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Indo-Pacific Cooperation: AOIP and IPOI

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific has been gaining new geopolitical construct over the last few years. There is also a growing consensus in understanding the geographical scope and economic and strategic approaches towards Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific obtained renewed vibrancy when ASEAN, in June 2019, and India, in November 2019, came out with their respective Indo-Pacific visions, namely, the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), respectively. This article reviews the perspectives of Indo-Pacific that are shared by different countries and discusses the key elements of the IPOI and the AOIP, as also ensuing areas of cooperation, where ASEAN and India can work together for the integration of the region.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, ASEAN, AOIP, IPOI, Trade

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Indo-Pacific Cooperation: AOIP and IPOI

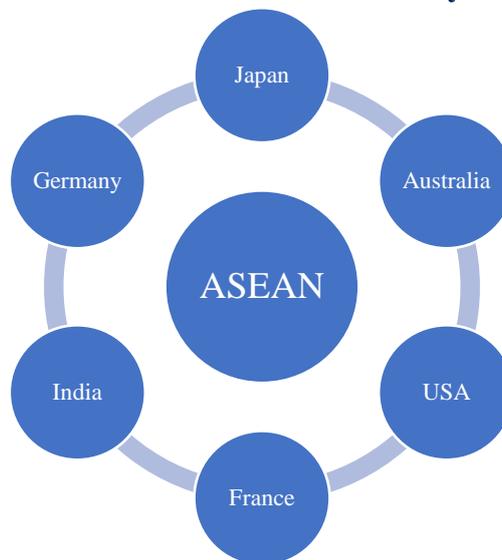
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1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has been gaining new geopolitical construct over the last few years. The Act ‘East’ is now getting transformed into Act ‘Indo-Pacific’ (De, 2020a). There is also a growing consensus in understanding the geographical scope and economic and strategic approaches towards Indo-Pacific. It is a multipolar region, contributing more than half of the world’s GDP and population. The Indo-Pacific is the lifeline of the entire world; one-third of the world's flow of trade and energy passes through this region. The motivation for a larger bloc always comes from the sheer size, the resources it owns, and, the scope and size of the economies of scale that it can generate.

The Indo-Pacific obtained renewed vibrancy when ASEAN, in June 2019, and India, in November 2019, came out with their respective Indo-Pacific visions, namely, the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), respectively. Figure 1 illustrates countries within and outside the region that have introduced Indo-Pacific Visions, with ASEAN being encouraged to take centre stage due to its already-established regional structures such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Figure 1: Indo-Pacific Visions Issued by Countries



Source: De and Kumarasamy (2020)

Given the foregoing, this paper reviews the perspectives of Indo-Pacific that are shared by different countries and discusses the key elements of the IPOI and the AOIP, as also ensuing areas of cooperation, where ASEAN and India can work together for the integration of the region.

2. Rising Strength of Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is a multipolar region, whose geographical coverage encompasses a number of countries in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The coverage of the Indo-Pacific includes as many 43 countries from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Pacific, West Asia, Latin America and North America, and France. As a region, the Indo-Pacific contributes more than half of the world's GDP and population and has huge natural resources and potential for new economic opportunities (see Table 1). On the flip side, the heterogeneity of the Indo-Pacific region in terms of economic development generates a variety of challenges in the economic, political and security domains.

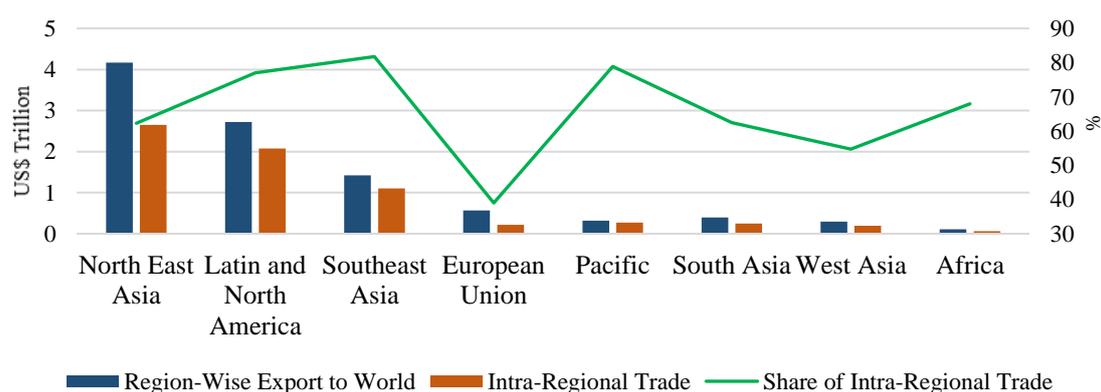
Table 1: Major Indicators of Indo-Pacific, 2019

Indicators	Indo-Pacific	Share in World (%)
Land area (million sq. km)	74.23	58.29
Population (billion)	5.24	68.28
GDP (current US\$ trillion)	60.19	68.63
Export in Goods (US\$ trillion)	11.76	47.43
Import in Goods (US\$ trillion)	11.98	49.27
Total Trade in Goods (US\$ trillion)	23.74	48.27
Intra-Regional Trade (US\$ trillion)	6.81	69.65

Note: ASEAN: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines; South Asia: India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives; Latin America: Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru; North America: Canada, Mexico, United States; North-East Asia: China, Japan, South Korea, Russian Federation; Pacific: Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji; West Asia: Iran, Islamic Rep., United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Rep., Oman; Africa: Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Mauritius, Comoros, Seychelles; European Union: France.

Source: De and Kumarasamy (2020) based on World Development Indicators, World Bank

Figure 2: Intra-Regional Merchandise Trade in the Indo-Pacific Subregions, 2019



Note: Refer Table 2 note for details.

Source: Calculated by authors based on DOTS, IMF Database

Table 2: Indo-Pacific Developments over Time

2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October - The term "Indo-Pacific" appears for the first time officially in the White Paper published by Australia
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - Defence White Paper of Australia mentioned the Strategy Outlook of stable Indo-Pacific
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October - The document Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy referred the term "Indo-Pacific"
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February - Defence White Paper of Australia mentioned the Strategic Outlook of stable Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based global order • August - Shinzo Abe declares his "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" to be the core of Japan's foreign policy doctrine.
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November - At the APEC Summit in Hanoi, U.S. President calls the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" the focal point of U.S. Asia Policy • November - Foreign Policy White Paper of Australia dedicates a chapter on "A stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific" • December - The National Security Strategy of the United States dedicates a special section to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" under strategy in the regional context
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - French President Macron speaks about a French strategy for the Indo-Pacific • June - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi presents his country's "Free, Open, Prosperous and Inclusive Indo-Pacific" concept in his speech at the IISS Shagri-La Dialogue in Singapore. • September - Japan from now on calls the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" a "vision" rather than a "strategy"
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - The French Ministry of Defence publishes the strategy paper "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific" • June - ASEAN summit, Bangkok, the ASEAN states agree on a joint document "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)" • June - The U.S. Department of Defense publishes the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnership, and Promoting a Networked Region • November - The U.S. Department of State publishes the strategy paper "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision" • November - Indian Prime Minister presents Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit, Bangkok
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September - German Government issues the Policy Guidelines on Indo-Pacific

Source: De and Kumarasamy (2020)

The intra-regional trade among Indo-Pacific countries stands at 69.65 per cent (about US\$ 6.81 trillion) in 2019, which is mostly contributed by North-East Asia, Latin and North America and Southeast Asia (Figure 2). This shows the potential strength of economic integration in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, Rahman *et al.* (2020)¹ have investigated the potential economic effect of 'Indo-Pacific' regional economic cooperation and compared it with that of the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)). The Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) results show that the quadrilateral grouping of the US, Japan, Australia, and India already shows a substantial economic gain and if South- and East Asia join with the Indo-Pacific cooperation, the economic benefit would be enormous. The findings also indicate that improved trade

facilitation amongst countries of South Asia and East Asia could bring huge gain, as the enormous potential of Indo-Pacific trade remains largely unrealised. High trade transaction costs are one of the major barriers inhibiting the growth of Indo-Pacific intra-regional trade. This paper emphasises that improvements in infrastructure and connectivity that leads to lower trade transportation costs are a necessary step to realise the potential of Indo-Pacific trade in full measure.

3. Emerging Perspectives of Indo-Pacific

The term “Indo-Pacific” has found its way into official documents such as national security strategies, defence white papers, foreign policy, maritime security strategy and other official documents (see Table 2). Australia referred to the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in its White Paper in 2012, Defence White Papers in 2013 and 2016, and its Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which taken in aggregate, under core Australia’s accord of strategic priority to the region. Similarly, the USA has also mentioned the term in its National Security Strategy and defence documents, respectively in 2017 and 2019, with an emphasis on ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ in the regional context. Table 2 also indicates that several major countries, such as Japan, ASEAN member-States, India, Australia, the US, France, and most recently, Germany, have gradually recognised the strategic importance of the region and come forward to state their perspectives and positions on Indo-Pacific. The idea of the Indo-Pacific has taken root across a wide swath from the European Union (EU) to East Asia. Other countries, such as Canada, Sri Lanka and South Africa, are expected to shortly launch their Indo-Pacific visions.² A common perspective of all these countries in respect of the Indo-Pacific is to ensure a safe and secure maritime space through an inclusive and multilateral approach among like-minded countries while acknowledging ASEAN centrality, and, to support a rules-based international order that promotes regional stability.

Indo-Pacific countries, all of which border the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean, seek to deepen their strategic bonding by enhancing maritime connectivity through quality infrastructure, free and fair trade, preserving marine resources, tackling climate change, and, enabling digital connectivity, marine safety and maritime security. Yet, although the end-goals might well be common goals of Indo-Pacific, there are differences in each country’s approach towards the Indo-Pacific construct; and there is, therefore, a need to maximise convergence in multiple areas of cooperation, to achieve peace and security in the Indo-Pacific as a whole. Table 3 encapsulates the major objectives and areas of cooperation that are stated in the Indo-Pacific visions of the various countries.

3.1 ASEAN Perspective - *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*

ASEAN is geographically located at the centre of the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN countries are well integrated in terms of trade and investment with major economies of the Indo-Pacific such as China, the US, Japan, Korea, India, etc. ASEAN has also been engaging with several Indo-Pacific countries at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. To promote a rules-based

regional order, ASEAN adopted the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)” in June 2019.

Table 3: Indo-Pacific Initiatives in Comparison

	Key Objectives	Focus Areas
ASEAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on existing regional arrangements • Strengthening and optimisation of ASEAN-led mechanisms to contribute to the maintenance of peace, freedom, and prosperity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime cooperation • Connectivity • UN SDG 2030 • Economic and other areas of cooperation
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening economic and security cooperation • Strengthening maritime security capacities • Advancing peace and security • Dealing with emergencies • Calling for respect for international maritime rules and norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime ecology • Maritime security • Marine resources • Capacity building and resource sharing • Disaster risk reduction and management • Science, technology and academic cooperation • Trade, connectivity and maritime transport
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc. • Enhancing connectivity through quality infrastructure • Ensuring sustainable development • Enhancing maritime safety and security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security • Quality infrastructure • Environment/Health • Human resource development • Energy sector • Legal system development
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolution of disputes peacefully, in accordance with international law, and without the threat or use of force or coercion • Facilitation of open markets for free flows of goods, services, capital and ideas • Inclusivity of economic integration and open regionalism • Upholding of the rights of freedom of navigation and overflight, and, the protection of the rights of small States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security • Enhance regional training on maritime domain awareness • Protection of maritime environment and international law • Support regional forum • Address fault lines, especially, South China Sea issues • Promote regional trade and investment, and infrastructure financing arrangements
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for the sovereignty and independence of all nations • Peaceful resolution of disputes • Free, fair, and reciprocal trade, based on open investment, transparent agreements, and connectivity • Adherence to international rules and norms, including those of freedom of navigation and overflight • Engagement of partners and regional institutions via multilateral and bilateral engagements • Enhancing of economic prosperity • Ensuring peace and security • Investment in human capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime safety • Quality infrastructure • Maritime security • Energy • Digital economy • Good governance • Peace and security • Human capital
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening and rebalancing of its comprehensive strategic partnership with China, while ensuring higher standards • Development and deepening of its other partnerships in the region • Strengthening the positioning of the European Union in the region • Playing a greater role in regional organisations • Addressing the threat of terrorism in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime safety • Infrastructure • Climate, environment and biodiversity
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening multilateralism • Tackling climate change and protecting the environment • Strengthening peace, security and stability • Promoting human rights and the rule of law • Strengthening rules-based, fair, and sustainable free trade • Promoting rules-based networking and the digital transformation of regions and markets • Bringing people together through culture, education and science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transformation and connectivity • Open market and free trade • Tackling climate change • People to People contact • Maritime trade and transport • Peace and security

Source: De and Kumarasamy (2020)

The AOIP promotes ‘ASEAN Centrality’ and emphasises ASEAN-led mechanisms to strengthen regional and sub-regional cooperation, to promote common interests within the Indo-Pacific. The AOIP is also intended to work as a set of guiding principles for Indo-Pacific regional cooperation, towards the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the region as well as for building connectivity and maritime cooperation, as also to achieve UN SDGs and economic cooperation³.

3.2 ASEAN Plus Perspectives

Japan – “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”

Japan’s former Prime Minister, Mr Shinzo Abe, announced Japan’s vision for a “*Free and Open Indo-Pacific*” in 2016. The vision emphasised the promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc., and sought to pursue economic prosperity and to ensure peace and stability in the region. The Indo-Pacific vision of Japan is to improve connectivity between Asia, Africa and Middle East countries by promoting quality infrastructure development, which includes roads, railway networks, ports, etc. For instance, Japan has initiated several connectivity projects within ASEAN, and in South Asia, too.

Japan’s enunciation of its Indo-Pacific vision also promotes sustainable development in the region through equipment-transfers and technical cooperation designed to enhance maritime safety and security, and the provision of capacity-building assistance to coastal countries of the Indo-Pacific to strengthen maritime law enforcement capacity and enhance maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the region. Japan has also been proactive in its cooperation endeavours in the fields of humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief (HADR), anti-piracy, counterterrorism, non-proliferation, etc. Towards these ends, Japan is actively partnering with ASEAN nations, the US, Australia, France, and India, and has demonstrated a ready willingness to extend assistance to ensure peace and prosperity in the region⁴. Apart from all this, Japan is also one of the proponents of the recent Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI). This has been extensively discussed in the study by Horimoto (2020)⁵ who has suggested stronger cooperation between Japan and India, to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. He has also suggested the creation of a free, open, inclusive, and democratic Indo-Pacific, through the creation and strengthening of mechanisms based on principles of multilateralism, e.g. Quad-Plus, involving not only the present four countries but also incorporating other like-minded countries.

Australia – “Secure, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific”

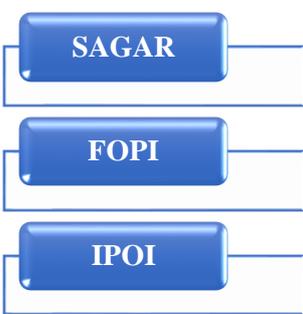
Australia has released two White Papers that set out its vision for the region, both of which seek to facilitate the free flow of trade and investment, work for economic integration which is inclusive and open to all the regional economies, and, support the freedom of navigation, and the rule of law. Australia is enhancing its cooperation with regional players such as Japan, Indonesia, Korea, and India, to ensure security, economic partnerships, and, people-to-people linkages. Australia has also enhanced its engagement with member-States of ASEAN

through strategic partnerships in the areas such as security, trade and investment, regional infrastructural development, and the environment. Australia is an island continent that plays an important role in issues such as maritime safety and security, marine resources and preservation, and maritime domain awareness. These areas are very important for the Indo-Pacific as a whole. Australia has been offering capacity-building programmes to Southeast Asia and enhancing cooperation with countries of the Indian Ocean, so as to promote maritime safety and security⁶.

India – “Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific”

India occupies a prominent role in the Indian Ocean in terms of geographical, cultural and civilisational linkages. At the regional as well as sub-regional level, India is actively engaged with several major countries, such as the member-States of ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the US. India is also working closely with island nations of both, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and with its extended neighbours such as Russia. It is noteworthy that during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, India launched ‘Mission Sagar’ to provide relief and succour to the island-nations of the Indian Ocean Region.⁷ India strongly believes that the key to regional prosperity lies in multi-faceted cooperation between the nations of the region⁸.

The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, introduced the concept of SAGAR – “Security and Growth for All the Region” during his Mauritius visit in March 2015, to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region and beyond. Further, to add momentum, Indian Prime Minister shared the vision of a “Free, Open, Prosperous and Inclusive (FOPI) Indo-Pacific” at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018. While attending the 14th East Asia Summit, in Bangkok, in November 2019, he sought to deepen cooperation amongst Indo-Pacific countries he proposed the ‘Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative’ (IPOI). The IPOI focuses on seven deeply interconnected pillars, namely, Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport (Box 1).

Box 1: IPOI Pillars									
 <p>The diagram consists of three blue rounded rectangular boxes stacked vertically. The top box is labeled 'SAGAR', the middle box is labeled 'FOPI', and the bottom box is labeled 'IPOI'. Each box is connected to the others by thin lines, suggesting a relationship or flow between the concepts.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>IPOI Pillars</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1. Maritime Security</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Maritime Ecology</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Maritime Resources</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Capacity Building and Resource Sharing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7. Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	IPOI Pillars	1. Maritime Security	2. Maritime Ecology	3. Maritime Resources	4. Capacity Building and Resource Sharing	5. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management	6. Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation	7. Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport
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Source: De and Kumarasamy (2020)

The USA - A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision

The USA is a significant player within the Indo-Pacific and has robustly promoted its Indo-Pacific vision of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. Unlike India, the USA has conceptualised the Indo-Pacific as a 'strategy'. The USA currently coincides the geographic boundaries relevant to the planning and execution of this 'strategy' with the area of responsibility of the 'Indo-Pacific Unified Combatant Command' (COCOM), which is one of its seven geographical COCOMs. As such, it describes the region as ranging from the western coast of the Americas to the west coast of India.

The USA's vision emphasises economic prosperity by endorsing free and fair trade, good governance by empowering citizens and civil societies, anti-corruption, transparency, democracy, protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights, addressing transnational crime and environmental challenges, protecting the maritime domain, and, responding to emerging threats to ensure security in the region. The USA proposes to invest about US\$ 113 million along with Australia and Japan to establish an investment fund to deliver infrastructure projects that would bring potential contribution in the Indo-Pacific region. The three countries have also intended to mobilise and support the deployment of private sector investment capital to deliver major new infrastructure projects, enhance digital connectivity and energy infrastructure, and achieve common development goals in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ A recent but important feature of the USA's 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' is the 'Blue Dot Network' (BDN), which was formally announced on 4th November 2019 at the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Bangkok, Thailand. This initiative is intended to promote high-quality, trusted standards for global infrastructure development. As such, it is envisaged as a globally recognised 'evaluation and certification system' for roads, ports, bridges, with particular focus being retained on infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁰

3.3 Policy Guidelines of France and Germany in the Indo-Pacific

France and its four pillars of Indo-Pacific Strategy

Among the EU countries, France has large overseas territories and 93 per cent of its exclusive economic zone is in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. About 1.5 million French citizens live in these territories and France also maintains a strong military presence in the region. France has realised the significance of geopolitical and geo-economic changes in the Indo-Pacific region and the country's President enunciated the 'French Indo-Pacific' vision at the Garden Island, Sydney in May 2018¹¹. The core aspects of the French approach to the Indo-Pacific are: settling regional crises, protecting shipping routes, robustly engaging in the fight against terrorism, radicalisation and organised crime; strengthening strategic partnership with regional partners like Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, but also with China. France follows the EU Framework while working with other regional partners in building regional cooperation. France also has been working closely with ASEAN, recognising that the ASEAN is the focal point of Asia's multipolar architecture and the core of any inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy. France is committed to promoting global public goods (climate change, environment and biodiversity, health, education, digital

technology and quality infrastructure) and enhancing the wellbeing of the region. France also endorses the EU as a key player for sustainable development and stability of the Indo-Pacific region under the cooperation of Europe and Asia Connectivity Strategy¹².

Germany: “Policy Guidelines” on Indo-Pacific

Within the EU, Germany has followed France and has recently (on 01 September 2020) shared a policy guideline to engage with countries of the Indo-Pacific. Unlike France, Germany does not have any recognised territory or territorial claim in the Indo-Pacific region. However, both these European nations have shared interests in shaping and shoring-up an Indo-Pacific region that is founded upon a consensually derived rules-based order that promotes comity between all nations through international cooperation. Germany has shown considerable interest in establishing partnerships for economic cooperation and to enhance its cooperation in combating marine pollution, mitigating and adapting to climate change, enhancing connectivity, spreading culture, broad based education, advancing science and technology, and furthering the opportunities resident in cyberspace.¹³

Germany’s Indo-Pacific approach supports an ASEAN-centric security architecture and proposes to initiate dialogues with BIMSTEC and IORA in the areas of business, maritime safety, and disaster risk management. Germany supports rules-based free trade and helps to shape the international rules-based order to ensure the enforcement of rules and norms in the region. Germany has also endorsed that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted trade and slowed the economic growth of the region, and, Germany accordingly calls for the diversification of global and regional supply chains and markets. This shows the positive aspects of potential investment opportunities in Asian countries by the EU member-States.¹² Germany also supports the 2021-25 Strategic Plan of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for the management of regional water resources.¹⁴ Apart from all this, Germany also seeks to enhance its defence and cybersecurity cooperation, particularly with Singapore, Australia, Japan, and South Korea and promotes digital transformation and connectivity in the region.

4. IPOI and AOIP: Complementarities and Cooperation

Section 3 briefly explores the significant role of the Indo-Pacific on building both the economic and security architecture of the region. There is a very large scope for convergence amongst Indo-Pacific countries in a variety of areas of common interest, and there is evident and significant complementarity in sustainably sharing the rich resources of this region. In this context, this section reviews the commonalities between IPOI and AOIP and the areas for plausible cooperation to strengthen the emerging regional architecture on Indo-Pacific.

India’s Prime Minister enunciated a new “*Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative*” (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bangkok, on 4 November 2020.¹⁵ The IPOI has been conceptually positioned to be in consonance with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) — specifically (but not exclusively) with ‘SDG 14’: Life Below Water.¹⁶ The IPOI is designed to further the endeavour of countries of the Indo-Pacific, stretching from the east

coast of Africa to the west coast of the Americas,¹⁷ “to create a safe, secure and stable maritime domain” within which collective and collaborative mechanisms could be created to “conserve and sustainably use” this domain and “safeguard the oceans, including from plastic litter; build capacity and fairly share resources; reduce disaster risk; enhance science, technology and academic cooperation; and promote free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and maritime transport.”¹⁸

The IPOI provides both, complementarity and specificity to the Indian vision of SAGAR, which, apart from being the Hindi word for ‘Ocean’, is, more pertinently, an acronym for ‘Security And Growth for All in the Region’.¹⁹ The vision of SAGAR itself rests upon India’s formulation of the Indo-Pacific as a region — and, specifically, the Indian outlook towards it. Abundant specificity in this regard has been provided by India, and clearly articulated at the highest level of the Government of India. Delivering the keynote address at the 2018 edition of the Shangri La Dialogue, in Singapore, on 1 July 2018, India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, was unequivocal in his presentation of the Indian outlook.

As may be seen from the Indian Prime Minister’s speech at the *Shangri La Dialogue*, ‘inclusivity’, and, ‘transparency’, are fundamental to India’s Indo-Pacific formulation,²⁰ as also to the vision of SAGAR, and these, therefore, also drive the ‘IPOI’.

The ‘IPOI’ identifies seven basic facets of maritime cooperation and collaboration. These are: (1) Maritime Security; (2) Maritime Ecology; (3) Maritime Resources; (4) Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; (5) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; (6) Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and (7) Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. These facets of maritime cooperation and collaboration have been described by India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as seven “pillars”,²¹ but should not be thought of as seven silos, since the interconnections between all of them are so abundant and so varied that they form an intricate web, with seven spokes.

It is important to note that both, ‘SAGAR’ (as a vision) and the ‘IPOI’ (as an initiative), are synchronous with other recent maritime initiatives and strategies relevant to the Indo-Pacific. Prominent amongst these is Japan’s “*Free and Open Indo Pacific*” (FOIP). This term, much favoured by Tokyo, actually has two distinct (albeit related) points of reference. The first is as a ‘concept’ in which the adjectives ‘free’ and ‘open’ are envisaged as “*international public goods*” that can be provided through the leveraging of the dynamism inherent in the combination of two continents (Asia and Africa) across two oceans (the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean). The second point of reference — and here the acronym ‘FOIP’ is used almost as a common noun — is a key strategy of Japan, through which a troika of objectives, namely, ‘peace’, ‘stability’, and, ‘prosperity’, all three of which result from a foundational adherence to a rule-based international maritime order, are sought to be achieved in a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent manner, across the geography defined by the aforementioned combination of the two continents (Asia and Africa) and the two oceans (the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean).²² As with the FOIP, the IPOI emphasises ‘inclusivity’, ‘transparency’, a ‘rules-based international order’, and the centrality of ASEAN and ASEAN-

led constructs, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS)²³ and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).²⁴ A similar congruence between the Indian conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific as a ‘strategic-geography’ may be seen with France’s concept as enunciated in the 2019-update to the French MoD’s policy document, *“France and Security in the Indo-Pacific”*, and, here too, ‘peace’ ‘stability’, and, ‘prosperity’ are enunciated as desired goals. As in the case of India and Japan, France has unequivocally stated that the attainment of these goals requires adherence to a rules-based international order that has been set through multilateral dialogue and comity.²⁵ While the geography of the Indo-Pacific specified in the Government of Australia’s “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” (*“We define the Indo-Pacific as the region ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States.”*),²⁶ is more limited than that of India, Japan and France, there is very substantial conceptual and geopolitical alignment, particularly where the IPOI is concerned. This congruity is most evident in the India-Australia *“Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”* of 4 June 2020.²⁷ Some analysts have tended to club the USA, Japan, India and Australia into something called a ‘FOIP bloc’, which they have posited is distinct from (and opposed to) China.²⁸ Considerable significance is provided by these analysts to the potential of the expected initiative from Indonesia by way of an *“Indo-Pacific Infrastructure and Connectivity Forum”*. However, this seems to be a force-fitted difference-of-approach because it is acknowledged by these very scholars that *“Several principles of the Jakarta-led Indo-Pacific cooperation concept — namely, openness, transparency, and upholding of international law (rules-based order) — are compatible with those proposed by the United States and its partners within their FOIP vision”*. In any case, the basic tenet of ASEAN-centrality embodied in this soon-to-be-proposed ‘forum’ has already been fully embraced by India, Japan, Australia and the USA. Indeed, the very conceptualisation by India of the Indo-Pacific, as also its ‘subsets’, namely, the vision of SAGAR and the IPOI, is founded precisely upon the centrality of ASEAN. This is equally true of the FOIP and the Australian and US formulations.

At this stage, it would be appropriate to briefly review ASEAN’s formulation, embodied in the *“ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”* (AOIP).

In terms of the geography of the Indo-Pacific, the AOIP makes two main assertions. The first is that ASEAN views the Indo-Pacific as being equal to the wider Asia-Pacific region *plus* the Indian Ocean region.²⁹ The second assertion both, modifies and amplifies, the first, in averring that the Indian Ocean region and the Pacific Ocean region are not perceived by ASEAN as being merely *“contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role”*.³⁰ There is no doubt that, cartographically, the Indian Ocean region does, indeed, stretch eastward from the east coast of Africa, and that the Pacific Ocean region does, indeed, stretch westward to the western shores of the Americas. It is thus clear that, contrary to the views of some European scholars³¹, there is a close congruence between ASEAN, Japan, France and India, insofar as the geographic framework of the Indo-Pacific region is concerned.

Beyond the strict confines of geography, too, clear congruence is visible in the functional framework of the Indo-Pacific perspectives of both, ASEAN and India. This commonality runs unbroken through the Indian concept of the Indo-Pacific itself, India's outlook as encapsulated by the acronym of SAGAR, and the programmes envisaged under the rubric of the IPOI. Specific evidence of this congruence is to be found in the following commonalities between the outlooks of ASEAN and India, respectively:

- The centrality of ASEAN, as a foundational principle.
- The predominance of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry.
- The pursuit of peace and stability as a prerequisite for prosperity.
- The pursuit of inclusive development and prosperity for all.
- The criticality of the maritime domain.
- The primacy accorded to inclusivity, openness, and transparency.
- The indispensability of a rules-based framework whose structural strength is derived from internationally and consensually derived laws, treaties and conventions such as the UN Charter, the ASEAN Charter, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982), the SOLAS Conventions, the SUA Convention, the 1976 ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC, 1976), the 2011 EAS Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations, etc.
- The essentiality of an abiding respect for sovereignty.
- The importance is given to complementarity with existing ASEAN-led cooperation-frameworks, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting 'Plus' (ADMM-Plus), the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), etc.

There is, once again, an almost complete commonality in the specific areas of cooperation envisaged by the AOIP and the IPOI, although the former has a more exhaustive listing and the latter, a more consolidated set that encompasses very nearly all the broad areas of cooperation enumerated in the AOIP, as well as their more detailed amplification.³² Table 4 shows the evidence of commonalities between AOIP and IPOI.

Special mention must be made of 'Connectivity' and, as the AOIP puts it — "*connecting the connectivities*". It is a central theme along which maritime cooperation and collaboration between ASEAN and India can and should be progressed. In August 2017, Dr S Jaishankar, who was then Foreign Secretary in the Government of India, had unequivocally stated, "*Growth and connectivity are, today, very central to India's foreign policy thinking. The approach of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (collective action, inclusive growth) is as much a belief in international relations as it is in the domestic development... Across South Asia, one can see today transformational initiatives in energy, road and rail connectivity and infrastructure building... As these initiatives are realised, their contribution to the emergence of a larger regional cooperative architecture would be increasingly appreciated. Significantly, we are today working closely with a number of other international players whose approach is similar in this regard*".³³

Table 4: Identified Broad-Areas of (Maritime) Cooperation

Sectors	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
Maritime Cooperation	Freedom of Navigation and Overflight	Maritime Security
	Peaceful Dispute-settlement	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Promote Maritime Connectivity	
	Maritime Safety & Security	
	Promote Maritime Commerce	
	Address Transnational Crime (e.g., trafficking in persons or illicit drugs, sea-piracy, robbery and armed robbery against ships at sea, etc.)	
	Develop a Blue Economy	Maritime Resources
	Sustainable Management of Marine Resources	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Address Marine Pollution	
	Mitigate impacts of Sea-level Rise	
	Tackle Marine Debris	Maritime Ecology
	Preserve and Protect the Marine Environment and Biodiversity	
	Promote 'Green' Shipping,	
	Protect the Livelihood of Coastal Communities	
Support Small-scale Fishing Communities	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing	
Technical Cooperation in Marine Science Collaboration (R & D; sharing of experience and best practices, capacity-building, managing marine hazards, raising awareness on marine and ocean-related issues, etc.)		
Connectivity (Connecting the Connectivities)	Reinforce existing MPAC 2025	Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport
	Mobilise resources for connectivity projects via regional public-private partnerships (PPP)	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Promote regional public-private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure projects	
	Explore potential synergies with sub-regional frameworks (e.g., IORA, BIMSTEC, BIMP-EAGA, MGC, ACMECS, etc.)	
	People-to-people connectivity (including academia and business communities)	
UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030	Utilization of the digital economy	IPOI's underpinning as a whole
	Align regional development with the SDGs	
Economic and Other Areas of Cooperation	Trade Facilitation and Logistics Infrastructure and Services	Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport
		Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
	Maritime Implications of Industrial Revolution 4.0	

Source: Chauhan (2020)

Finally, in this examination of complementarities between the AOIP and the IPOI, it is important to avoid undue self-limitation by restricting the geographic scope to the western Pacific alone. The Indo-Pacific maritime expanse offers opportunities for a number of cooperation-mechanisms within the Indian Ocean, too. The willingness of ASEAN member-States such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, to involve themselves in protecting and preserving freedoms in the maritime common in the north-western Arabian Sea within the Indian Ocean, offers a number of exciting pointers for future maritime collaboration that both, India and ASEAN would do very well to explore. An overarching facet of cooperation stipulated in the IPOI is that of “*Capacity Building and Resource Sharing*”.

As Table 4 shows, this is a recurring facet of complementarity across several, if not all, the areas of cooperation listed in the AOIP document. For instance, the enormous success that India has garnered in addressing water-stress in volcanic islands, such as those in the Lakshadweep, by way of Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD), can easily be leveraged and proliferated across several island nations of the Indo-Pacific as a whole. This offers immediate opportunities for several technologically-advanced ASEAN nations to improve the engineering of these LTTD plants and offer them as “public goods” in both, the western Pacific as well as the Indian Ocean, under the common rubric of the AOIP and the IPOI.

It may thus be seen from the foregoing arguments, that the complementarities between the AOIP and the IPOI are legion and the opportunities for maritime cooperation between ASEAN and India are limited solely by the collective imagination of the respective policy-makers.

5. Way Forward

With the announcement of the AOIP and the IPOI in 2019, the Indo-Pacific has been imparted very significant international momentum and geopolitical traction. As an open global initiative, the IPOI draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms to focus on seven central pillars that anchor the deeply interconnected areas of Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. The AOIP and the IPOI demonstrate very substantive commonalities and greatly enhance the scope of cooperation, particularly in view of unfolding changes to the global order against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) of India came out with the first-ever Indo-Pacific Report in 2019 and this initiative needs to be followed-up so that an extensive body of literature on the Indo-Pacific is available and its intellectual base is appropriately strengthened.

The success of this regional initiative also depends on bilateral as well as subregional relations. In July 2019, India joined ACMECS (Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy) as a ‘Development Partner’ along with Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and the US.

The Indo-Pacific has all ingredients required to facilitate trade and investments. However, the region is highly heterogeneous in terms of economic size and level of development, with significant differences in security establishments and resources. It also faces complex challenges in terms of economy, security and the environment. The maintenance of peace, stability and security on, in and under the seas; unimpeded lawful commerce; freedom of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the oceanic and air space; and, the protection and preservation of marine resources, as well as a sustainable and responsible fishery–framework; are all critical towards building a regional consensus on maritime security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

With countries from ASEAN, SAARC, BIMSTEC, EAS, EU and NAFTA all contributing towards a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, there is every likelihood of a substantial and substantive scale-up of regional cooperative and collaborative endeavours in the post-Covid period. Of course, this is provided countries do not repeat past mistakes in terms of regional cooperation initiatives, and, instead, devote quality time to build a better world for all. Security is not the only vehicle for the diffusion of integration. Geographical and cultural proximity is at least as effective if not more so. In the final analysis, it is the economy that would drive the Indo-Pacific in the days and years that lie ahead.

Even in this Covid-19 period countries of the Indo-Pacific have ample scope for further deepening their integration. Strengthening economic integration requires a shared strategic vision, political will, and strong commitment, which are the keys for the success of Indo-Pacific. Without doubt, ASEAN centrality would be a major driving force for speeding-up cooperation within the Indo-Pacific. Multidimensional regional cooperation within the Indo-Pacific would not only foster economic relations but would, in addition, strengthen regional capacity, and enhance regional capability while dealing with the region’s complex security challenges. To drive the initiative in this era of disruptions, it is recommended that Indo-Pacific countries that have enunciated their respective visions, convene a Ministerial-level meeting to begin with, and a Summit thereafter. It would be advantageous to constitute an empowered Joint Working Group (JWG) to design the Indo-Pacific blueprint and propose a comprehensive Plan of Action (POA).

6. Concluding Remarks

The Indo-Pacific has a significant role to play in building both the economic and security architecture of the region. Protecting marine resources, biodiversity, and developing adaptive and mitigative strategies to offset the deleterious effects of climate change, enhancing sustainable development, promoting connectivity, reducing marine pollution, promoting disaster-management and relief, information sharing, capacity building and capability

enhancement, generating maritime domain awareness, developing quality infrastructure, increasing non-polluting maritime trade and transport, strengthening the digital economy, promoting energy cooperation, and facilitating maritime tourism, are just a few of the several areas that could be explored further amongst the Indo-Pacific partnering countries.

There is a largely untapped opportunity for cross-border trade and investment across the Indo-Pacific region. Heterogeneity in the economic size and development in the region has thrown-up several challenges, but these can be managed by consolidating the efforts of countries to mobilise the skills, financial and technical resources to stimulate growth and long-term development of the region.

Countries of the Indo-Pacific can also advantageously use existing regional and sub-regional fora and initiatives, such as APEC, ASEAN, IORA, BIMSTEC, MGC, ACMECS, etc., to reinforce the partnership³⁴.

The long-term funding and supply of quality infrastructure are the biggest challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. India's SAGAR and IPOI, Japan's Quality Infrastructure, ASEAN's Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, the USA's BDN, and other initiatives across the region, are all aimed at strengthening regional connectivity. There is a large potential to consolidate and mobilise financing for infrastructure projects across the region by developing a comprehensive financing scheme as also by creating a master plan for Indo-Pacific connectivity and building the needed institutions to drive its constituent programmes.

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End Notes

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About AIC

Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the External Affairs Minister of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. The AIC is closely working with the Indo-Pacific Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India to undertake and disseminate evidence-based policy research and provide policy recommendations.

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