



## Toward an Indo-Pacific consensus? Assessing current Indo-Pacific strategies and policies

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# Toward an Indo-Pacific consensus? Assessing current Indo-Pacific strategies and policies

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## ABSTRACT

While numerous actors are ‘pivoting’ to the Indo-Pacific through formal policies, scholarly research on such approaches is still underdeveloped. Against this backdrop, this research broadens the extant literature on countries’ and institutions’ engagement with the Indo-Pacific, by offering the first comprehensive investigation of existing policies focusing on this macro-region. To that end, it first contextualizes the latter’s significance and scholarly debates, prior to introducing the article’s theoretical and methodological framework. Next, it outlines 27 policies addressing either the Indo-Pacific or its sub-regions, issued by states and institutions from six continents. Subsequently, it identifies similarities, differences, and trends. The article finds a growing consensus on the Indo-Pacific, centred on both a broad regional vision – not just a security-based construct – and a geographical understanding portraying a large cross-regional entity, superseding earlier descriptors. By shedding light on significant yet under-explored developments, this research aims to make a useful contribution to the Indo-Pacific scholarship.

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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific is widely considered one of the world’s most influential regions, if not the most consequential for twenty-first century global affairs (Medcalf, 2020). Its modern iteration emerged in Japan in 2007 and was progressively embraced by numerous states and organizations (Doyle & Rumley, 2019). To list merely its most prominent features, this macro-region comprises approximately two-thirds of the global population, gross domestic product, and maritime trade (Rahman, Chanwahn, & De, 2020). Moreover, it is home to significant diplomatic tensions, territorial disputes, and potential flashpoints, including China’s revisionism in Taiwan and the South China Sea, US–China superpower rivalry and its multiple regional and extra-regional implications, both China–India and India–Pakistan tensions, North Korea’s regional threats, and growing nationalism across the region, to mention but a few (Rodríguez & Rüland, 2021). The Indo-Pacific concurrently displays a plethora of non-traditional security issues, from climate change to human security (He & Feng, 2020). Consequently, this macro-region is increasingly viewed as emblematic of several key features of the twenty-first century, including the

nexus between geoeconomics and geopolitics, the resurgence of power politics, the growing relevance of non-traditional and hybrid security issues (Sharma, 2024), and the difficult position of smaller powers amid all this (Wallis, Koro, & O'Dwyer, 2024).

Still, the Indo-Pacific also represents countless opportunities due its vast and rapidly-growing human capital, hence providing unprecedented levels of potential in terms of economic, political, strategic, social, cultural, and environmental development and cooperation (Vreÿ, Otto, & Nel, 2024). As a result, numerous actors have progressively pivoted to this region. At first this occurred under a narrower US-led strategic interpretation that outgrew the former, trade-focused 'Asia-Pacific' (Patman, Köllner, & Kiglics, 2021). More recently, it followed a broader outlook aiming at harnessing the multifarious benefits of new forms of cooperation (Wirth, 2022). In this context, the adoption of formal policies that wholly or partially focus on this region is increasingly common across those actors that seek to elevate their Indo-Pacific engagement (see Cannon & Hakata, 2021). Despite the sheer global significance of this region, and notwithstanding the acknowledgement that Indo-Pacific policies effectively illustrate its importance, scholarly research on such policies is still underdeveloped.

To be sure, there are numerous publications exploring Indo-Pacific strategies or at least regional approaches, which are pertinent to this discussion and provide illuminating insights. However, there are three limitations in the extant literature that are relevant to this article's endeavour. First, the majority of these works focus on country-specific case studies (see Holland, 2021; Huynh, 2023; Koga, 2019; Pajon, 2023; Patalano, 2019; Rajagopalan, 2020; Scott, 2018; Shekhar, 2018; and Medcalf, 2014, by way of example). Second, even those valuable investigations that do assess more than one case study at a time, focus on specific country groupings, limited geographical areas, or more loosely-defined approaches to the Indo-Pacific – i.e. not necessarily *formal policies* (examples include Abbondanza, 2022a; Abbondanza & Grgić, 2025; Abbondanza & Wilkins, 2024; Anwar, 2020; Aryal & Adithyan, 2025; Paskal, 2021; Pugliese, 2024; Rim & Platte, 2023; Vashisht, 2023; Wallis et al., 2024; and Emmers & Teo, 2015). Third, several Indo-Pacific strategies have not been investigated yet in academic journals (Sweden's, Lithuania's, and others), which may be due to their recency, to the somewhat lower global influence exerted by the issuing states, and/or other reasons.

Put differently, there is currently no academic study on the international adoption of Indo-Pacific policies in their entirety, a significant lacuna in the extant literature that this article seeks to address by providing the first wide-scoped analysis of all existing policies on the Indo-Pacific. Against this backdrop, this novel research aims to make a useful contribution by answering the following research question: does the growing number of Indo-Pacific policies indicate a growing consensus on how this region is viewed and approached? And, if so, what are its main features? The rationale behind this question is that, since increasingly-numerous actors are pivoting to the Indo-Pacific, this process is likely signaling a growing acknowledgment of the region's significance, which warrants new research on how the region is viewed and approached. To further delimit the contours of this research, the latter does not seek to explore the effectiveness of such policies over time, nor it delves into the country-specific nuances concerning the meaning of 'Indo-Pacific', as these elements – however obviously related – would require a much longer investigation, falling outside the scope of this study, and are therefore left for future research. In light of the above, this research seeks to provide a novel 'bird's eye

view' of existing policies relating to the Indo-Pacific, therefore offering a broad overview of such them. While necessarily sacrificing some depth in favour of breadth, it aims to provide a wide-scoped review that directly addresses the extant gap in the Indo-Pacific literature.

Under such premises, this article is structured as follows. After this section, it briefly introduces critical regional studies as a beneficial theoretical lens, prior to expounding the article's inclusion and exclusion criteria and introducing comparative policy analysis (CPA) as an effective methodological approach. Next, it outlines the main objectives included in 27 official documents, which wholly or at least partially focus on the Indo-Pacific or one of its sub-regions. These documents are issued by polities from six continents and, consequently, their concurrent survey provides a novel and timely understanding of this region's import across numerous and diverse actors. The following section explores similarities, differences, and trends between the different types of regional approaches that are here investigated, thus gauging whether an emerging international consensus on the Indo-Pacific can be found. Lastly, the conclusion revisits the article's premises, goals, means, and limitations, while also calling for ongoing research on this momentous region.

The article finds that the majority of countries and institutions formally approaching the Indo-Pacific or its sub-regions do so under a broad understanding of what it represents, that is not only a place with security and normative issues, but also a venue for socio-economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation. This represents a considerable evolution compared to earlier, security-oriented visions for this region. Further, most (extra)regional actors describe it as a broad, cross-regional entity with large geographical boundaries. This suggests that the world is indeed 'pivoting' to the Indo-Pacific, as attested by the gradual embrace of this notion by numerous actors. Simply put, a growing global consensus on what the Indo-Pacific is, and on how to best approach it, seems to be emerging in this specific form. While documents outlining regional policies do not necessarily result in successful foreign policies, this research provides a new and useful contribution on a substantial yet understudied aspect of the Indo-Pacific's international and regional relations.

## **Regional policies on the Indo-Pacific**

While Indo-Pacific policies can effectively be interpreted with a variety of theoretical lenses, including 'new regionalism' (Söderbaum & Shaw, 2003), non-western approaches (Watanabe, 2018), and ocean-focused ones (see Chaturvedi, 2022; and Steinberg, 2001), another theory allows a more nuanced understanding. Critical regional studies provides pertinent insights, as it views regions not only as geographical realities, but also as sites of power, contextual interpretation, and ambitions, shaped by hierarchies and discursive practices (Toal, 1996). Rather than taking regional boundaries or identities at face value, it emphasizes how regions constantly adapt through political projects, shifting identities, and strategic narratives, often reflecting asymmetries between core and peripheral actors (Jones & Paasi, 2015). In doing so, it departs from more functionalist accounts by moving beyond the conventional assumptions about geography and international relations (Agnew, 1994). This is particularly relevant since this investigation focuses on Indo-Pacific policies, that is formal documents which are inevitably shaped by official

rhetoric and strategic discourse. In essence, this approach offers a broader understanding of region-making processes, rendering it particularly suitable for examining the Indo-Pacific as an evolving construct. Unsurprisingly, this framework has increasingly informed scholarly analyses of the Indo-Pacific, especially those concerned with discourse, historical legacies, and strategic ambitions (see Fry, 2019; and Scott, 2019 for example).

Shifting from theory to methodology, this article employs inclusion and exclusion criteria to delimit which policies are considered. Inclusion criteria comprise two types of sources. The first includes official approaches that are explicitly dedicated to this region, thereby considering Indo-Pacific 'strategies', 'policies', 'tilts', 'guidelines', and 'outlooks'. These usually take the form of official documents, issued by countries' governments or international institutions' governing bodies, which highlight the key engagement areas or priorities to be fostered. The second typology encompasses region-relevant postures that do not fall under the first category. Consequently, it comprises multiple speeches amounting to policy formulations, white papers, and national security strategies which refer to the Indo-Pacific or at least one of its sub-regions. As sources from this second category may not provide explicit policy pillars, this investigation comprehensively reviews them with the goal of identifying the key regional priorities.

Exclusion criteria, on the other hand, are occasional and generic mentions in speeches or websites that do not indicate a meaningful Indo-Pacific focus; very recent debates which are not supported by tangible regional policies, or the adoption of Asia-Pacific policies, which, however interesting for international and regional studies, attest an avoidance of the Indo-Pacific construct that makes them inapplicable to this research.<sup>1</sup> While this does not imply that other countries are not gradually acknowledging the region's significance, it does mean that states that do not display an actual policy focus as per the inclusion criteria above are not included in this study.<sup>2</sup> In all cases, the many geographical understandings of the Indo-Pacific are assessed by identifying geographical descriptors included in the states' and organization's regional policies that are here considered.

More on methodological issues, with the goal of prioritising a wide-scoped comparison of the many formal approaches to the Indo-Pacific region, this article adopts comparative policy analysis (CPA) as the most appropriate method to concurrently analyze them. The latter is a well-known and longstanding qualitative methodological tool that has been utilized for decades (Kingdon, 1984), including in international relations (see, for example, Risse-Kappen, 1996). As a result, CPA is particularly well-suited to this study's goals, not only given its methodological appropriateness, but also because it is here applied to shed light on both the same drivers that gave rise to this plethora of Indo-Pacific policies (i.e. the Indo-Pacific's meteoric rise in contemporary debates) and the same policy outputs (formal Indo-Pacific policies, broadly understood), which are issued by the same type of actors (states and regional organizations). In more practical terms, CPA is employed to identify and compare two main elements: (i) the key priorities of existing Indo-Pacific policies; and (ii) the many geographical definitions of the Indo-Pacific, in addition to resulting similarities, differences, and trends. On a related note, the diversity of the article's case studies – in terms of geographical origin, type of issuing body, and priorities – is here considered a valuable element, which is emblematic of the Indo-Pacific's heterogeneity.

Starting from such theoretical, definitional, and methodological premises, the following section succinctly outlines 27 official policies, broadly understood and mostly

published in English.<sup>3</sup> If a country or institution has issued more than one regional policy over the years, only the latest is assessed for the purpose of identifying the issuing country's latest goals. While this does not take into account potential policy changes over time, it renders the analysis feasible within the scope of a journal article. Such policies are grouped by geographical areas (continents), and, within them, they are listed alphabetically to increase the readability of numerous policies, to avoid unintentional state hierarchies, and to facilitate their subsequent assessment. To enhance their comparability under CPA's guidelines, the policies' key elements are summarized in continent-specific tables. These outline the type of policy being considered (i.e. national or regional scope), their focus area (from specific aspects to broader, multi-level cooperation), and the region's definition ('narrow' in the case of only one sub-region, such as the Indian Ocean, South-east Asia, the South/North Pacific, or the Pacific Rim; 'broad' with a cross-regional combination of at least two sub-regions; or 'broadest' when all countries in the two oceans are taken into account). Such policies are then assessed comparatively in the following section.

Existing Indo-Pacific strategies and policies

Africa

Although Africa's eastern shores are included in the Indo-Pacific's broadest geographical understanding, and notwithstanding growing regional debates concerning the Indo-Pacific, *formal* foreign policy developments addressing it remain scant in this continent (see Table 1). While this might be slowly changing, Africa's Indian Ocean states are still considered in Indo-Pacific debates as actors whose influence is the object of foreign competition, as a matter for regional organizations, or as countries whose importance continues to be discounted. In the words of Otto and Moeng (2024, p. 196) 'This is not helped by the fact that most African states seem to have little to no strategic thinking that encompasses the IP'.

Amid all this, one transregional organization stands out as an exception. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)<sup>4</sup> formally approached the Indo-Pacific by issuing its own Indo-Pacific Outlook (notably using the same nomenclature as ASEAN's) in 2022. In it, it formalized the Association's regional objectives through 12 points, some of which partially overlap: (1) maritime security; (2) prosperity, development, connectivity, resilience, and free trade; (3) sustainability, climate change mitigation, and environmental preservation; (4) regional institutionalism; (5) regional dialogue; (6) strengthening existing fora; (7) enhancing maritime security cooperation; (8) sustainable use of marine resources; (9) free and fair trade and investments; (10) multi-level connectivity; (11) strengthened cooperation between regional organizations; and (12) strengthened cooperation between sub-regional organizations and associations. In line with its inclusive approach, IORA defines the Indo-Pacific as comprising all states facing either ocean (IORA, 2022).

Table 1. Africa's Indo-Pacific approach.

| Country/Organization | Policy type     | Main focus              | Region's definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| IORA                 | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broadest            |

## Asia

Unlike Africa, the Asian continent is understandably home to several key Indo-Pacific policies<sup>5</sup> (six of them, see Table 2), while the interest of Gulf states is not included here due to its embryonic development stage (Fulton, Sim, & Samaan, 2023). After a few years of hesitation, ASEAN and its 10 member states formally embraced the Indo-Pacific notion in 2019 with the Indo-Pacific Outlook, which was spearheaded by Indonesia and comprises four main objectives: (1) maritime cooperation; (2) connectivity; (3) UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030; and (4) economic and other areas of cooperation. The Outlook's geographical understanding of this macro-region ranges from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific, which emphasizes ASEAN centrality<sup>6</sup> from a geographical as well as policy perspective (ASEAN, 2019).

India, a 'political heavyweight' within the region, follows in this list. Over the 2010s, it progressively merged its 'look west/east/north/south' policies, the 2014 Act East Policy, and the 2015 SAGAR policy, and eventually issued its Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) in 2019, which advanced seven goals. These are: (1) maritime security; (2) maritime ecology; (3) maritime resources; (4) capacity building and resource sharing; (5) disaster risk reduction and management; (6) science, technology, and academic cooperation; and (7) trade, connectivity, and maritime transport (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2019) (later to be bolstered by the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor – IMEC project). Completing this picture, India envisages the Indo-Pacific in the broadest possible sense (see Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2018). Interestingly, India adds the 'inclusive' moniker when referring to the Indo-Pacific, which signals a rejection of bloc politics, broad alignment with ASEAN, and strategic autonomy from the US while still cooperating with it.

The second key regional player is Indonesia, which pursued a new pivotal role under the label of 'global maritime fulcrum', presented in its 2017 Ocean Policy. The latter signaled Jakarta's shift from diplomatic proposals focused on international norms (the earlier 'Indo-Pacific Treaty' Initiative) to a national strategy prioritising domestic infrastructure and naval defence. Its seven pillars are: (1) marine and human resources development; (2) maritime security, law enforcement, and safety at sea; (3) ocean governance and institutions; (4) maritime economy development; (5) sea space management and marine protection; (6) maritime culture; and (7) maritime diplomacy. In geographical terms, this document mentions the intersections of the two oceans, and the map it includes at the beginning portrays both the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, indicating a broad definition of the region's boundaries (Indonesian Ministry for Maritime Affairs, 2017).

The third 'regional heavyweight' is Japan – the country that gave origin to the Indo-Pacific's modern notion back in 2007 – which published various region-specific documents over the years. The latest is the 2023 version of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

**Table 2.** Asia's Indo-Pacific approaches.

| Country/Organization | Source type     | Main focus                              | Region's definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| ASEAN                | Regional policy | Multilateralism, regional cooperation   | Broad               |
| India                | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation                 | Broadest            |
| Indonesia            | National policy | Multi-level cooperation                 | Broad               |
| Japan                | Regional policy | Regionalism and multi-level cooperation | Broadest            |
| South Korea          | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation                 | Broad               |
| Taiwan               | Regional policy | Regionalism and economy                 | Broad               |

(FOIP) vision,<sup>7</sup> outlining four chief goals: (1) peace and rules for prosperity; (2) addressing challenges in an 'Indo-Pacific way'; (3) multi-layered connectivity; and (4) extending efforts for security and safe use of the sea and the air. As per the boundaries of this region, Japan has traditionally included all states facing one or both oceans (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). On the other side of the Sea of Japan, South Korea more recently endorsed the Indo-Pacific idea after several years of alleged hedging. Seoul published its Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022, which comprised nine goals: (1) building a regional order based on norms and rules; (2) cooperating to promote the rule of law and human rights; (3) strengthening non-proliferation and counter-terrorism efforts across the region; (4) expanding comprehensive security cooperation; (5) building economic security networks; (6) strengthening cooperation in the critical domains of science and technology and closing the 'digital gap'; (7) leading regional cooperation on climate change and energy security; (8) engaging in 'contributive diplomacy' through tailored development cooperation partnerships; and (9) promoting mutual understanding and exchanges. Further, South Korea defines this region as comprising all states from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific (South Korean Government, 2022).

Taiwan – a country that suffers from its partial international recognition and fears for its survival due to China's objective to annex it – closes this list. To attempt to foster regional recognition and cooperation, Taipei has launched its New Southbound Policy in 2016, which revolves around four pillars. These are: (1) economic and trade collaboration; (2) talent exchange; (3) resource sharing; and (4) regional connectivity. As per regional definitions, Taiwan's encompasses India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand (see Taiwanese Government, 2019).

## Europe

Although Europe joined Indo-Pacific debates late, it is rapidly making up for lost time as evidenced by twelve formal regional approaches (Table 3). The Czech Republic released a fully-fledged Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022, which signals the country's will to interact with the region through four main points: (1) partnerships; (2) security; (3) prosperity; and (4) sustainability. In geographical terms, Prague understands this region as stretching from Afghanistan to the South Pacific (Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Denmark, on the other hand, published a foreign and security policy strategy in 2023, which therefore

**Table 3.** Europe's Indo-Pacific approaches.

| Country/Organization | Source type     | Main focus              | Region's definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Czech Republic       | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Denmark              | National policy | Multi-level cooperation | Narrow              |
| EU                   | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| France               | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Germany              | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broadest            |
| Italy                | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Lithuania            | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Netherlands          | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broadest            |
| Slovakia             | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Spain                | National policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Sweden               | Regional policy | Security cooperation    | Broad               |
| UK                   | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |

falls under this article's 'second category' of sources. In it, the country's six engagement goals are: (1) freedom of navigation; (2) trade; (3) green transition; (4) sustainability; (5) digital transformation; and (6) strategic partnerships. As Copenhagen's document is not a regional policy, the Indo-Pacific's boundaries are only implicitly described as ranging from India to Eastern Asia (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

The third policy considered here is the European Union's (EU) Indo-Pacific strategy, which spurred comparable developments across the continent. Published in 2021, it includes seven pillars: (1) sustainable and inclusive prosperity; (2) green transition; (3) ocean governance; (4) digital governance and partnerships; (5) connectivity; (6) security and defence; and (7) human security. With its strategy, Brussels defines the region as stretching from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific (European Commission, 2021). Next, France, the country that spearheaded Europe's approach and is also the European actor with the broadest and most deeply-rooted regional stance (also in light of its status as resident power). With respect to the country's relevant policies, it first produced the 2018 Indo-Pacific White Paper prior to issuing its 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy. The latter outlined four interaction pillars: (1) security and defence; (2) economy, connectivity, research, and innovation; (3) multilateralism and the rule of law; and (4) climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable management of oceans. Paris' given boundaries for this macro-region extend from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific (French Government, 2022).

As one of Europe's two 'Big Four' countries that are not resident powers, Germany has approached this region in its own specific way. After years of cautious policies toward Asia, chiefly due to the country's trade dependence, it released its Indo-Pacific guidelines in 2020. The latter's seven regional aims are: (1) strengthening multilateralism; (2) tackling climate change and protecting the environment; (3) strengthening peace, security, and stability; (4) promoting human rights and the rule of law; (5) strengthening rules-based, fair, and sustainable free trade; (6) rules-based networking and the digital transformation of regions and markets; and (7) bringing people together through culture, education, and science. Region-wise, Berlin views the Indo-Pacific in the broadest possible sense (German Government, 2020). The second 'Big Four' country that is not a resident power, Italy, also approached this macro-region in its own manner. In 2022 it released a document specifying how the country contributed to the EU strategy, while also briefly listing Italy's eight priorities. These are: (1) multilateralism and regionalism; (2) human rights, democracy, and the rule of law; (3) the rules-based order; (4) climate change mitigation; (5) free and fair trade; (6) multi-level sustainability; (7) transparency; and (8) inclusivity. Definition-wise, Rome views the Indo-Pacific as comprising all states nested between Eastern Africa and the South Pacific (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Shifting from major to smaller European countries, Lithuania issued a fully-fledged Indo-Pacific strategy in 2023. Through the latter, Vilnius signaled its nascent regional interaction under three main goals: 1) security and political dialogue; 2) economic cooperation; and 3) soft power and networking. Geographically, Lithuania understands the region as encompassing states between Pakistan and the South Pacific (Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The Netherlands follows in this alphabetical list. The Dutch maintain strong regional trade relations, as attested by their 2020 Indo-Pacific guidelines, which support the country's regional interactions under six elements. These are: (1) security and stability; (2) a framework for cooperation with democratic, like-minded partners in Asia; (3) sustainable trade and economies; (4) effective multilateralism

and the international legal order; (5) sustainable connectivity; and (6) global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development goals. Much like their German counterparts, the Dutch too view the Indo-Pacific in the broadest possible way (Dutch Government, 2020). Sweden comes next, albeit with a more strategy-focused regional outlook since it stems from a defence policy. The latter revolves around three main points: (1) defence relations; (2) military presence; and (3) defence cooperation. Relatedly, Stockholm defines the Indo-Pacific as ranging from Eastern Africa to South Pacific (Swedish Ministry of Defence, 2023).

Spain is one of the latest countries in Europe to publish a region-related document, in the form of a national foreign policy strategy. In it, the government uses ‘Indo-Pacific’ and ‘Asia-Pacific’ somewhat interchangeably and aims to develop stronger relations across seven areas: (1) multilateralism (China included); (2) international law; (3) the EU as a guiding entity; (4) stability and security; (5) trade; (6) climate change mitigation; (7) tourism. Despite not providing explicit definitions, the countries listed imply that Madrid views the region as starting in Western Asia and ending in the South Pacific (Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Europe’s penultimate document assessed here is Slovakia’s Indo-Pacific strategic concept, released at the very end of 2025 and outlining 3 priorities: (1) the rules-based order; (2) Indo-Pacific stability as directly relevant to Europe’s security; and (3) the enhancement of rules-based trade. Geographical definitions-wise, Slovakia sees the region as grouping the South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific sub-regions (Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2025). The last policy considered here is much more unequivocal in its direction, as it is the United Kingdom’s (UK) 2023 Integrated Review Refresh (IRR), which updated previous documents outlining its Indo-Pacific ‘tilt’. The IRR highlights eight areas of interest: (1) the regional balance of power; (2) a stable but adaptable regional order; (3) freedom; (4) territorial integrity; (5) international rules; (6) secure shipping lanes; (7) legal fishing; and (8) risk resilience, including climate change and cyberspace. Lastly, the UK’s understanding of the Indo-Pacific encompasses all countries between India and the South Pacific (UK Government, 2023).

## North America

For plain geographical reasons, the North American continent counts on two countries formally acknowledging the significance of the Indo-Pacific (Table 4). Canada did so with its 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy, which listed five regional goals: (1) promoting peace, resilience, and security; (2) expanding trade, investment, and supply chain resilience; (3) investing in and connecting people; (4) building a sustainable and green future; and (5) Canada’s role as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific. Ottawa interprets this region’s geographical boundaries as comprising countries between Pakistan and the South Pacific (Canadian Government, 2022). Second, the staunchest advocate of the Indo-Pacific, that is the United States (US), which has

**Table 4.** North America’s Indo-Pacific approaches.

| Country/Organization | Policy type     | Main focus              | Region’s definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Canada               | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| US                   | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |

published an Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022, updating previous documents released in 2017 and 2018. The strategy includes five pillars: (1) advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific; (2) building connections within and beyond the region; (3) driving Indo-Pacific prosperity; (4) bolstering Indo-Pacific security; and (5) building regional resilience to twenty-first century transnational threats. Relatedly, the US views the region as stretching from India to the western shores of North America (US Government, 2022).

Lastly, Washington has promoted and utilized minilaterals which operate in the region (Atanassova-Cornelis, Sauer, & Sato, 2025). In 2017 it revived the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ('Quad') to address regional security, emerging technologies, and infrastructures, a grouping that convenes and actions regularly. Also, in 2022, it launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), a platform aiming at strengthening rules-based economic ties in the Indo-Pacific with, so far, mixed results. As per Central America, there is currently no regional policy that satisfies this article's criteria, and, as a result, there is no corresponding section (still, see Jenne & Ramoneda, 2022; and Jenne, 2020 for valuable works on Latin America and the Indo-Pacific).

## Oceania

This continent, with its prominent position in virtually all Indo-Pacific definitions, currently offers three formal regional approaches (Table 5). To begin with, Australia is one of the steadiest and earliest supporters of the Indo-Pacific notion. The country's Indo-Pacific stance is distilled in several documents dating back to 2013, with the most recent of them – the 2026 National Defence Strategy – providing three overarching goals and five ancillary tasks (mostly defence-related, given the nature of this latest document). They are: (1) deter actions against Australia's interests; (2) shape Australia's strategic environment; and (3) respond with credible military force when required; in addition to: (a) defend Australia and our immediate region; (b) deter through denial; (c) protect Australia's economic connections; (d) contribute to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific; and (e) contribute to protecting the rules-based order. Somewhat curiously, for a country so supportive of a broad regional vision and so strategically close to the US, Canberra views it as ranging from the Maldives to the South Pacific, yet not up to the American continent's western shores or the African continent's eastern ones (Australian Department of Defence, 2024).

New Zealand comes second in this continental list. While Wellington has traditionally been lukewarm in its Indo-Pacific engagement, the country has recently shifted its foreign policy stance and has published a national security strategy in 2023, in which five region-related goals can be identified. These are: (1) ASEAN centrality; (2) an open, inclusive, stable, and prosperous region; (3) multilateralism and international law; (4) democratic values and human rights; and (5) collective security. As per regional definitions, New

**Table 5.** Oceania's Indo-Pacific approaches.

| Country/Organization | Policy type     | Main focus              | Region's definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Australia            | National policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| New Zealand          | National policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| PIF                  | Regional policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |

Zealand describes the Indo-Pacific as extending across India, Southeast Asia, and the whole Pacific Rim (New Zealand Government, 2023). Third, the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) prioritizes environmental and human security, rather than traditional security, thus centring its policies on Pacific Ocean unity and governance. While it also listed 10 ‘commitments’, the Forum has outlined seven regional priorities in its ‘Blue Pacific Continent’ strategy: (1) political leadership and regionalism; (2) people-centred development; (3) peace and security; (4) resource and economic development; (5) climate change and disasters; (6) ocean and environment; and (7) technology and connectivity (PIF 2022). Definition-wise, although PIF acknowledges the Indo-Pacific construct, it views its region as more specifically encompassing both Oceania and the Pacific Ocean, as reflected in the geographic location of its member countries.

### **South America**

The South American continent displays three nascent regional approaches that are relevant to this article’s purpose (Table 6). Chile has released a national defence policy in 2020, in which the Indo-Pacific is identified as one of the country’s four key ‘security and defence environments’. Its Indo-Pacific section highlights five goals: (1) freedom of navigation; (2) maritime communication lanes’ security; (3) sustainable economic development; (4) freedom of overflight; and (5) international law and norms. With reference to geographical references, Santiago understands the Indo-Pacific as ranging from India to the American continent’s western shores (Chilean Parliament, 2021). The second country considered here is Colombia, which has not issued a relevant national or regional policy, although its government ministers have stressed the importance of two elements – economic prosperity and democracy – in the region’s interactions (DNA, 2021). Moreover, Bogotá has emphasized the key roles of India, Australia, and New Zealand, while promoting ‘the inclusion of Latin America within the Indo-Pacific vision of Australia’s and New Zealand’s foreign policy’ (Colombian Government, 2022). Geographically speaking, as mentioned earlier in the article, such visions identify the Indo-Pacific as ranging from Maldives to the South Pacific (Australia) or from India to Western America (New Zealand). Lastly, Peru does not have an Indo-Pacific strategy yet, although the government’s strategic planning office does engage with the region’s significance. More specifically, the latest policy document centred on the Indo-Pacific argues for the need to strengthen economic relations, while defining the region as encompassing all countries across the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific (Peruvian Government, 2023).

### **An emerging international consensus on the Indo-Pacific?**

The above section has outlined the multifarious foreign policy goals of 27 policies, issued by a diverse array of states and institutions from six continents, which wholly or partially

**Table 6.** South America’s Indo-Pacific approaches.

| Country/Organization | Policy type     | Main focus              | Region’s definition |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Chile                | National policy | Multi-level cooperation | Broad               |
| Colombia             | National policy | Regionalism, economy    | Broad               |
| Peru                 | Regional policy | Economy                 | Broad               |

address the significance of the Indo-Pacific or its sub-regions. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier in the introduction, this endeavour inevitably overlooks the nuances of the many case studies' foreign policies, as well as their effectiveness – or otherwise (an entire monograph would scarcely suffice, to that end). On the other, the 'bird's eye view' of these numerous policies favours a broad and novel investigation of both states' and institutions' formal approaches to the Indo-Pacific and their geographical definitions of this region, as per the two elements that this article's comparative policy analysis (CPA) has focused on. Consequently, an assessment of the 27 policies allows to answer the article's research question, which is whether this growing number of Indo-Pacific approaches entails an emerging consensus on this macro-region.

First, a number of foreign policy clusters can be found within the numerous policies that have been considered. The most frequent policy pillars are (in alphabetical order) climate change, connectivity, democracy and human rights, digital governance, economic prosperity, freedom of navigation and/or overflight, international law, maritime governance, multilateralism, security, socio-cultural links, sustainability, and trade. Second, the 27 Indo-Pacific approaches that have been reviewed display various definitions of this macro-region. From the broadest to the narrowest, these are: (a) all countries facing the two oceans, (b) from the middle of the Indian Ocean to the Western shores of the American continent, (c) from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific, (d) from the middle of the Indian Ocean to the South Pacific, and (e) Indo-Pacific sub-regions such as Southeast Asia (with or without Australia and New Zealand), Eastern Africa, or Oceania. Relatedly, the significance of such developments for maritime affairs and, in particular, for ocean policy, is incontrovertible. This is the case for both the Pacific and the Indian oceans, which in this case are understood as overlapping subregions within a broader and interconnected macro-region. This does not mean that the two oceans lose their own specificities, identities, and relevance (far from it, as Chaturvedi's (2022) notion of 'Indianoceanness' highlights) but rather that the two levels of analysis – the ocean-specific and the wider Indo-Pacific – exist and exert considerable social, political, economic, and strategic influence at the same time.

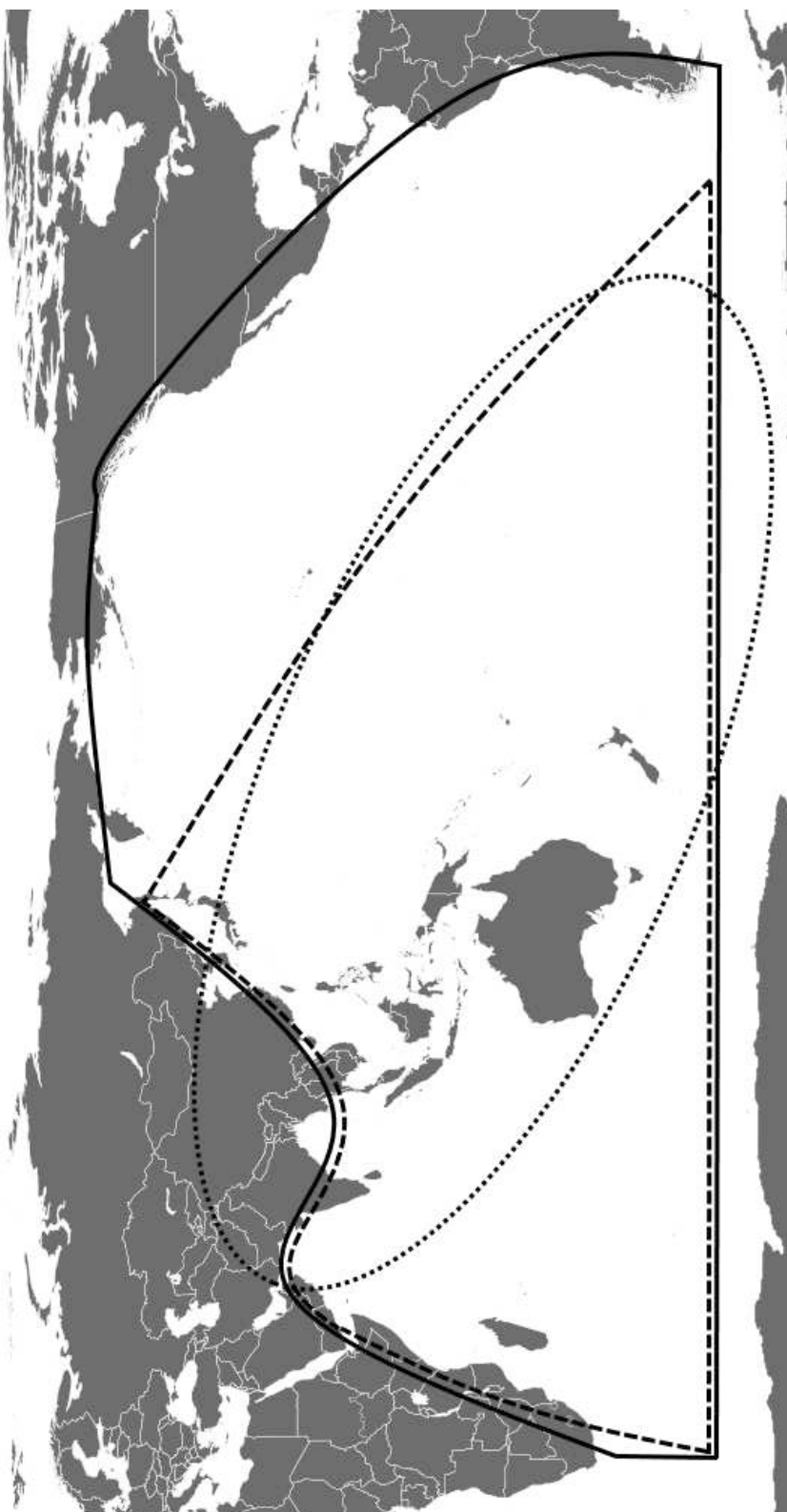
In light of the above, and considering the diversity of the article's case studies, select key similarities and differences can be determined. Starting with the former, the majority of the case studies engage with the Indo-Pacific through a 'hybrid' approach combining trade and economic governance, international law, traditional and non-traditional security issues, multilateralism, and other facilitating elements. This can be seen in Africa's (IORA), most of Asia's (India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea), Europe's (Czechia, Denmark, EU, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, the UK), and South America's actors (Chile), as well as in all countries or organizations in North America (Canada, the US) and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, PIF). This regional stance is therefore attested by the majority of Indo-Pacific-related policies that are explored in this article. As effectively highlighted by Indo-Pacific scholars, this hybrid approach applies to fully-fledged regional policies (Abbondanza & Grgić, 2025; Anwar, 2020; Huynh, 2023; Koga, 2019; Pajon, 2023; Patalano, 2019; Scott, 2018, and several others), to 'quasi-strategies' (see Abbondanza, 2022; Abbondanza, 2026; Shekhar, 2018; Wilkins, 2024), and even to unfolding policies that do not stem from formal documents yet (Jenne & Ramoneda, 2022, by way of example).

Relatedly, this inclusive conceptualization is often associated with an equally-inclusive understanding of the Indo-Pacific's geographical boundaries. Most policies from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and South America define this macro-region either broadly (a cross-regional combination of at least two sub-regions, such as the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, the South/North Pacific, and/or the Pacific Rim), or in the broadest possible sense (that is all countries in the two oceans) (see [Figure 1](#)). In theoretical terms, the two findings above arguably corroborate the usefulness of critical regional studies as a theoretical lens to interpret the Indo-Pacific with, as the latter displays broad, evolving, and diverse features that fit well with this lens' premises.

Conversely, two noticeable differences can be drawn from the few exceptions to the above. First, the occasional policies that do not follow the aforementioned hybrid approach inevitably focus on more specific foreign policy clusters. This is the case of ASEAN's, Taiwan's, Sweden's, and Colombia's documents, which emphasize either economic, security, regional, or societal pillars. Second, there is one instance in which the assessed policy defines the region of interest more narrowly. Such is the definition adopted by Denmark (from India to Eastern Asia). Even so, these deviant cases represent two minority groups within the broader comparative analysis (four cases out of 27 in terms of foreign policy clusters, and only one out of 27 with reference to geographical definitions), and, as a result, they could be deemed 'exceptions that prove the rule'. More on potential differences between the selected case studies, while real-world discrepancies in how these diverse actors approach the Indo-Pacific are not explored – as this falls outside the article's scope and is therefore left for future research – it is nevertheless useful to acknowledge once again the unavoidable difference between foreign policy on paper and in the real world.

On a related note, several elements help to trace a tangible foreign policy trend. In historical terms, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the Asia-Pacific was chiefly centred on economic opportunities – as embodied by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) – although it could not come to terms with India's rise and with other Asian economies' growing *extra-regional* interests. This partially facilitated the subsequent adoption of the geographically-broader Indo-Pacific (see Patman et al., 2021, p. 10). At the same time, just a decade ago the Indo-Pacific notion was not infrequently deemed polarizing given its prevailing security focus. Today, all the most influential actors in this macro-region as well as many regional and minor powers explicitly adopt the new nomenclature, along with the related international implications.

Today few countries (more or less aligned with China and/or Russia) reject the Indo-Pacific notion, including Myanmar, North Korea, and Pakistan. Even the only two major players that obviously reject the idea that the Indo-Pacific is a region – China and Russia – do engage with alternative yet comparable cross-regional visions.<sup>8</sup> Russia does so with its 'Greater Eurasia' ideal, which straddles Asia and Europe, and China with the former 'Asia-Pacific'. However, in this case the latter is duly expanded through the 'Two Oceans' naval doctrine and with its Maritime Silk Road, whose combination closely resembles the Indo-Pacific from a geographic – and geopolitical – viewpoint, since it encompasses all sub-regions from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific (see Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova, & Safranchuk, 2021). In other words, it may be argued that the countries that eschew the Indo-Pacific notion reject its conceptual origin and strategic use, rather than rejecting the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific regions *per se*. To that



**Figure 1.** The three most common geographical definitions of the Indo-Pacific. The solid line encompasses all countries facing the two oceans; the dashed line includes all countries from Eastern Africa to the South Pacific; and the dotted line encloses all countries from India/Pakistan/Afghanistan to the South Pacific. Source: author's own creation, modified from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BlankMap-World-162E-flat.svg>, which is released without copyright restrictions.

end, China, above all other players, avoids using the Indo-Pacific nomenclature for diplomatic and political reasons, while it pursues an Indo-Pacific strategy in all but name through the 'Two Oceans' doctrine and the Maritime Silk Road.

Next, as shown by the earlier survey of foreign policy clusters, the majority of countries and institutions pursue a multiplicity of regional and extra-regional goals. In international relations terms, this represents a marked evolution from the narrow, security-oriented vision initially advanced by the US and its allies to a broader and more accepted vision. Moreover, the related investigation of regional geographical definitions suggests two directions: first, a desire to interact with a large number of actors, considerably larger than what was customary with the Asia-Pacific or narrower sub-regions; second, a common goal of projecting countries' and institutions' interests and cross-regional cooperation farther than before. Lastly, these elements seem to further validate the article's theoretical framework, since the aforementioned hybrid approaches, (extra)regional goals, and cross-regional cooperation efforts clearly fall under the theoretical tenets of critical regional studies.

Consequently, it appears that an emerging international consensus on how the Indo-Pacific is viewed, and how a majority of actors seek to engage with it, can indeed be found. Put differently, the Indo-Pacific is now increasingly viewed as a macro-region characterized by numerous and complementary engagement pillars, and not just a security-based construct as was the case not long ago. It is also understood as a broad and cross-regional geographical entity, superseding earlier and narrower regional descriptors. Put differently, this highlights both an increasingly common vision of what the region is (the most common geographical definitions mentioned earlier) as well as what to do in it (the foreign policy clusters discussed in this section). Complementing these two key defining features, the number of countries and institutions approaching the region under these terms continues to grow, therefore displaying a growing international convergence that may well progress in the coming years.

## Conclusion

This article has aimed to advance the scholarly knowledge on the Indo-Pacific under a rather specific light, namely existing policies that focus on this macro-region or on one of its sub-regions. It has therefore sought to answer a related research question, that is whether this growing number of Indo-Pacific approaches entails an emerging consensus on this macro-region. To that end, it has provided a broad contextualization of the Indo-Pacific and its literature. Next, it has interpreted the remarkably-varied set of regional policies with critical regional studies, prior to stating their inclusion and exclusion criteria and advancing comparative policy analysis as a useful method to compare them. The key empirical analysis then outlined 27 regional policies spanning from six continents. Subsequently, the article has assessed the main implications by exploring the most significant similarities and differences in a comparative fashion, prior to tracing current and future trends.

The investigation's chief findings reveal that the world is indeed 'pivoting' to the Indo-Pacific, as attested by both the gradual acceptance of this notion by a growing number of polities and the large number of related policies that this article has identified and scrutinised. Moreover, this unfolding regional focus is mostly undertaken under a broad

assumption that the Indo-Pacific is not only home to security and normative issues, but also economic, social, scientific, and cultural cooperation. Among related findings, the majority of states and institutions view the Indo-Pacific as a large, cross-regional entity, which can be interpreted with critical regional studies' understanding of twenty-first century region-building. In essence, as the identification and analysis of these 27 documents attests, the Indo-Pacific is viewed today in a much broader and nuanced manner compared to narrower and security-focused constructs advanced not long ago.

On a related note, it is appropriate to remind that while such regional policies do not necessarily originate successful foreign policies, the success or otherwise of these Indo-Pacific policies falls outside of this article's scope, also considering that a longer time frame is needed to assess their effectiveness. What was in the article's scope, instead, was the first concurrent exploration of existing Indo-Pacific policies. While necessarily sacrificing depth over breath, this allowed to shed light on an important yet under-examined aspect of the Indo-Pacific's international and regional relations, as well as numerous countries' regional foreign policy. This pivotal region will arguably continue to attract interest and effort at the global level, which will require ongoing research on existing and unfolding aspects pertaining to it. To that end, this research hopes to offer useful insights for country specialists and regional experts alike.

## Notes

1. Such as Argentina's Asia-Pacific committee (CONAPAC), Ireland's Asia-Pacific strategy, or Spain's Asia-Pacific strategy, for example.
2. For instance, Djibouti, Malaysia, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, the UAE, and Vietnam have begun to approach the Indo-Pacific notion with varying degrees of intensity, yet they do not possess a regional strategy nor a set of policies amounting to one.
3. The few documents that have not been not released in English are translated in English by the author.
4. Although IORA's Asian members are slightly more numerous than its African members, IORA is included in the 'Africa' section of this article on account of its history (it began as a South Africa-led initiative) and the location of its secretariat, which is also in the African continent (Ebene, Mauritius). Mauritius' categorisation as an African nation can be seen, among other sources, in the UN Statistics Division and in its membership of the African Union.
5. While not an Indo-Pacific policy *per se*, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has endorsed the Indo-Pacific construct in 2025 through its Secretary General.
6. ASEAN centrality is a key concept in several Indo-Pacific approaches, including those of Australia, the European Union, India, New Zealand, the United States.
7. The FOIP framework is formally used by Australia, Japan, and the United States, as well as in Quad statements. Actors formally mentioning the 'free and open Indo-Pacific', though without using the acronym, include the European Union, India, and the United Kingdom.
8. While China plays an immense role in Indo-Pacific debates, this article focuses on Indo-Pacific *policies* and thus provides only a brief treatment of Beijing's role in the region.

## Author contributions

CRedit: **Gabriele Abbondanza**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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