

DEBATE

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

We now have 12 minutes for some discussion and there are potentially three French speakers, which shows that France is indeed an Indo-Pacific power.

Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Senior Researcher Emeritus at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) attached to the French Research Institute on East Asia (IFRAE) of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations, Professor Emeritus at Hong Kong Baptist University

Thank you to the conference for having put together this Indo-Pacific panel. Actually, your remarks Mr. de Montbrial were pretty sensible on it maybe being an uncertain concept but living in the Indo Pacific myself, I tend to agree with Mr. Yim. He was the clearest speaker on this Indo-Pacific concept, supporting the view that its aim is actually to balance China's rising power. I would like to ask the three other speakers if they agree with Mr. Yim that the Indo-Pacific concept is aimed at balancing China in your region? I have another more specific question related to India and Mr. Narayanan. You have not talked very much about the relationship with China along the border, do you think that your relations with China can go back to normal if the border issue is not solved? How do you see the way forward regarding the LAC and the border dispute with China, do you think your relationship with China can stabilize in the coming years?

Thierry de Montbrial

I will take three questions and not just from French speakers.

Bayu Krisnamurthi, Associate Professor in the department of Agribusiness the Faculty of Economics and Management of the Bogor Agricultural University, former Vice Minister of Trade and former Vice Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia

I would like to support Douglas's approach on the historical perspective of Indo-Pacific cooperation, that is APEC, RCEP, etc. This is not the first initiative and will certainly not be the last and maybe next year or in the years to come, there will be another initiative. For Indonesia at least, this is not a question about security and military, but economics, and we cannot choose between China and the US. They are both our biggest trading partners and not to mention that within Indonesian society there is also a cultural dimension. We are linked very closely to almost all the countries in Asia as well as the US and I think we welcome this initiative. There was a very good term for it yesterday, the multi-alignment approach, and I think that many Asian countries will see that, at least in ASEAN, I am certain that most of them will have that kind of approach. I would like to hear from our colleagues from India and Japan how they see this.



Michel Foucher, Member of the Centre for Higher European Studies, former French Ambassador in Latvia

Just a remark, as far as I know the mental map, because it is a map, it is about space, was first used by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in an address in 2007 in the Indian parliament. With the idea, and I quote, of 'the confluence of the two seas.' In your view, what kind of concept did this mental map refer to in terms of your nice reference to French aesthetics?

Hervé Mariton, Mayor of Crest and Chairman of the Franco-British Council

Thierry was joking about the French putting questions just now and my question is actually for Thierry and others. When France underlines in its strategic review its Indo-Pacific dimension, do you understand this as an anecdote or something more serious?

Thierry de Montbrial

Okay. Please make your answers as concise as possible so we have the chance to take another round. Who wants to start, perhaps India. By the way, as a mathematician, which I still claim to be, I am very embarrassed by the concept of multi-alignment which is meaningless. There is a famous verse in a French poem that says loving everybody is to love no one.

M. K. Narayanan, Executive Chairman of CyQureX Systems Pvt. Ltd., former Senior Advisor and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India (Manmohan Singh)

I think rather than addressing the individual questions you raise I think the major conflict in Asia today is between China and India. What I would like to stress that this conflict is not so much about territory or the seas but a conflict of civilizations. China and India have not been friends at any time in the past or the future and would remain friends, because they are very nearly opponents of two different philosophies.

Let us start on the technical point, I did not specify or make a reference to the border conflict between India and China because it is one of longstanding and it has several different facets. It is a long border and the problem for India has been that in terms of civilization, Indians are not map makers, all our traditions and writings are oral rather than written. The Chinese are great at writing. For six or so years I was the Special Representative for all the talks between India and China and Dai Bingguo was my counterpart. I could explain almost where a tree, river or a watershed was, but he would say please produce a map and I was stymied on that point. We have a border that is not demarcated border and there are border skirmishes, and the way China operates is that whenever it thinks India is growing closer to the United States or the anti-China group, they will rake up one of these issues. For instance, there is the Galwan Valley, where I have trekked, so I know what I am talking about. To begin with, it is very difficult to demarcate which is the border and which is the water, and it is an unfortunate case where people actually died. However, there are normally several skirmishes taking place on the border because the forces there put down a mound of stones and somebody removes it and that becomes an incident, etc. While the Galwan Valley is a most unfortunate event, I think there are issues on both sides as to where the border really lies. I know that in 1960, when Zhou Enlai came to India, he made an offer where he said if we gave them most areas of [inaudible] and we could have the entire area of what was then the North-East Frontier Agency; India was not ready to accept that. It keeps going up and down, Deng Xiaoping did the same thing in 1988

when Sonia Gandhi went to China. The border is a different issue and there will always be that kind of thing. Today, China is very interested in what we call Arunachal Pradesh, North-East frontier, because the Brahmaputra River has become important. They have dammed the river, but the biggest dam is yet to come and the bend in India [inaudible] means that the river [inaudible] falls within India and so that becomes an important issue.

On the other structural plane, as India emerges as an important country in Asia and perhaps the world and the West start courting India in many ways, and I use that word very carefully, and if India is seen as the recipient of everything the West has to offer in technology and other matters, the conflict between India and China will intensify to a far greater degree. India has no ambitions on anything that the Chinese have but it is essentially a concept of influence. The Chinese regard themselves as the only civilized nation in the world, and I do not want to talk about what they say about the West, but I think they also consider the Indians to be inferior. That means there will always be a conflict between the countries but what we need to do is to ensure, and that is what India tries to do, that there is no major conflict. We believe that we can deal with all the issues that are paramount today without entering into conflict, which is why we are not part of any Asia alliance. Because the situation of the Indo-Pacific has become a little tense, in a sense we have aligned ourselves with the QUAD, but we do not believe it has to be a defense alliance but invariably or inevitably it has been drawn into that kind of situation. However, we are hopeful that there will never be a conflict in which we have to take sides and engage in a war with China. The basic point is to understand the nature of the India-China conflict, which is very different from territorial aggrandizement, etc. We have no problems with the rest of Asia, and I heard the gentleman from Indonesia and Indonesia and India have a common culture of every kind, including religious culture. The point I am trying to stress is do not see the Sino-Indian conflict of one for territorial aggrandizement, it is about which particular system or philosophy will prevail. I rest my case.

Thierry de Montbrial

Unfortunately, there is only one minute left so there will be no second round of questions and we have a very busy schedule, this afternoon especially. Please, short remarks.

Hiroyuki Akita, Commentator of *Nikkei*, Japan

I want to make two points about the concept of the Indo-Pacific. I said there is a portrait, impressionist and pointillist approach and these are not mutually exclusive. Countries that do not want to antagonize China can adopt an interest sharing approach, while those who want to shape their order, like Japan, may adopt an approach of not sharing norms. However, maybe the US wants to expand democracy, so adopts a sharing values approach. These will grow simultaneously with everyone painting pointillist, impressionist or portrait pictures at the same time and combined together that will be the Indo-Pacific order. Also, the purpose for us is not to choose, but in order not to choose we have to avoid a war and to do that we have to fix the balance of power in the region, that has shifted to become too favorable to China in both military and economic terms. To co-exist with China without having to choose, maybe we need to push back a bit more militarily and politically so that we can co-exist with China.



Douglas Paal, Distinguished Fellow at the Asia Program Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, former Senior Director of Asian Affairs and Special Assistant to the President in the US National Security Council

Just very quickly, in contrast with this morning's discussion on how Europe has so successfully united in its reaction to the invasion of Ukraine, I think conflict of that nature in the Asia-Pacific region will not produce similarly unified responses. It will be very much situationally determined, coalitions of the willing of different sizes depending on the sense of what the threat is to their particular interests. We are not going to see the kinds of unified coalition response in the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region that you would in Europe.

M. K. Narayanan

Superior civilizations, Doug.

Yim Sung-Joon, Senior Advisor at Lee International IP & Law Group, former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, former National Security Advisor to President Kim Dae-jung

I think we have to align ourselves with the United States leadership to make the Indo-Pacific a free, peaceful and prosperous region, which means that we have to invest. One other latecomer to this IPS is Canada, which recently announced its participation, and they laid out an Indo-Pacific strategy to support long-term growth, prosperity and security beginning with an investment of almost 2.3 billion over the next five years. I think this is the way we can mitigate the contradiction Doug explained between security and economy, and which we should choose. Pouring money into making the region prosperous will ensure that the Indo-Pacific Strategy succeeds.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. As with all panels it is a bit frustrating because we would like to continue. Just a few words to conclude, this illustrates that the current situation of the world today is much more complex than we are used to talking about. It is much more full of uncertainties including, I must emphasize, on Europe because the purpose of the first session was to discuss post-war Europe and as you could see, it was very difficult to get the speakers to really talk about that issue. Let us try to remain clear minded. Thank you very much indeed, we will now switch to the next session.