STRATEGIC CONVERGENCES BETWEEN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

David Brewster*

Introduction

This article will look at strategic convergences between India and Australia in Southeast Asia. It will first examine the development of India’s strategic role in Southeast Asia and the trajectory of relations between Australia and India over the last decade or so. It will then consider the convergence of India and Australia’s strategic interests in Southeast Asia and review opportunities for strategic cooperation in the region, including in the political diplomatic area and cooperation in maritime security. Finally it will consider the idea of the “Indo-Pacific” as a single strategic region and the potential significance of this for the roles of Australia and India in Southeast Asia.

Australia in India’s Look East Policy: the trajectory of relations

For much of their modern history, Australia and India have not had a close strategic relationship. Despite a common language and some shared political traditions, Australia and India’s strategic perspectives have often been different. This was particularly so during the Cold War, when India was a determined advocate of strategic autonomy and nonalignment and followed a policy of economic autarky. In contrast, Australia was a loyal ally of the United States and based its prosperity on international trade. India’s relationship with Australia broadly fit the pattern of its relations with many countries in Southeast Asia—divergent geopolitical perspectives, ideological differences and weak economic links. But there were other factors as well that caused each side to neglect the relationship. In fact, Australia rarely figured in New Delhi’s security calculations, and when it did it was often considered as being merely a client state of the United States. For its part, Canberra did not see India as presenting any real threat to Australia, although there were some residual concerns about India’s security relationship with the Soviet Union and its implications for India’s role in Southeast Asia. During the 1980s, Australia, along with many ASEAN states,
perceived – rightly or wrongly - that India’s recognition of the Vietnam-backed regime in Cambodia was driven by India’s relationship with the Soviet Union.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union removed many irritants from the relationship, although different perspectives and misunderstandings continued for some years. This was demonstrated by Australia’s strong reactions against India’s Pokhran II nuclear tests in 1998. Australia and Japan led international condemnation of the tests, primarily motivated by a desire to safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation system. This caused considerable resentment among many in Delhi, who believed that Australia, which had the benefit of extended nuclear deterrence from the US, trivialised India’s legitimate security concerns that had led it to become a declared nuclear weapons state.

India’s Look East Policy

When India launched its Look East policy in the depths of its post-Cold War economic crisis in the early 1990s, Southeast Asia soon became the primary focus of its policy. India saw its inclusion in the regional political, economic and security groupings based in Southeast Asia as an important way to avoid marginalisation in the post-Cold War international landscape. India moved to improve bilateral security links with several Southeast Asian states and identified Singapore as its key gateway into the region. India also sought to further develop links with its longstanding political ally, Vietnam. These bilateral relationships have come to form the key points in India’s Southeast Asian strategy. India has developed close security relationships with both Singapore and Vietnam, which include regular exercises, ship visits and intelligence sharing.

In the late 1990s, India signalled a broadening of its Look East policy to the entire western Pacific basin. As Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh described it, “our Look East policy will be integrated into a larger regionalisation strategy which encompasses... the Asia Pacific.” The so-called “Phase 2” of the Look East policy involved a deepening of India’s relationships in Southeast Asia as well as expanding India’s focus to a broader region extending from Australia to Northeast Asia, and pursuing a broader agenda involving
security cooperation. But while Australia may have formed a conceptual part of India’s Look East policy, India initially did little to operationalise the relationship. Instead, it has focused its limited diplomatic resources on developing relationships with key partners in Southeast Asia and with Japan. From New Delhi’s perspective, the development of economic and security links with Australia was not a priority: Australia was not seen as adding much to the equation.

**Australia’s strategic perspectives on Southeast Asia**

Southeast Asia has been a primary strategic and economic focus for Australia for many decades. The Southeast Asian archipelago has long been seen as the most likely route by which extra-regional powers might potentially present a security threat to Australia, just as Japan did in 1942. Following World War II, Australia played an active security role in Southeast Asia as part of a policy of forward defence against communism. This included providing substantial military forces to assist Malaya against its communist insurgency (1950-60) and during the Indonesian *Konfrontasi* (1962-66), supporting the United States as a member of SEATO during the Vietnam War (1962-73), and in stabilisation operations in the newly independent Timor Leste (1997- present). Australia continues to have a formal security role in Southeast Asia through the Five Power Defence Arrangements with Malaysia and Singapore (and the related Integrated Area Defence System) which has been in place since the early 1970s. Australia also has a growing bilateral defence and security relationship with Indonesia under the 2006 Lombok security treaty, which has maritime security cooperation and capacity building as a significant part of its focus.

Since the early 1970s Australia has actively pursued closer political and economic relations with the region. Australia, along with Japan, played an active role in promoting closer economic cooperation throughout the region, which led to the establishment of APEC in the 1980s. This was primarily driven by economics and the desire to promote regional trade liberalisation and integration. But the idea of the Asia Pacific has always had a strong underlying security element: keeping the United States as a benign offshore balancer and the main security provider to the region. However groupings such as APEC were established without India. The concept of the “Asia Pacific” was not then seen as extending
to South Asia and there were concerns among some states that India’s participation might slow down the process of trade liberalisation. Australia is now a major economic partner to ASEAN, with bilateral trade in goods and services exceeding A$92 billion in 2012-13. As a group, ASEAN is Australia’s largest trading partner.

Changes in Australia’s perspectives on India

Over the last decade or so, the extension of India’s strategic gaze eastwards has been complemented by Australia’s changing perspectives of India. This reflected several factors. First was the increasing importance of India as a major regional power and potentially an important economic partner for Australia. Second, was the strategic rapprochement between India and the United States which opened the prospect for changes in India’s policies that had previously inhibited security cooperation between India and US allies. Third, is the US policy of “rebalancing” its defence resources away from West Asia and towards East Asia, which in coming years will likely require Australia to take a more active security role throughout the Indian Ocean region. Importantly, Australia has also seen the expansion of India’s strategic influence into areas such as Southeast Asia that were traditionally of key strategic concern for Australia.

As a result of these developments, Australia now recognises India as a potentially important strategic partner in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. As Australian Defence Minister, Stephen Smith, commented:

“India’s rise as a world power is at the forefront of Australia’s foreign and strategic policy, as is the need to preserve maritime security in the Indian Ocean. India and Australia, with the two most significant and advanced navies of the Indian Ocean rim countries, are natural security partners in the Indo-Pacific region.”

Since the turn of this century, Australia has made considerable efforts to develop a comprehensive strategic relationship with India, including numerous visits to India by Australian Prime Ministers and senior ministers. This increased political engagement has led to a number of agreements on security-related matters, including a 2003 agreement on
terrorism, a 2006 memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation, a 2007 defence information sharing arrangement and 2008 agreements on intelligence dialogue, extradition and terrorism. In November 2009, Australia and India announced a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, intended to set out shared strategic perspectives and create a framework for the further development of bilateral security cooperation. At the same time, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told an audience in New Delhi that India and Australia were “natural partners” and should become “strategic partners.”

The Australia-India Security Declaration is a non-binding declaration of principles and understandings in security matters. Australia has announced similar Security Declarations with Japan (in 2007) and South Korea (in 2009) and India announced a similar Security Declaration with Japan (in 2008). The 2009 Security Declaration was a notable step for Australia and India in establishing a framework for the further development of the security relationship, including the formalisation of regular consultations and dialogues between senior ministers, senior military and diplomatic representatives and joint working groups on maritime security operations and counter-terrorism and immigration. In conjunction with the Security Declaration, Australia and India have finalised new cooperation arrangements in intelligence, law enforcement, border security, terrorist financing and money laundering.

This has led to a considerable expansion in bilateral dialogues over the last few years, including regular meetings of foreign and defence ministers and high level officials. There has also been a considerable increase in visits and exchanges at the military to military level and the Indian and Australian navies, in particular, are looking for ways to further develop their relationship. The two navies engage in regular passage exercises (so-called “PASSEXs”) and regular bilateral exercises (which will probably focus on anti-submarine warfare) will commence in 2015.

Australia is gradually coming to see India as an important element in its security. Most strategic analysts in Australia now see the underlying strategic interests of Australia and India as “essentially congruent” and that there is significant scope for bilateral security cooperation between Australia and India. Some Indian commentators also see potential for a maritime security partnership between India and Australia that spans the entire Indo-
Others regard Australia merely as a potentially useful junior partner in an informal coalition with the United States to balance against China. Certainly, New Delhi has been somewhat more cautious than Canberra about developing the relationship. To some extent this simply reflects a matter of priorities: from India’s perspective Australia is a middle power that lies beyond the immediate arc of East Asia. Australia is neither a potentially important peer state such as Japan nor a small and useful “gateway” state such as Singapore. While there is some recognition of the potential for cooperation, there is not yet a recognition that Australia is an important element in India’s security. New Delhi sees the United States as a key strategic partner, but sees less need to invest in its relationship with Canberra. Although Australia is, along with Indonesia, one of the major states sitting between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, India does not yet see Australia as an “indispensable partner” in the Asia Pacific.

There have been irritations in recent years that have created political difficulties for New Delhi in developing the relationship with Australia. Assaults on Indian vocational students studying in Melbourne in 2008-09 became a major source of controversy among the Indian public. But the greatest irritant in the security relationship has been the uranium issue. Despite the US-India nuclear cooperation agreement reached in 2007, Australia was slow to fully accommodate India’s new status as a nuclear power outside of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. Australia has a longstanding policy banning the export of uranium to any state that is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This policy reflected the politically controversial nature of uranium mining and exports in Australia and Australia’s enthusiasm for supporting international non-proliferation norms. Australia’s refusal to supply uranium was taken by New Delhi as indicating a lack of commitment to the relationship and a refusal to acknowledge India’s great power status. For several years, this stand-off reduced any enthusiasm by the Indian government for closer relations. However, Australia’s agreement in December 2011 to exempt India from its policy removed an important political roadblock for the Indian government to further developments in the relationship and the terms of a uranium supply agreement are now being finalised.
Despite hesitations in the political relationship, over the last decade the economic relationship has been expanding rapidly, and India is becoming one of Australia’s most important trading partners. Bilateral trade was around US$18 billion in 2012 and is expected to double over the next 5 years. This has made India Australia’s fourth largest export partner after China, Japan and the United States. Australian exports to India are dominated by resources (primarily coal, gold and copper) and education services. Resource exports, including coal, minerals and natural gas, are expected to grow significantly in coming years and Australia is likely to become one of India’s major energy suppliers. However, Indian exports to Australia are growing at a much slower rate. There is also considerable room for growth in bilateral investment which is relatively undeveloped. Indian investments in Australian resources sector have been growing over the last several years, although Australian mining companies have been deterred by restrictive Indian foreign investment laws from making significant investments in India’s mining sector. A Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement has been under negotiation since 2011 and this is likely to be given renewed focus by both sides during 2014. When implemented, this should facilitate a much greater degree of economic interdependence.

The convergence of Australian and Indian interests in the Asia Pacific: prospects for cooperation

Developments in the India-Australia relationship since the turn of the century reflect an underlying congruence of strategic interests of Australia and India in the Indian Ocean region and the Asia Pacific. Many of these shared interests intersect in Southeast Asia.

The rise of China

China is a significant factor underlying this convergence of interests. India and Australia, along with many Southeast Asian states, have concerns about the growth of China’s political, economic and military power in the region. They have a strong interest in seeing a balanced role for China in the Asia Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia. ASEAN states are encouraging both India and Australia to play a more active security role in Southeast Asia as a way of promoting a “balanced” distribution of power in the region.
Both India and Australia are responding to the changing balance of power in Southeast Asia through enhancing their military capabilities in the region and seeking opportunities for greater defence cooperation with ASEAN states. In recent years the Indian Navy has given increased emphasis to its Eastern Fleet and has constructed new naval and air facilities in the Andaman Islands, near the western end of the Malacca Strait. Australia is rebalancing its defence resources from its Pacific coast to northern and western Australia. Australia is also strengthening security cooperation with the United States, including inviting regular rotations of US marines through Darwin in northern Australia and the increased use of northern Australia for training by US ground and air forces. There is also speculation about the increased use of Fremantle (near Perth) by the US Navy and access to an upgraded airstrip on the Cocos Islands.

However, there are some differences in Australian and Indian perceptions about China. Many in New Delhi still remember India’s defeat by China in the 1962 war and China’s territorial claims over large portions of Indian-administered territory continue to be a major concern. Many also see China’s “all weather friendship” with Pakistan as being essentially motivated by a desire to keep India off balance in South Asia. The size and strategic aspirations of India means that it naturally sees itself as a peer competitor and perhaps, a strategic rival, of China. Some believe that Southeast Asia could become a key focus of strategic rivalry between those countries.

Australia’s relationship with China is somewhat different. Australia is geographically distant from China and has a much smaller population. Although they fought on opposite sides in the Korean War, there is little memory of direct military conflict between them. Since 2007, China has become Australia’s major trading partner and Chinese companies now hold significant stakes in Australia’s resources sector. The strength of the Australian economy during the current world recession is very much dependent on China. Some influential Australian analysts see the rise of China less in terms of a direct threat, and more as part of a long term strategic shift in East Asia, to which Australia will need to adapt in one way or another. These differences in perception mean that Australian concerns about China tend to be in less “zero sum” terms than sometimes appears to be the case in New Delhi. For
example, Australian commentators tend to treat claims about the so-called “String of Pearls” in the Indian Ocean with a considerable degree of scepticism, generally seeing China’s activities in the Indian Ocean as reflecting its growing interests in the region. Australia would probably see Sino-Indian strategic rivalry either in Southeast Asia or the Indian Ocean as detrimental to its interests. Although Australia is keen to develop its strategic relationship with India, it is cautious about placing the relationship primarily in the context of China. Australia would like to see India develop as a friendly power to balance China’s rise, but would not wish to position itself as trying to contain China. Although China is a material factor in the bilateral relationship, it would be a mistake to frame the India-Australia relationship in Southeast Asia primarily in terms of China.

Other shared interests in Southeast Asia

India and Australia have numerous other shared security interests in Southeast Asia. These include shared interests in maritime security (including piracy, people smuggling and maritime terrorism) and both India and Australia would wish to see improvements in the maritime security capabilities of ASEAN states. Both have significant concerns about the growth of Islamic terrorist movements in several Southeast Asian countries, and both have significant stakes in the maintenance of the political stability in the region – particularly in the Muslim majority states of Indonesia and Malaysia. Both Australia and India want to see the maintenance of secularist traditions in those countries. The installation of an Islamist regime in Indonesia, for example, would be a matter of considerable concern. India and Indonesia were established as secular states including diverse religious beliefs, languages and traditions. Indonesia’s relatively tolerant (or syncretic) Islamic tradition, infused with mystical Sufi beliefs, has many links with the Islamic Sufi traditions practiced in India. The advent of an Islamist and non-secular Indonesia could have major ramifications for India’s internal stability. Similarly Australia would likely see such a development as adverse to the security of the region and Australia.

Australia and India are making tentative moves to jointly engage with Indonesia. This includes the establishment of a “troika” of past, present and future chairs of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in an effort to set a new agenda for IORA and inject more
life into the organisation. India, Australia and Indonesia will also act as past, present and future chairs of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which is a biennial meeting of regional heads of navy, again in the hope of establishing a common agenda for that grouping. A Trilateral Indian Ocean Dialogue has also been established between the three countries. All these groupings create new opportunities for three-way dialogue among India, Australia and Indonesia and, potentially, for cooperation in maritime security-related areas. However, there are perceptions that Indonesia has been slow to take advantage of these opportunities and still remains largely ASEAN-focused.

**Prospects for cooperation in developing regional architecture**

Over the last decade or so, India and Australia have worked in parallel (if not necessarily together) to promote the development of open, inclusive and balanced regional groupings covering East Asia. In developing the region’s political, economic and security architecture, India and Australia share many interests with ASEAN states, particularly to ensure that middle or emerging powers are not marginalised in the regional decision-making by major Asia Pacific powers such as the United States, China and Japan. This was demonstrated by the strong support of most ASEAN states for the membership of India and Australia in the East Asia Summit. While neither Australia nor India would readily admit it, they are both geographical and cultural outsiders to East Asia and neither are automatically accorded a place in regional fora. Australia and India may find each other useful in advocating that regional fora adopt a broad and inclusive definition of “East Asia”.

Raja Mohan suggests that expanded cooperation among India, ASEAN and Australia might be an important additional force in building a new order in East Asia. He cites KM Panikkar who called for cooperation among India, Indonesia, Australia and Britain in building the post war order.\(^{18}\) Although such cooperation was precluded by India’s policies during the Cold War, it may be possible now. However, one should not necessarily assume that a consensus exists between India and Australia on using ASEAN-centred institutions as the basis for regional security architecture. Indian approach has been to support the extension of ASEAN-centred regional arrangements, while Australia has generally focussed somewhat less on ASEAN as a basis for institution building. Nevertheless, India and Australia are both
strong supporters of ASEAN, including efforts to maintain solidarity among its members in relation to the territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. Australia now sees India as having a valuable and legitimate security role in the region alongside the United States.

**Prospects for cooperation in maritime security**

There are numerous possibilities for cooperation between India, Australia and ASEAN states in enhancing maritime security in Southeast Asia. These include in the areas of Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR), capacity building and in improving Maritime Domain Awareness.

As the most capable navies of Indian Ocean littoral states, India and Australia have much to offer the region in HADR. India and Australia, along with the United States and Japan, were key players in the multilateral naval response effort to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. This displayed India’s capabilities as an HADR provider to the region and earned India a considerable amount of regional goodwill. It also represented a major turning point in Indian thinking about the potential for cooperation with other key maritime democracies in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Assistance in building the capacity of ASEAN states to provide maritime security is another fruitful area for cooperation between India and Australia. To date, India has largely focused its capacity building efforts in Southeast Asia on its longstanding political ally, Vietnam. This has included the provision of training, spare parts for Soviet-vintage patrol craft and aircraft maintenance. Australia has its focused capacity building efforts on Indonesia and the Philippines. Since the 1970s, Australia has assisted in developing the capabilities of the Indonesian Navy, including providing coastal patrol ships and a squadron of Nomad sea coastal surveillance aircraft. In recent years, Australia has actively expanded cooperation with both Indonesia and the Philippines on maritime security and counter-terrorism. This reflects the importance to Australia of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade between northwest Australia and China that passes through the Sulu and Celebes seas, where pirates and terrorist groups are active. The focus on Indonesia also reflects geographical proximity
and includes arrangements for border security and to counter illegal fishing. Australia is also enhancing maritime security in the southern Philippines through funding improvements to sea surveillance systems, border controls and port security and has donated new patrol vessels to the Philippine Coast Guard. Australia is also assisting the Philippines to achieve compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code for its international ports, and to implement a similar security regime for domestic ports and ships, with an emphasis on domestic passenger ferries and ports located on the southern island of Mindanao.19

Indonesia would provide a potential focus for cooperation between India and Australia in regional capacity building. As noted previously, India and Australia have made tentative efforts to jointly engage with Indonesia, including on areas related to maritime security. Indonesia has numerous requirements to build its maritime security capabilities, not least the need for modern vessels. Other key requirements include aerial surveillance capabilities, coastal radar and support in the establishment of a Coast Guard Training Academy.20 Coordinated assistance by both India and Australia in these areas could maximise the benefits to Indonesia.

Another potential area for cooperation in Southeast Asian/Indian Ocean maritime security is in improved Maritime Domain Awareness. This would likely initially focus on the main straits used by shipping transiting the Indonesian archipelago. In recent years, India has given significant focus to improving its Maritime Domain Awareness throughout the Indian Ocean region. This has included considerable investment in maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. In July 2012 the Indian Navy opened a new Naval Air Station on Great Nicobar island, India’s nearest possession to the Malacca Strait, primarily for maritime surveillance activities. Australia already has considerable maritime ISR capabilities throughout the eastern Indian Ocean in areas which abut or overlap with areas of strategic interest to India. The Royal Australian Air Force has long played an active maritime surveillance role in Southeast Asia, including operating AP-3C Orion aircraft through Malaysia’s Butterworth Air Base as part of Operation Gateway. Australia is also considering developing the air field in the Cocos Islands to help expand its ISR capabilities in the region.
There are substantial opportunities for cooperation between India, Australia and key security partners in Southeast Asia in enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). In coming years, both India and Australia will acquire Boeing P-8 maritime aircraft and (likely) Global Hawk UAVs (or its maritime variant) as the backbone of their maritime ISR capabilities. This will create unprecedented opportunities for information sharing as well as for cooperation in training and maintenance. It has been suggested that India and Australia could jointly sponsor a Regional Maritime Domain Partnership which would involve collaboration with Southeast Asian states in intelligence sharing, MDA and coordinated patrolling.\(^{21}\) A regional arrangement co-sponsored by India and Australia and including Southeast Asian maritime states such as Singapore, Indonesia and, perhaps, Malaysia, could be a useful way of advancing ISR cooperation while also satisfying Indian political sensitivities about regional security partnerships that do not necessarily involve direct reliance on the United States.\(^{22}\) The recent loss of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 and the many problems faced by regional states in coordinating their search efforts is ample demonstration of the value of establishing regional cooperation arrangements in this area.

**The idea of the “Indo-Pacific” strategic region: its significance for Australia’s and India’s roles in Southeast Asia**

In broader terms, the convergence of Indian and Australian strategic interests in Southeast Asia should be seen in light of the growing reconceptualisation of the links between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in strategic thinking. Whereas the Indian and Pacific Oceans were once considered as largely autonomous regions in strategic terms, many analysts now see considerable strategic interaction between those regions. Of course, Southeast Asia sits at the conjunction of these oceans.

There is increasingly discussion within the security communities in Australia, India and the United States of an integrated, or at least interconnected, “Indo-Pacific” strategic region encompassing the entire Asian littoral running from northeast Asia to the Middle East and Africa. This is often primarily viewed in the maritime security dimension, particularly in connection with the security of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) running from the
Middle East to northeast Asia, through which much of the world’s energy supplies are carried. These security concerns cross the spectrum of state and non-state actors and traditional and non-traditional security concerns. The Indo-Pacific strategic construct also reflects the expansion of China’s area of strategic interest into the Indian Ocean and a simultaneous expansion of India’s area of strategic interest into the Western Pacific. China is developing economic and security relationships in the Indian Ocean (such as with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma) while India is developing important economic and security relationships in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific generally. This means that security interaction between India and China will increasingly span the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The Indo-Pacific strategic concept has particular significance for India’s growing aspirations to play a significant security role in Southeast Asia, and the broader Asia Pacific region. Despite giving much greater prominence to security concerns in East Asia since the 1990s, India still faces some constraints in playing an expanded role in the Asia Pacific, reflecting geography, its lack of economic influence and its relatively short history of strategic engagement with the region. For India, the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” could be a useful way of grouping India together with the key economic and military powers in the Western Pacific. As former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, commented, the use of the term Indo-Pacific in strategic discourse in India represents the recognition of the inclusion of the Western Pacific within the range of India’s security interests.23

However, significant questions remain as to the practical consequences of this concept. As former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, commented: “How we translate the growing connection between the Indian and Pacific Oceans into an operational concept is a question that we need to answer if we are to adapt to the new challenges in the region.”24 Some see the Indo-Pacific strategic construct as a way of bringing India into closer strategic relationships with “liberal democratic” powers in the Asia Pacific (especially the United States, Japan and Australia), primarily to balance the growing power of China. According to one report by influential Australian, Indian and US think tanks:

“Liberal democratic powers in the Indo-Pacific share a strategic interest in enhancing a web of relationships that promote economic and political stability, security,
continued free and open trade throughout the region, and democratic governance. U.S.-India-Australia trilateral cooperation should be a critical element of this underpinning.\textsuperscript{25}

However, others see the idea of the Indo-Pacific in more inclusive terms, seeing shared security interests of all major powers, including China, in the littoral running from the Middle East, through Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. According to this view, the Indo-Pacific as a concept is an opportunity for all interested powers to be recognised as legitimate stakeholders and cooperate in providing maritime security throughout the entire littoral. Whatever way this strategic concept evolves, it may become an important driver in strategic thinking of the United States, India, Australia and other major powers.

A change in US thinking about the strategic interrelationship of the Indian and Pacific Oceans is likely to have a significant impact on the US strategic relationships with both Australia and India as well as the Australia-India bilateral relationship. The United States is increasingly adopting a strategic posture that seeks to address the security challenges facing the Asian littoral in an integrated manner. This includes a gradual shift in US defence resources from the Northwest Pacific towards the Southwest Pacific area (including Australia, Singapore and the Philippines). The US is also placing greater importance on India and Australia as security partners in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. The United States would like to see India and Australia taking greater responsibility for security in the Indian Ocean, thereby, taking some of the strain off US resources in the Western Pacific. The United States is also encouraging a closer working security relationship between India and Australia that covers both the Indian and Pacific theatres.

The Indo-Pacific strategic concept has particular significance for India’s potential role in Southeast Asia. This includes India playing a much greater security role in the Pacific Ocean and forming much closer security relationships with US allies such as Australia and Japan and others. India is already gradually assuming a role in the South China Sea. From India’s perspective there may be increased focus on cooperation with partners that form gateways between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including Australia, Singapore and potentially
Indonesia. By joining together in Southeast Asia, India and Australia could give greater form to a new Indo-Pacific region in which they will play major strategic roles.

---


8 Kevin Rudd, “From fitful engagement to strategic partnership,” Address to the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi, 12 November 2009.


11 See, for example, Sandy Gordon, *Widening Horizons: Australia’s new relationship with India* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2007); and Rory Medcalf and Amandeep Gill, “Unconventional Partners: Australia-India Cooperation in Reducing Nuclear Dangers” Lowy Institute Policy Brief, October 2009.
12 See, for example, C.Raja Mohan, “Indo-Pacific naval partnership open to Delhi and Canberra” *The Australian*, 2 November 2011.


16 See, for example, Hugh White, *Power Shift: Australia’s Future Between Washington and Beijing*, (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2010).

17 Previously called the Indian Ocean Rim – Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).


22 Lawrence S. Prabhakar, “India’s Options and role in the PSI: Alliance of Necessity,” *Strategic Affairs*, February 2010.


25 See, for example, “Shared Goals, Converging Interests: A Plan for U.S.-Australia-India Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”, Joint Project by Scholars from The Heritage Foundation, the Lowy Institute for International Policy, and the Observer Research Foundation, November 2011.