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AIC COMMENTARY

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Emerging Perspectives of Indo-Pacific Initiatives

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This commentary investigates the perspectives of Indo-Pacific proposed by different stakeholders and the common key elements and areas of cooperation that the countries share on Indo-Pacific. This commentary also identifies the possible areas of cooperation leading to greater integration of the Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has been gaining new geopolitical construct over the last few years. There is also a growing consensus in understanding the geographical scope and economic and strategic approaches towards Indo-Pacific. The term “Indo-Pacific” has found its way into official documents such as national security strategies, defence white papers, foreign policy, maritime security strategy and other official documents (see Table 1). Australia referred to the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in its White Paper in 2012, Defence White Papers in 2013 and 2016 and its Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017, which signify Australia’s strategic priority to the region. Similarly, the USA has also mentioned in their National Security Strategy and Defence documents, respectively in 2017 and 2019, with emphasis on Free and Open Indo-Pacific in the regional context. Table 1 also indicates how gradually the countries such as Japan, ASEAN countries, India, Australia, the US, France and recently Germany have recognised the strategic importance of the region and come forward to state their perspectives and positions on Indo-Pacific. The idea of the Indo-Pacific has reached the countries of the European Union (EU) from the countries of East Asia. Some more countries such as Canada, Sri Lanka and South Africa are also expected to launch their Indo-Pacific visions.¹ The perspective of these countries about Indo-Pacific is to ensure safe and secure maritime space through an inclusive and multilateral approach among like-minded countries while ascertaining the ASEAN centrality and to support the international order and regional stability.

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[Views and opinions are authors’ own. Usual disclaimers apply.]

In this context, this commentary reviews the perspectives of Indo-Pacific shared by different countries and discusses the key elements and areas of cooperation. It also identifies the areas where countries can work together for integration of the region.

Table 1: Indo-Pacific Developments

2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October - The term "Indo-Pacific" appears for the first time officially in the White Paper published by Australia
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - Defence White Paper of Australia mentioned the Strategy Outlook of stable Indo-Pacific
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October - The document Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy referred the term "Indo-Pacific"
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February - Defence White Paper of Australia mentioned the Strategic Outlook of stable Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based global order • August - Shinzo Abe declares his "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" to be the core of Japan's foreign policy doctrine.
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November - At the APEC Summit in Hanoi, U.S. President calls the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" the focal point of U.S. Asia Policy • November - Foreign Policy White Paper of Australia dedicates a chapter on "A stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific" • December - The National Security Strategy of the United States dedicates a special section to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" under strategy in the regional context
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - French President Macron speaks about a French strategy for the Indo-Pacific • June - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi presents his country's "Free, Open, Prosperous and Inclusive Indo-Pacific" concept in his speech at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. • September - Japan from now on calls the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" a "vision" rather than a "strategy"
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May - The French Ministry of Defence publishes the strategy paper "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific" • June - ASEAN summit, Bangkok, the ASEAN states agree on a joint document "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)" • June - The U.S. Department of Defense publishes the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnership, and Promoting a Networked Region • November - The U.S. Department of State publishes the strategy paper "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision" • November - Indian Prime Minister presents Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit, Bangkok
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September - German Government issues the Policy Guidelines on Indo-Pacific

Source: Authors' own based on various official documents.

Rising Strength of Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is the multipolar region with the geographical coverage of a number of countries in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The coverage of Indo-Pacific includes 43 countries from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, Pacific, Middle East, Latin and North Americas and two EU countries. Indo-Pacific region contributes more than half of the

world's GDP and population and has huge natural resources and potential for new economic opportunities (see Table 2). The heterogeneity prevails in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of their economic development generates various challenges in the areas of economic, political and security.

Table 2: Major Indicators of Indo-Pacific, 2019

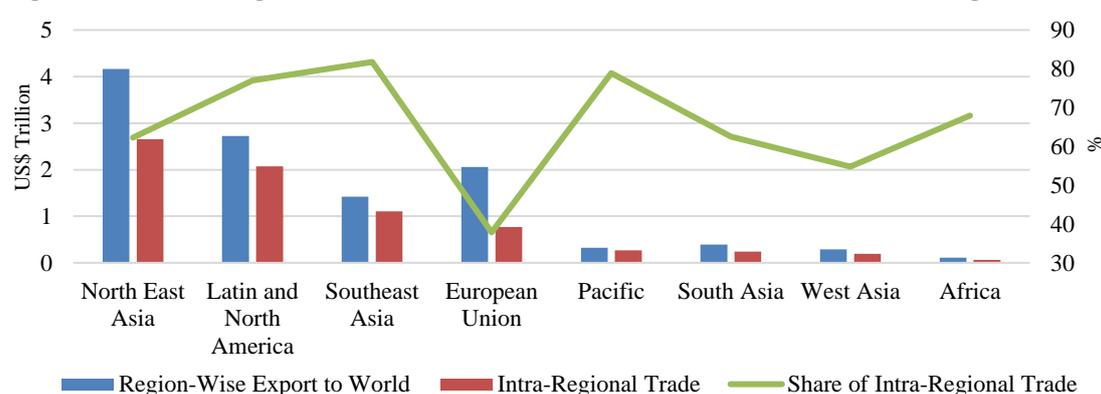
Indicators	Indo-Pacific	Share in World (%)
Land area (million sq. km)	74.59	58.57
Population (billion)	5.32	69.36
GDP (current US\$ trillion)	64.04	73.02
Export in Goods (US\$ trillion)	13.56	54.71
Import in Goods (US\$ trillion)	13.56	55.78
Total Trade in Goods (US\$ trillion)	27.13	55.24
Intra-Regional Trade (US\$ trillion)	7.37	64.11

Note: ASEAN: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines; *South Asia:* India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives; *Latin America:* Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru; *North America:* Canada, Mexico, United States; *North-East Asia:* China, Japan, South Korea, Russian Federation; *Pacific:* Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji; *West Asia:* Iran, Islamic Rep., United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Rep., Oman; *Africa:* Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Mauritius, Comoros, Seychelles; *European Union:* France and Germany.

Source: Calculated by authors based on World Development Indicators, World Bank Database.

The intra-regional trade among Indo-Pacific countries stands at 64 per cent (about US\$ 7 trillion) in 2019, which is mostly contributed by North-East Asia, Latin and North America and Southeast Asia (Figure 1). This shows the potential strength of economic integration in the Indo-Pacific.²

Figure 1: Intra-Regional Merchandise Trade in the Indo-Pacific Subregions, 2019



Note: Refer Table 2 note for details.

Source: Calculated by authors based on DOTS, IMF Database

Emerging Perspectives of Indo-Pacific

Indo-Pacific countries sharing a maritime border with the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean have objectives to deepen their strategic bonding by enhancing maritime connectivity through quality infrastructure, free and fair trade, preserving marine resources, tackling climate change, enabling digital connectivity, marine safety and maritime security which are some of

the common initiatives endorsed by the Indo-Pacific countries. Though these strategies or initiatives might appear to be common goals of Indo-Pacific; however, there are some differences in the country's approach towards Indo-Pacific construct that calls for convergence in the areas of cooperation to achieve peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region. Table 3 captures countries' major objectives and areas of cooperation that are stated in their respective Indo-Pacific visions.

ASEAN Perspective - ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

ASEAN is geographically located at the centre of the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN countries are well integrated in terms of trade and investment with major economies of the Indo-Pacific such as China, the US, Japan, Korea, India, etc. ASEAN has also been engaging with most of the Indo-Pacific countries at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. To promote rules-based regional order, ASEAN has adopted the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)" in June 2019. The AOIP promotes 'ASEAN Centrality' and emphasises on the ASEAN-led mechanism to strengthen the regional and sub-regional cooperation to achieve the common interest in the Indo-Pacific. The AOIP is also intended to work as guiding principle of the Indo-Pacific regional cooperation, promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region as well as building connectivity, maritime cooperation, achieve UN SDGs and economic cooperation.³

ASEAN Plus Perspectives

Japan – "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"

Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced Japan's vision for "*Free and Open Indo-Pacific*" in 2016. The vision emphasised to promote and establish rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade, etc., to pursue economic prosperity and to ensure peace and stability in the region. The Indo-Pacific vision of Japan is to improve connectivity between Asia, Africa and Middle East countries by promoting quality infrastructure development, which includes roads, railway networks, ports, etc. For instance, Japan has initiated several connectivity projects in the ASEAN and South Asia.

Japan's Indo-Pacific vision is also enunciated to ensure sustainable development in the region by supporting equipment and technical cooperation to enhance maritime safety and security and also providing capacity-building assistance to coastal countries of the Indo-Pacific to strengthen maritime law enforcement capacity and maritime domain awareness in the region. Japan has also built cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, anti-piracy, counterterrorism, non-proliferation, etc. Japan is also actively partnering with ASEAN nations, the US, Australia, France and India to extend the country's assistance to ensure peace and prosperity in the region.⁴ Japan is also one of the proponents of the recent Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI).

Table 3: Indo-Pacific Initiatives in Comparison

	Key Objectives	Focus Areas
ASEAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on existing regional arrangements • Strengthening and optimisation of ASEAN-led mechanisms to contribute to the maintenance of peace, freedom, and prosperity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime cooperation • Connectivity • UN SDG 2030 • Economic and other areas of cooperation
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepening economic and security cooperation • Strengthening maritime security capacities • Advancing peace and security • Dealing with emergencies • Calling for respect for international maritime rules and norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime ecology • Maritime security • Marine resources • Capacity building and resource sharing • Disaster risk reduction and management • Science, technology and academic cooperation • Trade, connectivity and maritime transport
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc. • Enhancing connectivity through quality infrastructure • Ensuring sustainable development • Enhancing maritime safety and security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security • Quality infrastructure • Environment/Health • Human resource development • Energy sector • Legal system development
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve the disputes peacefully in accordance with international law and without the threat or use of force or coercion • Facilitate open markets for free flows of goods, services, capital and ideas • Inclusive economic integration and open regionalism • Upholding rights of freedom of navigation and overflight and the protecting the rights of small states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security • Enhance regional training on maritime domain awareness • Protection of maritime environment and international law • Support regional forum • Address fault lines, especially, South China Sea issues • Promote regional trade and investment, and infrastructure financing arrangements
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect of sovereignty and independence of all nations • Peaceful resolution of disputes • Free, fair, and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent agreements, and connectivity • Adherence to international rules and norms, including those of freedom of navigation and overflight • Engaging partners and regional institutions via multilateral and bilateral engagement • Enhancing economic prosperity • Ensuring peace and security • Invest in human capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime safety • Quality infrastructure • Maritime security • Energy • Digital economy • Good governance • Peace and security • Human capital
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue strengthening and rebalancing its comprehensive strategic partnership with China ensuring higher standards • Develop and deepen its other partnerships in the region • Strengthening the positioning of the European Union in the region • Play a greater role in regional organisations • Addressing the threat of terrorism in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime safety • Infrastructure • Climate, environment and biodiversity
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening multilateralism • Tackling climate change and protecting the environment • Strengthening peace, security and stability • Promoting human rights and the rule of law • Strengthening rules-based, fair and sustainable free trade • Rules-based networking and the digital transformation of regions & markets • Bringing people together through culture, education and science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transformation and connectivity • Open market and free trade • Tackling climate change • People to People contact • Maritime trade and transport • Peace and security

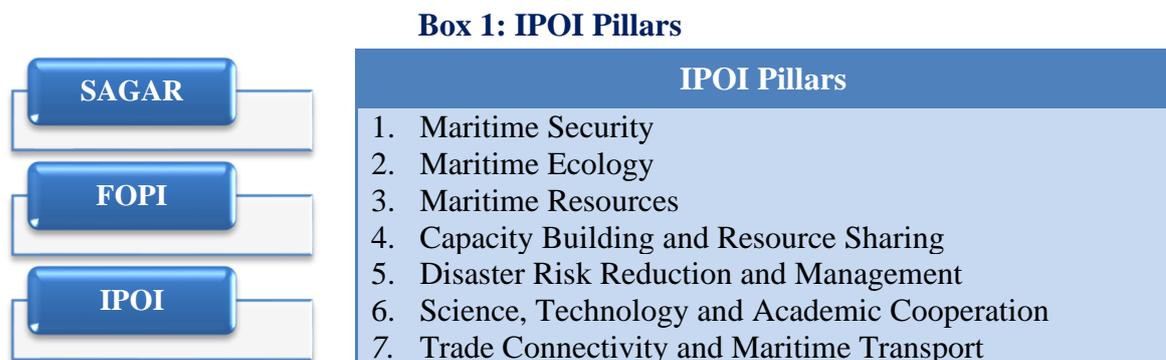
Source: Authors' own based on various documents.

Australia – “Secure, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific”

Australia has released two White Papers to set out the vision for the region to facilitate the free flow of trade and investment, to work for economic integration which is inclusive and open to all the regional economies, and support freedom of navigation and rule of law. Australia is building its cooperation with regional players like Japan, Indonesia, Korea and India to ensure security, economic partnership and people to people linkages. Australia has enhanced its engagement with ASEAN countries through its strategic partnership in the areas like security, trade and investment, regional infrastructural development and environmental issues. Australia is an island continent, which plays an important role in maritime-related issues such as maritime safety and security, marine resources and preservation, and have strong domain awareness. These areas are immensely important for the Indo-Pacific region. Australia has been offering capacity building programmes to Southeast Asia and enhancing cooperation with countries of the Indian Ocean to ensure maritime safety and security.⁵

India – “Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific”

India occupies a prominent role in the Indian Ocean in terms of geographical linkages and cultural and civilisational linkages. India is actively engaged with some major countries both at the regional and sub-regional level such as ASEAN countries, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the US. India is also working closely with island nations of Indian and the Pacific Oceans and far extended neighbours like Russia. In fact, during the pandemic, India has launched ‘Mission Sagar’ to facilitate ‘COVID Relief Mission’ to the Island nations of the Indian Ocean region.⁶ India believes that the prosperity of the region lies in cooperation between the nations of the region.⁷



Source: Authors’ own

Indian Prime Minister introduced the concept of SAGAR – “Security and Growth for All the Region” during his Mauritius visit in March 2015 to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. Further to add momentum, Indian Prime Minister shared the vision of “Free, Open, Prosperous and Inclusive (FOPI) Indo-Pacific” at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018. To deepen the cooperation among the Indo-Pacific countries, Indian Prime Minister proposed the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit, held at Bangkok in November 2019. The IPOI focusses on seven pillars, namely Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing;

Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport (Box 1).

The USA – A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision

The USA is one of the significant players of the Indo-Pacific and takes stronger steps with the Indo-Pacific vision '*Free and Open Indo-Pacific*'. The USA's vision describes the region ranging from the west coast of the Pacific Ocean to the west coast of India in the Indian Ocean.

The initiative emphasises economic prosperity by endorsing free and fair trade, good governance by empowering citizens and civil societies, anti-corruption, transparency, democracy, protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights, and lastly the important essence of USA's Indo-Pacific strategy is addressing transnational crime and environmental challenges, protecting the maritime domain, and responding to emerging threats to ensure security in the region. The USA proposes to invest about US\$ 113 million along with Australia and Japan to establish an investment fund to deliver infrastructure projects that would bring potential contribution in the Indo-Pacific region. The three countries have also intended to mobilise and support the deployment of private sector investment capital to deliver major new infrastructure projects, enhance digital connectivity and energy infrastructure, and achieve common development goals in the Indo-Pacific.⁸

Policy Guidelines of France and Germany in the Indo-Pacific

France and its four pillars of Indo-Pacific Strategy

Among the EU countries, France has large overseas territories and 93 per cent of its exclusive economic zone is in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. About 1.5 million French citizens live in these territories and France also maintains a strong military presence in the region. France has realised the significance of geopolitical and geo-economic changes in the Indo-Pacific region and French President has announced 'French Indo-Pacific' strategy at the Garden Island, Sydney in May 2018.⁹ The core aspects of French Indo-Pacific strategy are: settling regional crises, protecting shipping routes and fighting against terrorism, radicalisation and organised crime; strengthening strategic partnership with regional partners like Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and also with China. France follows the EU Framework while working with other regional partners in building regional cooperation. France also has been working closely with ASEAN as it is the focal point of Asian multipolar architecture and core of inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy. France is committed to promoting global public goods (climate change, environment and biodiversity, health, education, digital technology and quality infrastructure) and enhancing the wellbeing of the region. France also endorses the EU as a key player for sustainable development and stability of the Indo-Pacific region under the cooperation of Europe and Asia Connectivity Strategy.¹⁰

Germany: “Policy Guidelines” on Indo-Pacific

In the EU, Germany has followed France and shared a policy guideline to associate with Indo-Pacific countries on 1 September 2020. Both France and Germany are located in a different continent and without any territorial claim in the Indo-Pacific region. Both of them have shared their interests to shape up the Indo-Pacific region and also to endorse the rules-based order and international cooperation. Germany has shown interest in partnering for economic cooperation and to enhance its cooperation in marine pollution, climate change, connectivity, culture, education, science and technology, and cyberspace.¹¹

Germany’s Indo-Pacific strategy supports ASEAN-centric security architecture and proposes to initiate open dialogue on BIMSTEC and IORA in the areas of business and maritime safety and disaster risk management. Germany supports rules-based free trade and helps to shape the international rules-based order to ensure the enforcement of rules and norms in the region. Germany has also endorsed that the coronavirus has disrupted the trade and economic growth of the region and calls for diversifying supply chains and markets. This shows the positive aspects of potential investment opportunities in Asian countries by the EU nations.¹² Germany also supports the 2021-25 Strategic Plan of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for water resource management.¹³ Besides, Germany also seeks more defence and cybersecurity cooperation with Singapore, Australia, Japan and South Korea on digital transformation and connectivity in the region.

Concluding Remarks

The Indo-Pacific has a significant role to play in building both the economic and security architecture of the region. Protecting marine resources, biodiversity, and climate change, enhancing sustainable development, promoting connectivity, reducing marine pollution, disaster management and relief, information sharing, capacity building, enhancing maritime domain awareness, quality infrastructure, maritime trade and transport, strengthening digital economy, promoting energy cooperation, and facilitating maritime tourism are few areas that could be explored further through cooperation among the Indo-Pacific partnering countries.

There is an untapped opportunity for cross-border trade and investment across the Indo-Pacific region. Heterogeneity in the economic size and development in the region has thrown several challenges, which can be managed by consolidating the efforts of countries to mobilise the skills, financial and technical resources to stimulate growth and long-term development of the region.

Indo-Pacific participating countries can also use the existing regional and sub-regional initiatives such as APEC, ASEAN, IORA, BIMSTEC, MGC, ACMECS, etc., to reinforce the partnership.¹⁴

The long-term funding and supply of quality infrastructure are the biggest challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. India’s SAGAR and Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative, Japan’s Quality Infrastructure, ASEAN’s Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, the USA’s Blue Dot Network and other initiatives across the region are aiming to strengthen regional

connectivity. There is a potential to consolidate and mobilise financing for the infrastructure projects across the region through developing a comprehensive financing scheme by creating a master plan for Indo-Pacific connectivity and building the needed institutions to drive the programmes.

Endnotes

- 1 Refer, for example, De (2020).
- 2 Refer, for example, Rahman *et al* (2020) for a detailed analysis of trade potential.
- 3 Refer, for example, Acharya (2019) and Saha (2019).
- 4 Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>
- 5 Refer, for example, Adducul (2018) and Hardy (2019).
- 6 India launched ‘Mission Sagar’ on 10 May 2020 on a special ‘COVID Relief Mission’ carrying 580 tonnes of food aid and essential medicines and also dispatched medical assistance team to the island nations in the southern Indian Ocean region through Indian Naval Ship Kesari.
- 7 Refer, for example, Siddiqui (2019).
- 8 Refer Clayton Utz (2018).
- 9 Refer, for example, Nicolas (2019).
- 10 The Indo-Pacific region: a priority for France. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>
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- 12 Refer, for example, Fulda (2020).
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Refer, for example, De (2020).

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About AIC



Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of the Government of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC is closely working with the Indo-Pacific Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India to undertake and disseminate evidence-based policy research and provide policy recommendations.



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