

Chapter 2

Imperative and Drivers in the Trilaterals

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the bilateral relations among the USA, Japan, and India. It also focusses on the study of the minilaterals and geostrategic imperatives of these three countries vis-à-vis Indo Pacific. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part studies the strengths of minilaterals in the Indo-Pacific. The second section focusses on constituting the Indo-Pacific framing of the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions as a connected economic, political, and strategic space from the point of view of India, Japan, and the USA. The last section delves into the bilateral relations among these three countries which have proved to be a bedrock for this trilateral relationship in the broader Indo- Pacific region.

2.2 Explaining the Rise of Mini-Trilaterals in the Indo-Pacific: prospect for Cooperation

Minilaterals refer to informal and more targeted initiatives intended to address a “specific threat, contingency or security issue with fewer states (usually three or four) sharing the same interest for resolving it within a finite period of time” (*Tow, 2019*). Certain features are frequently associated with minilaterals: they have a small number of participants, they are ad hoc, and their outcomes and commitments are voluntary in nature. In contrast, multilateralism is defined as a “formal effort by three or more states to build trust and avoid conflict by identifying, institutionalizing and observing rules and norms for a common vision of regional or international order” (*Saran and Tirkey, 2021; Tow, 2019*). These forums are a result of the changing geopolitical dynamics in the region, and in turn, they will have strategic implications for the region (*Brown, 2018*). In the immediate timeframe, it would appear that China wants to play the role of regional police in shaping security order in the Indo-Pacific—one that is hegemonic and with itself at the apex (*Tow, 2019*). This contrasts with the vision held by key powers in the Indo-Pacific that do not wish to see a hegemonic Asia. This interest itself has pushed like-minded countries to come together in shaping an Indo-Pacific strategic order that is open and inclusive, as against Beijing’s idea of an exclusive one (*Raja Mohan,*

2017). As William Tow argues, there is a real, urgent need for “traditional security” politics; he quotes Henrick Tsjeng’s definition of ‘traditional security’ thus: “the protection of national security and sovereignty from external state-level threats and the management of the impact of major power competition” (*Tow, 2019*). The coming years will continue to witness the growth of interests-based coalitions or “ad-hoc coalitions of the willing” in the Indo-Pacific, which is a reflection of the deep uncertainties that currently prevail (*Ahl, 2019*).

However, scholars point out that focusing on the numerical dimension of the definition overlooks the qualitative aspect of what differentiates minilaterals from multilaterals i.e., Minilaterals focus on gathering the “critical mass” of members necessary for a specific purpose, in contrast to the broad and inclusive approach associated with multilaterals (*Singh and Teo, 2020*). Today Minilateral cooperation can be witnessed in all the areas of international cooperation ranging from climate change to trade to connectivity to security issues. The growth of regional clubs for international economic cooperation, such as the European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as more groupings with more diverse memberships, like the G20, are supplanting “global” multilateralism (*Brummer, 2014*). The creation of the smallest group necessary to achieve a particular goal, and a turn from formal treaties to non-binding accords and other soft-law mechanisms—are associated with ease and simplicity (*Chaffee, 2016*). Even for regulating financial markets, regulators and countries now lean towards informal mechanisms such as the Basel Committee and the Financial Stability Board, which tend to adopt “soft law” methods such as recommendations, pledges, commitments, and memorandums of understanding to achieve outcomes and objectives (*Patrick, 2015*). Such ad hoc approaches to international cooperation bring certain advantages, including speed, flexibility, modularity, and possibilities for experimentation (*Bretton Woods Project, 2020*). Due to the fact that these voluntary arrangements which follow the bottom-up approach has a small membership that facilitates fast coordination on focus areas and expedite decision making programme.

The idea of minilaterals is not new: bilateralism, multilateralism and minilateralism have co-existed in global governance since 1945. Notably, the multilateral institutions that were created in the post-war era were negotiated through “disguised” minilateralism, pursued between the United States (US) and other Atlantic powers (*Singh and Teo, 2020*). For instance,

the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1947 (GATT) can be traced to bilateral or minilateral negotiations between major trading powers, which were subsequently “multilateralised” by including other countries in the discussions (*Kahler, 1992*). This ideal vision of global cooperation now stands compromised: consensus seems impossible, and reforms remain elusive, while vested interests and institutional inertia continue to hamper decision-making (*Tirkey, 2020*). In 2009, Moises Naim famously declared that multilateral initiatives have failed, as talks have stalled, deadlines have been missed, and commitments are no longer honored—and that one can have the “smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem” (*Naim, 2009*). The frustration with multilateralism has emerged as these forums largely failed to fulfill the objectives, they set out to achieve—be it the maintenance of international peace and security through the United Nations (UN), or the next round of trade negotiations within the World Trade Organization (WTO). The growth of minilaterals is thus often viewed as a solution to address the inefficiency of multilaterals. While minilaterals cannot replace multilaterals to achieve “true” global cooperation, they can supplement the work of multilateral organizations by providing a platform for diplomacy, confidence-building, and cooperation (*Tirkey, 2020*). This lies in the simplicity and ease that minilaterals are associated with, as opposed to the complex, long-drawn negotiations required in multilateral frameworks (*ibid*).

There are several factors that led to the rise of minilaterals in the Indo-Pacific. In the recent years, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a pivot for many minilateral engagements and activities. A number of trilaterals have been established for enhancing cooperation and maritime security in the region, such as the India-France-Australia, Australia-Japan-India, Japan-US-India, and India-Italy-Japan – which provide an opportunity for middle powers such as Australia, India, and Japan, to build on common interests and strengthen the regional economic and security architecture (*Panda, 2021*). While security is the primary driver for the creation of these forums, a few of them, such as the India-Italy-Japan trilateral, have expanded their objectives to cover collaboration with third countries, multilateralism, and socio-economic concerns (*Sharma, 2021*). It is interesting to note here that these minilaterals in the Indo-Pacific region have come up or have been created for specific geostrategic objectives.

Minilateralism has found favor amongst several major powers in the Indo-Pacific primarily due to the question of credibility of the US alliance system in managing security challenges in the region (*Rajagopalan, 2021*). The first reason is the growing importance of strategic alliances over global cooperation. This type of initiative facilitates the creation of issue-specific partnerships between like-minded countries. For example, India, Japan, and the USA provide for a forum to strengthen defense and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. This minilateral initiative paves an avenue for India to participate in the decision-making capacity which is often lost in forums of the United Nations Security Council.

Secondly, a relatively unexplored line of enquiry is the correlation between improvement of information and communications technology, and the growth of minilateral. (*Tirkey, 2020*). While this may appear to be a tenuous connection so far, it is undeniable that technology—from telephonic communications to the Internet—are allowing countries to expand their networks of global and regional cooperation (*Raustiala, 2002*). The rise of technology has undeniably given way to less formal means of communication. In the opinion of scholars such as Chris Brummer, law professor at Georgetown University, with the decline of formality in communications, there is also less preference for formal, large organizations usually characterized by cumbersome procedures (*Chaffee, 2016*).

Thirdly, with the evolving nature of changing global threats - multilateral frameworks posing difficult questions on the continued relevance. Cooperation in HADR, the promotion of freedom of navigation, and respect for rule of law and the rules-based order are important factors driving minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific (*Rajagopalan, 2021*).

Lastly, capacity constraints are another set of issues that have pushed minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific. China has active territorial disputes with most of its neighbors and Beijing has only heightened tensions through its unilateral pursuit of measures like the establishment and extension of air defense identification zone (ADIZ), or the control over South China Sea by setting up new administrative regions headquartered in Sansha City, Woody Island. All countries that are engaged in minilateralism have had to deal with aggressive Chinese behavior in their backyard, while lacking in military and economic capacity (*Saha, Bland and Lakshmana,*

2020). Even if one were to combine the capacities of some of the bigger maritime powers, they still will not be able to match up to China. This also highlights the US's essential role in the Indo-Pacific strategic dynamics (*Rajagopalan, 2021*).

Furthermore, large multilateral forums having formal institutional structures international bureaucracies, and heterogenous membership, can face hurdles that impede prompt decision-making. The Indo-Pacific region has several capable navies and yet their ability to match up to China on their own is questionable. The individual capacities of these countries have remained inadequate to protect their vital security interests, and therefore there is a stronger case to be made for these kinds of minilaterals (*Rajagopalan, 2020*). Furthermore, the rise of a multipolar world—along with the emergence of geopolitical rivalry between the US and China—have heightened fissures in multilateral organizations and stalled decision-making and institutional reforms (*Tirkey, 2020*). As such, minilateralism have a more preferred mechanism. Minilaterals thus allow a group of countries with shared interests and values to bypass seemingly moribund frameworks and resolve issues of common concern (*ibid*). While developing countries intended to pursue the original objectives of the negotiations—i.e., for a single undertaking approach towards a development-oriented agreement—developed countries were keen on introducing new issues to the table. (*Lester, 2016*). According to Richard Baldwin, Professor of International Economics at The Graduate Institute, Geneva, negotiations have been slowed by the “impossible trinity”: (*Baldwin, 2018*). WTO rules a) apply universally, in other words for all members; b) are resolved in consensus; and c) can be implemented via a binding system of dispute resolution. Complicating the matter is that WTO membership has not only grown over the years, but it has also become more heterogeneous (*Brandi, Berger, and Bruhn, 2015*).

Today the states have also come to recognize the value of engaging in smaller, informal, more targeted, interests-based groupings to work on various contentious issues that are difficult to resolve in larger forums(*Patrick, 2015*). Thus, Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo argue that minilateral arrangements occupy the space between bilateralism (both the US- and China-led) and broader regional multilateralism (such as the ASEAN), involving three to nine countries and are rather “exclusive, flexible and functional in nature”(*Singh and Teo, 2020*).

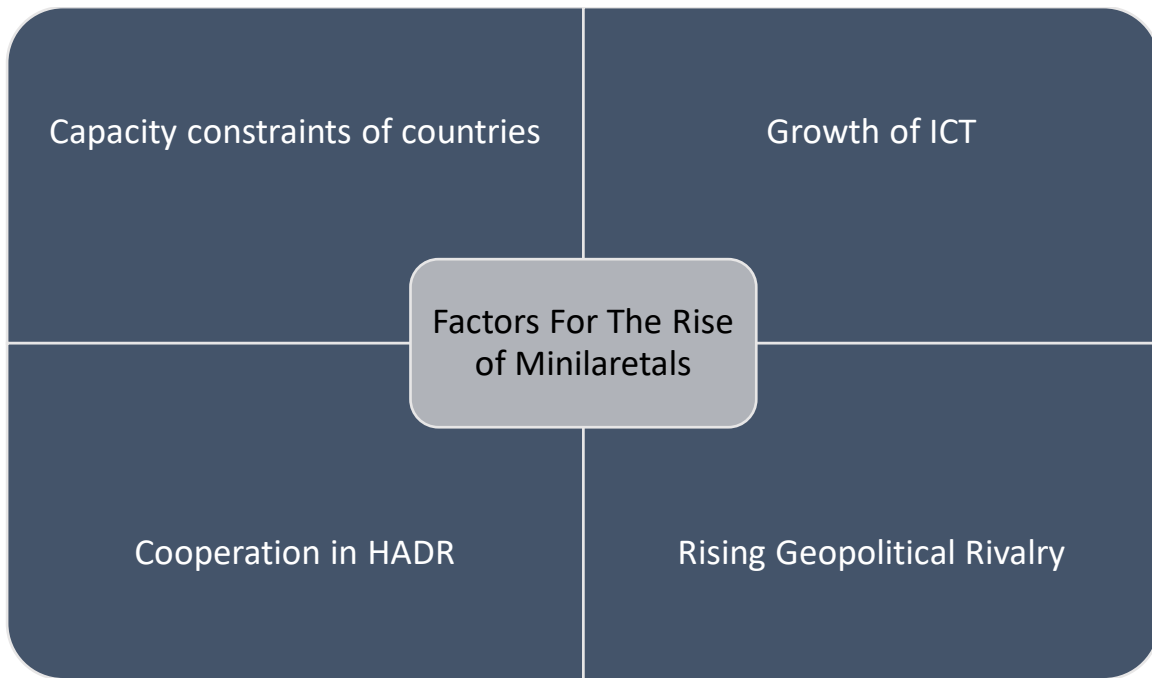


Image 2.1- Factors for the Rise of Minilaterals

Source: by the Author

To sum up, Minilaterals can help in framing targeted partnerships that can focus energies on shared interests and concerns. (*Patrick, 2015*). Minilateralism gives the option to the countries to engage with different nations for separate issues and coordinate policy approaches accordingly. On the other hand, as too, many cooks spoil the broth – in the same manner too many separate frameworks can lead to fragmented approach and disjointed strategy on a certain issue and may intern weaken the cooperation on global issues. Minilaterals would be effective if the members involved are committed towards a joint vision and work towards achieving it. These minilaterals help countries to cooperate on research and implementation of technologies and provide an inclusive platform for interacting with sub-national and non-government actors to formulate innovative solutions.

In security cooperation, minilaterals are a useful tool of diplomacy as they complement existing bilateral partnerships, allow countries to focus on specific regions, while the closed-door nature of discussions in minilaterals helps retain confidentiality (*Tirkey, 2020*). A forward-looking perspective needs to be implemented in deducing how minilaterals will affect security and strategic outcomes in diverse neighborhoods, and how their operations and

outcomes can be improved (*ibid*). Minilaterals provide a pathway for increasing political dialogue and enhancing confidence-building between key partners which in turn widen opportunities for streamlining negotiations before multilateral platforms and work towards the larger goal of international cooperation and global governance (*ibid*). As part of the foreign policy toolkit, the operation of minilaterals can be improved by setting concrete and measurable objectives, and by utilizing them judiciously to supplement efforts of existing multilateral frameworks (*ibid*).

However, minilateralism also presents dangers of forum-shopping, undermining critical international organizations, and reducing accountability in global governance (*Patrick, 2015*). Minilaterals promote voluntary and non-binding targets commitments, and not legally binding ones (*Tirkey, 2020*). For countries that are increasingly showing a preference for “soft law” mechanisms which are easier to negotiate, minilaterals make for an attractive alternative to multilaterals (*ibid*). However, this gives rise to compliance and accountability issues, which can in turn frustrate the objectives of global governance and international cooperation (*Frangos, 2010*). In this context, it is difficult to measure the actual qualitative and quantitative outcomes of minilaterals (*Tirkey, 2020*). Change in political leadership may also influence the foreign policy priorities of a country, which may in turn affect a member’s willingness to participate in a minilateral (*Singh and Teo, 2020*). Another, challenge in measuring outcomes from minilaterals is that the results of meetings are articulated in statements, press releases and memoranda of understandings; absent are concrete commitments, hard deadlines, and a discernible implementation framework (*Tirkey, 2020*).

From the above discussion on minilateralism -the mini- trilaterals are here to stay in the years to come. With the deepening of the bilateral relations among India, Japan, and the USA and their interest to discuss strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific region is a source of strength for this trilateral. The three countries aim towards “synergizing their respective strengths to ensure a peaceful, secure, prosperous and rules-based Indo-Pacific Region” (*Rajagopalan, 2021*). Given the increasing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific, one area that could gain greater attention from the three countries is maritime surveillance to monitor the Chinese naval activities in these waters. (*Rajagopalan, 2020*). It the security interests, defense capabilities, strategic calculations, and maritime geography along with their mutual respect a

rules-based order focused on trends, challenges, and priorities in regional and global platform that have brought them together. Thus, as coalition of the willing, minilaterals address a specific issue, or engage with a defined geographic region, or achieve a specific objective. (Tirkey, 2020). The following tables illustrates the various minilaterals since 2016.

Table 2.1 Minilaterals for Security Cooperation (2016-2021)

Minilateral/Plurilateral	Year Created	Objectives	Significant Meetings and Outcomes
India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue	2020	Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region	Foreign Secretaries' Dialogue (2020), followed by the first Ministerial Dialogue (2021).
Indonesia-Malaysia-The Philippines Cooperation (IMPC)	2016	To fight piracy, sea robbery, violent extremism, and terrorism	Meetings at the level of foreign ministers, defense ministers, chiefs of defense. Air and navy patrols in the Sulu Sea.
Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Members: India, Australia, US, Japan	2017	Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region	Elevated meeting to leaders' level in 2021. Launch of the Quad partnership, and working groups on climate and, critical and emerging technologies.

			Joint naval exercises (2020).
Australia-Japan-India (AJI) Trilateral	2015	Supply Chain Resilience in the Indo-Pacific	Ministerial-level meetings. Launch of Supply Chain Resilience Initiative to attain strong, sustainable, balanced, and inclusive growth in the region.
India -Italy-Japan Trilateral	2021	Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region	Meetings with senior foreign ministry officials.
Australia-India-Indonesia Trilateral	2017	Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region	Senior-level meetings.
Japan-US-India	2018	Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region	Leader-level meetings, at the sidelines of G20 summits.
Afghanistan – Turkmenistan – US Trilateral	2020	Political, security, and economic matters	In the 2020 meeting, participants committed to the Afghan peace process and improving security cooperation.
US-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan-Pakistan	2021	Quad Regional Support for Afghanistan-Peace Process and Post Settlement	No meetings yet. Aims to cooperate to expand trade, build transit links, and strengthen

			business-to-business ties.
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Source: <https://www.orfonline.org/>

Table 2. 2: Minilaterals for connectivity, infrastructure, and development cooperation (2016-2021)

Minilateral/Plurilateral	Year Created	Objectives	Significant Meetings and Outcomes
India-Iran-Afghanistan (Chabahar Agreement)	2016	Establishment of Transport and Transit Corridor	Trilateral Agreement signed in 2016, first meeting held in 2018.
India-Russia-Bangladesh Trilateral Cooperation	2018	Civil nuclear cooperation	Signing of memorandum of understanding for construction of the Rooppur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.
India-Iran-Uzbekistan	2020	Trade, economy, and connectivity	Trilateral meeting on joint use of the strategic Chabahar port. First meeting in December 2020 at the level of senior officials.

Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan Trilateral	2021	Cooperation on Eurasian Connectivity	A tripartite roadmap for deeper cooperation on the Lapis Lazuli Corridor.
Blue Dot Network (BDN) Members: US, Japan, Australia	2019	Infrastructure development	Helps members coordinate national approaches for infrastructure diplomacy, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.
Mekong-US Partnership Members: US, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.	2020	Development of the Mekong sub-region through cooperation	Aims to cooperate on economic connectivity, energy security, human capital development, transboundary water and natural resources management, and non-traditional security.
Three Seas Initiative (3SI), also known as the Baltic, Adriatic, Black Sea (BABS) Initiative Members: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania,	2015-16	Co-operation in economic matters: energy, transport, and communications infrastructure.	Annual summits with heads of states. Established the 3SIIF (Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund) in 2019 to target critical infrastructure

Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia			investment in Europe.
Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Members: China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam	2016	Cooperation between the riparian states of the Lancang River and Mekong River.	Three pillars of cooperation: political-security issues; economic affairs and sustainable development; and social affairs and people-to-people exchanges.

Source: <https://www.orfonline.org/>

Table 2.3: Minilaterals for Economic Cooperation (2016-2021)

Minilateral/Plurilateral	Year Created	Objectives	Significant Meetings and Outcomes
Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), previously the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Members: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand,	2016	Free trade agreement between Pacific rim countries.	The CPTPP has entered into force for Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Peru, Singapore, Vietnam			
Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) Members: China, South Korea, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand	2020	Free trade agreement built upon ASEAN+1FTAs	The RCEP will take effect after it has been ratified by at least six ASEAN and three non-ASEAN signatories. As of writing this brief, Japan, Singapore, China, and Thailand have completed the ratification process.
United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)	2018-19	Replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)	The USMCA builds on the NAFTA. The new Agreement received bipartisan support in the US Senate.

Source: <https://www.orfonline.org/>

2.2 Constituting the Indo-Pacific

The concept of the Indo-Pacific as a geostrategic and geo-graphical space based on the specific political intentions and interests is discussed from the three nations- India, Japan, and USA's point of view. This section studies and examines the concept of the Indo-Pacific and its implementations in the United States, Japan, and India by means of a comparative analysis.

2.3a Japan and the confluence of the two seas

The idea of connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans as a macroregional geopolitical space has historical precedents (*Medcalf, 2019*). Long back, during his first short-lived tenure as Prime Minister, Abe gave the landmark speech at the Indian parliament titled “Confluence of the Two Seas” on 22nd August 2007. According to Abe, “the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2007*). This “broader Asia”, as he called it, would “evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia” - by linking the two oceans and identifying core constituents, Abe was establishing the spatiality of the Indo-Pacific construct (*ibid.*). Abe indicated that as maritime states, India, and Japan had vital interests in the security of the SLOCs of the region, adding that these sea lanes were “the shipping routes that are the most critical for the world economy” (*ibid.*). The maritime security was at the core of the “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech. To this end, the shared values of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights are meant to be the normative foundation for regional cooperation (*ibid.*). Japan discovered India as a partner and for enriching the “seas of freedom and prosperity” in a manner that would be open and transparent to all (*ibid.*). Abe’s connectivity concept also emphasizes “universal” norms, which are intended to closely link the democracies in the region politically and economically and to regulate the behavior of non-democratic states, above all China. (*ibid.*)

Again, after his re-election as the Prime Minister in 2012, Abe authored an op-ed titled “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond”. While his address to the Indian parliament could be considered a subtle securitization effort, this op-ed was more explicit. (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). In response to China’s “aggressive behavior” in Asia, he proposed the formation of a democratic coalition composed of Japan, the United States, India, and Australia to jointly protect global public goods, especially the freedom of navigation (*Le, 2019*). This idea was again launched by Abe in a widely acclaimed speech in Nairobi in 2016, in which he spoke of a “union of two free and open oceans and two continents” -subsequently it was given the label “FOIP Strategy” (*Abe, 2016*). The “FOIP Strategy” has since found its way into the official discourse and strategy papers of Japan (*Rossiter, 2018*). The alliance with the United States is still regarded as Japan’s security guarantee (*O’Shea and Maslow, 2021*). Abe stated that

“peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Pacific Ocean are inseparable from peace, stability, and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean”, thus linking the Indian and Pacific Ocean through a securitization speech act (*Abe, 2012*). Here again, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States were identified as key partners, although India’s role was particularly elevated. Specifically, he indicated that India, as a “resident power in East Asia, with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands sitting at the western end of the Strait of Malacca (through which some 40 per cent of world trade passes) – deserves greater emphasis” (*ibid.*). Abe described the waters of the Indo-Pacific region as “public goods” that must be protected by compliance with international law, namely the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea -UNCLOS (*Abe, 2016*). Without naming China specifically as an adversary, this emphasis and rhetoric illustrate the goal of containing Beijing (*Soeya, 2020*). For Tokyo, Indo-Pacific geographically spans from the entire area from the east coast of Africa to the American Pacific coast. (*The author's discussion with Captain Gurpreet Khurana*).

The primary objective of Tokyo’s Indo-Pacific policy has been to maintain strategic stability in the US-led international system. Tokyo has serious reservations on a Sino-centric regional order. It has postured as a stabilizer of US-led order (*Taniguchi, 2019*) and an ardent champion of international norms and rules and custodian of global commons in the Indo-Pacific (*ibid*). Japan’s Indo-Pacific vision functions to bolstering strategic partnerships with other like-minded democracies with the aim of advancing rules-based order, universal political values and securing maritime global. (*Basu, 2020*). The Japanese Government has clarified the basic concept of FOIP on its website:

Develop a free and open Indo-Pacific region as ‘international public goods’, through ensuring the rule-based international order, in a comprehensive, inclusive, and transparent manner, attaching importance to ASEAN’s centrality and unity, to bring stability and prosperity for every country as well as secure peace and prosperity in the region as a whole. Japan will cooperate with any country that supports this idea. (Government of Japan, 2019).

In a press release issued on 12 November 2017 titled ‘Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Consultations on the Indo-Pacific’, the Ministry Of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Japan, reported, ‘Senior officials of diplomatic authorities in Japan, Australia, India, and the USA met in

Manila, the Philippines on 12 November, and discussed measures to ensure a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific’, and noted that ‘The participants affirmed their commitment to continuing discussions and deepening cooperation based on shared values and principles’ (*Horimoto, 2017*). Another round of four-way talks was held in June 2018. This FOIP might be termed as the second one because it was the successor of the first FOIP (*ibid*).

The Japanese Foreign Ministry thus summarizes the basic principles of FOIP in three core areas:

1. maintaining a rules-based order, with the principles of free trade and freedom of navigation as its foundation.
2. securing economic prosperity through more physical connectivity through the development of infrastructure, more people-to-people connectivity through the expansion of exchange programs, and institutional connectivity through the harmonization of global standards and rules; and
3. maintaining peace and security through increased security cooperation with the United States, India, Australia, and other partners (*Heiduk and Wacker, 2020*).

Despite several constants, the “FOIP Strategy” has undergone some innovations since 2016. It was renamed “FOIP Vision” in September 2018. Since then, Japanese diplomats, as well as Prime Minister Abe, no longer speak of a “strategy” but of a “vision” (*ibid*). In addition to this relabeling, the orientation towards China has also changed in terms of content: If Tokyo used the FOIP until 2018 primarily as a containment strategy vis-à-vis China, especially with regard to Bei-jing’s BRI, the rhetoric has changed since 2018. In a speech before the Japanese parliament, Abe indirectly alluded to the possibility that his FOIP vision and China’s BRI could coexist and complement each other and entertained the idea of cooperating closely with China in the field of infrastructure development in Asia in the future (*Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, 2018*). So far, however, nothing has been publicly announced about the implementation of such projects. At the same time, the importance of normative elements such as “democracy promotion” in the context of FOIP has diminished (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Address by Prime Minister Abe at the United Nations General Assembly, 2018*). While the Diplomatic Bluebook 2017 stresses the importance of democracy, market economy

and international law for maintain-ing stability and prosperity in Asia, (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook, 2017*) the Diplomatic Bluebook 2019 only mentions the latter aspect (inter-national law) in the context of the FOIP (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Diplomatic Bluebook, 2019*). Then Foreign Minister of Japan, Taro Kono, for example, spoke in 2018 merely of a “free and open maritime order based on the rule of law” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Foreign Policy Speech by Foreign Minister Kono, 2018*). This gives the impression that since 2018 Japan has been trying to prevent its own interpretation of the FOIP from being perceived as a containment strategy towards China. According to observers, the reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, relations between Japan and China have been warming up again since 2018 (*Nagy, 2019*). On the other hand, South and Southeast Asian partners have criticized the initiative launched by Abe; in their view, it was too strongly anti-Chinese and security policy oriented (*Koga, 2019*). This change has been reflected in government documents and declarations identifying the key policy areas for FOIP: whereas in 2016 and 2017 the FOIP was associated primarily with security policy threats, more recently aspects such as “connectivity”, “infrastructure expansion”, “national development” and “economic growth” have also been playing a role (*Heiduk and Wacker, 2020*). Hard security policy issues, such as the maritime conflicts with China in the East and South China Seas or the expansion and modernization of the Japanese armed forces, have receded somewhat into the back-ground from 2018 onwards (*Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, 2018*).

The above-mentioned core areas of the FOIP have remained unchanged since 2016, including the objective of preserving the freedom of navigation and the rules-based order for the entire Indo-Pacific. To sum up, over the years, Tokyo has pragmatically attuned its approach to Indo-Pacific concept from a ‘strategy’ into a ‘vision’, touted as FOIP 1.0 and FOIP 2.0, respectively (*Hosoya, 2019*). The Indo-Pacific strategy or FOIP 1.0 of 2016 was primarily crafted as a China-centric strategy and Tokyo’s Indo-Pacific vision or FOIP 2.0 attuned as a relatively more cooperative construct, predominantly guided by some hesitations in Tokyo on embracing a purely confrontational stance towards China as regards economic issues (*Kawashima, Kamiya and Schoff, 2019*).

2.3b The U.S. and the free and open Indo-Pacific

The American shift towards the Indo-Pacific regional construct began through the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, in which former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton played a key role. Clinton first used the term "Indo-Pacific" in 2010 during a speech in Hawaii where she discussed the growing U.S.-India naval partnership, which she felt highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific basin (*Clinton, 2010*). The following year she penned an op-ed in the journal *Foreign Policy* where she indicated that translating the "growing connection between the Indian and Pacific oceans into an operational concept" was crucial for adapting to "new challenges in the region" (*Clinton, 2011*). In this op-ed, Clinton stated that America's alliance system in the region would serve as the fulcrum of the pivot to Asia, and that the U.S.-Japan alliance was the "cornerstone of peace and stability in the region" (*ibid.*). Importantly, she revealed the need to reframe the "alliance with Australia from a Pacific partnership to an Indo-Pacific one" (*ibid*), thus illustrating the transformation of the regional context of the U.S.-Australian relationship. Lastly, Clinton identified India as a key democratic partner in the safeguarding of freedom of navigation along pivotal SLOCs (*ibid*). Thus, the U.S. Department of State's 2019 FOIP progress report articulates four principles that guide the implementation of the strategy: "free, fair, and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, good governance, and freedom of the seas." (*United States Department of Defence, 2019*).

Other officials in the Obama administration also echoed Clinton's framing. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, during a speech in New Delhi, stated that "as India 'looks east' and the United States 'rebalances', our interests across the full span of the Indo-Pacific region are aligning more closely than ever", thus highlighting the important place that India occupies in the U.S. framing of the Indo-Pacific, in addition to key allies like Japan and Australia (*Tow, 2021*). Hagel also indicated that due to "shared interest in maritime security in the region, including the global crossroads of the South China Sea," closer cooperation was needed to "protect freedom of navigation in the air and sea" (*ibid*). Clinton's successor, former Secretary of State John Kerry was also proactive in the promotion of the Indo-Pacific construct (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). During his visit to Sri Lanka in 2015, he stated that the United States was "providing leadership on maritime security in the Indian Ocean in association with

close friends and allies across the region, including India, Australia, Indonesia, and Japan”, adding that Washington opposed “the use of intimidation or force to assert a territorial or maritime claim by anyone” in the Indo-Pacific (*World Socialist Web Site, 2015*).

While the “Pivot to Asia” served as the platform for America’s construction of the Indo-Pacific during the Obama administration, the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) took on this mantle during the Trump administration. The Trump administration has focused almost entirely on great power competition, particularly with China (*Nye, 2020*). President Donald Trump first presented his “vision” of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in November 2017 at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hanoi. (*The White House, Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, 2017*). Soon afterwards then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson defined the “less responsible” approach of an increasingly powerful China to international standards and Beijing’s deliberate undermining of the “international rules-based order” as Washington’s main challenge. (*United States Department of State, Remarks by Rex W. Tillerson, 2017*). President Barack Obama had already strategically connected the Indian and Pacific Oceans to form an “Indo-Pacific” region and outlined plans for an Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) in addition to the political and military “pivot to Asia”. (*Scott, 2018*). In contrast to the Obama administration, however, the Trump administration sees the “Indo-Pacific region” as a central foreign and economic policy arena for dealing with China. In 2018 Vice President Mike Pence drew considerable attention when he delivered a speech denouncing China’s behavior and condemning its repeated interference in the internal affairs of other states (including the United States) and its aggressive policy in the South China Sea (*The White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence, 2018*).

During his visit to New Delhi in 2017, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis followed a similar discourse set out by Obama-era counterparts, stating that a “peaceful and prosperous future in the Indo-Pacific region is based on a strong rules-based international order and a shared commitment to international law, to peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for territorial integrity” (*Mattis, 2017*). Mattis indicated that U.S.-Indian defense cooperation was predicated on a convergence of mutual interests, adding that India’s designation as a defense partner reflected Washington’s recognition of New Delhi’s role as a “pillar of regional stability and security” (*ibid.*). Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson echoed these points

during a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in 2017, when he argued that the United States and India shared mutual interests in peace, security, and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific (*Tillerson, 2017*). Tillerson stated that the two countries should serve as “the Eastern and Western beacons” that maintain a free and open architecture in the region, adding that the Indo-Pacific “will be the most consequential part of the globe in the 21st century” (*ibid.*). During this speech, Tillerson also highlighted the important role that democracies such as India, as well as allies like Australia and Japan, play in strengthening the rule of law and furthering prosperity and security in the region (*ibid.*). Tillerson further remarked that “As we look to the next 100 years, it is vital that the Indo-Pacific, a region so central to our shared history, continue to be free and open.” (*ibid.*). Tillerson emphasized that FOIP is in part aimed at countering “China’s challenges to the rules-based order” and pushing back “where China subverts the sovereignty of neighboring countries.” (*ibid.*).

The clearest articulation of the Trump administration’s “Free and Open Indo- Pacific” (FOIP) strategy was given by the Deputy Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Alex Wong. (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). During a briefing in 2018, Wong deconstructed the strategy to its constitutive parts. He indicated that the word “free” meant that the nations of the Indo-Pacific should be “free from coercion” and that their societies should be free in terms of “good governance”, “human rights” and “transparency and anti-corruption” (*Wong, 2018*). These points implicitly speak to China’s coercive policies in the region as well as the illiberal nature of its regime. In regard to the word “open”, Wong stated that it referred to “open sea lanes of communication and open airways”, “open logistics”, “open investment” and “open trade” (*ibid.*). Here again, China appears to be the target, particularly its investment and lending practices, vis-à-vis the Belt and Road Initiative. Lastly, he highlights that the reason for the adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” concept is twofold: (1) “it acknowledges the historical reality and the current-day reality that South Asia, and in particular India, plays a key role in the Pacific and in East Asia and in Southeast Asia” and (2) it is in the U.S.’s and the region’s interest that “India play an increasingly weighty role in the region” (*ibid.*). Wong adds that as a democracy, India is invested in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific that can serve to anchor a free and open order in the region (*ibid.*). These points illustrate two important aspects of the Trump administration’s FOIP strategy. The first is the key role that India plays in Washington’s policies in the region. The second is that it reflects a balancing logic that frames India, a

democratic country, as a bookend in the regional construct, opposite the United States, with China, an authoritarian country, situated in the middle (*ibid*).

Trump himself defined a free and open Indo-Pacific as “a renewed partnership with America to work together to strengthen the bonds of friendship and commerce between all of the nations of the Indo-Pacific, and together, to promote our prosperity and security” (*The White House, Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, 2017*). In December 2017, the Trump administration issued its National Security Strategy (NSS), which devoted two pages to the Indo-Pacific and portrays the region as facing a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order. Although the NSS states that “the United States seeks to continue to cooperate with China,” it makes clear that China represents a fundamental challenge to the region (*ibid*). In particular, the NSS notes that “China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda” (*ibid*). Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell echoed these concerns in an October 2019 written testimony for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and stated that the Chinese Communist Party’s “repressive alternative vision for the Indo-Pacific ... has put Beijing in a position of strategic competition with all who seek to preserve a free and open order of sovereign nations within a rules-based order. (*Stilwell, 2019*). In a July 2018 speech, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo outlined three specific priorities of “America’s Indo-Pacific economic vision”: digital economy, energy, and infrastructure (*United States Department of State, Remarks by Michael R. Pompeo, 2018*).

Further details of FOIP emerged in later press briefings and official statements; key documents include the Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, Department of Defense, the Department of State’s fact sheet “Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region,” (*US Department of State, Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, 2018*), the White House fact sheet “President Donald J. Trump’s Administration is Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific,”(*United States Department of State, Fact Sheet, 2018*),and the State Department’s 2019 progress report- A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision. The State Department’s 2018 fact sheet details the goals of FOIP and outlines three overarching pillars: economics, governance, and security (*US Department of State, Fact Sheet, Office of the Spokesperson, 2018*).

The U.S. Defense Department’s Indo-Pacific Strategy Report begins by stating that the region is the Department’s priority theater. The report lays out a vision of the Indo-Pacific “in which all nations, regardless of size, are able to exercise their sovereignty free from coercion by other countries” (*US Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report; US Department of State, A Free and Open Indo -Pacific, 2019*). It also states that the United States seeks a region where “all nations enjoy access to international waters, airways, and cyber and space domains, and are able to pursue peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes” (*ibid*). The United States and ASEAN also conducted their first-ever maritime security exercise in September 2019 to promote “shared commitments to maritime partnerships, security and stability in Southeast Asia”(*ibid*). The U.S. FOIP strategy includes three main security objectives: preparedness, partnership, and promotion of a networked region (*ibid*). To enhance preparedness, the U.S. military is seeking to work with partners to fortify the U.S. posture across the Indo-Pacific. As part of this effort, Vice President Pence announced on November 16, 2018, that the United States would work with Papua New Guinea and Australia on their joint initiative at Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island (*ibid*). Furthermore, the report classifies Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Mongolia as “reliable, capable, and natural partners” of the United States and as model relationships for the region (*ibid*). Both the U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy call for utilizing foreign military sales as a means of bolstering alliances and attracting new partners (*ibid*). The Defense Department’s FOIP strategy report outlines that the United States is “augmenting its bilateral relationships with trilateral and multilateral arrangements and encouraging intra-Asian security relationships” (*ibid*).

While the securitization of China is implicitly present in statements by key government officials, it is much more explicit in official government documents. For example, Trump’s National Security Strategy contends that “a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific”. China’s threat to freedom of navigation and regional stability is specifically outlined. The State Department’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific document argues that “authoritarian revisionist powers seek to advance their parochial interest at others’ expense” (*ibid*). The document singles out China’s policies as threatening freedom of navigation in the region and adds that Beijing’s claims in the South China Sea, based on the “preposterous ‘nine-dash line,’ are unfounded, unlawful, and unreasonable” (*ibid*). Lastly, the U.S. Department of Défense’s Indo-Pacific Strategy Report

states that China's policies undermine "the international system from within by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously eroding the values and principles of the rules-based order" (*ibid*). The report calls attention to China's abuse of human rights at the domestic level as well as its coercion of neighboring states in the East China Sea and the South China Sea (*ibid*). At the Munich Security Conference, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper called on "friends" of the United States to "choose" between the systems of the United States and China when considering whom to cooperate with (*U.S. Department of Defense, Remarks by Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper, 2020*). A more general strategy papers published in parallel, such as the National Security Strategy (NSS), clearly identify China as an adversary aiming to undermine the rules-based international order (*US Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report; US Department of State, A Free and Open Indo -Pacific, 2019*). The U.S. State Department made it clear at the end of 2019, however, that (at least in theory) the U.S. vision of FOIP does not exclude any nation. (*ibid*).

The Indo-Pacific is presented in official documents of USA as a as a geopolitical and geo-economic space. The USA's geographical boundaries of the Indo-Pacific extends across the entire Indian Ocean, from U.S. overseas territories such as Guam and American Samoa in the West Pacific to U.S. states such as Hawaii and California and includes all nations bordering these two oceans. (*Ibid; Author's discussion with Captain Gurpreet Khurana*).

Trump emphasized the need to establish "fair," "reciprocal" trade relations based on principles such as respect for intellectual property rights, free trade, and protection of private property, fair competition, and open markets (*ibid*). Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy co-opts India as a rising democratic power to help manage China's rise, as Washington is experiencing relative erosion of power (*Scott, 2018*). Bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral networks with India, Australia and Japan have been one of the key pillars of Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy (*Basu, 2020*). In the meantime, other principles have been added which go beyond economic cooperation and which, in Washington's reading, form the foundation of the currently existing international order: respect for the sovereignty and independence of all states, peaceful conflict resolution and respect for international rules, including freedom of air and sea transport (*US Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report; US Department of State, A Free and Open Indo -Pacific, 2019*). In the international arena, the "Free" in Free and Open Indo-Pacific

(FOIP; Japanese: 自由で開かれたインド太平洋戦略, romanized: jiyū de hirakareta Indotaiheiyō senryaku) stands for the freedom of all states to exercise their sovereignty without interference by other states. At the national level this corresponds to good governance and the protection of human and civil rights. “Open” is interpreted as free access to international waters, airspace, and digital space, as well as open access to markets and fair, reciprocal trade (*ibid; the author’s interview and discussion with Captain Gurpreet S Khurana, Dr. David Scott, Prof. Sumit Ganguly, Dr. David Shambaugh, Dr. Sataro Nagao and Dr Thomas S. Wilkins*). From the U.S. perspective, China is also increasingly undermining the principle of openness, inter alia through its militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea. (*Heiduk and Wacker, 2020*).

Thus, the following three elements can be identified in the USA’s FOIP:

1. offering the states of the region an alternative to the Chinese BRI,
2. securing freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, and
3. making trade relations between the Asian states and the United States “free, fair and reciprocal”. (*the author’s interview and discussion with Captain Gurpreet S Khurana, Dr. David Scott, Prof. Sumit Ganguly, Dr. David Shambaugh, Dr. Sataro Nagao and Dr Thomas S. Wilkins*).

2.3c India’s Look East to Act East Policy

The idea of Indo-Pacific has gained currency with the rise of China and its expanding interests in the Indian Ocean and the subcontinent on the one hand, and India’s increasing footprint in the Pacific Ocean on the other and the Indian Ocean is a key component of the Indo-Pacific construct (*Raja Mohan, 2017*). As a resident power in the IOR, India sees itself as a security provider for the region, and consequently, a key player in the Indo-Pacific. However, in the context of existing Sino-Indian territorial disputes and growing geopolitical competition, New Delhi sees China’s ability to project power into the IOR as detrimental to its position as well as the stability of the region (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*). These concerns are encapsulated in securitization discourses surrounding a potential Chinese “string of pearls” in

the IOR and the threat this would pose to freedom of navigation along crucial SLOCs and choke points (*ibid*).

Traditionally, India has sought to maintain and limit its presence within South Asia but given China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, India is increasingly redefining the spatiality of its strategic space, leading to the rapid disappearance of differentiation between the Indian and Pacific Oceans (*Scott, 2012*). Traditional pillars of Indian foreign policy, i.e., non-alignment and strategic autonomy, play a decisive role in India's interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept (*Prasad, 2018*). Official documents such as the Indian Navy's report "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" demonstrate the growing acceptance of the Indo-Pacific construct, by acknowledging the shift from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus (*Government of India, Indian Navy, 2015*). More importantly, the report links the Indo-Pacific to India's Act East Policy, signaling acceptance of the Indo-Pacific spatial concept and highlighting Indian interests within that region (*Chand and Garcia, 2021*).

First used by the then Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, the Act East Policy was initially conceptualized to accelerate India's economic engagement with Southeast Asia (*Jaishankar, 2019*). India's "Look East" policy (since 1991) and later "Act East" policy (since 2014), with its focus on Southeast Asia, fits into the wider Indo-Pacific framework, with priority given to strategic and security aspects over economic issues (*Rajagopalan, 2020*). At the Indian Ocean Conference in the Maldives in 2019, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar stated that the Indo-Pacific was a priority for India and "the logical next step after the Act East and a breakout from the confines of South Asia" (*ibid*). That same year, Jaishankar articulated India's geographic conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific stating that, "economic and civilizational impulses link the eastern and southern shores of Africa through the Gulf, the Arabian Sea Island nations, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands" (*ibid*).

The 2018, Prime minister Modi's Shangri-La speech is considered an important reference point for India's understanding of the Indo-Pacific concept (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 2018*). In his speech, Modi emphasized the importance of

the Act East Policy in connecting with its neighbors to the East (*ibid*). In the realm of security, he emphasized the role played by the Indian Navy in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (*ibid*). More importantly, he stated that the Indo-Pacific region's common prosperity and security necessitated the development of a "common rules-based order for the region," adding that "it must equally apply to all individually as well as to the global commons" (*ibid*). He further argued, to "believe in sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as equality of all nations, irrespective of size and strength" where "equal access to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air are rights under international law" (*ibid*). Finally, Modi stated that India was committed to upholding international norms, including a free, open, and inclusive region in accordance with international law relating to the use of common spaces on sea and air. In stating this, he positioned India as a central player in the region that backs international norms and law as well as their inviolability (*ibid*). As is noted by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), "...through the Indo-Pacific construct, India envisages a greater role for itself in the wider region." (*Ibid*).

India's Indo-Pacific vision is situated within Modi's larger goals of empowering India as a leading power, rather than a balancer, in a multi-polar world order, defined by many centers of influence and stability (*ibid*). The Indo-Pacific strategy draws from Modi's 'Act East' policy and the Indian Ocean vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). In March 2015, Prime Minister Modi unveiled India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) during his tour of Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka. SAGAR intended to differentiate India's leadership from other regionally active major powers and to reassure littoral countries as India's maritime influence grows (*Estrada, 2020*). It should be noted that for Japan also the Indian Ocean carries strategic importance (*Nagao, 2019*). SAGAR has followed the Indian Navy's clear-cut image of Maritime Areas of Interest to India in the Indo-Pacific as put forth by Gurpreet S. Khurana. India advocates an inclusive version of the Indo-Pacific. For India the focus is on intensifying security co-operation with the United States, Japan, and Australia as well as with some states in Southeast Asia like Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia. (*Rajagopalan, 2020*). India has not engaged in formal alliance system in the Indo-Pacific. India is engaged in issue based multi-alignment frameworks as India does not conceive a zero-sum game in the Indo-Pacific. The centrality of this commitment ensures that India will set a positive and inter-active agenda with other major powers and groupings (*ibid*). India's approach to the Indo-Pacific seeks a leadership role in cooperation

with Southeast Asia, while ‘balancing’ its relations with Washington and Beijing (*Roy-Chaudhury, 2018*). India’s Indo-Pacific thus reflects ‘evasive balancing’ approach since it manifests ‘contradictory elements of balancing China by building partnerships with the United States as well as with regional powers, while simultaneously pursuing a reassurance strategy to convince Beijing that India is not really balancing China’ (*Rajagopalan, 2020*).

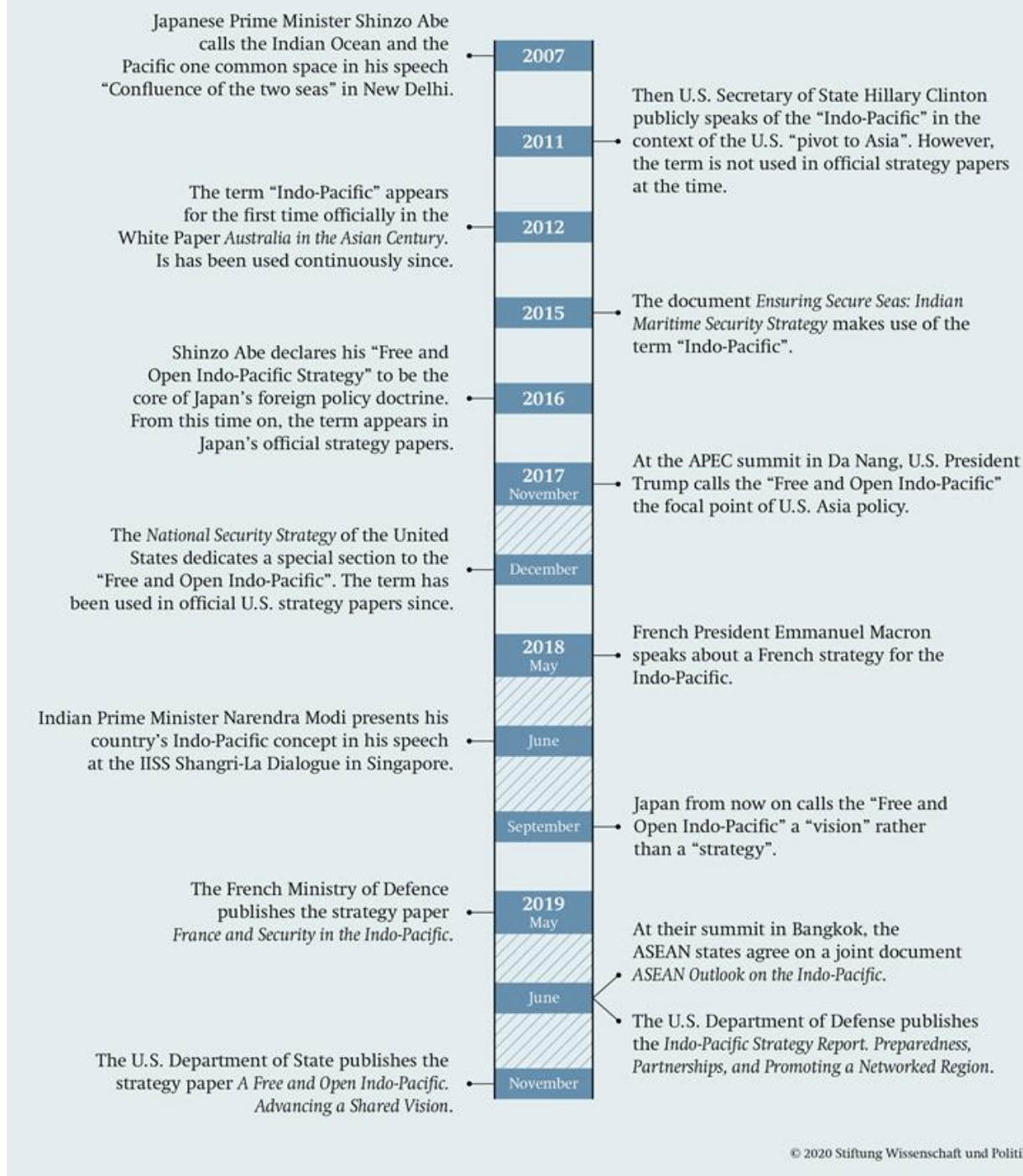
Three factors are most relevant that are real driving force behind India’s Indo-Pacific concept. They are:

1. India perceives China’s policy as “strategic encirclement”,
2. India is concerned about the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and
3. India is alarmed about China’s strong military presence in the Indian Ocean (*ibid*).

India’s Indo-Pacific is not essentially a subset of New Delhi’s China policy. Indo-Pacific is one of the strategies to counter China’s growing power and naval ventures in the Indian Ocean, which is perceived through the prism of strategic encirclement of India and concerns on the subject of freedom of the sea and protecting global commons, including the South China Sea (*Singh, Pande, Smith, Saran, Joshi, Lohman, 2018*). The basic dilemma of Indian foreign policy continues to lie in striking a balance between conflict and cooperation with China, i.e., between pre-serving credibility with India’s actual Indo-Pacific partners (the United States, Japan, and Australia) on the one hand and simultaneously maintaining constructive relations with China on the other (*Heiduk and Wacker, 2020*). To sum up New Delhi advocate for an open, inclusive, and balanced Indo-Pacific defined by open sea lanes and rule of law, trade liberalization and stressed the need to anchor the strategy in ASEAN unity.

From the above discussion it is evident that there are nuanced divergences in India, the US and Japan’s Indo-Pacific understanding, in terms of geographical borders, China strategy, and ASEAN centrality. The issues of divergences in other areas and in these above-mentioned areas in the Indo-Pacific canvas would be investigated and delved deep into the following chapters.

Indo-Pacific – timeline of key events



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Image 2.2 Time of Key events in the Indo-Pacific

Source: www.swp-berlin.org/

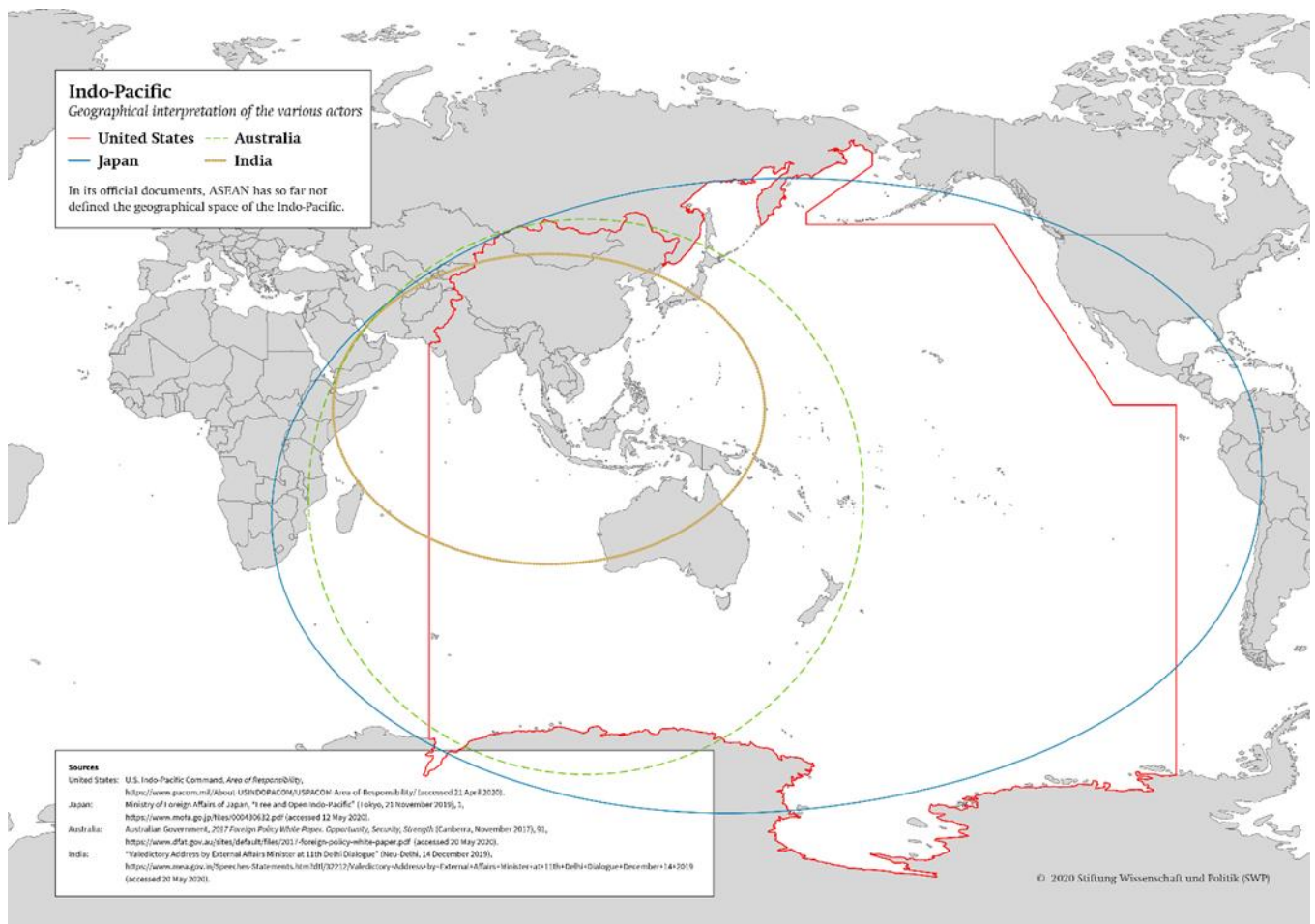


Image 2.3 spatial interpretations of the Indo-Pacific of the United States, Japan, and India

Source: www.swp-berlin.org/

2.4 Identifying the contours of Converging Bilateral traits in the Indo- Pacific among India, Japan, and the USA

Strategic convergence between the United States, Japan and India continues to grow in importance in the Indo-Pacific amid heightened maritime tensions and growing concerns about the rise of China. However, the foundation of good trilateral relations is not only supported by common concerns but continues to be defined by intentional bilateral relations between its members. Against this background, the bilateral network of Delhi, Tokyo and Washington has developed positively in recent years, despite its imperfections. This has been most visually

demonstrated through the giant bear hug that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave to US President Donald Trump during their first summit meeting. But there has also been significant traction gained through the warm relationship between Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Modi.

The Malabar exercise was a watermark on the rapidly improving trilateral relations between Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington, with Japan becoming a permanent member in 2015. However, the Malabar exercise, despite its importance, is not sufficient to advance trilateral relations. The United States and Japan continue to promote this relationship, pushing India for greater integration, which was previously reluctant to formalize strategic relationships that some parts of the region considered "quasi-alliance" for stronger integration. Delhi remains cautious about deepening trilateral relations with Washington and Tokyo, and perhaps with Australia, but this trend, especially as geopolitical tensions with China is a case to point out. Policy makers in India, the United States and Japan are aware of the limits and pace of trilateral cooperation but are proactive in niche areas of cooperation related to common shared security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Abe had so far skillfully managed uncertain and critical relations with the United States after President Trump's surprising election victory. At the diplomatic level, trilateral relations exceeded important thresholds at the first US-India trilateral ministerial dialogue held beside the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in New York in September 2015. This was subsequently followed by a second meeting of the foreign ministers this fall – also on the side-lines of the UNGA (*Panda, 2017*). This meeting was more of a diplomatic introduction though rather than fluid continuation as both Japan and the United States have had changes at the Foreign Minister level since the 2015 meeting (*Miller, 2017*). The Indian Minister of External Affairs Shushma Swaraj was the only remaining minister from the inaugural meeting (*ibid*).

Trilateral relations have continued to grow since 2015 despite political changes with an increase focus on maritime security issues. According to a US read-out of the meeting, of the three sides, “discussed the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific region underpinned by

a resilient, rules-based architecture that enables every nation to prosper (*US State Department, 2017*). Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of freedom of navigation and flight, and the free flow of legal trade in and around the world, including the South China Sea. They also stressed cooperation on the escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula. India had promised to ban all remaining trade with North Korea and block access to the trainings previously provided to many North Korean scientists and technical experts.

A key factor of this trilateral cooperation was the growing relationship between Japan and India. It is worth noting that the two initial turning points in India–Japan relations—the visits of Yoshiro Mori in 2000 and Junichiro Koizumi in 2005—coincided with major shifts in US–India relations, namely, President Bill Clinton’s and President George W. Bush’s respective visits to Delhi - deepening of India–US relations facilitated the development of India–Japan relations (*Rajamohan, Rahut, and Jacob, 2008*). Mr. Mori and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee decided the establishment of "Global Partnership between Japan and India" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Joint Declaration, 2001*). Since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visit to India in April 2005, Japan-India annual summit meetings have been held in respective capitals (*ibid*). When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Japan in December 2006, Japan-India relationship was elevated to the "Global and Strategic Partnership" (*ibid*). In September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Japan and had a summit meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (*ibid*). They concurred to upgrade the bilateral relationship to “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” (*ibid*). In December 2015, Prime Minister Abe paid an official visit to India and had a summit meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi (*ibid*). The two Prime Ministers resolved to transform the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership into a deep, broad-based, and action-oriented partnership, which reflects a broad convergence of their long-term political, economic, and strategic goals (*ibid*). They announced, “Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World”, a joint statement that would serve as a guidepost for the “new era in Japan-India relations” (*ibid*). During Prime Minister Singh’s visit to Japan in October 2008, two leaders issued "the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Japan and India" (*ibid*). In the Japan-India Vision Statement issued during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan in October 2018, two leaders reiterated their unwavering commitment to working together towards a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (*ibid*).

There have been various frameworks of security and defense dialogue between Japan and India including Foreign and Défense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2” meeting), annual Défense Ministerial Dialogue and Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard dialogue (*ibid*). The first “2+2” meeting was held in New Delhi in November 2019. On September 9th, 2020, the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of India Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services between the Self-Défense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces (so-called “Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement” or ACSA) was signed which came into force on July 11th, 2021 (*ibid*).

On the economic front, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project – a massive \$17 billion infrastructure project has largely been funded by Japan through long-term and low interest loans. High-speed rail cooperation remains a foundation of the investment relationship going forward and success on the project could lead to more connectivity rail projects for Japan in the coming years (*Miller, 2017*). The two sides also agreed to move forward on cooperation regarding civil nuclear energy – after concluding the agreement. (*ibid*).

Japan views India as a crucial geopolitical balancer amidst rising assertiveness from China and growing uncertainty of the role of the US over the long-term. India-Japan relations have transformed in recent years into a robust and matured partnership based on convergence in their strategic geopolitical and security concerns regionally and beyond (*Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova, and Safranchuk, 2021; Bhattacharya, 2020*).

Maritime security cooperation, high frequency of bilateral naval exercises and deepening level of the Malabar exercises coupled with expanding maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific region have been boosting the ongoing strategic approach encompassing enhanced defense, security, technological and economic cooperation with concrete action framework for peaceful Indo-Pacific maritime corridor while containing hostile forces in the greater Indo-Pacific theatre. Both aim towards shared economic growth, prosperity and maintaining peace, stability, and security in the Indo-Pacific. The delicate nature of maritime security and trade perspectives of Indo-Pacific has propelled India and Japan to come closer in recent years while fostering synergy and enabling formation of symmetrical

balance of power (*ibid*). Both New Delhi and Tokyo depend critically on sea-borne trade for sustaining their economies while strongly committed to respecting freedom of navigation, overflight, and unimpeded commerce in open seas (*ibid*). New Delhi and Tokyo recognize the profound significance of an enhanced strategic role that Japan-America-India (JAI) trilateral alliance can play in the Indo-Pacific for ensuring regional and global peace (*ibid*). The strong personal friendship India between Japan intensified cooperation on an entire gamut of strategic issues that are of mutual concerns. Strategically, the North-East also symbolized New Delhi and Tokyo's united stand against China's controversial One Belt-One Road initiative that India unilaterally had rejected earlier, thereby indicating that the two countries are determined to play pivotal role in shaping regional geopolitics (*ibid*). The relationship of the two countries could be formulated preferably as a public property (or good) to be shared by all countries in the Indo-Pacific (*Horimoto, 2013*).

The United States established diplomatic relations with Japan in 1858. During World War II, diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States were cut off in connection with the war following the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941. After many years of fighting in the Pacific, Japan signed a document of surrender in 1945. Normal diplomatic relations resumed in 1952, when the Supreme Allied Powers, which had overseen the occupation of Japan by the Post-war Allied Powers since 1945, disbanded. The US-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty was signed in 1960.

The Japan-US Alliance is the foundation of US security interests in Asia and the foundation of regional stability and prosperity. The Alliance is based on common key interests and values, including Maintaining Indo-Pacific stability: Protecting and promoting political and economic freedom, Support for human rights and democratic institutions, Expand the prosperity of the people of both countries and the international community as a whole.

The year, 2020 marked the 60th anniversary of the conclusion of the Japan-US Security Treaty. The US-Japan Alliance was strengthened in 2015 with the publication of revised US-Japan Défense Guidelines that provided for new forms of security-oriented cooperation. Japan provided the US military with the essential bases, financial and physical support to maintain

stability in the region. In January 2016, Japan and the United States signed a new five-year treaty to host US forces in Japan.

The U.S.-Japan relationship has become global in scope. Japan and the United States are cooperating in a wide range of global issues, including foreign aid, global health, environmental and resource conservation, and women's empowerment. Countries are also working together to promote the integrity of the information and communications technology supply chain and ensure a secure transition to 5G networks. They collaborate on a wide range of science and technology in areas such as brain research, aging, infectious diseases, personalized medicine, and international space exploration. The two countries are working hard to develop an already strong relationship between people in education, science, and other disciplines.

The United States and Japan have been working closely with international diplomatic initiatives. The United States is in talks with Japan and South Korea on its policy towards North Korea. The United States is coordinating with Japan and Australia with the support of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the Security and Défense Cooperation Forum. The United States and Japan are coordinating with India and Trilateral and the United States-Australia-India-Japan consultations. In Southeast Asia, US-Japan cooperation promotes maritime security and economic development. Outside of Asia, Japan's political and financial support includes fighting ISIL and terrorism, efforts to stop the spread of Ebola and other new pandemic infections, promoting environmental goals, and maintaining solidarity faced. It has greatly supported the United States' efforts to address global issues, Russia's invasion inside and outside the region, support for developing countries, fighting piracy, and human rights and democracy. Japan is an important partner of the United Nations and the second largest contributor to the United Nations budget. Japan provides the United States with extensive support on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear issues. Japan and the United States are also making progress toward our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region through partnerships such as the Japan-U.S. Strategic Energy Partnership (JUSEP), Japan-U.S. Strategic Digital Economy Partnership (JUSDEP), and the Japan-U.S. Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP) (*The White House, United States, Joint Statement, 2020*).

China displaced Japan as the greatest perceived economic threat to the U.S. and the emergence of North Korea as a belligerent rogue state brought the Japan and the USA closer together in the face of what was perceived to be a common enemy and in the face of these new threats, the two nations focused on increasing military and defensive cooperation, while also adopting a new rhetoric for the alliance—that of "shared values"(Miller, 2018). Japan, as both a US ally and a neighbor with deep historical and cultural connections to China, can play an important role in helping facilitate deeper communication between the United States and China to ensure that tensions in the region do not escalate.(Tanaka, 2021).Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi reaffirmed the vital importance of the U.S.-Japan Alliance as the cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world during Secretary Blinken's visit to Tokyo. (*The White House, United States, Joint Statement, 2020*). Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Motegi welcomed continued cooperation on maritime security, the denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the resolution of the abductions issue, and other security issues as stated in the Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee (2+2) (*ibid*). Deepening of U.S.-Japan economic cooperation has been a key priority for both governments.

The U.S.-India partnership is founded on a shared commitment to freedom, democratic principles, equal treatment of all citizens, human rights, and the rule of law have developed into a "global strategic partnership". (*ibid*). The United States and India have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity (*ibid*). The United States supports India's emergence as a leading global power and vital partner in efforts to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity (*ibid*). The strong people-to-people ties between these two countries, reflected in a four million-strong Indian American diaspora, are a tremendous source of strength for the partnership (*ibid*). In recognition of India's increasingly significant role and ability to influence world affairs—and with a widely held assumption that a stronger and more prosperous democratic India is good for the United States—the U.S. Congress and three successive U.S. Administrations have acted both to broaden and deepen America's engagement with New Delhi (*Congressional Research Service, 2021*). The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in September 2018 serves as the premier dialogue mechanism between the United States and India. This momentous dialogue reflected the shared commitment of India and the US towards

developing an institutionalized architecture for providing “a positive, forward-looking vision for the India-US strategic partnership and to promote synergy in their diplomatic and security efforts,” premised on the democratic values of freedom, justice, and adherence to rule of law. An important outcome of the dialogue was the bilateral convergence on working towards “regional and global issues, including in bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral formats,” which is in addition to establishing secure communication between India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the US’ Secretary of State on the one hand and between India’s Minister of Defense and the US’ Secretary of Defense, on the other. These initiatives were aimed at sustaining “regular high-level communication on emerging developments” (*Press Information Bureau, 2018*). The most significant outcome of the Dialogue, heralded as a “milestone” in boosting India’s defense preparedness and capabilities, and indicating “growing trust between the two countries,” has been the signing of the COMCASA. Another implication of the Dialogue is the decision taken by the two countries to foster engagement between the US Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Indian armed forces, in particular, the exchanges between the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and the Indian Navy, underscoring the importance of deepening their maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean. The decision to exchange personnel is the recognition of the interests and a practical step towards institutionalizing a mechanism to interact with the Western Naval Command. In an endeavor to support and facilitate bilateral coordination in the maritime domain, India and the US are determined to commence exchanges between the US Naval Forces Central Command and the Indian Navy. In the second edition of the Indo-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue held in December 2019, the respective Secretary of State/Minister of External Affairs and Secretary of Defense/Minister of Defense, of the two countries reiterated their commitment to a “free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region”, based on the converging visions of the Indo-Pacific, the leaders upheld closer bilateral cooperation as “instrumental to promoting security and prosperity” in the region and beyond. They particularly referred to the increasingly sophisticated cooperation between their Navies and the high level of operational interaction achieved in the MALABAR naval exercise and applauded the establishment of the new tri-service, amphibious exercise – TIGER TRIUMPH – as a tangible demonstration of the growing scope and complexity of military cooperation between New Delhi and Washington -resolved to enhance cooperation between the Indian Navy and the US Navy Fleets under the USINDOPACOM, Central Command and Africa Command (*The White House, United States, Joint Statement, 2020*).

The Indo-Pacific policies of India and the US share certain converging trends and constitute the pedestal for securitizing the maritime domain. The Indo-Pacific region has evolved as a pedestal for Indo-US maritime strategizing and cooperation, as envisioned in the US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, 2015, US National Security Strategy/NSS, 2017 and US National Défense Strategy/NDS, 2018. The official usage of the term, 'Indo-Pacific' may be traced back to the former Japanese Premier, Shinzo Abe's address to the Indian Parliament in August 2007, when he regarded the "confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" as "the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia" (Abe, 2007). It subsequently found niche in official references by the former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton in October 2010 and in Australia's Défense White Paper: 2013, prior to its usage in India and the more recent popularization, led by the former US President, Donald Trump, in the context of his first sojourn to Asia in November 2017. India's rationale of greater strategic coordination with the US was initiated under Barack Obama administration's 'Pivot to Asia' policy, which identified India as a solid pillar of its strategic pivot in the Indo-Pacific. As part of its anti-China "pivot," Washington's shoring up of strategic cooperation with India continued unabated under the presidency of Donald Trump. The Trump administration's use of the "Indo-Pacific" label, not only reverberated with the "importance of India's rise," but also acknowledged the vital role that India envisages to play in the region. The US' National Security Strategy of December 2017 and National Défense Strategy of January 2018 underscored the imperative of strengthening Indo-Pacific alliances through a policy of collective response with partners that uphold a shared respect for sovereign, fair, reciprocal trade practices, and rule of law. Therefore, the US' reinforced commitment to freedom of the seas and the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes in accordance with international law emphasized its stance of safeguarding a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (Congressional Research Service, 2018).

The Indo-Pacific policies of India and the US thus have converging trends: India's Indo-Pacific policy is infused with positivity, representing a "free, open, inclusive region, which embraces us all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity." It primarily seeks to promote, safeguard, and evolve a common rules-based regional order, which "equally apply to all individually as well as to the global commons", by ensuring the prospects of "equal access as

a right under international law to the use of common spaces on sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law” (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 2018*).

The US’ Indo-Pacific policy is a “principled vision” premised on integrating a “community of countries that respects the rule of law, stands up for freedom of navigation in the seas and skies above, promotes open commerce, open thinking and, above all, defends the sanctity of each nation’s sovereignty. So, it is free and open, does not exclude any nation, but does ask each nation to respect and promote those principles that we hold in common” (*The Economic Times, 2020*).

In this context, it would be worthwhile to discuss the implications of Washington’s strategies, the NSS and NDS for its policy in the region in general and vis-a-vis India, in particular. The NSS acknowledged China’s spree of building and militarizing outposts in the South China Sea as a threat to “the free flow of trade”, “sovereignty of other nations” and “undermining regional stability”, in addition to rueing Beijing’s ambitions of sustaining a military modernization campaign to constrain US access in the region. It thus underscored the “real world integration of our complementary strategic visions” as the region faces an increasingly complex security ambience. As Washington identified its commitment to respond to the “calling” by the regional states as a guarantor of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, it welcomed “India’s emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner,” as well as a compatriot in the QUAD architecture. The NDS categorized China both as a “revisionist” power, which employs coercive policies to undermine the rules-based international order and a strategic competitor using “predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea”, thus posing a central challenge to US prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific region. Under such circumstances, Washington aspires to maintain a favorable balance of power by strengthening regional alliances and partnerships, coordinating bilateral and multilateral security relationships to preserve the free and open international system, and facilitate the creation and sustenance of a networked security architecture, “capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains” (*Panda, 2020*). Therefore, spurred by the common

threat to regional peace and stability emanated from China, the bilateral coordination between India and the US has witnessed an upward trajectory, bolstering their objective of securing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. In 2019, the United States joined India's Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure to expand cooperation on sustainable infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region.

The U.S. government has in recent years fully incorporated the Indian Ocean into its strategic outlook and now employs terminology about the "Indo-Pacific" region, providing India with higher visibility in America's strategic calculations. (*Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova and Safranchuk, 2021*). U.S. and Indian officials have for more than a decade rated security and military cooperation among the most important aspects of transformed bilateral relations, viewing the bilateral defense partnership as "an anchor of global security," and extolling India's growing role as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean region (*Carter, 2016*).

Furthermore, recognizing the "increasing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans", the rechristening of the US Pacific Command (USPACOM), vested with the responsibility of military activities and stability in the greater Pacific region, based on "partnership, presence, and military readiness", to the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) is a significant symbolism, alluding to the escalating importance of New Delhi in Washington's strategic computations. Towards its objective of ensuring a FOIP in association with "a constellation of like-minded Allies and Partners," sharing concerns of mutual security, interests, and values, the USINDOPACOM envisages the implementation of a combat credible deterrence strategy against adversarial policies (*United States Indo-Pacific Command, 2018*). India is a participant of one of the world's largest US-led biennial multilateral maritime exercises, named RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific). Hosted and administered by the USPACOM (now USINDOPACOM), the inaugural RIMPAC was held in 1971.

Combined military exercises among all services have become routine. The exercises signal bilateral strategic cooperation and "shared commitment to stronger naval cooperation and support of a free and open Indo-Pacific," in the midst of heightened tensions with China

along the Line of Actual Control designed to maximize training and interoperability, including air defense (*Singh, 2019*).

In addition, defense trade has emerged as a leading facet of the bilateral partnership: India is now a major purchaser in the global arms market and a lucrative potential customer for U.S. companies (*Congressional Research Service, 2021*). In 2005, the United States and India signed a 10-year defense framework agreement outlining planned collaboration in several areas including multilateral operations, expanded two-way defense trade, and increasing opportunities for technology transfers and co-production (*ibid*). “Major Défense Partner” (MDP) is a unique designation created for India by the U.S. Congress and is intended “to elevate defense trade and technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with that of our closest allies and partners,” as well as “institutionalize changes the United States has made to ensure strong defense trade and technology cooperation” (*ibid*).

2.5 Conclusion

Indo Pacific should not be analyzed against a unified template, as different strategies and preferences hinder coherent clarification and coordination among stakeholders. The ambiguity of the Indo-Pacific visions of the United States, Japan, and India has been added to the puzzle. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s landmark speech in the Indian Parliament – “Confluence of the Two Seas” - capturing the dynamic coupling of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as seas of freedom and prosperity, India’s “Look East Policy,” to “Act East” and USA’s a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”- explores the competing visions of each nation on Indo-Pacific.

Nevertheless, the presentation of contradictions, divergences and convergence provides more scope to support each other in order to achieve a rule-based Indo-Pacific order. The United States, Japan, and India with rapidly evolving relations can work individually, bilaterally, and trilaterally to involve China constructively in maintaining a free order based on universal values. The United States, Japan, and India share common values and share a commitment to the maintenance of an open and stable international order that serve each

nation's interests and the cause of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific to enhance cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development; counter-proliferation; counterterrorism; maritime security, maritime domain awareness and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).