

# iscte

INSTITUTO  
UNIVERSITÁRIO  
DE LISBOA

---

Indo-Pacific: an evolving concept affecting Regional Order?

Rita Alexandra Simas Bastos

Master's in International Studies

Supervisor:  
PhD., Cátia Miriam Costa, Integrated Researcher,  
CEI – Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon

October, 2022



SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

---

History Department

Indo-Pacific: an evolving concept affecting Regional Order?

Rita Alexandra Simas Bastos

Master's International Studies

Supervisor:  
PhD., Cátia Miriam Costa, Integrated Researcher,  
CEI – Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon

October, 2022

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to firstly express my deep gratitude to Professor Cátia Miriam Costa, whose support helped me tremendously. I could conclude a project of this magnitude mainly because of her supervision and thoughtful guidance. It has been a challenging year, and I have been surpassing obstacles and prevailing through the Professor's help and patience. She also introduced me to new and helpful research methods and opened my mind to new ways to conceive ideas and arguments. So, I am forever grateful for the help and opportunity to participate in researching the Indo-Pacific concept and international relations on a broader scale.

Then I need to mention my partner and my family for all the support they mustered to give me. It was them that observed me slowly build this from scratch, and it was them that constantly reminded me that I was capable of finishing it. It is for them that I found the strength and purpose to achieve this life milestone. For that, I also want to thank my close friends for all their support throughout the master's. It would not be easy to do this without any of them.



## RESUMO

O conceito do *Indo-Pacífico* tem vindo a receber atenção das dinâmicas de poder da Ásia. Países e organizações regionais endógenas e exógenas – Japão, Índia, ASEAN, os Estados Unidos, a União Europeia e a China – têm vindo a partilhar as suas perspetivas da região do Indo-Pacífico. O caso da UE é peculiar devido à sua distância geográfica das dinâmicas. A China é vital para o estudo pela sua posição importante na região e pela sua receção dos conceitos. Neste estudo, os nossos objectivos foram compreender se estes conceitos estão a mudar as relações entre os países da região e como esta transformação está a decorrer. Também foi do nosso interesse descobrir as origens e particularidades de cada conceito. A nossa questão de pesquisa principal foi *O Indo-Pacífico está a mudar as relações dos poderes desta região?*, seguido por questões menores acerca da União Europeia e a sua perspetiva da região como poder exógeno e da receção Chinesa das perspetivas. Uma revisão de literatura foi feita a fim de se determinar o estado de arte do tópico do *Indo-Pacífico* seguida de uma análise de conteúdo indutiva de textos dos atores mencionados acima. Concluímos que os pontos de convergência entre os conceitos estudados criaram alinhamentos surpreendentes entre atores e que estes conceitos estão a modificar como certas áreas de cooperação internacional são manuseados e pensados.

Palavras-Chave: Indo-Pacífico; Ordem regional; União Europeia; China; Análise de Conteúdo Indutiva;



## **ABSTRACT**

The *Indo-Pacific* concept has been gaining attention in the international dynamics of Asia. Endogenous and exogenous countries and international organizations – Japan, India, ASEAN, the United States, the European Union and China – have shared their perspectives of the *Indo-Pacific* region. These could change the regional power dynamics. The case of the EU's participation is peculiar, given its' distance from the dynamics. China is vital for this study as a top regional player and her reception of the concepts. Our research goals consisted of determining if the Indo-Pacific concept is changing the relationships between the actors of the region and in what ways that is occurring. It was also our interest to discover each perspective's origins and particularities. Our main research question was *Is the Indo-Pacific changing the relationships between the powers of this region?*, followed by minor questions regarding the European Union and its own perspective of the region as an exogenous power and China's reception of the perspectives. A literature review was conducted to assess the state of the art of the *Indo-Pacific* studies, and an inductive content analysis was executed to texts of every actor aforementioned. We concluded that the points of convergence found in the concepts create surprising alignments between actors and shift how the areas of cooperation are dealt with at the international level.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific; Regional Order; European Union; China; Inductive Content Analysis;





**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....iii

RESUMO ..... v

ABSTRACT ..... vii

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS ..... xi

1. INTRODUCTION..... 1

    1.1 Research Goals..... 2

    1.2 Topic Relevance ..... 2

    1.3 Research Design and Methodology..... 3

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 5

    2.1 The terminology of Indo-Pacific and Current International Dynamics of the Region..... 5

    2.2 The Indo-Pacific Perspectives ..... 7

        2.2.1 The Perspectives of Endogenous Powers: Japan’s FOIP, India’s Concept of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN’s AIOP and Australia’s Indo-Pacific Concept ..... 7

        2.2.2 The Perspectives of Exogenous Powers: the U.S. and the EU’s Strategies Towards the Indo-Pacific ..... 16

3. ANALYSIS OF THE EU’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INDO-PACIFIC POWERS AND CHINA..... 21

    3.1 Preexistent Relationships with the Indo-Pacific Powers..... 21

    3.2 The Evolution of the EU’s Relationship with China..... 23

    3.3 The Origin of the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy ..... 24

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC POWERS..... 29

    4.1 Preexistent Relationships with the Indo-Pacific Powers and the BRI agenda ..... 29

    4.2 The Chinese Stance towards the Indo-Pacific Discourses ..... 35

5. INDUCTIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS..... 39

    5.1 Results ..... 39

5.2 Results Discussion.....	44
5.3 Preliminary Conclusion of the Results.....	48
6. CONCLUSION .....	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	53
ANNEX.....	65
Annex A – Comparison Exercise for the Inductive Content Analysis.....	65
Table A1 – Data Extracted from the Analysed Texts .....	65

## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS**

ADF	Australia Defence Force
ADIZ	Air Defence Identification Zone
ADMM-Plus	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and the United States
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
AUKUS	Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAI	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
COC	Code of Conduct
CPTPP	Comprehensive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DSU	2020 Defence Strategic Update
EAC	East African Community
EAS	East Asia Summit
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
EU NAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EUMSS	European Union Security Strategy
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FPWP	2017 Foreign Policy White Paper

FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IA-CEPA	Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept
IPE	Indo-Pacific Endeavour
IPTFC	Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Agreement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOEs	State owned-enterprises
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The conception of a region of the *Indo-Pacific* is not new; it is a designation that fell in disuse. Now, a new momentum has launched it back to the policymakers' and governments' lexis.

In the past few decades, international power dynamics have shifted, and the global order suffered drastic changes. The regional dynamics have been characterized by multiple factors: The United States' (U.S.) presence playing a significant role in maritime security and as a security partner for members of the region; the *rise of China*<sup>1</sup> and her regional growth; the rivalry between the U.S. and China; the territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea in which several neighbouring countries are involved in; and modern militarization occurring simultaneously. This paraphernalia of events is the origin of many regional projects, which is the case of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts.

Actors of the region have released concepts, strategies, and initiatives towards this renewed term propelled in a time of tension and competition. Japan, India, the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN), and Australia are the regional players that have expressed their perspectives on the *Indo-Pacific* region. Their concepts reflect their concerns and anxieties about the region's state. As such, their contributions to the *Indo-Pacific* concepts are perspectives of what the region could become, an idealistic vision of the power dynamics generally based on unity and principles of freedom and respect. Each with its particularities.

Not only have regional actors spoken about the *Indo-Pacific*, but the U.S. and the European Union (EU) have done so as well. The U.S. has long had strategies for the Pacific region, as it is a significant player in the region. Those morphed into *Indo-Pacific* strategies as their policymakers began using *Indo-Pacific* instead of Asia-Pacific.

The EU is a peculiar case. The member-states influenced the Union to adhere to the *Indo-Pacific* movement, and this concept became a new approach to Asia and its regional partners. Their strategy demonstrates the desire of the EU to be closer to the region and diversify its partners further.

China is also part of the *Indo-Pacific* question as a regional actor that holds significant ties with every regional player. These ties are primarily trade ones since China is one of the biggest trade partners of many powers of the region (and not only). The *Indo-Pacific* concepts are not well received by the Chinese because of their content and strategical alignment, viewing them as attempts to contain their foreign policy in the region. Thus, their general sentiment regarding the concepts is scepticism and distrust.

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Rise of China* as a phenomenon with regional impact, plays a significant role in the formation of the *Indo-Pacific* concept and thus will be mentioned in this study, more specifically in Chapter 4.

In this research, the power dynamics of the region of the entitled *Indo-Pacific* will be studied through the perspectives of the actors involved, including China. Studying these and figuring out how their relationships are changing due to this movement of concepts is pertinent.

## 1.1 Research Goals

This research's objectives are the following:

- Learning about the *Indo-Pacific* concepts and their origins from both inside and outside the region.
- Determining if the concepts are causing changes in the relations between actors involved and how that process has been occurring.
- Discerning what the *Indo-Pacific* conception means to the European Union and its' foreign policy.
- Situating China in the *Indo-Pacific* movement and understanding her attitude regarding the concept's content and developments.

We must base our study on a series of questions to work through these objectives.

The main research question is: *Is the concept of the Indo-Pacific shifting and affecting the relationship between powers in this region of the world?* The tendencies, similarities and shared goals that have driven the involved actors to release their perspectives are crucial to our study. These include Japan, the first country to release an *Indo-Pacific* concept, India, ASEAN, and Australia. The involved actors include endogenous and exogenous countries, like the United States, and institutions, such as the European Union.

Then for minor questions, we work with “*What does the Indo-Pacific mean to the European Union?*” to determine the reasoning behind their *Indo-Pacific* strategy and what can come out of it. Moreover, *How does China react to the developments of the Indo-Pacific?* to bring forward the China factor in our study.

## 1.2 Topic Relevance

I chose the *Indo-Pacific* as my research topic because I am deeply interested in Asia, the international dynamics present in the region, and the potential to contribute to the studies of this region. This topic is highly relevant to today's international relations.

The *Indo-Pacific*, geographically, covers nearly half of the world; demographically, it is home to more than half of the world population and, economically, is where the biggest world economies are

located. In a globalised world like ours, relations between countries, organizations, regions, and continents deem every aspect susceptible to impact and be impacted. National economies impact regional economies, which in turn impacts international economies. Asia-Pacific, now designated *Indo-Pacific* by some regional powers, is vital to the world's economics and politics. Most of the world trade routes pass by this region which makes every world power virtually dependent on its' performance. The malfunction of these routes significantly impacts everyone involved, not just the countries from the region of the *Indo-Pacific*.

As competition rises in the region, we witness countries and organizations attempting to find solutions for the issues eminent. Their actions can and will have an impact felt outside of the region, which is why powers from the outside (the U.S. and the EU) involve themselves in these concepts.

The research wants to tackle this point: what are the *Indo-Pacific* powers doing to counteract the insecurity and instable environment felt in the region, and how are these initiatives affecting the relationships between them.

Given its' undeveloped academic studies that are only now picking pace, this research is pertinent to fill in spots left to cover by previous arguments that have not had the chance to do so. Moreover, the *Indo-Pacific* Concept has academics divided: the opinions are varied, and the predictions for the region under the light of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts are both negative and positive as the topic is relatively recent and in ongoing development.

The momentum the concepts bring forward is worth exploring as regional actors adhere to and release their own perspectives on the subject. As a not-so-new perspective that gained attention once again and is now part of some lexicons, it would be interesting to understand these better and study their capabilities.

Furthermore, if these perspectives are catalysts for a new phase of international relations in Asia or if they do not have enough strength to get out of the paper and become a reality are conclusions that can only be speculated as of now. Nevertheless, as we stand six years apart from the release of the first *Indo-Pacific* concept, we can at least comprehend if they are changing the dynamics of the region.

### 1.3 Research Design and Methodology

The main research question will be the front lens through which the research will be conducted. The hypothesis guiding the research is that the *Indo-Pacific* concept influences the regional actors involved in positioning themselves in the region and the international agenda.

The methodology is mainly inductive and based on qualitative data of this research is divided into three stages: first, literature review; second, inductive content analysis of selected discourses about the *Indo-Pacific* issue, which were considered relevant; and third and finally, conclusions.

We begin by performing a literature review to learn about the state of the art of the *Indo-Pacific* concept and its application to international relations. The literature review “summarizes and evaluates a body of writings about a specific topic” and “evaluates the state of knowledge in terms of what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s an area of uncertainty of debate that cannot be resolved using the existing research, and what’s missing because no one has yet considered it carefully.” (Knopf, 2006, pp. 127, 131). This part will overview the global and regional order in Asia and the evolution of the *Indo-Pacific* strategies in the countries involved. We will go through existing literature regarding the *Indo-Pacific* and localize the state of this subject currently.

After this, inductive content analysis will be conducted. Inductive methods are used when “no prior research has covered a particular phenomenon, if previous knowledge is fragmented.” and content analysis is useful “[...] due to its content-sensitive nature and ability to analyse many kinds of open data sets” (Kynge et al., 2020, pp. 9, 11).

There are few studies in the area of research regarding relations between the Indo-Pacific; thus, the data we find is varied and dispersed. In this context, the inductive content analyses can gather the strategies and perspectives of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts and work them through a data comparison process to induce conclusions.

This research will select an official document for each actor of the *Indo-Pacific* regarding their perspectives on the concepts. These consist of policy papers, reports, and speeches found on each of their official websites.

This method consists of “read, organize, integrate and form categories, concepts and themes by carefully comparing the similarities and differences between coded data.” (Kynge et al., 2020, p. 14). Therefore, this stage will have the following steps: summary of each text, comparison of common factors and disparities found in the texts and drawing of conclusions.

This comparison will be constructed into a table of factors and categories common in the texts, compiling the information extracted from each text needed for the inducing process of conclusions (see Annex A1). From this table, conclusions will be induced from these factors and specificities.



## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The terminology of Indo-Pacific and Current International Dynamics of the Region

The *Indo-Pacific* terminology is not new despite a few academics introducing it as such. Pardesi argues that the term *Indo-Pacific* was only obsolete during the period of the Cold War when Asia was divided into three areas, the regions we know today as South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia (Pardesi, 2020, p. 125).

This *Indo-Pacific* area has been a singular unit for nearly two hundred years until two events of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brought forward spatial division of the area: the consolidation of the British empire in India and the Great Divergence between the West and Japan. This argument is constructed around the definition of Strategic Region by Buzan and as it emerged from the “sustained politico-military interactions between its constituent units.” (Pardesi, 2020, p. 138).

However, the process of economic development in Asia during and after the Cold War began blurring the lines between these Asian sub-regions. The *rise of China* and India granted them a significant role in changing the strategic geography. Aside from these actors, Japan, the U.S., Australia, and Indonesia began speaking about the *Indo-Pacific* at their own pace. Thus, we are witnessing the rising usage of the *Indo-Pacific* terminology since the 2000s as opposed to Asia-Pacific, which Pardesi believes is merely the return of history (Pardesi, 2020, p. 138).

Nowadays, *Indo-Pacific* is used as a strategic term in the lexicon of policymakers and strategists and shapes a regional order in a more balanced way regarding middle powers’ influence. The new movement of the *Indo-Pacific* discourse apologists is constituted of regional countries that have released *Indo-Pacific* guidelines, such as Japan, India, Australia, and ASEAN, as well as exogenous powers, which are the US and the EU.

Academics’ opinions differ regarding what lies in the *Indo-Pacific* discourses, what is intended to be accomplished through the return of terminology of *Indo-Pacific* as a regional order and what this return itself implies for the geopolitical atmosphere of the region. Several academics defend that the *Indo-Pacific* is a denomination for a regional order excluding China, which sees it as a threat or an attempt to contain her rise. This is a rather oversimplistic and farfetched way of portraying the *Indo-Pacific* developments, as Denisov et al. argue, but other academics will not agree as we will see forward (Denisov et al., 2021, p. 73).

The major issues in the region of the *Indo-Pacific* that have been unfolding for the past decades are two: the *rise of China* and the consequent deepening of Japan-US ties to counterbalance it (Sinkkonen, 2019, p. 755). Accompanying these are the active territorial disputes in the regional maritime spaces and the military buildup.

Sinkkonen, in an analysis of the evolution of this security triad between the U.S., Japan and China, affirms that Japan holds a dual hedge strategy concerning the Chinese, which consists of actively maintaining the economic relationship with the Chinese while relying on the U.S. for security issues (2019, p. 749). This balance is essential as Japan is dependent on China economically. If Japan searches to tighten its ties with the U.S., China could see it as an attempt at containment.

The territorial disputes and geostrategic points of tension concern not only regional states but are also a global concern. Due to the shipping routes passing through, these areas are essential for the global economy and neighbouring countries.

In the East China Sea, Japan and China have contested territory, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, where Japan has an *Air Defence Identification Zone* (ADIZ) that is internationally recognized. China, in 2013, introduced her own ADIZ covering the contested area and received backlash internationally. (Sinkkonen, 2019, p. 766). In Taiwan, while there is no dispute, Japan holds historical ties with the island, and these, if deepened, can signify the deterioration of the relationship between China and Japan.

Several neighbouring countries dispute the Paracels and the Spratlys islands in the South China Sea. The sovereignty of these islands gives the state the right to explore the water space and its resources. *The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) created the *Exclusive Economic Zones* (EEZ).<sup>2</sup> The tensions regarding these territories were amplified when the EEZs were introduced, making it impossible for other countries to operate in waters that are not part of their own EEZ (Wirth, 2019, p. 481). This new approach to maritime sovereignty raised the importance of many territories whose EEZ are valuable and abundant in resources, which is the case of the mentioned islands groups and further explains the interest and several claims of the sovereignty of neighbouring countries.

According to the UNCLOS, a country must own a certain amount of landmass to claim sovereignty, parameters which China fills in neither the Paracels nor the Spratlys Islands. The involved countries deepened their security ties with powers like the U.S. and India because of issues such as the *nine-dashed map*, which spurred much controversy, and evidence that China artificially enlarged maritime features to meet the UNCLOS' criteria (Sinkkonen, 2019, pp. 765–766).

Consequently, several regional countries express concern regarding maritime security and regional stability, both aspects that boil down to the so-called *Freedom of Navigation* (Wirth, 2019, p. 476).

---

<sup>2</sup> UNCLOS is a mechanism created by the United Nations to bring countries to a mutual ground in all issues related to maritime law, signed in 1982. It is responsible for all kinds of maritime international affairs, including sovereignty issues (International Maritime Organization, n.d.).

UNCLOS and the *Freedom of Navigation* are mechanisms to maintain stability in maritime spaces. However, the advance of maritime codex and bureaucracy brought up several issues with China. They insist on interpreting international law differently, leading to several incidents in disputed areas, such as in the Spratly Group (Wirth, 2019, p. 484).

Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that a parallel movement occurs as the *Indo-Pacific* discourse progresses. The *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue* (QUAD) is a quasi-alliance, a mechanism between a formal alliance and a multilateral process that involves a selection of middle powers actors from the *Indo-Pacific*. Japan has gotten closer to middle powers such as India and Australia. As Kliem describes it, it is added that this Quad can be seen as containment of adversity by its nature of the desire for cooperation toward maintaining the balance of powers in the region. This necessity comes with the rising tensions in the South and the East China Sea, the *rise of China* and the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) (Kliem, 2020, p. 296). While there was a first attempt by the Japanese for the Quad to become active in 2007, it was ten years later, with the surge of *Indo-Pacific* discourse, that this mechanism grew and attracted more attention from actors such as India and Australia.

In these conditions, perspectives of the *Indo-Pacific* began surging from different regional actors as well as from actors outside of the geographic sphere. These will be discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 The Indo-Pacific Perspectives

### 2.2.1 The Perspectives of Endogenous Powers: Japan's FOIP, India's Concept of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN's AIOP and Australia's Indo-Pacific Concept

#### **Japan with the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision* (FOIP)**

One of the most prominent concepts constructed to date is Japan's *Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision* (FOIP), first introduced at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2016 (Koga, 2020, p. 58). When facing a dichotomy between the security provided by the alliance with the U.S. or the deepening of socio-economic ties with China, their biggest importer and exporter, Japan was not sure how to proceed and what side to choose. In this complex question, the *Indo-Pacific* is the least compromising option out of the twofold. Aside from China and the U.S., Japan can look at other powers within the region, middle powers that find themselves between the U.S. and China and, to some extent, in similar conditions. Thus, the Japanese *Indo-Pacific* discourse is introduced as the

region witnesses the *rise of China* and the decline of the U.S. power in the region (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 23).

The three principles of the concept are:

- 1) To promote and consolidate basic values (e.g. rule of law, democracy).
- 2) To pursue economic prosperity through regional connectivity by assisting infrastructure projects.
- 3) To develop maritime security (Koga, 2020, p. 63).

To achieve these goals, Japan displays tools of various natures redefined to fit the FOIP: diplomatically, economically, and defence-wise.

Diplomatically, various bilateral and trilateral dialogues and forums promote cooperation between the countries. Examples are the *High-Level Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Cooperation* in 2019, hosted by Indonesia, and dialogues between individual countries. The QUAD also contributes to this.

Economically, financial aid programs such as Partnership for Quality Infrastructure and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) exist. The area of the *Indo-Pacific* is prone to natural disasters and is threatened by terrorist advances, aside from practices of illegal fishing and cyber threats. In 2016, more than 70% of the ODA budget was directed to the *Indo-Pacific* region. (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 28)

Defence-wise, by legal bind, activities are divided between ODA and defence-based. (Koga, 2020, pp. 67–68) *Freedom of navigation* is a crucial feature of the FOIP and is one of its priorities. The Japanese have executed joint military exercises with countries from Southeast Asia and South Asia since 2015.

The FOIP inputs much relevance to the norms and principles as they ought to be rigorously promoted and respected by all the powers involved. Japan has put great effort into completing projects to enhance cooperation further. Three examples mentioned by Satake and Sahashi are the *Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership* (CPTPP), the *Economic Partnership Agreement* (EPA) with the EU, and the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP), which has become effective in 2022 (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 30).

An interesting term introduced by Koga to describe the FOIP is *Tactical Hedging*, an ambiguous short-term strategy aiming to determine its strengths and possible necessary long-term alternations before it becomes a solidified framework by processing the reactions to it. Koga proceeds to correlate this strategy to the FOIP: its' natural vagueness and the various instances in its initial principles have

evolved from 2016 to 2019 to accede to other's states' positions. The principles changed over time, and the same denomination also dropped the Strategy to use Vision instead (Koga, 2020, p. 65).<sup>3</sup>

The challenges identified are derived from the enabling factor of the concept to strive: the ambiguity is bound to suffer from strategic divergence and its flexibility to lessen with time. Furthermore, friction points might surge over time since every party must follow the FOIP's norms completely. Countries can agree with the FOIP while simultaneously having different interests and perceptions of the *Indo-Pacific* region. Not only interests but also there are internal reasons to consider, and most countries weigh their relationship with China.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the relationship between Japan and China is a constant dilemma, as Japan intends to cooperate if China follows the international order with transparency and fairness in its foreign policy (Koga, 2020, p. 71). Regarding material constraints, Japan lacks resources and a budget for defence, and there is also a shortage of human resources as well as legal constraints that difficult this multilateral process. (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 31)

Koga believes that for the FOIP to work, partners must work together and share the FOIP Vision of a regional order while recognizing the difficulty of such a task. If the involved actors do not truly share the FOIP vision, the strategy will become strictly against China's rise, worsening their relationship (Koga, 2020, p. 62). The question then is if Japan can coordinate diplomacy with like-minded states through coalition building through the FOIP Vision (Koga, 2020, p. 49).

Satake & Sahashi argue, similarly to Koga, that the FOIP is not meant to exclude powers but to build connectivity in the region, so it is possible to adapt to the *rise of China*. However, Japan needs to figure out where to position China in its discourse (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 35). The authors also call sceptic who believes the Japanese FOIP merely serves to contain China, adding that if the FOIP succeeds, Japan will be able to maintain good relations with both the U.S. and the Chinese (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 19).

### **India's *Indo-Pacific* perspective**

India's *Indo-Pacific* narrative was constructed by various factors, including their desire for multipolarity, the *rise of China* and domestic politics. These, combined with the intentions of developing economically outwards, made it possible to create an *Indo-Pacific* concept that fits India's

---

<sup>3</sup> Koga and the Japanese were aware of the risks a vague approach could generate but efforts to keep the inter-state dialogues active have assured a peaceful ambience between the countries involved in the Japanese FOIP. However, this strategy is not viable in the long-term. Its attractive ambiguity that characterizes the vision won't last as the discourse must keep evolving and structure itself in order to truly last.

<sup>4</sup> This is factor that is present in every *Indo-Pacific* strategy that will follow.

interests and propels them further into a regional dynamic (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020, pp. 250–251).

The usage of *Indo-Pacific* began in 2012 in speeches addressed to domestic audiences, but also to ASEAN, the U.S. and Japan. Furthermore, before this, Indian officials had shown their wish for regional integration through elements we found above in the Japanese FOIP: “*Open, inclusive, highly transparent and forward-looking regional architecture*” (Singh, 2009a).

In 2018, in a speech at the *Shangri La Dialogue*, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the *Indo-Pacific* concept and manifested enthusiasm regarding this new regional perspective. The speech begins by emphasizing the importance of ASEAN to this new regional order and its’ centrality among its’ vital aspects (Modi, 2018). India calls for a level playing field and a stable and peaceful environment between the countries of the *Indo-Pacific*.

The speech breaks the Indian concept down into six parts. It begins by reiterating the crucial elements of the concept – free, open, and inclusive – presented by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2009 and by mentioning the ASEAN’s importance to the discourse. It mentions multilateralism, regionalism, the need for equal dialogue among parties and commitment to the rule of law (Modi, 2018).<sup>5</sup> It is also clearly stated that the *Indo-Pacific* is not a strategy, a group of limited spots, or a mechanism against any party.

In more concrete terms, *freedom of navigation* and territorial disputes are addressed. The need for dispute resolution was stressed as these countries share a common air and maritime space relevant for stable relations and developing their flourishing economies. Regarding connectivity, the Prime Minister advanced that there are a few initiatives in the works while claiming to be part of existing frameworks, such as the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) (Modi, 2018).

The speech ends with a hopeful note, urging the countries involved to cooperate and unite themselves to commit to the values of transparency, peace and stability (Modi, 2018)

## **ASEAN’S Outlook of the Indo-Pacific**

In 2019, ASEAN released the *ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific* (AOIP). This document illustrates ASEAN’s perspective of the *Indo-Pacific* region, emphasizing the centrality of ASEAN for the new

---

<sup>5</sup> This multilateralism welcomes China and every other country related to the concept, as it embraces sovereign equality and regional cooperation foremost. This embracing attitude of India comes from the concern regarding China becoming hegemonic in Asia (Panda, 2021, p. 16).

regional order, stating its' intuit in leading this movement with its economic and security mechanism and norms (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1).

While this discourse differs in message and tone from the FOIP, it was published to demonstrate that ASEAN holds a relevant position in the region. Moreover, their concept is also expressed as less of a *strategy* and more of a guide towards regional cooperation (ASEAN, 2019, p. 2).

The AOIP does not use strategic language, does not mention any country, in particular, opting to use region denominations, and does not seem interested in creating new mechanisms towards cooperation between the powers involved, wanting to use existent ones.<sup>6</sup> Satake & Sahashi also note that the AOIP does not mention any particular policies or clear messages regarding issues present in the Japanese FOIP, such as *freedom of navigation* or the rule of law (Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 33).

ASEAN concerns itself with the US-China rivalry, evidenced in point six of the document, where it listed aspects envisioned for an *Indo-Pacific* region: “An Indo-Pacific region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry.” (ASEAN, 2019, p. 2). Thus, the ASEAN concept attempts to stay neutral by hinting not to hold anything against China.

According to Acharya, ASEAN sees the FOIP and the U.S. approach to the *Indo-Pacific* as an attempt to contain and exclude China which is noticeable in the language used: while the FOIP seeks a free and open region, the ASEAN's strategy seeks an open and inclusive region (Acharya, 2019).

Regarding individual opinions of the ASEAN members, Indonesia is the member that has shown greater interest in an approach towards the region. In 2013, the then Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa introduced the terminology into Indonesia's foreign policy discourse. Later, the *Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation* (IPTFC) pushed toward a mechanism that would bring security and peace to the countries of the region, with the presence of the U.S. and ASEAN in the centre (Natalegawa, 2013).<sup>7</sup>

A year later, Joko Widodo became the 7<sup>th</sup> President of Indonesia, adopting a maritime-oriented approach for his mandate. The focus on the maritime dimension overlaps with the usage of the *Indo-Pacific* terminology, portraying it too through this lens. Widodo entitled this approach to the *Indo-Pacific* as a *Maritime Fulcrum*, which highlights the maritime spaces of the region as well as elevates Indonesia's position as a central point of connectivity, as a transit position as Scott describes (Scott, 2019, p. 200). This approach developed over time but did not transition into an efficient plan.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The last factor reveals the significance put into ASEAN as the centre of the *Indo-Pacific* region, in not only the geographical sense but also diplomatically and economically.

<sup>7</sup> While this initiative was presented several times in meetings and conferences, no country adhered to the idea, thus it was dismissed (Scott, 2019, p. 200).

<sup>8</sup> This wasn't completely successful, firstly, because the maritime power Widodo had at the start of his mandate was bleak and corroded, with little ships capable of navigating safely, undermining the approach significantly;

In 2018, the approach changed and became the *Indo-Pacific Cooperation Concept* (IPCC), which is essentially “an Indo-Pacific construct with ‘Indonesian characteristics’” (Laksmana, 2018 as cited in Scott, 2019, p. 202). The IPCC was presented by Foreign Secretary Retno Marsudi, which emphasises the country's centrality for the *Indo-Pacific* dynamics and interrelations, similarly to its precedents.

Having been introduced to ASEAN and the *East Asia Summit* (EAS), Indonesia also presented this initiative at a bilateral level, particularly to Vietnam. In a Joint Statement for strengthening their strategic partnership, principles already presented in other Indo-Pacific concepts, such as inclusivity, were presented. However, it tackles the issue of security and territorial disputes in a more direct way that does not match the absolute neutrality ASEAN's outlook manifests (Indonesia-Vietnam, 2018). It tackles *freedom of navigation* and overflight, as other concepts do. Regarding territorial disputes, the term *demilitarisation* for the South China Sea is used as countries call for the end of the disputes and hostility in these delicate issues (Scott, 2019, p. 203).<sup>9</sup> As seen above, the ASEAN discourse is somewhat ambiguous regarding countries. Furthermore, it invokes the necessity of peace and stability while not being direct in how they are exercised.

Aside from Vietnam, Indonesia also has discussed the *Indo-Pacific*, on a bilateral level, with other countries with whom they hold close ties. With India, a strategic partnership has been stated since 2005, focusing on the maritime relationship they hold as centre players of the Indian Ocean and the transitional space to the Pacific. In 2018 when Prime Minister Modi visited Indonesia, both countries released a document entitled *Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. In this shared vision, both leaders discussed the Indo-Pacific ~~discourse~~ concept, its application, and their intention to cooperate to fulfil this desire to bring the countries involved closer. (India-Indonesia, 2018)

Indonesia also has a strategic partnership with Japan and has had a *Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting 2+2* mechanism since 2015. Widodo is very interested in the Japanese FOIP, mainly in the economic aspect of the vision from which Indonesia can benefit from the infrastructure projects (Scott, 2019, p. 206).

With Australia, Indonesia has had a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2020. The *Australia-Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Dialogue* mechanism reinforces their relationship and commitment to developing an *Indo-Pacific* region (Australia-Indonesia, 2021).

Despite the surging of these discourses in the last ten years and Indonesia's establishment as an actor in the Indian and Pacific oceans, they did not receive sufficient adherence and support from

---

secondly, the development mentioned earlier was, according to Scott, faltering and inward-looking, concentrating mostly in Indonesia and not so much in the relations with the other parties (Scott, 2019, pp. 201–202).

<sup>9</sup> The other Indo-Pacific concepts address the territorial disputes more directly but not displaying the degree of assertiveness present in the Indonesian-Vietnamese Joint Statement.



external actors. Neither of the initiatives was practised, and they do not address the disputes and other security issues.<sup>10</sup>

As Scott (2019, p. 210) states:

*“The danger remains that Indonesia’s Indo-Pacific strategy may be a weak play amid its unresolved naval weakness, increasing pressure of great power politics, a divided and powerless ASEAN, unenforceable principles, and a vaguely outlined and ineffective multilateral approach.”.*

### **Australia and its’ perspective of the Indo-Pacific**

Australia was one of the first countries to embrace the *Indo-Pacific* terminology, the term Australia’s strategic elites used from the mid to late 2000s. Australia’s usage of *Indo-Pacific* surges from anxieties recurrent in their official white papers below analysed: the role of Australia in the Asian landscape in the context of socio-economical changes with the *rise of China* and its implication to Australia’s relationships and the endurance of the U.S. position in the region as a stabilizing force (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020, p. 255).

The usage of *Indo-Pacific* has opinions divided. Medcalf believes the term pulls Australia closer to the region's centre. Phillips argues that *Indo-Pacific* can lead to various clashing interpretations and does not fit Australia’s foreign engagement goals (Medcalf, 2014, p. 472; Phillips, 2016).

The redirection of Australia towards Asia and the *Indo-Pacific* is a process that originated from *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper published in 2012. In this document, the region is presented as full of economic potential and opportunities that held China in a central position in the depicted picture (Australia, 2012). As Barthwal-Datta & Chacko described, this white paper adopted a relatively positive and optimistic lens to perceive the international dynamics of Asia (2020, p. 255).

This white paper included the perception of China as the centre of the region, which did not last for long as consequent actions by the Chinese government caused the relations between them to take a toll. The territorial disputes in the South China Sea as well as tension in investments in Australia and other Pacific countries that meddle issues in security and legislation, and the continuous attempt of

---

<sup>10</sup> While these initiatives show the desire of Indonesia to be a major part of the *Indo-Pacific* formation, the Ministry of Defence is more interested in the U.S. discourse on the *Indo-Pacific*, which will be discussed below. The relationship Indonesia holds with the U.S. is equally worth mentioning, as they hold close ties and have cooperated before in navy and military programmes and exercises.

China to influence Australian politicians all to contribute to the weakening of their ties (McGowan, 2018; Parry, 2022, p. 3).

From this point, the term began surging in official papers, including the *2013 White Defence Paper* and later the *2016 Defence White Paper*, which includes a solid Indo-Pacific strategy, so-called *Australia's Strategic Outlook*. It advocates for regional stability and openness where a rules-based order exists and is respected:

*“The wider Indo-Pacific region, from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by South East Asia, through and within which most of Australia's trade activity occurs, will be central to our national security and economic prosperity.”* (Australia, 2016, p. 39).

The White Paper tackles in detail the six factors that determine Australia's strategic views: the roles of the U.S. and China and their impact in the *Indo-Pacific* region; the threats to stability and a rules-based regional order; the threat of terrorism; state fragility; the quickening of military modernisation in the region; and the surging of new and complex non-geographical threats (Australia, 2016, pp. 14–16).

The existence of instability and threats leading to instability and uncertainty at a regional level is not ideal for the region's economic development and, first and foremost, Australia's economic development. Australia's trade activity is very active in the *Indo-Pacific* region, and because of this, the principles of openness and rules-based order are crucial and emphasized. For Australia, a rules-based order is the most effective way of dealing with threats that have not yet escalated. This rules-based order also very much aligns with the presence of the U.S. in the region (Wirth, 2019, p. 497).

The Outlook attributes much importance to the presence of the U.S. in the region to maintain stability and peace. The U.S. is Australia's biggest strategic partner, and the U.S. policy and threat awareness greatly contributed to Australia's strategic perception (Parry, 2022, p. 4; Wirth, 2019, p. 409). Australia intends to work closely with them through the *Australia, New Zealand and United States* (ANZUS) Treaty to increase regional stability and security. (Australia, 2016, pp. 15, 33, 42). Furthermore, it is also emphasized the importance of the relationship between the U.S. and China.<sup>11</sup>

Following the *2016 Defence White Paper*, the Department of Defence of the Australian Government launched 2017 the *Indo-Pacific Endeavour* (IPE). It is an annual *Australian Defence Force* (ADF) activity meant to reinforce partnerships with regional actors, acting for security and humanitarian reasons present in the region (Department of Defence of Australia, n.d.).

---

<sup>11</sup> The relationship Australia holds with these two parties is substantially different, nevertheless, important. While Australia maintains a relationship with the U.S. based on mutual core values, with China the relationship is primarily economic, as China holds a lot of opportunities for economic growth for Australia and other countries (Australia, 2016, p. 44).

As updates of the *2016 Defence White Paper*, the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (FPWP) and the *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (DSU) were published (Australia, 2017, 2020). The government explains in the DSU that “Australia’s strategic environment has deteriorated more rapidly than anticipated [...] Adjustments should be made by the Government to our defence policy, capability and force structure.” (Australia, 2020, p. 3).

The DSU states that the initially given time interval was no longer valid due to coercion, competition and grey-zone activities that affect Australia and its surroundings. Thus, the country does not have time to plan military responses set out at first (Australia, 2020, p. 14).

The DSU mentions the six factors above, adding that they have quickened their pace, and new factors have emerged from these and the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The White Paper explains how the “*major powers have become more assertive in advancing their strategic preferences and seeking to exert influence*”, directly addressing China (Australia, 2020, p. 11; Parry, 2022, p. 6). Furthermore, it mentions the *coercive activities* possibly occurring as military modernisation in the region develops and new *disruptive technologies* enter the military domain (Australia, 2020, pp. 12–13). The FPWP also expresses concerns regarding North Korea and its impact on regional dynamics. (Australia, 2017, p. 42)

Australia has been actively furthering the relations at both bilateral and multilateral levels. It had three *Free Trade Agreements* (FTA), with Korea, Japan and China becoming active in 2015 and Hong Kong in 2020. It signed the *Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement* (IA-CEPA) in 2020 to further enhance economic relations with Indonesia, asserting more presence in Southeast Asia, as the FPWP identified ASEAN as a central point for the region’s development (Parry, 2022, p. 7). The country is part of the CPTPP, the RCEP, the EAS, the AUZUS, the *Pacific Island Forum* (PIF) and the most recent AUKUS, containing *Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the U.S.* The FTAs in the works are the *Australia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement* and the *Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement* (Australia, n.d.). The FPWP approaches these cooperative mechanisms with high regard as it states that:

*“Australia’s long-term objective is to work towards a region-wide trade and investment arrangement defined by comprehensive rules to promote liberalisation, reform and a more seamless trading environment. It is likely a generational endeavour. Further integrating the major economies of the Indo–Pacific serves both our economic and security interests.”*  
(Australia, 2020, p. 45)

Australia’s strategy thus finds its origins in the concerns over the shifting process in the region’s power dynamics and its consequent influence on regional security and development and the necessity to seek new trading partners to counteract the heavy dependency on China.

## 2.2.2 The Perspectives of Exogenous Powers: the U.S. and the EU's Strategies Towards the Indo-Pacific

### **The United States' strategy to the *Indo-Pacific***

The roots of the U.S.' strategy to the *Indo-Pacific* are, among other factors, its' long rival relationship with China and its' growing worry regarding the ability to navigate in the Western Pacific Ocean (Scobell, 2021, p. 81).

During the Obama Administration, the U.S. foreign policy began refocusing towards Asia, as President Obama introduced in his speech to the Australian Parliament in 2011, and with its' *Pivot to Asia* policy (Obama, 2011). The U.S. searched for closer ties with Asian countries economically and militarily through this policy.<sup>12</sup>

In 2017, then-President Donald J. Trump introduced the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* American vision in a speech at the *Asia—Pacific Economic Cooperation* (APEC) Conference in Vietnam (Trump, 2017). The *National Security Strategy* of the same year began using the terminology. It is interesting to notice that the territory considered part of the *Indo-Pacific* was *from the west coast of India to the western coast of the United States*, having another separate section for South and Central Asia (Government of the United States of America, 2017, p. 46).

In 2019, the *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* was released as a culmination of President Trump's dedication to the area. This strategy enunciates the ties the U.S holds with the region, the vision, values, and interests driving the government for pursuing it and the actors serving as challenges. The strategy addresses China as one of the challenges, which merely prolongs its' already existent narrative of rivalry and aversion between the two powers (Department of Defence of the United States of America, 2019). The *rise of China* and her regional expansion and global influence are significant factors in America's focus on the *Indo-Pacific*, as evidenced in both documents above. Adding to this is America realizing the region's importance in economic terms and that both actors can benefit each other mutually. The choke points in the trade sea routes are vital for the economy, and thus, they should be protected through international law and respect for it (Pitakdumrongkit, 2019, pp. 5–8).

While it was during the Trump Administration that the U.S initiated a more significant focus on the region of the *Indo-Pacific*, more concrete plans were only released in February 2022 under the

---

<sup>12</sup> This was also the very beginning of the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP) which later became the CPTPP and the beginning of the negotiations with Japan and South Korea and Southern Asian powers (Schiavenza, 2013).

Biden Administration: *The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Government of the United States of America, 2022). This strategy now incorporates the whole Indian Ocean as opposed to the border stipulated during the Trump administration of the western Indian coast. It does not antagonize China as much as it once did during the Trump Administration.

This strategy lists its' five objectives and tackles them with the tools and mechanisms that will make possible the American vision of the region:

- Advance a free and open *Indo-Pacific* by promoting free, independent political choices, freedom of information and expression and advocating the power of democracy throughout the countries of the *Indo-Pacific*. This applies not only to mainland territories and their political situations but also to the *freedom of navigation* in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.
- Build connections within and beyond the region by urging the signing of regional alliances, encouraging every country to strengthen their ties with each other and emphasizing the role of ASEAN for this cause, given its strategic position and magnitude in terms of power within the region.
- Drive regional prosperity by focusing on economic integration through a so-called *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework*.
- Bolster Indo-Pacific security by intervening in threatening and aggressive territories to dissuade it through an *integrated deterrence* approach. The American military will also be more present in the area and will bet on innovation to answer any urgent necessity.
- Build regional resilience to transnational threats by cooperating with countries from the region to find solutions for challenges and problems such as climate change and the natural disasters that increase in frequency with it (Government of the United States of America, 2022, pp. 8–14).

The strategy attributes particular challenges in the region because of the Chinese actions deemed aggressive and coercive towards many regional partners and the lack of respect towards human rights and international law. While it speaks directly about China, this strategy is unclear as it merely states what actions will be taken towards the country.

The strategy under Biden Administration lost the relatively central factor of China's coercion and rising influence that characterized its earlier versions during the Trump administration. It positions the strategy in a slightly more neutral position by attributing so little attention to it, consequently focusing on its' five objectives and the countries of the *Indo-Pacific*. The adoption of this attitude and language assigns a certain subjectiveness keeping the strategy from facing the need to form concrete plans, search for proper mechanisms and overall answer urgent questions, especially regarding the relationship between the U.S and China that many find critical (Blivas, 2022; Smith, 2022).

Additionally, this feature of surging ambiguity brings the strategy closer to the formula of earlier ones, such as the Japanese FOIP.

Regarding concrete plans in the broader pan, the strategy includes an *Indo-Pacific* Action Plan consisting of ten focus points to be tackled in 12 to 24 months. These are:

- “Drive new resources to the Indo-Pacific.
- Lead an Indo-Pacific economic partnership.
- Reinforce Deterrence.
- Strengthen an empowered and unified ASEAN.
- Support India’s Continued Rise and Regional Leadership.
- Deliver on the Quad.
- Expand U.S.-Japan-ROK cooperation.
- Partner to build resilience in the Pacific Islands.
- Support good governance and accountability.
- Support open, resilient, secure and trustworthy technologies.” (Government of the United States of America, 2022, pp. 15–17)

### **European Union’s *Indo-Pacific* Strategy**

*The European Union Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* was released on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2021 by the European Commission.<sup>13</sup> This release succeeds previous guidelines by individual member states, which urged the EU to release its own. It was first addressed at the European Council earlier in April, as a Council Conclusions document was released on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April (Council of the European Union, 2021).<sup>14</sup>

This document was released to officialise the European Union’s intention and commitment to initiate an intense engagement plan towards the states of the *Indo-Pacific*. It breaks down its’ speech by motives pushing towards engagement, principles through which it will happen, the approach to partnership and cooperation with the region and in what areas the EU will be focused: “*The EU intends to increase its engagement with the region to build partnerships that reinforce the rules-based*

---

<sup>13</sup> The institution that issued the joint communication, the European Commission, is responsible for proposing new laws for the European Legislation, as well as implementing decisions of both the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. As it is a politically independent body of the EU, it simply writes proposals that might be of the EU’s best interest to pursue and adapt. By its’ nature as a joint communication, it is directed at both the European Council and the European Parliament as well as the European member states.

<sup>14</sup> The Council Conclusions served as a preamble of the official guidelines, addressed to state delegations.

*international order, address global challenges, and lay the foundations for a rapid, just and sustainable economic recovery that creates long-term prosperity.*” (European Commission, 2021, p. 1).

This document is divided into four sections: it begins by giving a background to the decision to release this joint communication, and then it nominates the principles and values at the heart of the strategy. Further, we find how the cooperation will be executed and how the EU plans to reach its’ goals with its’ partners (European Commission, 2021, p. 1).

The EU invokes the relationship it holds with the *Indo-Pacific* as *natural partners* through its trade and investment engagement, acknowledging the weaknesses and strengths of the area and addressing the geopolitical dynamics from which tensions have been intensifying. The document also mentions the threat imposed on the democratic principles and human rights present in some countries of the region with authoritarian regimes, which affects stability and order. From all these factors, the EU calls for strengthening cooperation with the region at multiple levels (European Commission, 2021, p. 2).

The principles driving the EU’s approach to the *Indo-Pacific* are based on items already seen in previous discourses, such as “defending the rules-based international order and promote *a level playing field*[...]” (European Commission, 2021, p. 3). There are also unprecedented principles that demonstrate the European perspective and the values the EU want to incorporate with their presence in the region. These include the intent to contribute to the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) and work towards the *Paris Agreement*, specifically on *Climate Change* and environmental issues. In the cooperation area, it mentions the already existing ties with the United Nations (UN) and Bretton Woods Institutions, that is, the *World Bank* and the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF), as well as regional mechanisms such as ASEAN and the African Union in the Western Indian Ocean. The mentioning of these institutions shows the EU’s ideals of building a new regional order working truly through mutual respect and honesty and, above all, the absolute importance of the existence of laws and policies that upholds fairness and brings every actor to an equal platform (European Commission, 2021, p. 3).

The EU thus organizes its’ focus in seven areas:

- Sustainable and inclusive prosperity, planning on diversifying further global trade chains by promoting the acceleration and increase of international economic mechanisms.
- Green transition: pushing the green agenda to reduce carbon emissions and protect biodiversity.
- Ocean governance by increasing security in the regional maritime spaces in terms of the UNCLOS and international law.

- Digital governance and partnerships to further develop digital partnerships and technology advancement with the countries from the region.
- Connectivity by increasing cooperation through partnerships and dialogues between the EU member-states and the *Indo-Pacific* countries.
- Security and defence, by articulating a regional security mechanism that protects the sea lines of communication and enhances naval presence and cooperation of the regional actors, as well as by seeking new partnerships that diversifies the military ties and brings new solutions to uprising threats such as cybersecurity.
- Human security by focusing on cooperation on health issues, such as COVID-19, and the threat of disaster risk (European Commission, 2021, pp. 5–16).

Human rights are a recurrent topic throughout the joint communication, emphasizing the EU's multidimensional approach to the *Indo-Pacific*, tackling issues that are not approached in other strategies. The focus on demographic and sociological factors makes the European approach unique and rich compared to other discourses merely concentrated on economic and political issues of the region. The EU thus holds tools such as dialogues and policies for these issues as well as sanctions to countries which do not hold these human rights accountable and intends to work with *Indo-Pacific* countries to reduce these human rights violations existent in the region. It mentions specific issues such as gender equality, discrimination and labour legislation (European Commission, 2021, p. 3).

Regarding cooperation, it is intended for the EU to deepen ties with the countries involved, those above and also actors such as New Zealand and South Korea and the QUAD. It mentions the importance of the Indian Ocean for the EU, international markets and regional stability, and biodiversity and environmental issues. For that, several mechanisms of the area, such as the Indian Ocean Commission and the *East African Community* (EAC), are vital to working peacefully and effectively. The document also reinforces the centrality of Southeast Asia countries as well as ASEAN, with which the EU holds strong and, as described, multifaceted ties, and with the Pacific states with which exists partnerships such as with the *Pacific Islands Forum* (European Commission, 2021, pp. 4–5).

The document mentions China directly, stating the intention to continue engaging bilaterally but protecting its interests and values in the friction points between the two actors (European Commission, 2021, p. 4).

This strategy is a plan institution-wide from which individual member states can join to be closer to the region or, in the cases of the countries with already released guidelines, to further enhance the broadening focus in this region by part of Europe. This strategy and its' origins will be presented and analysed in a way to understand its' depths and complexities.



### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INDO-PACIFIC POWERS AND CHINA

#### 3.1 Preexistent Relationships with the Indo-Pacific Powers

After World War II (WWII), Europe decolonized Asia, and the latter went through a period of economic reconstruction combined with the rising instability of the changing regional order. The EU has had a presence in the *Indo-Pacific* in political and security issues on a relatively small scale. In bilateral terms, the ties between the countries of the region and the EU focus on issues such as “trade and human rights discourse, encompassing substantial cooperation on economic, commercial, and development issues.” (Odgaard, 2019, p. 134).

The Indo-Pacific region is of utmost importance for the EU in economic and trade terms. Trade routes of most European countries navigate through vital spaces such as the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea, which are essential not only for the EU but also at a global level.

The guidelines for Asia in the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 go through the points needing assistance and what motivates the Union to do so (European External Action Service, 2014, p. 2). In 2014, the EU only had four strategic partners in Asia that had shown interest in advancing cooperation mechanisms and negotiations through *Partnership and Cooperation Agreements* (PCA) and *Foreign Trade Agreements* (FTA). The projects of these guidelines were mainly composed of development cooperation in poverty reduction as well as environmental disasters and challenges with 19 countries, most of which are part of the *Indo-Pacific* region (European External Action Service, 2014, p. 1) (European External Action Service, 2014, p. 1).

In terms of security and military involvement, there is not much from the EU. However, the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia-Operation Atalanta, established in 2008 and running until 2020, was the first European Naval force program operated in the Indian Ocean (Odgaard, 2019, p. 139).

Seeking stronger ties with states and multilateral entities was deemed the best way to pursue a somewhat independent attitude towards the EU's international relations and simultaneously grow stronger with the region. Cooperative mechanisms, frameworks and agreements at bilateral and multilateral levels were the proper tools the EU began building. While the EU took a while to produce its' own *Indo-Pacific* discourse, these steps walking inside the *Indo-Pacific* dynamics eventually led to the strategy. Trade relations are the core of the EU's relations and visibility in the region today (Odgaard, 2019, p. 140).

The shift in geopolitical dynamics in Asia implies security challenges that have repercussions in Europe. Europe is the world's largest trading block and depends on maritime traffic in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Thus, the safety and stability of these waters are crucial. Eva Pejsova believes that Europe can play a valuable role in this environment by being present in non-traditional security cooperation, good governance, and a regional stabiliser (Pejsova, 2018, p. 4). Thus, Europe has worked to expand its relationships with Asian powers in the past two decades.

With India, a strategic partnership was launched in 2004. In 2018, the EU released strategy guideline for India to further enhance cooperation in key areas such as trade, investment, climate change and maritime security as well, circling back to the EU NAVFOR program mentioned earlier and other security projects for cooperation enhancement in this underexplored area for the EU (European Union External Action, 2018; Odgaard, 2019, pp. 142–143). Development for this project and further cooperation plans are discussed in the annual EU-India Leader's Summit, one of the few other cooperation mechanisms between the two actors.

The EU has a good relationship with ASEAN. Europe is ASEAN's second-largest trade partner, and Europe is ASEAN's third-largest trade partner. They hold a similar role in their region as a multilateral institution bringing regional countries together for greater cooperation (Odgaard, 2019, p. 142). In 2007 negotiations began for a trade and investment agreement at a regional level. However, these were put on hold in 2009 to prioritize bilateral agreements, which, in turn, would lead to the regional trade agreement. As of 2022, the EU has two agreements with Singapore and Vietnam, has several on hold, and has been actively holding talks with Indonesia since 2016 (European Commission, n.d.-a). Regarding non-economic matters, the EU is only part of two diplomatic mechanisms: the ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and holds the EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security Cooperation (Odgaard, 2019, p. 142)

As for Australia, the relationship between the two actors has operated through the *EU-Australia Partnership Framework* since 2008. However, it has begun to develop more significantly as negotiations for a FTA were initiated in 2018. The EU was Australia's third-largest partner before BREXIT, working through shared values and principles in their *Indo-Pacific* guidelines (European Commission, n.d.-b; Odgaard, 2019, p. 143).

The EU and Japan have had an economic and strategic partnership agreement since 2019. These strong ties were sought as the EU is aware of Japan's significant role in the *Indo-Pacific* region and multilateral, regional entities, plus the shared values and principles present in the political speeches, making the latter a valuable partner. Regarding threat perception and defence cooperation, their concerns do not precisely overlap, and their cooperation might focus on dialogue mechanisms for security matters (Odgaard, 2019, p. 141).

### 3.2 The Evolution of the EU's Relationship with China

The EU has felt the continuous deterioration in the relations with the Chinese over the years as political divergence occurs and economic competition and cooperation progress simultaneously (Basu et al., 2021, p. 16).

The modern relations between China and European countries have around 50 years of existence and began stalling in the 2000s. In 1975, formal EU-China relations, at the time the EU was the European Economic Community (EEC), were established, and in 1978 a trade agreement was signed. The entrance of the Chinese to the WTO in 2001 marked a new momentum in the relationship with the European Union (Basu et al., 2021, p. 15). In 2003, a strategic partnership was implemented, and with it came expectations from both sides that would not be accomplished. (Casarini, 2006, pp. 9, 13).

The EU expected China to assume more responsibility in issues of global interest, such as the environment and climate change and in balancing trade relations. As for China, her expectations were related to the EU's diplomatic relationship with Taiwan and Tibet and the arms embargo. These were aggravated when China passed the "Anti-secession law" in 2005 (Bindi, 2010, pp. 263–267).

Nowadays, the EU is reevaluating its ties with China. The comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) has been completed after a long and nearly stagnant process (European Commission, 2020).<sup>15</sup> In 2019, the European Commission released the *EU-China Strategic Outlook*, which listed the EU principles and main areas of focus in their approach towards China (European Commission, 2019). The EU has declared to perceive China as a rival and a partner. This seems to be a contradiction; however, the trade and investment scenario of the two actors made such a description a reality (Odgaard, 2019, p. 148).

Both actors' trade and FDI have increased, regardless of trade and investment imbalances (Eurostat, 2022a, 2022b). The EU is very dependent on China, being China's largest trade partner and essential investor. (Basu et al., 2021, pp. 9, 15). Zenglein argues that while China is a key market for the EU and vice-versa, the dependence in trade and economic terms is not as much as probably estimated. However, later in the same article is stated that the disruption of economic ties would have consequences for both parties (Zenglein, 2020, pp. 6–10). Even if, by numbers, the dependence and trade between the two do not seem significant, it is impossible to ignore how the Chinese have entered the European markets and economies, especially in the poorest countries of the EU.

Chinese *state-owned enterprises* (SOEs) and *Foreign Direct Investment* (FDI) are some of the ways the Chinese are present in our economies. These SOEs and FDIs resulted in many realities, like their control of one-tenth of European seaports, fully or partially (Pejsova, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, the

---

<sup>15</sup> The CAI has been in negotiations since 2013 and only in 2020 an agreement in principle was reached. Since then, the document hasn't yet been ratified by the European Parliament. (European Commission, 2020).

deficit in trade dynamics has set their numbers to be asymmetrical from the start, with no visible changes to mend it (Basu et al., 2021, p. 16).

Another reality is the constricted access to the Chinese market for European companies. Chinese companies can easily invest and enter the EU market. However, many restrictions exist on entering the Chinese market and later hindering practices while already established. The Chinese have a relatively protectionist approach that does not cooperate reasonably with the EU's open market (Hanemann & Huotari, 2018, pp. 11–12). Even though the Chinese have promised to correct these measures, development has been relatively slow, and in some specific cases, it has become even worse for the EU (Hanemann & Huotari, 2018, 2018).

This has led to continuous diplomatic and legal fights as the EU argues that the Chinese play unfairly, mainly in the trade and bureaucracy issues. These tensions lead to both actors taking normative actions to pressure the other to act as wanted. Tariffs and other measures were applied to Chinese products to obligate China to play fairly. The Chinese have resorted to coercive economic practices when unhappy with the EU's divergence from their perspective (Eckhardt, 2015, pp. 139–140).

Regarding investment projects, the BRI has entered Europe and has been accused of a lack of transparency between official statements and actions, which also impacts their relations (Pejsova, 2018, p. 2). While certain European countries have adhered to it, some wealthiest countries, such as Germany and France, have criticized the initiative (Basu et al., 2021, p. 17).

This brings us to the understanding that there is no unified image of what China is to the EU (Basu et al., 2021, p. 15).

### 3.3 The Origin of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy

The European Union did not have a proper strategy for the *Indo-Pacific* until 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021, when *the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* was published. This was considered a late release, for the institution did not acknowledge any *Indo-Pacific* discourses developments throughout the years.<sup>16</sup>

It did not seem logical to focus on a distant region where geographically closer issues must be tended to. Furthermore, since various strategies and discourses differ in some way, it was not clear what the *Indo-Pacific* was for the EU (Mohan, 2020, p. 174).

Europe has mainly invested in the region of the *Indo-Pacific*, having invested around €800 million in Asia from 2014 to 2020, becoming the top trade and investment partner in several state members

---

<sup>16</sup>The documents and policy papers regarding the Asia had never acknowledged this concept or the developments surging.

(Mohan, 2020, pp. 171–172). This dynamic is not only on a broader institutional scale but also on an individual, bilateral level, with several countries holding historical ties with most *Indo-Pacific* countries. The EU has only begun waking up to the enormous potential of the *Indo-Pacific* region a few years prior.

Furthermore, Europe held a more institutional diplomatic presence in the region, an independent stance that allowed European interests to be heard. However, Europe has not acted in unity as many internal factors do not allow for that to happen, which is, as Odgaard argues, regarding the complexity of the Union combined with urgent matters needing more attention, such as migration (Odgaard, 2019, p. 131).

Nonetheless, as stated earlier, the EU has released policy papers and strategies for security matters at the general and superficial level of policymaking and implementation. One is the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) from 2014. It promotes *freedom of navigation* and the adoption of security mechanisms towards a safer maritime space (European Council, 2014). In 2016, the *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* was released, a global strategy for foreign and security policy at a global level, reinstating the same narrative or principles and goals of the EUMSS (European External Action Service, 2016). In this document, the EU sought to support an *Indo-Pacific* regional dynamic where ASEAN was at its centre, not only geographically (Odgaard, 2019, p. 138).

Until this date, only individual states of the EU had released strategies: France with *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy* in 2018; The Netherlands's *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia*, released in 2020; and Germany's *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region*, in the same year (France, 2018; Germany, 2020; the Netherlands, 2020).

France considers itself part of the region due to historical ties and sovereignty in territories in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, constituting nearly the total of France's EEZ.<sup>17</sup> They hold a strategic position through their EEZ and want to be involved actively in conflict resolution and initiatives against terrorism in the region. They also push for partnerships and bring these powers closer to France and Europe (France, 2021). On the other hand, Germany is prioritizing the advancement of relations and dynamics with countries classified as like-minded partners in the *Indo-Pacific* for the more significant benefit of both sides. Stability, security, and prosperity are the most critical factors of the document (Germany, 2021). The Netherlands follows the same line as Germany, and both urged the EU to follow their steps and articulate a strategy for the *Indo-Pacific* region (the Netherlands, 2020).

2018 was also the year the EU released a Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the regions and the European Investment Bank entitled *Connecting Europe and Asia* (European Commission. Directorate

---

<sup>17</sup> France has EEZ in both the Indian Ocean, because of the La Reunion – Mayotte – Scattered Islands as well as the French Southern and Antarctic Territories, and in the Pacific Ocean because of the New Caledonia, Wallis-and-Futuna, the French Polynesia and the Clipperton Island (French National Portal of Maritime Limits, n.d.).

General for International Cooperation and Development., 2018). While this document does not mark the first use of the *Indo-Pacific* terminology by the EU institutions, it reveals the close attention the EU is giving to the shifting dynamics in Asia and its' growing interest in becoming closer. Nonetheless, this document focuses mainly on connectivity and presents policy proposals and initiatives to enhance the connection between the two regions further. It divides this connectivity into three segments – sustainable, comprehensive, and international rules-based – and in three ways:

- Advancing connections and networks between the two regions through projects such as transport corridors, digital links and energy cooperation.
- Establishing partnerships based on common policies and standards towards good governance flows in all forms.
- And tackling the gaps in investment in these areas with the EU's financial resources and international partnership (European Commission. Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development., 2018, p. 7).

This document, as it is addressed to several European Institutions, calls for the discussion of the ideas presented, being simultaneously presented in the 2018 *Asia-Europe Meeting* (ASEM).

At this point, the European strategy is characterized by a dichotomy: making general policies and mechanisms such as FTAs and implementing those policies by member states. The EU is more present in trade policies and mechanisms when compared to security matters since the EU does not have a military power that could send to the *Indo-Pacific* (Odgaard, 2019, p. 132).

On the other hand, France strengthens the presence of the French in the area and the European Union. (Odgaard, 2019, pp. 144–145). Even though France does not have sovereignty over any territory in the South China Sea, there have been several naval exercises, and port calls with the coastal countries. Physical presence combined with naval diplomacy is vital for building a significant position in the *Indo-Pacific* dynamics. This is something France believes in and has demonstrated with the exercises, missions, and port calls it has executed in the maritime spaces of the region.

Nonetheless, given the ambitious dimension of this project, France counts on other European countries and the EU for financial and naval resources (Odgaard, 2019, pp. 146, 149–150). It is also pertinent to seek closer cooperation with coastal countries to enhance relations and work towards common goals of maritime security enhancement.

These efforts and ideas for bringing Europe closer to the *Indo-Pacific*, some specific countries are trying, especially France, then are faced with diplomatic questions of geopolitical nature. Was France developing independent bases for an autonomous European approach, parallel to the U.S.'s, whose strategy inevitably positions itself against China? Was the European Union walking towards a neutral position in the *Indo-Pacific* while seeking new partners, new ties that did not imply its' economic detachment from the Chinese?

France has sought a more visible and independent position in the region recently. However, it is also a fact that these maritime exercises were not meant to include China. Furthermore, occasions

where openly defiance of the Chinese contributed to this intent detachment (Odgaard, 2019, pp. 154–155).<sup>18</sup>

The European naval diplomacy in the *Indo-Pacific* was the first step in forming an official European guideline towards the region, as the EU supports common values and principles with the U.S. but from an independent position searching for closer relations with middle powers from the *Indo-Pacific* itself.

Moreover, being amidst the U.S.-China competition and the *rise of China* paints the neutral option of seeking new partners in a rather attractive hue (Mohan, 2020, p. 172). Both issues affect the EU's foreign policy to a higher degree. Instead of following the U.S. vision of the region, the EU could align itself with the Japanese and ASEAN discourses, a point argued by Mohan (Mohan, 2020, p. 172). Interacting further with these powers will lead to more considerable diversity in European foreign relations, a more relevant position in the security dynamics of the *Indo-Pacific*, averting the U.S.-China rivalry by joining the middle powers and new opportunities not only for the EU but as well for the *Indo-Pacific* countries (Iuppa, 2020, p. 22).

This is something argued at a European Union level. However, if the perspective is changed to a multilateral European overview of what the *Indo-Pacific* is and means, then the arising issues are alarming. Some authors believe that an *Indo-Pacific* concept by the European Union could potentially work, given that the member-states work together towards the same goals. This holds rather idyllic aspirations on a colossal project for the European Union regarding current world politics and individual external relations of the member-states. The latter is perfectly exemplified by research conducted by the *European Council on Foreign Relations* (ECFR), which is meant to draw data and conclusions from European member states regarding their opinions and perspectives of the region of the *Indo-Pacific* (Grare & Reuter, 2021).

The research information was launched in the same month as the European guidelines, in September 2021. Hence, it depicts the views of the member states at the time the EU acted towards closer engagement with the *Indo-Pacific* region.

The ECFR survey reveals how most of the member-states lack that enthusiasm and even comprehension of the geopolitics of the area (Grare & Reuter, 2021, p. 3). Thus, European countries' priorities and perceptions of the *Indo-Pacific* vary drastically, from physical borders to understanding strategy, security, and economic relations.

Many discrepancies exist because of the complicated and diverse relationship dynamics of each member-state with China. Several European countries hold significant economic mechanisms with the Chinese, which weighs in the disinterest and avoidance shown regarding the Indo-Pacific region's changing dynamics of global geopolitics (Grare & Reuter, 2021, p. 4). The wealthiest countries of the

---

<sup>18</sup> This is the case when a French vessel went through the Taiwan Strait in 2019, leading other European vessels to do the same, considering it international waters as opposed to China's understanding of the space (Ali & Stewart, 2019).

EU are more accepting of the *Indo-Pacific* concept than the poorest, as their investment mechanisms invigorate their economy (López-Aranguren, 2022, p. 47). Member-states are anxious over the consequences of taking a stance on what this U.S.-China dichotomy might bring.

Half of the countries do not want any free trade deal that includes China, while the other half is divided into wanting it and thinking of the *Indo-Pacific* region as anti-China. (López-Aranguren, 2022, p. 47; Luthra, 2021, p. 14).

This disparity is a severe obstacle to European action in the area but also in an intra-level of agreement and harmony. Countries with working agreements with the Chinese may not be able to support future “assertive European positions” regarding issues such as human rights (López-Aranguren, 2022, p. 47).

Thus, the research fears that without a common ground between member-states, the European guidelines might not advance as intended (Grare & Reuter, 2021, pp. 19–20).

The guidelines illustrate in detail what this new era of relations between the EU and the *Indo-Pacific* countries entails. However, a few issues could prove alarming for the translation from theory to practice. Resources face challenges of geographical but bureaucratic nature as the reallocation of European resources would need much cooperation between entities. It also includes naval power and European deployment in the area (Luthra, 2021, pp. 13–14). Furthermore, these efforts at a European level will strictly be the fruit of cooperation between member-states, a movement that is not expected so soon, given these conclusions.



## 4. ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC POWERS

### 4.1 Preexistent Relationships with the Indo-Pacific Powers and the BRI agenda

Asia is going through an order transition and a change in power distribution. Regional geopolitical characteristics shift with the evolution of the U.S.-China rivalry, which has aggravated in the last couple of years during the Trump administration (Liu, 2020, pp. 9–11; Pejsova, 2018, pp. 1–2; Scobell, 2021, pp. 75–76; Tomé, 2019, p. 81, 2021, p. 40; D. Wang & Meng, 2020, pp. 513–514). Therefore, addressing China's role in the Indo-Pacific perspective is essential.

The Chinese foreign policy is based on principles of *peaceful rise* and a *win-win logic* for *mutual gaining* in an approach to foreign policy that Tomé believes in avoiding a confrontational attitude that could bother the regional order and security (Jung & Chen, 2019, p. 18; Tomé, 2019, pp. 80–81; Xi, 2021). In the Xi Jinping era, these goals culminated as China pursued an expansion of their connections, building closer ties and constructing regional and global influence. Ultimately, China wants to “play a leading role in Asia”. (Liu, 2020, pp. 9, 14).

Today, China is a giant in nearly every sense. It is one of the biggest countries in the world, the most populated, and the country with the biggest army. Her development since the 70s has led China to become one of the biggest economies in the world, being the most significant trade partner with more than 100 countries, the largest exporter and the second largest importer (*China / Data*, n.d.; Tomé, 2019, pp. 72–77). China is the largest trade partner of all the EU and ASEAN countries – this is particularly important for the evolution of her foreign policy and development of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts (Tomé, 2021, p. 55).

As Tomé puts it: “China has a decisive role in the current global order transition, specifically in Asia and the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, affecting the perceptions, behaviour and interactions between all the actors involved.” (Tomé, 2019, p. 90).

Academics differ in perspectives regarding the *rise of China*, and the discussion grows immensely. Wang and Meng argue that “the rise of China will not only pose a challenge to US hegemony in East Asia but also reshape the regional order in East Asia.” (D. Wang & Meng, 2020, p. 513). Tomé emphasizes that “China represents the biggest challenge to the United States supremacy but also to the liberal internal order” (Tomé, 2021, p. 54). Denisov et al. state, “The rise of China challenges the regional balance of power and creates a security dilemma as an area of influences shift and causes disturbance.” (Denisov et al., 2020, pp. 228, 234). It is thus agreed that China is fused to the regional order's stability, and relations and mechanisms are deeply linked to the well-being of the international agenda of Asia. The biggest dilemma of today's international order is the US-China rivalry.

Liu explains that “American and Chinese understandings of the status quo and the future of the regional order diverge significantly.” (Liu, 2020, p. 11). American understandings consequently influence their partners, thus initiating a chain reaction. Power distribution is agitated, and uncertainty takes over.

As mentioned earlier, *Pivot to Asia* was released during the Obama administration as concerns over the place of the U.S. in Asia vis-à-vis the *rise of China* began to bloom. Since then, the U.S. has paid closer attention to their Asian partners to keep them under its scope of influence (Jung & Chen, 2019, p. 18).

During the Trump administration, this focus on Asia became more assertive and direct regarding China as the country was designated a *rival power* (Government of the United States of America, 2017, p. 1). U.S.-China encounter divergences in human rights, trade, and diplomatic issues involving Hong Kong and Taiwan and territorial disputes (Tomé, 2021, p. 47).

Due to the departure of the U.S. from various international mechanisms, the pandemic and its economic consequences, China’s influence rose in the *Indo-Pacific* region, whereas the US reduced (Tomé, 2021, pp. 39–40).

In 2018, Mike Pompeo announced the *Indo-Pacific Economic Vision*, a project with a similar basis to the BRI, to counteract the latter (Pompeo, 2018). QUAD partners like Japan and Australia supported the initiative. However, not even with their monetary aid did this project reach close to the BRI's magnitude (Tomé, 2019, p. 86).

Hence, we find Asia between giant China and its’ BRI agenda and the U.S. and its allies attempting to find a balance between the two actors in the light of the *Indo-Pacific* strategies. The U.S. recognizes China as their biggest strategic partner, able to compete for global influence (Tomé, 2021, p. 40).

Wang and Meng analysed the perceptions of Chinese scholars regarding this U.S.-China dilemma, finding that the majority believe that China does not “[...] advocate building a competing alliance to counter the U.S.-led alliance system in East Asia.” since the Chinese policies are merely defensive and guided by “principles of peace and development” (D. Wang & Meng, 2020, p. 514). So, China has no intention of driving the U.S. out of the area, as that would be impossible. Instead, the Chinese strive for the fair distribution of power in the region, according to Chinese academics (D. Wang & Meng, 2020, p. 514).

Odgaard believes the Chinese want to replace the U.S. as the *dominant regional power*. Nevertheless, Tomé argues the opposite: China says they do not have “hegemonic intentions” with their foreign policy (Odgaard, 2019, p. 133; Tomé, 2021, p. 52).<sup>19</sup>

Regarding foreign policy, China adopted a non-conflict and non-confrontation approach, joined its’ regional system and grew as intended (Liu, 2020, p. 13). However, the values of the so-called non-

---

<sup>19</sup> This is a very sensitive point that won’t be discussed with depth in this argument as the goal is to understand how these contested opinions and views affect the perception of China in the global order.

confrontational path were not interpreted as desired. A significant portion of actors and academics alike began using adjectives such as *overconfidence* and *assertiveness* to describe Chinese foreign policy.

One of the concerns of neighbouring countries is the modernization of the *People's Liberation Army* (PLA), and the active revamp the government is executing to make it excel in every security domain. The military budget has grown astronomically, and the PLA has now surpassed 2 million active soldiers, tackled nuclear power and brought new dimensions to cover more defence ground (Tomé, 2019, pp. 77–79). This, topped by the rising presence of the Chinese navy in the South and the East China Sea, has contributed to the feeling of anxiety and suspicion among the neighbouring countries and not only (Odgaard, 2019, p. 131).

Despite the general concern, the Chinese government has stated in the *2019 White Defence Paper* that “China will never inflict such sufferings [war or aggression] on any other country”, and it has not in 40 years, and it is not part of any military alliance or military blocs (Maizland, 2020; The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019, p. 8). Moreover, despite its considerable size, it is not strong or trained enough to be considered a global force. This fact is not an issue since, as it is apparent in the *2019 White Defence Paper*, the Chinese are focused mainly on regional influence (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019, p. 34). As the BRI initiatives grow, the interests needing to be protected abroad also follow, which could be one of the reasons for this modernization.

The BRI is the cornerstone of the Chinese international agenda. In the words of Xi Jinping:

“The joint pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to enhance connectivity and practical cooperation. It is about jointly meeting various challenges and risks confronting mankind and delivering win-win outcomes and common development. Thanks to the joint efforts of all of us involved in this initiative, a general connectivity framework consisting of six corridors, six connectivity routes and multiple countries and ports has been put in place.” (Xi, 2019).

Nearly 150 countries and regional organizations have joined the BRI, including some EU countries (Nedopil, 2022). To fulfil the *Chinese Dream*, they proved to be very flexible in spreading their message to be more readily accepted by other international powers. Thus, the various levels of the relationship between the participating countries and China (Costa, 2020, p. 34).

The project displays versatility by approaching various Silk Roads through continental and maritime agreements. Aside from the MSR, there are many others, such as the Ice Silk Road, the Space Silk Road, the Digital Silk Road and even the Green Silk Road (Costa, 2020, p. 34; Tomé, 2021, p. 55).

Through this initiative, China has created funding mechanisms such as the AIIB and the *Silk Road Fund* in 2014 and development projects in partner countries like overseas naval bases. (Tomé, 2021, p. 77).

Xi Jinping has been reiterating the BRI ideals – peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit – since its’ introduction during state visits in Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013 (Xi, 2013a, 2013b). These adhere to the general foreign policies of “win/win, common interest, the international community as a community of shared interest or common destiny [...]” (Costa, 2020, p. 30).

Using tradition and history as the motivation of the project’s discourse, as in the revival of the ancient Silk Road, China unapologetically invokes its’ past in a speech not catered to the West. Creating such a narrative intended to reach regional and global levels is prone to misinterpretations and, as Costa labels it, “a tendency for the demonisation of the unknown.” (Costa, 2020, pp. 28–29).

So, while the BRI is a project that has the most possibilities to bring countries around their preconceived notions of China, this is met with scepticism, mostly by western countries that do not see the *rise of China* in a good light (Costa, 2020, pp. 30–35). And we circle back to the public perception of how these ideals have been implemented.

Liu summarises the question in a sentence:

“Beijing’s rapid military buildup, coupled with its tough rhetoric and behaviour in territorial, diplomatic and economic disputes with its neighbours, is widely perceived as an expression of Chinese assertiveness.” (Liu, 2020, p. 9).

All opposing stances derivate from keywords Pejsova compiled: “debt-trap diplomacy”, “asymmetric” deals, and “lack of transparency” in projects with partners whose economies are weaker as well as easily exploited (Pejsova, 2018, p. 2). The BRI and associated projects are seen as Sino-centric, and even though they are executed in foreign territory and carry the preached win-win logic, they do not honour it at the end (Liu, 2020, p. 19).

Everything boils down to the fact that the Chinese presence in the partnering countries eventually morphs into political influence and military assistance (Odgaard, 2019, p. 134). This assertiveness recalls, in addition to the BRI policies, the modernization and deployment of the PLA in the Indian Ocean and the South and East China Sea and the territorial disputes’ attitude. These elements impel actors and academics alike to go beyond the word assertive to reach for aggressive and coercive (Gong, 2020, p. 33; Kliem, 2020, pp. 276–281; Panda, 2021, pp. 16–17).

Nevertheless, the Chinese assertiveness issue is not linear at all. Negative perceptions exist, as well as the *Indo-Pacific* strategies, simultaneously as economic relations between China and its’ neighbour flow.

All the QUAD members have bilateral relations with the Chinese: the *U.S.-China Constructive Strategic Partnership*, the *Japan-China Friendly Cooperative Partnership*, the *India-China Constructive Partnership of Cooperation towards the 21st Century* and the *Australia-China Cooperative Partnership*. There is a strategic triangle with Japan and South Korea, and the ASEAN+3. Various ASEAN countries hold bilateral relationships with China despite the territorial disputes,

specifically the *Code of Conduct* (COC) between them and the Chinese for the South China sea. (Tomé, 2021, p. 46).

Border issues and regional developments deeply condition the China-India relationship. The territorial disputes in the Doklam Plateau have lasted for decades, having ended in 2017 in mutual agreement, and negotiations have resumed (Liu, 2020, p. 23). While this case found some closure, the Galwan Valley, an undisturbed area since 1975, fell into chaos in 2020 as a new period of skirmishes began and has not yet been resolved (Mittal, 2022). The border issues weigh on India's attitude quite a lot. Regarding the BRI, India will not participate "as long as the road from China to Pakistan's Gwadar Port passes through territory disputed by India and Pakistan." (Liu, 2020, p. 23).

Economic-wise, since the 90s, trade agreements have been put in the works and China was India's largest trade partner until recently, while India is in China's top 10. FDI Flows have not been that significant as China is not a top investor in India (Rohit Singh & SP Sharma, 2018, pp. 3–4, 16). Trade relations have become even more alarmingly imbalanced, and the U.S. has statistically surpassed China as India's largest trade partner, even though the Chinese have denied this claim (Batra, 2022). While their economic ties are not looking up, they are still significant, and China intends to mend their relationship with its new approach.

China has tried to restore some strength to its relationship with India. However, their dynamics are deeply contrasted by these deteriorating geopolitical aspects coexisting with the debilitating yet major economic and trade factors (Denisov et al., 2020, pp. 228–234).

Regarding Japan, similarly to India, the relations between the two actors have weakened due to territorial disputes, specifically about the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands since the beginning of the 2010s. Incidents related to the island's disputes put a halt to their relations. They began to mend in 2017 and 2018 when Shinzo Abe visited Beijing and signed agreements on trade and maritime security agreements and papers (Liu, 2020, pp. 23–24; Satake & Sahashi, 2021, p. 21). However, it is important to emphasize that Japan's largest trade partner is China (as a client and supplier).

China holds close ties with the ASEAN countries, the former being one of their largest trading partners and the biggest with ASEAN as an organization, accelerated in the last years by the BRI-related projects and the withdrawal of the US from the TPP (Jung & Chen, 2019, pp. 16–17). This makes China their fourth largest source of FDI. Their economic dimensions are powered by the *ASEAN-China Free Trade Area* (ACFTA) and several agreements in trade and investment in the 2000s that have been in constant evolution (ASEAN, n.d.). Various cooperative mechanisms are in effect between the two actors, such as the previously mentioned BRI, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the 10+3 meeting with the East Asia countries. Moreover, they also partner up for humanitarian aid and environment-based issues. (Gong, 2020, p. 31).

ASEAN countries are of interest to the Chinese for economic and security issues for its centrality. As Gong explains:

“It is relatively easier for China to expand its influence in south-east Asia than in other subregions in the neighbourhood such as south Asia and north-east Asia, because south-east Asia is the only one where Beijing does not have an adversary or hostile rival with major-power status.” (Gong, 2020, p. 32)

Indonesia has joined the *Maritime Silk Road* (MSR) initiative. These ideas coincided with Widodo’s *Global Maritime Fulcrum* (Lalisang & Candra, 2020; Scott, 2019, p. 205). Several projects in Indonesia, funded by the Chinese, are in the works, but nothing has yet been finished. So, the Chinese focus in Southeast Asia is not all frowned upon, mainly in the economic area.

The release of the ASEAN and Indonesian *Indo-Pacific* strategies paired with bilateral initiatives from neighbouring states determined that these countries seek to cooperate instead of utilizing mechanisms existing with the Chinese (Gong, 2020, p. 33). To counteract this, the Chinese have been trying to strengthen their security relations regarding the ASEAN members’ concerns to “build trust” and “lay a solid foundation for the framework” by stabilising the South China Sea and the COC. (Government of China, 2017; Liu, 2020, pp. 24–25).

A tendency we must not overlook in these Chinese bilateral relations is the coexistence of tensions and issues with competition. Conflict coexists with dialogue and cooperation in a space Tomé says is volatile and uncertain. He coins this phenomenon as *congagement*, which joins the words containment and engagement (Tomé, 2021, p. 56). This term fits the Chinese relations precisely: they are primarily tense and still have a very active economic side, which of course, is not alienated from these tensions and do work to a certain extent.

An interesting perspective Liu brings to the conversation is that the economic dependence these countries have on China “has been exaggerated”, explaining how there are few indicators except the economic ones that China dominates (Liu, 2020, p. 10). Nevertheless, are not these economic indicators of most importance for these countries of the region?

The influence China exudes is linked to its’ economic ties and partners. An example of how influential China can be because of their economic power is the correlation between trade relationships and the rising number of states not recognizing Taiwan as an “autonomous state” to develop further relations with China (Tomé, 2019, p. 76).

As Mahbubani has stated, “The big strategic game in Asia isn’t military but economic.” (Mahbubani, 2021).

These tensions, however, are not ideal for China either. States become wary of a real threat to the security of the region. As Tomé defends, “neither «strategic competition» nor rising «bipolarization» necessarily mean military confrontation or a «second Cold War»” (Tomé, 2021, p. 54).

In a self-retrospective way, Chinese scholars have examined the Chinese foreign policy approaches in the past few years and have drawn the general conclusion that China should “reformulated its overall strategy.” (Liu, 2020, p. 19).

The term ‘strategic overstretch’ has been used before by Chinese academics. Debates over the veracity of this claim have followed. “[...] the very discussion shows that some scholars are worried about the rapidity of China’s expansion of its global influence, which will lead to a lack of resources internally and counterbalancing externally.” (Liu, 2020, p. 20).

This hard-line diplomacy described by Liu refers to over-exceeding confidence in their speech and approach as they have taken one too many projects under their wing. In their pursuit of promoting these initiatives inside the BRI agenda, considered the pinnacle of this strategic overstretch, the impression of coercion was left. Liu notes that a weakening of foreign relations, including with the U.S., greatly impacts the Chinese economy and outer perception. (Liu, 2020, pp. 20–22).

The government is conscious of this issue which resulted in a slow shift in foreign policy since 2017 (Liu, 2020, pp. 20–21). The U.S. advancement of the Indo-Pacific strategies makes the Chinese reactive but also forces the government to “reassess its tactical objectives and strategic goals” (Denisov et al., 2021, p. 80).

What has been conducted now is a more transparent approach to the BRI to tackle the projects’ financing issues with the countries where they are located (Liu, 2020, p. 22). It is opening then the BRI projects to the receiver and consequently making them less sino-centric than they once were.

#### 4.2 The Chinese Stance towards the Indo-Pacific Discourses

In order to understand the depth of the Chinese involvement in the *Indo-Pacific* issues, we did an overview of China’s foreign policy and relations. Theoretically, China is out of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts as it has not joined or made any intentions to do so. Nevertheless, the world and regional order do not make it possible for a complete alienation and dismissal of a country.

The Chinese see “the Indo-Pacific as the prototype of an America-centric defensive alliance, a regional geopolitical bloc.” (Denisov et al., 2021, p. 82). So, it is not unexpected for their reaction to be utterly averse. For the Chinese, the term is even “potentially damaging” due to its power in discourse (Denisov et al., 2021, p. 78).

Official remarks by the Chinese government had not used the term *Indo-Pacific* until July 2022. In a press conference in 2018, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as part of his comments on China’s foreign policy, did shortly address the *Indo-Pacific* by stating it is like “[...] the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate.” (Y. Wang, 2018). In May 2022, the Foreign Minister added that it is a strategy “for creating divisions, a strategy for inciting confrontation, and a strategy for destroying peace,” (‘China’s Wang Yi Says US’s Indo-Pacific Strategy “Doomed to Fail”’, 2022; Y. Wang, 2022).

The Chinese government rarely addresses the *Indo-Pacific* strategies, but when they do, it fatalistically comments on them, demonstrating its' rejection and disapproval of a concept they describe as ephemeral.

On July 11th 2022, Foreign Minister Wang Yi gave a policy speech about open regionalism during his visit to the ASEAN Secretariat (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022a). This moment was when China first acknowledged the Indo-Pacific by showing support to ASEAN and its commitment to its regional projects. Later in August 2022, the *Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture* was released (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b). It expresses the commitment of the Chinese Government toward the growth and centrality of ASEAN in the region through existing mechanisms that connect ASEAN and China. As it states:

“The *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (AOIP), as ASEAN's independent initiative, upholds openness and inclusiveness, and aims to enhance ASEAN Community building process instead of creating new mechanisms or replacing the existing ones. China is ready to work with ASEAN to uphold openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation, advance practical cooperation in the four priority areas of the AOIP, and promote post-COVID recovery and sustainable development in the region.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

Aside from the little mentions in press conferences and this most recent development with ASEAN, there is not much official content to go through. In this light, Liu collected the views of Chinese scholars and academia as “they serve as intermediaries between Chinese leaders and the Chinese public and therefore, at least implicitly, influence or reflect the policy preferences of Chinese decision-makers.” (Liu, 2020, p. 16). The Chinese IR academia has tackled the issue of the *Indo-Pacific* much more than the government, and it would be pertinent to acknowledge their perceptions.

As suspected, the majority believes the *Indo-Pacific* concept is a reaction to the *rise of China* and the order transition happening in the region (Liu, 2020, p. 16).

In terms of security, they argue that the concept will result in the weakening of China's security capacities as well as lead to strategic uncertainty, promoting an arms race and, thus, further militarization of the region and negatively affect the territorial disputes in progress (Liu, 2020, p. 17).

Like the government officials, some lessen the *Indo-Pacific* into an unsubstantiated, baseless idea that will not evolve. These do not believe the U.S. has enough influence or regional impact on implementing such a concept, which Liu does not disagree with. The U.S. has indeed been losing power in the region in the last few years, but we cannot deny how vital its presence is for security reasons (Liu, 2020, p. 17). Aside from this point, they also mention the non-existent space for an economic dimension within most concepts. The supporting countries of the *Indo-Pacific*, aside from the U.S. announcement of the *Indo-Pacific Economic Vision*, have not stepped forward with a mechanism whose purpose would be to serve the *Indo-Pacific* agenda exclusively. These countries



have promised to invest in partners of the region but in a bilateral move or through existing mechanisms that do not serve the *Indo-Pacific* cause only. Another topic Chinese scholars attribute to the eminent failure of the concept is the lack of partners whose attention is entirely dedicated to supporting it. Liu gives the example of India, which has published its own *Indo-Pacific* guidelines but will not risk offending China which is a sentiment present in the document (Liu, 2020, pp. 18–19).

A point that should be mentioned is the Chinese vision of the Asian continent, a *Global Asia* concept, the basis of the BRI roots. Tomé affirms that the conception of *Global Asia* makes the concept of *Indo-Pacific* less threatening to the Chinese as both share a space for maritime issues, and thus it could fit into the Chinese's agenda (Tomé, 2019, pp. 89–90). The Chinese academia is split on whether China and its' BRI could fit in the international dynamics of what an *Indo-Pacific* region could entail (Denisov et al., 2021, p. 78).

Tomé believes there is a dyad when looking at China's role in shaping the *Indo-Pacific* concept: on the one hand, its' own development and rise in the international agenda and, on the other hand, the foreign perceptions of them (Tomé, 2019, p. 81). A paradox thus forms when we consider how the Chinese government avoids acknowledging the term *Indo-Pacific* itself because its existence has impacted the construction of all the concepts.

While some concepts do not mention China or claim not to have its' containment in mind, it is impossible not to emphasize how heavily security and geopolitics matter in the *Indo-Pacific* concepts (Tomé, 2019, p. 85; Wu, 2022, p. 5).



## 5. INDUCTIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Results

To reach the answer to our main question - Is the concept of Indo-Pacific shifting and affecting the relationship between powers in this region of the world? – We will now analyse various texts from the main actors of the *Indo-Pacific*: Japan, India, ASEAN, Australia, the United States, the European Union, and China. These texts span from 2016 to August 2022.

As such, we are conducting an inductive content analysis methodology for this study. After reading the most relevant documents, we selected some of them. We chose the ones directly connected to the Indo-Pacific concept and highly relevant in the scope of documents produced by each actor. Subsequently, we read the selected texts and established a series of categories to organize the data in them. The categories were: values; background; areas and levels of cooperation; inclusivity; preference in existing mechanisms; perception of ASEAN centrality; and perception of the term strategy. These categories were created from the common points of content in the texts. Through these categories, we can extract from each text the data of our interest. With these in mind, we can begin our analysis.

The data compiled from the selected texts are in Annex A1.

#### **Japan's *To Achieve a Free and Open Pacific***

Japan, every year, the government releases the *Diplomatic Bluebook*, a report of Japanese foreign policies and activities that occurred prior, written by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). The text chosen for analysis is a special article in the 2019 edition entitled *To Achieve a Free and Open Pacific*. It regards the evolution of the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (FOIP) 2 years after its' first mention by the then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the sixth *Tokyo International Conference for African Development* (TICAD VI).

The maritime domain is very relevant for the Japanese as they describe the *Indo-Pacific* as a maritime order in the text since it is the area of most worry for them due to illegal activities such as piracy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). Instability in the maritime spaces of the region undermines regional stability, which undermines trade and regional prosperity.

This text compiles the basic points of the Japanese FOIP that we have also introduced in the first chapter: a free, open, and stable maritime order where there is the rule of law and peace.

The FOIP seeks cooperation in defence and connectivity with regional partners to work toward the pillars of the region (solidifying the rule of law, *freedom of navigation*, free trade, the pursuit of economic prosperity and commitment to peace and stability) through existing cooperative mechanisms remodelled for the *Indo-Pacific*.

The FOIP started as a strategy, but criticism made the government change the wording and begin describing it as a *vision*, which is used in this text. Countries like India, Australia and the U.S., considered the region's security stabiliser, are mentioned as actors with which Japan wants to work for this vision. These are the four members of the *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue* (QUAD).

### **India's speech at the Shangri La Dialogue by Prime Minister Narendra Modi**

For India, we selected a speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018 (Modi, 2018). This mechanism is a yearly defence dialogue organized in Singapore by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In this keynote speech, Modi introduces the Indian perspective of the Indo-Pacific for the first time.

For the nature and location of the Dialogue, Modi alludes to the past and historical ties between India, Singapore, and ASEAN countries connected to this day through the “Malacca Strait to the South China Sea [...] to the Pacific.” (Modi, 2018). It goes through their dynamics, emphasizing the maritime domain of their relationship and the various mechanisms that bring the two together, both India and ASEAN-led initiatives. It is given the latter more importance as Modi then proceeds to name ASEAN as an example of a successful regional mechanism living in unity, which carries on to the speech to tackle India's *Indo-Pacific* vision.

For India, the *Indo-Pacific* region would be a free, open, inclusive, and united area, a level playing field that respects the law. For this, regional partners must work toward these values together and resolve regional issues.

Concerns over “clashing visions”, “competing models”, and rising military expenditure within the region propelled India to call for a concept where partners could work these issues out and seek peace and stability. So, Modi calls for “cooperation instead of rivalry” as they recognize that one actor can only do so much. Moreover, it is stated that this *Indo-Pacific* concept is not a strategy or a “grouping that seeks to dominate” (Modi, 2018).

From this text, we find that India's *Indo-Pacific* concept calls for cooperation, strengthening connectivity and trade ties with ASEAN in the centre of the region to bring prosperity and peace.

### ***ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)***

For ASEAN, the text chosen to be analysed is the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)* released in 2019 (ASEAN, 2019). It is important to emphasize that ASEAN is not a country but a regional organization. This perception is vital to comprehend the AOIP and their overall position regarding the *Indo-Pacific* conception.

This document was released due to the drastic changes happening in the region. These changes affect the regional dynamics, thus bringing ASEAN an opportunity to reinforce its position in the region:

“Therefore, it is in the interest of ASEAN to lead the shaping of their economic and security architecture and ensure that such dynamics will continue to bring about peace, security, stability and prosperity for the peoples in the Southeast Asia as well as in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific.” (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1).

Hence, as reiterated throughout the Outlook, the primary aspect is bringing ASEAN to the region's centre through its leadership role in regional dialogue in every area of cooperation between the partners. The exclusive usage of ASEAN-led mechanisms further emphasizes this.

This leading role consists of guiding cooperation, promoting a prosperous environment for common growth and addressing common challenges within the region. It would be a region “of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry;” and “development and prosperity for all” (ASEAN, 2019, p. 2).

Their initiative focuses on openness, transparency, inclusivity, good governance, equality, mutual trust, and benefit. These principles translate into the repurposing of ASEAN projects from the *Indo-Pacific* perspective. Initiatives such as the EAS, ARF or the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) are meant to be optimized and become the main regional mechanism of cooperation and dialogue. There is an ASEAN mechanism designated for every area of cooperation in the Outlook (maritime cooperation, connectivity, the SDGs, and economy). Moreover, the Outlook seeks to use the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)* as a kind of protocol for regional cooperation (ASEAN, 2019, p. 3).

## **Australia's 2020 Defence Strategic Update (DSU)**

Next is Australia, and the text chosen for analysis is the *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Australia, 2020). As we have seen earlier, this document is an unplanned update of the 2016 DWP written out of the increasing anxieties of the Department of Defence of the Australian government.

As this document is a defence report, the *Indo-Pacific* element under scrutiny here is not a concept per se but their defence strategy for the region they call *Indo-Pacific*. The DSU goals are “to shape Australia’s strategic environment; to deter actions against Australia’s interests, and to respond with credible military force, when required.” (Australia, 2020, pp. 24–25). The text develops a detailed plan for that.

The main reason that propelled the DSU release was the accelerated military build-up of the region, complemented by the 2016 original anxieties, which were the U.S.-China rivalry, the threat of terrorism, state fragility and the Chinese activities in the *Indo-Pacific* region.

Given that this text mainly focuses on defence, the principles of the strategy are stability, security, and prosperity. It focuses on connectivity as it intends to strengthen the relationships with immediate neighbouring countries, the *Indo-Pacific* region countries, to work toward more complex defence cooperation that can respond to the region’s changing security environment in faster response times.

In terms of relationships, Australia describes itself as an *active ally* in the region regarding security and stability. It highlights the centrality and importance of ASEAN to the region’s dynamics and its relationship with Japan and India. The Indo-Pacific is a critical area of security and trade for Australia, so they must deepen ties to reach their defence goals.

## **EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**

The text chosen for the EU is the *Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, released in 2021, as we introduced earlier in its dedicated chapter (European Commission, 2021). The EU is not a country but a regional organisation, and unlike ASEAN, it is an organisation situated outside of the region in study.

This strategy was released intending to propel the EU into the *Indo-Pacific*, as both areas share common challenges and benefit from the stability and peace of the seas. Moreover, intense competition paralleled by a military build-up in the region raises concerns. The state of democracy and human rights in these countries are also factors adding up to the release of this document.

The principles of cooperation of the EU strategy are principled, long-term, open and fair, sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based. The areas of priority we have already tackled before, although it is important to note the variety of issues the EU is bringing forward, not only current issues but systemic ones, which could benefit from this regional perspective.

Security, defence, and connectivity are the main focus of the EU concept. Working with partners that have released their *Indo-Pacific* perspectives and regional partners towards cooperation and understanding will benefit every actor. So, the EU seeks to participate more in regional dialogues and create a better environment suited for investment and trade.

Therefore, the EU wants to participate in the *Indo-Pacific* dynamics to support policy-making and take on a normative role as a “defender of human rights and democracy.” in the *Indo-Pacific* region (European Commission, 2021, p. 3). It calls for deepening cooperation and dialogue between partners through existing mechanisms and creating new ones that complement the existing structures.

### **United States *Indo-Pacific* Strategy**

The text selected for the United States is the Indo-Pacific Strategy released in February 2022, which we have mentioned before (Government of the United States of America, 2022). The Biden administration released this strategy, chosen for this analysis as the most recent U.S. strategy. While another strategy was released during the Trump administration, this one is the perspective of the Biden mandate.

This document has a defence-centric view of the region. The main challenges in the *Indo-Pacific* region are China, the climate crisis, and the Pandemic.

The text introduces the issue of China early as it blames the Chinese for most of the challenges in the region, stating they are coercive in its pursuit of becoming the “world’s most influential power.” (Government of the United States of America, 2022, p. 5). The *Indo-Pacific* as a strategy is an instrument that brings states feeling the same way as the U.S. to be together and strengthen themselves against whatever challenges China brings. However, the text states:

"Our objective is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share." (Government of the United States of America, 2022, p. 5)

The U.S. envisions a free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient region. Defence, connectivity, and economy are the major areas of focus here. Thus, the strengthening of partnerships

and ties, the intent to invest and push forward the Indo-Pacific Economic Frameworks, and increasing military capacity in the region are some of the biggest goals of the strategy.

***China's Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture***

Lastly, to bring the Chinese perspective to the analysis, the text selected was the *Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture*. This document was released in August 2022 by the Chinese government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

This document announces the Chinese commitment to supporting ASEAN in its' path of becoming a leader in the "regional architecture", that is, the *Indo-Pacific* region, through its initiatives, including the AOIP. This is the first time the Chinese have accepted an *Indo-Pacific* concept (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

China describes the AOIP as *free* and *inclusive* but, more importantly, as an *independent* initiative. Therefore, not allied to any other concepts of the *Indo-Pacific*, which she heavily rejects. Moreover, it is stated that the Chinese do not want ASEAN to take any sides. It is also mentioned how the Chinese are not targeting any third party through this text. These many disclosures emphasize the independent element configured to the AOIP to alienate it from other perspectives that might be influenced or not by the U.S..

## 5.2 Results Discussion

The texts we have just introduced are subject to many interpretations. Each text's content is not on its level, and they share common points and concerns from which can be drawn conclusions. We mention again the seven categories used: values; background; areas and levels of cooperation; inclusivity; preference in existing mechanisms; perception of ASEAN centrality; and perception of the term strategy. We will organize the results obtained through them.

Starting with *values*, every actor in their texts has expressed under which principles their concepts operate. These principles are recurrent in the texts, and there are no opposites. Most texts collide with their ideas and morals toward the *Indo-Pacific*.



Most of the seven texts in the analysis used the terms *free* and *open*, which is the case of Japan, India, the EU, the U.S., and China. (European Commission, 2021, p. 8; Government of the United States of America, 2022, p. 6; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b; Modi, 2018). This usage shows a view of the *Indo-Pacific* that coincides with the one of the U.S.. Conversely, China uses *open* to show how inclusive and impartial the AOIP can be. Despite considering the United States a vital ally and presence in the region, Australia does not use them as the text is a defence paper that concerns, first and foremost, defence and security. EU and India want a level playing field, and China strives for win-win cooperation between partners.

Most of them also call for the respect of the law, seeking a rules-based order and a stable, secure, and peaceful region, defence-related values with which Australia now agrees. The EU brings an unforeseen principle: sustainability for its mission in the *Indo-Pacific*.

When it comes to the *background* of the concept, namely the context and factors impelling these actors to publish these texts, we find three general concerns: the intense competition between the U.S. and China, the territorial disputes paired with rising military expenditures in the region and Climate Change (Australia, 2020, p. 5; European Commission, 2021, p. 2; Government of the United States of America, 2022, pp. 5–6; Modi, 2018).

The U.S.-China rivalry is considered a worry for Australia, which explicitly elaborates on it, and for the EU and India. Their texts mention the intense competition between countries affecting the region's dynamics (Australia, 2020, p. 11). The U.S., regarding this, is concerned about China and its' actions undermining the region's stability. Australia is the only actor sharing this direct opposition to the Chinese. No other text is so blatantly against another country or event. The EU and Indian concepts both mention China to explain their relationship's complexity.

The territorial disputes are an issue tackled in all texts, except the Chinese, given its' different nature. They are a huge source of anxiety, as we have seen earlier. Furthermore, military modernization simultaneously alerts actors, making them feel vulnerable and insecure.

The third factor, climate change, is felt by the EU, the U.S. and ASEAN (ASEAN, 2019, pp. 1, 5; European Commission, 2021, p. 2; Government of the United States of America, 2022, p. 5). They fear the consequences of climate change in issues such as natural disasters, which many countries of the *Indo-Pacific* are prone to.

Specific cases include ASEAN, which has published the text to demonstrate its utter desire to take the ropes in the region and be essential for its development and growth. The dynamics and instability in the region opened their eyes to the opportunity they brought them. Nevertheless, Japan, whose FOIP

is focused mainly on the maritime domain, is concerned with illegal activities such as piracy and fishing and threats like terrorism.

In *areas of cooperation*, all texts attribute much importance to the maritime spaces of the region, as instability in those waters affects trade activities. Defence is equally crucial for all in the same spectrum, being the primary focus for Australia and the U.S.. These two are the most defence-oriented texts.

Connectivity is present in most texts, especially in the AOIP, as it pushes forward its projects and mechanisms for further regional engagement (ASEAN, 2019, p. 4). Like ASEAN, the EU focuses primarily on connectivity (European Commission, 2021, p. 12). They both seek to enhance dialogue and tackle issues of every nature, defence-based, environmental challenges, and democratic and human rights issues, which the EU only brings up.

Environmental issues are tackled in the texts by the U.S., the EU and ASEAN, the last two explicitly wanting to work toward the SDGs.

The *inclusivity* factor analyses the openness toward actors outside of the *Indo-Pacific* spectrum, which, in every text, indirectly refers to the Chinese. As we have seen before, every *Indo-Pacific* concept has had some influence on the Chinese. Every actor involved holds a specific relationship dynamic with them which is rendered into the texts through the factor in question.

Most of the texts outright declare to be *inclusive*, except Japan, U.S. and Australia. For Japan, whose text does not state anything about inclusivity, particular partners are mentioned: the U.S., India, and Australia. When this text was published, these actors had shown interest and initiatives toward the Indo-Pacific in 2019. They are also, counting with Japan, the four actors of the QUAD. On the other hand, the U.S. and Australia are very opposed to China, which eliminates the idea that their concepts could welcome her.

India and EU, whose texts declare to be inclusive, address their relationship with China and each other's multitudes in the text: India acknowledges their tensions but has a hopeful note for their bilateral relationship. In contrast, the EU addresses their economic ties and divergence in issues such as human rights.

ASEAN's text also states *inclusivity*, however, it does not mention China or any other partner. China, in their text, reinforces how *inclusive* and *open* the AOIP is, clarifying how the statement is not targeting anyone and that they welcome everyone to join ASEAN in its' project of the *Indo-Pacific* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022b).

*Levels of cooperation* is an interesting point because the texts explain at what levels they want the cooperation mechanisms, be dialogues or forums, to run. Aside from ASEAN and Japan, every text

wants their *Indo-Pacific* mechanisms to be dealt both bilaterally and multilaterally. The EU further distinguishes between multilateral and regional as the text invokes both levels of cooperation. Japan seeks to make mostly bilateral cooperation between partners. Its' big exception is the QUAD (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). ASEAN, in turn, wants every mechanism to be multilateral as long as it is based on already existing ASEAN-led mechanisms (ASEAN, 2019, p. 5).

In the same topic, every text wants to work with existing mechanisms that are already in use. This is particularly strong in the AOIP since several existing projects were then to serve the *Indo-Pacific* purpose (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1). A common goal in the texts is strengthening institutions of cooperation and dialogue instead of creating new and more projects only for the region. Although there are exceptions, for example, the U.S. has created the *Indo-Pacific Economic Vision*.

Another factor in these texts is the apparent support of ASEAN as a regional centre and its' vitality for development and growth. Every text released after the AOIP emphasizes ASEAN and its' initiatives in their message. Modi's speech also stated the same, even though it happened before the AOIP, and Japan's article does not mention ASEAN.

Finally, the last factor is the perception of the term *strategy*. As tackled earlier, *strategy* was the definition of the Japanese FOIP when it was first released, later switching to *vision* instead due to implications. Partners considered the word *strategy* too strong and partial, which led the Japanese to use *vision* instead. Because of a lack of consensus and differences in meaning, these texts do not all use the same term to describe their Indo-Pacific texts.

ASEAN avoids the term *strategy* and instead uses *outlook* as in an ASEAN view of what the region of the *Indo-Pacific* could become with their input. China, in its text, considers the AOIP an *initiative*.

Also, India does not use the *strategy* as Modi states that the Indo-Pacific is not a "grouping that seeks to dominate." This reveals the negative connotation associated with the term they want to avoid (Modi, 2018).

Australia is a particular case since the text is a defence report that considers the *Indo-Pacific* a region, not a strategy or a concept. So, the text being a defence plan is itself a strategy towards the established region of the *Indo-Pacific*.

The only two texts that apply *strategy* to their texts are the U.S, and the EU, which we must note are the two exogenous countries. They regard their texts as strategies but in a different light: the EU's strategy is a plan of action for engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, while the United States' strategy is a defence-based text.

### 5.3 Preliminary Conclusion of the Results

In the analysis, we compared a variety of subsequent parameters in their texts, those that reveal the information needed to draw conclusions toward our main question. These texts about each *Indo-Pacific* concept reveal how the concepts change and influence the region's dynamics.

A tendency observed in all the analysed texts is the perception that the *Indo-Pacific* concepts create momentum toward a new phase of regional engagement:

“This Outlook is not aimed at creating new mechanisms or replacing existing ones; rather, it is an Outlook intended to enhance ASEAN’s Community building process and to strengthen and give new momentum for existing ASEAN-led mechanisms to better face challenges and seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments.” (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1).

The concepts hold expectations of their new plan toward cooperation to bring a new wave and air to the region's unstable and uncertain power dynamics, hoping it will soothe and unify the actors.

The principles are identical throughout the texts, stemming from common problems and needs. This could mean that, theoretically, the actors are all like-minded in their pursuit of *the Indo-Pacific*, however, it is not. The principles might match, even complement each other, but what truly differentiates them are each actor’s purposes, which apply to each text's goals.

Since the general goal of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts is to make the region stable and prosperous given its’ unstable environment, it is understood that these concepts do not advocate for the creation of new institutions and mechanisms of cooperation. Even though creating a project would bring attention and authority to the creator, it would also stir the environment further. Working with well-established and familiar mechanisms has the advantage of not doing that as actors are already participating in them or aware of their work. Therefore, we can induce that strengthening dialogues, forums, talks, and every kind of cooperation mechanism is the proper way to head toward the *Indo-Pacific* agenda, according to the texts.

One could say that since there are no substantial changes in the relationship structures of the region, then there is not much influence from the *Indo-Pacific* texts, however, we cannot simply ignore the phenomenon happening as partners release their own perspectives of the *Indo-Pacific*. That momentum that the first actors to release concepts has already begun.

In terms of engagement, these concepts focus on connectivity and defence-oriented perspectives. As Modi stated in his speech: “Connectivity is vital. It does more than enhance trade and prosperity. It unites a region.” (Modi, 2018). The United States complements this statement: “the United States is

enhancing our capabilities to defend our interests as well as to deter aggression and to counter coercion against U.S. territory and our allies and partners.” (Government of the United States of America, 2022, p. 12).

The actors believe solutions for the region's security problems catalyse regional prosperity. Hence, the importance of defence in the majority of the texts analysed. Moreover, economically, the actors already hold bilateral relations to some extent, which also explains why trade is not the top priority for any of the powers involved. It does not mean trade relations are alienated from the region's tensions, as we have seen with the concepts stemming from worry over the U.S.-China rivalry.

Furthermore, from the texts, we conclude that the majority of the involved actors stating to be inclusive do so to demonstrate their neutrality regarding the U.S.-China rivalry and regional tensions. It is highly doubtful that China is joining any of the concepts, but it is still clever to demonstrate impartiality. Since the Chinese do not like the *Indo-Pacific* concepts, this is a pre-emptive action to ensure bilateral relations do not falter.

In the case of the U.S. and Australia, whose texts are heavily opposed to China, there are no signs that their relationships are brightening soon. Australia doubts that the U.S.-China tensions will alleviate any time soon, which shows the conditions of its' plan towards the region: “Strategic competition between the United States and China is unlikely to abate, and the pandemic has sharpened aspects of this competition.” (Australia, 2020, p. 15). The accusatory tone in the strategies isolates the Chinese from their plans toward the region, hardening their bilateral relationships and making the Chinese even more sceptical of the *Indo-Pacific* concepts.

The recent reception of the AOIP marks a significant shift in their overall public responses to the *Indo-Pacific*. It is stated that “China is ready to work with ASEAN to uphold openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation, advance practical cooperation in the four priority areas of the AOIP, and promote post-COVID recovery and sustainable development in the region.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2022b).

The exceptions, perhaps, are the concepts that show fewer ties with the U.S., which is the case of the AOIP and its' independency. China is a big player in Asia. As we have seen earlier, most of these countries involved have intense economic relations with her, including Australia and the U.S, even if at a smaller level than the other actors. So, bilateral relations with the actors of the *Indo-Pacific* are going to continue to be significant. However, the *Indo-Pacific* concepts are bringing together the partners in defence, diplomacy and trade, and areas that China would benefit from being part of.

The example of the EU is very peculiar as a power from outside the region that found the concepts an interesting approach to that area of the world. EU’s ties with the Chinese are also at the

origins of their strategy, and it only demonstrates the more independent position the EU seeks to hold in international power dynamics.

Therefore, regarding the main research question, if the *Indo-Pacific* concepts affect the relationships between powers in this region of the world, we can induce from the texts analysed that it is a positive affirmation. Since the international power dynamics are changing, these actors want to take an active role in them. Actors are searching for a new angle from which to interact with each other, searching for solutions for issues that affect everyone and can only be resolved in consensus. While the issues worrying the regional actors involved are very delicate and have been active for several years, these new perspectives can help with their resolution. This would be accomplished if there was regional consensus between them. However, as we have seen earlier, the purposes of each concept are peculiar to each of their own, which can compromise these genuine intentions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The relations between the actors of this region of the world were indeed affected by the *Indo-Pacific* discourses. We observed that the concepts bring the actors together and change how they interact. Multilateral mechanisms are becoming more relevant as communication channels, and we witness the tendency of these concepts to bring defence and diplomacy matters to these dialogues at a multilateral level, leaving trade and matters of the sort in bilateral mechanisms. Not only this, but the concepts indeed spotlight ASEAN as a centre and leader of the region. Even if the *Indo-Pacific* concepts lose momentum later, the attention granted to ASEAN is bound to stay and change the region's international dynamics.

The EU's strategy for the *Indo-Pacific* is a document that does not transpire a homogenous perspective of the Indo-Pacific matters. So, what future does the EU's *Indo-Pacific strategy* has? It would be difficult to venture into the *Indo-Pacific* when there is no consensus between member-states, not to mention the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the concept has innovative ideas for the region, for example, dialogues focused on human rights issues, which no other concept has tackled yet. It is also worth noting that the EU apprehends that it would serve best as a normative power given its distant location. As such, diplomacy and cooperation are the areas the EU focuses its strategy as they have more chances of thriving in the *Indo-Pacific*. Areas that require consensus between member-states, which is the case of security and defence issues, are less promising, at least in the short term.

We have also witnessed how crucial China is for the *Indo-Pacific* concepts. In one way or another, they are part of the roots of every *Indo-Pacific* concept, given their presence in the region and trade relations with the involved actor. The hostility in the United States' strategy, and Australia's on a minor scale, are why China dismisses the concepts when they could be parallel initiatives with the BRI. Most public reactions regarding the concepts are negative, aside from China's neutral reception of the AOIP. This reception is mainly given for its' independence factor that, according to the Chinese, displays complete separation from the U.S.'s strategy.

Regarding the academic argument about whether the *Indo-Pacific* concepts are a mere containment of China, one factor brings all these concepts together: the evolution of their relationship with China. Each concept has a different background however they absorb international events and anxieties even more if the concept itself is a region-wide project. The case of the United States' strategy is undeniably against China, but other concepts gain the benefit of the doubt for sharing common points with the Chinese's Position Paper.

Our research has shown just how these concepts align with China in terms of content. In its policy paper, China has also declared her support for cooperation and dialogue between partners, an element in every *Indo-Pacific* concept, especially ASEAN's, India's, and the EU's. This India-China alignment is particularly interesting as it contrasts with India's rejection of China's BRI.

Not only is this visible in terms of areas of focus but also the principles as China shares terms such as *open* and *inclusive* with other concepts. *Inclusivity* is a factor that many of these concepts adopted in order to appeal to the Chinese, and it worked. *Openness* regarding trade shows how these actors strive for the same goals despite differences. These points of convergence demonstrate that these concepts are not so different from the Chinese's perception of the region, even if they are executed in different projects (China's BRI and these actors' *Indo-Pacific* concepts).

Through our research, we recognise possible power alignments that before seemed illogical. China and India hold similar views concerning the need for multilateral cooperation in the region. All of these powers are concerned with maritime security and want to find solutions together, in this particular case, we identified China-India and China-Japan. Furthermore, all these powers believe in cooperation and dialogue as the way toward an *Indo-Pacific* region characterized by a peaceful and prosperous environment where all players benefit.

The *Indo-Pacific* concept is indeed shifting something in the region but is it enough to make a change? The concept needs much manpower to become a reality in Asia-Pacific and positively manipulate the changing international order. The first step that would have to be taken for these concepts to be successful would be to concentrate on the territorial disputes, end tensions and ease the military build-up of the region. For this, the U.S. and China must compromise, and partners must see eye to eye.

This study revealed essential points that distinguished the relations of these actors from a new angle and used inductive content analysis for the first time to understand the political discourse on the *Indo-Pacific* concept. While we have conducted this study successfully, some shortcomings can be addressed. The chosen methodology for this study was due to our objectives and the state of the art of this issue. As studies advance in this topic and further analysis of the discourse can enable more profound results and perspectives. It would be interesting to analyse how countries and organisations representation of the *Indo-Pacific* evolved through the released documents in order to determine if there is an adaptation to a possible changing of the international order.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Acharya, A. (2019, August 11). *Why ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook matters*. East Asia Forum. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/11/why-aseans-indo-pacific-outlook-matters/>
2. Ali, I., & Stewart, P. (2019, April 25). In rare move, French warship passes through Taiwan Strait. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-france-warship-china-exclusive-idUSKCN1S10Q7>
3. ASEAN. (n.d.). *ASEAN-China Economic Relation*. ASEAN Main Portal. Retrieved 16 October 2022, from <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/integration-with-global-economy/asean-china-economic-relation/>
4. ASEAN. (2019). *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*.
5. Australia. (n.d.). *Australia's free trade agreements (FTAs)*. Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Retrieved 14 February 2022, from <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/trade-agreements>
6. Australia. (2012). *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper: Australia's roadmap for navigating the Asian century* [Press Release]. <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22media/pressrel/2010380%22>
7. Australia. (2016). *2016 Defence White Paper* [White Paper]. <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>
8. Australia. (2017). *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* [White Paper]. Government of Australia. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf>
9. Australia. (2020). *2020 Defence Strategic Update* [White Paper]. Government of Australia. <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update>
10. Australia-Indonesia. (2021). *Joint Statement on the Seventh Indonesia-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Meeting*. <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise->

payne/media-release/joint-statement-seventh-indonesia-australia-foreign-and-defence-ministers-22-meeting

11. Barthwal-Datta, M., & Chacko, P. (2020). The politics of strategic narratives of regional order in the Indo-Pacific: Free, open, prosperous, inclusive? *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 74(3), 244–263. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2020.1744517>
12. Basu, P., Saha, R., & Bhowmick, S. (2021). *Connecting Distant Geographies: The EU in the Indo-Pacific* (Occasional Paper). Observer Research Foundation.
13. Batra, S. (2022, July 26). Uh oh. Data shows India-China trade deficit widening, Indian exports falling for 1st time in yrs. *The Print*. <https://theprint.in/economy/uh-oh-data-shows-india-china-trade-deficit-widening-indian-exports-falling-for-1st-time-in-yrs/1054872/>
14. Bindi, F. (Ed.). (2010). *The Foreign Policy of the European Union Assessing Europe's Role in the World*. Brookings Institution Press.
15. Blivas, A. (2022, February 18). *The Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy Lacks Clarity on China*. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/the-biden-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy-lacks-clarity-on-china/>
16. Casarini, N. (2006). *The evolution of the EU-China relationship: From constructive engagement to strategic partnership*. European Union Institute for Security Studies.
17. *China / Data*. (n.d.). Retrieved 28 August 2022, from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/CN>
18. China's Wang Yi Says US's Indo-Pacific Strategy 'Doomed to Fail'. (2022, May 22). *Bloomberg.Com*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-22/china-s-wang-yi-says-us-s-indo-pacific-strategy-doomed-to-fail>
19. Costa, C. M. (2020). The Words of the Belt and Road Initiative: A Chinese Discourse for the World? In F. J. B. S. Leandro & P. A. B. Duarte (Eds.), *The Belt and Road Initiative* (pp. 23–44). Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2564-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2564-3_2)

20. Council of the European Union. (2021). *EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific— Council conclusions*. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>
21. Denisov, I., Paramonov, O., Arapova, E., & Safranchuk, I. (2021). Russia, China, and the concept of Indo-Pacific. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 12(1), 72–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366521999899>
22. Denisov, I., Safranchuk, I., & Bochkov, D. (2020). China–India relations in Eurasia: Historical legacy and the changing global context. *Human Affairs*, 30(2), 224–238. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2020-0021>
23. Department of Defence of Australia. (n.d.). *Indo-Pacific Endeavour* [Website]. Retrieved 12 February 2022, from <https://www.defence.gov.au/operations/indo-pacific-endeavour>
24. Department of Defence of the United States of America. (2019). *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*. <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>
25. Eckhardt, J. (2015). *Business Lobbying and Trade Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137325440>
26. European Commission. (n.d.-a). *Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)*. European Commission. Retrieved 10 April 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/asean/>
27. European Commission. (n.d.-b). *Australia*. European Commission. Retrieved 10 April 2022, from <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/australia/>
28. European Commission. (2019). *EU-China – A strategic outlook*. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>

29. European Commission. (2020, December 30). *EU and China reach agreement in principle on investment* [Press release]. European Commission. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2541](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2541)
30. European Commission. (2021). *The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. European Commission. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_2021\\_24\\_1\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf)
31. European Commission. Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development. (2018). *Connecting Europe and Asia: Building blocks for an EU strategy: joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2841/401705>
32. European Council. (2014). *European Union Maritime Security Strategy*. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%2011205%202014%20INIT/EN/pdf>
33. European External Action Service. (2014). *Regional Programming For Asia Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020*. European Union. [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asia/docs/rsp/regional-asia-mip-2014-2020\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asia/docs/rsp/regional-asia-mip-2014-2020_en.pdf)
34. European External Action Service. (2016). *Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe: A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy*. Publications Office. <https://doi.org/doi/10.2871/64849>
35. Eurostat. (2022a). *China-EU - international trade in goods statistics*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU\\_-\\_international\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics)
36. Eurostat. (2022b). *Foreign direct investment—Stocks*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Foreign\\_direct\\_investment\\_-\\_stocks](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Foreign_direct_investment_-_stocks)
37. France. (2018). *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy*. Government of France. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>

38. France. (2021). *The Indo-Pacific region: A priority for France*. France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>
39. French National Portal of Maritime Limits. (n.d.). *Areas of France's maritime spaces of sovereignty and jurisdiction | limitesmaritimes.gouv.fr*. French National Portal of Maritime Limits. Retrieved 19 September 2022, from <https://maritimelimits.gouv.fr/resources/areas-frances-maritime-spaces-sovereignty-and-jurisdiction>
40. Germany. (2020). *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region*. <https://rangun.diplo.de/blob/2380824/a27b62057f2d2675ce2bbfc5be01099a/policy-guidelines-summary-data.pdf>
41. Germany. (2021, September 13). *One year of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region: Taking stock*. German Federal Foreign Office. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/indo-pazifik-leitlinien-fortschritt/2481700>
42. Gong, X. (2020). Non-traditional security cooperation between China and south-east Asia: Implications for Indo-Pacific geopolitics. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 29–48. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz225>
43. Government of China. (2017). *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceasean/eng/zgwj/t1430079.htm>
44. Government of the United States of America. (2017). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>
45. Government of the United States of America. (2022). *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States of America*.
46. Grare, F., & Reuter, M. (2021). *Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific*. European Council on Foreign Relations.

47. Hanemann, T., & Huotari, M. (2018). *EU-China FDI: Working towards more reciprocity in investment relations* (Papers on China). MERICS & Rhodium Group. <https://merics.org/en/report/eu-china-fdi-working-towards-more-reciprocity-investment-relations>
48. India-Indonesia. (2018). *Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. [http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared\\_Vision\\_of\\_IndiaIndonesia\\_Maritime\\_Cooperation\\_in\\_the\\_IndoPacific](http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared_Vision_of_IndiaIndonesia_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific)
49. Indonesia-Vietnam. (2018). *Joint Statement*. <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-indonesia-issue-joint-statement/138185.vnp>
50. International Maritime Organization. (n.d.). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. International Maritime Organization. Retrieved 18 September 2022, from <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Legal/Pages/UnitedNationsConventionOnTheLawOfTheSea.aspx>
51. Iuppa, G. (2020). *An "Indo-Pacific" Outlook for the European Union* [Briefing]. European Institute for Asian Studies. <https://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/IPO-Briefing-Paper.pdf>
52. Jung, H.-S., & Chen, J.-L. (2019). Impact of the U.S. "Indo-Pacific Strategy" and "Pivot to Asia" and China's "Belt and Road Initiative" on Sino-US Political and Economic Relations. *International Business Research*, 12(6), 11. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v12n6p11>
53. Kliem, F. (2020). Why Quasi-Alliances Will Persist in the Indo-Pacific? The Fall and Rise of the Quad. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 7(3), 271–304. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797020962620>
54. Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a Literature Review. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(01), 127–132. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506060264>

55. Koga, K. (2020). Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' question: Countering China or shaping a new regional order? *International Affairs*, 96, 49–73. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz241>
56. Kyngäs, H., Mikkonen, K., & Kääriäinen, M. (Eds.). (2020). *The Application of Content Analysis in Nursing Science Research*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30199-6>
57. Lalisang, A. E. Y., & Candra, D. S. (2020). *Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum & China's Belt and Road Initiative* (p. 34). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/indonesien/16770.pdf>
58. Liu, F. (2020). The recalibration of Chinese assertiveness: China's responses to the Indo-Pacific challenge. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 9–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz226>
59. López-Aranguren, J. L. (2022). The EU's strategic projection in the Indo-Pacific. *Cuadernos Europeos de Deusto*, 03, 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.18543/ced-03-2022pp29-49>
60. Luthra, G. (2021). An Assessment of the European Union's Indo-Pacific strategy. *Observer Research Foundation*, 304.
61. Mahbubani, K. (2021, January 27). Why Attempts to Build a New Anti-China Alliance Will Fail. *Financial Times*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/27/anti-china-alliance-quad-australia-india-japan-u-s/>
62. Maizland, L. (2020, February 5). *China's Modernizing Military*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-modernizing-military>
63. McGowan, M. (2018, January 30). Chinese government exerts influence across Australian society, MPs told. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jan/31/chinese-government-exerts-influence-across-australian-society-mps-told>
64. Medcalf, R. (2014). In defence of the Indo-Pacific: Australia's new strategic map. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(4), 470–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2014.911814>

65. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). *To Achieve an Open and Free Indo-Pacific* (Diplomatic Bluebook 2019).  
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2019/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf01>
66. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2022a, July 11). *Wang Yi Delivers a Policy Speech on Open Regionalism at ASEAN Secretariat*.  
[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202207/t20220712\\_10718813.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202207/t20220712_10718813.html)
67. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2022b). *Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Supporting ASEAN Centrality in the Evolving Regional Architecture*.
68. Mittal, V. (2022, February 21). The Lesser-Known Border Dispute: China And India. *Forbes*.  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/vikrammittal/2022/02/21/the--lesser-known-border-disputechina-and-india/>
69. Modi, N. (2018, June 1). *Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018)*. Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>
70. Mohan, G. (2020). A European Strategy for the Indo-Pacific. *The Washington Quarterly*, 43(4), 171–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1850447>
71. Natalegawa, M. (2013, May 16). *'An Indonesian Perspective on The Indo-Pacific' Keynote Address by H.E. DR. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa Minister for Foreign Affairs Republic of Indonesia, at the Conference on Indonesia in Washington DC, 16 May 2013*. Conference on Indonesia, Washington DC. [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/attachments/130516\\_MartyNatalegawa\\_Speech.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/130516_MartyNatalegawa_Speech.pdf)
72. Nedopil, C. (2022). Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – Green Finance & Development Center. *Green Finance & Development Center*. <https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>



73. Obama, B. (2011, November 17). *Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament*. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>
74. Odgaard, L. (2019). European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy. *Asia Policy*, 26(4), 129–159. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2019.0051>
75. Panda, J. P. (2021). China as a Revisionist Power in Indo-Pacific and India's Perception: A Power-Partner Contention. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(127), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766906>
76. Pardesi, M. S. (2020). The Indo-Pacific: A 'new' region or the return of history? *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 74(2), 124–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2019.1693496>
77. Parry, M. (2022). *Australia's strategic view of the Indo-Pacific* [Briefing]. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/pt/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)698917](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/pt/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)698917)
78. Pejsova, E. (2018). *The Indo-Pacific: A passage to Europe?* Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2815/56656>
79. Phillips, A. (2016, October). *The Strategist From Hollywood to Bollywood? Australia's Indo/Pacific future in a contested Asia*. The Strategist. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/hollywood-bollywood-australias-indopacific-future-contested-asia/print/>
80. Pitakdumrongkit, K. K. (2019). *The impact of the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy on regional economic governance*. East-West Center.
81. Pompeo, M. (2018, July 29). *Secretary Pompeo Remarks on "America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision"*. U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Republic of Korea. <https://kr.usembassy.gov/073018-secretary-pompeo-remarks-on-americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/>

82. Rohit Singh, & SP Sharma. (2018). *India-China Trade Relationship: The Trade Giants of Past, Present and Future*. PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry. <http://rgdoi.net/10.13140/RG.2.2.13039.28325>
83. Satake, T., & Sahashi, R. (2021). The Rise of China and Japan's 'Vision' for Free and Open Indo-Pacific. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(127), 18–35. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766907>
84. Scobell, A. (2021). Constructing a U.S.-China Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(127), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1766910>
85. Scott, D. (2019). Indonesia Grapples with the Indo-Pacific: Outreach, Strategic Discourse, and Diplomacy. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 38(2), 194–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103419860669>
86. Singh, M. (2009b). *Minutes of Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India Following the Japan-India Summit Meeting*. Government of Japan. [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200912/29india\\_kaiken\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200912/29india_kaiken_e.html)
87. Sinkkonen, E. (2019). The more the merrier? Sino-Japanese security relations in the context of complex interstate rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. *The Pacific Review*, 32(5), 748–777. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1569113>
88. Smith, J. M. (2022, February 15). *The Indo-Pacific Strategy Needs Indo-Specifics*. Defense One. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2022/02/indo-pacific-strategy-needs-indo-specifics/362022/>
89. the Netherlands. (2020). *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for strengthening Dutch and EU cooperation with partners in Asia*. Government of the Netherlands. <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>

90. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2019). *China's National Defense in the New Era*.
91. Tomé, L. (2019). Espaço “Indo-Pacífico”: O Fator China e Motivações Geopolíticas. *Instituto Nacional de Defesa*, 151, 66–100.
92. Tomé, L. (2021). China e Ásia-Pacífico na política da Administração Biden Operacionalizando um «sistema internacional estável e aberto» e um «Indo-Pacífico livre e aberto». *Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais*, 69, 035–068.
93. Trump, D. J. (2017, November 11). *Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit* [Speech]. APEC CEO Summit, Vietnam. <https://asean.usmission.gov/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>
94. Wang, D., & Meng, W. (2020). China debating the regional order. *The Pacific Review*, 33(3–4), 497–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1728576>
95. Wang, Y. (2018, March 8). *Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press*. Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Macao Special Administration Region. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/como/eng/news/t1540928.htm>
96. Wang, Y. (2022, May 22). 王毅：美国“印太战略”必然是一个失败的战略\_中华人民共和国外交部 . Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjbxhd/202205/t20220522\\_10690865.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjbxhd/202205/t20220522_10690865.shtml)
97. Wirth, C. (2019). Whose ‘Freedom of Navigation’? Australia, China, the United States and the making of order in the ‘Indo-Pacific’. *The Pacific Review*, 32(4), 475–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1515788>
98. Wu, Y.-S. (2022). Beyond ‘Indo-Pacific’ as a buzzword: Learning from China's BRI experience. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 29(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2042373>

99. Xi, J. (2013a, September 8). *Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future*. Embassy of People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm>
100. Xi, J. (2013b, October 2). *Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament—ASEAN---China Center*. ASEAN-China Centre. [http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c\\_133062675.htm](http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm)
101. Xi, J. (2019, April 26). *Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation—Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*. The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. <http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2019/0426/c22-1266.html>
102. Xi, J. (2021, October 25). *Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Conference Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Lawful Seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations*. Conference Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Restoration of the Lawful Seat of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202110/t20211025\\_9982254.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202110/t20211025_9982254.html)
103. Zenglein, M. J. (2020). *Mapping and recalibrating Europe's economic interdependence with China*. MERICS. <https://merics.org/en/report/mapping-and-recalibrating-europes-economic-interdependence-china>

## ANNEX

### Annex A – Comparison Exercise for the Inductive Content Analysis

Table A1 – Data Extracted from the Analysed Texts

	<b>Values</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Focus on</b>	<b>Areas of cooperation (in order)</b>	<b>Levels of cooperation</b>	<b>Inclusive/Directly opposed to a party</b>	<b>Creating/ Maintaining</b>	<b>ASEAN centrality</b>	<b>Sees Indo-Pacific as a strategy</b>
<b>Japan</b>	Free, Open, Stability, Peace, respect to law, freedom of navigation	Concern over maritime illegal activities and threats	Defence	Maritime domain;	Bilateral mostly	Heavily leaning on the U.S.	maintaining	no	no, it is a concept
<b>India</b>	Inclusive, open, unity, free, level playing field, respect to law,	Anxieties over "rising military expenditure"	Cooperation	Defence; Economy; Connectivity;	Bilateral and multilateral	Inclusive	maintaining	yes	no

	freedom of navigation	in the region and the territorial disputes;							
<b>ASEAN</b>	openness, inclusivity, mutual respect/trust/benefit, respect to law, freedom of navigation	Desire to lead a movement in the region toward stability and peace to motivate mutual growth	Regional prosperity through ASEAN centrality	Maritime domain; connectivity; SDGs;	Multilateral based on ASEAN existing mechanisms	Inclusive	maintaining	yes	no, the AOIP is an outlook
<b>Australia</b>	security, prosperity, stability	Anxieties over U.S.-China rivalry, China itself, terrorism, state fragility;	Defence	Defence; Connectivity;	Bilateral and multilateral	Openly opposed to China	maintaining	yes	for AUS, Indo-Pacific is a region itself

<b>EU</b>	principled; long-term; level playing field; open, fair; sustainable, rules-based	Geopolitical dynamics of intense competition and territorial disputes, military build-up, frail democracy and human rights.	Diplomacy	Cooperation; Maritime domain; Defence; SDGs;	Bilateral, multilateral and regional	Inclusive	maintaining	yes	yes
<b>The U.S.</b>	Free, open, connected, prosperous, secure and resilient	Challenges: China and Climate Crisis and the Pandemic	Defence	Connectivity; security; Economy;	Bilateral and multilateral	Openly opposed to China	both	yes	yes
<b>China</b>	Independent, open, inclusive, win-win cooperation	Paper addressing the intention	Cooperation	Cooperation in all ASEAN-led	bilateral (china-ASEAN)	Inclusive	maintaining	yes	yes, except AOIP, which the

		to support ASEAN in it's regional policies fully		initiatives					Chinese describe as "initiative."
--	--	---	--	-------------	--	--	--	--	---