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THE “INDO-PACIFIC” CONCEPT GEOGRAPHICAL ADJUSTMENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The United States, Australia, Japan, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia and ASEAN have adopted the term “Indo-Pacific” as a policy symbol of regional engagement. However, less attention has been given to the change in the geographical definition of the “Indo-Pacific”. This study examines how these countries have adjusted the geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific” to understand how they conceptualise the region. It finds that the inherent core area of the “Indo-Pacific” is from India to the Southeast Asian countries and the seas from the eastern Indian Ocean to the South China Sea, and that the “Indo-Pacific” has converged eastwards and diverged westwards through the geographical adjustment process. It also found that some of the geographical definitions have an additional function of conveying diplomatic messages. These findings will help us understand how the concept of “Indo-Pacific” as conceptualised by various countries develops.

Introduction

“Senior officials from the United States, Australia, India, and Japan met in Bangkok on May 31, 2019, for consultations on their collective efforts to advance a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.” This is a part of the media note on the US-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (“The Quad”) announced by the US Department of State.¹ However, if someone had asked officials from each of the four countries where the “Indo-Pacific” is, would their answers have coincided with each other?

A new geographical term “Indo-Pacific” has become a widely-recognised regional conception. The United States, Australia, Japan, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia and ASEAN have adopted “Indo-Pacific” as a policy symbol of regional engagement and have started taking actions to make “Indo-Pacific” an ideal region for themselves based on their values.

The general understanding of “Indo-Pacific” is a combination of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It is natural to interpret that “Indo-Pacific” consists of the two oceans and the surrounding countries. Yet, not all the countries use the term to describe the whole area. In other words, each country bears in mind its own geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific”. Moreover, even within the same country, the geographical definition has at times changed along with policy development.

Understanding each country’s geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” is important for two reasons. First, each country makes and implements its policies under the “Indo-Pacific” concept within its own geographical perception. Misunderstanding or ignoring each other’s definition might negatively affect possible dialogues or collaborations and even lead to mistrust, derived from wrong expectations. Second, it is important to take note and analyse why a country changes its geographical definition. No country changes a definition of a key concept without a reasonable reason, once it has adopted the term as a policy symbol. If it does change the definition, there could be a certain intention behind the change. Therefore, changes in the geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” should be examined as implying policy changes.

Since the term “Indo-Pacific” emerged in the diplomatic and security arena, the meaning and the diffusion process of the new regional conception have been examined in several studies.² Some studies

¹ US Department of State, “US-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (“The Quad”)”, Media Note from the Office of the Spokesperson, 31 May 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-australia-india-japan-consultations-the-quad/>.

² See, for example, David Scott, “The Indo-Pacific”? New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US-India Strategic Convergence”, *Asia-Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (November 2012): 85–109, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13439006.2012.738115>; Yoshinobu Yamamoto, “Josyō. Indo taiheiyou gainen wo megutte [Introduction to On the Indo-Pacific concept]”, *Ajia (tokuni minami shina kai indo-you) ni okeru anzen hoshou chitsujo* [Research Report on Security Order in Asia (especially in South China Sea and Indian Ocean)], Japan Institute of International Affairs, March 2013, 5–23, http://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/resarch/H24_Asia_Security/introduction.pdf; Rory Medcalf, “The Indo-Pacific: What’s in a Name?”, *The American Interest* 9, no. 2 (October 2013), <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/10/10/the-indo-pacific-whats-in-a-name/>; and Kazutoshi Tamari, “Indo taiheiyou gainen no fukyu katei [The diffusion of the concept “Indo-Pacific”]”, *Kokusai Anzen Hoshou* [The Journal of International Security] 43, no. 1 (June 2015): 68–86.

provided overviews of the geographical scope of the concept as conceived by each country,³ and discussed it in the context of bilateral relations or “the Quad”.⁴ However, less attention has been paid to how the countries have shaped the geographical scope of the concept and why they have changed the definition along the way. To fill the gap, this study examines the geographical adjustment process of the term “Indo-Pacific”, drawing on official documents and statements on the concept.

The paper is structured as follows. The first two sections are devoted to individual countries’ understanding of the geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” and how the definition has changed. They also examine what caused the adjustment in each case. The third section discusses the implications for policy of the geographical understandings of each country’s definition.

The Geographical Adjustment Process

The United States

The United States government started to use the term “Indo-Pacific” under the Obama administration’s rebalancing strategy towards Asia. However, there was no clear and coherent geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” under the administration. The geographical focus of the “Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor” initiative, which the then Secretary of State John Kerry introduced at the US-India Strategic Dialogue in June 2013, was South and Southeast Asia.⁵ Meanwhile, in April 2014, the Assistant Secretary of the US State Department’s Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs described “Indo-Pacific” as “the vast littoral arc stretching from South Africa to Australia.”⁶

The administration also used the term “Asia-Pacific” and “Indo-Asia-Pacific” when it referred to the region linked by the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Hillary Clinton, when she was Secretary of State, defined “Asia-Pacific” in October 2011 as “stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western

³ See, for example, Yoshinobu Yamamoto, “Indo taiheiyou to umi no shiruku rohdo — seisaku symbol no khousou to kokusai chitsujo no keisei [Indo-Pacific and Maritime Silk road —competition of policy symbol and shaping international order]”, PHP Research Institute, 18 May 2016, <https://thinktank.php.co.jp/policy/2696/>, and David Scott, “The Indo-Pacific in US Strategy: Responding to Power Shifts”, *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3, Issue 2 (August 2018): 19–43, <https://risingpowersproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/vol3.2-scott.pdf>.

⁴ See, for example, Alyssa Ayres, “The US Indo-Pacific Strategy Needs More Indian Ocean”, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 January 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/us-indo-pacific-strategy-needs-more-indian-ocean>; Sinderpal Singh, “The Indo-Pacific and India-US Strategic Convergence: An Assessment”, *Asia Policy* 14, no. 1 (30 January 2019), <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-indo-pacific-and-india-u-s-strategic-convergence-an-assessment/>; Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, “India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad”, *Survival* 60, no. 3 (1 June 2018): 181–194, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470773>; and William Choong, “The return of the Indo-Pacific strategy: an assessment”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 73, Issue 5 (2019): 415–430, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10357718.2019.1639134>.

⁵ US Department of State, Remarks by John Kerry, Secretary of State, on “The US-India Strategic Partnership”, 23 June 2013, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/06/211013.htm>.

⁶ US Department of State, Remarks by Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, on “US Foreign Policy in South Asia: A Vision for Prosperity and Security”, 16 April 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2014/224914.htm>.

shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans — the Pacific and the Indian”.⁷ “Asia-Pacific” was also used as the region “stretching from the Indian Ocean, through the South and East China Seas, and out to the Pacific Ocean” in a discourse on maritime security.⁸ On the other hand, the US Department of Defense defined “Indo-Asia-Pacific” as a region “spanning from the West Coast of the United States to the eastern coast of Africa”.⁹

The Trump administration’s initial geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific” was similar to that of Japan at the time, since the United States seemed to have been inspired by Japan’s idea of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. In October 2017, the then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made a speech in Washington, in which he described “Indo-Pacific” as “the entire Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and the nations that surround them” and highlighted India’s role by stressing that the United States and India must serve as “the eastern and western beacons” of the Indo-Pacific or as “the port and starboard lights between which the region can reach its greatest and best potential.”¹⁰ Despite the geographical definition in the speech, his answer to the question on the architecture of the US engagement in the new strategy indicated that there was a different geographical perception. He pointed out that the “Indo-Pacific” map all the way to the western coast of the United States was the part of the map they were dealing with and that India, Japan and Australia were democracy pins on the map of “Indo-Pacific”.¹¹ This brings to mind “the Quad” and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s idea of “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond”¹². Furthermore, Secretary Tillerson mentioned that there was an important part of the South Pacific that also needed an important pinpoint.¹³ These remarks predicted an eastward geographical adjustment of the “Indo-Pacific”.

The United States changed its geographical definition immediately after President Trump officially announced a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)” as its new regional policy.¹⁴ The *National Security Strategy* (NSS), published in December 2017, defined “Indo-Pacific” as “the region, which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States”.¹⁵ Through this adjustment, the “Indo-Pacific” was enlarged in the Pacific Ocean, whereas it shrunk in the Indian Ocean. That is, the United States excluded the western part of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and Africa in

⁷ Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy* 189 (November 2011): 56–63.

⁸ US Department of Defense, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, August 2015, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF.

⁹ The United States Navy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, March 2015, <https://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf>.

¹⁰ US Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson, Secretary of State, on “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century”, 18 October 2017, <https://www.state.gov/remarks-on-defining-our-relationship-with-india-for-the-next-century/>.

¹¹ US Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson.

¹² Shinzo Abe, “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond,” *Project Syndicate*, December 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe?barrier=accesspaylog>.

¹³ US Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson.

¹⁴ The White House, Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, 10 November 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>.

¹⁵ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

the concept while expanding it to cover the entire Pacific Ocean. As a result, the “Indo-Pacific” almost coincided with the area of responsibility of the US Pacific Command (USPACOM).¹⁶ Since then, the United States has argued that it is a part of the “Indo-Pacific” and underlined how important the region is for its future, based on the adjusted geographical definition. For instance, in January 2018, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Dan Rosenblum mentioned that when they spoke about the region, they were defining it as stretching “from the US West Coast through the Bay of Bengal”, and explained that the reason for the US commitment to the region was that they were a part of it and they had a major stake in its success.¹⁷ In its *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* of June 2019, the US Department of Defense reaffirmed that “Indo-Pacific” was “spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the west coast of the US to the western shores of India” and declared that the “Indo-Pacific” was “the single most consequential region for America’s future”.¹⁸

The United States reflected the adjusted geographical definition in its military structure. In May 2018, it renamed USPACOM as US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).¹⁹ As mentioned above, the “Indo-Pacific” has already adjusted to almost coincide with USPACOM’s area of responsibility. This command name change implied that the United States had by then regarded the Indo-Pacific strategy as a long term regional security policy framework and that its geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific” was not likely to change easily.

The reason why the United States limited the geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific” up to the west coast of India can be considered in two aspects. First, the country’s Indo-Pacific strategy is subordinate to its security strategy. In June 2018, the then Secretary of Defense James Mattis mentioned in his remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore that the Indo-Pacific strategy was a subset of America’s security strategy.²⁰ Taking the US military command structure into consideration,²¹ it is efficient that a single geographical command, USINDOPACOM, rather than multiple geographical commands, is responsible for security under the strategy. Second, the United States divides India’s roles into its two regional strategies: the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the South Asia Strategy. India was

¹⁶ The western boundary of USINCPACOM’s area of responsibility is 68 degrees east longitude, and the west coast of North America is assigned to USNORTHCOM. See US Indo-Pacific Command, “USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility”, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>; and “History of United States Indo-Pacific Command”, <https://www.pacom.mil/AboutUSINDOPACOM/History/>.

¹⁷ Embassy of the United States of America, Bangladesh, Remarks by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Dan Rosenblum on “The United States and the Indo-Pacific Region”, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), Dhaka, 30 January 2018, <https://bd.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/Remarks-by-Deputy-Assistant-Secretary-of-State-Dan-Rosenblum-on-the-United-State-and-the-Indo-Pacific-Region-English-January-30-2018.pdf>.

¹⁸ US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, 1 June 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

¹⁹ US Indo-Pacific Command, “US Indo-Pacific Command Holds Change of Command Ceremony”, 30 May 2018, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1535776/us-indo-pacific-command-holds-change-of-command-ceremony/>.

²⁰ US Department of Defense, Remarks by Secretary Mattis at Plenary Session of the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, 2 June 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1538599/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-plenary-session-of-the-2018-shangri-la-dialogue/>.

²¹ US Department of Defense, “Combatant Commands”, <https://www.defense.gov/Our-Story/Combatant-Commands/>.

mentioned not only in the Joint Regional Strategy for East Asia and the Pacific,²² but also that for South and Central Asia.²³ In September 2018, a senior State Department official mentioned that India's role was prominent in not only the NSS but also the South Asia Strategy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy. According to him, the expected role of India in the South Asia Strategy was in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, and that in the Indo-Pacific Strategy was committing itself to a free and open Indo-Pacific region in the security and economic dimensions.²⁴

Regarding India's role in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US expectation was limited to the eastern side of India. In April 2018, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs provided the two reasons that led the United States to use the term "Indo-Pacific" instead of the existing term "Asia-Pacific", or simply "Asia": one was South Asia's, in particular India's, key role in the Pacific, in East Asia and in Southeast Asia, and the other was India's increasingly weighty role in the region.²⁵ The geographical adjustment could have been related to this expectation of India as a key player limited to the east.

Under the geographical definition, the United States government has been formulating and implementing its "Indo-Pacific" strategy.²⁶ It started announcing a concrete approach to three focus areas: economics, governance, and security.²⁷ In July 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo explained his country's Indo-Pacific economic vision, focused on digital economy, energy, and infrastructure, and announced a US\$113 million fund allocation to expand economic engagement in the region.²⁸ In August 2018, he announced nearly US\$300 million in new funding to reinforce security cooperation, especially to strengthen maritime security, develop humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping capabilities, and enhance programmes that counter transnational threats.²⁹ In November 2018, Vice President Mike Pence announced an initiative for transparent governance.³⁰ In June and November 2019, the

²² US Department of State, *Joint Regional Strategy, East Asia and the Pacific*, State Department –Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs USAID — Bureau for Asia, 20 November 2018, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/JRS_EAP-UNCLASS-508.pdf.

²³ US State Department Bureau for South and Central Asia, USAID Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, and USAID Bureau for Asia, *Joint Regional Strategy, South and Central Asia*, 27 February 2019, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/JRS_SCA_UNCLASS_508_CMC.pdf.

²⁴ US Department of State, Special Briefing, "Senior State Department Official Remarks to Traveling Press", 6 September 2018, <https://www.state.gov/senior-state-department-official-remarks-to-traveling-press/>.

²⁵ US Department of State, Special Briefing by Alex N. Wong, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, on "The Indo-Pacific Strategy", 2 April 2018, <https://www.state.gov/briefing-on-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

²⁶ US Department of State, Special Briefing by Alex N. Wong.

²⁷ US Department of State, Fact Sheet, "Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region", 18 November 2018, <https://www.state.gov/advancing-a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-region/>.

²⁸ US Department of State, Remarks by Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, "on America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision", at Indo-Pacific Business Forum, US Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, 30 July 2018, <https://www.state.gov/remarks-on-americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/>.

²⁹ US Department of State, Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, "US Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region", 4 August 2018, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

³⁰ The White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence at the 2018 APEC CEO Summit, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 16 November 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2018-apec-ceo-summit-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea/>.

Department of Defense and Department of State each published its first report on the “Indo-Pacific” strategy.³¹

The Trump administration has also promoted legislation for implementing the “Indo-Pacific” strategy. In October 2018, President Trump signed the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD Act), which doubles US development finance capacity to US\$60 billion.³² The Department of State evaluated that the act would ignite more opportunities for partnership in the Indo-Pacific.³³ In December 2018, President Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 (ARIA), which establishes a multifaceted US strategy to increase US security and economic interests and values in the Indo-Pacific region.³⁴

Australia

Australia was the first country to use “Indo-Pacific” as a keyword in strategic documents. In October 2012, the government published a white paper titled *Australia in the Asian Century*, and introduced “Indo-Pacific” as a new conception for the Asian region, pointing out that the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean would come to be considered as one strategic arc.³⁵ Immediately after that, Australia used the “Indo-Pacific” as an alternative to the “Asia-Pacific” in its new security and defence strategy. In January 2013, Australia's new National Security Strategy explained that the use of the term “Indo-Pacific” complemented the term “Asia-Pacific” and that the “Asia-Pacific” was a commonly used geopolitical construct, whereas the “Indo-Pacific” emphasised “the growing significance of the geographic corridor, spanning the Indian Ocean through to the western Pacific Ocean, and of India”.³⁶ The *Defence White Paper 2013* used “Indo-Pacific” as “a logical extension of the wider Asia-Pacific” and announced that the region was Australia's priority strategic focus.³⁷

The white paper provided Australia's initial geographical definition of “Indo-Pacific”, an area “extending from India through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia, including the sea lines of communication”. This description clarified that the starting point of the “Indo-Pacific” in the Indian Ocean

³¹ US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*; US Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

³² The White House, “President Trump's Administration is Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Through Investments and Partnerships in Economics, Security, and Governance”, 18 November 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-trumps-administration-advancing-free-open-indo-pacific-investments-partnerships-economics-security-governance/>.

³³ US Department of State, Fact Sheet, “Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region”.

³⁴ The White House, Bill Announcement, 31 December 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/bill-announcement-12/>.

³⁵ Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, 28 October 2012, <https://content.webarchive.nla.gov.au/gov/wayback/20130328232210/http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/white-paper/australia-in-the-asian-century-white-paper.pdf>.

³⁶ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government, *Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security*, 23 January 2013, https://content.webarchive.nla.gov.au/gov/wayback/20130427041147/http://www.idis.gov.au/national_security/docs/national_security_strategy.pdf.

³⁷ Department of Defence, Australian Government, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 3 May 2013, https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf.

was India, and the Pacific Islands was not included. The white paper listed “Indo-Pacific” as Australia’s third strategic defence interest, after the Australian mainland itself and South Pacific and Timor-Leste, and before a rules-based order.³⁸ That was because Australia recognised “Indo-Pacific” as the area next to its immediate neighbourhood, namely Southeast Asia and the maritime environment. That meant that Australia’s initial geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific” was limited to the eastern Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean.

Australia changed the explanation of its strategic defence interests in the *2016 Defence White Paper*. The strategic priorities were ordered as follows: the first was “a secure, resilient Australia”, the second “a secure near region”, and the third “a stable Indo-Pacific region and rules-based global order”. According to the white paper, “the Indo-Pacific includes North Asia, the South China Sea and the extensive sea lines of communication (SLOC) in the Indian and Pacific Oceans that support Australia’s economic development.”³⁹

In late 2017, Australia adjusted the geographical range of “Indo-Pacific”. In the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, it identified the promotion of “an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region” as one of the five objectives of fundamental importance to its security and prosperity. The white paper also revealed its clear definition of “Indo-Pacific”, as a region “ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States”.⁴⁰ That is, Australia has enlarged “Indo-Pacific” to reach the United States. As a result, Australia’s geographical scope has become identical to that of the Trump administration.

There could be two reasons for the expansion of the concept within the Pacific Ocean. The first is policy resonance with the United States. Australia recognises that the alliance with the United States is central to its approach to the “Indo-Pacific”.⁴¹ Australia includes the United States within its geographical definition to make sure that it is not an offshore participant but one of the key players in the “Indo-Pacific”. The second is the importance of the Pacific Islands. Although Australia focused on the significance of the sea lanes through Southeast Asia and emerging India in its initial conception of “Indo-Pacific”, the stability of the Pacific Islands has been crucial for Australia’s security. Australia calculates that it is efficient to deal with the Pacific Islands as a part of the “Indo-Pacific” so that it can advance its own security policy: it can draw in the other partners such as the United States and Japan to collaborate with it in the Pacific Islands under the expanded conception of “Indo-Pacific”.

³⁸ Department of Defence, Australian Government, *Defence White Paper 2013*.

³⁹ Department of Defence, Australian Government, *2016 Defence White Paper*, 25 February 2016, <https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/2016-defence-white-paper.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, 23 November 2017, <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/file/2651/download?token=Q5CYuX29>.

⁴¹ Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*.

Japan

The origins of Japan's notion of "Indo-Pacific" can be found in Prime Minister Abe's speech before the Indian Parliament in August 2007.⁴² A senior Japanese government official pointed to the speech as an example of the prime minister's longstanding awareness of the importance of a free and open "Indo-Pacific" region.⁴³ Despite emphasising "the confluence of the two seas", the geographical term that Prime Minister Abe used at the time was not "Indo-Pacific" but "broader Asia". He pointed out the imperativeness of deepening friendship between India and Japan, located at the opposite edges of these seas, as the new "broader Asia" took shape at the confluence of the two seas.⁴⁴ The Prime Minister's Office of Japan interpreted that the "broader Asia" was an integration of East Asia and South Asia, in which Japan and India should work together as key players.⁴⁵

There are two points to be noted. First, the "broader Asia" did not focus on Southeast Asia. There was no reference to the region in the discourse of "broader Asia" regardless of Prime Minister Abe's visit to Malaysia and Indonesia prior to visiting India.⁴⁶ Second, he revealed the expectation that cooperation between India and Japan in "broader Asia" would develop a network with the United States and Australia. He mentioned that by Japan and India coming together, "broader Asia" would evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States and Australia.⁴⁷ This implied that he had already borne in mind "the Quad" in the expanded "broader Asia", which covered the eastern Indian Ocean and the entire Pacific Ocean.

The second Abe administration, which took office in December 2012, has gradually increased use of the geographical term "Indo-Pacific" and developed its own "Indo-Pacific" concept. In February 2013, Prime Minister Abe used "Indo-Pacific" together with "Asia-Pacific" in his speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC.⁴⁸ In January 2015, the then Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio made a speech titled "Special Partnership for the Era of the Indo-Pacific" in New Delhi and revealed that the region was "bound together by seas, extending from the Indian Ocean through the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean".⁴⁹ In August 2016, the administration launched a

⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Confluence of the Two Seas, Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 August 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Mekong Cooperation Seminar Speech by Kentaro Sonoura Special Advisor to the Prime Minister", 23 March 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000347628.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Confluence of the Two Seas, Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe.

⁴⁵ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, Prime Minister Visits Indonesia, India and Malaysia (India), 21–23 August 2007, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/abepphoto/2007/08/21india_e.html.

⁴⁶ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, Prime Minister Visits Indonesia, India and Malaysia (India).

⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Confluence of the Two Seas", Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan is Back By Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan", 22 February 2013, https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us_20130222en.html.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Policy speech by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida on "Special Partnership for the Era of the Indo-Pacific", 15 January 2015, https://www.mofa.go.jp/sa/sw/in/page3e_000291.html.

new diplomatic policy based on the geographical conception of “Indo-Pacific”.⁵⁰ In *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, approved in April 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) noted that Prime Minister Abe had announced the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)” at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) held in Kenya in August 2016. It stated that Japan intended to open up a new frontier of Japanese diplomacy by regarding the “two continents” — Asia and Africa, and the “two oceans” — the Pacific and Indian Oceans — as an integrated region, and promote peace and prosperity in the region as a whole by improving the connectivity of “Asia, the Middle East and Africa”. It also stressed that Japan would expand infrastructure development, trade and investment, and enhance the business environment and human development “from East Asia as a starting-point, to the Middle East and Africa”.⁵¹

Although the geographical boundaries of “Indo-Pacific” were ambiguous, the map in the bluebook outlining the coverage of the FOIP⁵² illustrated Japan’s initial geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific”. The map only marked almost the entire Indian Ocean and the western part of the Pacific Ocean, thus including Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and the East African littoral countries. The figure also listed India, the United States and Australia as strategic collaboration partners to bring the strategy into shape, but not all of them were denoted in the map as a part of the “Indo-Pacific”.

After the official adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” concept, Japan’s geographical perception has gradually expanded on the Pacific Ocean side. In regard to the FOIP, the then Foreign Minister Kono Taro referred to not only Africa, the Middle East and Asia, but also “North America” in a speech at Columbia University in September 2017. He mentioned that “the Indo-Pacific Ocean links rapidly growing Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and North America”.⁵³ In his remarks at the Atlantic Council in February 2018, the then Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Sonoura Kentaro mentioned that the Indo-Pacific region stretched from “Asia-Pacific” through the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa, and referred to “the Pacific Islands countries”, as well as “ASEAN, Southwest Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries”.⁵⁴ The extended geographical perception was reflected in a map outlining the reach of the FOIP in the MOFA’s *White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017*, published in February 2018. The range of the “Indo-Pacific” on the map spread to the western coast of the United States and fully covered Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. MOFA also changed the starting point of

⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Remarks by Mr. Nobuo Kishi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Indian Ocean Conference 2016”, 2 September 2016, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000185853.pdf>. However, the new diplomatic policy was called “Free and Open India and Pacific Strategy” in this speech.

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, June 2017, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000290287.pdf>. In the Japanese version, the bluebook also mentioned “South Asia” between “East Asia” and “the Middle East”. See *Gaikou Seisyo 2017* [Diplomatic Bluebook 2017], https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1_02.html#s102.

⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, 27.

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Speech by Foreign Minister Kono at Columbia University on “Diplomacy in Creeping Crises”, 21 September 2017, https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page3e_000749.html.

⁵⁴ Atlantic Council, “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy”, 22 February 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/webcasts/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

“Indo-Pacific” from “East Asia” to the “Asia-Pacific” and added New Zealand and the ASEAN countries to the list of strategic collaboration partners mentioned in the map.⁵⁵

The reason for this adjustment could be interpreted as a desire for policy resonance with the United States, along the same lines as Australia. In November 2017, Prime Minister Abe and President Trump affirmed that Japan and the United States would work together to promote peace and prosperity in the region by developing the “Indo-Pacific” as free and open.⁵⁶ Japan made it clear that the United States was a part of “Indo-Pacific” by expanding the geographical scope to include it and added the Pacific Islands to promote development assistance with the United States, Australia and New Zealand under the “Indo-Pacific” concept.

Japan’s geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific” has kept changing. In September 2018, the then Foreign Minister Kono included “South American continent” to the eastern end of “Indo-Pacific” when he participated in a panel discussion at the World Economic Forum. He mentioned that Japan was trying to connect “from eastern shore of African continent, through the Indian Ocean, through ASEAN countries, through the Pacific Ocean, to the western coast of the North and South American continents”.⁵⁷

Around the same time, MOFA reflected this expansion to the outline of FOIP in a map posted on its official webpage.⁵⁸ Besides the expansion in the Pacific Ocean, two significant changes of geographical perception were found in this updated outline of FOIP. First, MOFA highlighted ASEAN as the hinge of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It not only accentuated ASEAN on the FOIP map but also mentioned “strengthening connectivity in ASEAN region”, Japan’s will to expand “ASEAN’s success” to other regions such as the Middle East and Africa, and “ASEAN’s centrality and unity”.⁵⁹ This ASEAN-related adjustment was probably based on Japan’s consideration of ASEAN’s view that ASEAN centrality and unity should be supported in any proposal on regional cooperation and engagement in the “Indo-Pacific” region.⁶⁰ Second, the geographical scope of the “Indo-Pacific” was enlarged to penetrate more deeply into the Eurasian continent and covered China, too. One of the underlying reasons for this change could be the progress in Japan’s cooperation with China. In May 2018, Japan and China signed the Memorandum on Business Cooperation in Third Countries during Premier Li

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017: Japan’s International Cooperation*, 3 February 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000406627.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan-US Working Lunch and Japan-US Summit Meeting”, 6 November 2017, https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000699.html.

⁵⁷ World Economic Forum, “World Economic Forum on ASEAN: Asia’s Geopolitical Outlook”, 13 September 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-on-asean/sessions/asias-geopolitical-outlook>.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Free and Open Indo-Pacific: What is Free and Open Indo-Pacific? Outline”, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Free and Open Indo-Pacific: What is Free and Open Indo-Pacific? Outline”.

⁶⁰ Prime Minister’s Office of Singapore, “Transcript of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s statement at the Press Conference by the ASEAN Chair on the 33rd ASEAN Summit”, 15 November 2018, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/pm-lee-hsien-loong-press-conference-33rd-asean-summit>.

Keqiang's visit to Japan.⁶¹ In October 2018, the two countries held a meeting of the Japan-China Forum on Third Country Business Cooperation and exchanged 52 memoranda of cooperation.⁶² The other reason could be to signal that Japan does not support the "containment" of China. To include the whole of China in the map could be intended to signal "inclusiveness", which some of the "Indo-Pacific" related countries have called for.

India

India used to employ the term "Indo-Pacific" as an eastern exit of the Indian Ocean. The *Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, published in October 2015, listed "Indo-Pacific" as one of the six sea areas around India. It explained that the "Indo-Pacific" was "Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean, through the various Indo-Pacific Straits and South/East China and Philippines Seas" and across which India expands its engagement and relations to its east under the "Act East" policy.⁶³ This area consisted of India's primary and secondary areas of maritime interest because India saw itself as the centre of the Indian Ocean.

The Narendra Modi administration explained that India's conception of "Indo-Pacific" covered the entire two oceans. In June 2018, Prime Minister Modi presented India's vision of "Indo-Pacific" in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue. He described "Indo-Pacific" as a natural region, and concretely as a region "from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas". In particular, he mentioned the Pacific and most of India's partners — ASEAN, Japan, Republic of Korea, China, the Americas, the Indian Ocean region, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Island nations, Russia and Africa. This speech showed that India's "Indo-Pacific" consisted of the whole Indian and Pacific Oceans and the surrounding countries.⁶⁴

The geographical definition played a significant role in Prime Minister Modi's speech, in which he declared that India's engagement in the region would be inclusive. He used the geographical definition as evidence that India's vision for "the Indo-Pacific Region" was a positive one and had many elements. He pointed out that India did not see the region as a strategy or as a club of limited members, nor as a grouping that sought to dominate; and, by no means did India consider it as directed against any country. He stressed that a geographical definition as such could not be negative. Given this emphasis on inclusiveness, India's definition of "Indo-Pacific" has one of the largest geographical scopes among the various conceptions.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Premier of the State Council of China Li Keqiang Visits Japan: Japan-China Summit Meeting and Banquet", 9 May 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000857.html.

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Prime Minister Abe Visits China", 26 October 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000958.html.

⁶³ Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.2, October 2015, https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf.

⁶⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue", 1 June 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>.

⁶⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue".

There are two reasons why India unveiled its broader geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific”. First, India needed to argue that the “Indo” of “Indo-Pacific” denoted the Indian Ocean. The United States, Australia and Japan had already by then set “Indo-Pacific” at the centre of their regional policies and unveiled their expectations that emerging India would play an important role in the region. India, whose primary strategic focus was in the Indian Ocean, needed to clarify that the western edge of “Indo-Pacific” was not India. Second, India’s relationships with regional powers are not only with the United States but also with China and Russia. The term “Indo-Pacific” is sometimes interpreted as a region where the countries advocating the concept have visions of achieving their strategic interests through collaboration with countries that share their views. Therefore, India is uncomfortable about being incorporated into a grouping of like-minded countries under the rubric of “Indo-Pacific”, especially one interpreted as a grouping aimed at the containment of China. Prime Minister Modi stressed in his speech that India would work with other nations individually or in formats of three or more for a stable and peaceful region but its friendships were not alliances of containment.⁶⁶ The large geographical scope including China and Russia gives India wider options for achieving its national interests in the “Indo-Pacific”, avoiding a situation of being overly committed to a specific side.

France

France has recently started to use the term “Indo-Pacific” in terms of defence and security as a replacement for “Asia-Pacific”. In its *White Paper on Defence and National Security* of April 2013, France put emphasis on the Asia-Pacific and on French and European defence and security interests within the region.⁶⁷ Based on this perception, in 2014, France published *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*. This publication mentioned that France, which had remote territories in the region, was a power in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and that its permanent military presence in the region gave France special responsibilities regarding defence and security in the Asia-Pacific.⁶⁸ However, in the third edition of the same publication dated July 2018, France replaced “Asia-Pacific” with “Indo-Pacific”.⁶⁹ The change was probably a terminological adjustment in line with the emerging use by several countries of “Indo-Pacific” with its various conceptions.

The restyled document, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, presented France’s self-recognition as an Indo-Pacific nation as well as its geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific”. It explained that the “Indo-Pacific” constituted a maritime and land geographical area, shaped by interactions around

⁶⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue”.

⁶⁷ French Republic Department of Defense, *French White Paper on Defence and National Security* 2013, 29 April 2013, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/content/download/206186/2393586/file/White%20paper%20on%20defence%20202013.pdf>.

⁶⁸ French Republic Department of Defense, *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, 10 April 2014, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/261113/3194598/file/PlaqueAsiePacifique2014ENBD.pdf>.

⁶⁹ French Republic Department of Defense, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, 8 June 2018, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/532754/9176250/file/France%20and%20Security%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific%20-%20202018.pdf>.

strategic centres of gravity — India, China, Southeast Asia and Australia. More specifically, it mentioned that the “Indo-Pacific” comprised the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans and formed a security continuum spreading from the East African coastline to the western American seaboard.⁷⁰

One of the notable characteristics of France’s definition of “Indo-Pacific” is the inclusion of the Southern Ocean. The reason for including the third ocean was Adélie Land, the territory in Antarctica claimed by France. In terms of geographical size, France’s “Indo-Pacific” is the largest one among the countries that use the “Indo-Pacific” concept.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has recognised “Indo-Pacific” as one of the core regions for its vision beyond its exit from the European Union, called “Global Britain”. In March 2018, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons published a report on “Global Britain” with a memorandum from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The memorandum declared that it would place “new emphasis” on the “Indo-Pacific” region, which it identified as one of the three centres of the global economy and political influence, the others being in North America and in Europe and its neighbourhood. It said that maintaining influence in these areas was central to making Global Britain a success.⁷¹ The United Kingdom reflected the same perception in its *National Security Capability Review*, published in the same month.⁷² In August 2018, the then British Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field stated in Jakarta that the United Kingdom was committed to a secure, free, open, inclusive and prosperous “Indo-Pacific”, playing an active role in maritime security in the Indian Ocean region through military, multilateral and commercial engagement and capacity building.⁷³

The memorandum mentioned above partially presented the country’s geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific”. It referred to China, India and Southeast Asia and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) between the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore, and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) initiative in the “Indo-Pacific” section, whereas it mentioned the United States, Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America in the other sections. This implies that the United Kingdom’s geographical perception of “Indo-Pacific” might not cover the two oceans in their entirety and the surrounding countries.

Although the United Kingdom put new emphasis on the “Indo-Pacific” region and has already deepened its engagement with the countries that employ “Indo-Pacific” in its various conceptions, it does not seem to have a clear geographical definition of the region. In April 2019, the Foreign Affairs

⁷⁰ French Republic Department of Defense, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*.

⁷¹ UK Parliament, *Global Britain, Sixth Report of Session 2017–19*, 12 March 2018, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfa/780/780.pdf>.

⁷² UK Government, *National Security Capability Review*, 28 March 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4_391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf.

⁷³ UK Government, “The UK and All of Asia, a Modern Partnership: Mark Field’s speech”, 14 August 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-mark-field-speech-the-uk-and-all-of-asia-a-modern-partnership>.

Committee of the House of Commons stated in a new report that they support the government's efforts to increase the United Kingdom's presence, including its military presence, in the "Indo-Pacific", in line with its capacity and other defence commitments. The report confirmed that the United Kingdom had endorsed the idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific", including in recent joint statements with Japan and India, and that the United Kingdom already had structures of military engagement with the Quad nations, including participating in joint naval exercises. It also cautioned the UK government that its "Indo-Pacific" policy should not give rise to the mistaken impression that the United Kingdom seeks direct military confrontation with China. However, it pointed out that the UK government did not appear to have given an independent national definition of what it meant by the term "Indo-Pacific".⁷⁴

Indonesia and ASEAN

Indonesia was one of the earliest users of the term "Indo-Pacific" in official statements. In May 2013, the then Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa made a speech on the concept in Washington, explaining that the "Indo-Pacific" was "an important triangular spanning two oceans, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, bounded by Japan in the north, Australia in the southeast and India in the southwest, notably with Indonesia at its center."⁷⁵ In other words, at that time, Indonesia's "Indo-Pacific" did not include the western Indian Ocean nor the eastern Pacific Ocean. In November 2014, President Joko Widodo announced his World Maritime Axis doctrine, in which he referred to the Pacific and Indian Ocean region as "PACINDO".⁷⁶

Since early 2018, Indonesia has promoted its own "Indo-Pacific" concept. In January 2018, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, in her annual press statement, introduced her view of "Indo-Pacific". She mentioned that Indonesia wanted the ecosystem of peace, stability and prosperity to be established not only in ASEAN, but also in the Indian and Pacific Ocean rims or the "Indo-Pacific", and that it would continue to contribute to advancing a strong positive cooperation in the region together with ASEAN.⁷⁷ This description allows the interpretation that Indonesia's geographical perception of "Indo-Pacific" consists of the whole of the two oceans and their surrounding countries.

Indonesia's "Indo-Pacific" concept has developed into ASEAN's concept. In his remarks at the 32nd ASEAN Summit of April 2018, President Widodo enunciated his view that "Indo-Pacific" cooperation should be inclusive and should promote ASEAN centrality, and that ASEAN should be able to contribute

⁷⁴ UK Parliament, *China and the Rules-Based International System, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19*, 4 April 2019, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaif/612/612.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Marty Natalegawa, "An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific", *The Jakarta Post*, 20 May 2013, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/05/20/an-indonesian-perspective-indo-pacific.html>.

⁷⁶ Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, "Pidato Presiden RI Joko Widodo Pada KTT Ke-9 Asia Timur, di Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 13 November 2014", 14 November 2014, <https://setkab.go.id/pidato-presiden-ri-joko-widodo-pada-ktt-ke-9-asia-timur-di-nay-pyi-taw-myanmar-13-november-2014/>.

⁷⁷ Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi, "Indonesia: Partner for Peace, Security, Prosperity", *The Jakarta Post*, 11 January 2018, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/01/10/full-text-indonesia-partner-for-peace-security-prosperity.html>.

in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans.⁷⁸ At the 13th East Asia Summit (EAS) in November 2018, he argued for the necessity of “Indo-Pacific” cooperation, not rivalry, and also emphasised the importance of increased maritime cooperation, not only in the Pacific Ocean, but also in the Indian Ocean.⁷⁹ At its 34th summit in June 2019, ASEAN finally adopted a document titled “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)” as an initiative that reinforced the ASEAN-centred regional architecture.⁸⁰ The AOIP indicated that ASEAN used the term “Indo-Pacific” as a paraphrase of “the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions”. It mentioned that one of the key elements of the document was “a perspective of viewing the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, not as contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role”. It also highlighted that the AOIP was not aimed at creating new mechanisms or replacing existing ones, and revealed ASEAN’s intention to strengthen and give new momentum to existing ASEAN-led mechanisms.⁸¹

Although the precise geographical scope of Indonesia’s “Indo-Pacific” is unclear, the country could consider it to be the entire Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean with the surrounding countries. In January 2018, President Widodo mentioned the linking and integration of cooperation mechanisms in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, namely, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in the Indian Ocean, and ASEAN-lead mechanisms, particularly the EAS in the Pacific Ocean.⁸² In May 2018, when Foreign Minister Retno enunciated Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific Cooperation concept in her speech in Jakarta, she revealed that Indonesia’s key message in her discussions with India, Russia, Australia, the United States, China and Japan was that the “Indo-Pacific” concept should not be used as a form of containment.⁸³ In March 2019, Indonesia hosted the High-Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation, inviting the 18 EAS member countries.⁸⁴ This step indicated that Indonesia regarded at least the member countries of EAS as key components of “Indo-Pacific”.

ASEAN’s “Indo-Pacific” has two characteristics that are different from the others’ conception of “Indo-Pacific”. First, ASEAN recognises “Indo-Pacific” as an aggregation of the two existing regions — Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region — which have regional or sub-regional mechanisms, rather than as an aggregation of the two oceans. Second, the AOIP puts the Asia-Pacific region first and Indian Ocean region second, notwithstanding the word order of “Indo-Pacific”. These characteristics derive from

⁷⁸ Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, “President Jokowi: Indo-Pacific Cooperation Should be Inclusive and Promote ASEAN Centrality”, 28 April 2018, <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-jokowi-indo-pacific-cooperation-should-be-inclusive-and-promote-asean-centrality-3/>.

⁷⁹ Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, “Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept Focuses on Cooperation, Not Rivalry: President Jokowi”, 15 November 2018, <https://setkab.go.id/en/indo-pacific-cooperation-concept-focuses-on-cooperation-not-rivalry-president-jokowi/>.

⁸⁰ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”, 23 June 2019, https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

⁸¹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific”.

⁸² Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, “President Jokowi Hopes ASEAN-India Partnership Can Create Stable Indo-Pacific Region”, 25 January 2018, <https://setkab.go.id/en/president-jokowi-hopes-asean-india-partnership-can-create-stable-indo-pacific-region/>.

⁸³ CSIS Indonesia, “The Global Disorder: An Indonesian Perspective”, 8 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVTI7-hoGqw>.

⁸⁴ High Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation, Jakarta 20 March 2019, “High Level Dialogue (HLD) on Indo-Pacific Cooperation 2019: Participants”, <https://hldipc.kemlu.go.id/about/participants>.

ASEAN's strong stance that the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region should keep developing as a central platform for the emerging regional order in the "Indo-Pacific". ASEAN's "Indo-Pacific" appears to cover the member states of the existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions.

Geographical Understandings of "Indo-Pacific"

Inherent Core Area

The above-mentioned geographical definitions of the "Indo-Pacific" concept have some similarities. First, the various conceptions have recognised the two oceans as a single maritime domain. They uniformly emphasise the importance of maritime security in keeping the international SLOC connecting the two oceans through the Straits of Malacca not only safe but also open for everyone. The reason why the SLOC as global commons was significantly included in every discourse on "Indo-Pacific" was the threat posed by China, which might limit freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. This maritime-oriented perception derives from anxiety about a potential change in the situation and is a common factor in consolidating each country's interest in the term "Indo-Pacific". Second, the other common factor in shaping the geographical conception of "Indo-Pacific" is the notion of an emerging India. Some of the conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" regard India as the western boundary of "Indo-Pacific". In any event, there is no conception of "Indo-Pacific" that excludes India. This is not only because of India's geographical location, connected to Southeast Asia or facing the Indian Ocean, but also because of a mixed expectation and anxiety about India's potential as an emerging regional power. Behind the shaping of the various conceptions of "Indo-Pacific", there are intentions of involving India as a benign power to share burdens in the region or to balance China's rise. That is, the various "Indo-Pacific" concepts emerged to ensure the integration of India into the Asia-Pacific, where China is increasing its influence. Third, the two key factors mentioned above place Southeast Asia at the geographical centre of the "Indo-Pacific". The Southeast Asian countries are unable to detach themselves from the "Indo-Pacific" because of their geographic location and are destined to get involved in every "Indo-Pacific" concept that is determined to engage with them. The various conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" have given the countries of Southeast Asia more options to achieve their national interests in the various domains that encompass the "Indo-Pacific" while simultaneously making them anxious that the new regional conceptions might undermine the existing ASEAN-led regional architecture and might embed them into a bloc against China. It was against this background that ASEAN announced its own vision of "Indo-Pacific" and the other conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" have increasingly underscored their will to respect ASEAN centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms.

The three invariable common geographical components — the maritime domain, India and Southeast Asia — show that the overlapping geographical scope of the various conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" is the area from India to the Southeast Asian countries, and the seas from the eastern Indian

Ocean through the Straits of Malacca to the South China Sea. That is, this geographical range is the inherent core area of the “Indo-Pacific”, as conceived by all the countries that have articulated an interest in the concept, however conceived by each of them.

Eastward Convergence and Westward Divergence

Outside of the core area, the “Indo-Pacific” has converged eastwards and diverged westwards in the course of the adjustments that the various countries have made to the geographical scope of the concept. To the east, the United States, Australia and Japan’s notion of “Indo-Pacific” covered only the western Pacific Ocean at the initial stage. However, these countries subsequently adjusted their geographical scopes to cover the Pacific Islands and reach the United States. India, France and probably Indonesia and ASEAN’s definitions also cover the entire Pacific Ocean. As a result, the Pacific Ocean side of the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” have converged to cover the whole area known as “Asia-Pacific”.

Conversely, the “Indo-Pacific” has diverged westwards in the geographical adjustment process. Japan, India, France, and probably Indonesia and ASEAN’s definitions include the entire Indian Ocean reaching the African continent, whereas the United States, Australia, and possibly the United Kingdom only include the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. For India and France’s security, the western part of the Indian Ocean is one of their priority areas — for India because it is facing the area, and for France because some of its overseas territories are located there. For Japan, the connectivity of Asia, the Middle East and Africa is one of the core components of its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. This gap in geographical range in the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” could be an obstacle to progress in collaboration among the various players involved.

Primary Driving Factor for Geographical Expansion and Contraction

Through the geographical adjustment process, America’s definition of “Indo-Pacific” resulted in a contraction, whereas for those of the others it resulted in expansion. The United States had a broader perception when it used “Indo-Asia-Pacific” or “Asia-Pacific” under the Obama administration. However, it shrank the geographical scope to fit the area of responsibility of USPACOM and defined the “Indo-Pacific” as stretching from the western coast of India to the western shores of the United States. The geographical contraction and the renaming of USPACOM to USINDOPACOM indicate that the United States built its concept of “Indo-Pacific” with the highest priority on security. The primary driving factor for shaping this security-focused “Indo-Pacific” concept was the US concern regarding China. The Trump administration abandoned America’s two decades-old policies of engagement with rivals and instead classified China as a revisionist power.⁸⁵ Based on this policy change, the administration set out the “Indo-Pacific” as the priority theatre where it should maintain superiority against China. The NSS

⁸⁵ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

expressed concern that China sought to displace the United States “in the Indo-Pacific region” and expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder “the region” in its favour.⁸⁶ In addition, the *2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) expressed concern regarding China’s ambition to reorder “the Indo-Pacific region” in its favour through military modernisation, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighbouring countries. It added that China would continue its military modernising programme, which sought “Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term” and “displacement of the United States to achieve global pre-eminence in the future”.⁸⁷ Within this context, the “Indo-Pacific” became the priority theatre for the Department of Defense.⁸⁸

On the other hand, the expansion of “Indo-Pacific” occurred mainly because of diplomatic consideration towards the other players involved. The first driving factor for geographical expansion was policy resonance with like-minded partners. Australia and Japan added the South Pacific into their “Indo-Pacific”, synchronising with the geographical definition of the United States. This geographical expansion was motivated by the need for cooperating with their ally. However, concern regarding China’s increasing influence over the Pacific Islands also might have pushed them into achieving such policy resonance. The second factor was concern about being perceived as hostile towards China. Because of the unambiguous declaration of competition with China by the Trump administration, the term “Indo-Pacific” itself has increasingly been recognised as a shorthand denoting anti-China. India and ASEAN’s “inclusive” geographical scope and Japan’s geographical adjustment to cover China can be interpreted as being driven by concern that they might be perceived as hostile to China. The third factor was recognition of change in the geographical definition itself, and it was observed in Japan’s adjustment process. The initial geographical perception of Japan indicated that it regarded “Indo-Pacific” merely as a geographical arena where it would provide assistance or support to realise its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. Therefore, it was not always necessary to include the providers of support, namely Japan, India, the United States, Australia and New Zealand into its geographical scope of “Indo-Pacific”. However, as the partner countries each developed its own concept of “Indo-Pacific”, Japan changed its mindset, and reflected the idea that Japan itself and its partners were not outsiders but part of the “Indo-Pacific”.

In sum, the geographical contraction of “Indo-Pacific” by the United States was an active adjustment derived from an independent policy change towards China, and the geographical expansion by the others was a passive adjustment through their policy development or change in self-awareness influenced by the other players in the “Indo-Pacific”.

Additional Function of Geographical Definition

⁸⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

⁸⁷ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, 19 January 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁸⁸ US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*.

The other finding is a functional difference in the geographical definitions. For the United States, defining the clear geographical range of “Indo-Pacific” was one of the prerequisites to embed a new policy as a part of NSS, which covers the whole world. The fact that Australia has explicated its updated geographical recognition of “Indo-Pacific” in its strategic documents proves that the country also regards a clear geographical definition as a prerequisite for policy discussion. This could apply to France, too. On the other hand, for Japan, India and possibly Indonesia and ASEAN, in addition to giving physical substance to the concept, their geographical definitions play a significant role in justifying their visions. From another point of view, their geographical definitions are wrapped with diplomatic messages, such as “cooperation” for reassuring and “inclusivity” for hedging. These imply that some of these countries might have included low priority areas into their “Indo-Pacific” where they do not have concrete ideas to project, or that they cannot push their ideas because of lack of capacity, even if they have the will to push them.

Political Implications for Regional Order

Geographical Density of Various Conceptions of “Indo-Pacific”

This study tracked the changes of geographical definition in the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific”. At the initial stage, not all the conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” covered the area called “Asia-Pacific”. This illustrates that “Indo-Pacific” did not emerge merely as an alternative label for “Asia-Pacific”. Through the geographical adjustments, the three distinct areas — the inherent core area, the areas of convergence and the areas of divergence — have formed the “Indo-Pacific”. As a result, the “Indo-Pacific” became “Asia-Pacific” plus “alpha”. “Alpha” is the area, stretching westwards from Southeast Asia, and the boundary in the largest conception of “Indo-Pacific” is the eastern coast of the African continent, whereas that of the smallest conception is the western coast of India. That means that the adjusted common area of the “Indo-Pacific” stretches from India to the United States, which coincides with the geographical definition of the United States and Australia.

The geographical overlap in the conception of “Indo-Pacific” has two implications in terms of the regional order. First, the adjusted common area indicates that ASEAN-led mechanisms which have developed in the context of “Asia-Pacific” are likely to remain the central architecture of the “Indo-Pacific”. All the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” recognise the significance of ASEAN centrality and the validity of ASEAN-led mechanisms. More importantly, ASEAN itself declared its aspiration for centrality in its AOIP. In particular, two ASEAN-led mechanisms — the EAS and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), which includes ASEAN, Japan, Australia, India and the United States — have the potential to work as appropriate mechanisms to coordinate the concept of “Indo-Pacific”. France and the United Kingdom, which would be key players especially in “Indo-Pacific” security, might join these mechanisms. Both of them are already the high contracting parties of ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and have the will to strengthen

cooperation with ASEAN. France has already applied to join ADMM-Plus,⁸⁹ and the United Kingdom seems to have ambitions of becoming an independent ASEAN Dialogue Partner after its exit from the European Union since being a dialogue partner is one of the conditions for participating in EAS and ADMM-Plus.⁹⁰ To implement their “Indo-Pacific” concepts efficiently with their partners in the region, the two European countries would try to participate in these mechanisms.

Second, the differing geographical density in the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” implies that minilateral frameworks to implement specific practical actions among the various players involved in “Indo-Pacific” would develop. The minimum requirement for this is a coincidence of the geographical definitions, because collaborations would not happen outside of the geographical scope of the “Indo-Pacific”. The adjusted common area, where the geographical density is high, would have more partners that can work under the various “Indo-Pacific” concepts. It would lead to collaboration and burden sharing if the countries concerned have similar interests. In that sense, the Pacific Islands is the area which has rarely been included in the original conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” but subsequently became a high density area of “Indo-Pacific” as a result of geographical adjustments. Particularly, taking into account the fact that the United States, Japan and Australia have been committed to the stability of the Pacific Islands before they launched their “Indo-Pacific” concepts, their geographical adjustments to converge towards including these islands were inevitable with a view to collaboration among them. This policy-based convergence suggests further progress in collaboration among the three countries in the area covered under their conceptions of “Indo-Pacific”.

On the other hand, the area of divergence, where the geographical density is low, has fewer partners that can work together under the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific”. The difference of geographical scopes is a fundamental restriction to collaboration among the countries with such divergent conceptions. For example, it might not be easy for the Quad to promote collaboration under the “Indo-Pacific” concept in the western part of the Indian Ocean or Africa because of the geographical definitions that the United States and Australia hold. To take another example, although India and France have deepened bilateral cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, especially the western part of it,⁹¹ “the Indo-Pacific axis” with France, India and Australia, which French President Emmanuel Macron proposed in May 2018,⁹² may have a geographical restriction derived from Australia’s definition. However, there may be room for geographical adjustment, considering that Australian Minister of Defence Linda Reynolds, speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2019, mentioned that the Indian Ocean was vital to

⁸⁹ French Republic Department of Defense, *France and Security in the Indo-Pacific*, 8 June 2018.

⁹⁰ Ian Story, “The United Kingdom and Southeast Asia after Brexit”, *ISEAS Perspective*, Issue: 2019, no. 33, 23 April 2019, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_33.pdf.

⁹¹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region”, 10 March 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/Joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018>.

⁹² Emmanuel Macron, “Discours à Garden Island, base navale de Sydney”, 3 May 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/05/03/discours-a-garden-island-base-navale-de-sydney>.

Australia's security, as was the whole "Indo-Pacific" region, and that Australia wanted to build a web of regional cooperation.⁹³

From this point of view, understanding each country's geographical definition helps us to find where and why practical collaboration among the players would or would not happen. It is also worth paying attention to changes of definitions, because these could signal policy changes, as we have seen so far.

Terminological Complexities: Coexistence with Other Terms

The regional concept "Indo-Pacific" has just joined the lines of parallel regional concepts such as "Asia-Pacific" and "East Asia", and concurrent use of these geographical symbols could last well into the future for three reasons. First, "Indo-Pacific" has not fully replaced "Asia-Pacific" or "East Asia". For example, "Asia-Pacific" is a component of "Indo-Pacific" for Japan's adjusted geographical definition, and its National Security Council holds meetings on both "East Asia" affairs and "Indo-Pacific" affairs.⁹⁴ Second, there is some opposition to or reservations about the various "Indo-Pacific" concepts. For instance, in March 2019, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi compared them to "the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean" which "may get some attention, but soon will dissipate".⁹⁵ At the Shangri-La Dialogue 2019, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong presented his view that the various concepts of "Indo-Pacific cooperation" proposed by several countries were "less fully elaborated or implemented than BRI [China's Belt and Road initiative]".⁹⁶ These perceptions derive from concerns regarding the use of "Indo-Pacific" as a concept to contain China or to create rival blocs and anxieties arising from an unfamiliar or unclear substance.⁹⁷ Third, the existing regional mechanisms have names attached to parallel geographical terminologies and they are not likely to change because of the second reason.

Coexistence with other regional concepts means that there will remain a long-lasting dissonance arising from superficially different but substantially similar labels, superficially similar but substantially different concepts. Moreover, the additional diplomatic consideration that is involved in some of the geographical definitions might make it difficult to determine the priority geographical area for each country. On top of that, the exact geographical boundaries for some of the conceptions of "Indo-Pacific" remain unclear. These imply that there is no universal and coherent answer to the question of which countries constitute the "Indo-Pacific", and there possibly will be no such answer in the future either.

⁹³ Department of Defence, Australian Government, "Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister of Defence's Speech at Shangri-La Dialogue 2019", 2 June 2019, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/speeches/shangri-la-dialogue-2019>.

⁹⁴ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, "Kokka anzenhoshou kaigi kaisai joukyou" [Status of National Security Council], <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/anzenhosyoukaigi/kaisai.html>.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press", 9 March 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1540928.shtml.

⁹⁶ Prime Minister's Office of Singapore, "PM Lee Hsien Loong at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019, 31 May 2019, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lee-Hsien-Loong-at-the-IISS-Shangri-La-Dialogue-2019>.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press"; and Prime Minister's Office of Singapore, "PM Lee Hsien Loong at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019.

This lack of clarity has a historical precedent in the term “Asia”, which also has had various meanings. This ambiguity should be taken into consideration in discussing “Indo-Pacific” architectures, as well as the emphasis of some countries on upholding “inclusiveness”.

To use limited funds and assets effectively amid such terminological complexities, the countries that seek to engage the “Indo-Pacific” region, whether they call it “Indo-Pacific” or something else, should understand each other’s terminology carefully. The geographical definition of the “Indo-Pacific” is one of the basic elements that must be understood. The above-mentioned complexities show that not only the countries which advocate the “Indo-Pacific”, however it is conceptualised, but also others should make efforts to avoid misunderstanding and mistrust derived from different perceptions of the geographical definitions.

Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of how the geographical contours of the term “Indo-Pacific” have evolved in the conception of the key countries involved. Its two findings are: how the geographic scopes of the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific” have overlapped and why the functional difference in the various geographical definitions exists. These findings will help us obtain a better understanding of how the various countries perceive the region. The term “Indo-Pacific” has already entered into common usage, even though there are reservations about, and even resistance towards, the various conceptions of “Indo-Pacific”. The “Indo-Pacific” is here to stay, and it will continue to shape the foreign policy strategies of all the countries discussed here, and even beyond. Hence, it is important to understand the geographical evolution of the concepts thoroughly to avoid misunderstanding and mistrust.

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