

MARITIME SECURITY, GOVERNANCE AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: INDIA'S CENTRAL ROLE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP

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This Concept Paper has been prepared within the framework of the keynote conversation with by Dr. Samir Saran, President of Observer Research Foundation (ORF), in the II Spain-India Dialogue of its 2023 Programme under the title **India Matters? Maritime Security, Governance and Commerce in the Indo-Pacific** in the headquarters of Fundación Ramón Areces, Madrid, on March 28th, 2023. The present document aims to present the relevant elements surrounding the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific, including security, governance and connectivity affairs. This Concept Paper does not intend to be exhaustive but accessible for all readers, as well as to provide a snapshot of the naval and maritime presence in the region, with a special focus on India, together with the main partnerships, challenges and opportunities ahead.

* 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.

Intro: India's growing maritime and naval influence in the Indo-Pacific

India as a global maritime and naval power

India's geography—a peninsula with a coastline of 7,517 kms, 2,305 thousand square kms of maritime zone, nine coastal states, 1,382 islands, and a large network of navigable waterways— has a **clear maritime vocation**. Its 200 ports, including 12 government-owned major ports, handle 1,400 million tonnes of maritime cargo every year, 95 per cent of India's trading by volume and 68 per cent by value (Economic Advisory Council PMO, 2020). To ensure this trade flow, securing the sea lanes of communication has become a top priority for Indian authorities. In recent years, India has boosted its maritime approach through the **strengthening of its naval power**. With the goal of becoming a global maritime leader, India has formulated the *Maritime India Vision 2030*, which seeks to ensure an accelerated growth of the maritime sector in the next decade (see Figure 1), and the Indian Navy has committed to becoming fully self-reliant — *Atmanirbhar*— by the centenary of its independence in 2047. The appointment of its first *National Maritime Security Coordinator* (NMSC) in February 2022 reflects India's firm commitment to the maritime domain. The **maritime sector has experienced a reinforced centrality in government policies** as a result of the growth of India's maritime and Blue Economy interests. A series of initiatives for the development of the maritime domain and the sustainable utilization of ocean resources have been promoted by the Indian Government targeting the Indian and Pacific oceans, including the *India's Blue Economy: A Draft Policy Framework* and the *Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative* (IPOI).

TRAFFIC HANDLED AT MAJOR INDIAN PORTS April 2022 to Feb 2023, in thousand tonnes				2030 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	2020	TARGET 2030
1	Deendayal Port Trust	Gujarat	127,217	Major ports with >300 MTPA cargo handling capacity	0	3
2	Paradip Port Trust	Odisha	121,863	% of Indian cargo transshipment handled by Indian ports	25%	>75%

3	Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust	Maharashtra	75,941	% of cargo handled at major ports by PPP /other operators	51%	>85%
4	Vishakhapatnam Port Trust	Andhra Pradesh	66,725	Average vessel turnaround time (containers)	25 horas	<20 horas
5	Mumbai Port Trust	Maharashtra	57,958	Average container dwell time	55 horas	<40 horas
6	Chennai Port Trust	Tamil Nadu	44,617	Average ship daily output (gross tonnage)	16,500	>30,000
7	Haldia Dock Complex	Kolkata	44,231	Annual cruise passengers	468,000	1,500,000
8	New Mangaluru Port Trust	Karnataka	37,267	% share of Indian seafarers across globe	12%	>20%
9	VO Chidambaranar Port Trust	Tamil Nadu	34,406	% share of renewable energy at Major ports	<10%	>60%
10	Cochin Port	Kerala	31,365	Global ranking in ship recycling	2	1

Figure 1: A Snapshot of India's Port Sector

Source: Indian Ports Association & IBEF

India and the Indian Ocean Region

The Indian Ocean is India's home ocean. Not only Indian historical encounters with other Asian civilizations and the main trade, religion, and culture exchanges have been sea-borne, but also India's security and future growth are nowadays linked to the security of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the resources and routes surrounding it. **The Indian Ocean has increasingly become central** in India's international agenda, being the Neighbourhood First Policy a pillar within India's foreign policy. Therefore, India gives primary importance to the maritime security and governance in the Indian Ocean and also to its leading regional role as the **preferred security partner for littoral and island states and as the 'first responder' in the region**. Prime Minister Modi-led *Security and Growth for All in the Region* (SAGAR) initiative has been targeting this regional cooperation since 2015. India has engaged in different **multilateral groupings with neighbouring countries** to tackle security challenges in the Indian Ocean, like the *Colombo Security Conclave* (CSC), and has also expanded its presence throughout the Indian Ocean thanks to the Indian Navy's Mission-Based Deployments (see Figure 2). India has conducted the *Milan Biennial Naval Exercise* since 1995, which in its 2022 edition gathered 42 countries including India's partners in the *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue* (Quad) —with US, Australia and Japan—, and the 3rd edition of *Goa Maritime Conclave* in 2021, bringing together the chiefs of navy and heads of maritime agencies of IOR littorals.

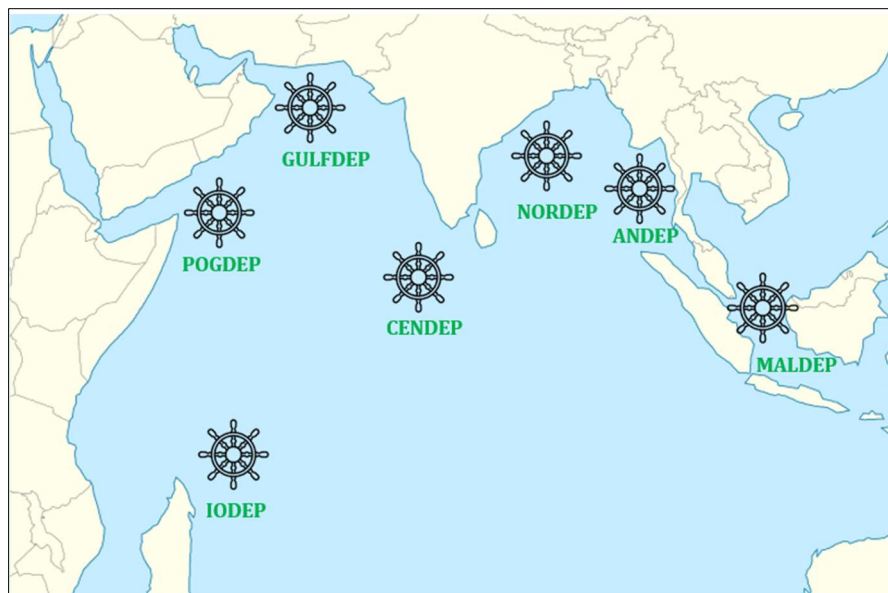


Figure 2: Map of India's Missions across the Indian Ocean Region

Source: Own elaboration – Data: National Maritime Foundation

India and the Pacific Ocean Region

In India's encounter with the Pacific Ocean, the Bay of Bengal plays a strategic role due to its central location in the Indo-Pacific. The Pacific Ocean is where India's network of partnerships expands, **building on growing strategic engagement with Pacific countries**. Beyond bilateral partnerships with regional countries, minilateral alliances play a key role. Since 2020, the four members of the Quad participate jointly in the annual Malabar naval exercises whose last edition was conducted in the East China Sea in November 2022. India has also recently joined the multinational maritime exercise Kakadu hosted by the Australian Navy and has signed with New Zealand an agreement for sharing information on white shipping. Key issues for today's India such as **connectivity and resilient supply chains are very much related to stability and freedom of transit in the Pacific Ocean**. As a result of the signing of a *Shared vision of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* and a *Defence Cooperation Agreement* with Indonesia on the occasion of a visit by Prime Minister Modi in 2018 —followed by the signing of an additional shared vision in the Indo-Pacific with Australia in 2020—, India has won access to the north Sumatran port of Sabang, at the head of the Malacca Strait. The *Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative* has turned **India's maritime cooperation to a holistic approach** beyond the security pillar and the scope of the Indian Ocean, establishing specific partnerships with different countries, including Pacific partners such as Australia on maritime ecology and Japan on connectivity.

1. Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific

The main security challenges jeopardizing a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific maritime region, that gathers key fishing areas, the most critical global sea lanes of communication and untapped natural resources, faces **significant conflicts and maritime disputes**. Along with the strategic significance of the regional choke points, including the straits of Hormuz and Malacca —the two-largest for oil and gas trade—, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean are crucial security spots. China's expansion in the South China Sea and ubiquitous presence in the Indian Ocean has created an increasing awareness in the region. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific has witnessed how extra-regional powers, including the US, have increased their naval presence while regional powers are turning themselves into sea powers. **New naval coalitions, capacity building partnerships and rules-based alliances** among like-minded countries have been promoted. Along with the naval competition challenges, the maritime scenario in the Indo-Pacific also faces **non-conventional security challenges**, including seaborne terrorism, natural and man-made disasters, arms and drug trafficking or illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU). Within these multifaceted security challenges, rampant piracy — in the Somalian Coast, the Gulf of Guinea, Strait of Malacca, Sulu and Celebes Seas— has triggered joint efforts by regional countries together with pan-regional and extra-regional actors, promoting over the last few years a stronger cooperation.

Maritime competition in the Indo-Pacific

In the new era of great power competition, the **main actors in the Indo-Pacific are focusing on becoming maritime powers**. While the military presence of non-regional actors in the Indo-Pacific has traditionally been naval-driven, the main regional players are targeting their efforts on building stronger navies to confront the new maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, among the major sea powers in the region, naval expenditure is increasing its footprint within the defence budget. The presence of nuclear-weapon states in the Indo-Pacific has **pushed the military build-up** and countries such as China or India are targeting a new generation of nuclear-powered navy in the next decade. The *United States Indo-Pacific Command*, beyond its headquarters in Hawaii and the naval bases in Diego García, Djibouti and Bahrein, has repair facilities in Japan and Guam, Singapore is hosting the *Logistics Group Western Pacific* and the rotationally deployed *U.S. Littoral Combat Ships*, and Philippines has designated nine locations for combined cooperation under the *Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement* (EDCA). China, after setting its first overseas military base at Djibouti in 2017, is searching for a permanent navy

outpost in the Pacific Islands. The **Indian Navy's *Maritime Capability Perspective Plan 2022-23 targets 200 ships by 2037*** —of which 45 ships and submarines are under various stages of construction—, focusing on capacity building rather than numbers (see Figure 3).

SIZE OF THE INDIAN NAVY, as of June 2019		MAJOR COMBAT PLATFORMS, as of September 2022	
Active Personnel	67,252	Aircraft Carriers	2
Reserve Personnel	75,000	Destroyers	11
Ships and Submarines	150	Nuclear-powered submarines	2
Aircrafts	300	Conventionally-powered submarines	16

Figure 3: Current Indian Naval Force

Source: Own elaboration – Data: Press Information Bureau, Indian Government & Indian Navy

Towards maritime cooperation through minilateralism and engagements with regional associations and bilateral partnerships

The Indo-Pacific has been the catalyst of a renewed network of partnerships that transcends the traditional multilateral and plurilateral alliances. The advent of a **diversity of maritime coalitions** have reconfigured the Indo-Pacific maritime picture, including the *Quad* and the *AUKUS security pact* —among US, United Kingdom and Australia— which have attracted global attention, and the expansion of regional initiatives, for instance maritime patrolling. Beyond this minilateral approach, the main regional and extra-regional powers have targeted their engagement with **regional associations**, especially with the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN) and the *Indian Ocean Rim Association* (IORA), as the main fora for the Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean, as shows the participation of Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States in the *South-East Asian Nations Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus*. Furthermore, the **bilateral approach has remained central in the regional relationship**. The development of bilateral capacity-building navy partnerships, the joint participation in naval and patrolling exercises, the deployment of infrastructure for maritime security or the agreements on mutual logistic

support are among the main initiatives achieved by regional partners. In the case of India, and beyond its leadership and preferred role among neighbouring partners in the IOR, India is prone to foster **capacity-building partnerships with like-minded partners**. For instance, cybersecurity has been a realm in which capacity-building initiatives have proliferated, as shown by the launch of the *Quad Cybersecurity Partnership*.

2. Maritime governance in the Indo-Pacific

Fostering a rules-based Indo-Pacific

China's sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, particularly in the militarized Paracel and Spratly islands, have been disputed under the *UN Convention of the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) by regional countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan or Vietnam. Although a legally binding Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN is still under negotiation, efforts from regional and extra-regional players concur in fostering a **rules-based maritime order**. The recently agreed United Nations *High Seas Treaty*¹, after two decades in the making and with the key role of the Singapore presidency and the involvement of the EU, US, UK and China, has been seen as a **victory of multilateralism** (UN NEWS, 2023). The exit options for parties on the conditions for the establishment and management of future Marine Protected Areas reveal, nonetheless, the geopolitical rivalry among the great powers in the Indo-Pacific region, especially the Arctic and the China Sea. Institutions such as the *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium* (IONS) —where India plays a leading role— and the *Western Pacific Naval Symposium* (WPNS) —that includes Chile and Peru as members—, along with the *Indian Ocean Rim Association* (IORA), the *Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum* (EAMF) and the *Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation* (BIMSTEC) provide the main **fora for the discussion of maritime governance in the Indo-Pacific** (see Figure 4).

ASSOCIATIONS/ INITIATIVES	MEMBERS	YEAR OF FOUNDATION
PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM (PIF)	18 states in Oceania	1971
INDIAN OCEAN COMMISSION (IOC)	Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion (France) and Seychelles	1982
WESTERN PACIFIC NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (WPNS)	22 countries bordering the Pacific Ocean	1987

¹ Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, 4 March 2023.

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)	23 countries bordering the Indian Ocean, among them India	1997
BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION (BIMSTEC)	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand	1997
QUAD	Australia, Japan, India and the US	2007
INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)	25 member states in the Indian Ocean	2008
ASEAN MARITIME FORUM	10 Member States in South-East Asia	2010
INFORMATION FUSION CENTRE - INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IFC-IOR)	11 partner nations in the Indian Ocean Region	2018
AUKUS	Australia, UK and US	2021

Figure 4: Main regional maritime associations in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: Own elaboration

The centrality of the Maritime Domain Awareness

The Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), as the effective understanding of the maritime domain that could impact security, safety, economy or marine environment (IMO, 2018), provides **situational awareness and fosters coordinated decision-making to mitigate maritime non-conventional threats**. Barriers on data management and information sharing are the main challenges to improve MDA nowadays. The **Quad has taken the lead**

in promoting it as a fundamental requirement for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific (US Department of State, 2022). In the 2022 Tokyo Summit, the Quad leaders launched *the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)*, offering a near-real-time, integrated and cost-effective maritime domain awareness picture. The integration and extension of regional fusion centres² and the collection of commercially-available data through automatic identification systems and radio-frequency technologies are key initiatives within this partnership. **Regional players are boosting their MDA strategies** such as India's *National Maritime Domain Awareness (NMDA) Project 2022*. The regional display of India's missions, that aim to boost surveillance and precision-strike capabilities, include a *Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems (CSRS) network*, the Indian-Navy-led *Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region (IFC IOR)*, and a *Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)* for Island states.

Towards ocean governance and Blue Economy in the Indo-Pacific

The **ocean-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** are key for the Indo-Pacific taking into account the damaging effects of climate change in the region —rising sea levels, climate disasters, threatened livelihoods and challenges on food security, among others—. The continuing exploitation of natural resources, the high demand for energy, plastic pollution, or the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are some of the most concerning challenges. **Ocean resources are key for the Indo-Pacific economies**. In 2020, Asian countries accounted for 70 percent of the total fisheries, 97 percent of the total production of algae and 84 percent of all fishers and fish farmers (FAO, 2022). India, that has a fleet of 250.000 fishing boats, sustains over 4 million fishermen (Economic Advisory Council, 2020). Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific oceans for the regional economies as well as for the global economy as key economic corridors, **protecting the Blue Economy** has become one of the main goals for regional countries by promoting an economic model that ensures growth while protecting the sustainable use of the involved resources. The Government of India through its *Maritime India Vision 2030*, the draft of the *National Policy for India's Blue Economy 2020* and *Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana' (PMMSY)* —to bring about a Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector— has laid the foundations to a sustainable increase of the blue economy's contribution to India's GDP. India's strategy shows how a cooperative regional approach is needed to protect valuable marine resources while jointly facing transnational threats, as in the case of the Bay of Bengal.

² Including the Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region, based in India; the Information Fusion Center, based in Singapore; the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, based in the Solomon Islands; and the Pacific Fusion Center, based in Vanuatu.

3. Maritime connectivity in the Indo-Pacific

Freedom of navigation as a main pillar of a free and open Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is home to 65% of the world’s oceans and hosts 50% of the world’s maritime trade (NATO, 2022). In 2021, Asia remained the **world’s leading maritime cargo handling centre**, accounting for 42% of exports and 64% of imports. In that very year, volumes on container shipping lanes increased in the transpacific route by 15% and in the Asia-Europe one by 10% (UNCTAD, 2022). The **Indo-Pacific strategic chokepoints** play a key role in the need to secure the sea lanes of communications. Among them, the straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are crucial for energy supplies to Asia, especially the former, considering that it 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— (see Figure 6). Within the Indo-Pacific, the Strait of Malacca are amongst the busiest waterways with nearly 100,000 vessels passing through the strait annually (see Figure 5). **The need to maintain freedom of navigation** in a region that is central for international trade has required a combined effort to fight non-conventional security threats. The conduction of joint exercises and port calls among Indo-Pacific like-minded partners to confront piracy and other security challenges have foster maritime coalitions among regional and extra-regional partners. As an example, EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA conducted joint naval exercises with South Korea, India and Indonesia between 2021 and 2022. Due to these counter-piracy operations, the shipping industry has removed the Indian Ocean as a *High Risk Area (HRA)*.

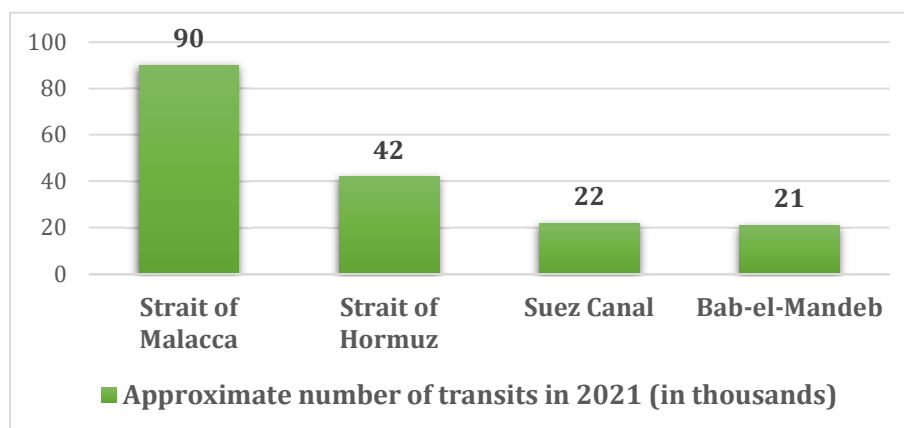


Figure 5: The Strait of Malacca, the busiest chokepoint in the Indo-Pacific

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

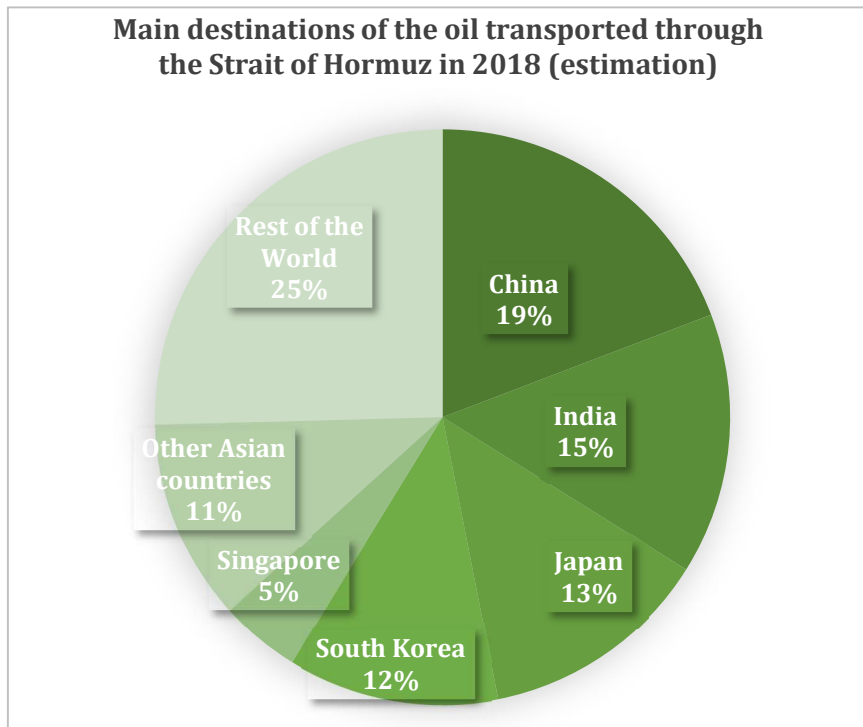


Figure 6: The Strait of Hormuz, key for oil supply to Asian countries
Source: Own elaboration – Data: US Energy Information Administration (EIA)

The Indo-Pacific as centre of gravity for global trade

The centre of gravity for global trade and economic activities is nowadays located 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, will be home in 2030 to 3 of the 5 top global economies and to 2.4 billion new middle-class members, 90% of the global newcomers (European Commission, 2021). Although 60% of Asian trade is inter-regional in nature, subregions such as South Asia have a minimal intra-regional trade —less than 5% (Brookings, 2020)— . There are many **challenges surrounding maritime connectivity**, specially related to maritime cargo. The imbalances in cargo volumes, the integration of the maritime industry, the port productivity and competitiveness, or the ease in processing and operations, among others, are key factors in the deployment of containership in certain routes. The Indian **Sagarmala Project aims to modernize the Indian port system to adapt to the connectivity of the future** (see Figure 7). In the field of **digital connectivity**, there is a lack of undersea cables in the Indo-Pacific such as in the Bay of Bengal region. This digital divide is especially significant among regional countries and within rural and urban areas, obstructing the sectorial and connectivity integration. Beyond internet infrastructures, the regulatory differences generated by data-governance fragmentation create a barrier for regional and global digital trade.

SAGARMALA PROJECT 2015-2035 in numbers			
	Number of Projects	Cost (billion \$)	Share
Port Modernisation	236	16.2	19.7%
Port Connectivity	235	32.2	39.2%
Port-led Industrialisation	35	32.7	39.9%
Coastal Community Development	68	1	1.2%
TOTAL	574	82.03	

Figure 7: The Sagarmala Project
Source: Own elaboration – Data: IBEF

The Indo-Pacific and the building up of resilient global supply chains

Maritime connectivity has acquired a whole new dimension of geopolitical competition that has reached maximum relevance in the building up of resilient global supply chains. China currently is a key unavoidable part of global supply chains and a crucial trading partner for regional countries. From the China Plus One business strategy —that promotes manufacturing diversification by also investing in alternative countries — to Altasia —a group of regional countries³ that offer a manufacturing base enough to compete for the supply chain relocation with less labour cost— there is a greater regional and global awareness to **reduce dependence on China**. For consolidating further regional integration, free-trade frameworks have a decisive long-term role. Beyond the world’s largest FTA, the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)* —that includes China but not India—, other regional associations are key in offering a trade association that may foster the integration of supply chains, including the *Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)* or the *ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)*. Different **partnerships target promoting resilient supply chains** such as the *India-Australia-Japan Supply Chain Resilience Initiative*.

³ Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

Conclusion: How can Spain and India engage in maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific?

From the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific

The traditional Atlanticism —that has fostered a close relationship between the NATO allies in Northern America and in Europe— has witnessed how, despite the Russian aggression to Ukraine, North America has a long-term focus on the Indo-Pacific. NATO's initiative *Futures in the Indo-Pacific*, following the historic participation of the leaders of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea in the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, fosters a greater cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. For a renewed Atlanticism approach, **Europe should seek an active participation in the Indo-Pacific** in cooperation with its NATO allies. The recently published *EU Maritime Security Strategy* gives indeed a central place to the Indo-Pacific. The *EU NAVFOR Atalanta* has partnered with regional players, such as Japan with which three joint naval exercises have been conducted in the Arabian Sea. The EU and Japan are about to sign an administrative arrangement designed to seal cooperation and boost interoperability in the long run. **Spain's involvement with Operation Atalanta** offers an opportunity for its participation in the region. The operational headquarters were relocated from London to Naval Station Rota in Spain as a result of Brexit and in February 2023, the Force Commander of Task Force 456 was handed over to Spanish Captain Juan María Ibáñez Martín. India and Spain share **common interests in maritime governance together with favourable interaction channels** such as the *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)* in which Spain participates with observer status.

Indo-Spanish partnership in defence and security

Bilateral talks held in June 2022 between the ministers José Manuel Albares and Dr S. Jaishankar showed the **bilateral commitment in enhancing cooperation in countering common security challenges**, including terrorism and cybercrime. Spanish companies have been significantly active in their involvement in the **Indo-Spanish defence cooperation**. Airbus Defence & Space Spain will supply 56 C295 aircraft —a medium tactical transport aircraft designed and manufactured in Spain—, 40 of which would be made in India. Navantia is participating in the P75(I) project competition using as reference design its S-80. Furthermore, **Spanish technology and innovation** has revealed itself as a key ally for the Indian aerospace sector. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has awarded Indra and their local partners a contract to deploy in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Navi Mumbai and Mopa (Goa) an integrated system to centralise all the phases of air traffic surveillance and control in India, helping to improve flight safety, increase management capacity and efficiency, and reduce delays, emissions and noise pollution. UAV Navigation-

Grupo Oesia, a Spanish company specialising in the design and development of aerospace-grade flight control solutions for unmanned systems, has signed a collaboration agreement with Zerosum Technologies, an Indian company that specialises in unmanned aviation.

Key priority areas and sectors to be explored

The *Indo-Spanish Joint Programme (ISIP)* has shown the **Indo-Spanish complementarity in key priority areas** where Spain and India share common interests and technological synergies. Most of these areas are key for security, governance and connectivity in the Indo Pacific, including data governance, energy transition and transport sustainability. The June 2022 Foreign Affairs ministers' bilateral talks identified **unexplored emerging areas** where the two countries can collaborate. Among these new fields for bilateral cooperation, green hydrogen, electric mobility, advanced materials or deep-sea exploration offer potential opportunities for the Indo-Spanish collaboration in the Indo-Pacific. Capacity-building partnerships could be explored in **blue economy**, a sector where Spain is one of the European Union leaders, employing more than 830,000 people and generating more than 30 billion € in turnover (European Commission, 2020). Furthermore, maritime resources, ecology, research and connectivity are areas identified by India in its *Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative* for further maritime cooperation in the Indian and Pacific oceans, areas in which countries such as Australia, France, Japan or United Kingdom are already partnering with India, and Spain has proven its technological capacities and advanced know-how.

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