

Conference

Franco-German Observatory on the Indo-Pacific

Online | 9–10 December 2021

Institutional sponsors:

German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) | Center for International Studies (CERI), Sciences Po

This conference features a series of roundtable sessions discussing the current geopolitical transformations taking place in the Indo-Pacific. The objective of this event is to debate the stakes of these evolutions, their implications for our understanding of international politics in Asia, and their policy implications for European states and the European Union.

The conference will be divided into two parts that reflect the double intellectual and policy ambitions of the Observatory: Day 1 will focus on “Complex foreign policy signalling in the Indo-Pacific”, with the aim of contributing to the understanding and theorisation of “foreign policy signalling” in the region. Day 2 will focus on European and US perspectives and strategies towards the Indo-Pacific and vis-à-vis China.

Today, the Indo-Pacific has become a laboratory of foreign policy signalling. It has seen numerous novel diplomatic phrasings and formats emerging in the recent past – from the adoption of the Indo-Pacific terminology itself, to the Quad, a series of European strategy papers on the region and varying multilateral naval exercises, the routinization of 2 plus 2 summit meetings, to India’s self-description as a “net-security provider”. Playing host to the rivalry between the US and China that is set to define 21st century world politics, it is not surprising that both major Asian and external powers have intensified their foreign policy signalling towards and within the Indo-Pacific. What is more puzzling is the simultaneity of often very public signals and their vagueness. A multipolar Asia is replete with interdependencies – from water sharing and safe sea lanes to infrastructure investments and arms supplies – is full of ambiguous signalling.

This situation raises a series of important questions. For instance, how credible are foreign policy signals by extra-regional and regional states? What is the value of “cheap talk” and does adopting the Indo-Pacific come along with costs at all? Do audience costs play a role – and if so, where and to what extent? At another level, what are the means of signalling that dominate and why? How and why does the Indo-Pacific’s peculiar distribution of power and other factors shape the way foreign policy signalling is employed by local and external actors – and with what consequences for the region’s stability and major power rivalries?

Lastly, what does explain the peculiar vagueness of foreign policy signalling today and what implications do vague foreign policy signals have? Those are some of the questions that will be explored during the conference. Employing a broad understanding of signalling outside immediate crises, two panels will explore the characteristics of foreign policy signalling in the Indo-Pacific. It will seek to better understand the nature and consequence of ambiguous signalling in Asia across an array of individual states, groupings, and foreign policies initiatives.

The recent release of the EU's Strategy on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the announcement of AUKUS, a security pact between the US, the UK and Australia, also raise new important policy issues. In particular: To what extent are the existing strategies in Europe towards the Indo-Pacific in alignment? What is the potential of EU-UK co-operation in the region? Will the Europeans succeed in coordinating their China policies? Two panels on 10 December will tackle these issues as well as discuss the priorities and challenges of implementing the EU strategy towards the Indo-Pacific.

Lastly, the conference will also include a closed-door seminar with policymakers from France, Germany, and the European External Action Service to discuss national as well as EU strategies towards the Indo-Pacific.

The below mentioned time and schedule are in CET (Central European Time).

9 December 2021

9:00–11:15 a.m. (including break)

Closed-door seminar: Taking stock of national and EU strategies towards the Indo-Pacific

Under the Chatham House Rule, this seminar fosters an exchange of views between French, German and EU policymakers on Indo-Pacific related issues. The seminar is structured in two parts. First, participants debate the current state and lessons of implementing French and German strategies towards the region. The first part also highlights how German and French strategies have been received by actors in the Indo-Pacific. The second part explores expectations and priorities for implementing a joint EU approach towards the region.

Chairs & moderators: Amrita Narlikar (GIGA) and Christophe Jaffrelot (CERI, Sciences Po)

1:30–1:45 p.m.

Introduction to the conference

Christophe Jaffrelot (CERI, Sciences Po) and Patrick Köllner (GIGA)

1:45–3:30 p.m.

Panel 1: Transversal perspectives on foreign-policy signalling in the Indo-Pacific

- Status signalling in the Indo-Pacific (Xiaoyu Pu, University of Nevada)
- Tactical hedging in the Indo-Pacific: Evolving strategies of the 'Quad' (Kei Koga, Nanyang Technological University)
- Ambiguous signalling and Indo-Pacific multilateralism (Delphine Allès, Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales/INALCO)
- Connectivity and foreign policy signalling in Asia (Emilian Kavalski, Jagiellonian University)

Chair & moderator: Raphaëlle Khan (City University of New York)

3:30–4:00 p.m.

Break

4:00–5:45 p.m.

Panel 2: Country case studies on foreign-policy signalling in the Indo-Pacific

- India's foreign policy signalling (Raphaëlle Khan, City University of New York and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, University of Oxford)
- European Indo-Pacific strategy papers and foreign policy signalling (Nicolas Blarel, Leiden University)
- Japan and foreign policy signalling (Isabelle Saint-Mézard, University of Paris VIII and Guibourg Delamotte, INALCO)
- Foreign-policy signalling in Australia and New Zealand's Pacific Policy (Patrick Köllner, GIGA)

Chair & moderator: Johannes Plagemann (GIGA)

10 December 2021

9:00 a.m–noon

Meeting of the Hamburg and Paris-based teams

1:00–3:00 p.m.

Roundtable 3: European perspectives and strategies on the Indo-Pacific region

- France (Nicolas Regaud, Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire/IRSEM)
- Germany (Gudrun Wacker, German Institute for International and Security Affairs/SWP)
- United Kingdom (Shaun Breslin, University of Warwick)
- The Netherlands (Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, Clingendael Institute)
- Poland (Tomasz Kamiński, University of Lodz)

Chair & moderator: Patrick Köllner (GIGA)

3:00–3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15–5:15 p.m.

Roundtable 4: European and US strategies vis-à-vis China and the Chinese reaction to their Indo-Pacific policies

- French and European Indo-Pacific strategies and China: a mirroring effect? (Marianne Péron-Doise, IRSEM)
- What the tale of the 'Bayern' tells us about Germany's Indo-Pacific strategy and German-Chinese relations (Thorsten Benner, Global Public Policy Institute)
- Ripples of empire: China's rise and British security policy in the Indo-Pacific (Hugo Meijer, CERI, Sciences Po)
- How China faces the emergence of an Indo-Pacific balancing coalition (Mathieu Dûchatel, Institut Montaigne)

Chair & moderator: Christophe Jaffrelot (CERI, Sciences Po)
