



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

INDO-PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



A monthly Newsletter on Security and Strategic Issues on Indo-Pacific Region from Centre for Air Power Studies

From Editor's Desk

While the Ukraine crisis persists, discussions are abound on how the experience will impact the Indo-Pacific region, including within the Quad format at the Leaders' summit in March. This month, amidst the context of the ongoing war, we take a look back at the US' recently updated Indo-Pacific strategy and India's place in it, France's ambitious Indo-Pacific goals for its EU presidency; the outcomes and essentials of the February Quad Ministerial meet; and the future of drones in the balance of power dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. Our carefully curated selection of cherry picks features, among other things, how the China threat looms larger than the Russia-Ukraine crisis, how extra-regional challenges are testing the Quad, and the significance of Bangladesh in the region. Last but not the least, starting this month, we introduce to you a new section under the SM Corner 'CAPS Experts In Focus' to highlight the exceptional work of our scholars.

The Ukraine war has not only significantly changed global threat calculus, but also is causing states to revisit deterrence measures and readiness. The situation is fast-moving and we will keep a close eye to project how it agitates the Indo-Pacific. Happy reading!

Jai Hind

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QUOTE

Indo-Pacific is central to world and today India has more capabilities, more influence"

S Jaishankar,

The external affairs minister, India

Opinions/Review/Expert View

Decoding The Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy

Source: Vivek Mishra and Premesha Saha, ORF

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/decoding-the-biden-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>. 19 Feb, 2022.



The Biden presidency brought out its Indo-Pacific strategy on 12 February 2022, a day after the Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting in Melbourne, Australia. This is clearly reflective that the Quad is considered the most potential platform for furthering of the US objectives and strategy in the Indo-Pacific. This region has been a dedicated policy focus of various US Presidents like President Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' or 'Rebalance' strategy and the Trump era's own 'Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific', therefore, Biden's Indo-Pacific policy depicts a sustained interest in and priority of the region. The document potentially coming out at a critical stage in European security restructuring, requiring considerable US' focus and resources on another flank to deter a Russian threat to Ukraine, underscores the indispensability of a sustained regional strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The document's assertion that the US 'will focus on every corner of the region-from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, to South Asia and Oceania,

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including the Pacific Islands' seems intended towards cementing back the eroded assurance of the US support to its allies during the Trump presidency, as well as to insinuate that US' focus on one flank of this vast region will not be at the cost of ignoring the other.

Not surprisingly, the document clearly lays out the China threat as one of the primary reasons for Washington's intensifying focus in the region. Broadly, the document does not mince words on its China challenge and the great power competition that the US faces from Beijing in the areas of economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might. Specifically, Australia's diplomatic tension with China, India's ongoing border standoff across the LAC,

tensions around sovereignty in East and South China seas, and the ever-increasing threat looming over Taiwan are all mentioned under China's aggressive, bullying, and coercive strategies. Respect for human rights and international law, including freedom of navigation, are equally stressed upon in the document. At the same time, the need to work with China on issues like climate change, non-proliferation has also been highlighted. The document is clear-eyed in its policy of seeking to compete with China along with its partners and allies of the region, while leaving enough room for cooperation with China. While it cannot be denied that most of US' allies and partners in the region like Philippines, Australia, Japan, India does recognise China's 'not so peaceful rise' and is looking to strengthen cooperation with the US, but at the same time there are countries like Thailand, South Korea,

New Zealand, some ASEAN member countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, also the EU who are still adopting the hedging approach and treading along carefully amidst the US-China competition. Therefore, expecting all of its partners to work alongside the US to compete against the Chinese rise, may seem like a far-fetched one. Like the US, these countries would also want a mix of competition and cooperation in their policies towards China.

Strategically, there are two planks that undergird Biden's Indo-Pacific policy. First, a collectivisation of efforts of all the Indo-Pacific partners is placed at the centre of the effort to change the regional strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific in which China would operate. Thereby, a regional balance of influence along with like-minded partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific, broadening spectrum of manoeuvrability for other Indo-Pacific partners. Secondly, the US seeks to turn the regional balance of influence in the Indo-Pacific in the favour of itself and its partners by aligning its approach with that of its allies and partners in the region. The document outlines a string of countries and regional organisations that the US seeks to engage in building a networked Indo-Pacific security architecture. These include Australia, India, Japan, France, ROK, New Zealand, the UK, France, the EU, the ASEAN and the Pacific Island nations.

The need to work alongside India, to "support a strong India as a partner in this regional vision" and strengthen this bilateral alliance further in new domains, such as health, space, and cyber space; deepen economic and technology cooperation has been repeatedly harped upon and marked out in the action plan of the strategy. India has

been recognised as the leader in South Asia, the net security provider in the Indian Ocean; having substantial influence in the ASEAN; and an important player in the Quad. Given that the US' focus has been more on the Western Pacific, what kind of a role India expects the US to play alongside in the Western Indian Ocean which is India's backyard and where the Chinese threat is looming could be outlined as well.

The documents also lay out an action plan carving out the methods and ways that will be implemented to achieve its objectives in the region. The first strategic objective of advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific promises to link three important dimensions through a process of standardisation: norms of governance; consistency with international laws and partnership based on critical and emerging technologies, space and cyber domains.

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Internally, within the countries of the Indo-Pacific, the free and open aspirations would span sectors like information, expression and governance. In seeking these, the ability of the US to achieve fiscal transparency, exposing corruption and driving reforms across the economies of the Indo-Pacific may prove to be the most challenging. The second aspect seeks a consistency in the rules-based order across the span of the Indo-Pacific region, with special focus in the South and East China seas and therefore, the need to work with the Congress to fund the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and the Maritime Policy Initiative have been laid out. The third area of focus, to advance common approaches to critical and emerging technologies, is in consonance with the Biden administration's focus in the area both internally and externally. While internationally, critical and emerging technologies have received

renewed focus in the recent past, including through the Quad's reformed objectives, internally the Fast Track Action Subcommittee on critical and emerging technologies under the National Science and Technology Council has recently expanded its mandate in this area.

A part of Biden's Indo-Pacific policy focuses on addressing existing internal conflicts between the nations that the US seeks to bring together, as well as prevent future bilateral discord between them. By specifying the state of ties between Japan and the ROK, the policy makes clear that prioritising transnational issues over bilateral differences will be key to stitching together a melange of interests in the region.

The Action Plan part of the document particularly mentions the commitment of the US to invest in an "Empowered and Unified ASEAN". Some ASEAN countries have raised suspicions about the US' long-term commitment towards the region after Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Therefore, there is a need to review this fractured relationship. From hosting the first ever US-ASEAN Summit in Washington DC to prioritising investing 100\$ million in new US-ASEAN initiatives has found a mention in the Action Plan as well.

The Quad members' cooperation on global health, climate change, critical and emerging technology, infrastructure, cyber, education, and clean energy has been identified as a key element to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific. As such, the stated integration of the Quad into the US Indo-Pacific policy by earmarking common areas of policy pursuit makes Biden's policy clearer than that of the Trump administration.

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Biden's Indo-Pacific also seeks a 'bridge' between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific, particularly with larger roles for the EU and NATO in the Indo-Pacific to seek common objectives. While increasing strategic roles in the Indo-Pacific for the EU and individual countries like France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK is a fact, the timing of NATO's mention could raise a few eyebrows.

The objective to drive prosperity in the Indo-Pacific rests on two main goals: Framing and strengthening an Indo-Pacific economic framework and closing the infrastructure gap in the region with the help of the G7 partners through the Build Back Better World initiative(B3W). Infrastructure

needs in developing Asia are vast; The Asian Development Bank estimates that \$26 trillion is needed through 2030. Past US initiatives like the Blue Dot have not been able to make enough substantial contributions, therefore, laying out a few key projects that the B3W, would focus on, especially in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, would have been helpful. The focus on secured global telecommunication, 5G vendor diversification and Open Radio Access Network (O-RAN) technology is geared towards keeping suspicious competitors like Huawei out and yet curate a favoured and competitive environment in these areas.

The strength of US Indo-Pacific strategy is as good as its network of security alliances and partnerships, which it calls its 'single greatest asymmetric strength'. As such, interoperability with its allies as well partners in the region remain central to US vision of Indo-Pacific security. The security of the Taiwan Strait, complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula,

achieving new gains through AUKUS, advancing Major Defence Partnership with India, investing in the ASEAN, countering terrorism, biological threats and cybersecurity remain predictable key security objectives for the US in the region. At the grand strategy level, the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy has sought a seamless integration of US domestic objectives with its international goals. Be it the climate crisis, clean-energy technology investments, energy security, health and working with multilateral institutions, all objectives seek a balanced alignment.

Quad Meet Focuses on Indo-Pacific Cooperation

Source: Suhasini Haidar, *The Hindu*

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/external-affairs-minister-s-jaishankar-attends-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-melbourne-on-february-11-2022/article38412830.ece>. 12 Feb, 2022.



Left to right; U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, and Foreign Minister of Japan Yoshimasa Hayashi participate in the Quad foreign ministers' press conference in Melbourne, Friday, Feb. 11, 2022. | Photo Credit: AP

Calling for justice for the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai (2008) and the Pathankot airbase attack (2016) for the first time since the group was formed, Foreign Ministers of the Australia-India-Japan said that the Quad is already cooperating on sharing intelligence on threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

The group of ministers, who held their fourth Quad ministerial meeting in Melbourne on Friday

also resolved to speed up delivery of more than a billion Covid vaccines to be manufactured in India, to hold a special meet on climate change this year, and step efforts to ensure maritime security in the region. They announced plans for a Quad summit including PM Modi, U.S. President Biden and Australian PM Morrison to be hosted by Japan's PM Kishida in Tokyo in the "first half of 2022".

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While the grouping committed to stronger cooperation on Indo-Pacific initiatives, divisions appeared in their stand on global developments like Russia-NATO tensions over Ukraine and sanctions against Myanmar's military, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed an independent line during a press conference held after the meeting.

"Where we are concerned, we don't follow a policy of national sanctions," Mr. Jaishankar said, pointing out that India is "troubled" by

the situation in Myanmar post-coup, but its thinking is guided by concerns over cross border insurgencies, Covid infections, and concerns of a humanitarian situation that could arise from food shortages when asked about fresh US sanctions being placed on Myanmar.

In contrast, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has backed the sanctions, pushed for countries to stop arms trade with the Myanmar military. The joint statement called for a return to democracy in Myanmar, and also condemned North Korea's recent ballistic missile tests.

Foreign Ministers of Australia, Japan and U.S. also took a sharp line on the build up of Russian troops along the border with Ukraine in recent weeks, where Mr. Blinken warned that "an invasion [by Russian troops] could begin at any time". Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne expressed "deep concern" about Russian "aggression", while Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa raised tensions over Ukraine as well. However Mr. Jaishankar did not speak about the issue, nor did the Russia-Ukraine situation find any mention in the joint statement. When asked by Australian journalists about India's stand, Mr. Jaishankar said that the Quad meeting was "focused on the Indo-Pacific." "So I think you should figure out the geography there, and where we stand," he added.

Vaccines initiative

The joint statement issued included a renewed commitment to the "flagship" Quad Vaccine initiative to deliver at least one billion vaccines produced at Hyderabad's Biological E facility

by the end of 2022 to Indo-Pacific countries, and to a pledge to donate 1.3 billion vaccine doses globally. It also recorded progress on the other fields for cooperation identified during the Quad summit last year, including climate change, critical and emerging technologies, counter-terrorism, infrastructure, humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief (HADR) and maritime domain awareness.

"We call on all countries to ensure that territory under their control is not used to launch terror attacks and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks,"

Bilateral meetings

After the Quad meeting, Mr. Jaishankar also held separate bilateral meetings with Mr. Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa.

Mr. Jaishankar is due to meet Mr. Blinken in Washington for a "2+2" along with India-US defence ministers, for a meeting that has been delayed since November.

In talks with Mr. Yoshimasa, Mr. Jaishankar also hoped to welcome the Japanese PM Kishida for a visit to India, that has been delayed since former PM Shinzo Abe put off his trip in December 2019, and the two ministers agreed to hold the next round of the India-Japan 2+2 soon.

All the Quad ministers called on Australian PM Scott Morrison, who said the Quad must ensure regional countries "can enjoy their sovereignty, and not be coerced".

The Future of Drones in The Indo-Pacific

Source: Harun Talha Ayanoglu, *The Diplomat*

<https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/the-future-of-drones-in-the-indo-pacific/>, 23 Feb, 2022.



Visitors walk past a Chinese made CH-4 drone during the 13th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, also known as Airshow China 2021 on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021 in Zhuhai in southern China's Guangdong province.

Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

Technological supremacy creates asymmetrical relationships between states. Similar to ballistic missiles, smart munitions, and cyberwarfare capability, can unmanned weapon systems, specifically unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), potentially shape the ways war are fought?

The realist theory of international relations underscores that states avoid fighting each other because of costs. War is politically costly because governments cannot send their people to the battlefield to kill and be killed unless there is a reason worth dying for. War also comes with unbearable economic costs. Hence, “victory but at what cost” is another point of concern for states.

Like realists, the philosopher Immanuel Kant agreed with the cost of war theory and noted that as technology improved, battles became more destructive and costly. Hence, states will not choose violence as their first resort. Nevertheless, instead of eschewing conflicts, states concentrate on reducing the cost of fighting. The rise of drones

is helping governments reduce this cost.

Throughout the Cold War and specifically in Vietnam and Cambodia, drones were deployed for intelligence purposes. General Atomics developed the first advanced intelligence UAVs in 1989, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and Turkish Air Force were its first customers. Following 9/11, the worldwide military use of drones skyrocketed. Conflict concepts evolved to include the “global war on terrorism and humanitarian intervention” which brought new understandings of both war and enemy. Military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were so-called test-beds for UAVs, which were deployed to monitor the activities of resistance forces as well as to neutralize them. The combat-proven success of UAVs was appreciated by other countries. Israel caught the trend and produced the second-most famous UAV, Heron.

Similar to the birth of UAVs, unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) were born out of necessity. UAVs were convenient for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. However, the reaction time between detection and strike could reach up to 30 minutes, giving targets time to avoid air raids. To tackle this challenge, a Hellfire guided-missile-mounted Predator, also known as the MQ-9 Reaper, completed its first flight in 2004.

Drones are changing the nature of war, but are yet to decisively shift the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Today, many countries operate drones for a wide range of purposes. According to a RAND Corporation report published in 2014, 50 countries have developed indigenous surveillance and reconnaissance drones, while 23 of them produce UCAVs. The numbers of countries developing and operating drones continues to increase, since UAVs meet many of the needs of irregular warfare; they

are operated as part of military operations in urban warfare, rebellion, and counterterrorism. Conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Ukraine, and Libya have demonstrated that such systems will continue to play a more significant role on the battlefield.

The development of drones represents a leap in the war-fighting capacities of states, while reducing the cost. Compared to conventional aircraft, drones are much cheaper to produce and carry out similar tasks. The cost of forming a drone squadron almost equals the price of few fighter jets. On the other hand, they are operated remotely, and in the event of accidents or being shot down, states do not have to confront the political consequence of the loss of personnel. Democratically-elected decision-makers can avoid the public pressure involved in using hard power overseas thanks to UAVs. The United States was able to bypass the War Power Act before its military intervention in the civil war in Libya since no boots on the ground were needed.

Unconventional Solutions to Unconventional Threats and Proliferation

UAVs have operational advantages in coping with emerging threats. After 9/11, it became clear that conventional fighter jets and reconnaissance aircraft were not sufficient and convenient for monitoring resistance activities in mountainous regions, as rebels could change locations and hide rapidly. Therefore, governments needed a new way to monitor these regions. Drones can fly around 20-25 hours (some versions of Reapers can fly over 60-70 hours via in-flight refueling); although a similar flight length by a manned fighter is technically possible with in-flight refueling, pilots cannot endure long hours because of distraction

and fatigue. Also, even advanced fighters cannot bear maneuvers involving forces up to 9G, since this is the limit of the human body. For drones, even forces up to 50G do not pose any problems if they are built to be compatible with such high G-force exposures. Thus, some have posited that fifth-generation fighters will be the last military aircraft controlled by human pilots.

New developments in weapon systems have come along with novel threats, and for UAVs the main threat is proliferation. Governments are not the only admirers of UAVs or UCAVs; they are also appreciated by non-state armed groups, which

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pose grave threats to national security. Numerous non-state armed groups have incorporated UAVs into their operations, ranging from surveilling enemy positions to targeting their enemies. These armed groups are operating in regions where civil wars or extensive terrorism continue. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) is one of the most famous non-state armed groups operating UAVs. Besides IS, Yemeni Houthis have been using drones to target Saudi Arabian positions, such as the Abqaiq oil facilities, the world's largest oil processing plant. This set of bomb-laden drone attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia demonstrated that non-state armed groups operating drones can inflict damage on global oil supplies, as Saudi Aramco had to stop its operations in the wake of attacks.

Drones in the Indo-Pacific

From 2015 onward, the drone club has been expanding in the Indo-Pacific. Following the success of drones on various battlefields, the desire to develop indigenous armed drones spread across Asia. Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Russia, Taiwan, and

India have taken steps toward developing armed drones. As of late 2020, 39 countries, five of them from the Asia-Pacific region, were operating armed drones.

Drones appeared to be one of the most cost-effective means to ensure a military presence, particularly in the fraught South and East China seas. Although maritime UAV technology is not yet proliferating at the pace of aerial drones, countries like the U.S., the U.K., and Russia are already looking seaward in UAV development. In addition to this, Indo-Pacific nations began relying on unmanned solutions for maritime missions, including monitoring China's activity and watching for piracy and transnational criminals.

In early November 2020, the Trump administration approved four arms purchase requests from Taiwan, including the Sea Guardian drone to strengthen Taiwan's intel-sharing capabilities. Taiwan is not the only admirer of the Sea Guardian; Japan has shown its interest in operating it to monitor China's navy and Chinese maritime militia activities.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asia faces challenges ranging from land and maritime border disputes to longstanding issues over piracy and rebellion. Thus, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam have purchased the Boeing ScanEagle. However, operating cost-effective and expendable drones has heated up the maritime disputes in the South China Sea and evoked a reaction from China, as Beijing accused the U.S. of seeking to contain China by selling drones to its neighbors.

Drones are a vital part of China's strategy for

winning information and intelligence wars, and China has become one of the world leaders in this sector by introducing a large number of advanced drone systems. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China has delivered 220 drones to 16 countries within the last decade. Michael Horowitz noted that armed drone proliferation is inevitable because of Chinese exports. China's exports have prompted other nations, such as South Korea, Turkey, and Russia, to boost their own efforts in developing indigenous drone capabilities.

Chinese drones have been filling the void created by the United States in the global drone market. Although the U.S. exports its drones to 55

countries, its strict regulations on the selling of military drones mean that most customers from Africa and the Middle East have turned to China. The Chinese state-owned company AVIC has been selling drones for use in various battlefields, such as to the UAE for use in Libya's civil war, to Egypt for targeting Sinai rebels, and to Saudi-led troops in Yemen. Although they are not as capable as the U.S. or Israeli ones, Chinese drones are much cheaper (the MQ-9 Reaper costs \$30 million, whereas the Wing Loong II costs \$1-2 million). Also, contrary to the United States, China does not pay much attention to how its customers operate these UAVs.

Can UAVs Shape the Future of Indo-Pacific?

Despite the combat-proven success of armed drones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh, it would be highly optimistic to anticipate similar results in disputed areas of the Indo-Pacific. There are several reasons

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for this.

First, drones have proved themselves on battlefields where there was irregular warfare in the case of state failure/collapse and a lack of advanced military systems. Some footage demonstrated that individually operating low-altitude air defense units were neutralized by drones in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, but this does not prove that drones are indestructible or stealthy. The absence of a nationwide integrated radar network ensured that these drones could infiltrate the enemy airspace. On the other hand, advanced battle management systems reinforce the capability of drones. The Turkish Armed Forces embraced a highly complicated and integrated operational concept in Syria. In this battle environment bolstered by AWACs and electronic warfare capabilities, Turkish drones could get credits against irregular and already damaged enemy forces.

Second, countries having disputes in the Indo-Pacific are financially more capable of maintaining and developing advanced military technologies than their Middle Eastern counterparts. South Korea, China, Japan, and Taiwan are the four wealthiest and militarily advanced countries in the region. On the southern flank, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines have been raising and maintaining competitive and advanced military forces. Therefore, operating drones in the region is not as easy as in the Middle East. Highly sophisticated nationwide radar networks, electronic warfare capabilities, and other advanced systems are likely to hinder the effective use of existing drones in military disputes and possible conflicts in the Indo-Pacific.

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UAVs increase the warfighting, spying, and intel-gathering capabilities of states because they are easy to develop, cheaper to operate, and expendable if needed. Moreover, by operating drones, democratically-elected decision-makers will be less vulnerable to public pressure in using hard power overseas. Soon UCAVs – of various types – will be one of the dominant machines of war, not only in counterterrorism operations but also in conflicts between states. On the other hand, the international community has witnessed that non-state armed groups began acquiring and operating drones modified from commercial versions. Such advancements represent another challenge to national security. Terror groups can launch devastating attacks using bomb-laden drones, just as Houthis mounted dozens of attacks in Saudi Arabia.

U.S., Israeli, Turkish, and Chinese drones have proved their success in battlefields where countries fought against irregular forces (in Syria and Yemen) or highly weak or outdated military establishments (in Nagorno-Karabakh). Whether UAVs would play a decisive role in combat against peer or near-peer competitors is far from certain.

According to Alexander Huang from Tamkang University, UAVs are a cost-effective means of observing huge areas like the South China Sea in a non-hostile situation. However, should it come to a military standoff in the Indo-Pacific region, where countries have more capacity and up-to-date military capabilities compared to already war-torn countries, UCAVs with their current capabilities

are still some time away from reshaping the rivalries of the Indo-Pacific region.

France's Ambitious Indo-Pacific Goals for its EU Presidency

Source: Jean-Pierre Cabestan, GMF

<https://www.gmfus.org/news/frances-ambitious-indo-pacific-goals-its-eu-presidency>. 08 Feb, 2022

It has set ambitious goals for its EU presidency regarding the Indo-Pacific. Nonetheless, the EU is not focused and united enough to deliver much on this front.

In November 2021, when visiting Indonesia, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian declared that the Indo-Pacific would be “a priority for France’s EU presidency.” It is clear that there are other priorities for President Emmanuel Macron, who will seek a second term in April’s presidential election. Demonstrating that the EU can protect its citizens and, as a result, that it “adds value” to the life of the French people is probably more important. In addition, Russia and Ukraine loom large on this short six-month period.

Holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of this year gives France the opportunity to determine the EU agenda and influence its longer-term policies.

Yet, in the ambitious program with over 60 priorities issued by Paris in December 2021 for its presidency of the Council of the EU, the Indo-Pacific and China in particular are far from absent. The sections related to the region highlight not only France’s own vision for the EU but also its efforts to reach out to—and compromise with—other member states as it wants to turn its own Indo-Pacific strategy into a steady feature of the EU’s common foreign and security policy. The question is whether this effort will strengthen the

EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy as well as its ability to act.

Being the first member state to have articulated an Indo-Pacific strategy, France is very much aware of its influence on the EU’s. Trying to capitalize on the territories that it administers and the armed forces that it still deploys in this vast region as well as to stimulate its weapon sales there, Macron presented the strategy in Sydney in 2018. Not long after, the armed forces and foreign ministries issued long documents detailing it. Later, the Netherlands and Germany made public their own Indo-Pacific strategies. In September 2021, the EU followed suit.

The EU’s strategy was published the day after the signing of the security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) that provoked a diplomatic crisis between Paris, Washington, and Canberra, and forced France to adjust its Indo-Pacific strategy. Since then, while relations with Australia have remained shaky, France has been keen to demonstrate that its Indo-Pacific strategy has not changed, forging closer partnerships with India, Indonesia, Japan, and other countries of the Indo-Pacific as well as resuming its security cooperation with the United States in the region.

There are many common features but also noticeable differences between the Indo-Pacific strategies of France and the EU. While claiming to be comprehensive and inclusive, France’s strategy is more oriented toward hard security, and it aims at better coordinating with partners in the region and the United States. The EU’s

strategy emphasizes values, connectivity, soft security issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection, and its special partnership with Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The objective and challenge of the French presidency of the Council of the EU therefore is to bring the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy closer to its own strategy.

Common Commitments

On the positive side, there is in Paris a real willingness to reach out to other member states to make the EU stronger and more credible vis-à-vis its main

“The objective and challenge of the French presidency of the Council of the EU is to bring the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy closer to its own strategy.”

partners in the Indo-Pacific. France has declared being “fully committed to implementing the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

To illustrate this commitment, on February 22, it will organize in Paris, together with the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, an Indo-Pacific Forum. In addition to all the member states, the foreign ministers from 30 Indo-Pacific countries have been invited, including those from India, Japan, and South Korea. This will be the main initiative of the French presidency related to the region.

The forum is planned to “address specific challenges related to security and defense, and digital and connectivity issues in the context of the Global Gateway initiative to develop infrastructure worldwide, as well as global challenges such as global health, climate change, biodiversity and the protection of the oceans.” Three roundtables will be organized to discuss these issues.

Launched in December 2021 and mobilizing

up to €300 billion in investment until 2027, the EU's Global Gateway initiative aims not only “to underpin a global recovery, taking into account our partners needs and EU's [sic] own interests” but also to balance China's growing influence in the region and beyond.

China and the United States have been excluded from the forum, highlighting the push by France and the EU for greater strategic autonomy. Yet, in an attempt to build consensus

among member states, in its presidency program, France has refrained from promoting too actively the EU's “strategic autonomy,” preferring instead to assert its “sovereignty”, which is mentioned 13 times. Although used five times, “strategic autonomy” refers in the document to the EU's ability to act independently only in terms of trade, technology, and innovation.

Moreover, worried about the criticism of Macron's neo-Gaullist inclinations, especially regarding Russia, France's program states that “it will support a deeper dialogue with the United States with regard to foreign policy, in particular concerning China and the Indo-Pacific region.” On this particular issue, Paris's goal is to make sure that, in the post-AUKUS context, the United States recognizes the important role that the EU can play in this part of the world. And on China specifically, France has promised to “continue to implement the approach chosen [by the EU] with regard to EU-China relations”.

This later commitment will not be too hard to meet since France, and the EU have much in common with regard to China. They have adopted more assertive language, considering it

since 2019 as a “systemic rival” and criticizing more openly Beijing’s infringements of human rights in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and elsewhere as well as its threat to security and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. While France and the EU continue to push for a ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment approved in principle by the EU and China in December 2020, they agree that the counter sanctions imposed by Beijing on some members of the European Parliament have made ratification impossible in the foreseeable future.

Finally, to reassure other EU capitals and Washington, in its presidency program, France reasserted that “a stronger and more operational European defense” is “complementary to NATO” and that “it will support the strengthening of EU-NATO cooperation in areas of mutual interest”. Yet, Paris has not changed its position that the Indo-Pacific remains outside of NATO’s action perimeter. In this region, it prefers to operate through a bilateral EU-US format, stating that the French presidency “will back the holding of the first EU-US defense and security dialogue and will work to strengthen partnerships, in particular in Africa and the Indo-Pacific.”

Prospects for Influence

Nonetheless, it remains to be seen how much can France influence and strengthen the EU’s capacity to act in the Indo-Pacific.

First, the Indo-Pacific Forum can highlight divergences among EU member states. Those more friendly toward China, such as Hungary or Poland, may object to working too closely with the United States and its allies in the region, such as Japan. Therefore, the forum is not certain to help Indo-Pacific countries adopt a common position regarding the role that they want the EU

to play in their region.

Second, like the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, France’s EU presidency program states that the “EU’s access to contested strategic areas will [...] be a priority.” Apart from France, few member states—Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—have the capacity and shown the willingness to deploy naval ships in the Indo-Pacific. The EU’s lack of security means compels it to continue to rely on economic, financial, and soft security means to enhance its influence in the region.

Third, the European countries that have deployed naval assets in the region have generally been very cautious. For example, in the South China Sea, they have always refrained from entering the 12 nautical mile limit around the artificial islands controlled by China, despite their support for 2016 decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration that found that than none of the land features in this body of water warrant island status.

In December 2021, in a first, and after having consulted its French counterpart, the German navy sent the frigate Bayern to the South China Sea, which did not sail through the Taiwan Strait so as not to offend China. Some German parliamentarians have called for abandoning this prudence, but it remains to be seen whether the government will follow this advice.

Fourth, in its EU presidency program, France has stated its willingness to “provide special support for the action to be taken in the maritime fields through the expanded application, in early 2022, of the Coordinated Maritime Presence [CMP] in a new area of the Indo-Pacific.” Since 2013, the French navy deploys every year its Jeanne d’Arc mission, a five-month qualifying mission for student officers to the region. In

September 2021, the EU decided to enhance its member states' naval deployments in the Indo-Pacific, taking stock of the experience it acquired in the Gulf of Guinea.

To push this idea forward, France proposed in late January to first conduct the CMP in the northwestern Indian Ocean. And the Paris forum on February 22 may better define the CMP missions, probably extending them to the South China Sea. But these missions face obvious practical limits in view of the number of European navies that can be involved in them. Moreover, behind France's offer of support there may be an attempt to convince the EU to contribute more actively to securing its overseas territories and large maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific, particularly New Caledonia and French Polynesia in the South Pacific. As in Africa, Paris may be trying to "Europeanize" its security objectives and challenges.

Finally, there is a tension between France's ambition to promote the EU's sovereignty and strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific and the need to closely cooperate with the United States in the region. Despite the commitments in its EU presidency program, Paris's priority remains to use the EU to empower its Indo-Pacific strategy. It has continued to develop this strategy, based on security partnership and defense cooperation with key partners in the region, particularly India, Indonesia, and Japan.

In December 2021, Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly visited New Delhi and France and India held their third annual defense dialogue. The following month, Paris organized virtual 2

+ 2 talks between foreign and defense ministers with Japan, sharing with its counterparts its "serious concerns" on the state of affairs in the East and South China seas, and underscoring the importance of "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

All in all, France's presidency of the Council of the EU will probably contribute to strengthening and fleshing out the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. Nevertheless, the EU lacks the unity, willingness, and military means to deliver more effective security policies and actions in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, France and the EU are likely to be seized with more pressing issues, such as the coming presidential election in France and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, that prevent it from delivering as much as promised on the Indo-Pacific front.

Indo-Pacific countries covered by the survey. Its trade with select economies in the region has grown eight times since 2001—from USD33 billion that year, to USD262 billion in 2020.

Social Media with Cherry-picks

of the Month

1. China bigger threat than Russia-Ukraine crisis - <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/china-bigger-threat-than-russia-ukraine-crisis-jaishankar-hints-to-eu-at-indo-pacific-meet/842332/>
2. India's Place in the New US Indo-Pacific Strategy - <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/indias-place-in-the-new-us-indo-pacific-strategy/>
3. Bangladesh strategically vital in Indo-Pacific - <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-strategically-vital-indo-pacific-377905>
4. Australia's Strategic Imperatives in Indo-Pacific: Opportunities for India - <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/australias-strategic-imperatives-in-indo-pacific-rpsingh-230222>
5. Challenges Beyond the Indo-Pacific Test the Limits of the Quad - <https://www.orfonline.org/research/challenges-beyond-the-indo-pacific-test-the-limits-of-the-quad/>

CAPS Experts In Focus

1. President Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy: A 'Collective' Endeavour - <https://capsindia.org/president-bidens-indo-pacific-strategy-a-collective-endeavour/>
2. India in Kishida's Year of 'Summit Diplomacy' - <https://capsindia.org/india-in-kishidas-year-of-summit-diplomacy/>

3. The Emerging AUKUS and its Implications for Japan - <https://capsindia.org/the-emerging-aukus-and-its-implications-for-japan-2/>

Interviews / View Points

1. India on Russia-Ukraine tensions, ties with China, Indo-Pacific issues & more at Munich conference - <https://www.yoube.com/watch?v=sRRTnwXd-tY>
2. Russia, Ukraine, and the Indo-Pacific Region - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQMGrH6vsHU>

Debates

1. Evolving Maritime Issues in the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3mXS0ZMY5o>
2. What's Next for India and the Quad? - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6WIt_t8pZw

Podcasts

1. Check Mates: ANZUS and the Chessboard - <https://www.csis.org/node/64068>
2. The US Strategy for the Indo-Pacific - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anFx6Fxafug>



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