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## The 'Indo' in Indo-Pacific: German-Indian Defence Relations

In the autumn of 2020, the German Federal Government adopted its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, setting out, above all, objectives and principles for the areas of foreign policy, foreign trade and development cooperation, but also for the field of security policy.<sup>1</sup> As far as this part of the world is concerned, it was mainly the Pacific region that took centre stage in last year's discussions about security policy. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the German Minister of Defence, for example, underlined her intention to increase cooperation on security, defence and armaments matters when speaking at a series of public talks with the defence ministers of Singapore, Australia and Japan in 2020.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the Minister announced in November 2020 that Germany would, '[...] in the future, underpin its interest in the Indo-Pacific area also by allocating military resources, especially by deploying ships.'<sup>3</sup> The deployment of the frigate *Bayern* in support of the monitoring of UN sanctions against North Korea, which began in August 2021, is a visible sign of Germany's commitment to defending the region. The deployment received even more political attention when the German Defence Minister also travelled to South Korea and Guam.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Pacific region has played an important part in the German debate on security in 2020 and 2021, this GIDS statement will focus on Germany's defence relations with *the* key security actor in South Asia: India. In view of India's importance for the region's stability, its large population, its status as a nuclear nation and its growing economic power, close and sensible relations between Germany and India are of considerable significance for German security. In the past two decades, Germany's military policy focus on South Asia has been characterised, first and foremost, by the Bundeswehr's deployment in Afghanistan and the resulting geostrategic necessity to cooperate with Pakistan in order to be able to secure logistic supply routes, among other things. However, the Bundeswehr's recent withdrawal from Afghanistan has given Germany an opportunity to realign its security framework by redefining its defence relations with countries in the South Asia region in line with national interests. In light of the above, this GIDS statement argues in favour of strengthening Germany's military ties with India and outlines opportunities for broadening the cooperation between the two states in the last chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Paul/Weininger 2021.

<sup>2</sup> BMVg [FMoD] 2020a; BMVg [FMoD] 2020b.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from the German original: BMVg [FMoD] 2020b.

<sup>4</sup> On its way to and from the Indo-Pacific region via the Indian Ocean, the frigate is scheduled to call at ports in South Asia in the second half of 2021 and at the beginning of 2022; cf. BMVg [FMoD] 2021a; Brössler/Szymanski 2021.

## 1 What is the Current State of German-Indian Defence Relations?

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for Germany to effectively develop its relations with India. Even in the years running up to the pandemic, the defence ties between the two countries were not very close despite the Indo-German strategic partnership adopted in 2000, the Bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2006 and the arrangement on implementation of the aforementioned agreement concluded in 2019.<sup>5</sup> Even though once a year Germany and India hold a strategic dialogue at the state secretary level called the India-Germany High Defence Committee (HDC),<sup>6</sup> the countries' defence relations essentially do not go beyond general talks about security issues. When it comes to the military, only few members of the Indian armed forces take part in personnel exchange programmes and courses offered in Germany,<sup>7</sup> except for a number of Indian officers who have attended the International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course (IGASOC) at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg.<sup>8</sup> Whenever Indian officers visit Bundeswehr training institutions or academies, they never stay for too long and the exchange with their German counterparts is usually limited to a few technical talks between members of individual service branches.<sup>9</sup> Multilateral cooperation is limited to Germany participating as observer in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.<sup>10</sup> With regard to visits paid by German servicemembers to India, it is only Navy officer candidates who have regularly participated in sailing regattas organised by the Indian Navy, such as the Admiral's Cup Regatta.<sup>11</sup> As far as arms and defence equipment is concerned, Germany's military exports to India include a variety of systems. However, with a volume of about 95 million euros, they have played only a marginal role compared to Germany's overall arms exports in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Why Should Germany Strengthen its Defence Relations with India?

As outlined below, Germany should strengthen its defence relations with India because in view of German security interests and principles as defined in its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, India plays a key role in the South Asian part of the Indo-Pacific region. India's involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – known as the Quad –, which includes the United States, Japan and Australia, as well as its bilateral and multilateral activities with various small and medium-sized countries are in line

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**5** Cf. Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages [Research Services of the German Bundestag] 2016: 13; Dt. Vertretungen in Indien [German Missions in India] 2021.

**6** Dt. Vertretungen in Indien [German Missions in India] 2021; Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages [Research Services of the German Bundestag] 2016: 13.

**7** Cf. Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages [Research Services of the German Bundestag] 2016: 13; interview held with a confidential and valid source on 9 June 2021

**8** Cf. interviews held with confidential and valid sources on 9 June 2021 and 17 July 2021.

**9** Cf. Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages [Research Services of the German Bundestag] 2016: 13.

**10** Cf. Wilkins/Parkes 2017.

**11** Cf. The Times of India 2018; Indian Navy 2019.

**12** Cf. Mutschler/Bayer 2021a: 9.

with Germany's interest in 'diversified partnerships in the region', 'the promotion of regional multilateral structures' and overall 'security and stability in the Indo-Pacific'.<sup>13</sup>

The US, for example, renewed its 10-year defence framework agreement with India in 2015. Since around that time, the US has also been one of the most important exporters of arms to India, and has maintained – despite India's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – a cooperation on the civilian use of nuclear energy since the end of the 2000s.<sup>14</sup>

Since around the turn of the century, India has played an important role in the security of the area ranging from Southeast Asia to East Asia, having an impact on more than just its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia. India's Look East Policy (renamed the 'Act East' Policy in 2014), which was introduced in 1992 and was originally intended to increase India's foreign trade, has been supplemented by a focus on political and security issues. This is reflected, among other things, by the fact that India has been conducting bilateral summits with the ASEAN states since 2002, has been a part of the East Asia Summits since 2005, has strengthened its bilateral relations with Vietnam and Singapore and has been cooperating with Indonesia on maritime security issues.<sup>15</sup> As the Indian government emphasises, the Look East Policy has been a major pillar of its foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>16</sup>

Over the past decade, India has also gradually developed its foreign and security relations with the regional power of Japan.<sup>17</sup> In 2008, Japan issued a Joint Security Declaration with India<sup>18</sup> and in October 2009, the Japan-India Maritime Security Dialogue was inaugurated. In 2014, Prime Ministers Modi and Abe announced the elevation of their countries' relations to a 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' and in September 2020, Japan and India signed an Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement, which allows both parties to access each other's naval bases and establishes the reciprocal provision of supplies and services.<sup>19</sup>

Last but not least, India – together with the US, Japan and Australia – is part of the Quad. Originally established on the initiative of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, the format was reactivated in 2017 as part of the Western commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.<sup>20</sup> As early as 2007, the US-Indian naval exercise Malabar, which used to be a bilateral drill, became multilateral and has since been conducted as a regular joint exercise involving the naval forces of all Quad states.<sup>21</sup> With its focus on maintaining the rules-based international order in the maritime domain, the Quad has both a realpolitik and a normative component.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to the strengthening of relations between Germany and regional 'partners with shared values' as required in the German Policy guidelines for the Indo-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ayson 2015: 71–72; Yamaguchi/Sano 2016: 169; SIPRI 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 826.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 183.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Brewster 2010; Pant/Joshi 2016.

<sup>18</sup> This was Japan's third such declaration (it had signed the first Joint Security Declaration with the US and the second with Australia).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Brewster 2010; Yamaguchi/Sano 2016: 154; Paul 2019: 71; MOFA Japan 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 181 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Brewster 2010: 98; Miglani 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 182, 186.

Pacific,<sup>23</sup> India proves to be a complex actor: India's colonial experience and the high need for security coupled with the different forms of government in the region have led the country to traditionally prioritise the defence of its national sovereignty and the safeguarding of realpolitik and foreign policy interests over a foreign policy based on shared values and standards.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, India's foreign policy has undergone a change over the past decade, emphasising the narrative of pursuing a democratic community of shared values in strengthening foreign policy and security partnerships, such as the Quad.<sup>25</sup> As political scientists Mazumdar and Statz explain, India's foreign policy has recently adopted a more active stance towards promoting democracy. According to them, India is using available multilateral and bilateral mechanisms, such as UN initiatives and technical or legal support to electoral and constitutionalisation processes in the Himalayan region, to support democratic developments. Moreover, India is committed to promoting institutional capacities to support democracy.<sup>26</sup> Against this background, in early 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg highlighted India's multilateral action and its activities as a 'like-minded democracy, sharing the same values and standing up for the rules-based order'.<sup>27</sup>

Although India has taken a different position than Western states in matters related to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and insists on the requirement of obtaining a coastal state's consent to other countries conducting military exercises or operations in its EEZ,<sup>28</sup> it submits nonetheless to the jurisdiction of international courts. This becomes apparent, for example, from India's acceptance of the judgment delivered in the case of the 'Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Arbitration between Bangladesh and India' by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2014.<sup>29</sup> India thus acts in accordance with Germany's ideas on the rules-based international order and the rule of law as stipulated in our policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, enhanced cooperation with India is also recommended in view of Germany's interest in 'open shipping routes' as formulated in its policy guidelines, and, secondly, in view of the 'maritime multilateralism' concept mentioned in the 2014 EU Maritime Security Strategy.<sup>31</sup> In 2008, for example, India hosted for the first time the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a biennial meeting of the chiefs of the navies of the Indian Ocean coastal states.<sup>32</sup> The aim of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium is to strengthen the maritime cooperation in the region through a series of working groups dealing with topics such as maritime security and information exchange and to establish an effective maritime security architecture in the Indian Ocean.<sup>33</sup> In 2014, Shivshankar Menon, India's National Security Advisor, announced an agreement on closer cooperation between India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Seychelles and Mauritius – called the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] 2020: 9, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 835–836; Mazumdar/Statz 2015: 95.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Mazumdar/Statz 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Mazumdar/Statz: 84, 85, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. NATO 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 190.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Lee/Lee 2016: 295; Song (n.d.): 15–16.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] 2020: 11, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Council of the European Union 2014: 5; Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] 2020: 9.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 846.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. IONS 2021; Royal Australian Navy (n.d.)

'IO-5' – in the field of maritime security. On a visit to Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Seychelles in the following year, Prime Minister Modi set out his ideas to build common capabilities to ensure maritime security, set up rapid reaction capabilities and promote economic development in the Indian Ocean based on international standards and the international law of the sea.<sup>34</sup> India backs its ideas with disaster relief capabilities. It has done so, for example, after the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, in 2020 when supplying South Sudan with food aid via the port of Mombasa and with its maritime security activities in the area of the Andaman Sea.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as part of its national operations, the Indian Navy continues to patrol the Horn of Africa, which is affected by piracy and other uncertainties.<sup>36</sup>

New Delhi's interest in foreign policy action through bilateral and multilateral alliances and in deepening its strategic partnerships is, however, limited by India's core interest – preserving its strategic autonomy.<sup>37</sup> This is why India, for example, has so far refrained from entering into any formal security alliances.<sup>38</sup> Strengthening the defence relations with India would thus safeguard Germany's interest in contributing to the reduction of bipolar power structures in the region.<sup>39</sup> In other words – to cite Robert Ayson – a politically strengthened India '[...] might be independent-minded and strong enough to keep the region from descending into a relentless game of competition between two great powers.'<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the current state of German defence relations with India and Pakistan calls for a reorientation towards New Delhi. The Bundeswehr has long-standing and deep relations with the Pakistani military. In recent years, military command personnel of the Bundeswehr and the Pakistan Armed Forces have called on each other, Pakistani staff have visited Bundeswehr education and training facilities, and Pakistani soldiers have attended a digital training for staff officers in UN operations. Furthermore, both armed forces have implemented numerous other bilateral cooperation projects.<sup>41</sup> As far as developing countries are concerned, Pakistan is also the most important recipient country of German arms exports with an export volume amounting to 174.4 million euros.<sup>42</sup> There is, therefore, an inherent imbalance in German defence policy when it comes to these two key powers, meaning Germany does not live up to its claim of keeping a balance in its defence cooperations. Germany's close defence cooperation with Pakistan has been noted by New Delhi with concern, especially against the background of Pakistan's complex relationship with Islamist organisations.<sup>43</sup>

In theory, security relations between India and EU states, such as Germany, could play an important role – close bonds with Europe's middle-sized countries would not call into question India's core interest in strategic autonomy, as might be the case with similar relations to the two great powers, the US and China. India's large geographical

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Brewster 2015: 234; Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 185.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 845; Negi 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Peri 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 831; Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 183; Brewster 2015: 224–225.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Brewster 2011: 831.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] 2020: 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ayson 2015: 78.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. BMVg [FMoD] 2021b; The Nation 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Deutsche Welle 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gain 2021; according to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 9 June 2021.

distance to the European states would avoid the image of ‘entanglement’, an impression that might arise from bonding with regional medium-sized powers.<sup>44</sup> In practice, however, security relations between India and EU countries have so far played a secondary role. While India sees France as a reliable arms exporter and a valued military exercise partner with regard to the Varuna exercise series, for example, Germany is irrelevant to India when it comes to security policy. In particular, Germany’s restrictive arms export policy towards India, especially with regard to firearms, is incomprehensible to India and has had a serious impact on the relations between the two countries.<sup>45</sup> While defence cooperation between Germany and India is currently taking place to a very limited extent only, the general economic ties between the two countries have traditionally been close. The EU is India’s most important trade and investment partner. During the German-Indian government consultations in 2019, for example, both countries agreed to cooperate in areas such as climate change mitigation, artificial intelligence and digitalisation.<sup>46</sup>

### 3 Opportunities for Expanding German-Indian Cooperation

In view of German interests, it is advisable for Germany to develop its defence relations with India at all echelons. Beyond defence minister/state secretary level, military policy talks should also be held at the ministerial level or that of the individual services. It is recommended that Germany is represented at conferences and trade fairs, among other things, by the appropriate echelon. Examples of those events include the Raisina Dialogue in Delhi or the various regional conferences in the area, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium or the EU-India maritime dialogue CRIMARIO.<sup>47</sup>

The opportunity for German officers to be able to complete some of their training in India, something that was discussed between the German Chief of Defence and his Indian counterpart during the CHOD’s trip in 2019, should be implemented in order to promote a deeper understanding and mutual exchange beyond the political level.<sup>48</sup> The Indian Defence Services Staff College in Wellington or the Naval War College in Goa would be ideal for this purpose. In addition, it should be reassessed whether the Bundeswehr really does not have the personnel resources to have servicemembers pursue a Master’s degree at the Indian National Defence Academy or the University of Madras combined with attending the Indian general/admiral staff officer training offered each year. At present, Germany only makes use of this training opportunity every three years.<sup>49</sup> If India offers training opportunities to the Bundeswehr, these should under no circumstances be rejected, especially if they relate to capabilities or exercise areas that are not available within Germany – provided that the Bundeswehr has sufficient personnel and material resources.

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<sup>44</sup> Brewster 2015: 225.

<sup>45</sup> According to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 17 July 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ganapathi 2017: 54; Die Bundesregierung [The Federal Government] 2019.

<sup>47</sup> According to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 17 July 2021.

<sup>48</sup> BMVg [FMoD] 2019.

<sup>49</sup> According to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 9 June 2021.



Disaster relief could be another field of defence cooperation with India. As is the case with many countries in the region, India's security is threatened by extreme weather conditions.<sup>50</sup> Disaster relief is one of the core areas of Japanese-Indian security cooperation, with India being able to benefit from the special capabilities of Japanese engineer forces to cope with natural disasters.<sup>51</sup> In view of Germany's interest in the region as highlighted by its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific – why not explore if there are opportunities for trilateral exercises and/or trainings?

With a view to acting multilaterally, it would also be advisable to join exercises, in particular those of the naval forces. If Germany joined different exercise formats in which the Indian Navy participates – such as Varuna with France, Milan with various ASEAN states, Malabar or another Quad exercise in the Pacific – it could highlight its wide range of interests, including European action, cooperation with partners with shared values and diversification of partnerships.<sup>52</sup> Other NATO partners, such as France and Canada, have already been given the opportunity to host exercises together with the Quad or to join Quad exercises.<sup>53</sup> Should German naval units be deployed regularly to the Indo-Pacific region in the future, Germany could seize the opportunity to ask the host states whether they would be interested and willing to invite Germany to the above-mentioned exercise formats.

However, Germany should not send the same units and systems to both Pakistan and India, since the chronological order of deployments (either first to Pakistan and next to India or the other way around) could be interpreted as a hierarchical classification of its relations with these two states. It would be better to deploy forces separately or if Germany's systems and platforms made stopovers for visits and cooperation activities in Pakistan's and India's respective territories while on their way to other strategic partners, such as Australia.<sup>54</sup>

With regard to the maritime domain accentuated in both the German policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific and the EU Maritime Security Strategy, the exchange of information on commercial shipping (known as white shipping information), in particular, would also provide scope for further cooperation. India has an increased interest in the monitoring of commercial shipping in the Indian Ocean and concluded a bilateral agreement with Vietnam in 2018, prioritising the exchange of information on white shipping.<sup>55</sup> In addition, it has established the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), a cross-authority maritime security information centre, which in turn has concluded cooperation agreements with various countries for the purpose of sharing information. With regard to German naval surveillance capabilities, which are already benefitting from inter-European cooperation and the assignment of a liaison officer to the IFC in Singapore,<sup>56</sup> cooperation with India in particular could offer considerable advantages, especially in terms of geography – provided that, firstly, India was prepared to exchange background information on white shipping that goes beyond the simple tracking of ship movements and that, secondly, sufficient personnel and material was

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ayson 2015: 4.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Yamaguchi, Sano 2016: 153.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Roy-Chaudhury/Sullivan de Estrada 2018: 190.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bhattacharyya/Janardhanan 2021; Sharma/Pene-Lassus 2021.

<sup>54</sup> According to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 9 June 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of External Affairs 2018a; IFC-IOR (n.d.).

<sup>56</sup> Hegering 2019.

available in Germany to process and evaluate the additional data. In general, however, maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean is a topic in which both India and Germany are interested.<sup>57</sup>

There is also a lot of potential for the expansion of German-Indian defence relations as regards the procurement of defence equipment, which is a key area that Germany and India have wished to cooperate in since they signed a bilateral cooperation agreement in 2006.<sup>58</sup> In practice, however, the possibilities for arms exports are limited. On the one hand, this is due to India's protectionist measures and the efforts of the Make in India initiative to develop and produce military materiel in India, if possible. On the other hand, the expansion of effective arms relations with India is also significantly hampered by Germany's restrictive arms export regime. In individual decisions taken on the basis of its regulations governing arms exports, Germany should consider that India is a democratic great power with significant influence in the Indo-Pacific region whose foreign policy is committed to international law. Other countries of the global West, such as the United States and Australia, have already intensified their defence cooperation with India and removed many of the restrictions they had imposed as a result of India's nuclearisation in the 1990s.<sup>59</sup> In this context, it would be wise if Germany, too, in line with our allies and partners, was to adopt a more positive position towards arms exports and cooperation with India. Germany's special expertise and its naval defence companies would complement Indian interests and requirements, particularly in the areas of submarine weapons and mine warfare.<sup>60</sup>

Germany could also try to promote military confidence-building measures between the opponents India and Pakistan using the capabilities available at the Bundeswehr Verification Centre. Currently, a window of opportunity for such measures is opening up because the cease-fire between India and Pakistan along the Line of Contact in Kashmir, which was agreed upon years ago, has been relatively stable since February 2021 and because the Pakistani military leadership is also interested in de-escalating the conflict.<sup>61</sup>

After all, it is important for Germany to take more account of India's political weight. Germany should encourage India to live up to its role as the world's largest democracy and show its appreciation by means of targeted strategic communication whenever India acts based on shared values and standards, also with a view to pursuing a potential partnership with India in the global conflict over the rule-based order. Even small gestures can go a long way. If, for example, German political and military leaders refer to partners in the region that share the same values and mention Australia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, they should take care to appropriately include India in this list.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Grare 2021: 4.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Deutsche Vertretungen in Indien [German Missions in India] 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Pant/Joshi 2016: 100; Ministry of External Affairs 2018b.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. BMVg [FMoD] 2019; Paul/Weininger 2021.

<sup>61</sup> According to an interview with the defence attaché at the German Embassy Islamabad held on 2 July 2021; according to an interview held with a confidential and valid source on 17 July 2021.

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