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Conference Paper

### INDIA–INDONESIA MARITIME CONVERGENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: STRATEGIC COOPERATION, REGIONAL SECURITY, AND THE RULES-BASED ORDER

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#### Abstract.

The paper examines the strategic convergence between India and Indonesia in shaping the evolving maritime order in the Indo-Pacific. As two key littoral states with shared historical, geopolitical, and geoeconomic interests, their partnership remains central to maintaining regional stability amidst intensifying great power competition, asymmetric threats, and challenges to international law in contested maritime zones. Using qualitative content analysis of policy documents, regional frameworks, and scholarly literature, the study analyses how India's maritime posture, through mechanisms including the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, BIMSTEC, and the Quad, reinforces its commitment to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The analysis incorporates empirical developments involving global energy and supply chain disruptions, conflict spillovers from Europe and West Asia, and the growing use of maritime technologies in hybrid warfare. The study situates these developments within a theoretical framework that regards maritime domains as shared spaces requiring collective governance. The findings highlight the significance of multilateral cooperation, trust-building, and strategic self-reliance, particularly through India–Indonesia collaboration, to uphold a rules-based maritime order and secure the Indo-Pacific's future.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific; maritime security; multilateral cooperation; regional security; rules-based order

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## Introduction

There can be no concept of the Indo-Pacific without India and Indonesia, as both nations are central to any strategic deliberation concerning the region (1). Their geographic positioning and growing influence establish them as pivotal actors in shaping the Indo-Pacific's evolving geopolitical landscape, which has emerged as a significant arena in global affairs (2). The region is characterised by a complex interplay of competition, contestation, and conflict, alongside sustained efforts toward cooperation and collaboration. These dynamics mirror broader global shifts, including the protracted conflict in Europe that has dispelled the notion of short, decisive wars and demonstrated the extensive consequences of regional instability in an interconnected world. Simultaneously, tensions in West Asia threaten to destabilise the region and disrupt maritime commerce, illustrating the strategic significance of asymmetric forces, unmanned technologies, and maritime leverage (3). In the eastern Indo-Pacific, particularly the South China Sea, challenges to sovereignty and the rules-based order persist, while great power rivalry adds further complexity to regional affairs (4). Despite these pressures, the Indian Ocean region, especially the areas south and east of India, has largely remained peaceful due to collaborative initiatives with partners including Indonesia (1). Partnerships of this nature demonstrate the fundamental importance of regional cooperation in maintaining stability, securing maritime domains, and reinforcing shared values across the Indo-Pacific.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Studies

The oceans function as pathways of peace and prosperity, rooted in their historical role as conduits for trade, cultural exchange, and human interaction. Conversely, the Indo-Pacific is best conceptualised as a shared geopolitical and geoeconomic space in which security and stability rely on collective responsibility (5). The interconnected nature of regional actors demands cooperative maritime governance grounded in principles of mutual respect, openness, and multilateral engagement. This theoretical perspective challenges unilateral approaches and affirms that safeguarding sea lanes, ensuring freedom of navigation, and fostering an inclusive regional architecture are essential for maintaining long-term peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

### Empirical Studies

Current global conflicts provide important empirical insights into the changing nature of security and geopolitical risks. The prolonged war in Europe, now in its third year, has dispelled the notion of short and decisive modern warfare, demonstrating the extensive consequences of sustained conflict in an interconnected

world. This war has disrupted energy flows, trade networks, and global supply chains, underlining the susceptibility of regional crises to trigger global instability (6). At the same time, the ongoing conflict in West Asia has intensified regional security risks and endangered major maritime commerce routes (3). The strategic deployment of asymmetric forces, unmanned technologies, and maritime leverage in these theatres illustrates the evolving character of contemporary conflict and its extension into the maritime domain.

In the Indo-Pacific, empirical evidence indicates that regional peace and economic prosperity are increasingly dependent on the security of open and stable sea lanes. The recurrence of disruptive events, including crises in fuel, food, and fertiliser supply, has revealed the vulnerability of maritime supply chains (7). Challenges of this nature are exacerbated by unsustainable debt burdens and opaque lending practices in certain states, leading to heightened economic dependency and weakened governance structures. Maritime threats, including piracy, illegal fishing, and ecological damage from oil spills, remain persistent, while recent attacks on merchant vessels using drones and missiles, including incidents in the Indian Ocean, indicate growing militarisation of the seas. The developments emphasise the need for strengthened regional maritime cooperation, enhanced intelligence sharing, and robust security frameworks, particularly in view of past incidents such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which exploited weaknesses in maritime surveillance and coastal defence.

## Methods

The study applies a qualitative content analysis to examine strategic narratives, policy frameworks, and security discourses on maritime governance and geopolitical developments in the Indo-Pacific (8). Data sources include official documents, regional cooperation frameworks, multilateral declarations, institutional reports, and scholarly literature published in the past decade, selected for relevance to maritime security, regional diplomacy, strategic resilience, international legal frameworks, and non-traditional threats. The analysis focuses on the application of international law, multilateral cooperation, and strategic doctrines in India's maritime engagement, with attention to security policy and regional cooperation amid global conflicts, supply chain crises, and technological escalation at sea. Research validity was ensured through source triangulation, expert review, and alignment with real-time regional developments.

## Results and Discussion

The Indo-Pacific has drawn increasing global attention, particularly regarding the strategic value of its maritime domain.

Stability and prosperity in the region rely fundamentally on the security, openness, and freedom of the seas. Recent disruptions, including fuel, food, and fertiliser crises, have demonstrated the vulnerability of global supply chains and reinforced the urgency of establishing resilient systems. Disruptions of this nature, compounded by unsustainable debt burdens and opaque lending practices in several parts of the world, expose structural weaknesses in global economic governance. The frequency and intensity of these challenges require coordinated regional responses and stronger maritime governance frameworks.

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of diversifying production bases and developing regionally integrated supply chains. The rapid growth of digital technologies has shifted the emphasis toward trust and transparency as essential foundations for economic cooperation. Within the Indian Ocean region, the call for collective self-reliance has intensified, not as a means of isolation but as a strategy to reduce systemic exposure to global shocks. Security threats at sea persist, with piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and environmental damage from oil spills continuing to endanger coastal and economic stability. The increasing use of drones, cruise missiles, and advanced technologies in attacks on commercial vessels, particularly in the Indian Ocean, illustrates the evolving nature of maritime threats. The memory of the Mumbai terror attacks, which used maritime entry routes, serves as a reminder of the consequences of inadequate maritime security cooperation.

India's commitment to preserving a free, open, and inclusive maritime domain aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a legal framework that remains essential to regional order. Disregard for this framework undermines the principles that govern responsible state conduct. In advancing regional engagement, India underscores ASEAN centrality through the Act East policy and supports multilateral mechanisms that strengthen rules-based cooperation. India's forthcoming chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association from 2025 to 2027 reflects its strategic intention to expand institutional capacity and advance regional security, sustainable development, and counter-piracy measures.

India promotes the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which addresses interconnected areas including maritime ecology, maritime security, science and technology, and capacity building. Partnerships with Australia, the United Kingdom, France, and Indonesia highlight the initiative's inclusive and multidimensional character. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation also features prominently in India's regional approach, with Indonesia's participation considered a positive development. Furthermore, the Quad, composed of India,

Australia, Japan, and the United States, supports maritime security, infrastructure connectivity, and technological cooperation. Rather than competing with ASEAN, the Quad complements ASEAN-led frameworks and reinforces the region's multilateral architecture.

India's strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific is anchored in its identity as a maritime nation dedicated to international law, multilateral cooperation, and regional stability. Through proactive diplomacy, institutional engagement, and maritime initiatives, India demonstrates not only its readiness to address regional issues but also its determination to take decisive action in support of a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

## Conclusion

The evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific confirm that maritime security, regional cooperation, and adherence to international law are essential for sustaining peace and prosperity in this strategically important region. Disruptive global events, from prolonged conflicts to supply chain crises and technological threats at sea, have revealed both the vulnerabilities and the interdependence of Indo-Pacific states. A rules-based multilateral approach, grounded in frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and supported by initiatives including the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, and the Quad, provides the most viable path forward.

India's active participation in these regional mechanisms, combined with its consistent advocacy for freedom of navigation, inclusive development, and collective self-reliance, demonstrates commitment through tangible action. By aligning its strategic vision with shared regional priorities and fostering trusted partnerships, particularly with Indonesia, India strengthens its role as a responsible maritime actor. The future stability of the Indo-Pacific will rely on sustained collaboration, institutional capacity-building, and a collective resolve to preserve the maritime commons as a global public good.

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