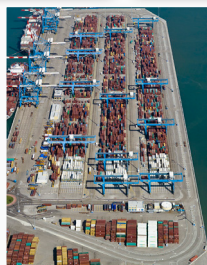
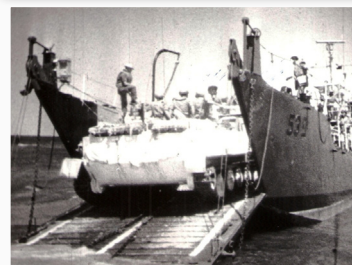


MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2019/20

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The Indo-Pacific Region

Benni Ben Ari

About a decade ago, the term Indo-Pacific became part of the political lexicon in place of the term Asia-Pacific which had been used until then to describe the Asian-Pacific geostrategic region, in economic, geographic and diplomatic terms. The new region includes the Indian Ocean and its coastlines in the west, including the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and up to the central Pacific Ocean in the east and even up to the West Coast of the US. The region includes East and Southeast Asia and the northern coast of Australia.

The term Indo-Pacific appeared for the first time in an article by Captain Dr. Gurpreet S. Khurana of India on cooperation between India and Japan,¹ and in a national security document published by the Australian government in 2013, which declared that: "A new Indo-Pacific strategic region is beginning to emerge, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia."² This definition has been adopted by the US (Trump Administration, 2017) in order to describe the region of Asia as a whole without differentiating between East Asia and Southeast Asia; it includes the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, all of the coastal nations (36 in number) and two oceans. The "Pivot to Asia" policy, which was adopted by US President Obama and whose name was changed to the "Indo-Pacific Pivot", involves the shift of US geostrategic, geopolitical and economic focus from the Middle East to Asia. The ASEAN³ countries also adopted the definition at the Manila Conference of 2019.⁴

The significance of the new name for the region is the recognition of the growing economic, military and political importance of the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, which constitute a single strategic unit. From a geographic perspective, it is essentially a "super-region" in which sub-regions are still important. The region includes a number of important choke points: the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el Mandeb Strait and the Malacca Straits, the straits between the Indonesian islands and also the South China

1 Gurpreet S. Khurana, November 14, 2017 'INDO-PACIFIC' CONCEPT: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT, <http://cimsec.org/indo-pacific-concept-retrospect-prospect/34710>; Mercy A. Kuo, The Diplomat, January 25, 2018, The Origin of 'Indo-Pacific' as Geopolitical Construct. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-origin-of-indo-pacific-as-geopolitical-construct>

2 Nikhil Sonnad, Quartz, November 7, 2017 <https://qz.com/1121336/trump-in-asia-all-about-indo-pacific-the-new-term-trump-is-using-to-refer-to-asia/>

3 ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

4 Tashny Sukumaran, 24.6.2019, South China Morning Post, <https://www.scmp.com/news/5-asia/diplomacy/article/3015892/whats-difference-between-indo-pacific-and-asia-pacificregional>

Sea, which the Chinese have made into a "mega choke point" by means of fortified artificial islands. The region includes shipping lanes that are the route used to bring raw materials and energy products from its western part to its eastern part, as well as highly productive fisheries and energy resources and mines. The geostrategic theater as defined by the US military, which was previously the Asia-Pacific Command was expanded to become the Indo-Pacific Command. As part of the "radicalization" of the picture, it is also worth mentioning North Korea on the eastern outskirts of the region and Iran on the western outskirts.



Figure 1: The Indo-Pacific as a geostrategic region⁵ and the choke-points in the region



Figure 2: The US Asia-Pacific Command was expanded to become the Indo-Pacific Command⁶

5 PROJECT UPSC, June 9, 2018

<https://projectupsc.wordpress.com/2018/06/09/indo-pacific-area-should-be-inclusive>

6 Angelo Vijaya, 21 Jan 2018, Reconfiguring Foreign Policy Focus: time for an Indo-Pacific 9 region? <https://medium.com/@angelowijaya/refocusing-strategy-time-for-an-indo-pacific-region-deae9b1ba6d1>

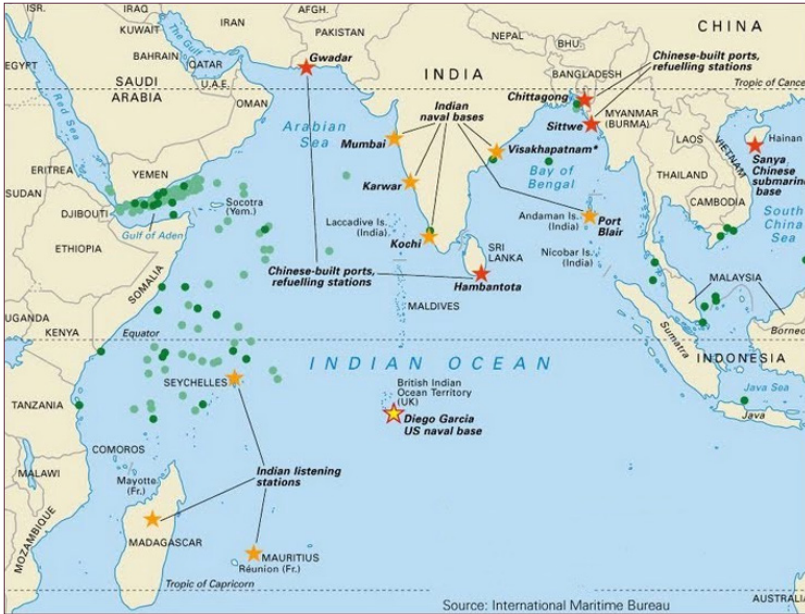


Figure 3: The presence of the superpowers in the Indian Ocean⁷

The rapid economic growth in China, India and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region means that the race to control and defend the (primarily commercial) sea routes and the demand for the ocean's resources, including energy, fishing, infrastructure, industry, etc., will continue. These assets emphasize the global importance of the Indo-Pacific region and reinforce the uniqueness of maritime factors in global political and economic affairs. This is based on the fact that the Indo-Pacific is perceived primarily as a maritime region⁸ which connects two oceans by way of its main commercial route, namely the Malacca Straits, and which is influenced by the increased Chinese presence in the area on the one hand and the effort to renew the US network of alliances with the countries of the region, on the other hand.

The Indian Ocean region

The Indian Ocean, which is at the center of the region, constitutes an important and sensitive economic, political and military arena. Through this area flows the supply of energy from the Middle East to East Asia and it also includes the main trade routes between Asia and Europe. The region is complex and difficult to control and monitor

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rahman, C. (2011) "The Geopolitical Context" in Indo-Pacific Maritime Security in the 21st Century Ed. Thomas G. M. US Naval War College and Lowy Institute for International Policy : 1-10

due to the increased activity of the naval superpowers (the US, China and India) and the appearance of second- and third-tier players (France, Britain, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and others), which have maintained activity in this increasingly important region. Although the region's name implies the importance of India's position in the new region, the main players are in fact the US and China. In a meeting between the leaders of the US, India, Japan and Australia⁹ in November 2017, President Trump used the term Indo-Pacific as a hint to the intention of the US and its allies to increase their efforts to counter the growing activity of China in the region.¹⁰

The Indian government does not view the countries of the region as belonging to an exclusive club and it is active in expanding the dialogue between the countries in order to achieve broader agreement with the vision of making the region into a free economic zone from the coasts of Africa to the Western Pacific, with the goal of building a barrier against Chinese regional hegemony.¹¹ In 2015, the Indian navy published its new naval strategy in which its "area of interest" was expanded to the entire western and southwestern parts of the Pacific Ocean.¹² India has increased its political and military activity in the Indian Ocean, including the strengthening of ties with small countries at the western entrance to the Indian Ocean, including Mauritius, the Seychelles Islands and Oman, as well as its activity in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean, and primarily in the Malacca Straits, which is undoubtedly a response to China's increased naval activity in the Indian Ocean.¹³ As part of this policy, India sees itself as a country that will essentially control the Malacca Straits and therefore the Indian Navy declared in 2017 that it would maintain a permanent presence there.¹⁴

9 Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

10 The Times of India, November 2017, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: India, Japan, Australia, US held talks on Indo-Pacific Cooperation. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/quadrilateral-security-dialogue-india-australia-japan-us-hold-talks-on-indo-pacific-cooperation/articleshow/61616602.cms>

11 Swaran Singh, July 9, 2018, Asia Times, Is India shifting the goalposts in Indo-Pacific debate? <http://www.atimes.com/is-india-shifting-the-goalposts-in-indo-pacific-debate>

12 See Benni Ben Ari, *Maritime Strategic Evaluation for Israel 2016*, Shaul Chorev and Ehud Gonen, (eds.), pp. 48-63.

13 Mercy A. Kau, January 25, 2018, The Diplomat, The Origin of 'Indo-Pacific' as Geopolitical Construct <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-origin-of-indo-pacific-as-geopolitical-construct>

14 Ajay Banerjee, 2017, Indian Navy looks to dominate Malacca Straits. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/indian-navy-looks-to-dominate-malacca-straits/421162.html>

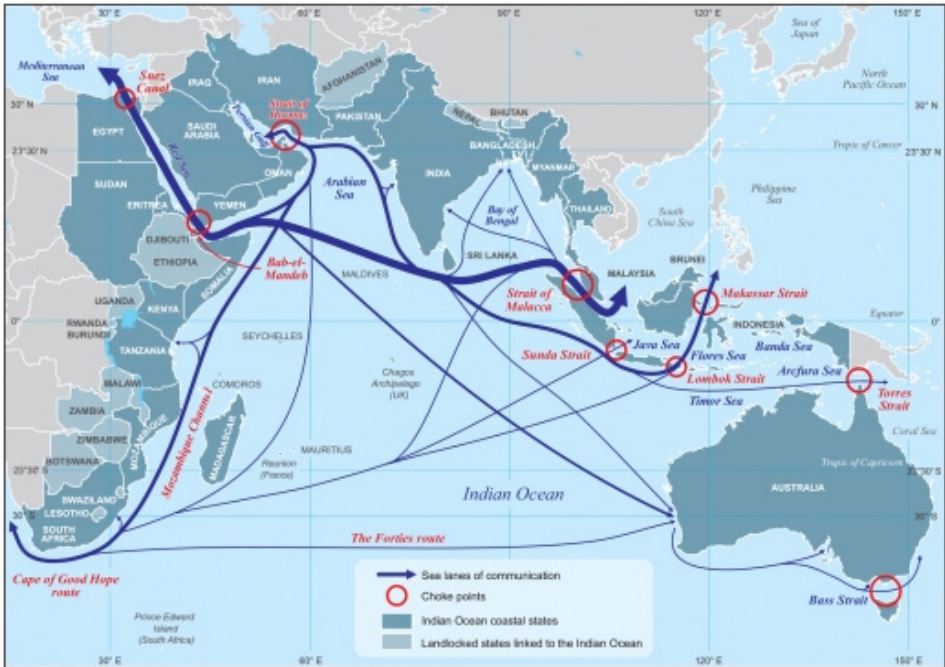


Figure 4: Shipping routes in the Indian Ocean¹⁵

China has increased its military activity in the region, an effort that began with the creation of a naval base in Djibouti (2017), and it intends to establish bases in Gwadar and Jiwani in Pakistan and at Hambantota in Sri Lanka. Additional bases will apparently be established at Kyaukpya in Myanmar, at Bagamoyo in Tanzania, at Gan in the Maldives Islands and at other locations in the central and western Indian Ocean.¹⁶

Other countries with political, religious, commercial and strategic interests are making military moves in the region. These include Saudi Arabia which has established a military port at Djibouti and has shown interest in Comoros Islands and in the Maldives Islands; the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which has established a military port and airport at Assab in Eritrea and a training base at Mogadishu in Somalia; Turkey which has signed an agreement with Sudan to rebuild the Ottoman port of Suakin on the Red Sea, which is in addition to the military bases and forces in Qatar and Mogadishu and

¹⁵ Denis Venter, 2017, India and Africa: Maritime Security and India's Strategic Interests in the Western Indian Ocean <https://books.openedition.org/cei/469>

¹⁶ David Brewster, The Interpreter, 30 January 2018' China's new network of Indian Ocean bases. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinas-new-network-indian-ocean-bases>; David Brewster, The Maritime Executive, 15 May 2018, China's Play for Bases in the Indian Ocean. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/china-s-play-for-bases-in-the-indian-ocean>

the support of the Muslims in Myanmar; Egypt which is reinforcing its naval forces in the Red Sea; and Iran which is focusing on the Persian Gulf.¹⁷



Figure 5: The deployment of naval bases in the Indian Ocean¹⁸

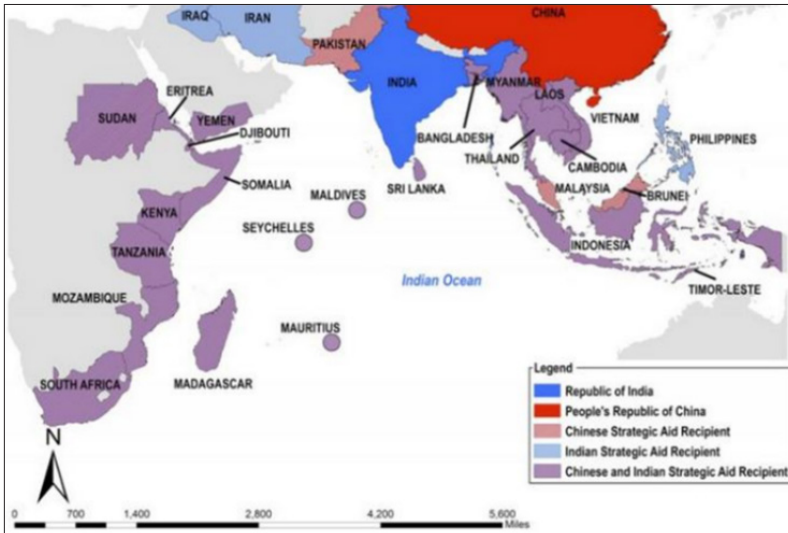


Figure 6: India's and China's areas of economic and political interest in the Indo-Pacific¹⁹

17 Ibid.

18 David Tweed and Adrian Leung, Bloomberg, 7 May 2018, China Is Making a Bold Military Power Play. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-china-navy-bases>

19 Rani Mullen & Cody Poplin, 30 September 2015, The Battle for Access and Influence in the Indo-Pacific. <http://www.correlationmatrix.ca/2015/09/rani-mullen-and-cody-poplin-on-battle.html?m=1>

The South China Sea

There is no doubt as to the economic and strategic importance of the South China Sea to all of the countries along its coasts and to international maritime trade. The South China Sea is more than 1450 miles long and 800 miles wide with an area of about 1.4 million square miles. The maritime trade that passes through it in a year has a value of more than \$5 trillion. About 11 billion barrels of oil and huge amounts of natural gas are located under its seabed and it accounts for about 12 percent of global fish production.

According to the assessments of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), about 80 percent of global trading volume and 70 percent of its value are seaborne.²⁰ About 60 percent of this amount is by way of Asia and about one-third of all global sea transport is by way of the South China Sea, which is of critical importance to China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, whose imports arrive by way of the Malacca Strait.²¹



Figure 7: The volume of shipping routes in the South China Sea²²

For a number of years now, China has been aggressively reinforcing its ability to project power with respect to both commercial shipping and its naval forces. In contrast to the naval presence and projection of power on the shipping routes and the establishment

20 UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport 2018.

[https://unctad.org/en/Pages/Publications/Review-of-Maritime-Transport-\(Series\).aspx](https://unctad.org/en/Pages/Publications/Review-of-Maritime-Transport-(Series).aspx)

21 China Power 2016, How much trade transits the South China Sea?

<https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea>

22 JEFF HIMMELMAN, New York Times 2016, A Game of Shark and Minnow

<http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/10/27/south-china-sea/index.html>

or purchase of ports around the world, the demand for sovereignty over most of the South China Sea and the establishment of military positions on the artificial islands is an unprecedented geostrategic move.



Figure 8: The Nine-Dash Line – Chinese demands for sovereignty in the South China Sea²³

China, which is demanding sovereignty over most of the South China Sea, on the basis of the "Nine-Dash Line",²⁴ has been investing effort since 2012 in creating facts in the South China Sea by building seven artificial islands on reefs and shoals and arming them. Some of the islands are located more than thousand kilometers from China's coast. The aggressive Chinese activity to prevent Philippine fishing in the area of the Scarborough Shoal led to the Philippines submitting a claim against China in the International Court in the Hague.²⁵ The verdict, which was handed down in July 2016 on the basis of the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS), unanimously rejected China's claims to sovereignty, which were based on historical arguments and old naval maps.²⁶ China continued carrying out its plans nonetheless and the islands became military positions for all intents and purposes, despite the repeated complaints and the promise

23 Todd Crowell, August 2015, Anadolu Agency, all you need to know about the South China Sea dispute, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/all-you-need-to-know-about-the-south-china-sea-dispute/19877#>

24 Wai Fu, 2015, How the Eleven-Dash Line Became a Nine-Dash Line, <https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/line-07162015121333.html>

25 ISDP, June, 2016, pp. 8, Understanding China's Position on the South China Sea Disputes, <http://isdp.eu/publication/understanding-chinas-position-south-china-sea-disputes>

26 Chris Whomersley, June 2016, Chinese Journal of International Law, The South China Sea: The Award of the Tribunal in the Case Brought by Philippines against China—A Critique, <https://academic.oup.com/chinesejil/article/15/2/239/2548385>

by Chinese President Xi that the construction of the islands and the facilities on them are meant to ensure the safety of civilian shipping and to provide shelter to fisherman during storms.²⁷

China is exploiting its position of power relative to most of the countries involved, most of which are members of the ASEAN organization, and is behaving according to the principles of "Asian Culture" in its decision-making, foreign policy and negotiating strategies.²⁸ China continues to reject the court's verdict and is successfully sticking to its negotiating position with each of the countries involved. "Asian culture" is familiar to the countries bordering on the South China Sea, and therefore China has recorded achievements and has in practice implemented its demands for sovereignty, despite the policy of the West, led by the US, which is continuing to demand compliance with the 2016 verdict. The only real US response is to carry out patrols from time to time to ensure freedom of passage (known as FONOP – Freedom of Navigation Operations), to which the Chinese have reacted with diplomatic protests. As part of the talks and discussions with the various countries, and in particular the Philippines and Vietnam, China has managed to almost completely reverse the opposition to its moves and has thus made major geopolitical and geostrategic achievements by means of agreements for cooperation and economic aid. The President of the Philippines who has changed his position several times has stated that "he will go to war against China, perhaps in the year 4001..."²⁹ and in January 2018 he stated that: "The efficacy of sovereignty patrols is an American problem since the Philippines has other tactics for managing the conflict and dealing with China."

Already at the end of 2017, there was clear evidence that the artificial islands are essentially military positions which include landing runways and naval bases that are equipped with early warning systems, electronic warfare systems, anti-aircraft missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles and command and control systems (which are certainly

27 Richard A. Bitzinger May 10, 2018 Why Beijing is militarizing the South China Sea, <http://www.atimes.com/why-beijing-is-militarizing-the-south-china-sea>; Agence France-Presse, 21 May 2018 ,ABS/CBN News, Beijing denies 'militarization' of South China Sea <http://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/05/21/18/beijing-denies-militarization-of-south-china-sea>

28 See the expanded article by Benni Ben Ari "The conflict in the South China Sea – the influence of Eastern culture on events, developments and outcomes", Chaiken Chair of Geostrategy and the Maritime Policy and Strategy Research Center, 2018, University of Haifa. [Hebrew]

29 Genalyn Kabling, 5 July 2018, Manila Bulletin, Duterte says: No war with China; perhaps in year 4001, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/05/duterte-says-no-war-with-china-perhaps-in-year-4001>; Alexis Romero, The Philippine Star, 19 June 2018, Duterte wants China out of West Philippine Sea, but no war, https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/06/19/1825891/duterte-wants-china-out-west-philippine-sea-*no-war#xhTot83PvzZJwlyW.99

not intended to ensure the safety of civilian shipping or to provide shelter to fishing boats against the weather). This situation did not prevent China from continuing to deny the military character of the islands, until at some point, they hinted at an "admission" in semi-official statements that indeed the artificial islands and the installations on them are for military purposes.³⁰ As of the end of 2019, it appears that the improvement in the intelligence systems on the artificial islands is continuing, as revealed by the discovery of an observation balloon (Aerostat) on the Mischief Reef Island.³¹

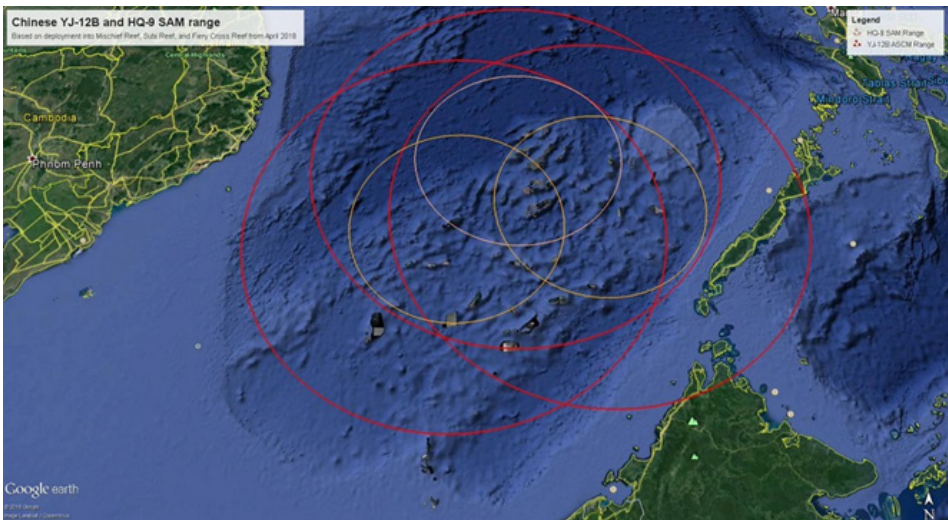


Figure 9: Chinese military installations on the artificial islands in the South China Sea. Missile ranges against ships (red) and against aircraft (yellow). Google Earth image via twitter user Dr. Malcom Davis.³²

The recognition of the situation as a "fait accompli" has led the navies of Britain, France and Australia to participate in freedom of navigation patrols, and other countries in

- 30 Steven Stashwick, 25 January 2018, The Diplomat, China Signaling it May Finally 'Militarize' the South China Sea Officially <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/china-signaling-it-may-finally-militarize-the-south-china-sea-officially>; Steven Stashwick, 14 June 2018, China's New Missiles in the Spratlys May be a Turning Point. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/chinas-new-missiles-in-the-spratlys-may-be-a-turning-point>
- 31 Joseph Trevithick, 2 December 2019, Chinas New Surveillance Blimp in The South China Sea 37 Is Likely Just The Beginning <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/31279/chinas-newsurveillance-blimp-in-the-south-china-sea-is-likely-just-the-beginning>
- 32 Navy Recognition, 4 May 2018, China Deploys YJ-12B and HQ-9B Missiles on South China Sea Islands <http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2018/may-2018-navy-naval-defense-news/6190-china-deploys-yj-12b-and-hq-9b-missiles-on-south-china-sea-islands.html>

the region, and in particular Vietnam, have reinforced weapons systems on their own islands;³³ at the same time, China and Japan have expanded their naval activity in the region.³⁴

The "strategic solution"?

Simultaneously with the expansion of the geostrategic region, the Indo-Pacific was redefined by President Trump in 2017 as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which is based on three pillars: 1) promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.; 2) pursuit of economic prosperity (improving connectivity and strengthening economic partnerships including EPAs/FTAs and investment treaties)"; and 3) commitment for peace and stability.³⁵ The US has given the region top priority in its foreign policy and has confirmed its deep commitment to the countries in the region through investment, maintenance of existing alliances and continuing development of the region's resources.³⁶ Figure 10 describes the initial intentions of the US declaration from an economic standpoint.

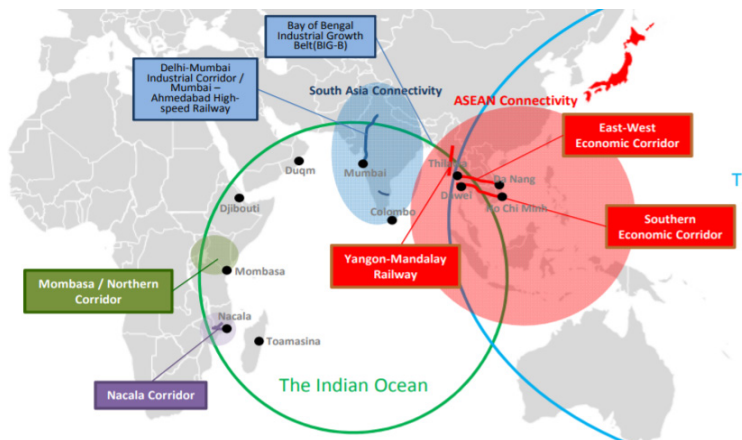


Figure 10: Improvement in relations with Asia, the Middle East and Africa.³⁷

33 Naval Today, 6 June 2018, France, UK announce South China Sea freedom of navigation operations, <https://navaltoday.com/2018/06/06/france-uk-announce-south-china-sea>

34 Reuters., Oct 07, 2018, China, Japan navies extending reach in Indo-Pacific region. 40 <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-navy>

35 Based on the accomplishments of the Abe Administration, Japan intends to further improve and expand these diplomatic concepts A New Foreign Policy Strategy, August 2019: "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" <https://www.asean.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000352880.pdf>

36 USA Department of State, 4 November 2019 <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>

37 See 35

But since the definition of the new region and the declaration of the FOIP policy, there has been an evident change in relations between the US and the Indo-Pacific countries, which has been manifested in a reduction in traditional cooperation and in the US commitment to the countries in the region.³⁸

As a result of the changes and developments in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, a mechanism was created in 2007-2008 at the initiative of the US, Australia, India and Japan for the coordination of policy and strategy by means of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). The organization was not active after its founding and was "reactivated" only in 2017.

Although the organization's goals and strategies are not completely clear or fully agreed-upon, it is reasonable to assume that it will follow three main principles: 1) To strengthen and reinforce the regional order based on the existing system of laws; 2) To promote a liberal trade regime and freedom of navigation; 3) To provide guarantees of mutual security in the region.³⁹

All of the countries in QUAD, as well as the rest of the countries in the region are experiencing "problems and obstacles" originating with China,⁴⁰ which views the renewal of QUAD and the implementation of its new/old strategy as a direct threat and is responding in its characteristic way against each of the participants, by means of economic and political pressure. The success of the strategy as a security arrangement will depend on the answer to the following question: Can the potential partners withstand pressure from China? The US is in a trade war with China and at the same time is in nuclear disarmament negotiations with North Korea. The US must talk to China on both of these issues, a situation that will make it difficult to aggressively pursue the strategy for the new region. At this stage, it appears unlikely, despite the new geostrategic definition, that the US will make any significant changes in its policy toward Asia.

France also attributes great importance to the region in view of its territorial, geographic and political presence in the region (93 percent of France's Exclusive Economic Zone

38 Elliot Silverberg and Matthew Sullivan, 1 October 2019, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/assessing-trumps-indo-pacific-strategy-2-years-in>

39 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 15, 2018, Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Consultations, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000099.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 31 May 2019, Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Consultations, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002464.html

40 Mark J. Valencia, *The Diplomat*, 30 March 2018, What Does a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Actually Mean? <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/what-does-a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-actually-mean>

– EEZ is located in the Indo-Pacific region).⁴¹ China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the regional strategies of Australia, Japan and India and the importance of the ASEAN organizations all create new issues and opportunities for France, as well as for other EU countries.⁴²

Since the beginning of 2019, Britain has also increased its naval presence in the region, including the passage of warships through the Taiwan Straits and of course in the South China Sea, as well as joint exercises with the US navy. However, for a change, the British are not crossing the territorial maritime boundaries declared by China for the South China Sea islands.⁴³



Figure 11: France's presence in the Indo-Pacific region⁴⁴

- 41 France is rooted in the southern part of the Indian Ocean with the islands of Mayotte and La Réunion, the Scattered Islands and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories. France is also anchored in the Pacific Ocean with its territories in New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia and Clipperton Island. <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/475376/7615622/file/201606-PlaquetteAsiePacifiqueEN.comp.pdf>
- 42 The Indo-Pacific region: a priority for France, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france>
- 43 Teddy NG, British navy vessel passes through Taiwan Strait, South china Morning Post, 7 December 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3041076/british-navy-vessel-passes-through-taiwan-strait>
- 44 France and security in the Asia-Pacific, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/475376/7615622/file/201606-PlaquetteAsiePacifiqueEN.comp.pdf>

China's activities in the Indo-Pacific region, in both the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, are evidence of its determination to develop an economic and military strategic presence in the commercial shipping lanes between China, Africa, the Persian Gulf and Europe.

The QUAD mechanism is still not ready for implementation. All of the countries involved in the new strategy have their own reasons for operating in the region, in addition to the main one, i.e. the attempt to block China's growing influence in the region, an effort that is being led by the US.

Japan "likes" the definition since it is in line with its desire for a larger role in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region and the new definition of the region is much broader and extends beyond the bilateralism of the US alliance.

Australia has a goal of widening its understanding and political involvement in the region. India is adopting the Indo-Pacific concept because it respects India's essential role in the future of Asia.

Indonesia supports it in view of its location in the middle of the region. The ASEAN countries are concerned, even though they are located at the geographic center of the region, that they are not part of the organization and the concept, but are being dragged by "a fashionable usage that is spreading quickly."

The US is pushing the discussion and it feels like there is a strategy here.⁴⁵ At the 7th Reagan National Defence Forum in California in September 2019, the US Secretary of Defence stated that he will return American forces to the Indo-Pacific Command and will reinforce them because he foresees higher American priority for the region. Most of the ASEAN countries want a continued US presence but do not want to choose sides and thus get caught in a rivalry between the US and China and they prefer that the two superpowers be involved, including other forces.

Conclusion

The multiplicity of major players and participants in the region is evidence of its importance, though it also hinders the ability to reach an agreed-upon policy. The FOIP, which is meant to balance between commerce, defense and policy, was of course received and interpreted differently by each of the countries in the region. The ongoing conflict between China and the US over hegemony involves other players, such as Japan, India, Australia, France, Britain, the ASEAN countries and perhaps also Russia,

45 Graeme Dobell, *The Strategist*, 5 Jun 2018, Indo-Pacific versus Asia-Pacific as Mackinder faces Mahan <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au>

and complicates the picture since many of these countries have important interests that involve China. Small countries must exercise caution in their negotiations with the large forces. For example, even though the general trend is to block China from taking control, the ASEAN countries include China in their definition of the region, in accordance with the organization's principles ("The ASEAN Way"), which is to be interpreted according to "Asian culture"...⁴⁶ The political and military dynamic will continue to exist in the future, including a growing presence of the involved players and others. The new situation that is taking shape is "The New Great Game".

Thus, the definition can be assessed theoretically against two old and opposing opinions – that of John Mackinder vs that of Alfred Mahan,⁴⁷ a comparison made by the Australian journalist Graeme Dobell.⁴⁸ The land component in the definition of Asia-Pacific and the Chinese understanding of its meaning rests on Mackinder's theory from 1904 with regard to the global importance of the Euro-Asian land mass. The definition of the strategy on the basis of two oceans undoubtedly fascinated Alfred Mahan (whose 1890 book on naval history still serves as a textbook of naval strategy). Mackinder would have apparently understood the importance of trade and China's initiative in establishing a land Silk Route, while Mahan would have saluted the symbolism and intention of the US navy declaration (in May 2018) that the US Command in the Pacific Ocean is to be called the "Indo-Pacific Command".

46 Mie Oba, *The Diplomat*, 17 July 2019, ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Concept and the Great Power Challenge <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/aseans-indo-pacific-concept-and-the-great-powerchallenge>

47 Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) was an admiral in the US navy, a geostrategist and a thinker in the theory of sea power. His thinking on the impact of naval power on history and on a country's political and economic power has had a major influence on decision makers in navies around the world and it encouraged the naval arms race that preceded the First World War. Mahan is considered to be one of the most important military-naval thinkers and is viewed as the "naval Clausewitz". His most important book *The Influence of Sea Power on History 1660-1783* was published in 1890. Sir Halford John Mackinder (1861–1947) was a British geographer who is considered to be the father of geopolitics and geostrategy and inventor of the theory of the Geographical Pivot of History. In 1904, he gave a lecture to the Royal Geographic Society and presented his theory of "The Geographical Pivot of History", which describes a world divided into regions according to geographic characteristics. Mackinder claimed that this division to a large extent shapes the political ideologies and strategies of the populations in those areas, which is a kind of geographic determinism.

48 Graeme Dobell, 5 Jun 2018, *The Strategist*, Indo-Pacific versus Asia-Pacific as Mackinder faces Mahan <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indo-pacific-versus-asia-pacific-as-mackinder-faces-mahan>; Graeme Dobell has been reporting on Australian and international politics, foreign affairs and defence, and the Asia Pacific since 1975. He is Journalist Fellow with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, writing for ASPI's blog, *The Strategist*, <https://www.aspi.org.au/bio/graeme-dobell>

The Indo-Pacific is a maritime concept while the Asia-Pacific concept attempts to connect the oceans with the continent. The Indo-Pacific concept does not include the land mass of Asia (primarily China) and replaces the continent with the two oceans.

The translation into policy may be "India is India" but "the Pacific is the US". Such a policy reinforces Chinese paranoia since it is contained by and limited by two oceans and lies between the US on one side and India on the other, and in the case of conflicts with India in the modern era, China's experience has been on land, rather than at sea.

The outskirts of the Indo-Pacific region reach to the Israeli coast in the south in the area of the Gulf of Eilat (the region including the Red Sea). The uncertainty as to the US position in the Indian Ocean and the activity of a multiplicity of players, some of which are hostile to Israel (such as Iran) and some of which are friends (such as the US and Australia), and many others who are in between, make this a complicated region from a geostrategic viewpoint. The ambitions of the various countries to achieve control, including in the Red Sea, should be a focus of interest, attention and evaluation by Israel on an ongoing basis.