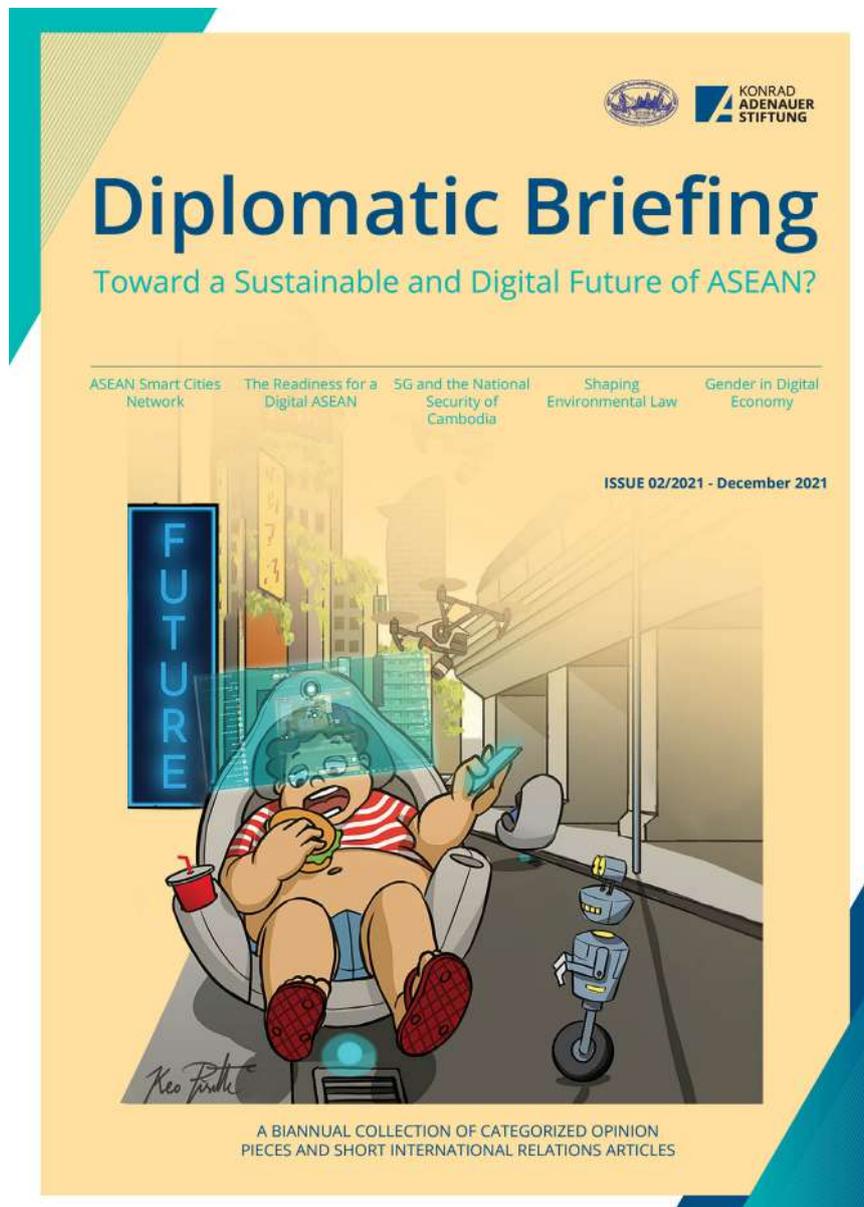
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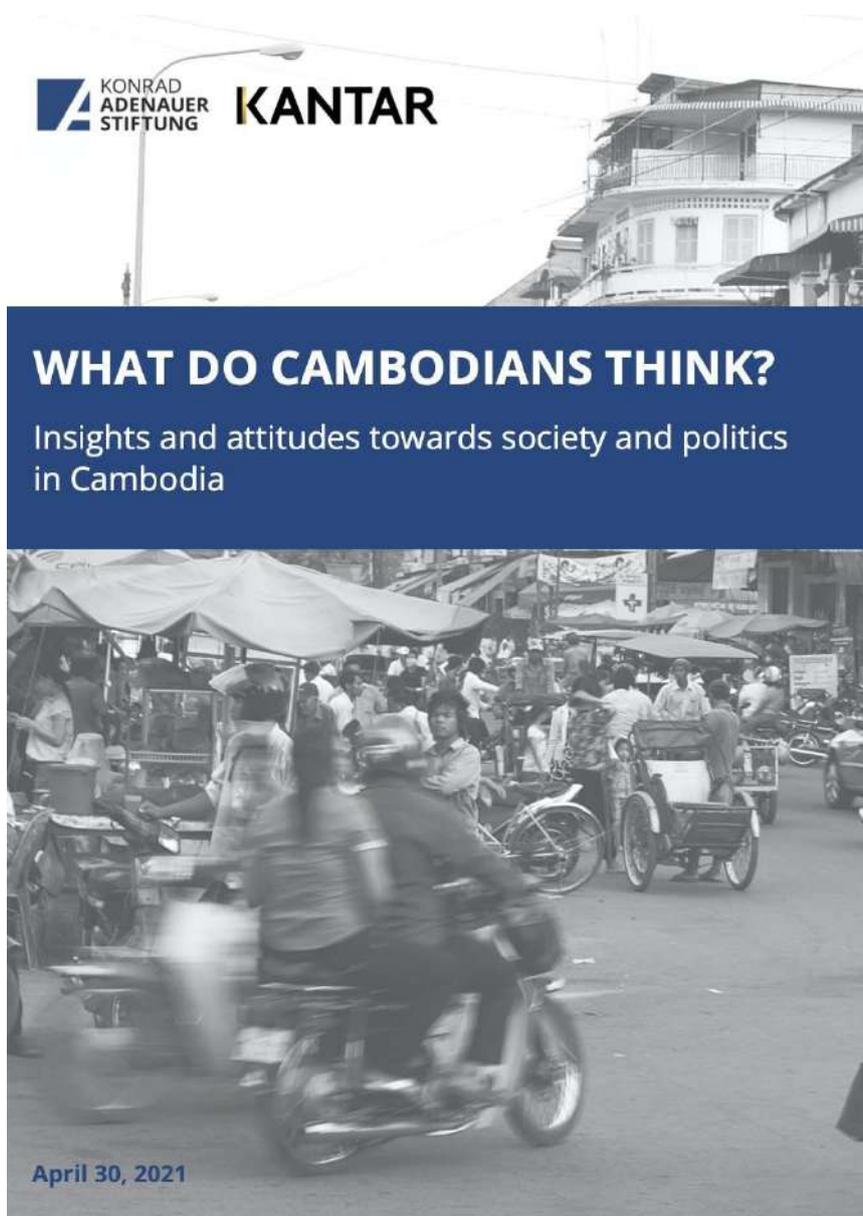
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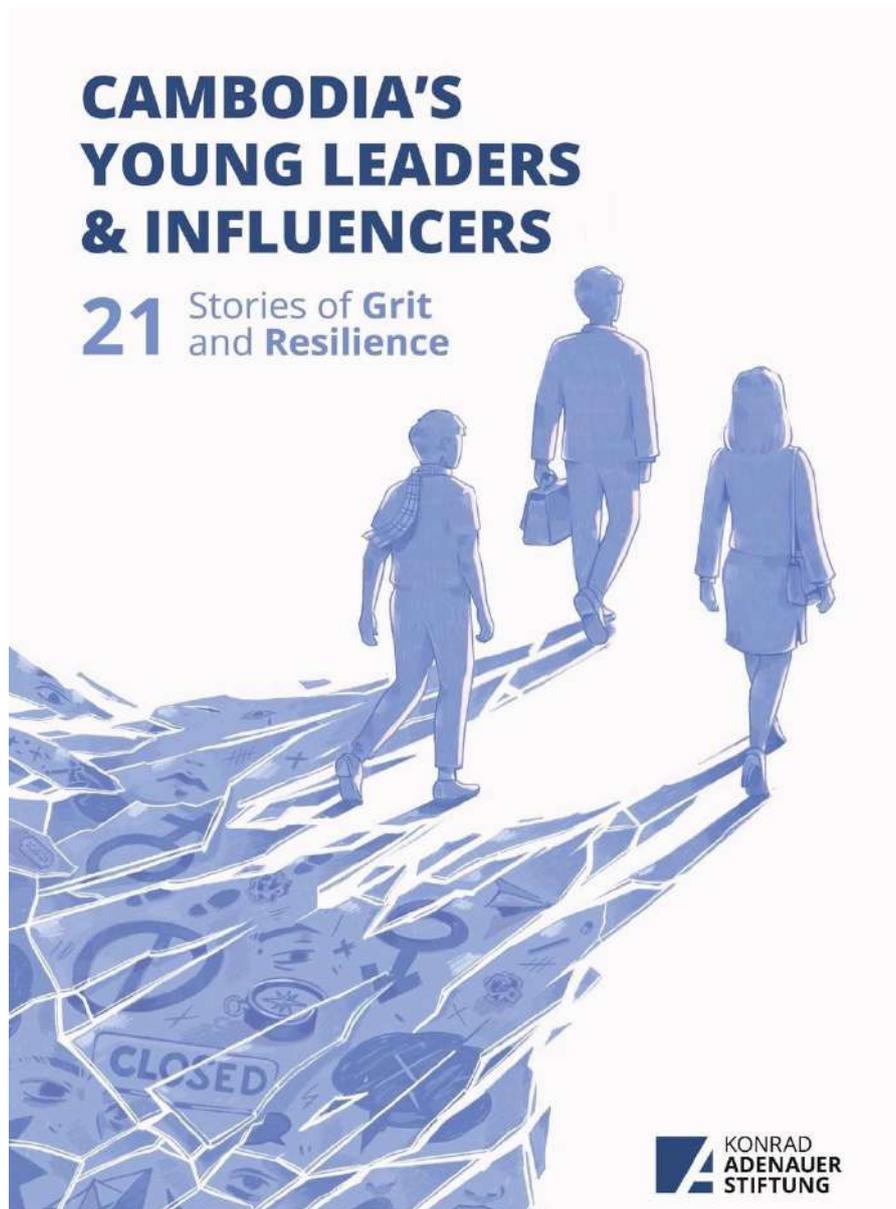
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by

**Dr. Deth Sok Udom, Seng Reasey, Kok Tha, Charadine Pich et. al.**

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