



# ROUNDTABLE REPORT

AFRICA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC



**Faculty of Humanities**  
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This report was prepared as part of the Department of Political Science 'Africa in the Indo-Pacific' project.

It is based on the roundtable discussion regarding the Indo-Pacific that was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 at the University of Pretoria.

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### **Chair**

Professor Maxi Schoeman and Mr Roland Henwood both from the University of Pretoria

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### **List of speakers**

**Ms Sanusha Naidu** Senior Research Fellow at Institute for Global Dialogue

**Mrs Shiskha Prabawaningtyas** HOD of Paramadina Graduate School of Diplomacy

**Professor Chris Alden** Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science

**Mr Tad Brown** U.S. Embassy in Pretoria

**Dr Yu-Shan Wu** Postdoctoral research fellow, University of Pretoria

**Dr Frank Mattheis** Research Fellow at United Nations University

**Mr Ed Cohen** First Secretary, Australia High Commission in South Africa

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### **List of responders**

**Mr Jaimal Anand** Department of International Relations and Cooperation

**Professor Garth le Pere** Extraordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria and a Senior Associate of the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection

# 1

## India and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Ms Sanusha Naidu

In the first presentation, **Ms Sanusha Naidu**, described India's approach to the Indo-Pacific which can be summed up in several points. Firstly, reference is made to the history of India's Indo-Pacific strategy. **Ms Naidu**, points out that during the Cold War, India was very much focused on its regional neighbourhood. However, after the 1990s, and the reforms in 1991 (which opened up the Indian markets) there was a shift to a much broader strategy. Importantly, **Ms Naidu** points out that this is not specifically, an Indo-Pacific strategy, but forms a part of a broader approach. One of the pivotal points to understanding India's approach is looking at how it conceptualises security. On the one hand, it has to manage the dynamics with China and Pakistan and on the other hand, it needs to manage the internal changes in its domestic environment. Closely linked to its security challenges, India is also affected by its identity as a nuclear power and the question is thus: how does India locate itself in this context? Furthermore, **Ms Naidu** pointed out that the Indo-Pacific strategy plays into a reconceptualization of the Asia-Pacific. Here, two events are interesting: (1) the 2004 Tsunami, that saw India become a leader in the disbursement of aid, and (2) India's engagement with actors beyond the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

Thirdly, there has been an understanding that India can play a role beyond its regional neighbourhood. However, this also raises important questions such as whether India can coalesce with other partners in the region, especially considering China's flexing of its military muscles and its 'string of pearls' strategy. Furthermore, there are questions concerning India's ability to deal with insurgencies and maritime and overland security. Fourthly, in the recent Indo-Pacific Strategy published by the United States (US), India was identified as an 'interlocker' – a country that can serve as a bridge.

Fifthly, **Ms Naidu**, points to the shift in the understanding of security. Security is no longer understood solely in terms of traditional security but there is also a focus on looking at business and trade. For example, **Ms Naidu**, referred to the inaugural Indo-Pacific Business Forum (IPBF) that was held in October 2021 and jointly hosted by the US and India. However, despite these shifts in priorities, it must also be noted that India has not taken up the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Here, **Ms Naidu**, poses an important question namely: to what

extent will this impact India? Amongst concluding thoughts, **Ms Naidu** ended her presentation with the assertion that India will have to move beyond Singapore as its main partner.

## 2

### **Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Mrs Shiskha Prabawaningtyas**

The presentation by **Mrs Shiskha Prabawaningtyas**, explored Indonesia's perspective on the Indo-Pacific, that in the last five to ten years has seen a change in terminology from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific. Indonesia recognises the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific, which is home to many of the world's important shipping routes, oil containers and has an abundance of raw materials. However, the region is also plagued by numerous issues, which **Mrs Prabawaningtyas**, points out are: illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, drug and human trafficking, climate change and geopolitical rivalry. Furthermore, there are challenges of managing regional cooperation (in respect of the rise of China). Within this context, Indonesia's approach is supported by three pillars that respectively focus on: geostrategy (concerning military spending and conflict), geopolitics (concerning regional organisations and how these align with Indonesia's position), and geoeconomics (which focuses on policy). Importantly, **Mrs Prabawaningtyas**, stressed that Indonesia, being at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, cannot stand idly by the regional competition for power – there needs to be a focus on how Indonesia can promote peace and prosperity. Here, several thematic pillars of Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy were outlined, such as its emphasis on its territorial integrity (Indonesia's perspective on the Indo-Pacific is linked closely to its territorial identity and its struggle to get international recognition for its territories). Indonesia sees its territory as consisting of both land and water as was pointed out by Allah SWT, its desire to prevent any competition in the region, and the rising challenges, such as transnational crime, border disputes and terrorism. **Mrs Prabawaningtyas**, thus highlighted how Indonesia's core values are: association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) centrality, openness, transparency and respect for international law. Indonesia has been approaching the region, mainly through multilateral diplomacy through ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) (during 2015-2017 Indonesia assumed the presidency of IORA) and in 2019, the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific, proposed by Indonesia, was adopted in Bangkok. Importantly, it was stressed that Indo-Pacific cooperation is not carried out by creating new mechanisms but rather by re-enforcing the existing regional cooperation mechanisms.

# 3

## The U.K. and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Professor Chris Alden

**Professor Chris Alden** gave insights into the United Kingdom's (UK) perspective on the Indo-Pacific. The core rationale for the tilt in the UK policy towards the Indo-Pacific is due to three reasons: (1) economic reasons, (2) security concerns and (3) promotion of certain norms. After BREXIT, the UK had to find an alternative market, which it found in the Indo-Pacific (which is where the world's fastest-growing economies are). The UK has expressed interest to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and has become a dialogue partner of ASEAN. It has also established a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia and has similar agreements with India and Chile. Concerning security, the UK is concerned with threats to the freedom of navigation and the rising geopolitical competition. It was pointed out that the UK has opened a military base in Bahrain, sent a new aircraft carrier to the region and has conducted freedom of navigation exercises and drills with India. In 2020, the UK also signed a strategic partnership with Kenya which combines the economic and security dimension. Concerning the promotion of norms, the UK sees an opportunity to promote the norms of democracy, open societies and the upholding of international rules and laws. Furthermore, the UK is trying to frame its engagement in the region through its colonial history in the sense of trying to leverage the economic links that were established during colonialism and that still remain. While the UK recognises the issues that come with its legacy of colonialism it is trying to use this as leverage and not as an anchor weighing it down.

Lastly, **Professor Alden**, also drew on the *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* report published in 2021, to give insight into exactly what the UK's approach is. Importantly, the moving of the economic centre of gravity to the Indo-Pacific and the perception of China as a systemic competitor are two defining features of this document. Although the UK did publish this document which is seen as ambitious, it must also be noted that in comparison to other European countries, the UK did join the party late. For example, Germany already has a connection with the Red Sea Council and thus has a point of entry into the region.

# 4

## The U.S. and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Mr Tad Brown

The presentation by **Mr Tad Brown** made several key points. Firstly, **Mr Brown** pointed out that one of the reasons why China has been able to be so successful in its rise is due to the structures that were put in place after World War Two that have enabled free trade and allowed countries to spend money on their economic development and not their defence. Further, using the metaphor of the blind man and the elephant, **Mr Brown** emphasised that *how* one views the Indo-Pacific is very much dependent on the position one finds itself in. Thus, for some, it may well look like a security vision, whilst for others, it may look like a response to humanitarian emergencies (which speaks to the manner in which the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) was formed). For someone in the presidency, it may look like a completely new vision, while **Mr Brown**, is, however, quick to point out that the strategy towards this region has been very consistent through the Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump administrations. Secondly, it was pointed out that the US's position on the Indo-Pacific was not solely about being 'anti-China' but that it was also concerned with fighting other issues related to fishing, climate change and terrorism. According to **Mr Brown** one of the major challenges facing the US at the moment is to rectify the image that its approach to the Indo-Pacific is only centred on containing China. This is only one component of the much broader approach to the Indo-Pacific; however, it came to be seen as the only component after the US Department of Defence released its strategic paper in 2017. Thirdly, **Mr Brown**, discussed how the initial vision of the Indo-Pacific as 'free and open' has now morphed into five pillars namely: (1) free and open, (2) interconnected, (3) prosperous, (4) resilient and (5) secure. Fourthly, sharing a similar sentiment to Australian Diplomat, **Mr Ed Cohen**, posited that South African and other African countries need to be engaged in the region, and where they have a stake, speak out. Lastly, according to **Mr Brown** the US strategy should be seen as a tool that can be adopted by South Africans.

# 5

## China and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Dr Yu-Shan Wu

**Dr Yu-Shan Wu** provided a Chinese perspective on the Western Indo-Pacific (WIP) as well as Africa's role vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific. Firstly, China's perspective on the broader Indo-Pacific

was discussed, especially its initial decision to reject the idea of the “Indo-Pacific” as this was seen as a means to contain China. China has since then, displayed more willingness to embrace the concept, evidenced by its support of regional organizations such as ASEAN, and its willingness to work with the G7 on the ‘Build Back Better’ initiative. However, it must be noted that there is still some uncertainty concerning China’s exact position on the “Indo-Pacific” as certain government officials still refer to the “Asia-Pacific”. Furthermore, **Dr Wu**, pointed out that China is identified as the main challenge in the US Strategic Document, although it must be noted, that in an earlier presentation, **Mr Brown**, seemed to be of the opinion that this is a misunderstanding that originated when the US Department of Defense released a document in 2017 which was then taken to be the sum total of their approach to the Indo-Pacific. Regardless, **Dr Wu**, made an important point, namely, that it is necessary to look beyond the US-China dynamics and that certain narratives should not override other narratives.

Secondly, **Dr Wu**, discussed China’s specific view on the Western Indo-Pacific. Generally, the WIP received little attention in the discussion on the Indo-Pacific (for example it has not been featured in the US Strategic Document). In contrast to this, China is paying significantly more attention to the WIP. In January of 2022, the Chinese foreign minister visited Africa as part of its 30-year tradition. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean forms an important part of the Maritime Belt and Road Initiative (MBRI) and in recent years the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become a part of the Africa-China relationship. From an African perspective, **Dr Wu** highlighted that Africa’s inclusion in the BRI has helped elevate the image of the BRI, and recently, the BRI has been welcomed and defended against the ‘debt trap’ narrative which accompanies much of the BRI discourse. Elements of its success can be found in the plethora of MoU that have been signed and the extent to which it has even made its way into banks. Overall, **Dr Wu**, highlights that the BRI has made significant progress, especially in terms of its executive leadership and ideational leadership, which are considered essential for the durability of foreign policy ideas. Lastly, according to **Dr Wu**, the BRI emphasises geoeconomics over geopolitics, and it has been shown to complement development. Importantly, the engagement has also been consistent which further strengthens the overall image of the BRI. Lastly, **Dr Wu**, pointed out that not all members of QUAD are willing to counter China.

# 6

## The EU and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Mr Frank Mattheis

Concerning the European Union's (EU) approach to the Indo-Pacific, **Mr Frank Mattheis**, gave valuable insight by looking at two levels. Firstly, he discussed the intergovernmental level, in which specific attention was devoted to explaining different EU member states' perspectives on the Indo-Pacific. **Mr Mattheis** highlighted that France was, by some distance, the main driver of the EU's strategy towards the Indo-Pacific. France has a unique connection to the Indo-Pacific (compared to Germany and the Netherlands) because it has territory in the region – more than 2 million Frenchmen currently live in the Indo-Pacific. Resultantly, as **Dr Mattheis** pointed out, France has a wide portfolio of interests, and has not only adopted a security approach but is also focusing on a cultural approach which includes aspects such as education, languages and exchanges. Other than France, Germany has also adopted a guideline (not a strategy though) for the Indo-Pacific. However, in contrast to the multi-faceted approach of France, Germany's interests are linked more closely to trade and international law. Similarly, so, the Netherlands has also expressed interest in preserving security in the region and specifically crucial trade routes. Secondly, **Dr Mattheis** discussed the EU strategy at a supranational level. Here, it was pointed out, that although, as mentioned above, member states may have diverse interests, overall, member states still want to see the EU move forward on a common front and importantly, adopt an EU Maritime strategy. The EU is committed to combating threats such as piracy and disruptions to shipping and have recently embarked on coordinated military training missions. **Dr Mattheis** made an important point, namely, that for the EU, its strategy is mainly centred around how the Indo-Pacific can be useful for achieving its own goals (such as Carbon Neutrality). Furthermore, concerning China and the BRI, an important topic at the moment, **Dr Mattheis** pointed out that the EU had launched the 'Global Gateway', which is its attempt to counter the BRI. Lastly, reference was made to the Ukraine/Russia conflict and specifically the United Nations (UN) vote that saw many countries in the Indo-Pacific abstain (such as Indonesia, Kenya, South Africa, Yemen, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates). Here **Dr Mattheis** discussed that this was an important indication to the EU regarding who exactly the EU could rely on in the future.





## Australia and the Indo-Pacific – presented by Mr Ed Cohen

**Mr Ed Cohen**, representing the Australian High Commission in South Africa, gave insight into Australia’s approach to the Indo-Pacific. After briefly tracing the origin of the concept to Australia’s 2013 Defence White Paper, **Mr Cohen** touched on a crucial debate concerning the Indo-Pacific, namely: who is considered a part of the region and who is excluded. According to **Mr Cohen**, less time should be spent on deciding who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ and rather, states who feel they have an interest in the region should join (this sentiment was also shared by **Mr Brown**). Lastly, **Mr Cohen** stressed that it is of pivotal importance to bring tactical issues, such as terrorism, and transnational crime to the discussion.



## A response to the presentations – presented by Professor Garth le

**Pere**

In **Professor Garth le Pere’s** response, reference was made to Africa’s participation in the Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (held in Paris on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2022). While, the most active participants were Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, South Africa was absent from this forum. South Africa had apparently decided not to attend because China was not invited and the perception was thus, that this was an anti-China forum. However, as **Prof. le Pere** points out, the US was also not invited.

A further point that was raised, is the question of what France’s strategic aims in the Indo-Pacific are. **Prof. le Pere** reasons that France’s aims are driven mostly by China’s increasing influence in the Pacific and the competition with the US. However, it can also be argued that France is motivated by ensuring the security of the shipping lanes which is vital for its trade. Furthermore, it was pointed out that France may also see itself as a resident power, which links to the point made by **Dr Mattheis** concerning the number of French people living in the region.

A further important point that **Prof. le Pere** makes is that there is a conceptual battle between the Western conception of the Indo-Pacific and the Western conception. He makes this point by drawing on the words uttered by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi when he mocked the concept of the Indo-Pacific as a “headline-grabbing idea” that would “dissipate like sea foam”.

Lastly, **Prof. le Pere** asks an important question, namely what is the role that France has played in shaping the strategy of the EU in the Indo-Pacific? This is vital to understand considering that France hosted the forum referred to earlier which gave it the ability to largely shape the agenda. For example, part of the agenda was directly informed by several of the pillars of the French Indo-Pacific Strategy, namely, (1) security and defence, (2) economy, connectivity, research, and innovation and (3) climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable management of oceans. To end off his discussion, reference was also made to France becoming a development partner of ASEAN in September of 2020 and its joining of IORA in December of 2020.



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