Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Mixed Opportunities and Challenges from Connectivity Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

"Maritime security," "Indo-Pacific," and "connectivity" are currently three buzzwords that are used frequently but lack clear definitions. Maritime security receives global attention due to the vulnerability of infrastructure at shore or sea against security threats. However, maritime security might also involve protection of the marine environment, the blue economy and human security of coastal communities. The Indo-Pacific has come under the spotlight because there are a number of connectivity strategies, such as those by the United States, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, India, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, which focus on this region. The geographical scope of the Indo-Pacific, however, remains ambiguous. The impacts of connectivity strategies on the Indo-Pacific's maritime security are also unclear. This article argues that maritime security in the Indo-Pacific faces both challenges and opportunities in the context of those connectivity strategies. If the region wants to overcome those challenges and make use of the opportunities, countries in the Indo-Pacific should come up with a common and comprehensive understanding of maritime security, explore new areas of cooperation, try to peacefully solve their territorial and maritime disputes, and promote the role of multilateral institutions, especially ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms.

THE INDO-PACIFIC AND CONNECTIVITY STRATEGIES

The Indo-Pacific currently has an undefined scope. In the narrowest sense, it is an area that ranges from the western shore of India to the western shore of the United

States.[1] In a broader sense, it might be considered to consist of the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific.[2] Despite its unclear boundaries, the Indo-Pacific is considered an economic centre and a driving force for the world's economy. In this region, there are important sea lanes such as the maritime trade routes via the northern Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. In the Indo-Pacific, there are 9 out of the 10 busiest sea ports in the world. About 60 percent of the world's maritime trade goes through the region, of which one-third pass through the South China Sea.[3] The Indo-Pacific is also the world's most biodiverse area. The region has about one-third of the world's shallow marine fishes, about 3,000 species in comparison to no more than 1,200 in any other region.[4] The Indo-Malay-Philippines Archipelago is believed to host the maxima of the world's marine biodiversity. In the Indo-Pacific, marine-related industries, including fishery and tourism, are sustaining a large population of people.

Although the Indo-Pacific generally enjoys peace and security, it faces a number of challenges in maritime security. First, it has about 40 sea-related disputes among regional countries, either disputes on sovereignty over territories at sea or sovereign rights over maritime areas. Among those disputes, some, such as those in the South China Sea or the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, are considered potential causes of a Sino-US war or even a Third World War.[5] Second, piracy and armed robbery often cause the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to be placed at the top of the list of the world's most dangerous waters. In 2018, the number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in those areas were 57 and 25 respectively, ranking only after West

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[1] President of the United States of America, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," December 2017.

[2] The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific considers the Indo-Pacific as including the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This article uses this geographical scope for the Indo-Pacific. For further information, see: ASEAN, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," June 2019, https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

[3] Department of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region" (Department of Defense - United States of America, 1 June 2019), 1, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF.

[4] Gene S. Helfman et al., *The Diversity of Fishes: Biology, Evolution, and Ecology*, Second Edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 331.

[5] Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

Africa with a total of 81 cases.[6] Third, maritime terrorism has been spread to the region by Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups like Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia. The *SuperFerry 14* case, the bombing of a ferry in the Philippines in 2004 which killed 116 people, is considered the world's deadliest terrorist attack at sea even today.[7] Lastly, the Indo-Pacific is also witnessing a number of new maritime security threats that affect the lives of coastal communities, including sea-level rise, an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, a mounting volume of marine debris, and losses of biodiversity.

In recent years, various countries, including the United States, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, India, and the European Union (EU), have proposed their own connectivity strategies for the Indo-Pacific region and considered the maritime domain as a component of their connectivity strategies. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) places the highest priority on the maritime domain when it proposed the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which links sea ports together, as one of its two main connections between China and Europe.[8] The United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy believes that the vital sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific "underpin global commerce and prosperity."[9] The United States, therefore, tries to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific through promoting linkages in economics, governance, and security. Japan also has its own "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" initiative, which stresses the importance of linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. This initiative aims to promote a rules-based order; freedom of navigation; free trade; economic prosperity; and commitment to peace and stability.[10] India has its own vision of the Indo-Pacific, in which it wants to promote peace and stability through equal access to the sea and air, freedom of navigation, combating maritime crimes, protecting

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[6] International Maritime Organization, "Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual Report - 2018," 1 April 2019, Annex 3.

[7] "Superferry14: The World's Deadliest Terrorist Attack at Sea," *Safe for Sea*, 27 February 2019, https://safety4sea.com/cm-superferry14-the-worlds-deadliest-terrorist-attack-at-sea/.

[8] Lily Kuo and Niko Kommenda, "What Is China's Belt and Road Initiative?," *The Guardian*, 30 July 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer.

[9] Department of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region," 1 June 2019, 2.

[10] The Government of Japan, "Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific," June 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf.

the marine environment and developing the blue economy.[11] Australia also places high priority on maritime security, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia pledges to invest in maritime security capacity-building, regional maritime domain awareness, protection of the marine environment and international law, and freedom of navigation and overflight.[12] Russia focuses on inland connectivity in its Greater Eurasia initiative. However, Russia also understands that its initiative is actually aiming "Toward the Great Ocean" to use it to link Russia with the Greater Eurasia, a vast area of land from Europe to East Asia.[13] The European Union also proposes to use its "Connecting Europe and Asia" strategy to link Europe with Asia via transport, energy, digital connections, and human-dimension networks. Maritime connections are important because 70 percent of the trade value between Europe and Asia goes by sea.[14]

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM CONNECTIVITY STRATEGIES TO MARITIME SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

The connectivity strategies by the above-mentioned countries are creating both challenges and opportunities for the maritime security of the Indo-Pacific. These challenges and opportunities are intertwined and make the situation of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific a mixed picture of bright and dark spots.

Regarding the challenges, there are three main dark areas. First, there is an overlap in the concepts of "Indo-Pacific" and "maritime security." The concept of Indo-Pacific was first mentioned by Gurpreet S. Khurana, an Indian naval officer, in 2007.[15] In Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's speech in 2007, Japan became the first

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[11] Government of India - Ministry of External Affairs, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue," 1 June 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements. htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018.

[12] Australian Government, "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper," November 2017.

[13] The Valdai Club, "Toward The Great Ocean - 5: From The Turn to the East to Greater Eurasia," September 2017, http://valdaiclub.com/files/15300/.

[14] European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank," 19 September 2018, 3.

[15] Gurpreet S. Khurana, "Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation," *Strategic Analysis* 31, no. 1 (2007): 139-53.

country to officially put forth the concept of the Indo-Pacific.[16] However, the term *Indo-Pacific* began to receive the world's attention after it was mentioned in President Donald Trump's speech in Danang, Vietnam in 2017. India, Australia, and ASEAN countries also proposed their own visions of the Indo-Pacific. In fact, the geographical scopes of the Indo-Pacific vary between the respective visions. The United States considers the Indo-Pacific to range from the western shore of India to the western shore of the United States; Australia views it as spanning from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean; India, Japan and ASEAN have somewhat similar views as they consider the Indo-Pacific as roughly consisting of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. These visions all agree that the Indo-Pacific is not a contiguous territorial space, but linked together based on economic and cultural ties.

The connectivity strategies all mention the concept of "maritime security" but do not make clear its meaning. The term *maritime security* has gained attention in political discourse for about 20 years. Several governments and inter-governmental mechanisms have promulgated their strategies for maritime security, including the United Kingdom, France, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, and the African Union. However, there are still different perceptions of this concept. Maritime security can be seen in a "maritime security matrix" with related concepts, including national security, marine environment, economic development and human security; it can be put into a "securitisation framework" with a list of threats to human beings; or it can be seen through the aspect of "security prac-tices and communities of practice" or the security of those whose work is related to the sea.[17] In the Indo-Pacific region, only the United States and India have national strategies for maritime security. The 2005 National Strategy for Maritime Security by the United States considers maritime security from the perspective of a list of threats, including nation-state threats, terrorist threats, transnational crimes and piracy, environmental destruction, and illegal seaborne immigration.[18] Meanwhile, India's 2015 Maritime Security Strategy views maritime security as conditions for the "freedom to use the seas for the pursuit of maritime activities, in support of na-tional development and prosperity, and [to] promote legitimate use of the maritime

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[16]   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "'Confluence of the Two Seas' Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India," 22 August 2007, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html.

[17]   Christian Bueger, "What Is Maritime Security?," *Marine Policy* 53 (March 2015): 159-64.

[18]   The White House, "The National Strategy for Maritime Security," 2005.

global commons."[19] In that sense, these connectivity strategies make the already complicated concept of maritime security further complicated.

Second, the connectivity strategies create fragmented efforts in regard to the region's maritime security. The United States, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, India and ASEAN have each proposed a connectivity strategy for the region. However, these strategies do not accommodate each other. They are formulated in order to advance the national interests of their own originating countries. China's BRI was initially said to be for improving infrastructure connectivity in the region. However, since its inception, the BRI has changed its name from "One Belt, One Road" to "Belt and Road Initiative" and expanded to encompass policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds.[20] The scope of the Belt and Road Initiative was also enlarged to include Latin America and the Arctic.[21] Therefore, China's BRI is beyond an infrastructure initiative. The United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy is clearly aimed at maintaining the United States' leadership in the region and countering the increasing influence of China. Connectivity strategies by Japan, India, Australia, and Russia each hope to better position their originating countries in an evolving regional structure. Bilateral cooperation seems to be more favourable to most countries. Regional countries, particularly small and medium-sized countries, are likely to be trapped in power struggles among major powers. The regional countries are now on the verge of having to take sides if the confrontation between the US and China escalates, perhaps even resulting in another Cold War.

Third, the different connectivity strategies challenge the role of multilateral mechanisms in maritime security. In the region, there is already a network of mechanisms that deals with different aspects of maritime security. They include global mechanisms such as the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, and various regional organisations. These mechanisms have created forums for the countries to work together, aimed at promoting the blue economy, protecting the coastal communities, preserving the maritime environment and building mutual confidence, easing the tensions emerging from disputes at sea. However, when countries put

[19] Ministry of Defense of India, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy," 2015, 166.

[20] The State Council of The People's Republic of China, "Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative," 30 March 2015, http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm.

[21] Luis Alberto Lacalle, "The Road Continues South: China's Expansion of the Belt and Road Investment in Latin America," *China Today*, April 2019.

forth their own connectivity strategies, they choose selective forums to work with. For example, China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to support its BRI. The United States supports ASEAN, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the Quadrilateral Consultation (Quad) with Japan, India, and Australia, and other regional institutions, including the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).[22] Therefore, it is difficult for the region to establish an international framework to cope with maritime security challenges. The most inclusive framework so far is the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), whose members are 20 Indo-Pacific countries and 4 European countries (Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark and UK). However, this framework is just focused on intelligence sharing via the ReCAAP Information Sharing Center.[23]

Nevertheless, it is fortunate that the various connectivity strategies also provide opportunities for enhancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. There are three major opportunities: increase in maritime awareness, opening of new areas of cooperation, and exposure of the need for collective actions. First, the connectivity strategies increase awareness of the importance of the seas and oceans in the region. Although the maritime domain accounts for a large part of the Indo-Pacific, not many regional countries had previously accorded high priority to issues concerning the seas and oceans. As a result, the Indo-Pacific has a great deal of threats to maritime security, including territorial and maritime disputes, piracy, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and pollution of the marine environment. The region lacks an overall strategy on maritime security and, in fact, only a few countries have their own national strategies on maritime security. However, as the connectivity strategies consider the maritime domain as a part of their initiatives, awareness of the maritime domain began to change. Maritime domain awareness and maritime security are being mentioned more often in the statements or joint statements of regional countries. A collective effort to deal with maritime security began to emerge. A recent example is ASEAN's efforts to deal with marine debris, a new threat to maritime security, which resulted in ASEAN's adoption of Declaration on Combating Marine Debris and ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris in

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22 Department of State, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision," 4 November 2019, 7-8.

23 "About ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre," 2019, http://www.recaap.org/about_ReCAAP-ISC.

June 2019. Similar efforts will build up momentum for regional countries to pro-mote cooperation in terms of maritime security.

Second, they reveal new areas for potential cooperation on maritime security in the region. The South China Sea has emerged as an area that needs enhanced cooperation. As connectivity strategies, whether by the United States, China, EU, Japan, Australia, or India, more or less centre on the Indo-Pacific, the South China Sea – as the bridge between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean – has become the weakest link in the region's maritime security. In the South China Sea, there are three layers of disputes: territorial claims on islands/rocks in the sea, demarcation issues among littoral states, and power struggles among major powers, particu-larly between the United States and China. As a result, greater cooperation on the maritime security of the South China Sea is needed in order to maintain peace and security. Furthermore, as the connectivity strategies view the importance of the marine domain from different angles, they broaden the notion of maritime security. Maritime security is no longer just threats to sea ports or infrastructures. They now include threats to the livelihoods of coastal communities as well as measures to promote economic development by sustainable use of seas and oceans. Therefore, maritime security expanded from traditional issues like territorial and maritime disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy and armed robbery to newly emerging issues such as sea-level rise, marine pollution, IUU fishing and smuggling. As a result, re-gional countries can work together on these new areas of cooperation on maritime security.

Third, they expose the need for collective actions on maritime security. Although countries develop their connectivity strategies through unilateral approaches, they understand that their strategies cannot succeed without the support of other countries and multilateral institutions. Therefore, all the strategies emphasise the importance of collective actions, which leads to two important consequences. First, there is a need to uphold international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). As a package deal, the 1982 UNCLOS might not satisfy everyone. However, it has served as the "constitution of the oceans" since its entry into force. No other legal instrument can replace the 1982 UNCLOS on maritime issues. Second, as Southeast Asia has the geopolitical impor-tance of linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean, ASEAN comes under the spotlight of all the connectivity strategies. All the connectivity strategies, whether by the United States, China, EU, Japan, India or Australia, place a high priority on cooperating with ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms, including East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). ASEAN was quick to realise its importance and responded with its own Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, a connectivity strategy by

ASEAN. In this Outlook, ASEAN considers the Indo-Pacific as "a closely integrated and interconnected region" and strives to promote maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, as well as economic and other possible areas of cooperation.[24] This is a comprehensive and suitable approach to maritime security given the new political and economic context of the Indo-Pacific.

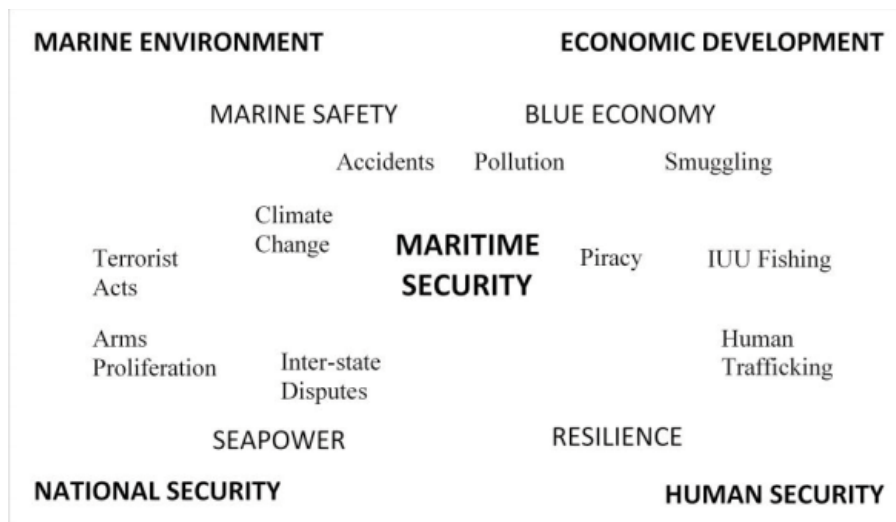## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNTRIES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

The challenges and opportunities provided by the various connectivity strategies require regional countries to take actions in order to maintain the maritime security of the Indo-Pacific. Some suggestions for regional countries are as follows:

First, there should be a region-wide awareness of the importance of maritime security to the region's peace and stability. All peoples in the region should understand that threats to maritime security are not only direct, like territorial and maritime disputes, piracy, and maritime terrorism, but also indirect, like climate change, pollution, and depletion of natural resources. Therefore, the concept of a "maritime security matrix", which considers maritime security in its entirety, including the related concepts of national security, marine environment, economic development and human security, should be promoted. A comprehensive approach will also help the region to not only maintain maritime security but also strive towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which view security in close relations with development, social inclusion, and sustainable use of resources.

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[24] ASEAN, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific."

Figure 1. The matrix of maritime security.[25]

Second, countries in the region should increase their cooperation in areas of common concern. Maritime domain awareness is an important area of cooperation. Regional countries should have the ability to observe and analyse the changing situation in maritime areas. Therefore, countries in the region should cooperate to improve their human and infrastructure capacity in maritime domain awareness as well as increase information sharing without undermining their information infrastructure and national defence. Other areas of cooperation include anti-piracy activities, environmental protection, and protection of biodiversity and natural resources. Such cooperation should take into account the obligations and interests of the different countries as well as the common interests of the whole region.

Third, countries in the region should try to solve existing territorial and maritime disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. These territorial and maritime disputes are still the most prominent threats to the region's maritime security. Peace and security in the South China Sea, the main linkage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, should be given the utmost attention. Militarisation of the features in the South China Sea and coercion and intimidation activities against other claimants will never render legitimacy to claims by any parties.

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25 Christian Bueger, "What is maritime security?," *Marine Policy*. 53 (3/2015): 159-164.

Fourth, the United States and China – the two dominating powers in the region – should show their leadership in the Indo-Pacific. They should act for the common good of the whole region and support efforts to promote peace and cooperation by other countries. China should have clear explanations for its ambiguous and excessive claims in the South China Sea. It should refrain from assertive actions and respect international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. The United States should not only promote freedom of navigation, but also a comprehensive concept of maritime security, which is linked to national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security.

Fifth, the role of multilateral institutions should be promoted. ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms, including EAS and ARF, are suitable mechanisms for promoting maritime initiatives. Although these ASEAN-led mechanisms have large memberships, including all powers in the Indo-Pacific region, like the United States, China, Australia, Japan, and India, they are not paralysed because ASEAN works as a filter to harmonise contradicting views from major powers. Therefore, ASEAN's centrality should be strengthened and promoted. To do so, ASEAN should have a concrete plan of action to implement the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. It should also work with other countries to establish subordinate mechanisms for EAS and ARF, which currently only serve as forums for leaders.

In conclusion, various connectivity strategies proposed by the United States, China, Russia, India, Australia, Japan, and ASEAN bring both opportunities and challenges to the already complicated situation of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. It should be noted that solutions to this situation will only come from a common understanding of maritime security, cooperation among regional countries, peaceful settlements of disputes, unselfish leadership by the United States and China, and collective actions in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

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