

## Security in the Indo-Pacific: the Asianisation of the regional security architecture

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Forschungsbericht / research report

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Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Heiduk, F. (2022). *Security in the Indo-Pacific: the Asianisation of the regional security architecture*. (SWP Research Paper, 11/2022). Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022RP11>

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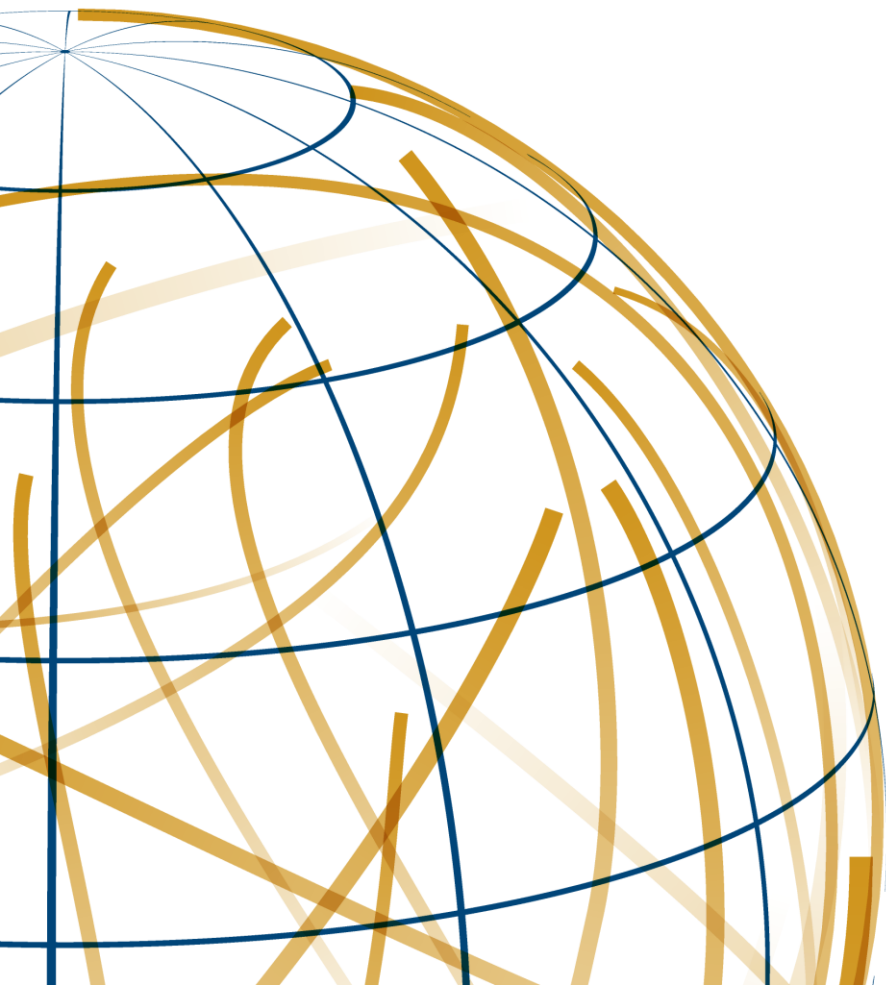
SWP Research Paper

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*Felix Heiduk*

# Security in the Indo-Pacific

The Asianisation of the regional security architecture



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for  
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 11  
November 2022, Berlin

- Since the Korean War of 1950–53, the security architecture of the region previously referred to as the “Asia-Pacific” has been based on a US-led system of bilateral alliances known as the “hub-and-spokes” system. A multilateral system of collective defence, similar to NATO in Europe, has not existed in the region.
- In 2014, the People’s Republic of China under Xi Jinping began to develop its own ideas for reshaping the regional security system. Xi called the hub-and-spokes system a relic of the Cold War and called for a regional security architecture “by Asians for Asians”.
- The “Indo-Pacific” is widely regarded as a strategy to counter a Sinocentric restructuring of the region. The majority of actors involved conceives its security architecture as an antagonistic order in which security is established against, and not with, China.
- This architecture is more “Asianised” than before. The region’s US allies are gaining significance in relation to Washington. What’s more, bilateral and minilateral partnerships outside the hub-and-spokes system are becoming increasingly important, for example those involving states such as India or Indonesia.
- Structurally, bilateral alliances and partnerships dominate. They are increasingly supplemented by minilateral formats such as AUKUS or the Quad.
- For the EU and its member states, all this means that realising the idea of an inclusive Indo-Pacific has become a distant prospect. The effective multilateralism propagated by the EU is also gradually falling behind as the regional security architecture is increasingly being transformed into a web of bilateral and minilateral cooperation formats.

**SWP Research Paper**

*Felix Heiduk*

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SWP Research Paper 11  
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ISSN (Print) 2747-5123  
ISSN (Online) 1863-1053  
DOI: 10.18449/2022RP11

(English version of  
SWP-Studie 11/2022)

## Table of Contents

<b>5</b>	<b>Issues and Conclusions</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>From Pax Americana to Pax Sinica?</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Security in the Indo-Pacific: understandings, norms, structures and practices</b>
12	USA: Free and Open Indo-Pacific
16	Australia: Security for the Indo-Pacific
21	India: “Indo” or “Indo-Pacific”?
26	Indonesia, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific
<b>32</b>	<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>
34	The Asianisation of the regional security architecture
34	Implications for Germany and the EU
36	Recommendations
<b>37</b>	<b>Abbreviations</b>

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The author would like to thank Simona Beckemeier for her  
support in the literature research.*

## **Security in the Indo-Pacific The Asianisation of the regional security architecture**

Since the Korean War of 1950–53, the security architecture of the Asia-Pacific region has been based on a US-led system of bilateral alliances known as the hub-and-spokes system. The USA maintains these alliances with Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and, most intensively, with Japan and South Korea. So far, the US military presence in the region has been overtly concentrated in South Korea and Japan.

A multilateral system of collective defence similar to NATO in Europe has so far not existed in the Asia-Pacific region. Since 2014, the People's Republic of China (PRC) under Xi Jinping has been developing its own ideas for reorganising the regional security system. China has also begun to at least partially implement them. This includes an increasing militarisation of the South China Sea and the comprehensive rearmament of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), as well as the expansion of bilateral security partnerships and the establishment of its own multilateral security forums and dialogue formats, for example the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Xi Jinping described the US-led military alliances as a relic of the Cold War, called for a regional security architecture “by Asians for Asians”, and thus directly questioned the future of the hub-and-spokes system.

In response, Washington declared the central strategic goal of US foreign policy in the region to be the preservation of US hegemony against growing Chinese assertiveness, and to engage in balancing China to this end. The concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which has gradually replaced the long-dominant Asia-Pacific construct, is regarded as a counter strategy to a Chinese-dominated reorganisation of the region. In addition to the USA, a series of actors have developed their own Indo-Pacific strategies in recent years. These include regional actors such as India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Australia, as well as the EU and some of its member states such as France, Germany and the Netherlands. China, on the other hand, sees the Indo-Pacific concept as a containment strategy directed against itself under the leadership of the USA, and therefore categorically rejects it.



The development of regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific is particularly relevant because the region plays host to a number of security hot-spots. These include maritime disputes between states bordering the South China Sea and the East China Sea; the Taiwan conflict; and the India-China border conflict. A destabilisation of the region would have a direct negative impact on German and European interests, for example if trade-flows on important trade routes were impaired and supply chains interrupted. That is why the German government commits itself to intensify its regional security policy engagement as part of its Indo-Pacific guidelines, as does the EU in its Indo-Pacific Strategy. In order to enable more European engagement in the region in the future, however, German and European security policy must first and foremost address and respond to the changing regional security environment. This study therefore examines key aspects of the emerging Indo-Pacific security architecture: How is security understood in the Indo-Pacific, and what are the strategic goals behind it? Which norms and rules dominate, and who sets them? On what structures is the regional security architecture based? And what form do the corresponding state practices and interactions take?

Following an actor-centred approach, four prominent regional actors are examined, all of which have formulated their own Indo-Pacific strategies, but beyond that have little in common at first glance. These are: the USA as the eminent security actor in the region; Australia as one of the five regional US allies; India as an emerging power with regional leadership aspirations that has traditionally been critical of bilateral alliance systems; and Indonesia as *primus inter pares* of ASEAN and co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement. The study's findings clearly show that, despite all their differences, all the actors studied, except Indonesia, prefer a security architecture in which security is established against rather than with China. Structurally, the current security architecture is still primarily based on US-led alliances. However, the importance of US allies ("spokes") in relation to the US ("hub") is growing. This applies both at bilateral level and to the new minilateral formats, such as the security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA (AUKUS) and the revived strategic dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the USA (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, "Quad"). In addition, bilateral and minilateral partnerships outside the hub-and-spokes system are being upgraded, with states such as India and Indo-

nesia playing an increasingly important role. This leads to the preliminary conclusion that the Indo-Pacific security architecture will not be a mere remake of the hub-and-spokes system, but will be accompanied by a strengthening of the role of "spokes" and like-minded regional partners below the threshold of formal US allies. These changes can be interpreted as the beginning of an Asianisation – understood here as an open process rather than a static state of affairs – of the regional security architecture. In this context, it can also be observed that relevant norms, structures and political practices directly or indirectly exclude the PRC, and in some cases are even openly antagonistic towards China. At the same time, multilateral and inclusive, traditionally ASEAN-centred regional structures continue to lose importance.

# From Pax Americana to Pax Sinica?

Since the Korean War of 1950–53, the security architecture<sup>1</sup> in the Asia-Pacific region has been based on what is known as the hub-and-spokes system, also called the San Francisco system. This was often depicted as a wheel with the USA in the centre (hub) and the US allies Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines as spokes. In addition, the US entered into a number of security partnerships in the region (for example with Singapore) that remained below the threshold of formal alliances. In contrast to Europe, where a multilateral system of collective defence emerged in the form of NATO under the leadership of the USA, the Asian security architecture was based for decades on bilateral, US-led alliances and security partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

1 In the relevant literature, the terms security architecture, security order and security system are often used synonymously. In this study, the term security architecture is used throughout. See William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor, “What Is Asian Security Architecture?” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 95–116.

2 There are three competing explanations for the lack of a multilateral defence system. According to the first approach, the enormous asymmetry of power between the USA and its Asian partners in the 1950s and 1960s thwarted such a system, because the USA had to shoulder most of the burden alone. The second approach emphasises that, unlike among NATO countries, there was no common identity, and different norms and values between the US and its Asian partners. Washington’s perception at the time was characterised by racist stereotypes of “the Asians” and the supposed superiority of Anglo-Saxon-European culture. According to the third approach, the reasons lay not in Washington but in the region itself. An “Asian NATO” had failed due to the resistance of Asian elites. Regional leaders such as Nehru in India and Sukarno in Indonesia saw a US-dominated regional security system as a new form of foreign domination and therefore prevented the creation of a US-led collective security system. Currently, the third approach predominates in research. See Victor D. Cha, “Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia”, *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009):

## For decades, the Asian security order was based on bilateral, US-led alliances and security partnerships.

Thus, no collective defence or even security system emerged in Asia. To this day, the hub-and-spokes system led by the USA is the regional security architecture’s core structure. For decades, several successive US administrations have claimed the role of preeminent regional power.

However, the hub-and-spokes system’s endurance since the 1950s does not mean that it is a static, monolithic system. On the one hand, it was often endogenous (for example, the military coup in Thailand in 2014) as well as exogenous developments (for example, the global economic crisis in 2008) which influenced the views of US allies such as Japan, South Korea and Thailand towards the system — and how they positioned themselves inside of it. On the other hand, multilateral forums such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) were

158–96; Donald Crone, “Does Hegemony Matter? The Reorganization of the Pacific Political Economy,” *World Politics* 45, no. 4 (1993): 501–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950707>; Galia Press-Barnathan, *Organizing the World. The United States and Regional Cooperation in Asia and Europe* (London: Routledge, 2003); Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 575–607; Arthur A. Stein, “Recalcitrance and Initiative: US Hegemony and Regional Powers in Asia and Europe after World War II,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 1 (2014): 147–77; Yasuhiro Izumikawa, “Network Connections and the Emergence of the Hub-and-Spokes Alliance System in East Asia,” *International Security* 45, no. 2 (2020): 7–50, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00389](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00389); Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism”, *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239–75.

created after the end of the Cold War. The ASEAN-centred security forums ARF and EAS in particular tried to contribute to confidence building, and thus to regional security, by involving all the major regional players and creating regular security dialogues.<sup>3</sup> However, the influence of these multilateral organisations remained limited as they were merely dialogue forums and were even described by critics as mere “talk shops”.<sup>4</sup> At best, therefore, they complemented the hub-and-spokes system with multilateral forums that included China and other regional participants. At no time, however, did they represent an alternative structure.

The hub-and-spokes system was only really challenged by the rise of the PRC. Back in 2014, its president Xi Jinping presented his vision of an “Asian-led” regional security architecture.<sup>5</sup> Xi called the US-led military alliances a relic of the Cold War. He called for the creation of a regional security order “by Asians

for Asians”, thereby expressing his view of the US-led hub-and-spokes system as obsolete.<sup>6</sup>

In the 2000s, some observers initially argued that China’s rise was mainly economic in nature and therefore focused on the policy fields of economy and trade rather than security and military.<sup>7</sup> In recent years, however, it has become clear that China is increasingly broadly challenging US dominance in the region, especially in the military sphere, for example through its aggressive actions in the South China Sea, its massive arms build-up, and the expansion of bilateral security partnerships. It has remained unclear how a regional security system “by Asians for Asians” should be structured and what role China would play in it.<sup>8</sup> Some commentators believe it is likely that a second, Chinese-led alliance system will emerge in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>9</sup> This is interpreted as China’s response to the growing threat to its security interests from the US-led hub-and-spokes system.<sup>10</sup> Some even see a Chinese strategic alliance with Russia emerging.<sup>11</sup>

A quick glance at the observable foreign policy behaviour of the PRC under Xi Jinping, however, reveals that the country has not yet entered into any (further) formal alliances. The development of a competing Chinese-led alliance system has thus far failed to materialise. However, it can also be observed that China has formed a number of bilateral partnerships

3 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia. ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jürgen Rüländ, “Southeast Asian Regionalism and Global Governance: ‘Multilateral Utility’ or ‘Hedging Utility?’” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2011): 83–112; Alice Ba, “Institutional Divergence and Convergence in the Asia-Pacific? ASEAN in Practice and in Theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2014): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2014.889082>.

4 Mark Beeson, *Institutions of the Asia-Pacific. ASEAN, APEC and Beyond*, London: Routledge, 2008; Katja Weber, “Recalibrating Sovereignty-related Norms: Europe, Asia and Non-traditional Security Challenges,” *Journal of European Integration* 35, no. 1 (2013): 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2012.661422>; Shaun Narine, “ASEAN and the ARF: The Limits of the ‘ASEAN Way’,” *Asian Survey* 37, no. 10 (1997): 961–78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645616>; David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, “Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order,” *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 148–84, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.1.148>; David Martin Jones and Nicole Jenne, “Weak States’ Regionalism: ASEAN and the Limits of Security Cooperation in Pacific Asia,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 16, no. 2 (2016): 209–40, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcv015>.

5 Xi Jinping, “Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia”, Shanghai, 21 May 2014, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2014-05/28/content\\_32511846.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2014-05/28/content_32511846.htm).

6 In May 2022, Xi Jinping also published ideas for a (Chinese-dominated) reorganisation of the global security order (“Global Security Initiative”), which at least indirectly contradicts the ideas of order of the Indo-Pacific concepts.

7 Zheng Bijian, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status”, *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 18–24 (18).

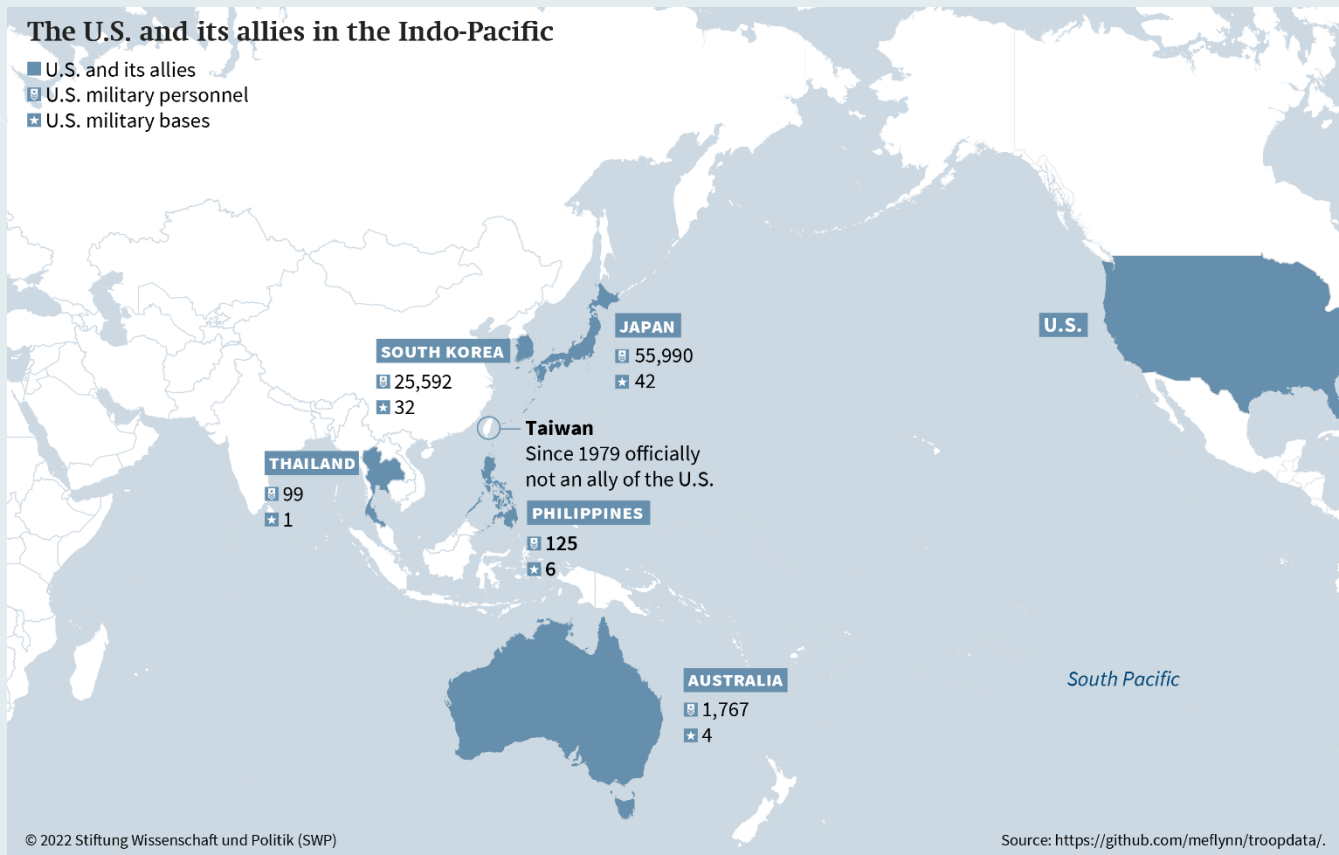
8 Linda Jakobson, “Reflections from China on Xi Jinping’s ‘Asia for Asians’”, *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): 219–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12230>; Kai He and Mingjiang Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors, and Beyond”, *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz242>.

9 John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (2019): 7–50, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00342](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342).

10 Feng Zhang, “China’s New Thinking on Alliances,” *Survival* 54, no. 5 (2012): 129–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2012.728350>; Feng Zhang, “Chinese Visions of the Asian Political-Security Order,” *Asia Policy* 13, no. 2 (2018): 13–18.

11 Graham Allison, “China and Russia: A Strategic Alliance in the Making”, *The National Interest*, 14 December 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-and-russia-strategic-alliance-making-38727>.

Map 1



Source: <https://github.com/meflynn/troopdata/>.

and intensified existing partnerships in recent years. Bilateral partnerships with countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Pakistan, Iran and Russia encompass not only economic cooperation but increasingly security cooperation too. The latter includes joint military exercises, security dialogues, and arms deliveries.<sup>12</sup> As far as China’s “all-weather” partnership with Pakistan is concerned, some Western observers even speak of a “quasi-alliance”.<sup>13</sup> Parallel to the expansion of its bilateral partnerships in the region, Beijing has also established multilateral security forums and dialogue formats. These include, for example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the Conference on Interaction and Con-

<sup>12</sup> Wei Fenghe, “Speech at the 18th Shangri-La Dialogue by Gen. Wei Fenghe”, IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, 2 June 2019, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/leadership/2019-06/02/content\\_4842884.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/leadership/2019-06/02/content_4842884.htm).

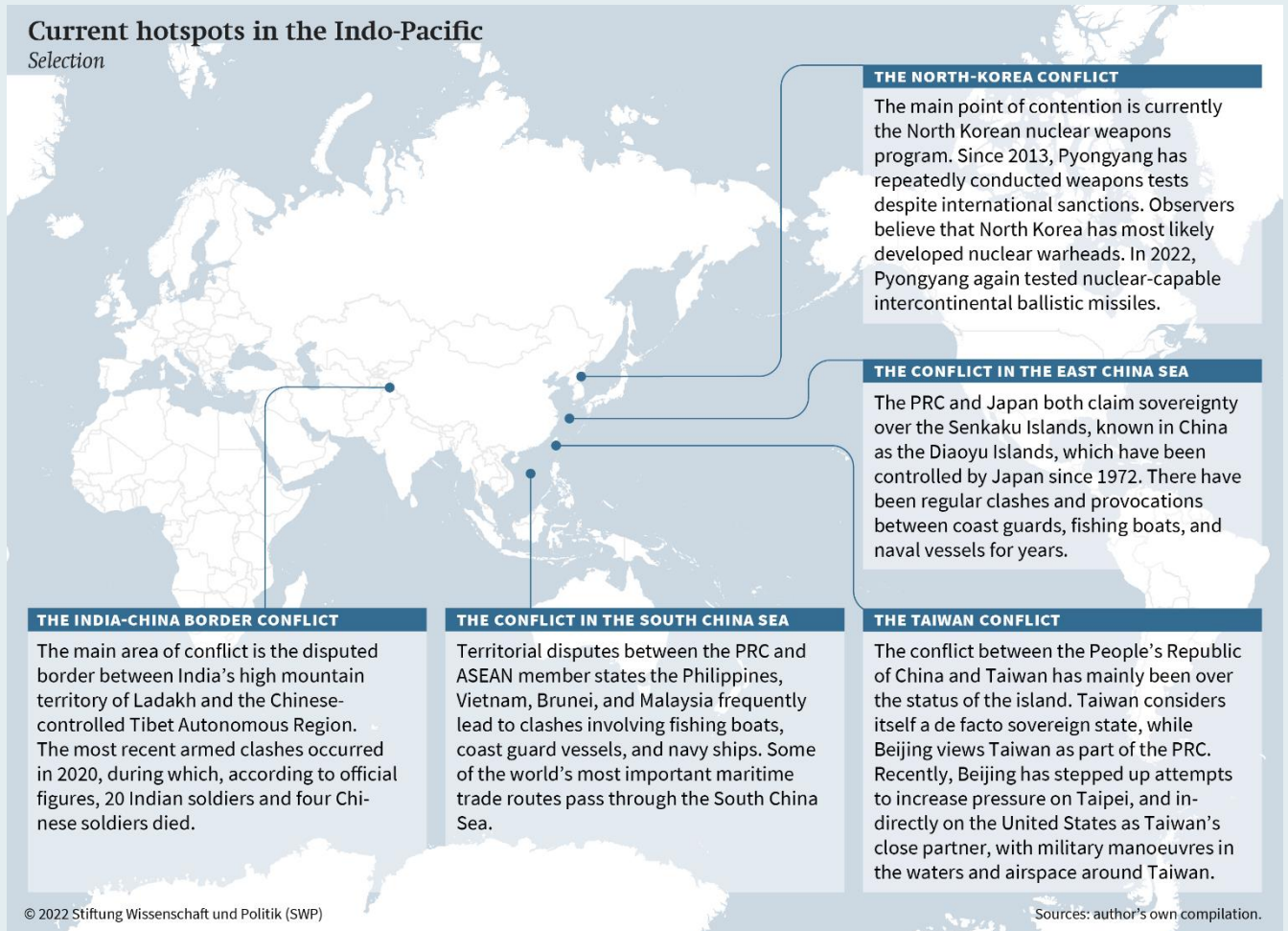
<sup>13</sup> Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis. Asia’s New Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

fidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Xiangshan Forum.<sup>14</sup>

From statements by Chinese elites and Beijing’s observable foreign policy behaviour throughout the last decade, it can also be inferred that the People’s Republic perceives the current regional security architecture based on the US-led hub-and-spokes alliance system as not (any longer) compatible with its own interests. What’s more, in recent years China’s leadership has developed a number of its own ideas for reorganising the regional security system — and has begun to implement some of them. As a result, Bei-

<sup>14</sup> Patricia M. Kim, “China’s Search for Allies”, *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-11-15/chinas-search-allies>; Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, “Contested Multilateralism”, *The Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 4 (2014): 385–412, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-014-9188-2>; Kai He, ed., *Contested Multilateralism 2.0 and Asian Security Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://www.routledge.com/Contested-Multilateralism-20-and-Asian-Security-Dynamics/He/p/book/9780367893385>.

Map 2



Sources: Author's own compilation.

China is increasingly challenging the dominance of the USA in the field of security policy.<sup>15</sup>

**The “Indo-Pacific” concept is intended to serve as a strategic alternative to a Chinese reorganisation of the region.**

In response, successive US administrations have declared the preservation of US hegemony (“US leadership”) and related balance of power vis-a-vis China to be the central strategic goal of US foreign policy in

the region.<sup>16</sup> In this context, many perceive the “Indo-Pacific” as an alternative strategic concept to a Chinese-led reorganisation of the region, as well as a possible starting point for a new or reformed security

15 Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Southeast Asia’s New-Old Cold War”, *Jordan Times*, 13 February 2022, <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/thitinan-pongsudhirak/southeast-asias-new-old-cold-war>.

16 David R. Stilwell, “Advancing U.S. Engagement and Countering China in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond” (Washington, D.C.: The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 17 September 2020), [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/091720\\_Stilwell\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/091720_Stilwell_Testimony.pdf); “Vice President Mike Pence’s Remarks on the Administration’s Policy toward China,” Washington, D.C., 4 October 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>; “Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Indo-Pacific Region,” Singapore, 24 August 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/24/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-on-the-indo-pacific-region/>.

architecture.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the USA, a number of different actors — including Japan, Australia, India, ASEAN, the EU, France and Germany — have published Indo-Pacific strategies or guidelines in recent years. Comparative analyses have shown, however, that although a diverse range of actors all refer to “the” Indo-Pacific, their conceptions of “the” Indo-Pacific differ greatly in some cases. Broad divergences include the extent of the Indo-Pacific as a geographical area; strategic goals associated with the concept; the prioritisation or weighting of different policy fields within different respective Indo-Pacific concepts; the question of China’s inclusion or exclusion; and the significance of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral approaches.<sup>18</sup>

Although the region plays host to a whole series of security hotspots, there have been no comparative analyses to date that specifically address questions linked to the emergence of a “new security architecture”<sup>19</sup> for the Indo-Pacific. How is security under-

stood in the Indo-Pacific, and what are the strategic goals behind it? Which norms and rules dominate, and who sets them? What structures is the regional security architecture based on? And what do different state practices and interactions look like? This study attempts to provide answers to these questions via a comparative analysis of the key regional actors. Relevant speeches and interviews, government documents, and relevant states’ practices and initiatives have been systematically analysed for this purpose.

**17** Stephen Tankel et al., “Positive Visions, Powerful Partnerships. The Keys to Competing with China in a Post-Pandemic Indo-Pacific” (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 31 March 2021), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/positive-visions-powerful-partnerships>; Scott W. Harold, “The Indo-Pacific Security Outlook: An American View,” in *CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2022*, ed. Ron Huisken (Canberra: Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, 2021), 8–11, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14bSO8enlQmQ1tugVExu78nSZC11BiUre>; Celine Pajon, “France’s Strategic Engagement in the Indo-Pacific Makes a Difference: Here Is Why,” *The Canon Institute for Global Studies* (blog), 9 April 2021, [https://cigs.canon/en/article/20210409\\_5727.html](https://cigs.canon/en/article/20210409_5727.html); Kei Koga, “Japan’s ‘Indo-Pacific’ Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 49–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz241>; Thomas Wilkins, “Australian Strategic Approaches to the Indo-Pacific: National Resilience and Minilateral Cooperation” (Brussels: Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, 21 December 2021), [https://brussels-school.be/sites/default/files/CSDS%20Policy%20brief\\_2126.pdf](https://brussels-school.be/sites/default/files/CSDS%20Policy%20brief_2126.pdf); Rory Medcalf, “Many Players, Many Layers: The Indo-Pacific Long Game”, in *Asian Geopolitics and the US-China Rivalry*, ed. Felix Heiduk (London: Routledge, 2022), 32–46.

**18** Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific. Significance, Implementation and Challenges*, SWP Research Paper 9/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2020).

**19** Hanns W. Maull, “The Gaps in the New Regional Security Architecture for the Indo-Pacific”, *The Diplomat* (blog), 16 October 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/the-gaps-in-the-new-regional-security-architecture-for-the-indo-pacific/>.

# Security in the Indo-Pacific: understandings, norms, structures and practices

## USA: Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The USA has for decades regarded itself as a “Pacific nation”, as evidenced by its own Pacific coast; its U.S. overseas territories such as Guam as part of a “hidden empire”<sup>20</sup>; numerous military bases in the region; the close economic relations and strong migration movements from there to the USA; and by the USA’s perception of itself as the preeminent power in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>21</sup> The structural core element of the USA’s regional security engagement is its military alliances with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia. Ever since the “pivot to Asia” was launched by the Obama administration, these alliances have once again become the main focus of US security policy. Certainly, a heated debate on financial and security burden-sharing between the US and its allies in Asia was conducted under Obama’s successor Donald Trump, during which Trump repeatedly and publicly cast doubt on the purpose of the alliances. But even during the Trump administration, these alliances enjoyed strong bipartisan support. In Joseph Biden, an outspoken advocate of close military alliances won the presidential election again in 2020. Representatives of the Biden administration repeatedly travelled to the region and stressed the alliances’ utmost importance as well as the USA’s claim to remain the preeminent security actor and leading power in the Indo-Pacific region.

20 Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire. A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

21 Antony J. Blinken, “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, 14 December 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>.

## A new Bipolarity and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

In Washington’s view, it was the increasing political, economic and military great power rivalry between the USA and China that became the main paradigm for Trump’s Indo-Pacific policy. From that perspective, it was primarily China that intended to reorganise the region’s security architecture in its favour, using military, political and above all economic means of power to do so, and by doing so intended to weaken US supremacy in the region. Past attempts by previous US administrations to increase the legitimacy of the US-led security architecture vis-a-vis Beijing through targeted (economic) interdependence and diplomatic rapprochement were regarded as having failed.<sup>22</sup> From the Trump administration’s perspective, the growing “Chinese revisionism” had to be countered primarily with deterrence and containment.<sup>23</sup>

Under the Biden administration, this perception has not changed significantly.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, China is

22 Robert C. O’Brien, “How China Threatens American Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, 21 October 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-10-21/how-china-threatens-american-democracy>.

23 “Vice President Mike Pence’s Remarks on the Administration’s Policy toward China” (see note 16); Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C., 1 June 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

24 Vivek Mishra and Premesha Saha, “Decoding the Biden Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy”, *ORF Raisina Debates* (blog), 19 February 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/decoding-the-biden-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

seen as a “rival” that challenges the “prosperity, security and democratic values” of the USA.<sup>25</sup> China also continues to be portrayed as a revisionist power that wants to reshape the hitherto US-dominated regional security architecture according to its own particular interests,<sup>26</sup> and also seeks to create exclusive Chinese spheres of influence in Asia via economic, diplomatic and military means.<sup>27</sup> Thus the Biden administration perceives Beijing’s behaviour in Asia as “destabilising”, “disregarding international law” and “refusing peaceful conflict resolution”.<sup>28</sup> Beijing’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, its threatening gestures towards Taiwan, and its position in the Sino-Indian border conflict, not only endanger the sovereignty of allies and partners of the USA,<sup>29</sup> but also “stability and prosperity” in the Indo-Pacific in general.<sup>30</sup> The regional security architecture’s core function is therefore to preserve a free, open Indo-Pacific under the leadership of the USA, in which the region’s states can act freely, both politically and economically, and without external coercion<sup>31</sup> – at least insofar as this is compatible with US interests. The latter curtailment can be inferred from Washing-

ton’s initial reactions to a security agreement between the Solomon Islands, which are a Pacific island state, and China: According to US officials, US military action against the Solomon Islands could not be ruled out if Beijing were to establish a military base there.<sup>32</sup>

### From America first to liberal internationalism

The Indo-Pacific strategy under the Trump administration was normatively underpinned by a regional leadership claim, expressed directly by stating the unconditional goal of preserving US sovereignty and independence under all circumstances, that was closely linked to its “America first” policy. With regard to the Indo-Pacific, “respect for sovereignty”, “fair and reciprocal trade” and “transparency and the rule of law” were therefore the most important normative foundations for U.S. foreign policy in the region, according to Trump.<sup>33</sup> Free access to global public goods, above all the “freedom of navigation”, as well as peaceful conflict resolution were also mentioned.<sup>34</sup> Against the backdrop of global rivalry between “free” and “repressive” concepts of international order, these values are in competition with those of “revisionist” powers such as China, which question the “free and open” Indo-Pacific in order to assert their particular interests at the expense of others, primarily the USA.<sup>35</sup>

However, Trump’s “America first” policy<sup>36</sup> also influenced the assessment of regional alliances and partnerships. Under Trump, this assessment followed a transactional logic: alliances were considered mean-

25 “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World”, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 4 February 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>.

26 Antony J. Blinken, “A Foreign Policy for the American People” (Washington, D.C., 3 March 2021), <https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>; Asia Society, “A Conversation with Kurt Campbell, White House Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific”, New York, 6 July 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/video/conversation-kurt-campbell-white-house-coordinator-indo-pacific>.

27 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C., February 2022), 5.

28 Lloyd Austin, “Secretary of Defense Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture”, IISS Fullerton Lecture, Singapore, 27 July 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/2708192/secretary-of-defense-remarks-at-the-40th-international-institute-for-strategic/>.

29 “Remarks by Vice President Harris before the Bilateral Meeting with President Phúc of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (August 25, 2021)”, Hanoi, 25 August 2021, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-before-bilateral-meeting-with-president-phuc-of-the-socialist-republic-of-vietnam/>.

30 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (see note 27), 5.

31 Blinken, “A Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (see note 21).

32 Kate Lyons, “US Won’t Rule Out Military Action if China Establishes Base in Solomon Islands”, *The Guardian*, 26 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/us-wont-rule-out-military-action-if-china-establishes-base-in-solomon-islands>.

33 Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 23).

34 U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision* (Washington, D.C., 3 November 2019), 6, <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-advancing-a-shared-vision/>.

35 *Ibid.*, 5.

36 Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly”, New York, 25 September 2018, <http://uy.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-trump-to-the-73rd-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/>.



ingful if they were predominantly beneficial to the US. Conversely, a negative trade balance or too little military spending by allies meant that these partners were taking advantage of the US.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation repeatedly caused disgruntlement among some US allies in the region.<sup>38</sup>

That “free and sovereign” states should be the general norm is reflected in statements by the Biden administration, as are references to “transparency and the rule of law”, “peaceful conflict resolution” and “freedom of navigation”.<sup>39</sup> Under Biden, “free trade” is also part of the vision of a “free and open” Indo-Pacific.<sup>40</sup> Yet in at least partial contrast to the Trump era is the fact that, under Biden’s presidency, on the one hand allies enjoy greater esteem and, on the other, liberal internationalism has a high priority. Above all, liberal norms such as democracy and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are the basic normative principles of Biden’s foreign policy. At the same time, these are to form the foundation for an alliance of democracies under US leadership to push back the growing influence of authoritarian powers in international politics.<sup>41</sup> The aforementioned liberal principles are to be safeguarded against “revisionist” powers, such as China, chiefly through the US military alliances in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>42</sup>

37 Andrea Bernstein, “Where Trump Learned the Art of the Quid Pro Quo”, *The Atlantic*, 20 January 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/trumps-brand-of-transactional-politics/604978/>; Mark Beeson, “Donald Trump and Post-Pivot Asia: The Implications of a ‘Transactional’ Approach to Foreign Policy”, *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 1 (2020): 10–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1680604>.

38 Marco Overhaus and Alexandra Sakaki, *Die US-Bündnisse mit Japan und Südkorea. Stärken und Bruchlinien in der sicherheitspolitischen Kooperation*, SWP-Studie 5/2021 8 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2021).

39 Austin, “Secretary of Defense Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture” (see note 28).

40 “Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Indo-Pacific Region” (see note 16).

41 Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World” (see note 25).

42 Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, “How America Can Shore up Asian Order”, *Foreign Affairs*, 12 January 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-01-12/how-america-can-shore-asian-order>.

## The hub-and-spokes system 2.0

Both the Trump and Biden administrations’ approaches also converge on a central idea that is itself an integral part of the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific: a networked security architecture consisting of bilateral alliances between the US and regional partners. From Washington’s perspective, the challenge is not to build a new security architecture, but to modernise and strengthen key components of the existing one.<sup>43</sup> Three structural core elements are mentioned in this context.

First, the US military bases in the region are to be maintained. The asymmetric military capacities stationed there, for example combat drones, submarines and long-range ballistic missiles, are to be expanded.

### The USA wants to strengthen and upgrade its allies in line with its concept of integrated deterrence.

Secondly, US allies in the Indo-Pacific are to be strengthened. The USA wants to build a system of integrated deterrence, in which the allies are to be an integral part of the military deterrence of US adversaries in the areas of conventional, nuclear, cyber and information warfare.<sup>44</sup> Behind this lies a realisation in Washington that the USA no longer has the capabilities to militarily dominate every region and operational space in the world due to, among other things, the massive armament of China and Russia. Strengthening or upgrading the US allies is therefore gaining importance because, from Washington’s point of view, the system of integrated deterrence can only work if the allies’ military capacities are expanded in order to reduce dependence on the large US military bases, which are seen as tactically vulnerable. Only in conjunction with allies and partners in the region will it be possible to effectively deter China militarily in the future.

Thirdly, security cooperation among and between US allies and partners in the region is to be expanded. In the areas of intelligence and defence, the “spokes” are to cooperate more intensively with each other instead of primarily with the USA “hub”, as in the

43 Ibid.

44 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (see note 27), 12.

past.<sup>45</sup> That being said, from Washington's perspective, the bilateral US alliances thus remain the central structural instrument of a US-led security architecture in the region. Above all, they continue to play a primary role in containing China and maintaining a regional balance of power in favour of the USA.<sup>46</sup>

The Biden administration also refers to multilateral organisations and international rules and norms in the context of its security policy. However, a look at the relevant strategy papers reveals that the main focus is clearly on bilateral alliances in the Indo-Pacific. Neither official documents nor speeches elaborate on how exactly multilateral cooperation formats fit into the concept of a modernised hub-and-spokes system based on bilateral alliances and partnerships.<sup>47</sup> With the exception of minilateral formats such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)<sup>48</sup>, multilateral organisations are only mentioned in connection with transnational global challenges, such as climate change and pandemic control.<sup>49</sup> This also applies to ASEAN. It is true that, under both Trump and Biden, ASEAN has been ascribed "central importance" for the regional "architecture" of the Indo-Pacific. However, ASEAN's actual place in it is not clarified anywhere. US policymakers have merely stated that the ASEAN states do not have to choose between the USA and China, and that the USA's relations with Southeast Asia are not limited to geopolitics ("bigger than geopolitics").<sup>50</sup> In several statements by the Biden administration on ASEAN, China is not even mentioned.<sup>51</sup>

Hence the role of multilateral organisations, including ASEAN, is primarily to deal with global challenges in policy fields such as climate and health. Structurally, at least for the Indo-Pacific, they are at best of secondary importance in terms of security policy.

## Upgrading and integrated deterrence

In view of this, it is not surprising that multilateral cooperation did not play a key role when examining the practices of US security engagement as part of the free and open Indo-Pacific either. Existing multilateral cooperation continued in the field of security policy, for example US participation in the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the Pacific Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group to combat illegal fishing in the Western Pacific, and multilateral manoeuvres.<sup>52</sup> The US also continued to participate in the Lower Mekong Initiative and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).<sup>53</sup> New multilateral initiatives in cooperation with ASEAN have, however, so far been limited to combating the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>54</sup>

In practical terms the main focus has not been on multilateral processes, but on strengthening existing alliances and bilateral cooperation with new partners in the region. In accordance with the idea of integrated deterrence, US allies' security and defence capacities are to be expanded in the coming years.<sup>55</sup> Among other things, this will involve intensifying security cooperation with Australia. For example, Washington intends to send fighter jets and bombers to Australia more frequently and for longer periods in the future. Cooperation with partners such as India and the ASEAN states, above all Singapore, is also to be intensified. The focus is on upgrading projects such as arms deliveries, joint manoeuvres and train-

<sup>45</sup> Campbell and Doshi, "How America Can Shore up Asian Order" (see note 42).

<sup>46</sup> Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 23), 44.

<sup>47</sup> "Southeast Asia Strategy Act," H.R.1083 – 117th Congress (2021–2022) (Washington, D.C., April 20, 2021), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1083/text>.

<sup>48</sup> Austin, "Secretary of Defense Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture" (see note 28).

<sup>49</sup> "Secretary Antony J. Blinken Virtual Remarks at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Multilateralism", New York, 7 May 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-virtual-remarks-at-the-un-security-council-open-debate-on-multilateralism/>.

<sup>50</sup> Austin, "Secretary of Defense Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture" (see note 28).

<sup>51</sup> Derek Grossman, "Biden's Indo-Pacific Policy Blueprint Emerges," *The RAND Blog*, 23 August 2021, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/08/bidens-indo-pacific-policy-blueprint-emerges.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (see note 23), 39–50.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (see note 34), 8–10.

<sup>54</sup> Blinken, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (see note 21).

<sup>55</sup> The White House, "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference", Washington, D.C., 25 March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/03/25/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference/>; Austin, "Secretary of Defense Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture" (see note 28).

ings, as well as intelligence cooperation. Washington concluded a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with New Delhi in 2016, which enables the mutual use of military bases for repair and replenishment purposes. Closer cooperation with partners below the threshold of formal alliances also explicitly includes continued US military support for Taiwan.<sup>56</sup> Another new aspect is that security cooperation formats are to be set up with the Pacific island states. However, this has not yet been concretised, even though the USA concluded cooperation agreements with the majority of Pacific island states in September 2022. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, there are no actual plans to increase the capacities of the US military itself in the region.<sup>57</sup>

With AUKUS<sup>58</sup>, a new trilateral security pact was also created between the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom. Its focus is on supplying nuclear-powered submarines with US and British technology to Australia. Intensified cooperation with allies thus also includes technology transfers, not only with Australia as part of the AUKUS framework but also with Japan, for example in the form of semiconductor deliveries. In addition, cooperation in the areas of artificial intelligence and quantum technology as well as cyber issues are planned within the Quad. Moreover, according to Washington, AUKUS is to be understood as an “open architecture” in the future and thus opened up to other US allies, first and foremost Japan.<sup>59</sup>

The other US-led minilateral format, the Quad, had already been revived under the Trump administration and declared an essential building block in the regional security architecture with the purpose of containing China.<sup>60</sup> However, concrete initiatives within the

Quad framework largely petered out under Trump, as the members did not agree on which policies to pursue. Under Biden, the strengthening of the Quad and its possible expansion as an instrument of “military deterrence” is also high on the agenda.<sup>61</sup> However, a more forceful anti-China orientation of the Quad has so far failed to materialise, mainly due to resistance from India, which has rejected an overt anti-China stance. Quad initiatives have therefore mainly included civilian policy fields, for example coordinating the supply of Covid-19 vaccines (Quad Vaccine Partnership); financing infrastructure projects (Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group); and establishing low-emission shipping corridors (Green Shipping Network).<sup>62</sup>

### Australia: Security for the Indo-Pacific

In recent years, Australian security policy has reoriented itself extensively towards the Indo-Pacific.<sup>63</sup> The Indo-Pacific has since become *the* regional frame of reference for Australia’s strategic positioning. This has been firmly anchored in speeches by officials<sup>64</sup> as

56 The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (see note 27), 13.

57 Zack Cooper, “Words Versus Deeds in Biden’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *War on the Rocks* (blog), 21 February 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/words-versus-deeds-in-bidens-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

58 Acronym from the English names of the three countries involved: Australia, United Kingdom and USA.

59 “In Conversation: Kurt Campbell, White House Indo-Pacific Coordinator, Lowy Institute”, 1 December 2021, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/conversation-kurt-campbell-white-house-indo-pacific-coordinator>.

60 Anthony Kuhn, “Pompeo Rails against China at ‘Quad’ Meeting with Foreign Ministers in Tokyo,” *NPR*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/06/920683263/pompeo-rails-against-china-at-quad-meeting-with-foreign-ministers-in-tokyo>.

61 Campbell and Doshi, “How America Can Shore up Asian Order” (see note 42).

62 “Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders’ Summit” (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 24 September 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-summit/>.

63 Ashley Townshend and Brendan Thomas-Noone, “Australia Steps up in Defence of the Indo-Pacific Order”, *The Diplomat*, 1 September 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/australia-steps-up-in-defense-of-the-indo-pacific-order/>.

64 Prime Minister of Australia, “‘Where We Live’ Asialink Bloomberg Address” (Sydney, 26 June 2019), [https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Australia-Where\\_We\\_Live\\_Asialink\\_Bloomberg\\_Address.pdf](https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Australia-Where_We_Live_Asialink_Bloomberg_Address.pdf); Senator Linda Reynolds, Minister of Defence, “Remarks at the 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue”, Singapore, 2 June 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/media/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2019/speeches/plenary-5---senator-linda-reynolds-minister-of-defence-australia-transcript.pdf>; Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Frances Adamson, “Shaping Australia’s Role in Indo-Pacific Security in the Next Decade”, Canberra, 2 October 2018, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/shaping-australias-role-in-indo-pacific-security-in-the-next-decade>; Frances Adamson, “The Indo-Pacific. Australia’s Perspective” (Kuala Lumpur, 29 April 2019), <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/the-indo-pacific-australias-perspective>.

well as official documents, such as the 2016 Defence White Paper,<sup>65</sup> the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper<sup>66</sup> and the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. From an Australian perspective, the region is increasingly becoming a focal point for the great power rivalry between China and the US. This in turn undermines stability in the region and increasingly threatens Australia's strategic interests. With regard to Australia's trade and economic policy in particular, the latter has become increasingly linked to Asian markets in recent decades. In particular, Australia's economic dependence on China is increasingly seen as a strategic challenge in view of Beijing's regional ambitions. In recent years, this perception received new impetus when bilateral relations with China deteriorated considerably. The reasons for this deterioration included, among other factors, China's interference in Australia's domestic politics, and the boycotts of Australian exports to China in response to Canberra's position that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic be investigated by an independent body.

In parallel, Canberra sees regional security primarily through the prism of its military alliance with the USA (Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty, ANZUS) and related treaties, for example the Five Eyes Alliance for intelligence cooperation, to which Canada and the United Kingdom belong in addition to the ANZUS states. From the perspective of all Australian governments in the post-war era, the alliance with regional hegemon the USA has ensured regional stability, without which Australia's economic opening towards its Asian neighbours would not have been possible. However, its close security ties with the USA<sup>67</sup> repeatedly earned Canberra the reproach of seeking "security from Asia" and thus from its immediate neighbours, instead of "security in Asia".<sup>68</sup>

## Australia in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Canberra sees regional security in the Indo-Pacific as primarily the result of the continued (military) dominance of the USA in this part of the world. The regional security order is seen as a hegemonic order led by the USA which is, however, increasingly being challenged by China. Australia therefore sees China's related activities as a growing threat to regional security. Australia is concerned about China's rapid arms modernisation programs, "grey zone activities" below the use of military force to enforce Chinese interests, as well as the militarisation of the South China Sea, threats against Taiwan, interference in the internal affairs of other states, and coercive economic measures such as punitive tariffs.<sup>69</sup>

The core function of the US-led Indo-Pacific regional security order, according to the official reading, is to preserve the sovereignty of independent states and the rules-based international order to ensure a "secure, open, prosperous Indo-Pacific region". The overarching goal is to maintain a "power balance" in the Indo-Pacific with the US as the main guarantor of Australia's strategic interests.<sup>70</sup> According to Australian policymakers, another core function of this US-led regional security order is to contain perceived Chinese aggression in the region — even if this is never explicitly mentioned in official documents.<sup>71</sup>

### The alliance with Washington is the "bedrock" of Australia's foreign and security policy.

Australia's role in the regional security order is defined first and foremost by its status as an ally of the USA. Its bilateral alliance with Washington is the "past, present and future" and the "bedrock" of Australia's foreign and security policy.<sup>72</sup> However, besides

65 Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2016 *Defence White Paper* (Canberra, 2016), <https://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>.

66 Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper. Opportunity, Security, Strength* (Canberra, November 2017), <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf>.

67 Australia is the only US ally to have participated in every major US-led military operation since 1945 — including Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

68 Mohan Malik, "Australia, America and Asia", *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 4 (2006): 587–95.

69 "‘Inconceivable’ Australia Would Not Join US to Defend Taiwan", *Australian Financial Review*, 13 November 2021, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-to-defend-taiwan-20211113-p598mi>.

70 Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 66).

71 Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia, "Face the Nation", interview, *CBS News*, 26 September 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-australian-prime-minister-scott-morrison-face-the-nation-09-26-2021/>.

72 "The 2019 Lowy Lecture: Prime Minister Scott Morrison", Sydney, 3 October 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute>.

the currently prevailing understanding of Australia as a dependent ally of the USA, some observers in Australia are more critical. They see the regional security order as more multipolar, and therefore attribute Australia with a more independent role as a middle power in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>73</sup> In this context, they also criticise a “geopolitical anxiety”, according to which regional security is primarily thought of as analogous to geopolitical spheres of influence and producing a zero-sum logic: “The growing influence of an Asian power compared to Australia or its allies is widely interpreted directly as a clear strategic defeat of Australia.”<sup>74</sup> Yet while some Australian officials in the past did consider a cooperative and inclusive regional security architecture possible,<sup>75</sup> for the time being the dominant understanding of regional security architecture is one that conceives of it as one without – or even openly against – China.

The view of the alliance with the USA as an essential component of Australian security policy is currently held across party lines. According to the official interpretation, this is made possible by “common values” and “shared experiences”, the foundation of which are “democratic values”, “respect for human rights” and the “strengthening of the rules-based international order”.<sup>76</sup> Popular support for the alliance with the US is also very high (again), according to polls.<sup>77</sup> During the Trump presidency, it was sig-

nificantly lower.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, any possible future decline in US interest in the region, and reduced US capacities, would be seen as a potential strategic challenge for Australia, as this could shift the balance of power in the region in favour of China. In Canberra’s view, this would threaten to bring about the establishment of an exclusive “Chinese sphere of influence”, which would massively reduce Australia’s access to and influence in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>79</sup> The new Labor-led government under Prime Minister Albanese has also clearly declared its alliance with the USA and announced that it will largely continue the previous government’s Indo-Pacific policy.

### Canberra’s liberal internationalism

Normatively, in Canberra’s view, the regional security order is based firstly on respect for international law, especially the United Nations Charter.<sup>80</sup> Above all, mutual respect for national sovereignty is repeatedly emphasised in this context.<sup>81</sup> Yet according to Canberra, these normative principles are being systematically undermined by some neighbouring states, first and foremost China. They are doing so through manipulation, the exercise of coercion and aggressive behaviour.<sup>82</sup> Australia therefore aims to strengthen its normative commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which national sovereignty is respected, and conflicts are resolved peacefully and without coercion.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Australian Constitution’s central norms including “political, economic and religious freedom,

[org/publications/2019-lowy-lecture-prime-minister-scott-morrison](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2019-lowy-lecture-prime-minister-scott-morrison).

**73** For a critical examination of Australian rhetoric and practice, see for example Brendan Taylor, “Is Australia’s Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 95–109.

**74** Nick Bisley et al., “For a Progressive Realism: Australian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (online first), 19 March 2022, 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2051428>.

**75** Gareth Evans, “Cooperative Security and Intrastate Conflict”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 96 (1994): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1149213>.

**76** U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2021” (Washington, D.C., 16 September 2021), <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-australia-u-s-ministerial-consultations-ausmin-2021/>.

**77** Simon Jackman, “At 70, Most See US Alliance as Foundation of Our Security”, *Australian Financial Review*, 30 August 2021, <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/at-70-most-see-us-alliance-as-foundation-of-our-security-20210826-p58m3o>.

**78** Michael Fullilove, “America and Australia Are Back on the Same Page”, *Lowy Institute Commentary* (blog), 16 February 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/america-and-australia-are-back-same-page>.

**79** Townshend and Thomas-Noone, “Australia Steps up in Defence of the Indo-Pacific Order” (see note 63).

**80** Australian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 66), 11.

**81** Scott Morrison, “Address to the OECD Council”, Paris, 16 June 2021, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-43446>.

**82** Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Canberra, 2020), 12; Peter Dutton, “Address to Australian Strategic Policy Institute Conference, Canberra”, Canberra, 10 June 2021, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/speeches/address-australian-strategic-policy-institute-conference-canberra>.

**83** Reynolds, “Remarks at the 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue” (see note 64).

liberal democracy, the rule of law and equality” are fundamental to the country’s concrete foreign and security policy.<sup>84</sup>

### Australia now officially considers China a “revisionist power”.

It is true that the Indo-Pacific is generally presented in Australian government documents and official pronouncements as “open” and “inclusive” for all states.<sup>85</sup> However, qualitative limitations are applied to these points using the above-mentioned normative criteria. These all exclude China, at least indirectly. For example, preference is given to economies that meet “open”, “market-based” criteria. Further, liberal-democratic political systems are deemed particularly important in trust-based cooperation between Australia and its partners in the region.<sup>86</sup> The adjectives used to describe neighbouring countries also reveal the significance of these normative distinctions at policy level: India, for example, is described as a “natural partner” and Japan as a “friendly partner”, which play a prominent role in the Indo-Pacific due to congruent interests. China, on the other hand, is mentioned as a “comprehensive strategic partner” mainly because of its economic power.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, in the field of security policy, China is now officially labelled as a “revisionist power” that is gradually undermining the principles of the regional security order.<sup>88</sup>

### Balance of power through a deepening alliance with the USA

In line with Canberra’s antagonistic understanding of regional security, according to which regional security is to be secured against China, the bilateral alliance with the USA forms the structural cornerstone of the regional security architecture. In Australia’s view, it is the US-led hub-and-spokes system of bilateral alliances that has provided regional stability

and formed the backbone of the regional security architecture since the Korean War. The regional balance of power is now increasingly threatened by China’s growing ambitions and Xi Jinping’s plan to create a Chinese zone of influence in Asia.

In order to bolster regional security in the near future, however, it is no longer sufficient in Canberra’s eyes to rely solely on the bilateral alliance with the USA. In Australia’s official policy documents, the view is increasingly gaining ground that the country would be well advised to adjust to a more multipolar model of order in the Indo-Pacific. It is assumed that the USA alone is neither strong enough in its foreign and security policy, nor stable and reliable enough domestically in the medium term to permanently and effectively counter growing Chinese power in the region. For this reason, a network of partnerships beyond the bilateral alliance with the USA is to be further consolidated, consisting of the Quad, AUKUS, various ASEAN member states such as Indonesia and Singapore, and also the Pacific island states. Priority will be given to cooperation with democratic partners: Japan, Indonesia, India and South Korea, the EU, certain EU Member States including Germany and France, as well as NATO are all mentioned, aside from the USA.<sup>89</sup>

Regional multilateral organisations such as EAS, ADMM-Plus and IORA are also explicitly mentioned in this context. But while multilateral cooperation is mentioned favourably,<sup>90</sup> it is de facto only assigned an active role in policy fields such as global climate or trade policy. The then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison in particular was repeatedly highly critical of multilateral organisations. He insisted on “preserving national sovereignty” and averting “external interference” in Australia’s affairs above all else as a main goal of his term in office.<sup>91</sup> For Australia’s Indo-Pacific policy, therefore, multilateral organisations have so far played only a subordinate role. In the Indo-Pacific theatre, it is the Sino-American rivalry and neighbouring states’ reactions to it that are considered to have the biggest structural impact on regional policy.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 66), 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 3f.; Morrison, “Address to the OECD Council” (see note 81).

<sup>86</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 66), 3f.

<sup>87</sup> “The 2019 Lowy Lecture: Prime Minister Scott Morrison” (see note 72).

<sup>88</sup> Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (see note 82).

<sup>89</sup> Dutton, “Address to Australian Strategic Policy Institute Conference, Canberra” (see note 82).

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2021” (see note 76).

<sup>91</sup> “The 2019 Lowy Lecture: Prime Minister Scott Morrison” (see note 72).

<sup>92</sup> Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (see note 82), 11; Australian Government, Department of Foreign

## From Darwin via the Quad to AUKUS

Australia has responded to the increasing instability in the Indo-Pacific by expanding its alliance with the US, substantially increasing its defence budget and corresponding arms purchases, forming strategic partnerships, and joining multilateral forums. At the operational level, US Marines have been stationed near Darwin for a few months every year since 2012 to conduct training units together with the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The personnel of the “Marine Rotational Force – Darwin” was increased from a few hundred to 2,500 Marines in 2021.<sup>93</sup> Joint naval manoeuvres, for example as part of the multilateral military exercise Malabar, also take place regularly. In addition, the USA is Australia’s largest arms supplier. Between 2012 and 2021, more than three-quarters of all Australian arms imports by value came from the United States, followed by imports from Spain, France and Germany.<sup>94</sup> A combination of external pressure from Washington and the realisation that the ADF is poorly trained and equipped for military confrontation led to a significant increase in the Australian defence budget. In 2021, it accounted for 2.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), an increase of 15 per cent compared to 2020.<sup>95</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that Canberra’s and Washington’s security interests in the Indo-Pacific do not always coincide. Despite pressure from the USA, Australia has so far not participated in Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), which are held near the artificial islands created by China in the South China Sea.<sup>96</sup> So far, there has been no permanent stationing of US troops in Australia beyond the Marine Rotational Force – Darwin. Consecutive Australian governments also rejected the idea of station-

ing US medium-range missiles, an idea which had been proposed by Washington.<sup>97</sup>

Another indication of the expansion of the alliance with the USA was the trilateral security pact AUKUS between Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA announced in September 2021. The formation was accompanied by Canberra’s decision to acquire nuclear-powered (but not nuclear-armed) American-made submarines. As a result, the Australian government unilaterally cancelled a contract previously signed with France for the supply of non-nuclear-powered submarines. Observers warned that the new submarine deal would place Australia in long-term arms technology dependence on the USA. This is because nuclear propulsion technologies are subject to the strictest secrecy and can only be provided by the USA.<sup>98</sup> Other commentators, such as former Prime Minister Paul Keating, even denounced an alleged sell-out of Australian security interests to the USA.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to expanding its bilateral alliance with the US, Australia has entered into a number of other bilateral strategic partnerships below the threshold of formal alliances, namely with Japan (2014), Singapore (2015), France (2017), Indonesia (2018), Vietnam (2018), India (2020), Papua New Guinea (2020), Thailand (2020), Malaysia (2021) and Germany (2021). As expected, these partnerships are very differently structured. While bilateral cooperation with India, for example, includes joint naval manoeuvres (PASSEX, AUSINDEX) and the mutual use of military bases for bunker stops,<sup>100</sup> cooperation with Japan, for example, has so far focused more on logistical aspects.<sup>101</sup>

Affairs and Trade, 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* (see note 66), 25.

**93** Melissa Mackay, “Marking 10 Years in Darwin, Top US Diplomat Signals Bigger US Marine Deployments in Top End”, *ABC News*, 10 October 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-10/ten-years-us-marines-top-end/100523120>.

**94** SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

**95** Wilkins, “Australian Strategic Approaches to the Indo-Pacific” (see note 17), 4.

**96** Malcolm Cook, *Australia’s South China Sea Challenges*, Policy Brief (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 26 May 2021), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/australia-s-south-china-sea-challenges>.

**97** “Australia Won’t Host U.S. Missiles, Prime Minister Says,” *Reuters*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-usa-missiles-idUSKCN1UV0IB>.

**98** Sam Roggeveen, “Australia Is Making a Risky Bet on the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, 20 September 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/20/opinion/AUKUS-australia-us-china.html>.

**99** Paul Keating, “A Relic of a Bygone Age? I Might Be, but I’m Not a Defeatist”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/a-relic-of-a-bygone-age-i-might-be-but-i-m-not-a-defeatist-20210928-p58vdu.html>.

**100** Premesha Saha and Angad Singh, *Securing Two Oceans: Bolstering India-Australia Defence Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Occasional Paper no. 346 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation [ORF], January 2022), <https://www.orfonline.org/research/securing-two-oceans/>.

**101** Kei Koga, “Japan and Australia Step up Defence Cooperation”, *East Asia Forum* (blog), 8 March 2022, <https://www.>

New partnerships with regional organisations have also been launched, for example the ASEAN-Australian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and cooperation with NATO. In general, there is an increase in Australian initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, especially in minilateral cooperation formats. These include, for example, the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue of the USA, Japan and Australia; as well as Australia-India-Japan Trilateral; Australia-France-India Trilateral; Australia-India-Indonesia Trilateral; and AUKUS. In addition, existing formats were revived, such as the Five Eyes Alliance and especially the Quad. Since 2020, Australia has participated in the Malabar naval exercises of the USA, India and Japan in the Indian Ocean. In terms of their respective content, many of these minilateral formats have so far focused primarily on the topics of maritime security and the rules-based international order.

A regional focus of Australia’s security policy activities is the Western Pacific. The Australia Pacific Step-up includes bilateral security partnerships as well as projects in development cooperation, disaster relief, public healthcare and currently pandemic control. While in quantitative terms, Australia’s arms exports in the Indo-Pacific do not play a major role for the time being, Canberra has nevertheless become increasingly visible as an exporter of military hardware in the Western Pacific subregion in recent years. Australia has delivered patrol boats, helicopters and transport aircraft to neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tonga.<sup>102</sup> Projects in infrastructure development, such as the laying of submarine cables, are also part of the Pacific Step-up.

For a long time, Australia was the dominant donor country in the Western Pacific, especially in the areas of development cooperation and humanitarian aid, but has been increasingly confronted with Chinese initiatives for some time.<sup>103</sup> According to Australian security experts, Canberra therefore primarily wants to prevent China from establishing military bases in Australia’s vicinity. To this end, the Australian gov-

ernment intends to make further offers of cooperation to the Pacific island states in the near future.<sup>104</sup>

## India: “Indo” or “Indo-Pacific”?

India’s foreign and security policy after the era of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947 – 1964) until the 1990s was strongly oriented towards paradigms such as non-alignment and India’s role as an advocate for what were described as developing countries. Early on, the Indian leadership linked this general foreign policy orientation with the idea of assuming an independent role in the international system. During the Cold War, India – despite a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union – neither joined a military alliance nor was officially part of the two blocs.

The division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, the conflict in Kashmir, and the dispute with the PRC over the unsettled demarcation of the Sino-Indian border led to several armed confrontations with China and Pakistan shortly after India’s independence in 1947. In addition, establishing and maintaining domestic security and stability in the face of violent insurgencies and secessionist movements in parts of the country has been a significant security challenge over the decades.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, despite its geostrategic location as a peninsula in the Indian Ocean, the Indian elites’ concept of security was for a long time shaped by a “continental mentality”.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, Indian security policy focused chiefly on territorial conflicts with its direct neighbours and internal security, meaning maritime aspects were almost completely consigned to the background.

## India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative

Since the mid-1990s, the aforementioned traditional pillars of Indian foreign and security policy are still

<sup>104</sup> Michael Shoebridge, “Australia’s Pacific Step-up Needs to Aim Higher”, *The Strategist* (blog), 6 May 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-pacific-step-up-needs-to-aim-higher/>.

<sup>105</sup> Harsh V. Pant, “The US-India-China “Strategic Triangle”: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Dimensions”, *India Review* 18, no. 4 (2019): 343 – 47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2019.1662192>.

<sup>106</sup> David Scott, “India’s ‘Grand Strategy’ for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions”, *Asia-Pacific Review* 13, no. 2 (2006): 97 – 129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439000601029048>.

[eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/08/japan-and-australia-step-up-defence-cooperation/](https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/08/japan-and-australia-step-up-defence-cooperation/).

<sup>102</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

<sup>103</sup> Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (see note 82), 24.



regularly referred to rhetorically. In reality, however, their importance has diminished noticeably.<sup>107</sup> On the one hand, this is due to economic reforms since 1991 and India's growing embeddedness in (and thus dependence on) global markets and supply chains. On the other hand, it is also due to the international system's altered structures following the end of the East-West conflict and China's rise in particular. As a result, observers initially noted that foreign policy interest began to shift from the Non-Aligned Movement to an emphasis on India's strategic autonomy.<sup>108</sup> In recent years, however, an even bigger strategic realignment has taken place under the Modi government. India is now increasingly focusing on maritime spaces, especially the Indian Ocean, through which large parts of India's trade, energy and raw material imports are transacted. Security thinking in the country has therefore shed the "continental mentality", at least to some extent. In doing so, New Delhi is reacting directly to challenges emanating from China in foreign and security policy, but also economic policy in South Asia.<sup>109</sup>

### India wants to become the central security actor in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

In debates on regional security, New Delhi has so far focused its attention primarily on the "Indo" part of the "Indo-Pacific". Since the end of the Cold War, the country's foreign policy makers have regarded India as a central security actor in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Since then, the country has been trying to establish its own security structures in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

The means for this were both bilateral cooperation with India's neighbouring states and multilateral forums initiated by New Delhi, such as the IORA and

the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India sees itself as a net security provider through increased anti-piracy operations by the Indian Navy; arms deliveries to neighbouring states; joint education and training programmes; and the provision of regional systems for coastal surveillance and maritime domain awareness.<sup>110</sup> However, from India's perspective, its new role as a provider of security is often overshadowed by China's actions, namely by Beijing's confrontational behaviour in the India-China border conflict and the deterioration of bilateral relations, as well as by increasing Chinese influence in South Asia. The latter is visible both in projects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and in the field of security policy, namely through Chinese arms exports, security dialogues, and military training programmes with states such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar.<sup>111</sup>

As a result, the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has begun to re-orient India's foreign policy towards countering China's growing dominance in the region. Some observers therefore see India's role increasingly as part of a regional attempt at balancing China.<sup>112</sup> Yet at the same time New Delhi officially continues to signal a willingness to cooperate with China. India also remains a member of regional organisations such as the SCO and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which China has been instrumental in shaping and even launch-

**107** C. Raja Mohan, "The Changing Dynamics of India's Multilateralism", in *Shaping the Emerging World. India and the Multilateral Order*, ed. Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Bruce Jones (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 25–42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt3fjgnrt>.

**108** Harsh V. Pant, "The End of Non-Alignment?" *Orbis* 61, no. 4 (2017): 527–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2017.08.004>.

**109** Christian Wagner, *India's Rise: on Feet of Clay?* SWP Research Paper 2/2022 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2022), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/indias-rise-on-feet-of-clay>.

**110** Christian Wagner, "India's Bilateral Security Relationship in South Asia", *Strategic Analysis* 42, no. 1 (2018): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2017.1418952>; Manu Pubby, "India's Message to IOR: We Are a Reliable Partner. Can Take on the Net Security Provider Role", *The Economic Times*, 4 February 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indias-message-to-ior-we-are-a-reliable-partner-can-take-on-the-net-security-provider-role/articleshow/80680671.cms?from=mdr>.

**111** Darshana M. Baruah, "India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity" (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2020), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/30/india-in-indo-pacific-new-delhi-s-theater-of-opportunity-pub-82205>; Ganesan Wignaraja, "Reflecting on US-China Rivalries in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka", in *Asian Geopolitics*, ed. Heiduk (see note 17), 81–102, <https://www.routledge.com/Asian-Geopolitics-and-the-US-China-Rivalry/Heiduk/p/book/9780367608163>.

**112** Sharinee L. Jagtiani and Ameya Pratap Singh, "India Is a Swing State — Cooperate with It Accordingly", *War on the Rocks*, 13 July 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/india-is-a-swing-state-cooperate-with-it-accordingly/>.

ing.<sup>113</sup> In New Delhi’s view, the rising strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific is the joint result of Chinese expansionism, doubts about the durability of US involvement in the region, and the weakness of multilateral institutions. All this has led to a great power rivalry that is steadily intensifying and now threatens the stability of the region.<sup>114</sup> Thus, New Delhi now sees Chinese expansionism as a major factor of instability in the region, even if it does not officially state it as such. India perceives China’s actions in South Asia as “strategic encirclement”, worries about freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and is alarmed by China’s increased military presence in the Indian Ocean.<sup>115</sup>

According to the Modi government, the most important goal of regional security policy for the Indo-Pacific is therefore to limit the growing Chinese influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and thereby preserve New Delhi’s own claims to power. It has announced increased cooperation with African and Arab riparians of the Indian Ocean in the west and ASEAN in the east.<sup>116</sup> However, its main focus remains on India’s immediate strategic environment: the Indian Ocean and the Indian subcontinent.<sup>117</sup>

### Free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific

Formally, India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) envisages an “open, inclusive” security architecture in which regional security is maintained through “dia-

logue, a rules-based order and the resolution of disputes based on international law”.<sup>118</sup> According to Modi, “these rules and norms shall be based on the consent of all and not the power of a few states”, on which in turn “India’s belief in multilateralism and regionalism and our firm commitment to rule of law principles are based”.<sup>119</sup> There are also repeated positive references to ASEAN and its norms, such as territorial sovereignty, peaceful resolution of conflicts and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. At the same time, Prime Minister Modi emphasised the need for free access for all actors in the region to Indo-Pacific sea and air space, resources and markets. This in turn would only be possible if there was no return to great power rivalry and bipolarity. Commentators interpreted this as a thinly veiled criticism of China. Nonetheless, India’s partnerships follow the norms outlined above, which New Delhi presents as fundamental to an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific, and are therefore decidedly not “alliances of containment”.<sup>120</sup>

### New Delhi presents the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive region with equal players.

Consequently, Indian officials present the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive region in which all actors are to operate on an equal footing with each other on the basis of international law. However, this rhetoric should not obscure the fact that the Modi government’s focus is less on interpreting a rule-based order in a principled manner. Instead, the ostensible promotion of the aforementioned norms is intended to push back the perceived “aggressive” Chinese influence, especially in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.<sup>121</sup>

**113** Heiduk and Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific* (see note 18), 24; Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, “Address by External Affairs Minister at the 20th Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government”, Nur-Sultan, 25 November 2021, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34532/Address\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_at\\_the\\_20th\\_Meeting\\_of\\_the\\_SCO\\_Council\\_of\\_Heads\\_of\\_Government](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34532/Address_by_External_Affairs_Minister_at_the_20th_Meeting_of_the_SCO_Council_of_Heads_of_Government).

**114** Premesha Saha and Abhishek Mishra, *The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India*, Occasional Paper no. 292 (New Delhi: ORF, December 2020), <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indo-pacific-oceans-initiative-towards-coherent-indo-pacific-policy-india/>.

**115** Heiduk and Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific* (see note 18), 25; Jagannath P. Panda, “India, Indo-Pacific Coalitions and China: From Alignment to Alliance?” in *Asian Geopolitics*, ed. Heiduk (see note 17), 103–26, <https://www.routledge.com/Asian-Geopolitics-and-the-USChina-Rivalry/Heiduk/p/book/9780367608163>.

**116** Saha and Mishra, *The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative* (see note 114).

**117** Baruah, “India in the Indo-Pacific” (see note 111), 4.

**118** Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, “Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the 4th Indo-Pacific Business Forum”, Virtual Event, 28 October 2021, [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34434/Remarks\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_at\\_the\\_4th\\_IndoPacific\\_Business\\_Forum\\_October\\_28\\_2021](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34434/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_at_the_4th_IndoPacific_Business_Forum_October_28_2021).

**119** Narendra Modi, “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue”, Singapore, 1 June 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>.

**120** Ibid.

**121** Ian Hall and Šumit Ganguly, “Introduction: Narendra Modi and India’s Foreign Policy”, *International Politics*, 30 October 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00363-8>.

## Multipolarity and regional leadership

In the Modi government's view, the "open, inclusive" Indo-Pacific security order is to be based on a multipolar structure. A "strong, multipolar order" is an important prerequisite for coping with Sino-American rivalry and preventing a slide into a bipolar order, and is also the cornerstone of stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>122</sup> However, India explicitly refrains from entering into alliances within the framework of the IPOI, as this would undermine its own strategic autonomy. The IPOI is therefore also not a legalistic blueprint for order. Binding treaties and agreements are not envisaged or preferred by Delhi. Nor are there plans to create a new institutional framework for the Indo-Pacific.<sup>123</sup>

Besides the USA and China, Russia and India are deemed to be the most important poles of this emerging multipolar order. India strives to maintain close relations with all actors on a bilateral level, even though its relationship with states such as China has some potential for conflict.<sup>124</sup> Observers have therefore argued that the IPOI contains de facto contradictory elements. On the one hand, it has elements of balancing China through partnerships with the USA and other regional actors. On the other hand, by emphasising openness and inclusiveness, it tries to present a rather different image to China.<sup>125</sup> Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar indirectly confirmed this by presenting multipolarity in the context of the Quad as part of an Indian "rebalancing" whilst at the same time speaking of an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific.<sup>126</sup>

Multilateralism is therefore primarily associated with the UN system. Existing multilateral organisations at the global level are first and foremost portrayed in the New Delhi discourse as weak and in need of reform.<sup>127</sup> They, too, are dominated by a few major powers and offer too little room for manoeuvre to other actors — above all India. In Narendra Modi's words, only a more representative multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its centre can secure peace and prosperity worldwide. In this context, India's multilateral engagement focuses on policy fields such as development cooperation, humanitarian aid and climate policy.<sup>128</sup> Multilateral cooperation is also mentioned with regard to the need to "maintain the rules-based international order".<sup>129</sup> Moreover, since ASEAN is central to regional security from India's point of view, the country's participation in ASEAN-led multilateral forums such as EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus is officially emphasised.<sup>130</sup> As a structural element, however, multilateralism plays at best a marginal role for India's IPOI. Multipolarity as a structural framework of the Indo-Pacific, as defined by the Modi government, is primarily based on bilateral relations between the region's great and middle powers. Multipolarity enables India to structurally balance vis-à-vis China whilst also preventing the emergence of a Sino-American bipolarity.

## India as a security provider in the Indian Ocean

New Delhi's security policy activities and initiatives have increased noticeably in recent years, especially in India's immediate vicinity in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Bilateral military relations with neigh-

**122** "Prime Minister's Speech at the East Asia Summit", Bangkok, 4 November 2019, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32171/Prime\\_Ministers\\_Speech\\_at\\_the\\_East\\_Asia\\_Summit\\_04\\_November\\_2019](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32171/Prime_Ministers_Speech_at_the_East_Asia_Summit_04_November_2019).

**123** Riva Ganguly Das, "Keynote Address by Secretary (East) at the 5th EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation", Kolkata, 23 November 2021, [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34523/Keynote\\_Address\\_by\\_Secretary\\_East\\_at\\_the\\_5th\\_EAS\\_Conference\\_on\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Cooperation](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34523/Keynote_Address_by_Secretary_East_at_the_5th_EAS_Conference_on_Maritime_Security_Cooperation).

**124** Modi, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue" (see note 119).

**125** Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy", *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 75–93.

**126** Jaishankar, "Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the 4th Indo-Pacific Business Forum" (see note 118).

**127** Jaishankar, "Address by External Affairs Minister at the 20th Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government" (see note 113); "PM Modi Calls for 'Reformed Multilateralism' to Reflect Global Realities", *Hindustan Times*, 10 November 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pm-modi-calls-for-reformed-multilateralism-to-reflect-global-realities/story-vnio0kum4WFnasQBGMH1N.html>.

**128** Narendra Modi, "PM Modi's Keynote Address at United Nations Economic and Social Council Session", New York, 17 July 2020, <https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-keynote-address-at-united-nations-economic-and-social-council-session-550577>.

**129** Jaishankar, "Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the 4th Indo-Pacific Business Forum" (see note 118).

**130** Das, "Keynote Address by Secretary (East) at the 5th EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation" (see note 123).

bouring states such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius and Bhutan have been expanded. This includes joint military manoeuvres, training and capacity building programmes, and regular high-level dialogues. In 2021, for example, the Indian Navy conducted over 50 joint manoeuvres with “friendly states” in the Indian Ocean.<sup>131</sup> India increasingly sees itself as a provider of security in its immediate vicinity, be it through the expansion of radar stations in Indian Ocean littoral states or through Indian patrols to secure trade routes. India’s growing importance as an arms exporter should also be considered in this light. Indian arms exports increased rapidly – from US\$130 million (2012 – 2016) to US\$302 million (2017 – 2021). The main buyers since 2012 have been Myanmar (which imported arms for US\$196 million), Sri Lanka (US\$74 million), Mauritius (US\$66 million), Armenia (US\$32 million) and the Seychelles (US\$24 million) – all neighbouring countries of India except Armenia.<sup>132</sup> However, it should be noted that the starting level here is significantly lower than that of other regional players – most notably China.

The armaments exported by India in this context include surface-to-air missile systems, helicopters and patrol boats, as well as radar and other surveillance systems. For a long time, observers viewed India’s growing arms exports as primarily commercially motivated. Accordingly, they mainly serve to strengthen the domestic arms industry.<sup>133</sup> Recently, however, New Delhi made headlines in the region when it sold BrahMos ballistic missile systems, which are produced in India in cooperation with Russia, to the Philippines. Against a backdrop of territorial disputes between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea, the delivery of such supersonic missiles, which could be used against China, was interpreted in India itself as a “strategic statement” to Beijing.<sup>134</sup> Indonesia

is also said to have expressed interest in Indian supersonic missiles.

New Delhi has not only expanded its bilateral military relations. It also increasingly sees itself as a “first responder” to various crises such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks and humanitarian emergencies in the region. Examples of this are: New Delhi’s earthquake relief for Nepal; support for Mozambique in the fight against terrorism in the form of arms deliveries and humanitarian aid; and the delivery of vaccines as part of the fight against pandemics.<sup>135</sup> The Indian Navy’s regular cooperation with states in the region includes, for example, exercises in the field of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). And when the Yemen conflict escalated in 2015, the Indian Navy evacuated 4,000 Indian and 1,200 foreign nationals from Port Aden.

Although India’s main security focus is on its immediate vicinity, the country has also become more active in other parts of the Indo-Pacific region. First of all, this includes the expansion of its bilateral cooperation with the USA, Japan, Australia and the ASEAN states Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore, as well as with France. So far, these bilateral cooperations have focused on the purchase and sale of defence equipment, such as deliveries from the USA and France to India, and from India to Vietnam, as well as joint military exercises. India’s long-standing defence cooperation with Russia was also further developed in 2021. Over the next ten years, this will include Russian arms deliveries to India as well as joint arms production and military exercises.<sup>136</sup>

In addition, India is increasingly active in multilateral and especially trilateral formats. In recent years, the Modi government has co-founded trilateral formats with the USA and Japan, with Japan and Australia, with France and Australia, with Australia and Indonesia, with Japan and Russia, and with Italy and Japan. The maritime military exercise Malabar, which has existed since the 1990s and was initially held bilaterally with the USA, has had Japan participating since 2015 and Australia since 2020. The official goals of these tripartite formats are first and foremost to

<sup>131</sup> “India Ramps up Warship Patrols in Indian Ocean to Keep Pace with China but Funding Gap Remains”, *South China Morning Post*, 28 January 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3165041/india-ramps-warship-patrols-indian-ocean-keep-pace-china>.

<sup>132</sup> SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

<sup>133</sup> Rahul Singh, “Defence Exports in Focus as India Speeds up Approvals”, *Hindustan Times*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/defence-exports-in-focus-as-india-speeds-up-approvals-101646589839821.html>.

<sup>134</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury and Manu Pubby, “In a First, India to Export BrahMos Missile to Philippines”, *The Economic Times*, 15 January 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/in-a-first-india-to-export-brahmos-missile-to-philippines/articleshow/88908287.cms>.

<sup>135</sup> Wagner, *India’s Rise* (see note 109).

<sup>136</sup> Saheli Roy Choudhury, “India and Russia Broaden Defense Ties despite Potential Risk of U.S. Sanctions,” *CNBC*, 7 December 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/07/india-russia-broaden-ties-and-military-cooperation.html>.

foster exchanges between friendly states on various topics, ranging from maritime security to energy policy, as well as the joint commitment to shared norms and principles such as: the rules-based international order, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and freedom of navigation. India also seeks to more closely involve external actors such as France and Australia in such formats in order to be able to pursue the goals formulated in its Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPOI) more effectively. The fact that India now prefers mini- and trilateral formats is mainly due to the Modi government's pessimistic view of multilateral organisations, which it sees as outdated, cumbersome and inefficient. In contrast, trilateral and minilateral formats, functioning as coalitions of the willing, seem to be a more flexible and goal-oriented alternative in terms of content and membership.

However, India has so far been very reluctant to further institutionalise trilateral formats beyond their aforementioned function as dialogue formats or to diversify them in terms of their respective content. This means that in the Quad, for example, India is often seen as a cause of delay. While New Delhi supports the general orientation of the Quad as a counterweight to Beijing, it often refuses to act jointly on concrete issues and refers to its own particular interests.<sup>137</sup> Although India is involved in border conflicts with China, it does not express itself critically in the Quad, for example on Xinjiang, Hong Kong or even Taiwan. India also hampered the Quad with regard to a joint position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and actually prevented any condemnation of the invasion in any joint declaration by the Quad.<sup>138</sup>

At the multilateral level, India is involved in a number of regional organisations, such as IORA, EAS, ARF, ADMM-Plus, Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and BIMSTEC. For instance, India is

**137** Mohamed Zeeshan, "India Keeps Floating Away From Its Quad Partners", *The Diplomat*, 14 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/india-keeps-floating-away-from-its-quad-partners/>; Happymon Jacob, "The Quad Could End Up Running out of Steam", *The Hindu*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-quad-could-end-up-running-out-of-steam/article36702656.ece?homepage=true>.

**138** Kiyoshi Takenaka, David Brunnstrom and Michael Martina, "Quad Leaders Agree Ukraine Experience Should Not Be Allowed in Indo-Pacific – Japan, Australia", *Reuters*, 3 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-quad-leaders-discuss-ukraine-thursday-white-house-2022-03-03/>.

the lead country in the field of BIMSTEC security cooperation and therefore played a major role in the drafting of the Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking in 2021. According to this agreement, member states are to intensify their cooperation in the aforementioned policy areas, for example by establishing a security forum that meets regularly; coordinating humanitarian aid; and creating a maritime security action plan. India is also a member of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) and has, for example, conducted multilateral workshops on capacity building in the fight against piracy within this framework. The current Director General of ReCAAP is an Indian diplomat who won the vote against his Chinese competitor.

Indian Prime Minister Modi repeatedly placed ASEAN at the centre of his Indo-Pacific policy, spoke of security and growth for the entire region, and also praised India's involvement in the ASEAN-centred regional organisations EAS and ADMM-Plus. Yet in fact, the idea of ASEAN as a cooperative, collective security order in the Indo-Pacific<sup>139</sup> has so far offered few concrete steps for Indian foreign policy under Modi. For this reason, cooperation with ASEAN, apart from "active participation in ASEAN-led multilateral forums"<sup>140</sup>, is de facto limited to bilateral cooperation with individual ASEAN member states.<sup>141</sup>

## Indonesia, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific

Geographically, Indonesia is certainly the state most closely associated with the Indo-Pacific concept because of its location: Indonesia borders the Indian Ocean to the west, the Pacific Ocean to the east and the South China Sea to the north. Routes strategically important for maritime transport and trade, such as the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, the Lombok Strait and the Makassar Strait, run at least partly past

**139** ASEAN, *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (Bangkok, 23 June 2019), 3.

**140** Modi, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue" (see note 119).

**141** Jay Maniyar, "India-ASEAN Relations in the Maritime Domain – an Analysis", *ORF Expert Speak* (Blog), 17 November 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-asean-relations-in-the-maritime-domain/>.

or even through Indonesian territorial waters.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, Indonesia's security policy during the 20th century was primarily aimed at maintaining the archipelagic state's internal stability. For decades, the "archipelagic vision" ("Wawasan nusantara") was Jakarta's main strategic focus. This was because the Indonesian elites saw the stability and territorial integrity of the unitary state as being challenged by centrifugal forces including separatist movements, political Islamism and – under Suharto's "new order" ("Ordre baru") – communist infiltration of state and society.

When it did gain policymakers' attention, regional security policy was mostly pursued through and within ASEAN. A stronger maritime orientation of Indonesian security policy only began to take shape in the last two decades. During President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono rule (2004–2014), Indonesia's geographical position as a "bridge" between the Indian and Pacific Oceans was reinterpreted accordingly. Especially given Indonesia's central strategic location on the most important route of global maritime trade, the Strait of Malacca, and in view of its enormous maritime resources, a strategic reorientation of security policy appeared increasingly urgent. In May 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented ideas for an Indo-Pacific Friendship and Cooperation Treaty. The treaty was to take into account the region's changing geopolitical and geo-economic framework, and peacefully manage the inter-state rivalries that had emerged as a result of these changes, in particular those between the US and China. Security in Asia was thereby conceived as a jointly managed public good, and secured through the proposed Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.<sup>143</sup> However, the initiative did not gain traction outside Indonesia at the time. Neither a draft treaty nor negotiations materialised.

## Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept as an inclusive security concept

As a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia has always been strictly opposed to attempts made by major powers to create spheres of influence in Southeast Asia. This thinking also ties in with the constitutional doctrine of "independent and active" ("bebas-aktif") foreign policy. It posits that the country's ability to conduct its foreign and security policy free from the influence of major powers must be a strategic priority. This in turn is often linked to the equally important concept of "strategic autonomy" for Indonesia.<sup>144</sup> From Jakarta's perspective, the intensifying Sino-American rivalry makes it necessary to take steps to prevent Southeast Asia from being dominated by one of the two great powers.

### Indonesia prefers a security community that is independent of external powers' military alliances.

Indonesia's idea of regional security therefore focuses on establishing a security community that does not depend on the formation of military alliances by external powers. This also distinguishes Indonesia from other ASEAN states, such as Thailand and the Philippines, for whom the military alliance with the USA is an integral part of their respective security policies. The envisaged security community would be cooperative and inclusive, and therefore should not exclude any regional actor. Consequently, China is explicitly referred to as a "partner" and "participant" in this community, even if Jakarta and Beijing occasionally clash over the Natuna Islands and their surrounding EEZ in the South China Sea.<sup>145</sup> Indonesian officials never tire of emphasising that security is indivisible, based on common interests and norms, and certainly not a zero-sum game.<sup>146</sup> In this context, President Joko Widodo in particular cites growing economic interdependence as a common

**142** Evan A. Laksmana, "Indonesia Unprepared as Great Powers Clash in Indo-Pacific", *Foreign Policy*, 26 August 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/26/indonesia-china-us-geopolitics/>.

**143** "An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific. Key-note Address by His Excellency Dr. R. M. Marty M. Natalegawa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia", Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 16 May 2013, [http://csis.org/files/attachments/130516\\_MartyNatalegawa\\_Speech.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/130516_MartyNatalegawa_Speech.pdf).

**144** Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "Indonesia's Vision of Regional Order in East Asia amid U.S.-China Rivalry," *Asia Policy* 13, no. 2 (2018): 57–63.

**145** Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, "Indonesia Invites China to Join Indo-Pacific Cooperation", Jakarta, 14 November 2018, <https://setkab.go.id/en/indonesia-invites-china-to-join-indo-pacific-cooperation/>.

**146** Ryamizard Ryacudu, "Speech at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019", Singapore, 2 June 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2019>.

interest for maintaining security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>147</sup>

The “main pillar” (“sokuguru”) of Indonesian security policy for the Indo-Pacific is ASEAN and associated multilateral organisations led by ASEAN. From Indonesia’s perspective, stability, security and prosperity in the region as well as efforts to find “regional solutions to regional problems” are closely linked to promoting multilateral cooperation and using ASEAN as the most important cooperation mechanism.<sup>148</sup> From Jakarta’s perspective, ASEAN must therefore be at the centre of an emerging Indo-Pacific security architecture. This then also includes bringing the US, China, and a number of other external actors into ASEAN-led multilateral institutions.<sup>149</sup>

Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept (IPCC), presented by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi in 2018, reflects this understanding of regional security by emphasising “dialogue”, “cooperation”, “ASEAN centrality” and “inclusiveness”.<sup>150</sup> Jakarta’s strategy decisively influenced the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) published in 2019, as the ideas and principles outlined in the IPCC are all reflected in the AOIP. Jakarta thus seeks to offer an inclusive ASEAN-centric security architecture for the Indo-Pacific, as an alternative to the deepening Sino-American bipolarity.<sup>151</sup>

## International Law and the ASEAN Way

Regarding the normative foundations of an Indo-Pacific security order, Indonesian officials emphasise that a peaceful, secure Indo-Pacific cannot be guaranteed without respect for international law and the United Nations Charter.<sup>152</sup> Principles of multilateral cooperation such as “peaceful cooperation” and “dialogue” are also mentioned in this context.<sup>153</sup> In addition, Indonesia’s post-colonial identity is also relevant in this normative context — especially the country’s leadership role within the Non-Aligned Movement. Norms of great importance from Jakarta’s point of view are therefore the “Bandung Principles” of equality of all nations; preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty; peaceful cooperation; prohibition of interference in the internal affairs of other states; and prohibition of joining collective defence alliances that serve great powers’ special interests.<sup>154</sup>

Indonesian officials also repeatedly refer positively to the ASEAN norms (often referred to as the ASEAN Way), which are themselves heavily influenced by the Bandung Principles. Jakarta’s Indo-Pacific Code of Conduct subsequently reflects this aforementioned set of norms, namely the renunciation of the threat and use of force and the imperatives of peaceful conflict resolution, regional cooperation and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.<sup>155</sup>

**147** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Jokowi Praises Fruitful Partnership between ASEAN and China”, Jakarta, 22 November 2021, <https://kemlu.go.id/chicago/en/news/17526/jokowi-praises-fruitful-partnership-between-asean-and-china>.

**148** Donald E. Weatherbee, *Indonesia in ASEAN. Vision and Reality* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

**149** These include, above all, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM-Plus).

**150** Retno Marsudi, “Annual Press Statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia 2020”, Jakarta, 8 January 2020, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/946/pidato/annual-press-statement-of-the-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-2020>; Retno Marsudi, “Indonesia: Partner for Peace, Security, Prosperity”, Jakarta, 11 January 2018, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/01/10/full-text-indonesia-partner-for-peace-security-prosperity.html>.

**151** Gabriele Abbondanza, “Whither the Indo-Pacific? Middle Power Strategies from Australia, South Korea and Indonesia”, *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (2022): 403–21.

**152** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Jokowi Praises Fruitful Partnership between ASEAN and China” (see note 147); CSIS, “An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific” (see note 143).

**153** Retno Marsudi, “Remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of the Alliance for Multilateralism” (virtual), 25 September 2020, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/1724/pidato/remarks-he-retno-lp-marsudi-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-ministerial-meeting-of-the-alliance-for-multilateralism-25-september-2020>.

**154** Retno Marsudi, “Remarks at the High Level Commemorative Meeting to Mark the 60th Anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement” (virtual), 14 October 2021, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/3038/pidato/remarks-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-at-the-high-level-commemorative-meeting-to-mark-the-60th-anniversary-of-the-non-aligned-movement>.

**155** “An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific” (see note 143).

## ASEAN as a structural pillar of regional security

For Jakarta, ASEAN is also at the forefront of the structural elements of an Indo-Pacific security architecture. In its view, ASEAN-led organisations should be at the centre of a cooperative, multilateral security architecture.<sup>156</sup> According to Jakarta, the very membership of organisations such as ARF and EAS reflects the connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Members alongside the ASEAN states include the USA, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. From Indonesia's point of view, a marginalisation or even split of ASEAN would not only undermine its own regional leadership role, but would also endanger regional security and stability and the "long peace"<sup>157</sup> in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, Indonesia also sees itself as a guardian of the established ASEAN-centred multilateral structures there.<sup>158</sup>

### Jakarta insists that ASEAN should act as the centre of the regional security order.

With its call for "ASEAN centrality" for a regional security architecture, Jakarta also wants to avert the danger at structural level of the Indo-Pacific region being divided into competing great powers' zones of influence. The great powers' divergent interests in the region are to be defused by integrating them permanently and thoroughly into multilateral dialogue forums. At the institutional level, the idea of such open regionalism did already materialise in 1994 when the ASEAN Regional Forum was founded. All major external actors (USA, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and later also Russia, India, the EU and others) were included in this inclusive regional security dialogue. In addition, bilateral ASEAN+ dialogues with various major external powers were opened in subsequent years and several other multilateral dialogue forums were created, such as ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, South Korea), EAS and ADMM-Plus. All these formats are ASEAN-centric in the sense that the

organisation hosts the meetings and sets the agenda, and the code of conduct is the TAC norms. This specific involvement of external actors in multiple, ASEAN-centred dialogue forums was intended to prevent Southeast Asia from falling into the exclusive orbit of any major power and to maintain a dynamic equilibrium<sup>159</sup> in the region.<sup>160</sup> From this perspective, ASEAN is the "key to stability in the Indo-Pacific".<sup>161</sup> These ideas have also found their analogy in the AOIP.<sup>162</sup> Neither Indonesia's IPCC nor ASEAN's AOIP provide for a structural framework that goes beyond the regional organisation and its multilateral forums.

However, ASEAN's inability to develop a coherent position and policy on the conflict over the South China Sea, among other things, has made the narrow limits of its security policy activities clear. Frustration at the sluggishness of the regional integration process and ASEAN's inability to reform has therefore repeatedly manifested itself in fierce debates in Jakarta about ASEAN's effectiveness and Indonesia's role in the organisation.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, although hardly mentioned in the official rhetoric on the Indo-Pacific, another structural element has increasingly become part and parcel of Jakarta's regional security policy: minilateral cooperation.

One such minilateral format is the trilateral Australia-India-Indonesia format, which currently focuses on combating illegal fishing and piracy. Generally, the cooperation of like-minded states on long-term strategic challenges is becoming increasingly important for Jakarta, primarily to prevent a further erosion of the rule-based international order and to deal with the Sino-American rivalry.<sup>164</sup> From Jakarta's point of

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Timo Kivimäki, "Southeast Asia and Conflict Prevention. Is ASEAN Running out of Steam?" *The Pacific Review* 25, no. 4 (2012): 403–27.

<sup>158</sup> Marsudi, "Indonesia: Partner for Peace, Security, Prosperity" (see note 150).

<sup>159</sup> "An Indonesian Perspective on the Indo-Pacific" (see note 143).

<sup>160</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analysing Regional Security Strategies", *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 113–57.

<sup>161</sup> Ryacudu, "Speech at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019" (see note 146).

<sup>162</sup> Dewi Fortuna Anwar, "Indonesia and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 111–29, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz223>.

<sup>163</sup> Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Necessity or Norm-Setting Exercise?" CSIS Lecture Series on Regional Dynamics (Jakarta, 28 August 2019), <https://csis.or.id/events/indonesia-asean-and-the-indo-pacific-strategic-necessities-or-norm-setting-exercise/>.

<sup>164</sup> Premesha Saha, Natalie Sambhi and Evan A. Laksmiana, *India-Australia-Indonesia Maritime Partnership: Shared Challenges, Compelling Opportunities* (New Delhi: ORF, February



view, the above-mentioned minilateral formats function complementarily – and not contrary to – an ASEAN-centred security architecture. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, on a normative level, Indonesia ensures that these formats always refer back to the ASEAN Way and the centrality of ASEAN. On the other hand, they bring together like-minded small and medium-sized powers and in so doing follow traditional ASEAN foreign policy principles, such as strategic autonomy and equidistance between the major powers. Yet the government under Joko Widodo is critical of those minilateral formats which, in its eyes, do not take these principles into account, i.e. are not ASEAN-centred and pursue hegemonic intentions.<sup>165</sup> This applies above all to the Quad and AUKUS. Regarding AUKUS in particular, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry expressed concern about an increasing arms race and the softening of nuclear non-proliferation through the planned delivery of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. It did not refrain from public criticism.<sup>166</sup>

### More multilateral diplomacy than manoeuvres

In light of all this, it might not be surprising that Indonesia's activities in the Indo-Pacific have largely been concentrated on the ASEAN subregion itself, with a focus on multilateral cooperation.<sup>167</sup> This includes, for example, the negotiations with Beijing on an ASEAN-China Code of Conduct in the South

2022), <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-australia-indonesia-maritime-partnership/>.

**165** Calvin Khoe, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Strategy: What's Next? – Interview with Dr Siswo Pramono", *FPCI* (blog), 5 May 2021, <https://www.fpcindonesia.org/2021/05/05/asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific-and-indonesias-indo-pacific-strategy-whats-next-interview-with-dr-siswo-pramono/>.

**166** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement on Australia's Nuclear-powered Submarines Program", Jakarta, 17 September 2021, [https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/2937/siaran\\_pers/statement-on-australias-nuclear-powered-submarines-program](https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/2937/siaran_pers/statement-on-australias-nuclear-powered-submarines-program); Sebastian Strangio, "Indonesia and Malaysia Reiterate Concerns about AUKUS Pact", *The Diplomat*, 19 October 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/indonesia-and-malaysia-reiterate-concerns-about-aukus-pact/>.

**167** Prabowo Subianto, "Opening Address of the 17th IISS Manama Dialogue", Manama, 19 November 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/-/media/files/manama-dialogue/2021/plenary-transcripts/opening-address/lieutenant-general-ret-d-prabowo-subianto-minister-of-defense-indonesia--as-delivered.pdf>.

China Sea, which have been ongoing for more than 20 years. With the help of this code of conduct, mechanisms are to be established at the diplomatic level to deal with the conflicts over (artificial) islands, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), fishing grounds and raw materials. In addition, in a *note verbale* to the United Nations, Indonesia stressed the validity of the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague<sup>168</sup>, setting out its position on the international maritime status of Indonesia's Natuna Islands located on the southern border of the South China Sea, and the EEZs surrounding them. China is contesting parts of these EEZs with reference to alleged historical rights. Due to the conflicting interests of China and ASEAN, it has so far not been possible to establish a code of conduct for the South China Sea, which Indonesia also still supports.

The High Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation, initiated by Jakarta in 2019, was also based on ASEAN. Its aim is to strengthen communication in the region and thereby promote confidence-building. The circle of participants in this dialogue is identical to that of the EAS.<sup>169</sup>

At operational level, joint patrols with neighbouring countries to secure sea lanes feature prominently on the Indonesian agenda. The Indomalphi (Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Trilateral Maritime Patrol) initiative was formed by the three countries bordering the Sulu Sea. It was formed in response to the increased presence of militant Islamist actors with links to IS. Joint patrols in the Sulu Sea have been taking place in this format since 2017. So too has an exchange of intelligence information. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have been conducting joint anti-piracy patrols in the Strait of Malacca since 2004 as part of the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) agreement. Such coalitions of the willing are meant to enable cooperation below the often cumbersome ASEAN level. In line with the norms mentioned above, these minilateral formats are inclusive in nature. Thailand, for example, joined the MSP as early as 2006, while Viet-

**168** In the ruling, the judges of the Court of Arbitration had, among other things, declared China's historical claims to large parts of the South China Sea to be incompatible with international law.

**169** "Indonesia to Hold High-level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation", *Antara News*, 18 March 2019, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/122780/indonesia-to-hold-high-level-dialogue-on-indo-pacific-cooperation>.

nam and Myanmar have observer status. Singapore, Brunei and Thailand are observers to Indomalphi.<sup>170</sup>

Jakarta's willingness to cooperate in minilateral formats has further increased in recent years. This is particularly visible in the area of maritime security. The main reason for this is probably the manifest divergences on maritime security within ASEAN – especially with regard to the South China Sea conflict. Disagreements primarily exist between states such as Cambodia and Laos, which operate under strong Chinese influence, as well as between Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines. At the end of 2021, Jakarta also launched initial talks with the other four ASEAN conflict parties in the South China Sea (Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines) as well as Singapore. The goal here is to better coordinate the littoral states' efforts to uphold the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>171</sup> In addition, Jakarta initiated a first meeting of representatives of the coast guards in the ASEAN states in 2021. Possibilities for cooperation in the event of “disruptions” to regional security were discussed.<sup>172</sup>

Indonesia has also expanded its bilateral cooperation with India, the USA, Australia and Japan. With India, for example, Jakarta has launched an annual naval manoeuvre called Samudra Sakti. The Garuda Shield manoeuvre, also held annually together with the USA, has been recently expanded and, according to media reports, involved 14 participating states in 2022. However, cooperation formats such as Garuda Shield have actually existed for a long time and have only recently been given the additional label “Indo-Pacific”. Indonesia has also established annual “2+2” formats between the respective foreign and defence ministers with states such as Australia and Japan. It can therefore be inferred that Indonesia has intensified its bilateral relations in the field of security policy with, among others, Japan, India and Australia in recent years. However, this mostly concerns co-

operation in the field of “non-traditional security”, i.e. disaster control, humanitarian aid, measures against illegal fishing, environmental protection, economic security and pandemic control. Furthermore, Jakarta always insists on the importance of an ASEAN-centred security order and the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive space.<sup>173</sup>

In comparison with other Indo-Pacific actors, however, what is most striking is how few concrete initiatives Indonesia has launched by itself so far, despite its claim to a regional leadership role as *primus inter pares* within ASEAN. The government under Joko Widodo gives less priority to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific than to economic cooperation and the issue of recovery from Covid-19.<sup>174</sup>

**170** Grace Guiang, “Are Minilaterals the Future of ASEAN Security?” *East Asia Forum* (blog), 30 September 2017, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/30/are-minilaterals-the-future-of-asean-security/>.

**171** Ian Storey, “Cause and Effect: The Right Security Architecture for the Indo-Pacific”, *The Interpreter* (blog), 4 April 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/cause-and-effect-right-security-architecture-indo-pacific>.

**172** “Indonesia Seeks Cooperation among ASEAN Coast Guards”, *Radio Free Asia*, 28 December 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/asean-indonesia-12282021132246.html>.

**173** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Minister for Foreign Affairs Urges the US to Play Positive Role in the Region”, Jakarta, 14 July 2021, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/read/2709/berita/minister-for-foreign-affairs-urges-the-us-to-play-positive-role-in-the-region>.

**174** Khoe, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and Indonesia's Indo-Pacific Strategy” (see note 165).

# Conclusions and Recommendations

This analysis has shown that the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific is undergoing a comprehensive transformation. Changes are apparent in the understanding of regional security (and more specifically regarding the role of the USA), in the norms that underpin it, in its structures, and in the observable behaviour of key actors.

In the USA and Australia, an antagonistic understanding of regional security currently dominates, according to which regional security in the Indo-Pacific must be defended against a revisionist China. The dominant role of the USA (“US leadership”), on which the defence against perceived Chinese revisionism is based, is therefore understood to be a quasi-public good. Although India shares the perception of increasing Chinese expansionism as a threat, it also sees the growing strategic instability in the region as the result of the USA’s growing relative weakness. Much of the thinking on regional security policy by the government under Narendra Modi therefore focuses on achieving India’s self-imposed task as a “security guarantor” in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In the long term, this includes establishing a security architecture in the “Indo” part of the Indo-Pacific with India at the centre. Indonesia sees regional security threatened primarily by the Sino-American rivalry and is suspicious of both great powers and their attempts to establish spheres of influence. The prevailing view in Jakarta is to manage regional security via cooperation and inclusivity. Consequently, the government strictly rejects any antagonistic, exclusive conception of a regional security architecture in which all states in the region would have to decide for or against the USA or China. The normative basis of Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPCC) is anchored in international law and the UN Charter. Indonesia’s past as leader of the Non-Aligned Movement also plays an important role. The country has always attached great importance to the Bandung Principles, such as peaceful cooperation, respect for territorial

integrity and dialogue, which are also reflected in the ASEAN Way.

India also makes frequent normative references to international law when it speaks of maintaining a rules-based order for the Indo-Pacific. In addition, New Delhi positively emphasises the ASEAN Way and its associated norms such as territorial sovereignty, peaceful conflict resolution, and non-interference in internal affairs. According to the Modi government, all actors who subscribe to these norms are part of an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific. However, from the often thinly veiled criticism of China’s assertive behaviour it can be inferred that, from New Delhi’s perspective, China is currently violating rather than respecting the aforementioned norms.

The USA and Australia tend to subscribe to liberal internationalism as their normative basis. According to this, the rule-based order that must be defended in the Indo-Pacific against revisionist efforts is firstly based on norms of international law, such as peaceful conflict resolution and the preservation of territorial integrity. However, liberal norms and values such as open, free market economies, democratically constituted political systems, and the protection of human rights, carry far more normative weight for Canberra and Washington. This can be seen, among other things, in the creation of an “Alliance of Democracies” by the Biden administration.

From the perspective of the USA and Australia, the most important structural element in the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific continues to be bilateral alliances and partnerships, above all the hub-and-spokes system with the USA as the “hub” at the centre. However, in line with the concept of integrated deterrence, the USA’s allies (“spokes”) in the Indo-Pacific are to fulfil much more important functions in the future than before. They are to serve as an integral part of a networked security architecture, which will continue to operate under US leadership, but in which the USA’s allies and partners are

to shoulder a greater share of the overall burden, and therefore take on more tasks and also cooperate more intensively among themselves. The balance of power in the region in favour of the USA and its allies is thus to be structurally secured through a stronger Asianisation of the security architecture. In this context, minilateral cooperation formats such as the Quad and AUKUS are becoming increasingly important. Multilateral organisations such as ASEAN are mentioned in Washington's and Canberra's strategy papers, but play no role in the debates on the networked security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

From India's perspective, however, the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific has a much more multipolar structure. New Delhi is highly critical of a bipolar structure that would divide the region into Chinese and US zones of influence. India has also made it clear in its Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPOI) that it rejects the formation of alliances. Instead, New Delhi prefers a multipolar security architecture based on a close-meshed network of bilateral partnerships between the major and middle powers in the region, below the threshold of military alliances. This network is increasingly reinforced by minilateral cooperation formats such as the Quad. Multilateral organisations are not central to India's IPOI in structural terms. However, ASEAN-led multilateral forums such as EAS and ARF do play a role in New Delhi's strategic thinking because they serve as platforms for dialogue and mutual confidence building.

For Indonesia, it is the multilateral ASEAN forums that are at the very centre of a desired open, inclusive Indo-Pacific security architecture. In Jakarta's view, the relevant structural changes can only come about if all regional actors, including the USA and China, are permanently integrated into multilateral forums. Jakarta hereby attaches great importance to the centrality of ASEAN. At the same time, the Indonesian government rejects military alliances as well as the minilateral formats the Quad and AUKUS, as these are de facto dominated by a major power: the USA. In Jakarta's view, alliances and associated minilateral formats would gradually undermine ASEAN's central role in regional security.

In practice, however, frustration at regional multilateral forums' lack of effectiveness has led to the expansion of security policy activities beyond ASEAN in Jakarta. This primarily includes bilateral cooperation as well as trilateral and even minilateral formats outside the ASEAN-framework. It is also noticeable that a large part of Jakarta's security policy activities

and initiatives have so far been at the diplomatic level, and less so at the defence or military levels. India has also been active in a number of multilateral formats, most notably BIMSTEC and ReCAAP, but also ASEAN-centric formats such as EAS and ADMM-Plus. Nevertheless, bilateral cooperation with India's immediate neighbours predominates. Such cooperation includes, for example, joint manoeuvres, arms exports, and training programmes. The Indian Navy is also increasingly patrolling important trade routes in the Indian Ocean. India's security policy activities continue to focus on the immediate vicinity. Beyond that, bilateral cooperation is increasing with the Quad states, some ASEAN states and also France, among others. India is also becoming more active in minilateral formats. This includes the Quad but also trilateral cooperation formats with Australia and Indonesia, and with Japan and Russia.

For Australia, on the other hand, one partner in particular is at the operational centre of its security policy: the USA. This is reflected in a multitude of joint activities such as manoeuvres, training and education programmes, arms deliveries, and the temporary stationing of US Marines in Australia. It is true that the interests of Canberra and Washington are not always congruent. For example, Australia does not participate in US-led FONOPs in the South China Sea. But overall, the expansion of its military alliance with Washington has been an absolute priority in Canberra for several years. Australia is also an active partner of the USA in AUKUS and the Quad. Australia is the only one of the states examined in this study which made the island states of the Western Pacific a regional focus of its security policies. Furthermore, while it still gives priority to its military alliance with the USA, concerns over Washington's domestic stability have caused Australia to broaden its perspective to include a wider network of partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. Canberra has therefore recently established bilateral partnerships with countries such as Singapore, France, Vietnam, India and Germany. In addition, the Australian government has increasingly entered trilateral formats, for example with India and Indonesia.

The main focus of US activities is the expansion of its bilateral alliances for the purpose of implementing the concept of integrated deterrence. This includes, for example, the delivery of armaments, joint manoeuvres and training as well as intelligence cooperation. Washington also expanded bilateral cooperation with regional partners such as India and Singapore. Furthermore, a new trilateral security pact was founded

under US leadership in the form of AUKUS, whose membership Washington considers likely to be expanded in the future. It was also the US government that revived the Quad. Closer military cooperation has so far failed here due to India's resistance, but cooperation in the Quad does take place in the area of non-traditional security policy such as the fight against Covid-19. According to the US government, the Quad format is also likely to be expanded in future to include further cooperation partners ("Quad+"). In addition, Washington is also involved in a number of other trilateral cooperation formats, for example with India and Japan. Multilateral cooperation formats are repeatedly mentioned, but they are barely visible in the USA's observable behaviour in the area of security and defence.

### The Asianisation of the regional security architecture

In general, it can be deduced from these findings that the majority of the actors studied, with the exception of Indonesia, perceive the Indo-Pacific regional security architecture as one in which security is established against, rather than with, China. Structurally, this architecture still consists predominantly of US-led alliances. All actors assume that the US will remain the central security actor in the Indo-Pacific for the time being. Below the threshold of formal alliances, however, bilateral and minilateral partnerships are becoming increasingly important. At the same time, scepticism is spreading as to whether Washington will be able or willing to play its dominant role in the long term, either because of domestic factors in the USA or because of a relative decrease in power vis-à-vis Beijing. At the operational level, this has already led to some initial changes. On the one hand, the importance of the US allies (spokes) in relation to the US (hub) is growing, both through bilateral cooperation and through new minilateral formats such as AUKUS and the Quad.

On the other hand, the "spokes" are increasingly cooperating with each other and also cooperating more with like-minded partners outside the hub-and-spokes system, for example India and Indonesia. However, these forms of cooperation are mainly limited to certain policy fields and joint activities such as combating pandemics, counter-terrorism and illegal fishing. Aspects of defence policy are *at present* virtually non-existent in such cooperations. Thus the extent

to which these new types of cooperation will become permanently institutionalised, including defence policy, cannot be conclusively answered at present. However, it can at least be deduced from the findings that the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific will not be a simple remake of the hub-and-spokes system. The "spokes" will likely gain importance, as will the security cooperations between like-minded regional partners below the threshold of formal US alliances. These changes seem to mark the beginning of an Asianisation of the regional security architecture. Interestingly, these developments are thus far less apparent on the conceptual level than on the structural and practical level. This Asianised Indo-Pacific security architecture is one that is increasingly antagonistic towards China. At the same time, the multilaterally and inclusively oriented, traditionally ASEAN-centred forums continue to lose both structural and practical significance, and are not a priority at strategic nor operational level.

### Implications for Germany and the EU

For the EU and its member states, these developments mean firstly that an inclusive, multilaterally oriented security architecture for the Indo-Pacific is a distant prospect. In Europe, it is still posited that a regional security architecture is to emerge that would ideally include all regional actors – including China – and thereby enable cooperation with Beijing on common interests such as tackling the climate crisis and disarmament efforts. Yet most of the Indo-Pacific actors examined in this study increasingly see China as a threat rather than a partner. Therefore, they envisage – and are striving for – the establishment of a security architecture that establishes security against, and not with, China. This seems to confirm the fears expressed for years in Brussels and Berlin that the Sino-American rivalry is becoming structurally entrenched, and in turn causing bloc formation and polarisation in the region. What's more, the effective multilateralism propagated by the EU is also falling further and further behind in the face of a security architecture that increasingly consists of a juxtaposition of mostly exclusive bi- and minilateral cooperation formats. The ASEAN-centred multilateral cooperation formats may continue to exist, but their structural and practical significance is visibly dwindling.

Secondly, this study's findings show that neither the EU nor its member states hold much relevance in

terms of security policy in the strategies and observable activities of the states studied. Although the Quad, for example, describes European engagement and the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in a generally positive light, this is not substantiated further.<sup>175</sup> For Washington and Canberra, it is only the United Kingdom that plays a clearly defined strategic and operational role in this context because of its participation in AUKUS. In contrast, if EU member states are deemed to be important in terms of security policy, it is primarily in their role as arms suppliers for the region.

Thirdly, it can be noted that the majority of the states studied increasingly tend to understand regional security policy as an instrument of geopolitical balancing vis-à-vis China, either as part of a wider competition for zones of influence or even as part of a direct containment policy against Beijing. Other strategic goals, such as the preservation of the rules-based order, are increasingly seen as appendages. This binary understanding of security, which follows a zero-sum logic, continues to gain ground and challenges the EU to define its own strategic priorities more precisely than before. In essence, it is a matter of highlighting what role Germany and the EU should and can play in this complex situation, what capacities it requires, and what initiatives must be launched. How can Berlin and Brussels actively contribute to regional stability and security in an increasingly antagonistic security architecture, while at the same time complying with the self-proclaimed imperative of inclusiveness? So far, German and also European policy towards the Indo-Pacific has been mainly reactive. Strategies or guidelines were formulated in response to changes in the region. This was supposedly done by taking into account the far-reaching geopolitical dynamics there. What was neglected, however, was a comprehensive revision of the long-held understanding of the role of the EU and its member states, as well as their strategic concepts and instruments. In this context, a clear positioning vis-à-vis the PRC was avoided, as was an answer to the question of how Germany and the EU should act in the context of the intensifying Sino-American rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. This is surprising, because a driving force for change in the regional security architecture is China's rise and its resulting power and ambition in the field of security policy.

<sup>175</sup> The White House, "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement", Tokyo, 24 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>.

On the one hand, the EU and its member states continue to emphasise — similarly to ASEAN in its AOIP — that multilateral cooperation and inclusiveness are central to its Indo-Pacific policy. On the other hand, in the area of security policy, it intensified mainly bilateral cooperation with like-minded partners in the region. The EU has not established any security cooperation with the PRC, unlike many ASEAN member states such as Indonesia and Singapore, which advocate an inclusive, multilateral security architecture. This strategic ambiguity may be due to conflicting interests between EU member states. It is however of little help when it comes to developing and highlighting clear strategic priorities and outlining the EU's corresponding role.

The example of Indonesia, representative of many small and medium-sized states, reveals that criticism of the increasing geo-politicisation of the Indo-Pacific and its division into antagonistic blocs does very much exist in the region. Indonesia and a number of small and medium-sized states are therefore still potential partners for the inclusive multilateralism propagated by the EU. The open regionalism favoured by these actors provides possibilities for involving the EU and its member states in open, inclusive multilateral structures. Moreover, the security interests of those states are not primarily focused on containing Beijing, if only because of their strong economic dependence on China. The top strategic priority here should therefore be to promote inclusive security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In addition, the importance of ASEAN should be reassessed in view of its progressive marginalisation in security policy. ASEAN member states themselves are increasingly relying on bi-, tri- and minilateral formats. It would therefore seem advisable for the EU and its member states to turn to such formats more intensively than before, and to explore related possibilities for cooperation.

The changes outlined above, especially the emerging bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation, also make it difficult to intensify cooperation with partners in the region on a practical level. To participate in such a security architecture would inevitably mean supporting various cooperation formats simultaneously. Cultivating bilateral partnerships with the US, its allies and like-minded partners would be as much a part of this as cooperating, at least temporarily, in open minilateral formats (such as a future Quad+) and participating in the existing multilateral forums to which the EU and its member states are committed in the context of promoting multilateralism. All this could

push the EU and its members to the limits of their current capacities and resources. These would have to be increased accordingly in the future — first and foremost the size of embassies in the region.

## Recommendations

Against this background, it will be necessary to prioritise the partners of the EU and its member states as well as the main policy fields and corresponding initiatives. In addition to focusing on the major powers in the region, Berlin and Brussels should further strengthen security cooperation with India, and also with the middle powers such as Japan, Indonesia, Australia, South Korea and Vietnam. Their significance in the emerging security architecture is likely to grow rather than shrink in the future. Cooperation should focus above all on the broad policy field of maritime security. Although a regular deployment of European naval units is (by now) welcomed by many actors in the region, it does not de facto change the regional balance of power. The EU member states simply lack the capacity to make a significant military contribution to regional maritime security. The deployment of warships such as the frigate *Bavaria* serves primarily as a political signal to the region and is interpreted in exactly this way in the region, too. However, contributions to regional maritime security are by no means exhausted with the deployment of frigates. EU support should be expanded in the development of partners' capacities, for example in terms of maritime domain awareness, in anti-piracy operations, and also at the level of international maritime law, especially in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Cooperation with partners should also be expanded in policy fields of “non-traditional security”, for example the sustainable use of maritime resources. The danger of duplicating measures between EU states should be minimised by an EU-wide coordination mechanism for the Indo-Pacific. In general, security relations should be deepened and intensified, for example through regular high-level presence at existing security forums or through new bi- or even minilateral formats. The purpose is to further explore common interests and to better coordinate future security policy engagement in the region with partners.

On the surface, almost all states in the region are united by their normative commitment to international law and to an order based on it. But trust in the

stability of such an order is fragile because Washington and its allies have repeatedly broken its rules themselves.

The lack of a widely accepted normative foundation for the regional security architecture in the region, as well as the other changes listed, are all characteristics of a security order in transition. Therefore, these are by no means simple mistakes or defects in an otherwise stable order that could possibly be remedied or repaired by external actors from Europe or other parts of the world. Moreover, it can be assumed that this period of transition upheaval will continue to be present for the foreseeable future.

Therefore, German and European policymakers must adapt their strategic thinking and strategic concepts to the specific features of an Asianising security architecture in the Indo-Pacific as soon as possible. In this context, Asianisation is by no means to be equated with pushing out external (Western) actors. Triggered by concerns about an expansive China and fears that US engagement in the region could weaken, multiple new cooperation formats and partnerships are emerging at the bilateral and minilateral levels. Some of them are open to external actors. These emerging cooperation formats thus present Berlin and Brussels with numerous points of contact for security cooperation — albeit under significantly different auspices than before.

## Abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty
AOIPASEAN	Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARFASEAN	Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CICA	Confidence Building Measures in Asia
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.)
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
FIPIC	Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
G77	Group of 77
GDP	gross domestic product
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPCC	Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
MSP	Malacca Straits Patrol
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ORF	Observer Research Foundation (New Delhi)
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Solna)
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (ASEAN)
TIV	Trend Indicator Value
UK	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea



