

SPAIN, INDIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC: FOSTERING A (RE)CONNECTED PARTNERSHIP

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This Concept Paper has been prepared within the framework of the inaugural keynote speech to be given by **Professor Raja Mohan** about “Europe and the Indo-Pacific: A vision from India” on the occasion of the launching of the Spain-India Observatory (SIOb) in the headquarters of Fundación Ramón Areces, Madrid, on December 14th, 2022. The SIOb is an initiative promoted by the Spain-India Council Foundation that aims to foster a better knowledge, awareness and understanding between the two countries through thematic years. The 2023 programme of the SIOb will be devoted to analysing the Indo-Pacific from an Indian and Spanish perspective, including challenges ahead and opportunities for partnership. As an introductory document to the **2023 Indo-Pacific year**, this Concept Paper aims to put forward the main facts, ideas and lines of analysis surrounding the joint participation of Spain and India in the Indo-Pacific that will be developed in-depth in concept papers to follow. The present document does not intend to be exhaustive but to be accessible for all readers, as well as to provide a snapshot of the partnership of Spain and India in the Indo-Pacific.

* The views and analysis expressed in this Concept Paper are those of the authors exclusively. This concept paper does not reflect any opinion or endorsement by the Spain-India Council Foundation.

Methodological clarification: The differences in the definition and outreach of the Indo-Pacific, both by governmental approaches and academic studies, create additional challenges for a comparative analysis on the region. For clarity purposes, the Indo-Pacific is identified in this concept paper in two ways; the **geographic Indo-Pacific**, a maritime super-region representing a continuum of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean enclosed by the Eastern coast of Africa in the West and the Western coast of North America in the East; and the **pivotal Indo-Pacific**, a region bounded by the triangle formed by India and neighbouring countries in South Asia, China-Japan-Korea in East Asia and Australia-New Zealand in the Pacific, with Southeast Asia in its core, understood as the new global centre of gravity where connectivity issues are paramount (Figure 1). While the pivotal Indo-Pacific is home to a region of great-power competition with changing geopolitical balances and growing geoeconomic tensions as well as partnership opportunities, the geographic Indo-Pacific is a geostrategic conundrum that brings together a multiplicity of actors and challenges.

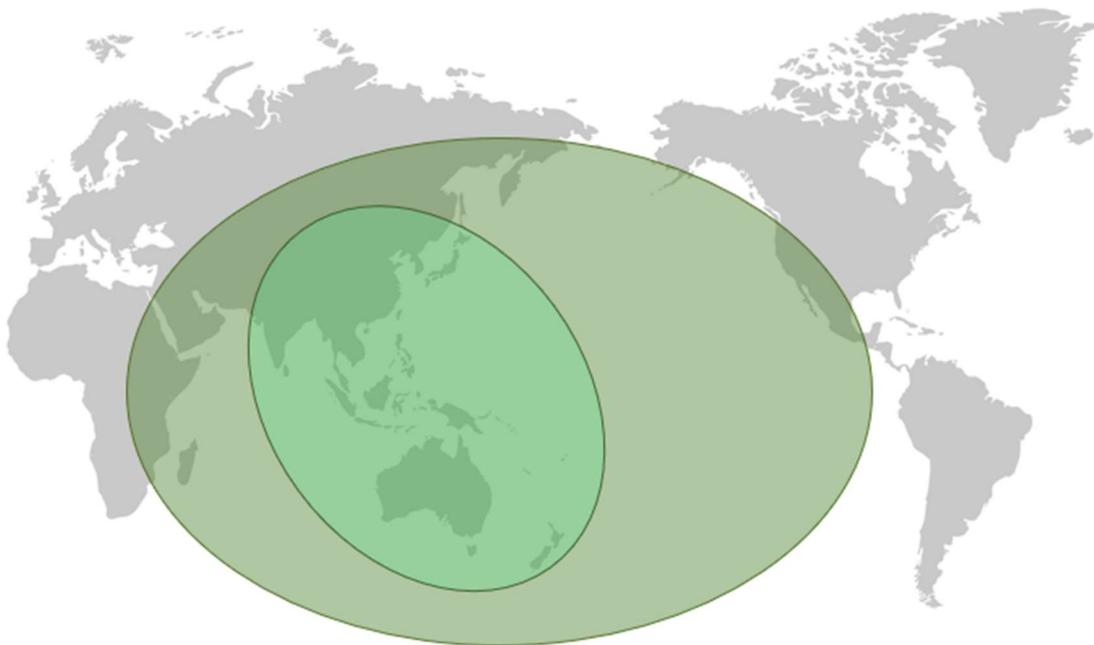


Figure 1: The geographic Indo-Pacific (in dark green) and the pivotal Indo-Pacific (in light green)

Source: Own elaboration

Intro: What is the Indo-Pacific and what does it represent nowadays?

The Indo-Pacific as the central axis for Asian regional architecture

The constant challenges that Asia is facing in current times—including the changing balances of power, the geostrategic tensions, and the post-pandemic supply chain disruptions— have changed the Asian and **global awareness of the Indo-Pacific**. As an ocean-based region where South, Southeast and East Asia are sea linked, the **centrality and continuity of the Indian and the Pacific oceans** are key in the regional architecture. While the Indo-Pacific importance is beyond its position as the main arena for the Sino-American competition, there are significant regional implications at stake not only conflict-wise but also for cooperation and partnership opportunities. Nonetheless, since the flagship speech of Prime Minister Abe at the Indian Parliament in August 2007 on the security of sea lanes linking the two oceans, the region has been revisited as an **interconnected pan-regional platform** for rebalancing the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.

The Indo-Pacific as a security conundrum

The geographic Indo-Pacific stands as a **confluence space of the greatest military powers** in the world, including regional nuclear-weapon States—United States, Russia, China, India, North Korea and Pakistan—, strengthened regional army and navy forces—Japan, South Korea, Indonesia or Australia— and extra-regional military powers—France or United Kingdom—. Furthermore, this maritime scenario gathers further **non-conventional security challenges**, including piracy, terrorism, natural disasters, arm and drug trafficking or illegal fishing. The **key natural resources** of the Indo-Pacific, such as offshore oil production, fisheries or critical mineral reserves, make these military and non-conventional tensions even more relevant nowadays.

The Indo-Pacific as the world economics' centre of gravity

The pivotal Indo-Pacific alone gathers around **36% of the world GDP**, reaching 42% at purchasing power parity (Figure 2). While the **Indo-Pacific and Europe hold together over 70% of the global trade in goods and services**, as well as over

60% of foreign direct investment flows (European Commission, 2021a), United States' foreign trade with the region supports more than three million American jobs and its direct investment in the Indo-Pacific has nearly doubled in the last decade reaching more than \$969 billion in 2020 (The White House, 2022a). This geoeconomic significance of the region to Western economies cohabitates with centripetal regional forces for economic integration where not only **60% of Asian trade is inter-regional in nature** —creating increasingly concentrated supply chains—, but also 70% of all financing sources for Asian start-ups come from inside the region (Asian Development Bank, 2022a).

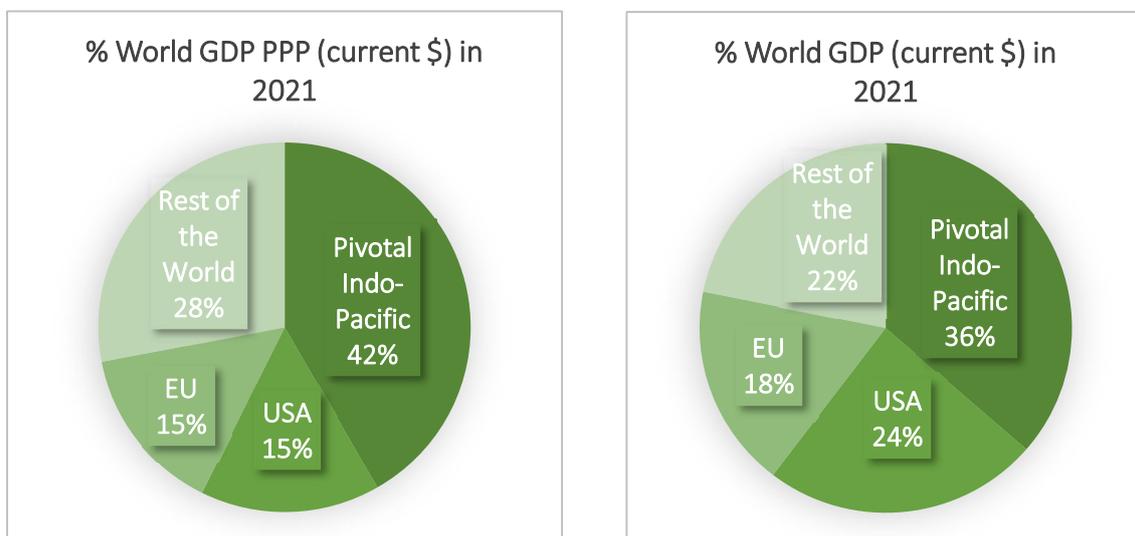


Figure 2: The Geoeconomic significance of the pivotal Indo-Pacific

Source: Own elaboration – Data: World Bank

The Indo-Pacific as one of the main arterial routes for global connectivity

The geographic Indo-Pacific is home to 65% of the world's oceans and the pivotal Indo-Pacific **hosts 50% of the world's maritime trade** (NATO, 2022). Given that 90% of world trade is seaborne, the need to secure the sea lines of communications in the Indo-Pacific with free and open passage is key. Among the **geographic Indo-Pacific strategic chokepoints**, the Straits of Hormuz and Bab El-Mandeb are crucial for energy supplies to Asia, especially the former one, considering that is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint with an average of 21 million barrels per day passing through in 2018 —more than 75% went to Asian countries— (Figure 3). Within the pivotal Indo-Pacific, the **Straits of Malacca are amongst the busiest**

waterways with nearly 100,000 vessels passing through the straits annually (Figure 4). Furthermore, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative has aimed to counterbalance the strategic vulnerabilities that represent the Straits of Malacca with alternative land pipelines and deep-water ports in Pakistan.

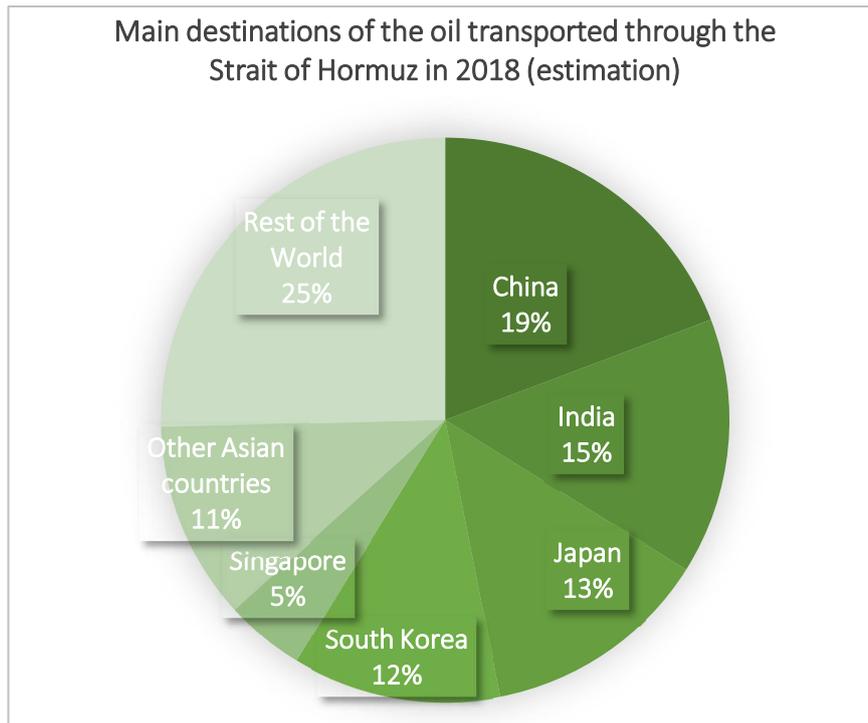


Figure 3: The Strait of Hormuz, key for oil supply to Asian countries

Source: Own elaboration – Data: US Energy Information Administration (EIA)

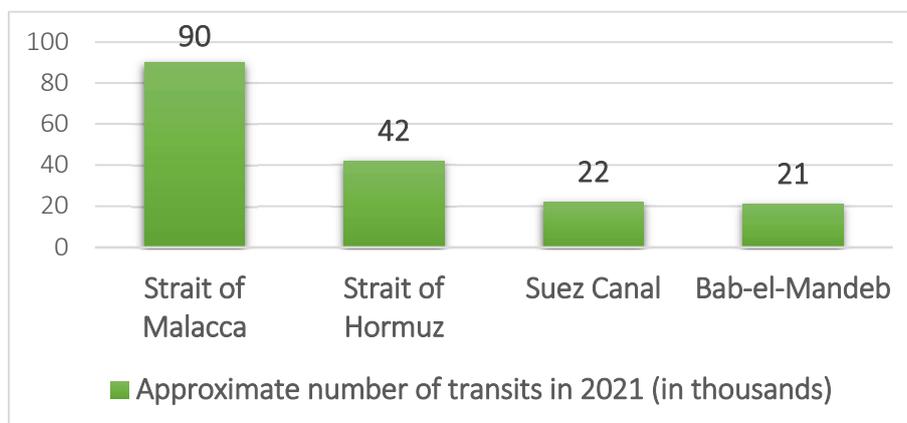


Figure 4. The Strait of Malacca, the busiest chokepoint in the Indo-Pacific

Source: Own elaboration – Data: International Maritime Security Construct, Institute of Physics & Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies

The Indo-Pacific as a cross-sectional scenario for sustainable growth

This pivotal region is home to 4.3 billion people, **60% of the global population** (UNFPA, 2021). The overall weight of the Indo-Pacific is so crucial that **18 of the World's 30 largest cities** are located there (UNDESA, 2022). Two of the top three global consumers —China and India— are leading countries of a region undergoing rapid demographic, social and urban transformation —where energy transitions and sustainable challenges predominate— with a rising middle class forging intra-Asian common cultural links and a society connected by a digital revolution that is facing similar commodity trends. Therefore, along with geostrategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic connectivity issues, there are also significant **connectivity challenges** from digital transformation, energy transitions and social resilience perspectives.

1. What are the main post-Covid trends in the Indo-Pacific?

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific from a geopolitical and geoeconomic perspective

As it has been observed in the G20 Leaders' Summit held by the Indonesia's G20 Presidency, global policy affairs and economic policy objectives are nowadays overwhelmed by security concerns, most notably the war in Ukraine and the competition in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific, a region that is projected to be the **largest contributor to global growth** over the next 30 years (Figure 5), shows how geopolitics has returned to be central in geoeconomics. In 2030, the pivotal Indo Pacific will be home to 3 of the 5 top global economies and to **2.4 billion new middle-class members, 90% of the global newcomers** (European Commission, 2021a). This projected economic growth in the region is increasingly intertwined to the complex balance of power, promoting a **system of overlapping regional and pan-regional coalitions**, very flexible in their configurations —from bilateral or unilateral to restricted multilateralism—, that aim to build together cross-sectional capacities among like-minded allies.

GDP PPP (constant 2021 prices) Forecast 2030			Military Expenditure Forecast 2030			Working Age Population (15-64) Forecast 2050		
1	China	\$42.7 Tn	1	China	\$559 Bn	1	India	1.11 Bn
2	India	\$18 Tn	2	India	\$186 Bn	2	China	843 M
3	Japan	\$6.2 Tn	3	South Korea	\$73.8 Bn	3	Pakistan	225 M
4	Indonesia	\$5.6 Tn	4	Japan	\$61.5 Bn	4	Indonesia	214 M
5	South Korea	\$3.1 Tn	5	Australia	\$43.7 Bn	5	Bangladesh	130 M

Figure 5: Economic, military and demographic projections in the pivotal Indo-Pacific

Source: Own elaboration – Data: Lowy Institute

Rising competition between China’s assertive regional agenda and the intricate United States’ approach to the Indo-Pacific

Beyond China’s ubiquitous presence in the South China Sea, the relentless performance of China in the Indian Ocean has been closely monitored since the emergence of the ‘String of Pearls’, term coined in 2004 to illustrate **China’s military and economic expansion in the Indian Ocean’s ports** and beyond. This engagement in the region has been recently amplified with flagship projects under the *Belt and Road Initiative*, including the *China-Pakistan and China-Myanmar economic corridors*, and the *Trans Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network*. The **United States has in response turned its Asia-Pacific approach into a more active and holistic involvement in the region**, making the Indo-Pacific a central scenario for its global action. The recent strengthening of the *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)* —with India, Australia and Japan—, the *AUKUS security pact* —with United Kingdom and Australia—, the launching of the *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity* —with the main countries of the region but China— or the creation of the *Partners in the Blue Pacific* —an informal group aimed at boosting economic and diplomatic ties with the Pacific Islands—, the last three created in the last two years, exemplify this renovated vision where various and comprehensive partnerships with a multiplicity of regional and pan-regional actors cohabit together (Figure 6).

INDIA'S PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL COALITIONS/INITIATIVES		
COALITIONS/INITIATIVES	MEMBERS	MAIN FOCUS
Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)	17 members, led by India and Japan	Economy and Sustainable Development
Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)	35 Asian countries	Regional Integration
Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand	Economy
I2I2	India, Israel, UAE, and the US	Economy
Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)	25 members bordering the Indian Ocean, among them India, Australia or France	Security
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	23 countries bordering the Indian Ocean, among them India	Economy and Sustainable Development
Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)	13 countries in the pivotal Indo-Pacific, among them India, Australia, Japan and the US	Economy and Sustainable Development
Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)	11 partner nations, among them Australia, France, Japan, the UK or the US	Security
Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)	India, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam	Economy and Connectivity
Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)	India, Australia Japan and the US	Security and Sustainable Development

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	India, China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and the Central Asian Republics (except Turkmenistan)	Security and Economy
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)	India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka	Regional Integration

REGIONAL COALITIONS/ INITIATIVES WITHOUT INDIA'S PARTICIPATION		
COALITIONS/INITIATIVES	MEMBERS	MAIN FOCUS
AUKUS	Australia, the UK, and the US.	Security
Blue Dot Network (BDN)	Australia, Japan and the USA	Economy
Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP)	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the US	Economy and Connectivity
Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)	ASEAN countries, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea	Economy

Figure 6: Main regional and pan-regional coalitions and initiatives

Source: Own elaboration

Connectivity as a priority in the Indo-Pacific partnerships

The post-pandemic economic scenario has shown **how vulnerable and how dependant on Asia in general and on China in particular global supply chains are**. More specific outcomes can be found comparing Asian supply chains to global ones. **Asia has been relatively resilient to disruptions** —although not completely immune—, intra-Asian shipping costs have risen a third compared to extra-Asian ones, and delivery times beyond the pandemic 2020 peak have remained stable in Asia while have almost tripled for the rest of the world (Asian Development Bank, 2022b). Connectivity challenges have positioned the Indo-Pacific in the centre of the globe but have also **strengthened the regional networks**. While transport links, secure logistics, sustainable supply chains, and key conductors and materials are nowadays central to geoeconomics, innovation has been proved crucial for supply chain management, including automatization.

Technology-based transitions to overcome the climate crisis

The footprint of climate change in a maritime region like the Indo-Pacific will create a **devastating scenario by 2050 with an estimation of 89 million climate refugees** and with a number of capital cities that could partly be underwater, including Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, Manila or Bangkok (World Bank, 2021; Germanwatch, 2017). Climate change, together with the adverse impact of the health, energy and price crises, has accelerated the need for environmental cooperation—as an example, the QUAD created the *Climate Change Working Group* and launched the *Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package*— and **investments in clean energy transitions** for supporting a sustainable connectivity in the Indo-Pacific—for instance, the G7 has launched an investment scheme for the several countries in the Indo-Pacific linked to the *Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)*—. Furthermore, the **access to critical minerals has become** one of the main challenges given their key importance in clean energy and digital technologies.

The undergoing digital revolution and the economic transformation around it

In a region where 78% of the e-commerce retail sales are performed via mobile phones, the **e-commerce is expected to** reach \$2 trillion by 2025 (UNESCAP, 2018; Euromonitor, 2021). The Indo-Pacific has the fastest growing digital economies, and it is also becoming a **dynamic technology hub for new digital frontiers** such as immersive-reality space, digital trust technologies, 6G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cybersecurity, handling of data or the creation of new materials for an environment-friendly, higher-quality and cost-effective digitalisation. **Digital challenges** such as security breakdowns, online privacy or the unethical use of artificial intelligence, along with critical internet infrastructure among which the submarine cable system and the maintenance service agreements—SEAIOCMA and APMMSA—are vital, require a renovated cooperation of which the *QUAD's Critical and Emerging Technologies Working Group* is an illustrative example of it.

2. What is India's role in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific?

An active commitment with a free, open, inclusive and peaceful Indo-Pacific

From the Look East Policy initiated in the 90's to the 2014's **Act East Policy** promoted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has transitioned to a dynamic engagement in the Indo-Pacific, actively endorsing a free, open, inclusive and peaceful Indo-Pacific built on a rule-based order and a sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment. India's Indo-Pacific strategy suggests a commitment to the promotion of partnerships among nations with similar values rather than fostering confrontation with competitors in a region where security, connectivity and capacity-building are key for Indian national interests. In its involvement in this multipolar world that nowadays conceives the Indo-Pacific as a new global centre, India **safeguards its autonomy** through a multiplicity plurilateral engagements in its determination to be open to all actors but to none of them in exclusivity. This development in India's foreign policy strategy —from non-alignment to a **diversity of overlapping capacity-building partnerships**— is part of India's renewed constructive regional vision.

Maritime security partner and the preferred one in the Indian Ocean

India gives primary importance to **maritime governance and security in the Indian Ocean**, as established by Prime Minister Modi in 2015 with his *Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)* initiative. India's envisioned role as net security provider in the Indian Ocean has adapted to a less expansive and more inclusive position as the **preferred security partner** for littoral and island states where India has displayed a *coastal surveillance radar systems (CSRS)* network. The Indian-Navy-led *Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC IOR)* —a maritime security information sharing hub for the Indian Ocean— together with the recently established *National Maritime Domain Awareness (NMDA) Project* —an integrated intelligence grid to identify and confront maritime threats— aim to boost surveillance and precision-strike capabilities. Since the *Malabar Exercises* were established in 1992 with the United States —currently also counting on the participation of Japan and Australia, gathering all QUAD partners—, India's maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific has advanced to a **holistic approach beyond the security pillar**, as established in *the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)* that has led to specific partnerships with different countries such as Australia on maritime ecology or Japan on connectivity.

TRILATERALS (External Affairs)	2+2 DIALOGUES (External Affairs and Defence)
India-Australia-Japan	India-US
India-US-Japan	India-Japan
India-Australia-Indonesia	India-Australia
India-Australia-France	India-Russia
India-France-UAE	
India-Italy-Japan	
India-Russia-China	

Figure 7: India's participation on Ministerial Dialogues

Source: Own elaboration

Plurilateral engagements as India's main partnership approach to the Indo-Pacific

In India's vision of the Indo-Pacific —that extends from the Eastern shores of Africa to the Western shores of America—, the *Neighbourhood First Policy*, the partnership with Southeast Asia, the historical links with Africa and the multi-sided approach with the main regional and pan-regional actors are crucial. Although India still works together with **regional associations**, especially with the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)* as a strategic partnership or the *Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)* as the main forum for the Indian Ocean, **minilateralism** is the preferred approach among actors beyond the pivotal Indo-Pacific. Among them, the QUAD is seen by India as the most prominent plurilateral platform that addresses in a comprehensive way the current challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific. European countries have also found ways to partner with India either through **Ministerial Dialogues** (Figure 7), such as France or Italy with *Trilateral Dialogues of External Affairs Ministers* in the margins of multilateral platforms —India, France & Australia; India, France & United Arab Emirates; or India, Japan & Italy, the latter targeting Indo-Pacific stability— or through capacity-building partnerships, for instance within the IPOI initiative —France on marine resources or United Kingdom on maritime security—.

India's expansive geoeconomic presence in the Indo-Pacific

India, that was just a decade ago the eleventh largest economy in the world, has overtaken the United Kingdom's GDP becoming the **fifth biggest global economy** in nominal terms. With a 7% growth forecast for 2022 (World Bank Data, 2022),

India's economy has also significant vulnerabilities —among others, India, with an oil import dependence rate of 85%, will surpass China in oil consumption by 2024 (International Energy Agency, 2020)—. Reassured by its economic growth, **India's geoeconomic presence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean has expanded** despite the minimal intra-regional trade —less than 5% in South Asia (Brookings, 2020)—. As a matter of fact, India's loans to the region have tripled since 2014 (Financial Times, 2022) together with the expansion of Indian companies in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Within the Indo-Pacific framework and despite India's decision not to join free-trade agreements —including the regional's largest *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)*— or its choice to partly opt out of the trade pillar in regional associations —such as the *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)*—, **India's economic engagement with ASEAN** is central in its agenda beyond the current *ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)* for goods, services and investment.

Fostering a key role for Indo-Pacific resilient supply chains through innovation capacities

India is projected to surpass China as the **world's most populous country in 2023** (UNDESA, 2022a). The challenges ahead, from climate emergency to food security, have become paramount. Besides India's goal of securing access to energy or key raw and critical materials, including semiconductors, India can also offer a **supply chain that could be more resilient** and efficient in the long-term and that might mitigate dependence on China. Within this framework, the *India-Australia-Japan Supply Chain Resilience Initiative* aims to develop principles that will strengthen supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region through better data management. By the same token, India —that spends more on research than France or the UK in purchasing-power-parity terms (UNESCO, 2021)— is a **key innovation player in energy transition and digital transformation** in the Indo-Pacific. India fosters this strengthening of innovation capacities through a minilateral approach as in its partnership with *Israel, United Arab Emirates and the United States (I2U2)* with a current focus on clean energy and food security.

3. How can Spain partner with India in the Indo-Pacific?

Spain and India (dis)connections in the Indo-Pacific

Spain and India do not coincide neither collide in their geographical priority areas. Indo-Spanish relations, although they have not been raised to a strategic partnership, are indeed **conflict-free with no historical irritant or geopolitical friction**. Despite this disconnection on regional priorities, India is showing a greater interest in its engagement with Latin America and Spain could channel this dialogue. At the same time, Spain acknowledges its opportunities for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and India and Spain seem to be **complementary partners**. Although Spain has not yet implemented any specific national strategy or guideline for the Indo-Pacific—as it is the case with Germany, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom or the Czech Republic—the recent appointment of an *Ambassador-at-Large for the Indo-Pacific* shows Spanish willingness to reinvigorate its approach to the region **in tune with the European Union strategy for the Indo-Pacific**. Beyond this European Union framework and the Latin American perspective, the Indo-Spanish cooperation within the Indo-Pacific could also benefit from capacity-building partnerships in areas of common interest such as maritime governance, energy transition or digital transformation.

Indo-Spanish cooperation within the framework of the EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific

The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, launched in 2021, highlights **seven priority areas for EU action** to address common challenges together with countries in the region—sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity; security and defence; and human security—. Among the instruments that might help to implement the EU Indo-Pacific strategy in collaboration with the member states, the *Global Gateway*—a new European strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport sectors along with health and educational cooperation—is mobilising up to 300 billion € of investments between 2021 and 2027 around the world. From a security approach, the *Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean II initiative (CRIMARIO)*—EU funded project for enhancing maritime awareness and cooperation through information sharing and joint exercises to be implemented exclusively in South Asian and Southeast Asian countries—has successfully entered in a second phase (CRIMARIO II) with a budget of 7.5 million euros from 2020 until 2024. The Indian partnership in EU-led projects

has still potential to be tapped, even more nowadays when India has turned to regard the EU and the EU member states as **valuable strategic partners for a rebalanced Indo-Pacific**.

India and Spain shared commitments in maritime governance and blue economy

India and Spain share **common interests in maritime governance together with favourable interaction channels** such as the *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)*—a series of biennial meetings between the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region to increase maritime security cooperation— in which Spain participates with observer status. Moreover, the operational headquarters of *Operation Atalanta*— the first naval operation conducted by the EU on counter-piracy at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean— was relocated from London at Naval Station Rota in Spain as a result of Brexit. **Maritime resources, ecology, research and connectivity** are areas identified by India in its *Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)* for further maritime cooperation in the Indian and Pacific oceans, beyond maritime security. Capacity-building partnerships could be explored on **blue economy**—the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem—, a sector where Spain happens to be one of the European Union leaders, employing more than 830,000 people and generating more than 30 billion € in turnover (European Commission, 2020b).

Complementarities and synergies in energy transition and digital transformation

Spain and India have shown to be **complementary technological partners** not only because of successful governmental cooperation programmes —of which the *Indo-Spanish Joint Programme (ISIP)* could be set as a major example— but also through the participation of innovative Spanish companies in the Indian economy and vice versa —as it was extensively documented in the Spain-India 2020 Report—. From a technical perspective, synergies have already been found in **clean tech, internet of the things or agri & food processing technologies**. From an approach of common interests, India and Spain share similar goals on **data governance, energy transition and transport sustainability**. The European Union's *Global Gateway* offers an excellent opportunity to explore this capacity-building partnerships between India and Spain within the framework of the Indo-Pacific not

only from a bilateral but also a plurilateral approach together with other countries of the region.

2023's G20 and EU presidencies as a favourable scenario for boosting Spain and India partnership in the Indo-Pacific

India will host the **18th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit in New Delhi on the 9th and 10th September 2023**. Prime Minister Modi commenced India's presidency calling for a global partnership to confront the major challenges of humanity. India's G20 Presidency focuses on a human-centric globalisation, championing the cause of the Global South. Spain will also assume the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of 2023**, giving specific attention to Latin America and the Southern Neighbourhood. This auspicious coincidence will not only represent a platform for a recurrent dialogue and interaction between Spain and India, but also an opportunity so both countries can benefit from an open cooperation and **partnership between Latin America and the Indo-Pacific**, where the two countries have respectively shown long-term commitment and valuable expertise.

Conclusion: What are the main pathways to connect India and Spain in the Indo-Pacific?

The Spain-India Observatory (SIOb)'s 2023 programme: Spain, India and the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific has returned **geopolitics** to the centre stage of the global agenda. Within these changing dynamics, exacerbated by health, energy and climate disruptions, **connectivity** has been identified as a mayor challenge as well as a significant opportunity for the Indo-Pacific cooperation. In the diversity of bilateral, minilateral and multilateral partnerships that have emerged in the region, **India is playing a major regional role** with an independent but active agenda based on plurilateral engagements. The disconnection of India and Spain in the Indo-Pacific, and in the regional multi-sided system, also represent an **irritant-free** foundation for a reconnected partnership in the region. Spain and India have benefited from very encouraging political, governmental and business interactions that are **still far from reaching their full potential**. The Indo-Spanish complementarities and synergies invite to explore new opportunities for Indo-Spanish partnerships within

the Indo-Pacific framework in a year in which India and Spain will play relevant roles in the G20 and the European Union respectively. The SIOb's first year of activities will be then devoted to exploring the main pathways for this partnership.

The SIOb as an open platform for bilateral dialogue and joint reflection

The SIOb aims to create a dynamic platform bringing together the main stakeholders—including institutions, private entities and experts—to promote a fruitful conversation on the Indo-Spanish partnership in the Indo-Pacific. With this aim, the key format for the 2023 programme would be thematic **Spain-India Dialogues** with Spanish and Indian experts. The SIOb will generate both a concept paper prior to the dialogues, with relevant data and the main lines of analysis for steering the debate, and an outcome paper with the significant reflections shared during the dialogue, thus favouring the usefulness of these interactions and their impact. **Spain-India Guides** will also be elaborated by the SIOb to make the relevant bilateral information from a specific sector accessible in a single document. Finally, the SIOb will be an open space for joint reflection where Spanish and Indian experts will be invited to contribute with **articles** or analysis on the Indo-Spanish partnership in the Indo-Pacific.

The EU strategy, capacity-building partnerships and the link with Latin America as main pathways to be explored

The SIOb's 2023 theme year programme will cover the Indo-Spanish partnership within the Indo-Pacific through dialogues from several perspectives. The first approach, and perhaps the most obvious one, would be the Indo-Spanish partnership within the **EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**. Spain is fully aligned with an EU strategy that provides not only a framework but also, through further instruments such as the Global Gateway, a financial opportunity to partner with India. The second approach, within the EU strategy but also beyond it, would consist of bilateral or plurilateral **capacity-building partnerships** in sectors where India and Spain share common interests and complementary technology. Among the potential capacity-building partnerships, the SIOb's 2023 programme suggests analysing the **Digital Indo-Pacific** from an approach based on connectivity, security and inclusive growth; the **Maritime Indo-Pacific** not only including maritime governance and security but also the blue economy; and finally, the **Sustainable Indo-Pacific**, targeting energy transitions and resilient supply chains, and key innovation and technological transformation around them. Finally, the SIOb will analyse the way Spain and India can collaborate together in fostering

a dialogue about the Indo-Pacific with **Latin American** countries. The SIOb will analyse this Indo-Spanish cooperation through sector-based Spain-India guides, focusing on economics of language and university cooperation.

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