

International Relations This Week - Solomon Islands & Other Issues

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the Solomon Islands violence and related developments.

Video link: https://youtu.be/lEmtbEEQC_c

Introduction:

- Colonialism is the system by which one group of people is subjugated and exploited by another.
- After centuries of imperialism and colonialism, the mid-twentieth century saw the liberation of several Asian and African countries from former colonial domination. As a result, colonialism is frequently assumed to be a thing of the past.
- However, many portions of the world remain under direct military occupation, such as Palestine, Western Sahara, Crimea, South Ossetia, etc.
- Colonization of indigenous territories has been established and institutionalized in colonial countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States for a long time.

Critical Analysis of Solomon Islands

What is the Solomon Islands Issue?

- Since their independence from Britain in 1978, the Solomon Islands have grappled with inter-island conflicts and political violence.
- The current issue has its roots in "The Tensions," a period of civil unrest that lasted from 1998 to 2003.
- Residents of Guadalcanal's main island have become resentful of newcomers from neighbouring islands, particularly Malaita, the most populated province.
- Timeline:
 - 1998: - Guadalcanal militants launched attacks on settlers.
 - 2003: - Peace was ultimately restored by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).
 - 2006: - Riots erupted in April 2006. Dozens of businesses owned by ethnic Chinese were looted and burned in the capital Honiara.
 - 2017: - RAMSI maintained a presence until 2017 but even after their departure tensions were never far below the surface.

- 2019: - The historical rivalry between Guadalcanal and Malaita converged with international geopolitics when veteran politician Manasseh Sogavare was elected prime minister, sparking another round of violent protests.

A tale of two provinces

- Domestic tensions have erupted in Guadalcanal, which is home to the capital Honiara, and Malaita, the second largest island.
- Malaita is the most populated island in the Solomon Islands, but its authorities claim it lacks the same degree of economic growth as its opponent.

How did Australia become involved?

- In 2017, Australia and the Solomon Islands inked their first bilateral security agreement. In the case of a serious security threat, it offers a legal foundation for the fast deployment of Australian police, military, and citizens.
- The bilateral agreement recognises that the fundamental reasons for the turmoil continued, posing development obstacles.
- The Solomon Islands were on the verge of becoming a failed state, according to Australia. Australia is concerned that the Solomon Islands may serve as a safe haven for international terrorists.

What's China's role?

- After a civil war in 1949, Taiwan broke away from mainland China, although Beijing claims it as part of its territory.
- With poor nations, Taiwan and China have been involved in a diplomatic tug-of-war for years, with economic help and other aid being used as negotiating chips in exchange for diplomatic recognition.
- China has created another schism in the society, with the government siding with Beijing and the Malay leaders siding with Taiwan.
- Experts say the Solomon Islands' unrest stems from the same underlying causes that have weakened the social fabric for decades: inter-island and ethnic tensions, a perceived lack of resource sharing between Guadalcanal and Malaita, widespread poverty, and high youth unemployment, according to experts.
- In the Solomon Islands, there has long been animosity toward Chinese businesspeople, which resulted in the burning of much of Honiara's Chinatown in 2006 and again in recent weeks.
- It is also cautioned that strengthening links with Beijing might jeopardize the Solomon Islands' land rights, rule of law, and cultural heritage.

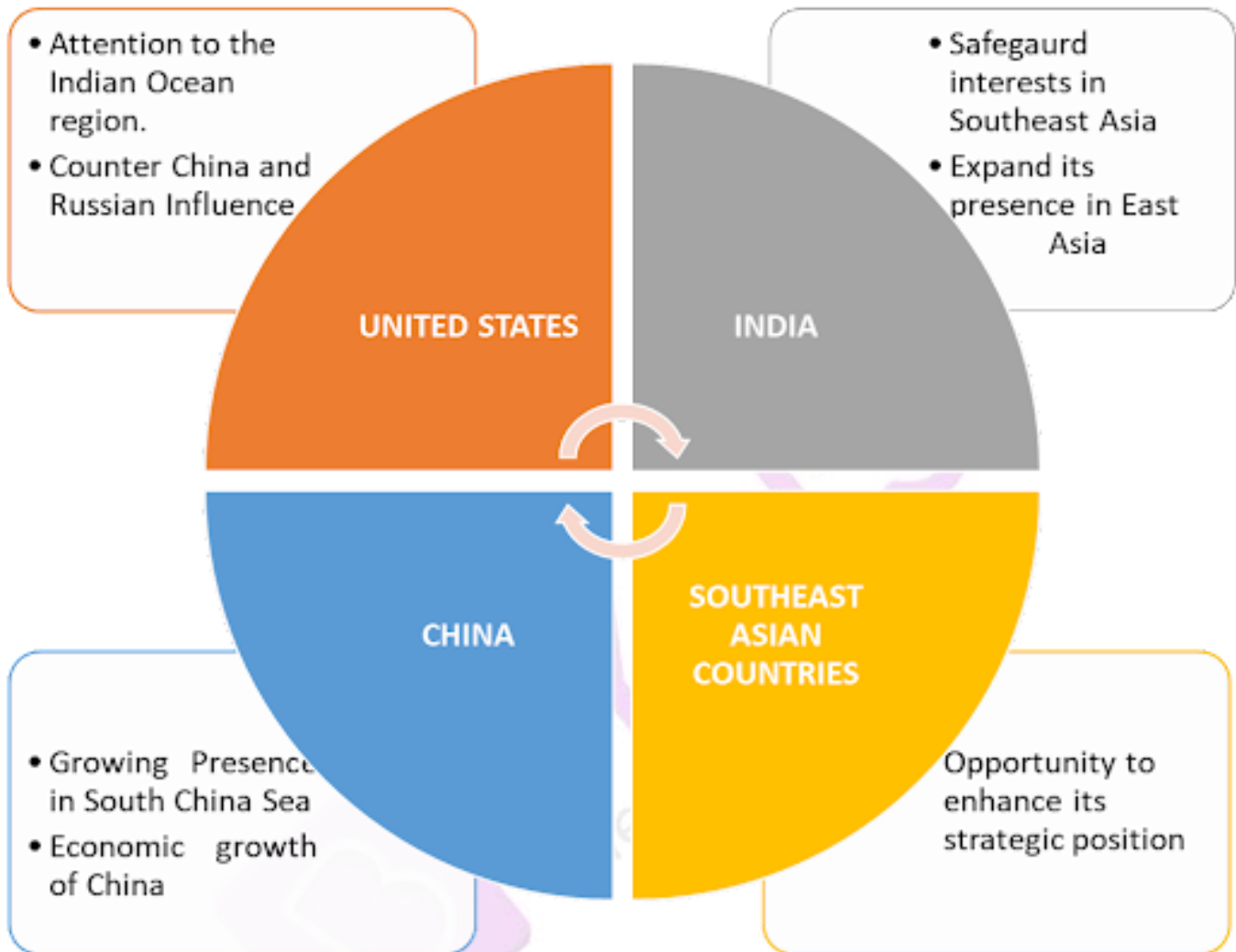
What is the Indo-Pacific and its Significance?

- The phrase "Indo-Pacific" has almost completely superseded the word "Asia-Pacific" in recent years, notably in the United States, India, Japan, and Australia.
- The term "Indo-Pacific" has entered the geopolitical conversation and the language of international relations. On the definition of the growing Indo-Pacific idea, there is no consensus.
- Indo-Pacific has a strategic future because it allows states to manage
 - the partially contradictory desires that arise from China's ascent.
 - the growing uncertainties regarding the United States' commitment to the security of its allies.
 - the desire to avoid the undercurrents of Sino-American polarization.

Strategic Aspects of Indo-Pacific

- The Indo-Pacific is gaining prominence as a result of the mutual interests and convergences of multiple strategic powers, each with their own set of influences and goals, as a result of three geostrategic and geoeconomic developments.
 - First, the marine and blue economy will dominate strategic rivalry over the next few decades.
 - Second, the Indo-Pacific encompasses a vast and varied region that includes Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean littoral states.
 - Third, China's ascent, outward expansion, and the intensification of the US-China competition.
- Quad, the US-Japan-India-Australia communication structure, will play a crucial role. The Indo-Pacific and the Quad are closely linked and Quad's growth is essentially identical to the institutionalization process of the Pacific region.
- The Indo-Pacific plan has the potential to grow, bringing additional nations into the fold, with South Korea, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and other [ASEAN](#) countries as the primary targets.
- Europe is also developing and executing its own Indo-Pacific Strategy, which will provide an extra boost to Indo-Pacific growth.
- Furthermore, by emphasizing the "pillar of four nations" and neglecting the status and function of South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, and other countries in the framework, the "Indo-Pacific" policy has put South Korea and Southeast Asian countries at a disadvantage.

Interests of Countries under the "Indo-Pacific Strategy"



Recent Developments in Indo-Pacific

- The emergence of India as a global economic powerhouse and a significant political player, notably in Asia.
- China's assertive foreign policy and deployment of military might to claim its sovereignty over disputed islands in the South China Sea is the second most important development.
- The third significant trend is the deterioration of ASEAN's self-confidence, which used to project itself as a triumphant political grouping in the area, despite differences in political systems, economic philosophy, religious views, and socio-cultural traditions.
- The development of the new framework is hampered by America's isolationist impulses and practices in Asia.

Fiji: Special Interest to India

- The Indo-Pacific is becoming an increasingly crucial arena in the rising great power competition.
- As ethnic violence between Indian immigrants and local populations in Fiji became more intense, Delhi focused only on safeguarding the diaspora's interests.
- Following a series of coups in Fiji and discrimination against the Indian population, Delhi sought to isolate the government and lose its larger influence on the island. India is expanding its economic aid programmes and establishing defense ties with Fiji.

France and Indo-Pacific

French Colonies and its Interests

- Due to its numerous overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific (e.g., Mayotte, La Réunion, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia), France perceives itself as an "island state" in the area.
- These areas give France the world's second-largest [exclusive economic zone](#), after the United States.
- France's Indo-Pacific strategy strives to safeguard the country's international position and distinctive interests, particularly in the overseas territories that serve as an anchor and source of legitimacy for the French policy.

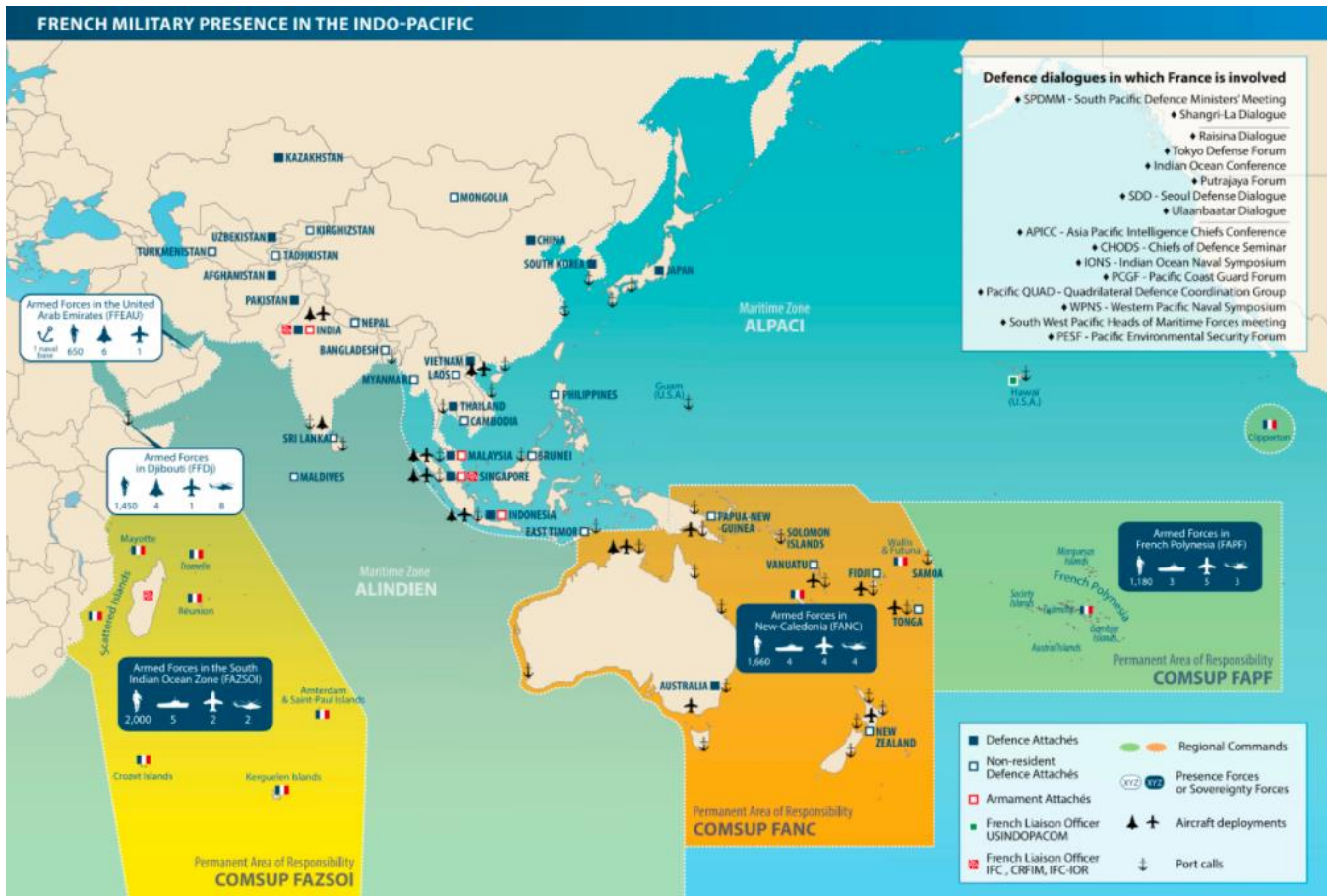


Image source: Center for Strategic and International Studies

- A large military presence complements the Indo-Pacific's people, geographical, and economic connections.
- New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and Clipperton Island—as well as Reunion Island, Mayotte, and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands—are crucial to its concept of the region's geographical breadth.
- They jointly make up France's second-largest exclusive economic zone in the world.
- Three avenues of action, in particular, stand out among the French.
 - First, France is prioritizing improving the regional military balance.
 - Second, Paris is a strong proponent of multilateralism as a pillar for the stability of the Indo-Pacific.
 - Third, France actively supports Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Embracing the Indo-Pacific Concept

- In 2018, Paris opted to accept the "Indo-Pacific" idea as a natural continuation of these tiny but steady moves, becoming the first EU country to do so.
- France recognised the region's cohesiveness as well as its increasing geopolitical significance.

- The Indo-Pacific is typically defined differently geographically from one country to the next.
- The French idea is broad, extending "from Djibouti to Polynesia." This demonstrates France's determination to treat the Indian Ocean with the same priority as the Pacific.

Aspirations of France in Indo-Pacific

- By contributing to increased coordination of efforts from like-minded countries across the region, France might play a significant role in US policy. It has already begun with the conversation between France, India, and Australia.
- France may also be able to influence EU policy in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring that Europeans play a valuable and coordinated role in the area.
- France and the United States, as an Indo-Pacific "island state," may collaborate more effectively to compete with China.

India's Options in the Region

First, pursue a proactive strategy for the region:

India should develop new cooperative ventures and speed up existing ones in infrastructure, industry, trade, and tourism, with a particular focus on connectivity, coastal areas, and ports. The Blue Economy and Resource Resilience programmes may be advanced at bilateral and sub-regional levels. Besides, [SAGAR](#) requires more structure, substance, and an implementation strategy.

Second, develop a common understanding of Freedom of Navigation:

Almost all countries agree that in maritime commons, there should be freedom of navigation. While it's critical to emphasize Freedom of Navigation at key meetings, it's also critical to go deeper in order to establish a shared understanding. India is an appropriate contender to lead such an initiative because of its track record of adhering to international maritime law (IML) and its standing as a maritime power.

Third, increase operational reach, sustenance and footprint in the Indo-Pacific:

This would allow for a lengthier presence in the regions of interest while also bolstering stability. Already agreed-upon bilateral logistic and support arrangements must be operationalized, and additional agreements must be formalized.

Fourth, make a tangible impact through Project Sagarmala:

India should prioritize port development, connectivity, port-led industrialization, and the development of coastal communities. Investments, as well as the potential for direct and indirect job creation, should be

made as soon as possible. At the same time, the Indian commercial fleet's capacity should be increased. Read more on [Sagarmala](#) in the linked article.

Fifth, set up of a Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies:

The preferred area for the Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies would be Port Blair, on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This should be a multi-disciplinary centre that is built on the basis of a public-private cooperation model.

Conclusion

Colonialism shaped the political global map into what it is today and downplayed the colonies' cultural, economic, political, and social conditions. There is a need to pursue the decolonization of the colonized world. A successful end to this process will be the achievement of full self-government.

India should play a leading role in the Indo-Pacific to reimpose identities on the people, self-efficacy, and focus on their long-term social development.
