



Germany and India in the Indo-Pacific: United or Untied?

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- ▶ Over recent years, there has been a growing interest in the 'Indo-Pacific' despite the contestations and confusions surrounding this concept. In simple terms, it means fostering closer economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The concept has not only become popular in Asia but also in Europe and America. Germany was the second European country after France that released Indo-Pacific Guidelines.
- ▶ The political approach of India in the Indo-Pacific was outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2018. In practical terms and keeping China in focus, India is bringing together its Indo-Pacific and ASEAN policies in a single approach and signals a meshing of Indian interests with key blocs and nations in the Indo-Pacific and external actors like the European Union and Germany.
- ▶ The German Indo-Pacific Guidelines have been positively reported in the Indian media, given the high degree of convergence between India and Germany on the Indo-Pacific. To secure the Indo-Pacific and uphold the rules-based global order in the region, countries like India will need outside help from European countries like Germany and France.

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The 'Indo-Pacific': Yet another label?

Policymakers and scholars have paid much attention in recent years to the emergence of the term 'Indo-Pacific' to describe the changing regional security system in Asia. There is still some contestation and confusion about what the concept means, whether it is beneficial, and what its implications are for policy – for the directions and decisions among key powers. For the US, it extends up to the west coast of India, which is also the geographic boundary of the US Indo-Pacific command. For Japan, the term incorporates the wider Asian region, including South Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. For Germany, the Indo-Pacific covers the entire region characterised by the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. India, in line with its Act East policy, defines the term as the entire Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. What is clear from these definitions is that the Indo-Pacific is more than just a “faddish label” or “a novel way of talking” about the region formerly identified as the Asia-Pacific.

At its simplest, the contemporary Indo-Pacific means recognising that the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region are creating a single strategic system. At its heart, a strategic system can be understood as a set of geopolitical power relationships among nations where major changes in one part of the system affect what happens in the other parts. Despite the name, the Indo-Pacific is not a concept framed primarily or solely by the rise of India. Rather, the evolution of what might be called an Indo-Pacific strategic system has its origins at least as much in the interests of East Asian powers (and not only China), most notably in their dependence on the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean for energy and trade.

To recognize
the Western Pacific
and the Indian Ocean
as one single
strategic system

India and the Indo-Pacific

Prime Minister Modi's address at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2018, which provides the foundation of India's approach to the Indo-Pacific, highlighted the need for “a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and law”.² At the annual India-ASEAN summit (November 2019 and virtual summit in November 2020), Prime Minister Modi spoke about the closeness between India's “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative” and ASEAN's “Outlook on Indo Pacific”. India's vision of the Indo-Pacific is part of its Act East Policy, and has evolved naturally from the Look East Policy as a direct consequence of the nature of China's rise, the inadequacies of the regional security order in Asia, and India's own growing capabilities and profile. A significant part of India's Act East Policy has been to secure the Indian Ocean region against greater security competition through better maritime domain awareness, improved naval capabilities and presence, enhanced infrastructural and capacity development, and greater institutional leadership³. This is at the core of PM Modi's slogan for the Indian Ocean, SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), based on a cooperative and collaborative rules-based order and the Indian Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) to

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focus more on the
maritime domain

ensure the safety, security, and stability of the maritime domain. To do that, seven pillars have been laid out in the IPOI including, 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.

In practical terms and keeping China in focus, India is bringing together its Indo-Pacific and ASEAN policies under a single unit, with the Ministry of External Affairs⁴ creating a new vertical, which includes a new Oceania territorial division with Australia at its centre, as well as including the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN divisions within it. Essentially, the move is intended to align policies in the region stretching from the Western Pacific (with the Pacific islands) to the Andaman Sea, the very area that China regards as its strategic backyard and where it is jostling for influence with its smaller neighbours and the US. The division will bring the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN region and the Quad to the Indo-Pacific table. By focusing administrative and diplomatic attention, India has signalled its own focus on the region. The geopolitical sweep and messaging is important as it indicates India's priorities over a longer timescale, and the timing of the decision in the context of heightened military tensions with China in Ladakh is significant. It signals a meshing of Indian interests with key blocs and nations in the Indo-Pacific and external actors like the European Union and Germany.

India brings it Indo-Pacific and ASEAN-Policy together in a single approach

The Indian plurilateral approach, which aims to create purposive partnerships with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific, also dovetails with Germany's priorities. Germany is focused on multilateralism and a policy of close involvement in multilateral organisations and groups such as the G20, as well as promoting regional structures. It aims to intensify its cooperation with ASEAN – including regular high-level exchange on regional and global developments – within the framework of a 'Dialogue Partnership'⁵. India has reiterated its commitment to inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity, as also stressed by Germany in its Guidelines.

The Indian plurilateral approach dovetails with Germany's priorities

Indian Responses to the German Guidelines

On September 2, 2020, the German government released a document titled Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region, which highlighted Germany's ambition to strengthen the cooperation with the region. These Guidelines, which mention India 57 times, have been positively reported in the media, given the high degree of convergence between India and Germany on the Indo-Pacific. The official narrative has been to advance practical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure security and growth for all. Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla welcomed Berlin's release of its Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region and underlined the high degree of convergence between the two countries on the issue. In his address at the Indo-German 1.5 Track Dialogue 2020, Shringla outlined how India is ready to diversify its supply chains and design them to be more resilient to disruptions like the current pandemic and become an "active manufacturing hub placed at the heart of global value chains". India has "simplified the labour laws; instituted landmark reforms in the agriculture sector; and launched production-linked incentive schemes to attract investment in sectors ranging from electronics manufacturing and solar modules to auto, textiles and pharmaceuticals".⁶ He invited German companies to ramp up their investment to decisively change the current paradigm which considers India to be a difficult investment hub.

The German Indo-Pacific Guidelines have been positively reported in the Indian media

Although the Indian media has welcomed Germany's proactive role in the region, it clearly views the Guidelines as an anti-China measure. Some of the reports mention how Germany has 'dumped' China and 'breaks ranks with China' and share India's vision on the Indo-Pacific. Other reports clearly highlight the proactive strategic role of Germany in the region and say the country is 'coming out of the closet' with its Indo-Pacific policy.

Indian media views the Guidelines as an anti-China measure

Policy Recommendations

Since Germany has only recently committed itself to a stronger engagement in the Indo-Pacific, there is an urgent need for reassurance from partners like India who already play an important role in the region. In that sense there is an unprecedented opportunity for both countries to step up cooperation in the spirit of their respective policy frameworks and approaches in the Indo-Pacific.

Germany and India should foster closer **departmental cooperation** by aligning their interests in the Indo-Pacific. This can be done by forging collaborations between the newly formed Indo-Pacific Wing in the Ministry of External Affairs, India and the Directorate for the Asia-Pacific, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany and by coming up with a joint agenda outlining issues of mutual interest. Enhancing interoperability at sea, intelligence sharing and capacity building could be initial building blocks for the two countries.

To align
their interests

India has focused on a **free and inclusive Indo-Pacific Region** and Germany should consider how it, too, might promote its own version of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy in cooperation with India. It is estimated that about four percent of India's GDP is related to the blue economy, which is abysmal in comparison to China. This has more to do with the fact that many of the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) nations do not have the technology and fishing infrastructure to maximise their oceanic catch. The EU's Connectivity Strategy may be a useful starting point for this, and Germany should also consider how it can engage directly in infrastructure projects.

Another area of mutual interest is **maritime security**. The scope for cooperation, especially in the Indian Ocean, is huge. The EU and India have cooperated in anti-piracy efforts in the Indian Ocean and the EU has been keen to see India joining in efforts to escort World Food Programme shipments off the coast of Somalia. Germany and India should join forces to promote the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as the basis of ocean governance and work more closely in the field of maritime surveillance to prevent maritime crimes, preserve marine ecology, protect against disasters and prosper from the blue economy.

Common interest in
maritime security

An important contribution that Germany could make to regional security is providing **capacity building** for maritime security, not only for India but also for other actors in the region. The Indian Ocean is one of the least-governed maritime spaces on earth. At the same time, many countries and communities in the Indo-Pacific rely heavily on the ocean for their economic wellbeing. However, most lack the capacity to address threats such as illegal fishing and the abundance of other maritime security issues faced in the region. Defence cooperation with India will hinge on the German efforts to provide submarines to India. Some progress has already been made in this direction with the German defence minister's November 2020 announcement that one of the country's warships will patrol the Indian Ocean. The German defence ministry needs to collaborate with its Indian counterpart, which conducts its own Indo-Pacific policy. For instance, Indian ships are currently touring Vietnam on a goodwill visit en route to China, while others are in Mozambique to provide relief.

Capacity building in
the Indo-Pacific

India wants to address and engage with Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia as critical partners in the region because ASEAN by itself does not speak as a united entity, particularly when China exerts political and economic pressure on the individual member states. While ASEAN is wary of China, it is equally sceptical of the US, preferring to keep the region outside great power politics. Germany should also strengthen its efforts to engage with these countries on cross-border terrorism, the spread of violent extremism and the situation in the South China Sea, marine ecology and pollution, especially in light of Covid-19, given India's interest in these issues. There is enormous potential for the EU, Germany, and other actors to cooperate on these issues with India in the Indo-Pacific region.

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To secure the Indo-Pacific and uphold the **rules-based global order** in the region, countries like India will need outside help from European countries like Germany and France. Europe is well placed, experienced and strategically intertwined in the Indo-Pacific. It can provide a much-needed normative underpinning as well as greater legitimacy to the new geopolitical construct, something that is also desired by Indo-Pacific partners. Given the sheer gravity of the non-traditional and traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, it would be a necessary strategy for India and others interested in the Indo-Pacific region to share the load and foster more profound engagement with Germany. For Germany, this would mean clarity on how it factors India into its strategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific as it starts immersing itself more deeply in the region.

To provide greater
legitimacy to the new
geopolitical construct

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