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SWP Research Paper

Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker

From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

Significance, Implementation and Challenges

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 9
July 2020, Berlin

- More and more states and regional organisations employ the term “Indo-Pacific”. It is increasingly supplanting the previously common term, “Asia-Pacific”. In Europe, only France has so far presented its own “Indo-Pacific” concept.
- The term “Indo-Pacific” is used to refer to various, sometimes divergent, concepts. These in turn are based on very different ideas on regional order. What they all have in common is the reference to the importance of a rules-based international order.
- “Indo-Pacific” is a political term and therefore neither purely descriptive nor value-neutral. In particular, the Trump administration’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” concept aims to contain China and is thus an expression of the growing strategic rivalry between Washington and Beijing. In Beijing, “Indo-Pacific” is primarily understood as a U.S.-led containment strategy directed against China.
- Other actors, for example ASEAN or India, emphasise aspects such as economic prosperity, connectivity and multilateral cooperation in their Indo-Pacific concepts.
- The EU and its member states are under increasing pressure from Washington to commit themselves directly or indirectly to the “Indo-Pacific” — and thus, from a U.S. perspective, for Washington and against Beijing. In their deliberations, Europeans should not succumb to this zero-sum logic.
- The EU and its member states have at their disposal three (ideal type) approaches: “equidistance”, “alignment” and “autonomy”. In order to be able to choose one option, Europeans must define their economic, security and normative interests in the region and provide the necessary resources for their advancement.

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Table of Contents

5 Issues and Recommendations

7 "Indo-Pacific": The Construction of a Region

11 The Indo-Pacific: Emergence, Objectives, Key Issues and Ideas on Regional Order

11 The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy of the United States

17 Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": From strategy to vision

21 Australia and the Indo-Pacific as a solid regional reference framework

23 India's "Act East" policy and the Indo-Pacific

26 The "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific"

28 Interim conclusions

31 China's Response to the Indo-Pacific

31 The perception of the Indo-Pacific in China

34 Chinese initiatives in response to the Indo-Pacific

34 The Indo-Pacific as a containment strategy

35 Where Does Europe Stand with Regard to the Indo-Pacific?

36 The Indo-Pacific concept of France

38 Initiatives by France and other European countries

40 Conclusions and Recommendations: How Should the EU and Member States Approach the "Indo-Pacific"?

43 Abbreviations

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From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges

In Asia, competing ideas of order for the region have emerged in recent years, with the potential to spark multiple conflicts. For almost 70 years, the system of order in the Asia-Pacific region, often referred to as "Pax Americana" and dominated by the United States, had not been called into question. This has changed in the second decade of the 21st century. In the context of China's rise to become the world's largest economy, which has also changed the regional balance of power in political and military terms, Beijing developed its own ideas and concepts of regional order and subsequently launched its own initiatives. These moves are driven by Beijing's increasing claim to shape or reshape the regional (and international) order in accordance with its own interests. The Chinese "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI) is a direct expression of this claim.

In response to this, in recent years a number of states have developed alternative concepts under the label "Indo-Pacific". First and foremost, the United States under President Donald Trump has attempted to respond directly to the perceived Chinese challenge by presenting a strategic concept called the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) as a counter narrative to a potential Sinocentric reorganisation or restructuring of the region. In addition, Japan, Australia, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have also presented their own concepts of the "Indo-Pacific". France is the only member state of the European Union (EU) that has adopted the term "Indo-Pacific" and drawn up a corresponding strategy, which derives mainly from the protection of national interests in its own territories in the region. China, on the other hand, rejects the concept of "Indo-Pacific" — and the FOIP in particular — as a containment strategy directed against Beijing.

The U.S., in particular, has increased pressure on states in and outside the region, including Germany and other EU member states, to commit themselves directly or indirectly to the concept of the "Indo-Pacific".

The present analysis shows that there is no uniform Indo-Pacific concept to date. Rather, the term

is used by the United States, Japan, Australia, India and ASEAN to refer to very different, in part divergent concepts, which in turn are based on different ideas on regional order. The divergences involve, among other things, a) the extension of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area, b) the objectives associated with each respective concept, c) the focus on or weighting of different policy fields within each respective concept, d) the question of China's inclusion or exclusion, and e) the significance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches to trade and security policy. And while the United States, in particular, is using the FOIP to openly position itself against China across various policy fields, states such as Japan or Australia are not seeking a comprehensive "decoupling" from China, especially not economically.

Furthermore, the analysis makes it clear that none of the Indo-Pacific concepts available to date offer new ideas on how to deal with the rise of China, which affects many policy areas. For example, the responses laid out in the FOIP of the Trump administration (but also the responses of other regional governments) to such multidimensional challenges have thus far been defined primarily in terms of security policy.

Moreover, Washington seems very unlikely to buy into a more multilaterally oriented or even inclusive concept of the Indo-Pacific. On the contrary, from the Trump administration's perspective, the geopolitical changes in Asia constitute a zero-sum game in which the "friends" of the United States should "decide" whether or not they want to cooperate with China or the United States. This is how Secretary of Defense Mark Esper expressed it at the Munich Security Conference.

Against this background, there is widespread debate in Europe over whether to take a position and what course of action to take in the Indo-Pacific strategy debate. German and European decision-makers are well advised to take a close look at existing concepts, identify convergences and divergences with their own interests, and realistically assess the scope of the various Indo-Pacific concepts.

There are a number of issues or challenges that have not been sufficiently addressed in the European debate: Can the term "Indo-Pacific" be used in a less securitised and less geo-politicised manner? (It could, for example, initially serve as a geographical term that describes an economic shift in emphasis and the growing importance of the Indian Ocean and India more adequately than the previously common "Asia-Pacific" construct. Conceiving of it this way would be more acceptable to Europeans.) Are synergy effects in interaction with already existing Indo-Pacific concepts conceivable? What concrete goals and priorities, including the importance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches, should the EU pursue? The question of whether China should be included or excluded from the Indo-Pacific concept has also been insufficiently discussed in Europe to date.

In their deliberations, the EU and its Member States should in any case eschew the zero-sum logic that currently dominates the debate. Ideally, there are three possible approaches:

1. "Equidistance": a conscious and open decision to retain the term "Asia-Pacific" while avoiding the "Indo-Pacific" construct altogether.
2. "Alignment": adopting and internalizing one of the already existing interpretations of the "Indo-Pacific". From a German or European perspective, adopting the French concept would be the obvious choice.
3. "Autonomy": defining a European understanding of the "Indo-Pacific" based on European norms and values and referring to the ideas and approaches already developed at the European level.

Perhaps even more important, however, than choosing one of the three approaches is formulating a clear definition of the economic, security and normative interests of Europeans in the region. That also means providing the necessary resources. Only if the latter is guaranteed can Europe act credibly in the region — also with respect to China.

“Indo-Pacific”: The Construction of a Region

The “Indo-Pacific” or “Indo-Pacific region” has enjoyed growing popularity for over ten years as a geographical and strategic construct in the foreign and security policy discourse in Japan, the United States, Australia, India, France and some Southeast Asian states. Many see “Indo-Pacific” as a new geographical and strategic frame of reference that has at least partially come to replace the previously dominant “Asia-Pacific” construct.

The term has found its way into official documents such as national security strategies or defence white papers as well as into the rhetoric of the elites. It is also increasingly being discussed in think tanks and academic institutions. As a result, it has become a kind of “geopolitical nomenclature”.[1]

Although each country has its own understanding of the concept, in terms of both the geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific region and its strategic orientation and essential attributes, there is a common denominator: The two oceans, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, are imagined as *one* contiguous area. This understanding is based on the fact that the vast majority of the world’s flows of goods, but also energy supplies, are transported via sea routes that traverse these two oceans. Moreover, the Indo-Pacific is currently *the* arena in which growing rivalry between the United States and China in Asia is being played out. Accordingly, it has gained in importance geopolitically and geo-economically over the last two decades. Moreover, many Asian actors see it not only as a “purely” geographical construct but also as an alternative to the Chinese “Belt and Road” Initiative (BRI) (see blue box on page 8). Geopolitical and geo-economic aspects are thus closely intertwined in the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific is closely linked to various aspects of the Sino-American rivalry.

This entanglement has taken place in the context of the rivalry between the United States and China, which in the last two years has become a guiding paradigm in international relations, especially in Asia; it shapes strategic debates as well as real political, military and economic dynamics. The Sino-American competition for power and status comprises several dimensions. Principal among these are perceptions of military threat, conflicts in trade policy, political-ideological aspects and competing ideas on regional order. However, the rivalry also centres on technology policy or on the issue of connectivity, for example with respect to infrastructure policy. Increasingly, therefore, technology development and its use, as well as infrastructure, are considered elements of the competition between the United States and China.[2] The Indo-Pacific is thus in many respects closely linked to various aspects of the Sino-American rivalry.

Not all states (both inside and outside the region) have committed themselves to the concept of the Indo-Pacific as a new regional frame of reference — above all not China, which interprets the Indo-Pacific primarily as a strategy directed against it by the United States. In some Southeast Asian states there is also scepticism or criticism; on the one hand because the concept calls into question the centrality of ASEAN, on the other hand because the focus of the policy (above all in the formulation of the United States) is on security policy, namely the containment of China. Added to this is the perception that, among other things, the economic prosperity of the region as a

1 John Hemmings, *Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific*, Asia Studies Centre, Research Paper no. 2/2018 (London: Henry Jackson Society, May 2018), 17.

2 Barbara Lippert and Volker Perthes, eds., *Strategic Rivalry between United States and China. Causes, Trajectories, and Implications for Europe*, SWP Research Paper 4/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2020), doi: 10.18449/2020RP04.

Background: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

- China's President and party leader Xi Jinping announced the BRI 2013 under its original name "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR), first in Kazakhstan (September), then in Indonesia (October). He raised the prospect of a major infrastructure initiative to connect China/Asia with Europe, including Africa ("new silk roads"). The concept initially remained vague and only took shape in the course of the following years.
- The official document *Visions and Actions* presented the following pillars of OBOR in 2015: Policy coordination, connectivity of institutions (infrastructure and standards), trade connectivity, financial integration and people-to-people links. In 2017, BRI was enshrined in the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party, and Xi Jinping hosted the first Silk Road or "Belt and Road" summit in Beijing. A second summit followed in 2019.
- The renaming of the initiative as BRI in mid-2016 was intended to signal that it was "merely" an initiative and at the same time more than just a road and a belt but rather a global network. BRI became the framework for existing projects, such as economic corridors. New dimensions such as the digital, the arctic or the "green" silk road have since been added.
- BRI is a multidimensional global project of China-centred connectivity and networking. The concrete projects are financed primarily through Chinese loans and most are realized by Chinese companies. While China describes the BRI as "open", "inclusive" and "win-win" cooperation, foreign observers criticize above all the lack of transparency surrounding the agreements between China and BRI partner countries as well as the accumulation of debt and the resultant dependence of these partners on China. The West in particular sees the BRI as an essential part of China's attempt to create an alternative to the existing international order.

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Paul Joscha Kohlenberg and Nadine Godehardt, *China's Global Connectivity politics. On Confidently Dealing with Chinese Initiatives*, SWP Comments 17/2018 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2018).
Colin Flint and Cuiping Zhu, "The Geopolitics of Connectivity, Cooperation, and Hegemonic Competition: The Belt and Road Initiative", *Geoforum* 99 (February 2019): 95—101.
European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, *The Road Less Travelled. European Involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative*, 2020 (online, accessed 28 April 2020).

whole has been largely neglected. States such as South Korea or Canada have thus far not used the term. Of the EU Member States, only France has adopted it and presented an Indo-Pacific strategy.[3]

Against this background, it should be noted that the (different) concepts of the Indo-Pacific as a geographically and strategically understood space are based on specific political intentions and interests. The term "Indo-Pacific" itself, as well as its use, is therefore never merely descriptive or value-neutral. Rather, the implicitly or actively drawn borders associated with it, inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, and the attribution of particular characteristics are always political in nature.[4]

The map on page 10 shows the spatial interpretations of the Indo-Pacific of the United States, Japan, Australia and India, the map on page 37 the spatial understanding of France.

In the first part, this study examines the various concepts of the Indo-Pacific and their implementations in the United States, Japan, Australia, India and ASEAN by means of a comparative analysis. Although several collections of articles have already been published that illuminate the Indo-Pacific from the perspective of various states,[5] a systematic comparison

3 Ministry of Defence of France, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific* (Paris, May 2019).

4 Gearóid O'Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics. The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Borderlines, vol. 6 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648. Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Jason Dittmer and Joanne Sharp, eds., *Geopolitics. An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2014).

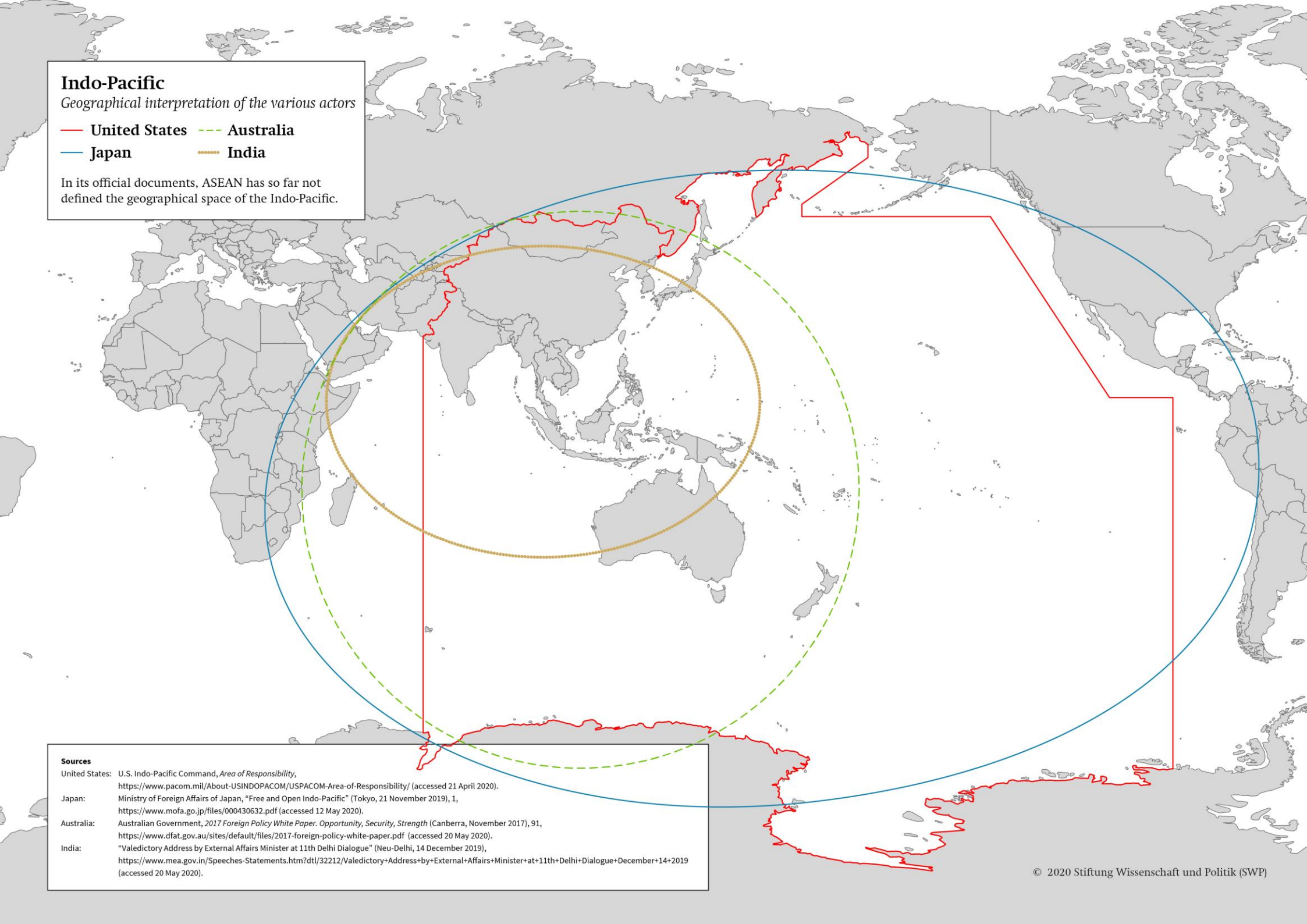
5 See, e.g., Axel Berkofsky and Sergio Miracola, eds., *Geopolitics by Other Means. The Indo-Pacific Reality* (Milan: Italian Institute for International Political Studies [ISPI], February 2019), https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/indo-pacific_web.def_.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020); Sharon Stirling, ed., *Mind the Gap: National Views of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, GMF Asia Program 2019, no. 9 (Washington, D.C.: The German Marshall Fund of the United States [GMF], 23 April 2019), http://www.gmfus.org/publications/mind-gap-national-views-free-and-open-indo-pacific (accessed 29 April 2020); Special Issue *Unpacking the Strategic Dynamic of the Indo-Pacific* of *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020); Congressional

based on a uniform analytical framework is presented here for the first time. The case studies are based on the following key questions:

1. Where did the term originate? How and by whom is the term "Indo-Pacific" currently used?
2. What are the objectives and priorities of the concept?
3. What initiatives have been launched so far under the "Indo-Pacific" label?
4. What ideas on regional order are associated with the "Indo-Pacific"? Is it understood as a new, alternative model of order for the region?

In a second step, the study investigates China's responses to the "Indo-Pacific" concept. It then analyses the response of the EU and its member states, examines the implications for German and European foreign policy, and takes stock of the challenges posed by the various Indo-Pacific conceptions. Finally, three options are presented as to how the EU and its members could ideally deal with this construct.

Research Service (CRS), *Indo-Pacific Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report R46217 (Washington, D.C., 30 January 2020), https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/ R/R46217 (accessed 29 April 2020).


Indo-Pacific
Geographical interpretation of the various actors
United States
Australia
Japan
India
In its official documents, ASEAN has so far not defined the geographical space of the Indo-Pacific.
Sources
United States: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Area of Responsibility, https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/ (accessed 21 April 2020).
Japan: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (Tokyo, 21 November 2019), 1, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf (accessed 12 May 2020).
Australia: Australian Government, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. Opportunity, Security, Strength (Canberra, November 2017), 91, https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf (accessed 20 May 2020).
India: "Valedictory Address by External Affairs Minister at 11th Delhi Dialogue" (Neu-Delhi, 14 December 2019), https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32212/Valedictory+Address+by+External+Affairs+Minister+at+11th+Delhi+Dialogue+December+14+2019 (accessed 20 May 2020).
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The Indo-Pacific: Emergence, Objectives, Key Issues and Ideas on Regional Order

The “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy of the United States

President Donald Trump first presented his “vision” of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in November 2017 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hanoi.[6] President Barack Obama had already strategically connected the Indian and Pacific Oceans to form an “Indo-Pacific” region and outlined plans for an Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) in addition to the political and military “pivot to Asia”.[7] In contrast to the Obama administration, however, the Trump administration sees the “Indo-Pacific region” as a central foreign and economic policy arena for dealing with China. In 2018 Vice President Mike Pence drew considerable attention when he delivered a speech denouncing China’s behaviour and condemning its repeated interference in the internal affairs of other states (including the United States) and its aggressive policy in the South China Sea.[8] Soon afterwards then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson defined the “less responsible” approach of an increasingly powerful China to international standards and Beijing’s deliberate undermining of the “international rules-based order” as Washington’s main challenge.[9]

Donald Trump seeks to implement a reorientation of U.S. policy towards China through the FOIP. This approach is based on his criticism of the previous administration’s Asia policy, which in his view initially announced an “Asia pivot” and later a rebalancing to the region but never fully implemented it.[10] At the Munich Security Conference, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper called on “friends” of the United States to “choose” between the systems of the United States and China when considering whom to cooperate with.[11]

Since the end of 2017, the term “FOIP” has been enshrined in official documents, for example the White House National Security Strategy (see timeline on page 12), and has been referred to as a “whole of government” approach since 2018. The White House and, among others, the U.S. Department of Defense, the State Department and the Department of Commerce have either published their own strategy papers in this regard or at least publicly referred to the FOIP

6 The White House, “Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam”, Da Nang, 10 November 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

7 David Scott, “The Indo-Pacific in US Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts”, *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2018): 19—43.

8 Hudson Institute, “Vice President Mike Pence’s Remarks on the Administration’s Policy towards China”, Washington, D.C., 4 October 2018, https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018 (accessed 29 April 2020).

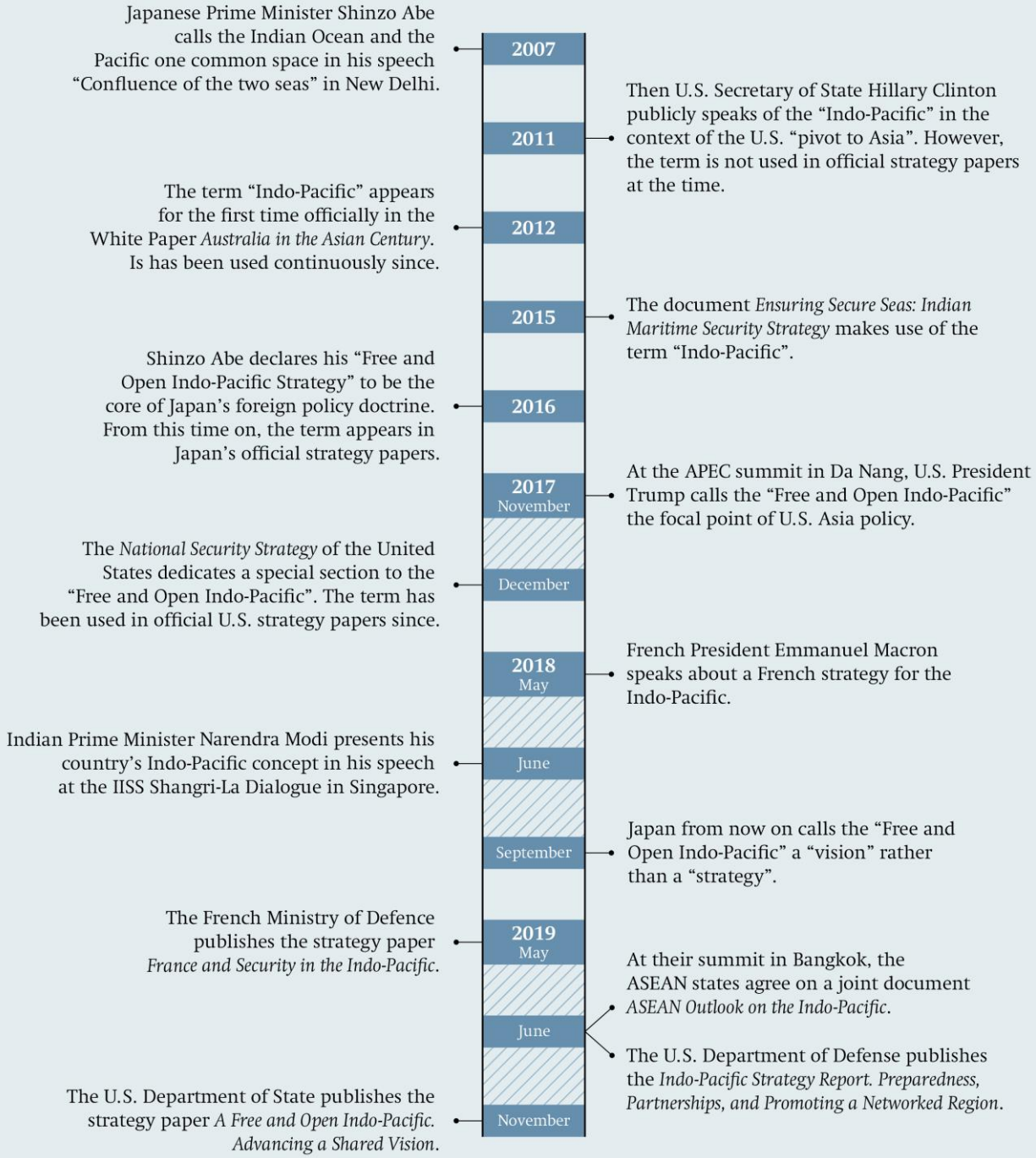
9 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson”, Washington, D.C., 18 October 2017.

10 Michal Kolmaš and Šárka Kolmašová, “A ‘Pivot’ That Never Existed: America’s Asian Strategy under Obama and Trump”, in: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2019): 61—79, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1553936 (accessed 29 April 2020).

11 U.S. Department of Defense, “As Prepared Remarks by Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper at the Munich Security Conference”, Munich, 15 February 2020, https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/2085577/remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-mark-t-esper-at-the-munich-security-conference/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

Timeline

Indo-Pacific – timeline of key events



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through their representatives. Although there is as yet no definitive document detailing the Trump administration's FOIP strategy in detail, there is cross-agency coherence on the key objectives of FOIP, particularly the containment of China. These are to be achieved in accordance with four principles: respect for the sovereignty and independence of all states, peaceful conflict resolution, free trade and respect for international law.[12]

Concept, evolution and goals

The Indo-Pacific is presented in official documents as a geopolitical and geo-economic space central to defending the global interests of the United States. However, its geographical boundaries are not precisely defined. It extends across the entire Indian Ocean, from U.S. overseas territories such as Guam and American Samoa in the West Pacific to U.S. states such as Hawaii and California, and includes all nations bordering these two oceans.[13]

The question of whether China is or could be part of the FOIP was neither explicitly denied nor affirmed in the official announcements on the Indo-Pacific until the second half of 2019. But more general strategy papers published in parallel, such as the *National Security Strategy* (NSS), clearly identify China as an adversary aiming to undermine the rules-based international order.[14] The U.S. State Department made it clear at the end of 2019, however, that (at least in theory) the U.S. vision of FOIP does not exclude any nation.[15] Secretary of Defense Esper made this even clearer in a speech in Hanoi by emphasising the inclusive nature of the FOIP and saying that it was directed "to all nations, including China".[16] Nevertheless, at the end of his speech, he underlined that given its current state and its foreign policy objectives, China is primarily seen as an opponent and a competitor when it comes to the political order in the region envisioned by Washington.

The development of the FOIP since 2017 has been based primarily on the definition of standards and principles. Initially, these related mainly to the economic interaction between the United States and the states in the region, above all China. Trump emphasised the need to establish "fair", "reciprocal" trade relations based on principles such as respect for intellectual property rights, free trade, and protection of private property, fair competition and open markets.[17] In Da Nang 2017, Trump referred to respect for these principles as "playing by the rules".

In the meantime, other principles have been added which go beyond economic cooperation and which, in Washington's reading, form the foundation of the currently existing international order: respect for the sovereignty and independence of all states, peaceful conflict resolution and respect for international rules, including freedom of air and sea transport.[18] In Washington's opinion, the continued existence of the current international order is being threatened by the presence of illiberal, authoritarian regimes.

In the international arena, the "Free" in "FOIP" stands for the freedom of all states to exercise their sovereignty without interference by other states. At the national level this corresponds to good governance and the protection of human and civil rights. "Open" is interpreted as free access to international waters, airspace and digital space, as well as open access to markets and fair, reciprocal trade.[19] From the U.S. perspective, China is also increasingly undermining the principle of openness, inter alia through

12 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Advancing a Shared Vision* (Washington, D.C., 4 November 2019), 6, https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-advancing-a-shared-vision/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

13 The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report. Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, D.C., 1 June 2019), 1, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF (accessed 29 April 2020).

14 U.S. Department of Defense, "As Prepared Remarks by Secretary Esper at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels", Brussels, 24 October 2019, https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/1997187/as-prepared-remarks-by-secretary-esper-at-the-german-marshall-fund-in-brussels/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

15 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 6.

16 U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam, "Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper Remarks at Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam", Hanoi, 20 November 2019, https://vn.usembassy.gov/secretary-of-defense-mark-t-esper-remarks-at-diplomatic-academy-of-vietnam/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

17 The White House, "Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam" (see note 6).

18 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 6.

19 The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 13), 4.

its militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea.[20]

The FOIP-relevant documents emphasise the importance of investment for the region, especially in the area of infrastructure, and call for a stronger role for the United States in infrastructure investment as an alternative to "state-directed" (i.e. Chinese) investments.[21] These documents thus leave little doubt that the FOIP is directed primarily at responding to China's behaviour, which in Washington's view is increasingly "aggressive" and is "undermining" the rules-based international order. In particular, the Pentagon's FOIP paper consumes far more pages presenting China as a "revisionist power" than it does outlining the actual U.S. goals and strategy in connection with the FOIP.

The main focus of the U.S. FOIP has so far been on the policy areas of security and defence.

Given the dominance of the Pentagon in the debate on FOIP, it is not surprising that the focus of FOIP has so far been primarily on the policy areas of security and defence. The Department of Defense focuses on three dimensions: preparedness, partnerships and promoting a networked region. In general, "preparedness" is understood to mean a comprehensive modernisation of the U.S. armed forces, which according to the Pentagon is necessary to secure long-term U.S. influence in the region. This prioritisation is based on the assumption that future conflict and war scenarios will take place where "competing powers" want to expand their areas of influence through military power to the detriment of the United States. In order to be able to react quickly to such scenarios, the expansion of military capabilities is to be promoted in close cooperation with partners such as Japan and Australia.

The "partnerships" dimension focuses primarily on strengthening the existing system of bilateral military alliances with Asian states such as Japan or South Korea — but also on expanding this system through closer cooperation with established partners such as Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand and Mongolia. For South Asia, in addition to promoting an "important defence partnership" with India, the aim is to intensify cooperation with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal. The same applies to the Southeast Asian states Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei Darussalam and the West Pacific island states. Foreign military sales are envisaged as the main instrument for consolidating existing partnerships and establishing new ones. In addition to the sale of U.S. military technology to partners, military aid, joint manoeuvres, and training programs for (foreign) military personnel in the United States are listed.[22] However, states such as Cambodia, Laos or some Pacific island states with which there is no active military cooperation to date or that, like Cambodia in 2017, have unilaterally ended military cooperation with the United States are also mentioned in this context.[23]

In 2017 and 2018, criticism was repeatedly voiced, especially by Southeast Asian states, because the FOIP was (until then) almost exclusively based on bilateral alliances. In 2019, the United States responded to this by undertaking to "promote a networked region" by expanding tripartite and multilateral commitments and establishing a "networked security architecture" spanning the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN is to be at the centre of this multilateral dimension,[24] drawing on established multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). However, no new multilateral initiatives in security policy are planned under the label "FOIP".[25] Rather, existing multilateral initiatives, such as the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), have been subsumed under the FOIP label, quasi retroactively.[26]

Another focus of the FOIP is on economic cooperation with the countries of the region and infrastructure development within the region. The FOIP Report of the State Department devotes most of its attention to this cooperation. Here, too, there is a mixture of already existing measures, subsequently combined under the FOIP umbrella, and new initiatives.

20 U.S. Embassy Vietnam, "Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper Remarks at Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam" (see note 16).

21 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 13.

22 The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 13), 22.

23 Ibid., 40.

24 U.S. Embassy Vietnam, "Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper Remarks at Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam" (see note 16); U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 7.

25 The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 13), 44—47.

26 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 8.

The principles of good governance and trade appear to be far less developed in terms of the overall content of the FOIP. Even the State Department's report devotes only one page to the area of good governance. Emphasis is placed on the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative (IPTI), which supports the fight against corruption in the region but also aims to promote democracy, youth development and press freedom. Since 2018, the IPTI has contributed over $600 million to addressing these concerns. Under the label of "good governance", this section also lists humanitarian aid for the Rohingya and U.S. support for Myanmar in holding free and fair elections in 2020, but beyond that, this section essentially lists China's authoritarian failures and is limited to the proclamation of supposedly universal norms such as "open societies" and "open markets".[27]

The implementation of "America first" has often led to conflicts with countries in the region in terms of trade policy.

Trade policy is potentially the most problematic part of the FOIP in terms of its external impact. The objective of promoting "free, fair, and reciprocal trade" underscores the Trump administration's understanding of trade policy as something which demands immediate reciprocal action and is guided by the principle of "America first". The corresponding initiatives within the framework of FOIP are therefore aimed at "deploying new and innovative mechanisms to improve market access and level the playing field for U.S. businesses". Among other things, this approach is intended to create incentives for private U.S. companies to invest more heavily in the emerging markets of the region. The only measures explicitly cited are the trade agreement between the United States and Japan and the renegotiation of the free trade agreement between South Korea and the United States.[28] Contrary to expectations in many quarters, it has not yet been possible to conclude a free trade agreement between the United States and India. And the United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade agreement, shortly after Trump took office.

In sum, the implementation of "America first" has often led to conflicts with countries in the region rather than binding the Asian states more closely to the United States in trade policy terms. The FOIP documents make no attempt to outline a regional trade strategy that goes beyond bilateral agreements.

Concrete initiatives and implementation

The analysis of the political context and the declared objectives of FOIP has made it clear that FOIP is primarily a response to China's BRI (see blue box on page 8). This Chinese initiative is currently estimated to comprise a total volume of over $1 trillion and more than 2,200 projects in 87 countries. It has established Beijing as a key player in Asia, particularly in development cooperation.

The FOIP is an attempt to respond to this development through a number of different initiatives. Partners for these initiatives can be found primarily among U.S. allies and, secondarily, among the "strategic partners" of the United States in Asia. In the security policy area, U.S. arms exports to partner countries have been expanded, for example the export of F18 and F16 fighter aircraft to India.[29] In order to be prepared for future conflict scenarios, the United States plans to promote the purchase of new air-to-air missiles, air-to-ground missiles, anti-submarine-warfare systems, missile defence systems and fighter jets in cooperation with Japan and Australia. In addition to the existing U.S. military bases in the region, the Lombrum naval base on the island of Manus is to be expanded in cooperation with Papua New Guinea and Australia.[30]

Cooperation in the security and defence sector has been intensified. One example of this is the training of Sri Lankan security forces by FBI experts in counterterrorism, which has been underway since 2018. In addition, existing forms of cooperation are now declared as FOIP initiatives, such as the annual "Malabar" exercise off the coast of India, in which American, Indian and Japanese naval units have been participating since 2015, or the annual "Chiefs of Defense Conference", renamed the "Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Conference" in 2019. In the context of FOIP policy, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with Japan, India and Australia has also been revived.

27 Ibid., 21.

28 Ibid., 13.

29 CSIS, "Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson" (see note 9).

30 The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 13), 16–19.

The Quad can be regarded as the core of FOIP at the institutional level and was upgraded to ministerial level in 2019. Finally, the United States has stepped up its Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea.

Although ASEAN and its affiliated multilateral forums, such as ARF and EAS, have been described as the institutional core of a FOIP, corresponding U.S. initiatives have not materialized. Not only that: In 2019, the Trump administration snubbed many of its partners in Southeast Asia by sending only the American national security advisor, not even a member of the cabinet, to the EAS summit, which normally takes place at the level of heads of state.

New development cooperation initiatives have also been launched in the context of the FOIP. At the legal level, two initiatives have been adopted: the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act (BUILD Act) and the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA). These initiatives are intended to consolidate the role of the United States as a donor country in Asia and provide an alternative to Chinese development initiatives. The BUILD Act provides for the establishment of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC), which will better coordinate lending to developing countries, especially in Asia and Africa, and provide alternatives to "state-directed initiatives that come with hidden strings attached".[31] In addition, the "Blue Dot Network" is to be set up together with Australia and Japan to establish a network for the certification of such high-quality, transparent infrastructure projects as an alternative to Chinese investments.

However, the $60 billion that has been made available for the IDFC seems like a drop in the ocean compared to BRI.[32] The ARIA, adopted at the end of 2018, will allow the government to spend up to $1.5 billion annually to implement a number of objectives linked to the FOIP concept, such as developing the defence capabilities of U.S. partners or promoting democracy.[33] Other initiatives such as Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (Asia EDGE) and the Indo-Pacific Business Forum (IPBF) are also being implemented. Their aim is to strengthen the role of U.S. investors in the region in geopolitically important areas such as energy and infrastructure and to better coordinate U.S. government policy with U.S. business interests.[34]

A more recent project is the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN), which is designed to support regional infrastructure and connectivity initiatives and thus provide Asian countries with an alternative to BRI. As part of ITAN, a Transaction Advisory Fund (TAF) has been established to help Asian partners assess the financial and environmental impact of infrastructure measures.[35]

Recent initiatives also include the U.S. government's $100 million "Pacific Pledge", a plan to double U.S. development funding for the Pacific states over the next several years. The plan also provides for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to increase its presence in the Western Pacific. In addition, Washington has set up the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) within the framework of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in order to help finance infrastructure measures in the Pacific. Also new is the Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership (PEP), which was set up with the aim of fundamentally improving the power supply in Papua New Guinea together with Australia, Japan and New Zealand.[36]

Ideas on regional order

In the publications of various U.S. government departments, as well as in speeches delivered by U.S. officials on FOIP, there are numerous implicit elements that are not always congruent. Despite these differences, at least three recurring elements can be identified: offering the states of the region an alternative to the Chinese BRI, securing freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, and making trade relations between

31 Bhavan Jaipragas, "Trump Strikes a Blow in US-China Struggle with Build Act to Contain Xi's Belt and Road", *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2018, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2169441/trump-strikes-blow-us-china-struggle-build-act-contain-xis (accessed 29 April 2020).

32 Ibid.

33 Library of Congress, "Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018", Washington, D.C., 31 December 2018, https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2736/text (accessed 29 April 2020).

34 Phuwit Limviphuwat, "American Investors Eye Energy Sector under Asia Edge Initiative", *The Nation*, 21 June 2019, https://www.nationthailand.com/business/30371530 (accessed 29 April 2020).

35 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12), 15.

36 Ibid., 11.

the Asian states and the United States "free, fair and reciprocal".[37]

For the United States, the implicit core intention of the FOIP is to formulate an interdepartmental response to China's growing influence in the region.

These three elements indicate that for the United States the implicit core intention of the FOIP is to formulate a coherent, interdepartmental response to China's growing influence in the region. Therefore, the FOIP calls for neither a return to the era of "Pax Americana" nor the creation of a changed, alternative model of order. Instead, it is primarily a reactive concept that does not envision a new model of order. It therefore does not mark a new U.S. strategy for Asia. No such claim is formulated and no corresponding capacities and resources are provided for such a strategy. It is also not surprising in this context that the publication of a comprehensive FOIP strategy document, which has been announced several times, has so far failed to materialise.

The FOIP is based on existing, U.S.-dominated, concepts of regional order, based on bilateral alliances and strategic partnerships. The few multilateral elements contained in the documents, such as the emphasis on ASEAN centrality, have been largely ignored. This tendency corresponds not only to the downgrading of the U.S. presence in multilateral forums but also to the neglect of multilateral elements in favour of bilateral "deals".

Thus, while the FOIP on the one hand makes clear the Trump administration's priorities and goals, it cannot, on the other hand, eliminate the divergences between the often normative FOIP rhetoric and the observable actions taken by the U.S. government — for example, with regard to its understanding of free trade and its sceptical attitude towards multilateralism.

Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": From strategy to vision

The term "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" was not coined by U.S. President Donald Trump but has its origins in a speech by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (see timeline on page 12). In 2007, during his first term in office, Abe delivered a speech entitled "Confluence of the Two Seas" to the Indian Congress. In it, he presented his vision of closer political and economic connectivity between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It was a vision based on intensive cooperation among the democratic states of the region, which was to serve as the centre of a network spanning the entire Indian Ocean and the Pacific and make way for a "free flow of persons, goods, capital and knowledge" that would guarantee "freedom and prosperity". According to Abe, the security of the shipping routes is of central strategic importance in this respect. Abe's connectivity concept also emphasises "universal" norms, which are intended to closely link the democracies in the region politically and economically and to regulate the behaviour of non-democratic states, above all China.[38]

Abe's connectivity concept emphasises "universal" norms that closely link the democracies in the Indo-Pacific region.

In this context, Abe also proposed in 2007 to establish the Quad, consisting of Japan, Australia, India and the United States. However, Abe's first term in office lasted only one year, so that the corresponding concepts were only brought to life in his second term of office, which began in 2012.

At the beginning of his second term as Prime Minister of Japan, Abe published an essay entitled "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond" at the end of 2012, in which he revisited earlier ideas. In response to China's "aggressive behaviour" in Asia, he proposed the formation of a democratic coalition composed of Japan, the United States, India and Australia to jointly protect global public goods, especially the freedom of

37 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 12); The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 13); The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

38 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Speech by His Excellency Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India 'Confluence of the Two Seas'", New Delhi, 22 August 2007, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

navigation.[39] This idea was again launched by Abe in a widely acclaimed speech in Nairobi in 2016, in which he spoke of a "union of two free and open oceans and two continents."[40] Subsequently it was given the label "FOIP Strategy".

The "FOIP Strategy"[41] has since found its way into the official discourse and strategy papers of Japan. The alliance with the United States is still regarded as Japan's security guarantee.[42] The Japanese Foreign Ministry summarises the basic principles of FOIP in three core areas: First, maintaining a rules-based order, with the principles of free trade and freedom of navigation as its foundation; second, securing economic prosperity through more physical connectivity through the development of infrastructure, more people-to-people connectivity through the expansion of exchange programs, and institutional connectivity through the harmonisation of global standards and rules; and third, maintaining peace and security through increased security cooperation with the United States, India, Australia and other partners.

Concept, evolution and goals

The above-mentioned core areas of the FOIP have remained unchanged since 2016, including the objective of preserving the freedom of navigation and the rules-based order for the entire Indo-Pacific. Accordingly, Abe described the waters of the Indo-Pacific region as "public goods"[43] that must be protected by compliance with international law, namely the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).[44] Without naming China specifically as an adversary, this emphasis and rhetoric illustrate the goal of containing Beijing.[45] Geographically, Tokyo understands "Indo-Pacific" to span the entire area from the east coast of Africa to the American Pacific coast.

Despite several constants, the "FOIP Strategy" has undergone some innovations since 2016. First of all, it was renamed "FOIP Vision" in September 2018. Since then, Japanese diplomats, as well as Prime Minister Abe, no longer speak of a "strategy" but of a "vision". In addition to this relabeling, the orientation towards China has also changed in terms of content: If Tokyo used the FOIP until 2018 primarily as a containment strategy vis-à-vis China, especially with regard to Beijing's BRI, the rhetoric has changed since 2018. In a speech before the Japanese parliament, Abe indirectly alluded to the possibility that his FOIP vision and China's BRI could coexist and complement each other and entertained the idea of cooperating closely with China in the field of infrastructure development in Asia in the future.[46] So far, however, nothing has been publicly announced about the implementation of such projects.

Since 2018, Japan has made an effort to avoid framing FOIP (any longer) as a containment strategy vis-à-vis China.

At the same time, the importance of normative elements such as "democracy promotion" in the context of FOIP has diminished.[47] While the *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017* stresses the importance of democracy, market economy and international law for maintain-

39 Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond", *Project Syndicate*, 27 December 2012, https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe (accessed 29 April 2020).

40 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development", Nairobi, 27 August 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

41 Ash Rossiter, "The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy and Japan's Emerging Security Posture", *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2018): 113–31.

42 Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?" *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 49–73 (57), https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz241 (accessed 29 April 2020).

43 Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 196th Session of the Diet", Tokyo, 22 January 2018, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/statement/201801/_00002.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

44 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Remarks by Mr. Nobuo Kishi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Indian Ocean Conference 2016", Singapore, 7 October 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000185853.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

45 Yoshihide Soeya, "Indo-Pacific: From Strategy to Vision", in *CSCAP [Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific] Regional Security Outlook 2020*, ed. Ron Huisken (Canberra: CSCAP, 2019), 16–19 (16).

46 Prime Minister of Japan, "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 196th Session of the Diet" (see note 43).

47 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Address by Prime Minister Abe at the Seventy-Third Session of the United Nations General Assembly", New York, 25 September 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/unp_a/page3e_000926.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

ing stability and prosperity in Asia,[48] the *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019* only mentions the latter aspect (international law) in the context of the FOIP.[49] Then Foreign Minister of Japan, Taro Kono, for example, spoke in 2018 merely of a "free and open maritime order based on the rule of law".[50]

This gives the impression that since 2018 Japan has been trying to prevent its own interpretation of the FOIP from being perceived as a containment strategy towards China. According to observers, the reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, relations between Japan and China have been warming up again since 2018.[51] On the other hand, South and Southeast Asian partners have criticised the initiative launched by Abe; in their view, it was too strongly anti-Chinese and security policy oriented.[52]

This change has been reflected in government documents and declarations identifying the key policy areas for FOIP: Whereas in 2016 and 2017 the FOIP was associated primarily with security policy threats, more recently aspects such as "connectivity", "infrastructure expansion", "national development" and "economic growth" have also been playing a role. Hard security policy issues, such as the maritime conflicts with China in the East and South China Seas or the expansion and modernisation of the Japanese armed forces, have receded somewhat into the background from 2018 onwards.[53]

Concrete initiatives and implementation

However, this shift is not only of a rhetorical nature; it is also reflected in the concrete initiatives thus far planned or launched by Japan as part of FOIP. The vast majority of these projects are related to Tokyo's declared goal of optimising connectivity between the two oceans. This specifically means expanding trade and investment through improved infrastructure.[54]

The ADB estimated in 2015 that Asia would need $26 trillion in infrastructure investment over the course of the following 15 years. Under Abe's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiative, Tokyo has earmarked $200 billion for projects from Africa to the South Pacific. Japanese "Quality Infrastructure" projects are designed to offer states in the region a fairer, more transparent, efficient and sustainable alternative to Chinese infrastructure projects.[55]

Corresponding Japanese projects include "soft loans" for port facilities in Mozambique ($230 million), Kenya ($300 million) and Madagascar ($400 million); the construction of a "trans-harbour link" in Mumbai, India, for $2.2 billion; a container terminal in Yangon, Myanmar, for $200 million; and a port with a special economic zone in Dawei, Myanmar, for $800 million. In Cambodia, Japan has contributed over $200 million to the expansion of the container port in Sihanoukville.[56] Finally, Japanese investors in southern Bangladesh are to build the port in Matarbari.

In addition, "Quality Infrastructure" projects can also be found in the railway sector. Japan is financing 80 percent ($8 billion) of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad line, on which high-speed trains are to run after completion, and in Thailand the Bangkok-Chiang Mai line is to be upgraded with Japanese investment. The construction of roads, as in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,

48 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017. Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2016* (Tokyo, 2017), 27.

49 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2019. Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2018* (Tokyo, 2019), 28.

50 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Foreign Policy Speech by Foreign Minister Kono to the 196th Session of the Diet", Tokyo, 22 January 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/unp_a/page3e_000816.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

51 Stephen R. Nagy, "Japan's Precarious Indo-Pacific Balance", *The Japan Times*, 14 November 2019, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/11/14/commentary/japan-commentary/japans-precarious-indo-pacific-balance/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

52 Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question" (see note 42).

53 Prime Minister of Japan, "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 196th Session of the Diet" (see note 43).

54 Axel Berkofsky, *Tokyo's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": Quality infrastructure and defence to the fore*, ARI (Analyses of the Elcano Royal Institute) 34/2019 (Madrid: Elcano Royal Institute, 14 March 2019), http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari34-2019-berkofsky-tokyos-free-and-open-indo-pacific-quality-infrastructure-defence-fore (accessed 29 April 2020).

55 Tomohiro Osaki, "In blow to China, Japan's 'quality infrastructure' to get endorsement at Osaka G20", *The Japan Times Online*, 25 June 2019, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/25/business/economy-business/blow-china-japans-quality-infrastructure-get-endorsement-osaka-g20/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

56 Chhut Bunthoeun, "Japan to Provide $1.8m in Aid to Expand Port", *Khmer Times*, 30 May 2019, https://www.khmertimeskh.com/609009/japan-to-provide-1-8m-in-aid-to-expand-port/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

or of power stations, as in Tanzania and India, is also being promoted.

As part of the "Japan-Mekong Connectivity Initiative", work began in 2016 to establish an economic corridor that will run from the Vietnamese port of Da Nang via Laos and Thailand to Myanmar. Japan is also financing an economic corridor further south, linking Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam and Dawei in Myanmar. Last but not least, Tokyo announced at the end of 2019 its intention to participate in the EU's Asia Connectivity Strategy.

In terms of trade policy, Tokyo has taken the lead in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement since the United States withdrew from the agreement in 2017. In March 2018, the eleven remaining states signed the free trade agreement in Tokyo, now called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Japan has also played an important role in previous rounds of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations.[57] This regional free trade agreement is intended to include China and India, among others; India, however, broke off negotiations in 2019. The free trade agreement with the EU (Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement) must also be mentioned.

In addition to promoting "Quality Infrastructure" and trade policy initiatives, Japan has underlined its importance as a key donor country in the field of development cooperation. The focus of the *White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017* directly follows the priorities of the FOIP strategy.[58] Tokyo has increased its development funds since 2016 — in some cases substantially — for projects in countries in the West and South Pacific, Southeast and South Asia as well as Africa.

At the security and defence policy level, Japan's focus has been on strengthening its military alliance with the United States and reviving the Quad. In addition, bilateral dialogues in security and defence policy have been expanded; for example, in October 2018 India and Japan initiated regular "2+2" dialogues (between their respective foreign and defence ministers). In this context, negotiations were launched in 2018 on an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which is intended to facilitate the mutual use of military bases for logistical purposes (food, ammunition and fuel), as well as joint manoeuvres, with the possibility of including third countries such as the United States.

In recent years, the navies and coast guards of Japan, India, Australia and the United States have conducted a series of joint manoeuvres and exercises in the South China Sea. Naval exercises have also been conducted with some ASEAN states, such as Vietnam. Japanese warships have called at ports in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Defence policy training of partners is also part of Japan's security policy initiatives in the context of FOIP; the country has, for example, donated coast guard patrol boats to Sri Lanka, Vietnam and the Philippines. At the diplomatic level, bilateral collaboration with India, the United States, Australia and other partners has dominated, though there have been some smaller multilateral initiatives, such as Tokyo's support for the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM).

Ideas on regional order

The transition of the Japanese FOIP from strategy to vision, along with Japan's focus on infrastructure projects, trade policy initiatives and development cooperation, make it evident that Tokyo's current interpretation and implementation of the FOIP is driven by economic ideas and initiatives rather than by security policy. It is clear that from a Japanese perspective FOIP is in many respects also intended to provide an alternative to China's BRI, though Tokyo has gradually warmed up to BRI from 2018 onwards. It is notable that Tokyo has always avoided aggressively presenting its FOIP vision as a containment strategy towards China.

Tokyo has so far refrained from securitising its relations with its big neighbour, despite its concerns about China's foreign policy ambitions and the domestic political changes in the country (including the Uyghur problem and Hong Kong). For the time being, the economic interdependencies between Tokyo and Beijing appear too close. In this respect, Tokyo's interpretation of FOIP differs markedly from that of Washington and Canberra.

57 RCEP: an agreement between the ten ASEAN countries and the six partner countries China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

58 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's International Cooperation. White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017* (Tokyo, 2018), https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/page22e_000860.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

Many aspects of Japan's FOIP vision seem like a makeover of old foreign policy principles and approaches.

In this respect, many aspects of the FOIP vision seem like a makeover of old Japanese foreign policy principles and approaches, with emphasis placed on long-established principles such as the rules-based international order, the protection of free trade and the centrality of Japan's alliance with the United States. Observers have called on Japan to develop its own vision of regional order in order to facilitate its transition from a "rules promoter" to a "rules maker". This hardly seems feasible within the framework of Japan's current FOIP vision.[59]

Australia and the Indo-Pacific as a solid regional reference framework

For Australia, the Indo-Pacific has become *the* regional frame of reference for its own geographical and strategic positioning since 2013; the term "Indo-Pacific" is firmly anchored in official documents. It was used as early as 2012 in a government *White Paper*, but only twice, to denote a geographical arc spanning the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean.[60] The Australian Defence White Paper of 2013,[61] in contrast, devotes an entire chapter to the concept (with a total of 56 mentions). Its use continues in the Defence White Paper of 2016[62] and the Foreign Policy White Paper of 2017.[63] Since then, the concept has been a central theme in speeches by politicians[64] and is also discussed in academic circles.

In 2012, Rory Medcalf, one of Australia's best-known security policy experts, presented a groundbreaking article on the term "Indo-Pacific".[65] In recent years, academic texts on Australia's strategic positioning have focused on the Sino-American conflict, power shifts in the region and the rules-based international order — all of which are discussed within the framework of the Indo-Pacific.[66] Two predominant traditions in Australia's foreign policy are highlighted in these texts, both of which employ the concept of "Indo-Pacific": Australia as a middle power on the one hand; and as a "dependent ally" of the United States on the other.[67]

Concept, evolution and goals

When Rory Medcalf's revised article was published in 2013, the terminology was still in flux, because in American politics the term "Asia-Pacific" was still predominantly used. For Medcalf, the term "Indo-Pacific"

59 Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question" (see note 42), 72.

60 Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century. White Paper* (Canberra, October 2012), 80, https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/australia_in_the_asian_century_white_paper.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

61 Australian Government, Department of Defence, *2013 Defence White Paper* (Canberra, 2013), https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

62 Australian Government, Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra, 2016), https://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

63 Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. Opportunity, Security, Strength* (Canberra, November 2017), https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

64 Prime Minister of Australia, "'Where We Live' Asialink Bloomberg Address", Sydney, 26 June 2019, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/where-we-live-asialink-bloomberg-address (accessed 29 April 2020); Minister of Defence Senator Linda Reynolds, Speech at the18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019 [International Institute for Strategic Studies], Singapore, 2 June 2019, https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2019 (accessed 29 April 2020); Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Frances Adamson, "Shaping Australia's Role in Indo-Pacific Security in the Next Decade", Canberra, 2 October 2018, https://dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/shaping-australias-role-in-indo-pacific-security-in-the-next-decade.aspx (accessed 29 April 2020); Idem., "The Indo-Pacific: Australia's Perspective", Kuala Lumpur, 29 April 2019, https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/the-indo-pacific-australias-perspective (accessed 29 April 2020).

65 Rory Medcalf, "Indo-Pacific: What in a Name?" *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute), 16 August 2012, https://archive.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indo-pacific-what-name (accessed 29 April 2020). A revised version was published under the title "The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?" *The American Interest* 9, no. 2 (2013), https://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/10/10/the-indo-pacific-whats-in-a-name/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

66 A critical assessment of Australian rhetoric and practice can be found in Brendan Taylor, "Is Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?" *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 95—109.

67 Ibid., 95.

makes sense: East Asia and South Asia can no longer be considered separately, and the maritime domain has become increasingly important for trade and competition. Particularly in view of the growing dependence of China, Japan and India on the Middle East and Africa, Medcalf sees the Indo-Pacific as a geo-economic reality that was acknowledged as early as 2005, when India was included in the first East Asia Summit (EAS). The Indo-Pacific region is not characterised by a uniform security architecture, however, but rather by a multitude of regional, minilateral and bilateral formats.[68]

Australia's interpretation of the Indo-Pacific has evolved. In 2013 it was seen as an "emerging" region and a natural extension of the "wider Asia-Pacific region". By 2016/2017 the Indo-Pacific had become a fixed regional reference point for Australia's foreign, economic and security policy. Geographically, the area extends "from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, linked by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States".[69]

Australia's Indo-Pacific concept puts maritime Southeast Asia at the centre.

Official Australian documents always refer to the central position of maritime Southeast Asia as a link and bridge between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, thereby reassuring the ASEAN states that ASEAN is to remain central within the new construct. This is not least due to the fact that Indonesia has been and remains one of Australia's most important partners in the region. Thus for Australia, too, long-standing priorities in foreign policy (Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea) continue to exist under the new frame of reference.

Australia sees two things as crucial for the stability of the Indo-Pacific: the continued presence of the United States and the commitment of the regional states to a rules-based order. Government documents speak of a "secure, open, prosperous Indo-Pacific region", i.e. they do not adopt the U.S. formulation of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP). Australia is pragmatic, says the 2017 White Paper on Foreign Policy; it does not want to impose its values on others but is also determined to stand up for liberal institutions, universal values and human rights.[70] To this end, Australia wants to work more closely with the major democracies in the region, bilaterally and in small groups.

Apart from the United States, Japan, Indonesia, India and South Korea are explicitly mentioned here, as are regional organisations and minilateral formats such as the EAS, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The growing trilateral cooperation with the United States and Japan on the one hand and with Japan and India on the other is also emphasised. In contrast, the Quad, i.e. the security cooperation among these four states — initiated as early as 2007 but only short-lived and revived in 2017 — is not prominently mentioned in the official documents.

For Australia, the presence of the United States in the region and their alliance remains very important.

For Australia, the presence of the United States in the region and their bilateral alliance remain essential as a stabilising force. This was also expressed in the speech by Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2019 in Singapore. In her speech, she underlined that China should make more contributions to peace and stability.[71]

Concrete initiatives and implementation

In June 2019, Reynolds outlined a number of concrete contributions that Australia was making, particularly in the South Pacific (infrastructure and patrol boats) and in maritime Southeast Asia (military training and education for 1,000 participants each year, strategic defence dialogues with all ASEAN states, and the annual "Indo-Pacific Endeavour" military exercise since 2017).[72]

There are also joint infrastructure initiatives with the United States (Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations, July 2018) and with the United States

68 Medcalf, "The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name?" (see note 65).

69 Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 63), footnote on p. 1.

70 Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 63), 11.

71 Minister of Defence Senator Linda Reynolds, Speech at the 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue (see note 64).

72 Ibid.

and Japan (since November 2018),[73] with a geographical focus on a number of islands in the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea (April 2019).[74] At the APEC summit in Papua New Guinea in 2018, Australia and the United States announced plans for the joint expansion of the Lombrum naval base on the island of Manus.[75] In November 2019, the United States, Japan and Australia announced the "Blue Dot Initiative" in the margins of the ASEAN summit.[76] A statement to this effect by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), however, went into little more detail than a statement made a year earlier.[77]

Australia's infrastructure cooperation with the United States and Japan emphasises quality ("global gold standard"), transparency, sustainability, private sector involvement and debt avoidance[78] — in contrast to China's BRI, which has been criticised in particular for driving other countries into a debt trap and failing to comply with any of the above standards.[79]

73 Australian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "US, Japan, Australia Reaffirm Commitment to Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Development", Media Release, Tokyo, 25 June 2019, https://dfat.gov.au/news/media/Pages/us-japan-australia-reaffirm-commitment-to-indo-pacific-infrastructure-development.aspx (accessed 29 April 2020).

74 One concrete project involves submarine cables connecting Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. See David Brewster, "A 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and What It Means for Australia", *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute), 7 March 2018, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/free-and-open-indo-pacific-and-what-it-means-australia (accessed 29 April 2020).

75 Taylor, "Is Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?" (see note 66), 108.

76 On Security cooperation with the United States and Japan see also the section "Concrete initiatives and implementation" in the chapters on the United States (p. 12ff.) and Japan (p. 16ff.).

77 For a critical evaluation of the "Blue Dot" initiative see Peter McCawley, "Connecting the Dots on the Blue Dot Network", *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute), 12 November 2019, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/connecting-dots-blue-dot-network (accessed 29 April 2020).

78 See Jeffrey Wilson, "Diversifying Australia's Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Diplomacy", *Australian Outlook* (Australian Institute of International Affairs), 16 April 2019, http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/diversifying-australias-indo-pacific-infrastructure-diplomacy/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

79 On joint initiatives with the United States in the area of infrastructure see also the section "Concrete initiatives and implementation" in the chapter on the United States (p. 12ff.).

Finally, the "New Colombo Plan", which was launched as early as 2014, enables young Australians to study or take part in internships in a total of 40 countries in the Indo-Pacific region.[80]

Ideas on regional order

Australia's stated goal is to maintain a rules-based order that will provide for lasting peace in the Indo-Pacific region — a region where the rights of all are respected and open markets allow the free flow of goods, capital and ideas.[81] Official documents emphasise that it is not in Australia's interest (nor in the interest of other states in the region) to stand by and watch the Sino-American relationship to continue to deteriorate, as this would cause collateral damage. Faced with the prospect of having to choose at some point between the United States as a security partner and China as a principal economic partner, Canberra prefers to maintain the status quo. And although the status quo is becoming more complex and increasingly contested, Australia is confident that the situation need not get out of control if everyone acts in their own interests.

Despite Donald Trump's disruptive policies, the alliance with the United States has not really been called into question, while relations with other democracies and central powers in the Indo-Pacific, notably Japan, appear to be secondary to maintaining common rules. Australia's vision of the Indo-Pacific puts ASEAN at the centre as a narrow geographical frame of reference for Australian foreign and security policy. For this reason, the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (AOIP) is explicitly supported.[82]

India's "Act East" policy and the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific experienced one of its constitutive moments in India in August 2007, when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered his speech to

80 Australian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "About the New Colombo Plan" [n.d.], https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/about/Pages/about.aspx (accessed 29 April 2020).

81 Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 63), 4.

82 Prime Minister of Australia, "'Where We Live'" (see note 64). On ASEAN and the "Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" see the next subchapter (p. 23).

parliament on the "confluence of the two seas".[83] Nevertheless, very few official Indian documents on the Indo-Pacific have been issued to date, although it should be noted that the Indian government does not publish white papers on foreign or defence policy. A more specific document, the *Indian Maritime Security Strategy* of 2015, refers in its introduction to a shift in global focus from the "Euro-Atlantic" to the "Indo-Pacific" and links the latter concept to India's "Act East" policy.[84] The *National Security Strategy*, commissioned by the Indian opposition party Congress and published in March 2019, also mentions "Indo-Pacific" seven times. Among other things, it calls for priority to be given to harmonizing the various views of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic framework.[85]

Representatives of Indian think tanks regularly discuss both the term "Indo-Pacific" and India's handling of it; they have also identified contradictions and ambiguities in India's strategy.[86] India's "Look East" policy (since 1991) and later "Act East" policy (since 2014), with its focus on Southeast Asia, fits into the wider Indo-Pacific framework, with priority given to strategic and security aspects over economic issues.[87]

Traditional pillars of Indian foreign policy play a central role in the interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept.

Traditional pillars of Indian foreign policy, i.e. non-alignment and strategic autonomy, play a decisive role in India's interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept.[88]

Although it is officially not openly formulated and often even explicitly denied, China is seen as the real driving force behind India's Indo-Pacific concept, just as India's large northeastern neighbour is the unspoken central theme of Indian foreign policy. Three factors are relevant here: India perceives China's policy as "strategic encirclement"; it is concerned about the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea; and it is alarmed about China's strong military presence in the Indian Ocean (e.g. under the guise of fighting piracy).[89]

Concept, evolution and goals

In December 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited India and signed a Joint Declaration with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on India's and Japan's vision for 2025, the "Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World".[90] The next time Abe visited India in September 2017, a second Joint Declaration followed, entitled "Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific".[91] In the paragraph on the common defence of the rules-based order, it was stated that India's "Act East" policy could

83 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Abe Speech 'Confluence of the Two Seas'" (see note 38).

84 Overall the term "Indo-Pacific" appears six times here. See Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, Naval Strategic Publication 1.2 (New Delhi, October 2015), https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020). In contrast, the previous document of 2009 did not mention the "Indo-Pacific".

85 *India's National Security Strategy*, March 2019, 11, https://manifesto.inc.in/pdf/national_security_strategy_gen_hooda.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

86 See, e.g., Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy", *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 75–93.

87 Ibid., 78.

88 See, e.g., Nidhi Prasad, *India's Foray into the Indo-Pacific: Embracing Ambiguity through Strategic Autonomy*, 2019, https://www.ide.go.jp/library/Japanese/Publish/Download/Report/2018/pdf/2018_2_40_011_ch07.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

89 Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing" (see note 86), 79. The author describes India's policy as "evasive balancing", i.e. India tries to strengthen security cooperation with other states in the region while at the same time assuring Beijing that this is not directed against China.

90 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World", New Delhi, 12 December 2015, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint_Statement_on_India_and_Japan_Vision_2025_Special_Strategic_and_Global_Partnership_Working_Together_for_Peace_and_Prosperity_of_the_IndoPacific_R (accessed 29 April 2020).

91 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan – India Joint Statement. Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific", Gandhinagar, 14 September 2017, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000289999.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

be aligned with Japan's strategy[92] of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" by developing maritime security cooperation, improving connectivity in the wider Indo-Pacific region, strengthening cooperation with ASEAN, and conducting regular exchanges between strategists and experts from the two countries.

In June 2018 Prime Minister Modi was invited to deliver the opening speech and keynote address at the Shangri-La Security Conference in Singapore. This speech[93] is still considered an important reference point for India's understanding of the Indo-Pacific concept. The United States expected Modi to make a strong commitment to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP),[94] but instead he focused his remarks on ASEAN, spoke of security and growth for the entire region, and emphasised India's involvement in the regional ASEAN-centred organisations (EAS, ADMM-Plus). In addition to Southeast Asia, Modi highlighted India's transformed relationship with Japan and new impetus in relations with South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. He also referred to India's intensified relations with Africa, a development manifested, for example, in a summit with African states.[95] India's strategic partnership with Russia was cited as a demonstration of India's strategic autonomy (both states advocating a strong multipolar world order). Modi said that India's global strategic partnership with the United States had overcome earlier hesitations and reservations, and that the two countries shared the vision of an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. India's relationship with China was characterised as the most complex, with trade on the rise and both countries taking a responsible approach to border issues.[96] One central assertion made in the speech was that India saw the Indo-Pacific region neither as a strategy nor as an exclusive club or a group striving for dominance or aligned against a single country.

Concrete initiatives and implementation

While the Indian government is reserved in its rhetoric and advocates an inclusive version of the Indo-Pacific, a number of steps have been taken to build a counterweight to China ("soft balancing", "evasive balancing"[97]). Some of these steps were initiated before the Indo-Pacific became the frame of reference.

For India the focus is on intensifying security cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia as well as with some states in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia).[98] India's navy cooperates with states in the region in joint exercises, including in the field of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Since 2015 Japan has also regularly participated in the maritime "Malabar" military exercise, which has existed since the 1990s and was initially conducted bilaterally between India and the United States. India and Indonesia share a common vision of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Although India claims it is seeking economic or free trade agreements with the region within the framework of the Indo-Pacific concept, it withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November 2019. The main reason for this withdrawal was the fear of an even higher trade deficit with China and of nationalist resistance at home.[99]

92 At that time in Japan the term "strategy" was still used; from September 2018 onwards it was called "vision" (see chapter on Japan, p. 15ff).

93 For the full text of Modi's speech see Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue", Singapore, 1 June 2018, https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri_La_Dialogue_June_01_2018 (accessed 29 April 2020).

94 Discussions of GW on the fringes of the Shangri-La Dialogue.

95 India's definition of the geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific thus most closely matches that of France. On India and Africa see in detail Christian Wagner, *India's Africa Policy*, SWP Research Paper 9/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2019), doi: 10.18449/2019RP09.

96 The Security dialogue in Singapore took place a few days after an informal meeting between Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Wuhan. The talks between the two leaders also focused on the disputed land border between the two countries, where there had been clashes the previous year.

97 Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing" (see note 86).

98 On Security cooperation with the United States and Japan see also the section "Concrete initiatives and implementation" in the chapters on the United States (p. 12ff.) and Japan (p. 16ff.).

99 Mie Oba, "The Implications of India's RCEP Withdrawal", *The Diplomat*, 14 November 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/the-implications-of-indias-rcep-withdrawal/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

As India is critical of China's BRI, it has been pursuing infrastructure partnerships within the Indo-Pacific concept, especially with Japan (projects in India and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor).[100] Like the North-South Corridor (with Russia and Iran), these partnerships are designed as alternatives to BRI. However, there are considerable obstacles to the realisation of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.[101] So far, India is not participating in the "Blue Dot Initiative" of the United States, Japan and Australia.

Ideas on regional order

Modi's speech at the 2018 Shangri-La Security Conference clearly outlined a vision of the Indo-Pacific that is oriented towards the status quo. He did not question the centrality of ASEAN and stressed the importance of establishing a free, open and inclusive region where all powers abide by the rules. He emphasised that equal access to sea and airspace on the basis of international law was essential and that connectivity played an important role while also insisting on the observance of certain principles such as transparency and the avoidance of debt. Modi stressed, however, that such ideas presupposed that there could be no return to great power rivalry and that India's friendships were not "alliances of containment". Indirectly, criticism of China can be seen here, albeit in a veiled form, both regarding the demand for "equal access" for all and on the issue of connectivity.

The basic dilemma of Indian foreign policy continues to lie in striking a balance between conflict and cooperation with China.

The main goal of Indian policy in the Indo-Pacific is to prevent China from dominating the region. Experts interpret India's policy as an essential component of a policy of counterbalancing China, even if India's government is at the same time signalling its willingness to cooperate with its neighbour.[102] This is demonstrated not least by its membership in organisations that China has played a key role in initiating or shaping, such as the BRICS group of states[103] with its development bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The basic dilemma of Indian foreign policy continues to lie in striking a balance between conflict and cooperation with China, i.e. between preserving credibility with India's actual Indo-Pacific partners (the United States, Japan and Australia) on the one hand and simultaneously maintaining constructive relations with China on the other.

The "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific"

Until June 2019, the term "Indo-Pacific" was not used in official ASEAN statements and documents. However, it must be mentioned in this context that the Indonesian Foreign Ministry presented concrete ideas for an "Indo-Pacific Friendship and Cooperation Treaty" as early as May 2013. This treaty was presented by then Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa as a possible new foreign policy "paradigm". It was designed to address the changing geopolitical and geo-economic framework of the region and to contain the resultant interstate rivalries. Security in Asia was to be understood as a jointly administered public good to be safeguarded by the Indo-Pacific Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.[104] However, the initiative was met with little enthusiasm outside Indonesia at the time.

Thus, even though ideas on the Indo-Pacific have been circulating within ASEAN for years, at least internally, the "Outlook on the Indo-Pacific" (AOIP), which appeared in June 2019, can primarily be seen as a reply to the Trump administration's FOIP strategy and to the responses of other states in the region such as Australia, Japan and India.

The ASEAN states felt compelled to launch their own vision of the Indo-Pacific in order to be able to

100 On joint initiatives with Japan in the field of infrastructure see also the section "Concrete initiatives and implementation" in the chapter on Japan (p. 16ff.).

101 See Aman Thakker and Elliot Silverberg, "India and Japan Eye the Dragon in the Room", *Foreign Policy*, 20 November 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/20/china-war-navy-india-japan-eye-dragon-in-the-room/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

102 See Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing" (see note 86), 91ff.

103 Consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

104 CSIS, "An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific. Keynote Address by His Excellency Dr. R. M. Marty M. Natalegawa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia", Washington, D.C., 16 May 2013, http://csis.org/files/attachments/130516_MartyNatalegawa_Speech.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

intervene in regional debates on the Indo-Pacific. Behind this lie, on the one hand, historical factors, such as the fear that ASEAN states could become the playground of great powers or the desire to establish ASEAN as a central anchor of regional security cooperation (ASEAN centrality);[105] but current factors also play a role, including concerns about the negative political and economic effects an escalation of the Sino-American rivalry could have on ASEAN.[106] The states of Southeast Asia, partly because of their geographical location between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, felt impelled to challenge the competing ideas of order of the two great powers, China (BRI) and the United States (FOIP), by formulating their own response.

Concept, evolution and goals

According to the AOIP, ASEAN's main interest is to determine its own economic and security structures, thereby ensuring that they bring "peace, security, stability and prosperity to the people of Southeast Asia".[107] Against this background, ASEAN defines "Indo-Pacific" less as a territorially clearly delineated (geopolitical) space, but rather as an interdependent, closely linked region without clearly defining its borders yet with ASEAN placed at its centre. "Dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry" and "development and prosperity for all" are also stressed as essential elements.[108]

ASEAN's outlook represents an inclusive understanding of the Indo-Pacific as a connectivity concept open to all states in the region.

This emphasis is based on an inclusive understanding of "Indo-Pacific" as a connectivity concept that is unequivocally open to all states in the region, including China. Accordingly, the document does not even mention a single country by name — neither the United States nor China nor other actors such as Japan, India or Russia.[109] Other regional organisations, however, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), are specifically listed as potential ASEAN partners.

The document repeatedly underlines the inclusive nature of AOIP; furthermore, it does not include any military aspects.[110] In this context it must be mentioned, however, that AOIP first and foremost constitutes a kind of "lowest common denominator" at the regional level. Individual ASEAN members have responded quite differently to the initiatives of the major powers (BRI and FOIP). For example, Cambodia and Laos have very close economic and political ties to China. Indonesia, on the other hand, attaches importance to preserving its strategic autonomy and the principle of ASEAN centrality vis-à-vis external actors.[111]

The objectives laid down in the AOIP essentially reflect the well-known core principles of ASEAN: deepening of regional integration processes, maintenance of a rules-based regional order, peaceful conflict resolution, multilateralism, and strengthening international law. No objectives are mentioned that go beyond these core principles. Therefore, the AOIP also refrains from establishing new mechanisms or institutions. Instead, it focuses on strengthening ASEAN-led mechanisms such as EAS, ARF, ADMM-Plus, the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).[112]

The policy areas identified by the AOIP as significant areas of cooperation include the maritime domain, connectivity under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025), economic cooperation and cooperation to achieve the Sustainable Development

105 Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia. Analyzing Regional Security Strategies", *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2008): 113–57, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2008.32.3.13 (accessed 29 April 2020).

106 Jonathan Stromseth, *Don't Make Us Choose. Southeast Asia in the Throes of US-China Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, October 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/research/dont-make-us-choose-southeast-asia-in-the-throes-of-us-china-rivalry/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

107 ASEAN, *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (Bangkok, 23 June 2019), 1.

108 Ibid., 2.

109 Amitav Acharya, "Why ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook Matters", *East Asia Forum*, 11 August 2019, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/11/why-aseans-indo-pacific-outlook-matters/print/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

110 Ibid.

111 Retno Marsudi, "Indonesia: Partner for Peace, Security, Prosperity", *The Jakarta Post*, 11 January 2018, https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/01/10/full-text-indonesia-partner-for-peace-security-prosperity.html (accessed 29 April 2020).

112 ASEAN, *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (see note 107), 2.

Goals (SDGs).[113] ASEAN should continue to play a "central role" in the evolving regional architecture of Southeast Asia. Only in this way can it guarantee inclusivity and act as an "honest broker" among competing interests.[114] So far, ASEAN has not launched any independent initiatives or projects as part of the AOIP.

Ideas on regional order

The contents and goals of the AOIP therefore offer little that is new: ASEAN has followed this same approach for decades. Neither in terms of its normative orientation nor in terms of the favoured cooperation mechanisms does it go beyond already existing ASEAN agendas. Critics have therefore complained that the AOIP contains no new strategic concept for dealing with the Sino-American great power rivalry, let alone new ideas for ordering the region. They argue that it is first and foremost an attempt by ASEAN and its member states to give themselves a voice in the increasingly loud debate on the future of the region.[115] In the words of a leading Indonesian diplomat, the AOIP constitutes "a response to the growing challenges stemming from external pressures that could threaten ASEAN's unity, undermine ASEAN's relevance and corrode ASEAN's centrality".[116]

Despite the use of the term "Indo-Pacific" in the title, the AOIP is by no means an endorsement of the FOIP. In contrast to the FOIP, the AOIP is not directed against China but includes all states in the region without exception. Moreover, because of its emphasis on the "ASEAN Way" and its inclusive orientation, the AOIP is unobjectionable to other actors and does not interfere with their interpretation of the Indo-Pacific.

The AOIP is based on the idea of a multilateral, inclusive security architecture for the region with ASEAN at its centre.

The ASEAN interpretation of the Indo-Pacific offers a conceptual space for all actors — provided they are willing to accept the multilateral regional security architecture with ASEAN at its core inherent in this interpretation. The AOIP appears to be ASEAN's attempt to respond to the concerns of many in Southeast Asia that the region could be split into two hostile camps. As a result, the AOIP focuses primarily on general goals and norms rather than on concrete, practice-oriented proposals for resolving problems.[117]

Consequently, the AOIP is primarily "an attempt to reclaim the geopolitical narrative amid the strategic rivalry between China and the United States",[118] an approach that is already bearing its first small fruits: Tokyo revised its FOIP concept at the end of 2018, adding a paragraph on the importance of regional, ASEAN-led multilateral organisations; and ASEAN was given prominent mention in connection with the Indo-Pacific in a Joint Statement by Prime Minister Modi and President Trump published during Trump's recent visit to India.[119]

Interim conclusions

The comparative case analysis has shown that the term "Indo-Pacific" is now used by a whole range of actors with very different foreign and security policy traditions, doctrines and capacities; even the geographical definitions vary considerably (see map on

113 Ibid., 3.

114 Ibid., 1.

115 Prashanth Parameswaran, "Assessing ASEAN's New Indo-Pacific Outlook", *The Diplomat*, 24 June 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/assessing-aseans-new-indo-pacific-outlook/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

116 Rizal Sukma, *Indonesia, ASEAN, and the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Necessities or Norm-Setting Exercise?* (Jakarta: CSIS, 28 August 2019), https://csis.or.id/events/indonesia-asean-and-the-indo-pacific-strategic-necessities-or-norm-setting-exercise/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

117 Mie Oba, "ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Concept and the Great Power Challenge", *The Diplomat*, 17 July 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/aseans-indo-pacific-concept-and-the-great-power-challenge/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

118 Hui Yee Tan, "Asean Issues Collective Vision for Indo-Pacific as It Attempts to Reclaim Geopolitical Narrative", *The Straits Times*, 23 June 2019, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-issues-collective-vision-for-indo-pacific-as-it-attempts-to-reclaim-geopolitical (accessed 29 April 2020).

119 The White House, "Joint Statement: Vision and Principles for the United States—India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership", Washington, D.C., 25 February 2020, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-vision-principles-united-states-india-comprehensive-global-strategic-partnership/ (accessed 29 April 2020).

page 10). It is therefore not surprising that, despite similar uses of the term, interpretations and emphases differ widely. In short, there are major differences between what, for example, the United States and ASEAN countries mean when they use the term "Indo-Pacific". The Trump administration's FOIP is resolutely opposed to China's growing influence in the region and aims to contain it, while the AOIP of the ASEAN states directly includes China.

The various conceptions or understandings are also clearly reflected in the corresponding priorities and initiatives. While one of Japan's priorities is the conclusion of multilateral free trade agreements, for example, India views such efforts rather ambivalently and withdrew from the RCEP negotiations at the end of 2019. The Trump administration is also opposed to multilateral free trade agreements but is seeking to conclude bilateral agreements.

Differences also exist in the weighting of individual policy areas. The strong focus on security and defence policy in Washington is particularly striking here, whereas Japan, Australia and India have so far attached greater importance to areas such as infrastructure development and connectivity. This weighting is also reflected in the approaches chosen: All actors except ASEAN (which is concerned with maintaining its own centrality) have so far refrained from pursuing multilateral approaches to security policy, though all actors rhetorically stress the importance of existing regional forums such as ARF and EAS. In terms of infrastructure policy, the approaches chosen are mostly bi- or minilateral. In economic policy, on the other hand, all actors, with the exception of the United States and India, prefer predominantly multilateral approaches.

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals some commonalities: All of the actors examined refer positively, at least in their rhetoric, to the rules-based international order and international norms, for example the freedom of navigation. Furthermore, all of them have committed themselves to improving the regional infrastructure and expanding connectivity, even if their weighting varies. With the exception of the United States, all actors directly or indirectly reject the securitisation of the Indo-Pacific, especially with regard to its economic dimension. Moreover, at least in the official documents, care is taken to avoid espousing concepts that are openly directed against China. For this reason, none of the actors under consideration, apart from the United States, is striving for economic decoupling from China, at least for the time being. And in the area of security policy, with the exception of ASEAN, all countries involved favour "balancing" (some softer, some harder) vis-à-vis Beijing.

The various Indo-Pacific concepts contain very few new ideas on how to deal with the rise of China.

Finally, the countries involved are united by the perception that the current status quo is fragile in many respects. Nevertheless, the various Indo-Pacific concepts provide few new ideas as to how China's rise could be managed more robustly. In general, it can be said that "Indo-Pacific" is always primarily conceived by all actors as a response to the challenges associated with China's rise. In its various forms, "Indo-Pacific" is therefore not to be understood at present as an independent new strategy or a vision of any kind of revised regional order. Even the FOIPs of Tokyo and Washington do not yet contain any new, concrete blueprints for the region. The term "Indo-Pacific", with the exception of the open confrontation course pursued by the United States, reveals to some extent the feebleness of the actors when it comes to dealing with China.

The table on page 30 provides an overview of the differences and similarities among the Indo-Pacific concepts of the actors studied.

Different concepts of the Indo-Pacific in comparison

Excluding China Including China

Actor	Term/Label	Key elements	Main initiatives	Ideas on regional order
ASEAN	Indo-Pacific	- ASEAN at the heart of regional cooperation ("ASEAN centrality") - Maintaining a rules-based order - Strengthening multilateral cooperation	none	multilateral
Australia	Indo-Pacific	- Maintaining a rules-based order - Enhanced security cooperation in the framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) - Opening up new markets for trade and investment - Improving connectivity through infrastructure development - Providing alternatives to the "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI) - Safeguarding the freedom of navigation	- Infrastructure projects (especially in Papua New Guinea and in the South Pacific) - Expansion of security cooperation with USA, Japan, India - "2+2" dialogues with India, Japan, USA - Revival of the Quad - Strategic dialogues ASEAN countries - Arms exports to partners in Asia - Bilateral and multilateral free-trade agreements	Trade policy: multilateral Security policy: bilateral, minilateral
India	Indo-Pacific	- Maintaining a rules-based order - ASEAN at the heart of regional cooperation ("ASEAN centrality") - Improvement of connectivity through infrastructure expansion - Providing alternatives to BRI - Safeguarding the freedom of navigation	- Infrastructure projects (especially in South Asia) - Asia – Africa Growth Corridor - Expansion of security cooperation with USA, Japan and Australia - "2+2" dialogues with Australia, Japan and USA	Trade policy: bilateral Security policy: multilateral
Japan	Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision (until 2018: *Strategy*)	- Maintaining a rules-based order - Enhanced security cooperation in the framework of the Quad - Opening up new markets for trade and investment - Improvement of connectivity through infrastructure expansion - Providing alternatives to BRI - Safeguarding the freedom of navigation	- Infrastructure projects (especially in East Africa and South and Southeast Asia) - Asia – Africa Growth Corridor - Expansion of security cooperation with USA, India and Australia - "2+2" dialogues with USA, India and Australia - Revival of the Quad - Bilateral and multilateral free-trade agreements	Trade policy: multilateral Security policy: bilateral, minilateral
United States	Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy	- Containment of China - Maintaining a rules-based order - Enhanced security cooperation in the framework of the Quad - Free, fair and reciprocal trade - Improving connectivity through infrastructure development, alternatives to BRI - Safeguarding the freedom of navigation	- Infrastructure projects (especially in the Western Pacific) - Expansion of security cooperation with Japan and Australia and India - "2+2" dialogues with Japan, Australia and India - Revival of the Quad - Modernization of the U.S. Armed Forces - Arms exports to partners in Asia - Bilateral trade agreements	bilateral

Sources: Official documents issued by the respective countries.

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China's Response to the Indo-Pacific

Officially the term "Indo-Pacific" is not (yet) used in China and therefore does not appear in key documents, such as the Defence White Paper of July 2019.[120] The term has been used occasionally in Chinese Foreign Ministry press conferences, but always exclusively by foreign journalists. Chinese officials consistently adhere to the expression "Asia-Pacific" in their answers. As late as March 2018, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared that the concept of the Indo-Pacific was as short-lived as the foam on the two seas.[121]

As far as academic publications are concerned, until 2017 the "Indo-Pacific" was mentioned in relatively few articles (2016: 126; 2017: 202). From 2018 onwards, however, its appearance has increased rapidly (2018: 793; 2019 to October: 612).[122] It has apparently been accepted that this concept is not going to disappear anytime soon — at least not from the foreign and security policy vocabulary of the United States — and that it is important to gain a better grasp of the new construct. The majority of academic papers published by think tanks and universities refer to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy; the roles of Japan, Australia and India are also regularly analysed. A number of texts compare the Indo-Pacific strategy with China's own BRI. In Chinese media, articles by international policy experts also address or comment on the Indo-Pacific concept.[123] A distancing from the term is already evident from the fact that it is placed in quotation marks in most Chinese publications.

The perception of the Indo-Pacific in China

Following Donald Trump's announcement of the new geopolitical construct as an American strategy during his first trip to Asia in November 2017 in Vietnam (APEC summit), the reaction not only of the Chinese leadership but also of Chinese academics was initially reserved.[124] Indeed, Chinese experts and scientists see the concept as still in flux even two years after Trump's announcement.[125] Almost without exception, they

120 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c138253389.htm (accessed 29 April 2020). The speech by Chinese Minister of National Defense, Wei Fenghe, at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue also makes no mention of the term Indo-Pacific, see https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2019 (accessed 29 April 2020).

121 Quoted in Feng Liu, "The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness: China's Responses to the Indo-Pacific Challenge", *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 9–27 (15–16). See also Feng Zhang, "China's Curious Nonchalance towards the Indo-Pacific", *Survival* 61, no. 3 (2019): 187–212.

122 The figures are based on a search in the *Crossasia* portal and refer to publications in the subject area "politics, military, law". The figures quoted in the text above are the result of a full text search. If one narrows this down to articles in which "Indo-Pacific" appears in the title, the numbers are much smaller: 2017: 10; 2018: 86; 2019 until October: 54.

123 See Liu, "The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness" (see note 121), 16.

124 Zhang, "China's Curious Nonchalance" (see note 121), 188, cites four reasons for the calm reaction in China: they have learned their lesson from the overreaction to rebalance/pivot; they believe they have new strategic levers to counter such challenges; they have more financial resources for regional economic initiatives and are open to cooperation with third parties at BRI; they believe they have enough strategic space to navigate the treacherous waters of the Indo-Pacific.

125 See Dingding Chen, "What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy", *The Diplomat Magazine*, 27 April 2018; Zhong Feiteng, "Zhongguo jueqi, Meiguo youxian yu Yin-Tai diqu zhixu de wangluohua" [China's rise, America first, and the interconnectedness of the Indo-Pacific regional order],

interpret the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy as a reaction to global and regional power shifts and to China's rise with its growing economic, political and military influence.

From the Chinese perspective, Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy has replaced the Obama administration's policy of "rebalancing" towards Asia.

From the Chinese perspective, Trump's strategy has replaced the Obama administration's policy of "rebalancing" or reorientation towards Asia ("pivot to Asia").[126] For Chinese analysts, its goal is obvious: the United States is concerned with maintaining its supremacy in the region (and globally) and with slowing down or containing China's further rise.[127]

Only a single article, albeit one that was published as early as 2013, manages to give the Indo-Pacific concept a positive spin by highlighting common interests in the Indian Ocean, for example in the fight against piracy, and thus identifying an opportunity for cooperation for China as well.[128]

When comparing the FOIP and BRI, it is generally emphasised that the latter aims at development, whereas "Indo-Pacific" focuses on security.[129] The most obvious evidence of this dichotomy, according to Chinese observers, can be seen in the quadrilateral security format (Quad) formed by the United States, Japan, Australia and India, which was revived in 2017 after a ten-year hiatus. From the Chinese perspective, the FOIP is a sign that the competition with China is moving away from the level of interests and power to a higher level where principles and order are at stake.[130]

Chinese experts have identified various weaknesses in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. Some doubt the will of the United States to provide the resources necessary to implement the strategy, especially because since Trump's inauguration Washington has been demanding more burden-sharing from its allies (above all Japan and South Korea).[131] Others point out that each of the four protagonists — the United States, Japan, Australia and India — has their own distinct understanding of the Indo-Pacific concept; there is considerable variation not only in their geographical definition but also in their strategic objectives. This lack of a unified concept is seen as a further weakness.[132]

According to the Chinese assessment, India's commitment to the Indo-Pacific is particularly tenuous because India does not want to be instrumentalised by the United States, Japan and Australia. Chinese observers argue that India is not prepared to form an alliance simply because of its identity as a co-founder

Zhongguo Zhanlüe Baogao [Chinese Journal of Strategic Studies], no. 2 (2018): 81—104.

126 See, e.g., Chao Mingwu, "Meiguo zheng fuyu 'Yin-Tai zhanlüe' shizhi neirong" [The United States is currently giving substantial content to the "Indo-Pacific Strategy"], *Shijie Zhishi* [World Affairs], no. 5 (2019): 55—57; He Kai, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" [The American Indo-Pacific strategy and China's institutional balancing], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], no. 1 (2019): 13—21.

127 See, e.g., Zhu Cuiping, "Telangpu zhengfu 'Yin-Tai' zhanlüe jiqi dui Zhongguo anquan de yingxiang" [The Trump administration's "Indo-Pacific" Strategy and its Implications for China's Security], *Nanya Yanjiu* [South Asian Studies], no. 4 (2018): 1—17; Liu Wu and Liu Chengkai, "'Yin-Tai' zhanlüe dui Dongmeng zai Yatai diqu hezuo zhong 'zhongxin diwei' de yingxiang" [The impact of the "Indo-Pacific" strategy on ASEAN's "centrality" in Asia-Pacific cooperation], *Shehuizhuyi Yanjiu* [Socialism Studies], no. 1 (2019): 133—40; Cai Penghong, "Meiguo dui Dongnanya 'zaibaozhang' zhengce xilun" [Analysis of American "Reassurance" policy towards Southeast Asia], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], no. 1 (2019): 30—37.

128 See Li Zhonglin, "'Yin-Tai' bing bu wanquan shi ge huai dongxi" ["Indo-Pacific" is not a totally bad thing], in: *Zhongguo Jingji Zhoukan* [China Economic Weekly], 27 May 2013, n. p.

129 See, e.g., Jia Wenshan, "'Yidai, yilu' ji renlei mingyun gongtongti lilun huayu tixi de jiangou" ["One Belt, One Road" and the construction of the discourse system of the theory of the community of a shared destiny], in: *Xinsilu Xuekan* [Journal of New Silk Roadology], (2018) 3, n. p. The author praises the Chinese initiative, while describing the Indo-Pacific Alliance as a zero-sum game.

130 See, e.g., Zhang Guihong, "'Yidai, yilu' changyi yu Yin-Tai zhanlüe gouxiang de bijiao fenxi" [Comparative analysis of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the Indo-Pacific strategic concept], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], no. 2 (2019): 26—34 (26).

131 See Zhong, "Zhongguo jueqi, Meiguo youxian yu Yin-Tai diqu zhixu de wangluohua" (see note 125).

132 See, e.g., He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126), 17; Zhong, "Zhongguo jueqi, Meiguo youxian yu Yin-Tai diqu zhixu de wangluohua" (see note 125); Miao Ji, "'Yin-Tai' shijiao xia de Ri-Yin guanxi" [Japan-India relations from the "Indo-Pacific" perspective], *Dangdai Shijie* [Contemporary World], no. 2 (2019): 10—15.

of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).[133] They also see few signs of U.S. dominance in the Indian Ocean, citing as indicators the lack of allies and the absence of a strong military presence in the region — unlike in the Pacific and East Asia.[134]

China sees the danger of regional isolation if the ASEAN states join the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific framework.

Moreover, in the assessment of Chinese experts the states in the region do not (or not yet) perceive China as a common threat but rather as an opportunity for development, despite territorial disputes and diverging interests.[135] At the same time, there is recognition that China could be isolated regionally if ASEAN were to join the Indo-Pacific framework.[136]

The greatest weakness of the Indo-Pacific concept from the point of view of Chinese analysts is that it does not yet have a credible economic dimension/pillar and therefore does not constitute a serious challenge to China's attractiveness as a trade and investment partner (including within the framework of the BRI). This criticism applies above all to the United States, whose Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP) focuses mainly on security. Due to the divergent economic interests of the four main proponents of the Indo-Pacific, Chinese experts question the long-term viability of the concept.[137] In this context, several publications point to the withdrawal of the United States from the TPP trade agreement. However, joint infrastructure initiatives between the United States and its partners in the region could potentially become a real competitor to China's BRI.[138] Some analysts see the trade war between the United States and China, which has been escalating since 2018, as the real economic dimension of U.S. containment policy towards China.[139]

Some Chinese experts argue that the key to the success or failure of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy lies with China itself and that if relations with neighbouring countries deteriorate on all fronts, China could provoke the formation of an alliance against itself.[140] Accordingly, many articles make recommendations for Chinese policymakers on how to deal with the Indo-Pacific strategy. They include "splitting" the Quad (mainly by improving China's relations with Japan and Australia); increasing Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia and in the ASEAN-centred organisations (ASEAN+3, ASEAN 10+1, EAS, ARF);[141] accelerating negotiations on the RCEP regional free trade agreement; actively opening the Chinese economy to strengthen existing interdependencies; and encouraging Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, ASEAN as a whole) to join the Indo-Pacific concept, thus weakening U.S. influence on decision-making. Finally, China is urged to actively seek involvement in the Quad members' infrastructure initiatives.[142]

133 See He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126), 15. On India's role in the Indo-Pacific see also Li Xiao, "Xueshujie guanyu Yindu 'Yin-Tai' waijiao yanjiu shuping" [Commentary on academic research on India's "Indo-Pacific" foreign policy], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi Luntan* [Forum of World Economics and Politics], no. 6 (2018): 62-81.

134 See He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126), 15.

135 See ibid. See also Liu and Liu, "'Yin-Tai' zhanlüe dui Dongmeng zai Yatai diqu hezuo zhong 'zhongxin diwei' de yingxiang" (see note 127); Ren Yuanze, "Telangpu zhengfu de Dongnanya zhengce jiexi" [Analysis of the Trump administration's Southeast Asia policy], *Meiguo Yanjiu* [The Chinese Journal of American Studies], no. 1 (2019): 49-70; Cai, "Meiguo dui Dongnanya 'zaibaozhang' zhengce xilun" (see note 127).

136 See He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126), 19.

137 See, e.g., Yang Yishuang, "'Yin-Tai' de jingji luoji bianxi" [Differences in the economic logic of the "Indo-Pacific"], *Guoji Zhanwang* [Global Review], no. 2 (2019): 84—105.

138 He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126), 19.

139 See ibid., 14.

140 See ibid., 15; see also Zhu, "Telangpu zhengfu 'Yin-Tai' zhanlüe jiqi dui Zhongguo anquan de yingxiang" (see note 127).

141 ASEAN+3: Meeting between ASEAN plus China, Japan and Korea; ASEAN 10+1: Meeting between the 10 ASEAN countries and China.

142 See He, "Meiguo Yin-Tai zhanlüe shizhi yu Zhongguo de zhidu zhiheng" (see note 126); Wang Kai, "Jiangouzhuyi shijiao xia de Tulangpu zhengfu 'Yin-Tai' zhanlüe" [The "Indo-Pacific" strategy of the Trump government from a constructivist perspective], *Zhengzhou Hangkong Gongye Guanli Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics (Social Science Edition)], no. 1 (2019): 1-8; Liu Feitao, "Meiguo 'Yin-Tai' jichu sheshi touzi jingzheng celüe" [The competitive tactics of the USA in "Indo-Pacific" infrastructure investments], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [International Studies], no. 4 (2019): 1—20 (19 f.).

Chinese initiatives in response to the Indo-Pacific

The quintessence of these analyses of the Indo-Pacific strategy is that China's main concern is preventing this geopolitical concept from becoming a rallying point for neighbouring states and the entire region to form a common front against China.

Chinese experts do in fact discern a softening of their own leadership's assertive and aggressive foreign policy behaviour since Donald Trump took office in 2017,[143] with efforts now focused primarily on weakening/splitting the Quad. In May 2018, Prime Minister Li Keqiang visited Tokyo, and in October 2018 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's return visit to Beijing took place — for the first time in seven years. The tense relations between China and India following the border incident in Doklam 2017 are also returning to a more constructive course following informal summits between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Wuhan in April 2018 and Mamallapuram in October 2019.[144] In contrast, no attempts at rapprochement have been made with Australia — the intense domestic political debate there on China's influence may prevent the two sides from striking a more conciliatory tone. Or perhaps the Chinese side sees no need for action here because of Australia's strong economic dependence on China.

In the opinion of its experts, China is also making an effort to establish a more acceptable policy towards the ASEAN countries by pushing ahead with the long-negotiated Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Chinese analysts cite the expansion of security cooperation in the form of maritime military exercises, which were held jointly for the first time in October 2018, as a further example.[145]

Despite the escalating trade and technology dispute in 2019, the Chinese rhetoric vis-à-vis the United States has been restrained, at least officially. Even if media such as the *Global Times*, which is known for its nationalist and "hard line" position, may take a sharper tone, the Chinese leadership (as well as many experts) have made a recognizable effort to balance competition, strategic rivalry and cooperation in relations with the United States.

It is doubtful, however, whether the countries surrounding China share China' self-assessment of its own positive behavioural changes and whether their fears have really been allayed.

The Indo-Pacific as a containment strategy

China has not officially adopted the term "Indo-Pacific" but has adhered to the term "Asia-Pacific". The various arguments cited by the Indo-Pacific advocats — the shifting of global economic focus to the region, the merging of the two seas, the increased strategic importance of India and the Indian Ocean, the regional community of values and norms — are all rejected as unconvincing in Chinese academic publications.

Nevertheless, China recognizes in the Indo-Pacific strategy a trend towards increasing strategic rivalry between the United States and China. The U.S. policy mix of cooperation and containment, which from the Chinese perspective has existed for decades, is clearly shifting in favour of the latter.

For China, the main goal is to avert the potential danger of a full-scale confrontation with the United States.

For China, therefore, the main goal is to avert the potential danger of full-scale economic and/or military confrontation. The starting point for this is above all China's policy towards its neighbouring states and the region, which must be carefully calibrated to prevent the emergence of a united front with the United States against China. China assumes that peaceful coexistence is — or must be — possible between the United States as an established power and China as an emerging power, because the costs and collateral damage of a confrontation are not acceptable to either side (or the other states of the region).

143 See Liu, "The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness" (see note 121), 20ff.

144 In June 2020, however, new conflicts flared up at a disputed part of the Sino-Indian border, triggering the most serious crisis since 1975 with casualties on both sides.

145 Liu, "The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness" (see note 121), 25.

Where Does Europe Stand with Regard to the Indo-Pacific?

The EU and its member states, with one exception, have not yet taken a position on the Indo-Pacific; only France has explicitly committed itself to it. In 2016 France underscored its role as a resident power in the region in the official document *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*,[146] and in 2019 a follow-up document was published under the title *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*.[147] The UK has taken a less clear position; at least official documents have so far made almost no reference to the Indo-Pacific.[148] Neither the EU itself nor any of its members have so far officially declared their support for the Trump administration's FOIP strategy or the Indo-Pacific concepts of other actors, although European politicians occasionally use the term "Indo-Pacific" in speeches when they are in Asia.[149]

Representatives of European (and non-European) think tanks, on the other hand, are intensively debating whether the EU or European states should take up the term "Indo-Pacific" and actively engage with the concept. They are also discussing whether Europe could make a specific contribution and, if so, what form it should take.[150]

(Asia) experts in- and outside of Europe have put forward various arguments as to why the EU (and the member states) should take a clear position on the Indo-Pacific and adopt the term. They do not see the lack of a common understanding among the proponents or participants of the concept as an obstacle; rather they assert that it is precisely *because* the concept is still in the process of being developed that Europeans could help shape the strategic debates on the Indo-Pacific if they were to become involved now.[151] They argue that, given its dependence on trade and its economic interests, the EU cannot afford

146 Ministry of Defence of France, *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Paris, 2016).

147 Ministry of Defence of France, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific* (see note 3). The *Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017* mentions the term "Indo-Pacific "only once.

148 Die *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015* does not mention the "Indo-Pacific". Only in the third annual report of July 2019 it is mentioned once, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819613/NSS_and_SDSR_2015_Third_Annual_Report_-_FINAL__2_.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020). An official document of the British Ministry of Defence from October 2018, *Global Strategic Trends. The Future Starts Today*, Sixth Edition, also does not contain the term, see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771309/Global_Strategic_Trends_-_The_Future_Starts_Today.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

149 See e.g., Mark Rutte, Rakesh Bharti Mittal and Indrani Bagchi, "The Netherlands: India's Pivot to a Strong and Competitive Europe", New Delhi, 24 May 2018, https://carnegieindia.org/2018/05/24/netherlands-india-s-pivot-to-strong-and-competitive-europe-event-6916 (accessed 29 April 2020). See also the speech by the British Minister of Defence Gavin Williamson at the IISS-Shangri-La Dialogue 2018 (3 June 2018), who mentioned the cooperation with France in the Indo-Pacific region.

150 See, e.g., Eva Pejsova, *The Indo-Pacific. A Passage to Europe?* EUISS Brief Issue 3/2018 (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies [EUISS], 15 March 2018), https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/indo-pacific-%E2%80%93-passage-europe (accessed 29 April 2020); Matthew Lillehaugen, "The 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific: A Call for European Partnership", *The Asia Dialogue*, 22 June 2018, https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/06/22/the-free-and-open-indo-pacific-a-call-for-european-partnership/ (accessed 29 April 2020); David Brewster and C. Raja Mohan, *Germany in the Indo-Pacific. Securing Interests Through Partnerships*, KAS International Reports online (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung [KAS], March 2019) 10, https://www.kas.de/documents/259121/4890181/DE_kas_ai_online_nr_10_2019_brewster_mohan_web.pdf/0984a025-dcfd-c9a9-31ca-9210edf4ee12?version=1.0&t=1551859148828 (accessed 7 June 2020).

151 See, e.g., Lillehaugen, "The 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific" (see note 150).

not to take a position.[152] According to a joint publication by an Indian and an Australian author, in the long term China's unilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific will pose a greater challenge to the international order than Russia's comportment in Eurasia.[153] The authors conclude that for Germany, in particular, there is no alternative but to increase its commitment:

> "This is why countries with important interests in the Indo-Pacific and the international order have little choice but to respond to China's challenge and the uncertainties surrounding Washington's willingness to uphold the global order."[154]

Security experts from the region underline the fact that, unlike in Europe, multilateral approaches to security are a rarity in the Indo-Pacific, where bi-, tri- and minilateral formats tend to predominate.[155] Europe, they point out, also has limited military capabilities in the region.

However, some authors argue that when engaging in the Indo-Pacific region, Europeans could focus on areas neglected by other actors. These include non-traditional security issues, good governance, and climate policy. Europe could even assume the role of a neutral actor and help stabilize the growing great power rivalry in the region by promoting the rules-based order and cooperative security initiatives.[156] The EU could also take a leading role on trade issues, building on the FTA with Japan. Last but not least, other European nations such as Germany or Norway could participate in the military operations in the South China Sea regularly conducted by France.[157] Maintaining a neutral stance is seen as a challenge, however. In order to avoid giving the impression of partisanship, it is argued that Europeans must honour their commitments to China while simultaneously supporting the principles of the Quad's democratic coalition.[158]

The Indo-Pacific concept of France

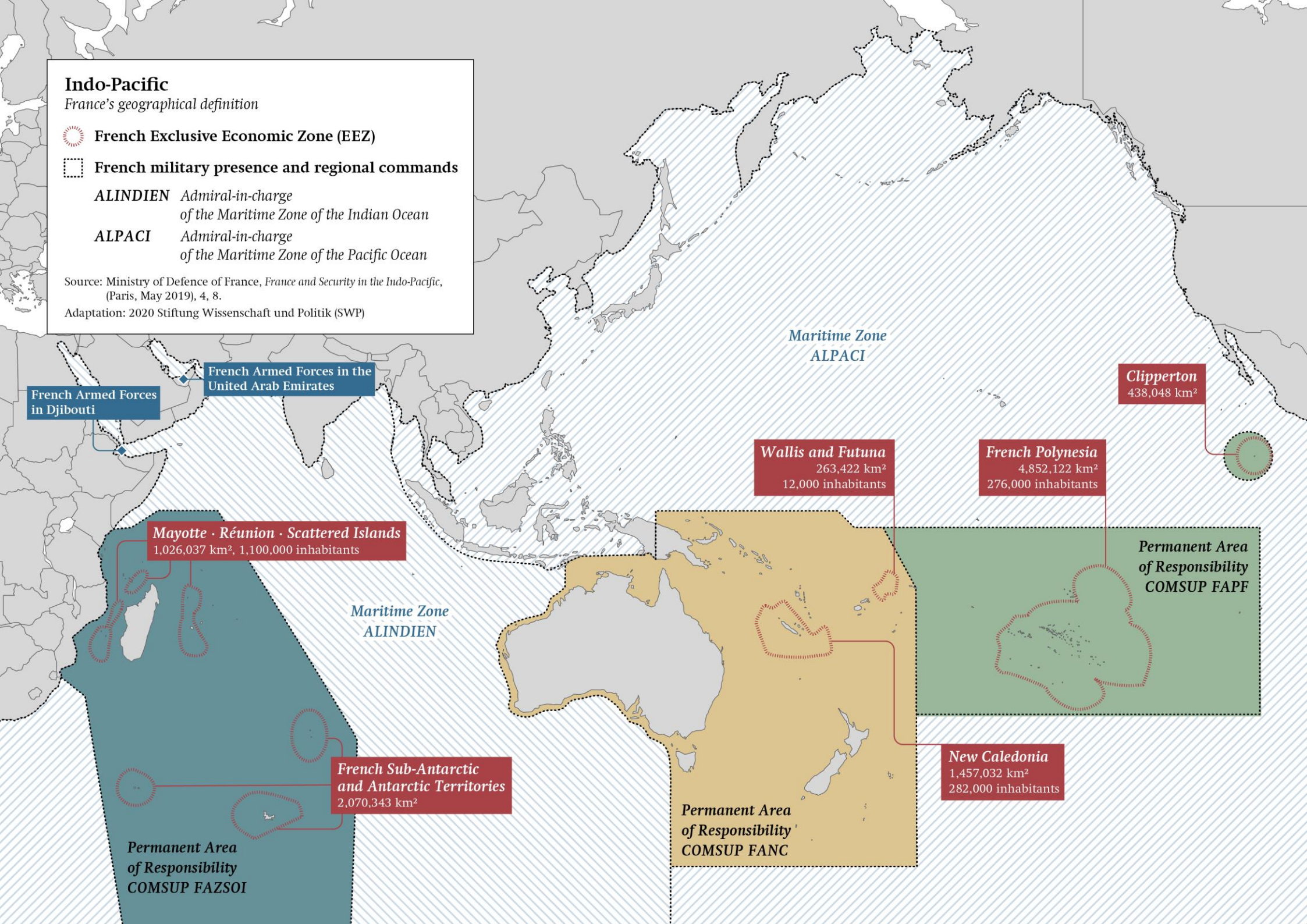
In her foreword to the document *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, Defence Minister Florence Parly emphasises: "[…] France is a nation of the Indo-Pacific region and holds a distinctive place in this part of the world […]". The Indo-Pacific is geographically described as a maritime and land area "shaped by interactions around strategic centres of gravity — India, China, Southeast Asia, Australia". It includes the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans and forms a continuum stretching from the East African coast to the American west coast[159] (see map on page 37).

For France, defending its national interests in the region and maintaining a rules-based order are paramount.

France's interests in the region are linked to French possessions (islands in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans and some off the East African coast, such as Mayotte, Scattered Islands, Réunion), the Exclusive Economic Zones derived from them (EEZs; 9 million sq km), the approximately 1.6 million French nationals in the region and the French military presence protecting the possessions.[160] Geographically and strategically, France's understanding of the Indo-Pacific largely coincides with what previous French strategy papers have called "Asia-Pacific".[161]

For France, defending its national interests, preserving its sovereignty and maintaining a rules-based order are paramount. The 2019 paper highlights France's network of strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific with countries such as India, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Indonesia and

152 See Pejsova, *The Indo-Pacific. A Passage to Europe?* (see note 150), 4.
153 See Brewster and Mohan, *Germany in the Indo-Pacific* (see note 150), 3.
154 Ibid.
155 See ibid.
156 See Pejsova, *The Indo-Pacific. A Passage to Europe?* (see note 150), 4. See also Lillehaugen, "The 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific" (see note 150).
157 See Lillehaugen: "The 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific" (see note 150).
158 See Pejsova, *The Indo-Pacific. A Passage to Europe?* (see note 150), 4.
159 Ministry of Defence of France, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific* (see note 3), 2.
160 Ebd., p 6: Military personnel: a total of 7,000 permanent, of which 4,100 in the Indian Ocean, 2,900 in the Pacific. A map with military assets in the region can be found on p. 7.
161 Already in *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific* (see note 146), the Minister of Defence's foreword states: "France is a power in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific" (p. 1).


Indo-Pacific
France's geographical definition
French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
French military presence and regional commands
ALINDIEN Admiral-in-charge of the Maritime Zone of the Indian Ocean
ALPACI Admiral-in-charge of the Maritime Zone of the Pacific Ocean
Source: Ministry of Defence of France, France and Security in the Indo-Pacific, (Paris, May 2019), 4, 8.
Adaptation: 2020 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)
Maritime Zone ALPACI
French Armed Forces in the United Arab Emirates
French Armed Forces in Djibouti
Clipperton
438,048 km²
Wallis and Futuna
263,422 km²
12,000 inhabitants
French Polynesia
4,852,122 km²
276,000 inhabitants
Mayotte · Réunion · Scattered Islands
1,026,037 km², 1,100,000 inhabitants
Permanent Area of Responsibility COMSUP FAPF
Maritime Zone ALINDIEN
French Sub-Antarctic and Antarctic Territories
2,070,343 km²
New Caledonia
1,457,032 km²
282,000 inhabitants
Permanent Area of Responsibility COMSUP FANC
Permanent Area of Responsibility COMSUP FAZSOI

Vietnam; its active contributions to various regional security formats and dialogues; and military exercises.[162] The importance of French arms exports to the region, with India, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore as the most important buyers, is also emphasised, as is France's keen interest in the nexus between the environment/climate change and security/defence.[163]

Moreover, French defence ministers regularly employ the term "Indo-Pacific" in their speeches. As in the French strategy paper, the focus is primarily on France as an Indo-Pacific nation and its military and military-diplomatic engagement in the region.

Initiatives by France and other European countries

Since 2014, France has demonstrated its commitment to the region mainly through military exercises. These include joint manoeuvres with the naval forces of India, for example, but also regular excursions by warships into the South China Sea near the artificial islands created by China.[164] In 2016, Jean-Yves Le Drian, then French Defence Minister, surprised his European counterparts with the idea of establishing a stable and visible European naval presence in the South China Sea.[165]

In March 2019 France sent the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to the region ("Opération Clemenceau"). In addition to the United States, a small number of other EU member states — Italy, Austria, Portugal and Denmark — participated in this French mission by contributing hardware or personnel.[166] Even if such operations are largely symbolic in nature, for observers, including those in the region, they demonstrate a shared commitment to the rules-based international order.[167] France is also strengthening its security cooperation with India, Australia and Japan.[168]

Post Brexit, France is the only EU country with a military presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In an interview in 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono offered the Foreign Ministers of France and Great Britain a collaborative role in the partnership between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.[169] It remains to be seen how Great Britain will position itself in the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region after its withdrawal from the EU and what capacities it will actually provide there. In any case, France will then be the only EU country with a military presence in the region. Paris can be expected to put the Indo-Pacific issue on the EU agenda — at the latest when it assumes the EU presidency in the first half of 2022 if there is no European positioning by then. It has already made offers of cooperation under this label, probably assuming that Europeans will align themselves with France's understanding of the concept.

At the meeting of the Franco-German Council of Ministers in October 2019, the foreign ministers of the two countries agreed on a number of measures which they intend to push forward jointly. Measure 6 reads as follows:

> "France and Germany are committed to jointly strengthen the EU-Asia connectivity strategy, *inter alia with the aim of developing a European strategy for the Indo-Pacific region* [emphasis by the authors].

162 Ministry of Defence of France, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific* (see note 3), 6 and 8. France's efforts to work with the ADMM-Plus are particularly mentioned (ibid., 4).

163 Ibid., 12.

164 See, e.g., "France Challenges Beijing in South China Sea", *The Straits Times*, 12 June 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/france-challenges-beijing-in-south-china-sea (accessed 29 April 2020).

165 Embassy of France in Abu Dhabi, "Speech Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence at the Shangri-La Dialogue", Singapore, 5 June 2016, https://ae.ambafrance.org/Speech-Mr-Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-Minister-of-Defence-at-the-Shangri-La-Dialogue (accessed 29 April 2020).

166 See, e.g., "French Aircraft Carrier Gets Underway for First Deployment since 2016", *Naval Today*, 5 March 2019, https://navaltoday.com/2019/03/05/french-aircraft-carrier-gets-underway-for-first-deployment-since-2016/ (accessed 29 April 2020). The *Charles de Gaulle* reached Singapore in late May 2019, in time for the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue.

167 See, e.g., Lillehaugen, "The 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific" (see note 150).

168 See Brewster and Mohan, *Germany in the Indo-Pacific* (see note 150), 4. See also CRS, *Indo-Pacific Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners* (see note 5), 21f.

169 Saki Hayashi and Yosuke Onchi, "Japan to Propose Dialogue with US, India and Australia", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 26 October 2017, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-to-propose-dialogue-with-US-India-and-Australia2 (accessed 29 April 2020).

They are committed to promote the unity of the European Union on EU-Asia policy issues."[170]

The fact that the development of a European Indo-Pacific strategy is here directly linked to the Asia-Connectivity Strategy[171] broadens the predominantly military and military-diplomatic orientation of France's Indo-Pacific concept and adds an economic and political dimension. Further bilateral talks on this are already taking place.

While France, with its clear strategic positioning, is the exception in the EU, some other member states — Germany, Italy and those states involved in French military exercises in the Indo-Pacific — and the EU institutions are at least considering how to engage with the Indo-Pacific concept. In most other member states, this issue is unlikely to be on the political agenda at all; at least there is no evidence of it in official documents, white papers or speeches by politicians. There is therefore almost less evidence of an intra-European consensus on this issue than there is on China's BRI. After all, the latter has been intensively debated within the European Union (and among the EU ambassadors in Beijing) since Europe and the member states themselves are important target regions for the BRI. Against this background, the question of how the EU and its members should position themselves with regard to the Indo-Pacific region is all the more pressing.

170 Federal Foreign Office, "Erklärung der Außenminister anlässlich des Deutsch-Französischen Ministerrats vom 16. Oktober 2019", Berlin, 16 October 2019, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2257806/8f3c85e49853716cecc822f421dd6deb/roadmap-data.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

171 High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank. Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy*, JOIN (2018) 31 final (Brussels, 19 September 2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_connecting_europe_and_asia_-_building_blocks_for_an_eu_strategy_2018-09-19.pdf (accessed 29 April 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations: How Should the EU and Member States Approach the "Indo-Pacific"?

The systematic comparison of the Indo-Pacific concepts has shown, firstly, that various interpretations of the term exist. Divergences among the concepts of the United States, Japan, Australia, India and ASEAN were identified with regard to a number of characteristics/core elements: a) the expansion of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area, b) the objectives associated with each respective concept, c) the focus or weighting of individual policy fields within each respective concept, d) the question of China's inclusion or exclusion, and e) the significance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches to trade and security policy.

Although all actors refer to *the* Indo-Pacific, there is still no common understanding of exactly what is meant by it. As a result, the various concepts of the Indo-Pacific contain all sorts of potential entry points and avenues of interaction for the EU and its member states. The ASEAN Outlook, for example, with its emphasis on multilateral security cooperation, provides a link for corresponding European ideas. Other examples are the interest in multilateral free trade agreements expressed above all by Japan and Australia or the widely proclaimed goal of maintaining a rules-based international order. France's Indo-Pacific strategy also provides points of reference for other European states, for example by linking environment, climate change and security policy in the region and by explicitly referring to and supporting multilateral regional formats such as the ADMM-Plus.

Secondly, the study makes it clear that the majority of actors understand and use "Indo-Pacific" not as a geographical term but rather as a decidedly political or strategic concept. Some of these concepts are based on widely divergent norms, interests and ideas of order. Thirdly, the second finding explains why China sees the emergence and use of the term as part of an anti-Chinese containment strategy by Washington and therefore rejects it outright. Fourthly, despite all the divergences, there are also convergences common to all actors, namely the reference to a rules-based international order, to the improvement of connectivity, and the positive references to ASEAN and its multilateral forums. Fifthly, the many divergences between the various Indo-Pacific concepts nevertheless make its adoption difficult for third parties; if they were to consider adopting the concept, they would first have to clarify which of the various interpretations and associated political connotations they prefer and why.

Against this background, it is not surprising that a discussion has flared up in Europe as to whether and how one should position oneself in this regard and what action to take. France is so far the only EU member state to use the term "Indo-Pacific" and has presented a corresponding strategic concept. However, neither the EU nor the other member states have so far followed the rationale of the French concept — namely protecting their own territories, citizens and EEZs in the Indo-Pacific.

At the EU level, in Germany and in the other member states, the first thing that must be clarified is whether and, if so, how the term "Indo-Pacific" can be used: if not in a neutral manner, then at least in a less securitised and less geo-politicised sense, for example as an (economic) geographical designation. This would describe the realities of trade, energy and investment flows more adequately than the previously used term

"Asia-Pacific". For Europe, "Indo-Pacific" also does better justice to the shift in economic focus and the growing importance of the Indian Ocean (and India) than the previously predominant "Asia-Pacific" construct. Furthermore, Europe has an economic and political interest in maintaining a rules-based order in the region. These two aspects, among others, can serve as points of departure and help to frame the European debate on the Indo-Pacific.

Nevertheless, it remains to be clarified what concrete goals and priorities Europe intends to pursue, including the importance of bi-, mini- and multilateral approaches. Last but not least, there needs to be an open discussion about whether China should be included or excluded from a possible future European Indo-Pacific approach.

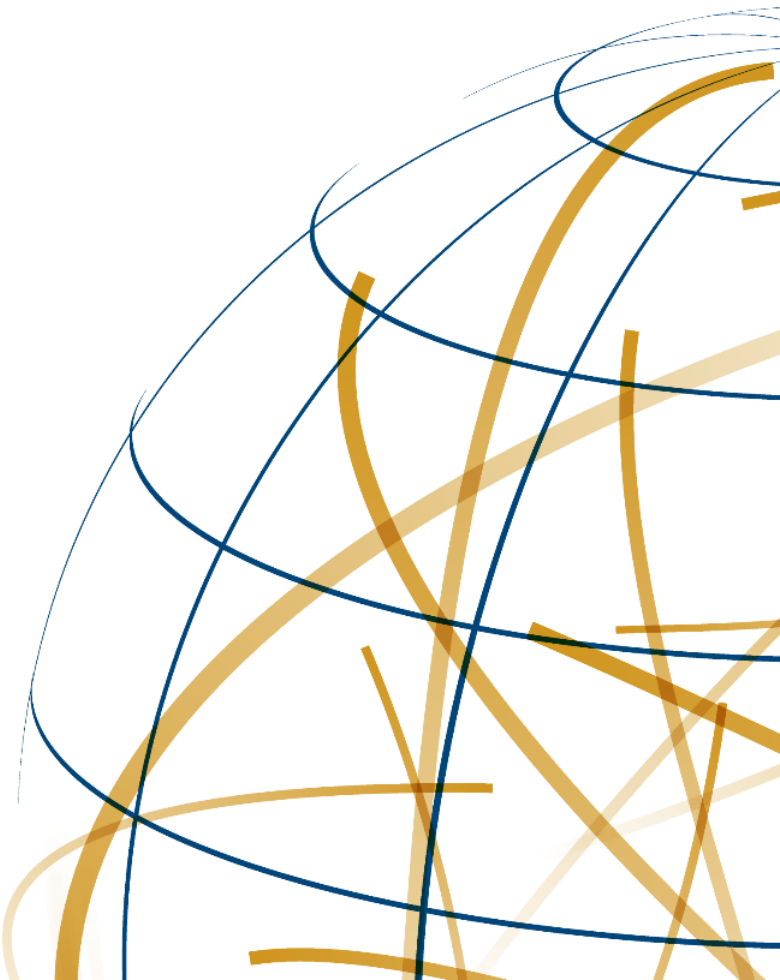
In their deliberations, the EU and its members should eschew the zero-sum logic that currently dominates the relationship between the United States and China. Instead, they should formulate an independent position. Ideally, they have three options at their disposal:

1. "Equidistance": Europe could make a conscious and transparent decision to retain the term "Asia-Pacific" and refrain from referring to the "Indo-Pacific". This would bring the EU into line with states such as South Korea or Canada, which have also refrained from adopting the term, and would also make it possible to avoid what would amount to taking sides "for" or "against" the United States or China — at least conceptually speaking. Subsequently, the EU could try to create synergies with both FOIP and BRI on the basis of its own standards and interests while at the same time maintaining a kind of "equidistance". The disadvantage of this option lies in the permanent hedging/manoeuvring between Washington and Beijing and the associated loss of Europe's own political and economic ability to shape events and of strategic autonomy. As a result, there would be little in terms of a contribution of the European Union to the Indo-Pacific.
2. "Alignment": This would entail adopting and internalizing one of the already existing interpretations of the "Indo-Pacific". From a German or European point of view, following the French concept would be an obvious option and would have several advantages: (1) It would demonstrate that the "Franco-German" engine works; (2) it would lower transaction costs by "Europeanising" a national security strategy and eliminating the need for a new conception; and (3) at least rudimentary military capacities on the ground would be provided for, initially by France. Europeanising the French approach would also give it greater visibility and weight in the region itself.
One of the disadvantages of this option is that adopting the French concept, with its emphasis on French national interests overseas, would be potentially difficult to communicate to a European public. Another disadvantage could be that the (hitherto) French orientation is strongly focused on security matters whilst failing to sufficiently address many other important policy areas. A French "copyright" would make it difficult for other member states to put forth correspondent proposals for amendments or additions and could lead to conflicts over interpretation and competence. Similarly, this approach would shift the burden-sharing to France's disadvantage, which could lead to intra-European conflicts. And finally, China could interpret the use of the term "Indo-Pacific" as participation in a U.S.-led containment strategy.
3. "Autonomy": Europe could also define its own understanding of the "Indo-Pacific" on the basis of its own norms and values, drawing on ideas and approaches that have already been developed at the European level. The EU strategy paper on connectivity in Asia, for example, provides a framework for greater commitment to infrastructure development in the region. An Indo-Pacific concept at the EU level would have the advantage of making an independent contribution. Since the debate on the "Indo-Pacific" is not static, an independent concept could be used to try to actively shape regulatory policy in accordance with one's own standards and interests. In doing so, the EU could certainly refer to elements emphasised by other actors in their conception of the Indo-Pacific (such as inclusivity based on common rules and freedom of navigation for all states). The partnership with Japan, which was concluded at the Connectivity Forum in Brussels in September 2019, could serve as a basis for infrastructure cooperation. A further advantage would be that the concept would ideally be supported by all member states, thus enabling the EU to demonstrate coherence to the outside world.
One disadvantage could be the high transaction costs that would arise from the intra-European negotiation process. Moreover, the EU would have to provide the resources necessary to achieve the

stated goals; otherwise the Indo-Pacific concept would have little effect. Moreover, even with this option China could interpret the adoption of the term as participation in the U.S.-led containment strategy, which could lead to conflicts with Beijing.

To develop a solely German Indo-Pacific concept would seem absurd given Germany's limited diplomatic and non-existent military capabilities in the region. Moreover, such a move could be seen as competing with the French approach and thus strengthen the perception of Europe in the region as a politically divided actor. And formulating a German concept could at least indirectly undermine any kind of common European approach.

While choosing one of these options is important, it is perhaps even more important to define Europe's economic, security and normative interests in the region. In addition, the necessary resources must be made available to advance these interests. Only if the latter is guaranteed will Europe be able to act credibly in the region and in its relations with China.

Abbreviations

ACSA	Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ARI	Analyses of the Elcano Royal Institute
ARIA	Asia Reassurance Initiative Act
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BUILD Act	Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSCAP	Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EAMF	Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum
EAS	East Asia Summit
EDGE	Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
EUISS	European Union Institute for Security Studies
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
GMF	The German Marshall Fund of the United States
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IDFC	U.S. International Development Finance Corporation
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPBF	Indo-Pacific Business Forum
IPEC	Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor
IPTI	Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative
ISPI	Italian Institute for International Political Studies
ITAN	Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MPAC	Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity
NAM	non-aligned movement
NSS	National Security Strategy
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
OPIC	Overseas Private Investment Corporation
PALM	Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting
PEP	Papua New Guinea Electrification Partnership
PRIF	Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TAF	Transaction Advisory Fund
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea
USAID	United States Agency for International Development