



OCEAN OF CHURN: SYNERGISING
VALUES ACROSS THE
INDO-PACIFIC

Conference Report

12-13 January 2024

About the conference

In the midst of profound socio-economic and geopolitical transformations, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a central arena for discussions concerning the evolving landscape of both regional and global security priorities, developmental collaborations, sustainable economic advancements, and the imperative for inclusive models of progress. The shifts in geopolitical dynamics provide the contextual canvas against which these regional and international relationships are evolving. As flourishing economies and emerging powers come to the forefront, there is a heightened significance in delving into the potential avenues for adeptly manoeuvring the strategic intricacies and fostering collaborative endeavours within the region. This exploration is crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that characterise the Indo-Pacific, offering a framework to understand and navigate the complexities inherent in its geopolitical tapestry.

Facilitating a discussion to explore these challenges, CSDR organised a two-day conference exploring three interlinked themes over six panel discussions, seeking answers to questions regarding the potential for sustainable peace, prosperity and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific. Each panel had relevant experts from India and the Indo-Pacific, offering varying viewpoints and encompassing rich discussions. The themes discussed during the conference were - Security Dynamics, Multilateralism, Minilateralism and Trilateralism, Maritime Security and Cooperation, Diverse Societies and International Norms, Mainstreaming Civil Society Expertise and Trade, Development and Sustainability in the Indo-Pacific.

The Conference was inaugurated by Ms. Paramita Tripathi- Joint Secretary, Oceania and Indo-Pacific - Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Ambassador (Retired) Riva Ganguly Das - Distinguished Fellow, CSDR and Dr. Happymon Jacob- Founder, CSDR.



Panel 1 - Evolving Security Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific

Moderator Dr. Happymon Jacob posed questions on the Indo-Pacific's regional security architecture, the intersection of geoeconomics & geopolitics, and small states' perception of increasing influence by China. Panellists highlighted a spectrum of threats faced by the Indo-Pacific region, encompassing short, medium, and long-term challenges. Vice Admiral Anil Chawla noted that immediate regional cooperation is imperative to tackle short-term threats originating from non-state actors, necessitating joint efforts in areas such as piracy, human trafficking, gun smuggling, and illegal fishing. The medium-term stability of the region hinges significantly on China's behaviour over the next decade, with uncertainties surrounding the role of small middle powers in Southeast Asia in potential crises, such as the situation with Taiwan. Minister Sang-Woo Lim spoke about the intricate interplay between geopolitics and geoeconomics underscored the link between the region's economic potential and the imperative for peace and stability. Mr. Don McLain Gill added to the conversation by noting that countries like Japan, Korea, and the Philippines are proactively responding to the complex security context through strategic infrastructure agreements and partnerships in crucial areas like technology. India, recognised as a pivotal security actor, is being sought for increased collaboration by regional states, with anticipation for its response extending beyond bilateral arms trade to broader security dynamics.

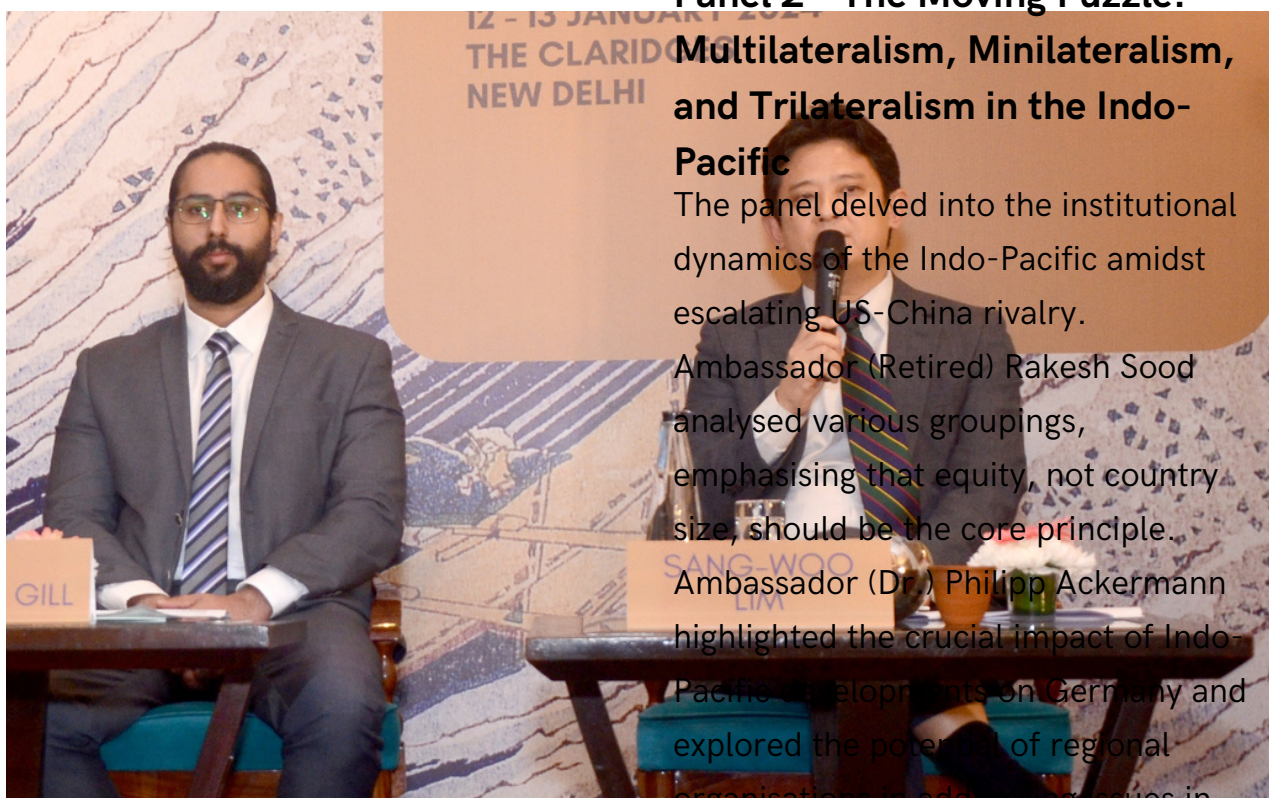
Panel 2 - The Moving Puzzle:

Multilateralism, Minilateralism, and Trilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

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Panel 3 - Indo Pacific Sea Links: Opportunities and Challenges in Maritime Security and Cooperation

The Maritime Security panel discussion delved into multifaceted maritime security and cooperation dimensions, addressing both traditional and emerging threats. Captain Sarabjeet S. Parmar (Retd.) spoke about enduring challenges in the maritime domain, such as the protection of chokepoints and the assurance of freedom of navigation. Notably, he highlighted the growing concern of cyber threats to maritime assets, proposing the potential formulation of regional norms and regulations to address this shared challenge.

Commander Amila Prasanga emphasized the strategic significance of Sri Lanka's geographical location, underscoring its role as an entrepôt capable of substantial contributions to economic and maritime security within the region. Prof Dr Adam Leong advocated for collective collaboration between the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to mitigate security issues effectively, considering the overlapping memberships of key countries.

Dr. Tharishini Krishnan stressed the importance of India's relationship with ASEAN, particularly with Malaysia, given its strategic location near the Strait of Malacca. She emphasized the need for autonomy among regional states in determining their interests, contributions, and policies through enhanced partnerships.

Ambassador Ina Krisnamurthi highlighted potential areas of cooperation, such as the Blue Economy, marine pollution, and maritime domain awareness, suggesting that collaborative efforts in these domains could form the basis for region-wide norms in the Indo-Pacific maritime landscape.



Panel 4 - Diverse Societies and International Norms: Toward A Conceptualisation of an Inclusive Indo-Pacific

In a comprehensive discussion on societies and norms in the Indo-Pacific, moderator Dr. Happymon Jacob emphasized the active role of Indo-Pacific countries in shaping values and engagement in the region, emphasizing the necessity of asserting regional agency over its identity. Ms. Bottheim provided a Norwegian perspective, highlighting that despite the distance, Norway is influenced by developments in the Indo-Pacific, particularly trade routes and security dynamics. Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das explored the multifaceted nature of the Indo-Pacific, its comprehensive policy and strategy, reflecting on the potential establishment of regional norms. Dr. Muhamad Haripin emphasised that smaller nations cannot afford to be drawn into conflicts between major powers, stressing the role of ASEAN in maintaining regional unity and autonomy.

Dr. Philips Vermonte provided insights into ASEAN's adoption of the Indo-Pacific as a construct and its implications. He discussed the challenges democracies face in delivering public goods efficiently while upholding liberal values, emphasising the significance of state socialisation. The conversation concluded by highlighting the ongoing need for frequent engagement in navigating and regulating international behavior within the evolving Indo-Pacific construct.



Panel 5 - A Multistakeholder Indo Pacific Conversation: Mainstreaming Civil Society Expertise

In the panel discussion on mainstreaming civil society expertise in the Indo-Pacific, Moderator Dr. Philips Vermonte raised the crucial question of how policymakers can perceive Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as partners rather than competitors. Dr. Atiqah Nur Alami highlighted the case of ASEAN, emphasizing the platforms available for civil society to engage in track I conversations, providing knowledge, ensuring accountability, and acting as watchdogs. Challenges identified included translating policy recommendations, fragmentation in civil society views, unequal access, institutional hurdles, digital suppression, censorship, and limited gender discourse. Proposed solutions included creating a more bottom-up dialogue platform, capacity building for civil society expertise, and leveraging digital platforms. Dr. Soumita Basu stressed the underutilization of academic expertise in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the top-down nature of the Indo-Pacific construct. For legitimacy and ownership, she advocated active engagement of civil society by Track I, addressing the disconnection of the Indo-Pacific concept from the people's concerns.

Dr. Swati Prabhu added perspectives on bringing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the forefront of the Indo-Pacific agenda. Emphasizing SDG 17's encouragement of public-private partnerships, she highlighted the need for localised expertise to prevent cooptation by western models, connecting domestic development expertise into India's triangular cooperation initiatives, and increasing access to regions for development partnerships through civil society involvement.



Panel 6 - Strengthening Resilience in the Indo Pacific: Trade, Development and Sustainability

Moderator Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das underscored the dynamic economic significance of the Indo-Pacific, highlighting its substantial contribution to global trade, GDP, and energy security. She emphasized its role as a thriving market, attracting investments and serving as a vital component of global supply chains. Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja delved into the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, particularly focusing on its 'Prosperity' pillar. He explored areas such as trade, supply chains, clean economy, and inclusive digital transformation, emphasizing the untapped economic potential of South Asia within the Indo-Pacific. Mr. Chandra Bhushan addressed sustainable development and climate action in the Indo-Pacific, forecasting the dominance of the 4Ts - Trade, Technology, Transition, and Treaties - in the next three decades. He spoke about growing climate concerns and substantial impacts of climate issues without decisive and joint climate action. Ms. Anita Prakash spoke about technology sharing, economic cooperation, and trade in shaping the emerging Indo-Pacific architecture. She spoke of India's relations with Japan and Korea, noting their role in fostering technological collaboration and advancement in the region through ASEAN partnerships.



Concluding Session

Conference Convenor Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das delivered concluding remarks for the Conference on Ocean of Churn: Synergising Values Across the Indo-Pacific, stressing that the dialogue aimed not at reaching a consensus but at initiating a continuous regional conversation. She underscored the vital role of Think Tanks in fostering such discussions, emphasizing the necessity to delve deeper into ASEAN centrality and operationalize it for non-ASEAN countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Ambassador Das highlighted the proactive responses of countries like Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines to growing regional security concerns posed by assertive Chinese influence. In conclusion, she emphasized the imperative of regional cooperation and collaboration for sustainable growth in the Indo-Pacific.