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Report on Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) Conference:

Development of an Indo-Pacific Framework Integrating the Seven IPOI Pillars

Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) &
Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS), University of Wollongong (UOW)

6 – 7 October 2022

The conference on *Integrated Maritime Management and Security across the Indo-Pacific: A Framework to Unify the Seven IPOI Pillars, with a Case Study to Reduce Plastic Debris in the Indian Ocean* was held over two days, 6-7 October 2022. It was conceptualised as a key mode for stakeholder engagement for the purpose to meet one of the primary objectives of the project, of the same name, to engage stakeholders from Australia, India, and the wider Indo-Pacific region to develop a framework for integrating the seven pillars of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

The conference was jointly hosted by the project partners, the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) and the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA), India. It was conducted online using videoconferencing.

Each day of the conference consisted of a keynote session, and three working sessions, with each of the six sessions corresponding to a pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Therefore, six pillars of ecology, resources, trade, security, disaster risk reduction, and technology were addressed over the two days, in three individual sessions each day. The seventh pillar, on capacity-building, was woven through every session as a critical common element of the IPOI framework.

The keynote sessions on each day featured the Australian and Indian High Commissioners online from their missions in New Delhi and Canberra, respectively. Due to a last-minute official schedule change, HE Barry O'Farrell, the Australian High Commissioner to India, could not be present live but pre-recorded his talk for the conference. Tim Hall, a subject expert from the Australian diplomatic mission, engaged with the ensuing questions and discussions on the High Commissioner's behalf. The Indian High Commissioner to Australia, HE Manpreet Singh, gave the keynote session on day 2 and engaged with questions and discussions. Having the principal diplomats of each country commence the conference proceedings each day signalled the keenness of both governments to engage with this project.

Proceedings of Day 1 (6 October 2022)

The day's proceedings commenced at 2:30 pm (AEDT)/9:00 am (IST). Prof Colin Picker, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Business and Law at the University of Wollongong welcomed the participants and delivered his opening remarks. He highlighted the importance and timeliness of this conference in light of the UOW's recent outreach in India, and recounted his involvement in facilitating collaboration between the Jindal Global University, India, and the UOW. Prof Picker introduced HE Barry O'Farrell, the keynote speaker.

HE Barry O'Farrell, the Australian High Commissioner to India delivered his recorded address. He highlighted the growing relationship between Australia and India, and the importance of the IPOI to this partnership. He encouraged the conference participants to explore innovative avenues of translating the IPOI goals into tangible outcomes that leveraged the strengths of institutions in both countries.

Following his recorded address, Tim Hall, Policy Officer at DFAT, took questions on behalf of the High Commissioner for around 10 minutes.

Session 1: Ecology Pillar

The first substantive session of the conference focussed on the Ecology pillar. Emeritus Professor Robin Warner of UOW moderated the session. In her opening remarks Prof Warner highlighted the importance of the marine ecology for the larger Indo-Pacific region and observed that there was significant potential for Australia and India to cooperate in this area.

The first speakers, Dr. Karen Raubenheimer and Prof. Greg Rose, both from ANCORS, focussed on the issue of marine plastic debris in the Indian Ocean. Their presentation shed light on the extent of the problem, the potential risks, and possible ways of mitigating them by creating and adopting viable action plans. In their presentation, they evaluated salient aspects of existing action plans that could be relevant to the Indo-Pacific region.

Next, Prof. (Dr.) Tarini Mehta from JSES-JGU discussed comparative legal policies on plastics in the Indo-Pacific region. Prof. Mehta explored various approaches and strategies implemented to tackle plastic pollution. This comparative analysis offered valuable insights into effective policy frameworks.

Following Prof. Mehta's presentation, Prof. (Dr.) Mimi Roy and Prof. (Dr.) Abhiroop Chowdhury from JSES-JGU jointly presented on the topic of mangroves and blue carbon. Their discussion delved into the significance of mangrove ecosystems, their role in sequestering carbon, and their importance in preserving ecosystems.

Prof Warner moderated the Q & A session, following which there was a ten-minute tea break.

Session 2: Resources Pillar

Dr. Sarah Lothian of ANCORS moderated the session on the IPOI resources pillar. In her opening remarks she highlighted the importance of resources management for countries of the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the maritime domain.

France is a key stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific that is deeply invested in the region in the context of its overseas territories. It is also the lead country on the resources pillar of the IPOI. Ms Lucille Sancho, the Political Counsellor from the Embassy of France in Canberra, provided France's official perspective as the lead country on the resource pillar. She discussed France's approach to the challenge of resources management and governance in the region.

Dr. Zaki Mubarok Busro from the Centre for Sustainable Ocean Policy at the University of Indonesia then addressed the issue of combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Dr. Busro

shared his expertise and highlighted the challenges posed by IUU fishing to effective resource management in the Indo-Pacific. His views on a collaborative framework to mitigate risks of IUU fishing were particularly insightful.

Dr. Aline Jaeckel from ANCORS and Prof. Pankaj Jha from JSIA-JGU jointly presented on seabed mining, providing the Australian and Indian perspectives. Their presentation delved into the complexities and potential environmental impacts of seabed mining activities. By examining both the Australian and Indian approaches, they offered a comprehensive view of this emerging issue.

Saber Salem, a former consultant from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), focused on the importance of developing capacity within communities and organizations to effectively manage and utilize resources. He highlighted the role of capacity building in sustainable resource management and offered insights into successful approaches.

There was a 20-minute discussion session in which the panellists responded to questions from the audience. This was followed by a short lunch/dinner break.

Session 3: Trade Pillar

The last session of day one focussed on the trade pillar of the IPOI. Ms Anuradha RV from Clarus Law Associates, India, was the moderator for the session. She noted that increasing trade and its importance was one of the major factors that defined the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan is the lead country for the trade pillar. Minister Counsellor Akhihiki Sunami from the Embassy of Japan in Canberra was the first speaker in this session, presenting Japan's official perspectives on the trade pillar. He highlighted Japan's emphasis on free and unhindered trade within the Indo-Pacific and emphasized that resilience in trade connectivity emerged from quality infrastructure and respect for a rules-based order.

Dr Chris Rahman of ANCORS drew attention to the vulnerability of global supply chains and examined common interests of the Quad and Indo-Pacific states in the protection of trade. He also touched upon the possibilities and problems related to the conduct of economic warfare in deteriorating strategic circumstances.

Dr Faisal Ahmed from FORE School of Management, India examined various competing frameworks for infrastructure and trade in the Indo-Pacific. These included the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, and the role of institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in regional geo-economics.

There was a robust exchange of points during the discussions period, which elicited questions from the audience. The moderator made her closing remarks, and the proceeding of day one were formally closed.

Proceedings of Day 2 (7 October 22)

Prof Shaun Star, Associate Dean of Jindal Global Law School opened the second day of the conference. He introduced the keynote speaker for the day, HE Manpreet Vohra, the Indian High Commissioner to Australia.

HE Manpreet Vohra presented India's perspectives on the Indo-Pacific, and its stewardship of the IPOI, particularly of the maritime security pillar. The High Commissioner highlighted India's role and interests in maintaining a rules-based order in the region. He encouraged participants in the conference to develop ideas by which states in the region could achieve their goals through collaborative and cooperative mechanisms. The High Commissioner also engaged in discussions after his address and took on questions from the audience for about 15 minutes.

Session 4: Security Pillar

Prof Gitanjali Sinha Roy from Jindal Global University moderated the session on the security pillar. In her opening remarks, she commented on the numerous security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and their potential to adversely impact the strategic environment.

Capt Sarabjeet Parmar, Senior Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation, India was the first speaker in this session. His presentation examined the various maritime security cooperative mechanisms that exist in the region, their interplay and effectiveness. He highlighted the natural convergence of maritime security concerns at the regional and global efforts, which was an effective driver for greater cooperation in this area.

Commodore Uday Bhaskar, Director of the Society for Policy Studies, evaluated the state of "ownership" of the IPOI, particularly as it emerged from a bilateral engagement between Australia and India. He made some observations and suggestions on bolstering the human element of security in the Indo-Pacific.

Dr Shishir Upadhyaya from Jindal Global University spoke on harmonising the maritime domain awareness grid in the Indo-Pacific. His presentation examined the threats and challenges in the absence of an overarching information grid for the region, and suggested ways by which such an arrangement could be instituted for effective information gathering, sharing and analysis.

Prakash Gopal from ANCORS examined the role and importance of maritime security capacity building in the region. He evaluated various initiatives that are already in place across the Indo-Pacific region. He suggested that there needs to be an equal emphasis on the 'soft' aspects of capacity-building, such as in developing policy and strategy, in addition to efforts focussed on improving hard capacities.

This was followed by a 20-minutes session for questions, and a short 10-minute tea break.

Session 5: Disaster Risk Reduction Pillar

Prof Jasmeet Kaur from Jindal Global University moderated the session on Disaster Risk Reduction. In her opening remarks, she observed that as a region that was prone to natural disasters, disaster risk preparedness was critical to the Indo-Pacific.

The Hon Fatafehi Fakafanua, Member of Parliament and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Tonga was scheduled to provide the Pacific islands perspective on disaster risk reduction. However, he could not be present due to other pressing requirements. Mr Paula Ma'u, the CEO for Meteorology, Energy, Information and Disaster Management in the Government of Tonga, presented in lieu, and spoke about the vulnerabilities of Pacific islands to natural disasters. He highlighted some measures that the Government of Tonga and other Pacific Island countries had undertaken to mitigate risks from natural disasters.

Prof Pankaj Jha from Jindal Global University spoke about building resilience to natural disasters in the coastal regions of India. He highlighted various measures instituted by the Indian Government, particularly after the tsunami of 2004, which had devastated the Indian Ocean Region.

Dr Lina Gong and Ms Nanthini Sambanthan from the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, then presented on factors that shaped disaster response across the Indo-Pacific. They examined the role of the covid pandemic and other geopolitical factors influencing collective responses through multilateral arrangements in the Indo-Pacific region.

After discussions relevant to the session, there was a short lunch/dinner break.

Session 6: Technology Pillar

The final session of the conference focussed on the IPOI technology pillar. This session was moderated by Dr Malti Goel of the Climate Change Research Society, India.

Ms Yuko Fukuma from Kawasaki Heavy Industries spoke about the pioneering work of Kawasaki Heavy Industries in liquid hydrogen technologies, and its impact on reducing the environmental impacts of energy production. She described the pilot project between Japan and Australia for an integrated liquefied hydrogen supply chain between the countries.

Ms Nicole Thomas from the International Energy Agency examined technological developments in energy and opportunities for partnership in the Indo-Pacific. She drew upon findings from the IEA's publication on India's Energy Outlook and broader work on technology and innovation, to identify a range of areas with value in multilateral and bilateral collaboration, including in the areas of solar photovoltaics, batteries and hydrogen.

Assoc Prof. Shuqing Yang, Assoc Prof. Muttucumaru Sivakumar from the University of Wollongong analysed the roles of coastal reservoirs for Australia and India's coastal reservoirs for environment protection and agricultural development. They examined how coastal reservoirs provided an ideal solution for many problems like fish farming pollution, carbon/plastic sinks.

Preliminary Outcomes of the Conference

The Indo-Pacific is a broad set of subregions, including ASEAN, the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. The IPOI conference created an opportunity to examine avenues for collaboration among Indo-Pacific countries across these regions.

It was a means to gather stakeholders relevant to the IPOI initiative from across the Indo-Pacific and was able to bring together a diverse pool of experts from around the region. By design, they came from across each pillar of the IPOI initiative.

The conference received robust support from both the DFAT and the Ministry of External Affairs of India. Despite the challenges of conducting a conference across multiple time zones, it was a resounding success, and added significant value to this project. About half the papers from the conference will be converted to book chapters on the integration of the IPOI pillars.

Preliminary findings from the conference indicated differences in the degree of current cooperation and different potentials for future cooperation within each IPOI pillar.

1. **Ecology**
   It was evident that there is much regional engagement and that there are opportunities for even more environmental cooperation within the first IPOI pillar. The conference presentations in the session on maritime ecology provided inputs to the proposed action plan for combating marine plastic debris. An outcome of discussions was a redirection of focus of the proposed action plan towards sea-based sources of marine plastic debris. Broader Indo-Pacific cooperation could form a part of the program of the Indian Ocean action plan.

2. **Security**
   Given the size and complexity of the Indo-Pacific, it is important to recognise that security threats are contextual to sub-regional and national geopolitical and geoeconomics factors. Australia and India expend considerable effort to shape the Indo-Pacific maritime security environment, particularly through building capacity of regional countries and facilitating information sharing mechanisms. To be effective, security cooperation and assistance need to be tailored to local requirements, and, to be efficient, these efforts need better coordination between donor countries.

3. **Resources**
   Regional fisheries science and management organisations form the principal institutions enabling cooperation within this sector. Boundaries within which they have jurisdiction are determined usually by oceanic boundaries and by the migratory range of relevant fish stocks but they share but they share the challenge of combating illegal unregulated and unreported fishing, which can be assisted by collaboration. Deep seabed mining is an emerging area of resources development but is subject to centralised UN coordination. The central role of capacity building in sustainable resource management was emphasised.

4. **Capacity Building and Resource Sharing**
   Capacity building and resource sharing comprise the fourth IPOI pillar but also permeate all other IPOI pillars. This IPOI pillar was not the subject of a separate conference session. Therefore, the fourth pillar is addressed in this report's final conclusion below.

5. **Disaster Reduction and Management**

The current prospect for disasters demands regional preparedness. Climate change generates pan-regional disaster challenges, as do the unstable geopolitical environment and recurring risks of regional pandemics. The shape of regional responses to disasters are drawn by India, France and the Australia-NZ, which each have emergency preparedness and response area systems.

6. **Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation**
   The session on the sixth pillar made apparent the relative lack of cooperation in the science and technology sector, as technology transfer is not well linked across the region. Thus, there is little coherence in this pillar.

7. **Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport**
   Speakers in this session emphasised the importance of trade connectivity resilience to withstand possible economic warfare or physical interruption. Resilience depends upon quality infrastructure and adherence to the rules-based order. Adherence to the rules-based order might be leveraged by conditionality on participation in plurilateral institutions. Frameworks for infrastructure could be diverse enough to include the Belt and Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and regional banking institutions.

Conclusion

Regional cooperation across the seven IPOI pillars is a key challenge and different in nature from regional cooperation within each pillar. Within each pillar, cooperation can promote regional integration, at least within that sector.

Across the different pillars, which each encompass different sectors, integration is more difficult. A common theme that can be discerned is that capacity building drives regional collaboration. It is a prime mover of integration across the Indo-Pacific region.

To improve the coordination of capacity building efforts across the different pillars, as well as integration within each, a clearinghouse body might be useful. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) performs this role for OECD member countries. A similar committee, perhaps under the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), could serve the function seek to enhance coordination within the Indo Pacific across the seven IPOI pillars.