



## India and the Indo-Pacific Discourse

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In November 2017 Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar noted ‘the growing appreciation and acceptance of the concept of Indo-Pacific’.<sup>1</sup> Followers of Indian foreign policy would not have encountered the term *Indo-Pacific* before 2006, but a decade later it has become a ‘new template of analysis’ for Indian security and foreign policy analysis.<sup>2</sup> Media use has also become common.<sup>3</sup> Indeed Indian figures talk of ‘the Indo-Pacific imperative’ for India.<sup>4</sup> The Indian ambassador to Singapore emphasized ‘our vision of the Indo-Pacific region as our natural habitat [...] and our strategic commitment to the region’.<sup>5</sup> His choice of words around the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ were revealing – *our vision*, of a *region* that was India’s *natural habitat*.

In a broad generalized sense, the term Indo-Pacific involves both Indian and Pacific Oceans (for India especially the eastern Indian Ocean and western Pacific), with the South China Sea as a joining buckle.<sup>6</sup> The ‘Indo’ bit of the term Indo-Pacific points not only to the Indian Ocean but also to India. Whereas India is marginal to the term *Asia-Pacific* (that is, the Pacific basin and the Pacific Rim), it is self-evidently politically and geographically right in the Indo-Pacific.

Geopolitically the adoption of the term Indo-Pacific reflects a shift of focus by India from land (the Indian subcontinent) to maritime concerns.<sup>7</sup> It reflects further development in India’s own foreign policy formulations. First was the formulation since the 1990s that India’s strategic horizons were no longer restricted to its *immediate neighbourhood* of South Asia, but instead also involved what was styled as India’s *extended neighbourhood*. This was also described as an *omni-directional diplomacy*, which consisted of a Look West to the Middle East, a Look North to Central Asia, a Look South to the Indian Ocean and a Look East to Pacific Asia. India’s Indo-Pacific pivot in effect represents a fusion of its *Look South* and *Look East* horizons established and gradually widened since the 2000s.<sup>8</sup> India’s self-defined strategic interests are Indo-Pacific wide, stretching from established interests in the Indian Ocean, to growing interests in the South China Sea, and indeed into the South/West Pacific.<sup>9</sup> The election

of a new BJP-led administration headed by Narendra Modi brought a new eastwards emphasis encapsulated with the mantra *Act East*.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter looks at three overlapping fields, namely India as an Indo-Pacific 'actor', the Indo-Pacific strategic discourse 'around' (that is, on) government, and the Indo-Pacific language and policies used 'inside' (that is, by) government.

### **An Indo-Pacific actor**

India is an 'Indo-Pacific power' in four ways.<sup>11</sup> First, as already noted, India is geographically located in the Indo-Pacific. Its west coast (and its Western Naval Command) faces the Arabian Sea, its south coast (and its Southern Naval Command) juts deep into the Indian Ocean and its east coast (and its Eastern Naval Command) faces the Bay of Bengal. In addition, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands sit on top of the Strait of Malacca, and are described by the government as a 'springboard to Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean'.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the Indian navy has regularly deployed into the South China Sea since 2000 and into the Western Pacific since 2007. Third, India has shaped various bilateral security partnerships with countries around the South China Sea and Pacific Rim, namely Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia,<sup>13</sup> Japan,<sup>14</sup> France,<sup>15</sup> and the United States.<sup>16</sup> Trilateral dialogues also involve India with both Japan and the US (IJUS), which reflect for India 'the growing convergence of their respective countries' interests in the Indo-Pacific region';<sup>17</sup> and more recently with Australia and Japan (IAJ), which is similarly Indo-Pacific in its spread of members.<sup>18</sup> India's involvement in November 2017 with the revived quadrilateral mechanism with Australia, Japan and the US was described by the Ministry of External Affairs as involving 'consultations on issues of common interest in the Indo-Pacific region', aiming to shape 'a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region' and 'highlighted India's Act East Policy as the cornerstone of its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>19</sup> All this makes for a rising India of increasing importance within the Indo-Pacific balance of power.<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, India is already involved in various de facto Indo-Pacific bodies that include members from the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Such bodies include the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). India is also a member of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFC), which had previously operated from 1948 to 1976 as the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council (IPFC).

India is also an observer in the West Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and is a leading member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Finally, India is involved in the RIC (Russia-India-China) Consultation on Asia-Pacific Affairs (CAPA), which first met in December 2016, but with no indications of actual substance. In addition, India is involved in two particular Indo-Pacific sub-regional mechanisms. First is the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) grouping set up in 2000, which brings India and Myanmar together with the South China Sea littoral states of Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Significantly the MGC does not have China as a member. Second is the Forum for India Pacific Island Countries (FIPIC) set up in 2014, an Indian initiative which brings India together with the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

India is also a maritime security partner in various Indo-Pacific settings.<sup>21</sup> India's organization of the MILAN naval exercises in the waters around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands started off as a modest meet between India, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand in 1995. By 2018, the MILAN framework was involving navies from both wings of the Indo-Pacific – in the shape of South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Oman, Seychelles, Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand. Pakistan and China remained absent. In turn, India has also joined other Indo-Pacific multilateral ventures in the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. With regard to the latter, India joined the ADMM-Plus naval Exercise on Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism (EMSCT), held in the South China Sea in May 2016. With regard to the latter, Indian warships participated in 2014, 2016 and 2018 in the RIMPAC exercises held off Hawaii which India considered 'a demonstration of India's commitment to peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and Indian Navy's increasing footprint and operational reach'.<sup>22</sup>

Various bilateral exercises have an Indo-Pacific nature to them. India's SIMBEX exercises with Singapore have alternated since 2005 between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. The INDRA exercises with Russia took place in the Indian Ocean in 2003, 2005, 2009 and 2015, and in the Western Pacific in 2007, 2014, 2016 and 2017. The India-Japan JIMEX naval exercises took place in the Western Pacific in 2011 and the Eastern Indian Ocean in 2013. Since 2007 the bilateral MALABAR exercises between India and the US alternated

between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. Trilateral MALABAR exercises with Japan and the US have taken place in the Bay of Bengal in 2015 and 2017, and the Western Pacific in 2007, 2009, 2014, 2016 and 2018.<sup>23</sup>

### **Around government: strategic debate**

Indian usage of the term 'Indo-Pacific' arose in naval circles. This was prefigured in India's formal 2004 *Naval Doctrine* which noted 'the shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic–Pacific combine to the Pacific–Indian Ocean region'.<sup>24</sup> The first 'Indo-Pacific' reference in India came in 2006 from Premvir Das, the former Chief of Eastern Naval Command.<sup>25</sup> This was quickly followed by Gurpreet Khurana, former Commander in the Indian Navy and subsequent Executive Director of the National Maritime Foundation. He used the term 'Indo-Pacific' in 2007 in connection with maritime cooperation with Japan, and in 2008 in connection with competition with China.<sup>26</sup> By 2009, Arun Prakash, the Chief of Naval Staff 2004–06 and subsequent Chairman of the National Maritime Foundation, was arguing that it was 'time for our diplomats to take a stand and suggest through regional and international forums that the Indian Ocean is now significant enough to be hyphenated with the Pacific, in order to create a new term, "Indo-Pacific"'.<sup>27</sup> Two years later the call was maintained by Prakash, 'I would suggest that it is time to coin a new term, the "Indo-Pacific"'.<sup>28</sup>

By 2011 the rising prominence of the Indo-Pacific as a term was signaled and further strengthened in the widely noticed piece *Mapping the Indo-Pacific*:






Over the past year, the term 'Indo-Pacific' has gained currency in strategic discourse in India. From a geopolitical perspective it represents the inclusion of the Western Pacific within the range of India's security interests, thus stretching beyond the traditional focus on the Indian Ocean theatre. It is a logical corollary to India's Look East policy.<sup>29</sup>

This was written by Shyam Saran, the former Foreign Secretary 2004–06, official advisor to the Prime Minister 2006–10, and subsequent Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board.

Indian think tanks have been a noticeable vehicle since 2011 in furthering Indo-Pacific terms of reference in Indian strategic discourse (Table 10.1), in particular the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the National

Maritime Foundation (NMF). Such think tanks form a semi-official bridge from outside government into government, and their Indo-Pacific conferences often include ministers, officials and diplomats. Think tank logic in organizing these conferences was simple, the 'Indo-Pacific is the new geopolitical reality'.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 10.1:** Indian think tanks – Indo-Pacific seminars, workshops and conferences

2011	United Service Institute	<i>Japan-India-US Trilateral Strategic Dialogue on Security Issues in the Indo-Pacific Region</i>	
2013	National Maritime Foundation	<i>Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region</i> <sup>31</sup>	
2013	United Service Institute	<i>Perspectives of the Indo-Pacific Region</i> <sup>32</sup>	
2013	Indian Council of World Affairs	<i>Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region</i> <sup>33</sup>	
2014	Observer Research Foundation	<i>Sea Change: Evolving Maritime Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region</i> <sup>34</sup>	
2014	Observer Research Foundation	<i>Regional integration in the Indo-Pacific</i>	
2014	Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies	<i>India, Australia and Indo-Pacific: Regional Interpretations</i>	
2014	Observer Research Foundation	<i>Evolving Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific</i>	
2015	National Maritime Foundation	<i>Maritime Dynamics in the Eastern Indian Ocean Region and the Western Pacific Ocean Region</i> <sup>35</sup>	
2015	National Maritime Foundation	<i>India and China: Constructing Peaceful and Stable Maritime Order in the Indo-Pacific</i> <sup>36</sup>	
2015	Observer Research Foundation	<i>Towards an Indo-Pacific Partnership: Reconnecting India and New Zealand</i>	
2015	United Service Institution	<i>The Indo-Pacific Region: Security Dynamics and Challenges</i> <sup>37</sup>	
2016	United Service Institution	<i>Strategic Balance in the Indo-Pacific Region</i>	

	2017	Observer Research Foundation	<i>Indo-Pacific Region: Converging India-Japan interests</i>
	2017	Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations	<i>Changing Security Dynamic in the Indo-Pacific</i>
	2017	Vivekananda International Foundation	<i>Trilateral India-Japan-USA Dialogue – The Indo-Pacific</i>
	2018	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses	<i>Strategic Stability in the Indo-Pacific</i>
			

What became apparent in Indian discussions around government was that a perceived ‘Indo-Pacific Great Game’ between India and China was felt, as a Chinese push westwards across the Indo-Pacific, which was seen as encircling India, was met by counteracting, in effect balancing, Indian moves eastwards across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>38</sup>

Into government

In retrospect, what has become clear is that with regard to government use of the term Indo-Pacific a geoeconomic focus under the Congress-led government of Manmohan Singh has given way to a more geopolitical China-concerned focus under the BJP-led government of Narendra Modi.<sup>39</sup>

Singh administration (2011–14)

The first appearance of Indo-Pacific in Indian official terminology was in December 2011, when Nirupama Rao, India’s ambassador to the US, argued that ‘continuance of economic growth and prosperity [...] is in many ways linked to the Indo-Pacific region’.<sup>40</sup> Within the Ministry for External Affairs, in February 2012, the then Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai noted a shift of terminology away from the Asia-Pacific; where ‘as some here have begun to call it, the Indo-Pacific,’ and in which ‘while our Look East Policy began with a strong economic emphasis and content, we now have growing strategic and security engagement in the region’.<sup>41</sup> The same month, the Defence Minister A. K. Antony stressed ‘the relevance of the Indian Ocean-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific combine’ in Great Power relationships that India was involved in.<sup>42</sup> By July 2012, the Minister of External Affairs, Salman Khurshid, was pointing out that ‘beyond ASEAN we are actually looking at the Indo Pacific now’.<sup>43</sup>

The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh deployed the term for the first time in December 2012 at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit: 'our future is inter-linked and a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity'.<sup>44</sup>

The following year Indo-Pacific official usage became even more noticeable. In February 2013, Rao argued that 'the term "Indo-Pacific" which is increasingly defining the cultural, economic, political and security continuum that straddles the Indian and the Pacific Ocean regions [is] fast becoming a geo-strategic construct to comprehend the common opportunities, the intersecting maritime and security interests, and challenges'.<sup>45</sup> The following month, the Secretary (East) Sanjay Singh in his Welcoming Address to the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) conference *Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region* noted how 'since the last couple of years, the term "Indo-Pacific" is being used increasingly during discussions amongst policy makers, strategic thinkers and think tanks' because quite simple the term "Indo-Pacific" has come to reflect contemporary realities'.<sup>46</sup>

At that ICWA venue, Khurshid also lent official impetus to this deployment of Indo-Pacific frames of reference, "India-Pacific" could be looked upon as a natural corollary of the country's modern version of "Look East Policy".<sup>47</sup> In 'an exciting era in this region where the Indian and Pacific Oceans meet,' Khurshid advocated seapower:

Maritime supremacy is the hallmark of a great power. [...] India's future lies in its ability to harness the power of the Ocean - the Indian Ocean and the extended 'Indian-Pacific' Ocean region.<sup>48</sup>

Two months later in June, Khurshid was talking of 'a common future that has to be secured not just within the new security and economic future of Asia Pacific but also the Indo-Pacific' and with the need for India to 'build partnerships across the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>49</sup> One such partnership was with Japan. Khurshid invoked how Shinzo Abe 'had eloquently spoken of the confluence of the two seas which gave rise to the term "Indo-Pacific" that is commonly used by strategic thinkers today'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his trip to Japan invoked Shinzo Abe's earlier maritime formula, 'Abe's inspiring and visionary address to the Indian Parliament in August 2007, when he spoke of "the confluence of the two seas" – the Pacific and the Indian Oceans – which has defined the new framework for our bilateral relationship [in] the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>51</sup>

*Modi administration (2014–18)*

The installation of a new BJP-led coalition headed by Narendra Modi brought a renewed push into the Indian Ocean, initiation of an *Act East* policy, further presence established in the South Pacific and specific Indo-Pacific anchoring for strengthened bilateral and trilateral security cooperation with France, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and the US, with China in mind.<sup>52</sup> Hence ministers arguing that ‘in the wider Indo-Pacific region ... we have covered new ground extending our outreach’.<sup>53</sup> For the Foreign Secretary, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, this outreach was ‘a profound shift in India’s geo-political outlook towards the world to its East [...] the transformation of the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific’ in which India’s ‘leapfrogging capabilities’ beckoned a role as ‘a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific’.<sup>54</sup>

Modi has led from the top, arguing that from a maritime perspective, ‘with a 7,500-kilometer long coast line, India has a natural and immediate interest in the developments in the Indo-Pacific region’.<sup>55</sup> The economic rise of India was rendering the previous reference point of the Asia-Pacific obsolete, ‘people now speak of the Indo-Pacific. It is now the focus of the world economic dynamism’.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Modi noted in his speech at the East Asia Summit (EAS), whose membership spans countries from the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and Pacific Ocean:

Since my government entered office 18 months ago, no region has seen greater engagement from India than the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region. This reflects a long standing national consensus in India on the importance of this region for India.<sup>57</sup>

Modi’s note of a national consensus over the importance of the Indo-Pacific area was accurate and significant as was his labeling of the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific (that is, the Pacific Ocean) as one region. Modi’s decision to attend the Shangri-la Dialogue in June 2018 included his Keynote Address which highlighted ‘India’s own engagement in the Indo-Pacific region’.

India’s relations with France have been strengthening for over three decades in the Indian Ocean, but Macron’s visit to India in March 2018 witnessed Modi anchoring their deepening strategic relationship into a wider Indo-Pacific framework. This included setting up a new bilateral dialogue on East Asia and agreeing on a Reciprocal Logistics Support agreement that will enable mutual use of each other’s military facilities in the Indo-Pacific. Modi was explicit on



India's maritime role in his Joint Strategic Vision statement with Macron that 'India occupies a central position in the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>58</sup>

Modi set India–Indonesian relations in an Indo-Pacific (explicitly maritime and implicitly China) setting during the visit to India by the Indonesian leader in December 2016. The Indian leader affirmed 'Indonesia is one of India's most valued partners in our Act East Policy', and welcomed 'our convergences to act as a force of peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>59</sup> The return visit by Modi in May 2018 brought their joint Shared Vision of India–Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. With regard to the South China Sea, the link waters between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, and the scene for Chinese claims over most of its waters, Modi's caution at the Raisina Dialogue forum in January 2017 was a careful warning that 'we believe that respecting Freedom of Navigation and adhering to international norms is essential for peace and economic growth in the larger and inter-linked marine geography of the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>60</sup> With China's assertiveness in the South China Sea in mind, Modi's explanation in March 2018 for increased defence links with Vietnam was that 'to enhance our maritime relations [...] we will jointly work for an open, independent and prosperous Indo-Pacific region where sovereignty and international laws are respected and where differences are resolved through talks'.<sup>61</sup>

Indian links with Japan were embedded in an Indo-Pacific context by Modi. In 2015, the joint *India and Japan Vision 2025* that Modi signed with the Japanese leader Shinzo Abe was subtitled as working together in 'the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>62</sup> In 2016, Modi outlined both the geoeconomics ('we have agreed to cooperate closely to promote connectivity, infrastructure and capacity-building in the regions that occupy the inter-linked waters of the Indo-Pacific') and geopolitics ('the successful Malabar naval exercise has underscored the convergence in our strategic interests in the broad expanse of the waters of the Indo-Pacific') in an Indo-Pacific maritime fashion.<sup>63</sup>

Indian links with Australia were also firmly anchored as being 'Partners in the Pacific' in the *Joint Statement* signed by Modi and the Australian Prime Minister John Turnbull in April 2017.<sup>64</sup> It was no coincidence that the visit of John Key, the New Zealand Prime Minister, to India in October 2016 saw the Indo-Pacific deliberately used as an organizing framework for strategic cooperation:

The two Prime Ministers underlined the fact that India and New Zealand are both maritime nations with a strong interest in the Asia-Pacific and

Indo-Pacific regions being stable and prosperous, including by ensuring the safety and security of sea lanes and freedom of navigation.<sup>65</sup>

The key thing is the identification of the Indo-Pacific as a *region* that they were both members of, the strong maritime focus of their envisaged roles in that region, and the focus on the issue of freedom of navigation which was implicitly aimed at any future Chinese restrictions in the South China Sea.

Further east, the summit meetings held with South Pacific island leaders was given a firm maritime Indo-Pacific underpinning by Modi:

The centre of gravity of global opportunities and challenges are shifting to the Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. The fortunes of nations in and around the two oceans are inter-linked. For this reason, the tides that bear hopes and bring challenges to the shores in India and the Pacific Islands are the same. That is why some call the region the Indo-Pacific Region.<sup>66</sup>

Modi's outreach to the South Pacific was welcomed by Nirupama Rao; it 'conjoins Indian interests and concerns in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, providing ballast to the term "Indo-Pacific"'.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the noticeable security cooperation now developing between India and the US not only involves tangible naval cooperation in both Indian and Pacific Ocean waters, it also involves common regional perspectives, indicated in the *Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region* agreed upon by President Obama and Prime Minister Modi in January 2015. In his summit meeting with President Trump in June 2017, Modi maintained this 'logic of our strategic relationship' working together across 'the large maritime space of the Indo-Pacific' in 'ensuring that sea lanes, critical lines of trade and energy, remain secure and open to all'.<sup>68</sup>

Further down the government chain, other officials too deployed the Indo-Pacific language. A significant development was its explicit adoption by the Ministry of Defence. Modi's Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, was certain at the 2016 Shangri-la Dialogue about the geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of the 'Indo-Pacific region', a region that 'is now aptly and increasingly referred to by the strategic community as the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>69</sup> All in all, *Indo-Pacific* was mentioned five times by Parrikar, *Asia-Pacific* but once.

The geoeconomics of the Indo-Pacific, and with it responding to China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative going across the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, were in play in April 2015, when Nirmala Sitharaman, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, signed the **Action Agenda for the**

India–Japan Investment and Trade Promotion and Indo-Pacific Economic Integration with her Japanese counterpart, Yoichi Miyazawa. This represented India's readiness to involve itself with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS) initiative designed to strengthen infrastructure links across the Indo-Pacific, and which was seen as a more desirable scheme for India than the Chinese MSR initiative that both the Singh and Modi governments avoided participation in. Less contentious economic mechanisms are represented by India's support for the setting up of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), negotiation for which started in 2012, and which India's ambassador to Singapore, Jawed Ashraf, considered 'brings all major regional economies into a single arrangement, which can anchor integration and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>70</sup> Significantly though it involves Pacific Asia countries like Japan and China, it does not involve the US.

Pranab Mukherjee also continued to pursue Indo-Pacific pathways as President. He portrayed the India–Indonesia naval cooperation as aimed at 'the security of the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>71</sup> In a pointed definition, Mukherjee argued that through 'sharing common values of democracy, freedom and rule of law' India and Japan were 'uniquely placed' to pursue economic and security cooperation 'in the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>72</sup> China was an unstated background consideration in both these settings.

A significant type of new voice was from Ram Madhav, the General Secretary of the BJP. In 2015, he stepped into foreign policy utterances with his assertion:

Today the global power axis has shifted from Pacific-Atlantic region to Indo-Pacific region. India is the third-largest and fastest growing economy in this region. We are an important counter-balancing power in this region too. We look at the great oceans as filled with great opportunities.<sup>73</sup>

This structural shift necessitated a change of terminology – 'the region, hitherto called Asia-Pacific, should now be renamed Indo-Pacific' – for while the term Asia-Pacific reflected the rise of Japan and the Pacific Rim, the term Indo-Pacific reflected the rise of India and the Indian Ocean in geopolitical and geoeconomic terms.<sup>74</sup> He welcomed as 'a pleasant departure PM uses phrase "Indo-Pacific" in place of "Asia-Pacific" at the Raisina Dialogue in January 2017'.<sup>75</sup> A degree of China-constraint was evident in his proposal of India as a counter-balance in the region, and like Modi he emphasized maritime underpinnings: 'today it is the Indo-Pacific region that has emerged as the new global power house. Our futures are invariably linked to the Indo-Pacific sea lanes'.<sup>76</sup>

India has a vision of Indo-Pacific economic cooperation, as presented by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Vijay Singh, in December 2017. In looking at the past he noted that ‘our historical maritime trade flourished through the Malacca Straits across the Indo Pacific region’ before going on to argue that ‘in the context of current geo-political realities [...] let us unite to reconstruct the same trade connections today with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region’.<sup>77</sup>

However, the current geopolitical reality involves India’s response to the MSR initiative pushed by Beijing since 2013, a maritime route going across the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Here it is significant that India continues to avoid participation in China’s MSR initiative, thus refusing to send any representative to the Belt and Road Forum held in Beijing in early May 2017. Instead, India has mooted its own schemes for the Indian Ocean like *Mausam* and the *Cotton Route*. India has also moved to Indo-Pacific economic cooperation with Japan. This was first indicated in April 2015, when Nirmala Sitharaman, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, signed the *Action Agenda for the India-Japan Investment and Trade Promotion and Indo-Pacific Economic Integration* with her Japanese counterpart, Yoichi Miyazawa. Indian support for an Africa-Asia Growth Corridor (AAGC), going from East Africa to Japan, was further signaled in the *Vision Document* drafted by the Delhi-based think tank Research and Information System (RIS), in conjunction with the ERIA from Singapore and the IDE-JETRO from Tokyo, and formally put forward by Modi at the African Development Bank meeting in late May 2017.

### Looking forward: New directions

On 26 January 2018, Narendra Modi asserted that ‘the Indo-Pacific region will be indispensable to India’s future’.<sup>78</sup> Matters for observers to look out for in Indo-Pacific developments include India

1. Rearranging the internal structure of the Ministry of External Affairs to join together its Look South and Look East policies.
2. Gaining membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC).
3. Concluding negotiations for setting up the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
4. Strengthening the Bay of Bengal (BIMSTEC) mechanism and pursuing its infrastructure projects overland to Thailand.
5. Strengthening the Ganga-Mekong Cooperation (GMC) mechanism.

6. Strengthening the Forum for India and Pacific Island Countries (FIPIC) mechanism.
7. Upgrading the officials-level India-Australia-Japan (IAJ) trilateral into a minister-level format like the India-Japan-US (IJUS) trilateral.
8. Establishing an India-Australia-US (IAUS) trilateral.
9. Moving to ministerial-level involvement in the Quadrilateral Alliance with Japan, Australia and the US, including naval exercises.
10. Blocking China's participation in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).
11. Furthering Indian strategic interest in the RIC (Russia-India-China) Consultation on Asia-Pacific Affairs (CAPA) mechanism.
12. Deciding whether or not to join in China's Maritime Silk Road initiative.
13. Actively synergizing with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative.
14. Actively synergizing with the US' Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor initiative.
15. Keeping China out of the MILAN exercises.
16. Building up the tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Island Command into an explicit Far Eastern Command, for operations further eastwards.
17. Developing bilateral naval exercises with Australia in the Pacific Ocean, as well as the initial ones started in the Indian Ocean in 2015 and 2017.
18. Considering whether to hold trilateral MALABAR exercises with the US and Japan in the South China Sea.
19. Considering whether or not to conduct joint naval operations with Vietnam in the South China Sea.
20. Making further use of Cam Ranh Bay as a focus point for India naval deployments in bigger strength in the South China Sea.
21. Making use of French military facilities in the Indian Ocean and Pacific under their Reciprocal Logistics Support agreement.

Matters 4–20 are unsurprisingly all explicitly or implicitly China-related. Admittedly there is some potential common ground in the Indo-Pacific with China over piracy threats and sea lane security.<sup>79</sup> However, the competitive dynamics seem more apparent, and with it the need for India to balance as well as to economically engage China in the Indo-Pacific. The suggestion in this chapter is that it will probably so continue, with regional friction more likely

than cooperation. Stephen Waltz's 'balance of threat' logic, especially its drivers of *geographic proximity* and *perceived offensive intentions*, will continue to shape India's responses to China in the Indo-Pacific.

Looking ahead, how is research on the Indo-Pacific discourse evolving, what is the likely research agenda around the Indo-Pacific? Certainly, research needs to be done on clarifying exactly what maritime spaces (in the Indian and Pacific Oceans) the term 'Indo-Pacific' geographically covers, or at least what it means for India. This raises the question of establishing what actually constitutes a meaningful coherent strategic area. Research will continue on the nature of the Indo-Pacific concept. In other words, how far is it a geopolitical framework for analysis driven by competitive power politics of the realism strand of International Relations (IR) theory, and how far is it a geoeconomic framework for analysis incorporating cooperative interdependence theory? The answer in reality is that it covers both aspects.

The Indo-Pacific also sheds light on India's continuing development. As a process feeding into government, research can fruitfully look at the role of think tanks and their Track 1.5 events in shaping wider strategic discourse and government in India. Research may fruitfully be pursued on how far the Indo-Pacific is giving India an alternative to its previous restricted South Asian horizons. Partly this is with regard to nation identity, and calls for a greater maritime consciousness within India, as propounded vigorously by the National Maritime Formation. Research can be pursued on how far Indian is thinking of itself as less of a land power in South Asia and more of a maritime power in the Indo-Pacific. The role of organization and bureaucracy in Indian foreign policymaking can be pursued in terms of government structures, particularly at the Ministry of External Affairs being matched or perhaps not matched up with Indo-Pacific rationales.

Finally, although the term Indo-Pacific may need further clarification, the pace of its acceptance in Indian strategic discourse and government formulations means that wider research directions will be from running other theoretical models through an Indo-Pacific lens. Models that can fruitfully be tested through the Indo-Pacific setting include balance of power (be it Mearsheimer's 'offensive realism' or Waltz's 'defensive/structural realism'), balance of threat, power transition, liberalism, interdependence and regionalism (identity formation and institutional mechanisms) and constructivism theories. Both geopolitics ('position' as location) and geoeconomics can be run through the Indo-Pacific setting, as indeed can critical geopolitics ('position'

as aspirations, hopes and fears). Before getting drowned in such, at times competing, research paradigms, the researcher can of course be reminded of the approach recommended by Sil and Katzenstein, namely 'analytical eclecticism', since all the above theories and models have some application on the Indo-Pacific.

## Notes

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