

## **Panel Proposal**

*The Evolving Indo-Pacific Construct: Responses from ASEAN and its Major Stakeholders*

### **Convener**

Dr. Rahul Mishra, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The term Indo-Pacific, which refers to a strategically significant area stretching from the littoral of east coast of Africa to the East Asian waters covering Middle East, the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean along the way, has become one of the most debated and speculated terms in contemporary strategic and foreign policy discourse.

First brought into eminence at the highest policy circles by Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, in his speech at the Indian parliament in 2007, the Indo-Pacific attempts to combine the strategic thrust of Indian and the Pacific Oceans involving leading maritime powers but leaving China out. In Abe's terms, it is a vision for the "Confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans" as "the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity" in the "broader Asia".

While an official articulation of the term first appeared in Australia's Defence White Paper, 2013, India, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States have been pitching for the Indo-Pacific as a zone of rule-based order. With the US government actively bringing in Indo-Pacific as the key idea for re-engaging with Asia and maintaining the strategic equilibrium in its favour, the term has gained salience.

However, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific has created some uncertainties in the Southeast Asian region leading ASEAN and its member countries to reassess their strategic and foreign policy choices. Competing visions for the Indo-Pacific have turned out to be a major aspect in that context. For instance, Indonesia, which claims to have proposed a comprehensive Indo-Pacific construct, proposes to make it an inclusive treaty-based construct similar to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

A major reason for ASEAN's apprehension about the Indo-Pacific is that it does not include China as a stakeholder in this strategic construct. On the contrary, China has been identified by proponents of the Indo-Pacific as a threat to the rules-based order. Both China and Russia are opposed to the Indo-Pacific. While ASEAN and most of its members support a rules-based order, they have been trying their best to avoid a situation where they have to choose between China and the US.

This panel attempts to comprehensively analyze the strategic objectives of the Indo-Pacific, ongoing debates about its promises and likely pitfalls, and responses from ASEAN and its major stakeholders including China.

### **About the panel: Double Panel**

**Convener:** Dr. Rahul Mishra, Senior Lecturer, Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

**Moderator:** Prof. Azirah Hashim, Executive Director, Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

### **Presentations (TBC):**

1. ASEAN/Southeast Asian perspective
2. Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific
3. India and the Indo-Pacific construct
4. The European perspective
5. The US perspective
6. Chinese response to the Indo-Pacific

### **About the Convener:**

#### **Dr Rahul Mishra**

Dr Rahul Mishra is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Prior to that he was a Consultant with the Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Dr Mishra worked with the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), a Delhi-based think-tank as a Research Fellow for more than four years.

Recipient of the 2015 Asia Fellowship of the East-West Center in Washington D.C., Dr Mishra was a Researcher at Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi for more than four years. In 2012-13, Dr Mishra was a Visiting Research Fellow at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (Singapore). Prior to that, he was affiliated with National University of Singapore. He has been a recipient of the Australian and Korean government fellowships also. Dr. Mishra specialises on politico-security affairs of the Asia-Pacific region. His latest publications include *India's Eastward Engagement - From Antiquity to Act East* (Sage Publications, 2019) (with Prof. S.D. Muni), and *One Belt, One Road - Mapping China's Strategy for Shaping the International Order* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).