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Title: EU-India Climate Security Partnership for the Indo-Pacific: Proposal to address climate-related security risks: A new dimension of engagement

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EU-India Climate Security Partnership for the Indo-Pacific

Proposal to address climate-related security risks: A new dimension of engagement

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Abstract

As the world's two largest democracies, the European Union and India defend a common interest in ensuring security, prosperity, sustainable development and addressing global challenges. Thus, combating climate change is DEFCON level-1 on the foreign policy priorities of both powerhouses. In order to build on these common convergences, the EU and India must look toward new areas of cooperation in geopolitical regions that are increasingly shaping global affairs. To this end, establishing an 'EU-India Climate Security Partnership for the Indo-Pacific' emerges as a natural culmination of the next steps in advanced cooperation between two like-minded leaders. Formalizing a strategic partnership addressing climate-related security risks helps Brussels establish greater presence in the region and further its status quo as a global climate leader. Concurrently, for India, a partnership will serve as a powerful action-plan to mitigate growing climate security risks in the region, whilst allowing New Delhi to expand its diplomatic and strategic profile as a frontrunner addressing urgent climate challenges in the Indo-pacific. Towards the end, this paper will determine a list of cohesive policy recommendations that will help chart future pathways towards practical and thematic cooperation between the EU and India to mitigate climate security risks that are on the uptick. An important step in this direction proposes the formation of a bilateral agreement such as an 'EU-India Climate Security Partnership in the Indo-Pacific'.

Summary of key issues

Climate change is increasingly posing a risk to global security. By re-inventing definitions of traditional and non-traditional security risks, the effects of climate change, especially fragile conflict settings, are risking inter-state tensions, posing new kinds of internal security challenges and pushing environmentally stressed communities into community-based violent conflict. These risks are very real in the Indo-pacific, which is an important geopolitical and geo-economic region shaping global affairs. Thus, ensuring peace and stability in the region is in the interest of all major international actors that have vested geostrategic interests in the region. To meet these ends, the European Union is eager to help address climate-related security risks in the region, as also articulate in foreign policy communications of the EU concerning the climate security nexus.

On the other hand, India is facing the brunt of major climate-related security risks. The security challenges for India range from large-scaled inflow of migrants destabilizing socio-political settings, to livelihood insecurities of environmentally-stressed communities causing communal hostilities. It is all the more important for India to recognize the sheer scale of risks and take steps to reduce climate-related security risks. To this end, this paper recommends the formation of an 'EU-India Climate Security Partnership in the Indo-Pacific' to help recognize the onset of major climate-related security issues in the region, and prompt cooperative action addressing these risks.

Introduction

The unprecedented speed and complexity of climate challenges today pose multifarious risks to societal stability. Ranging from potentially upending entire economic and financial systems, to compounding geopolitical tensions or straining global governance mechanisms, the full spectrum of climate risk today stands incredibly broad. Amongst many diverging risks, those pertaining to peace and conflict are especially on the rise affecting security situations across the globe. Yet, these climate security risks receive markedly less attention by virtue of the complexity and sensitivity connected with security situations overall.

Today, climate security risks are observed across the globe, and across various levels affecting human activities, community-level relations, and international security. These risks are multidimensional, for they can amplify socio-economic tensions, provoke competition over resources, or accentuate national rivalries affecting international order. So much so that, climate change is widely acknowledged as a [‘threat multiplier’](#) carrying vast security implications. Thus, as a potential driver of conflict, the secondary risks that follow can intensify population displacement or erode community resilience. Moreover, when the impacts of climate change interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities such as rooted-inequalities, a history of communal tension or extreme livelihood dependencies on natural resources – it can [incite violent conflict](#) between environmentally stresses communities or heighten inter-state tension.

With the frequency and magnitude of major climate events on the rise, the Indo-pacific offers fertile ground for climate security risks to extrapolate and affect social, economic and political considerations. Accommodating nearly 60% of the world’s population, the region faces major climate impacts in the form of extreme heat events, sea level rise, ocean acidification, and the onset of cyclones and typhoons. These unprecedented climate events prevail in a region that already faces a range of [conventional, unconventional, and hybrid security challenges](#). For instance, the chess-match between Washington and Beijing to expand military capabilities and consolidate presence in the region, together with intensifying boundary disputes in the South China Sea is a reflection of the scale of geo-strategic competition at play. In addition, security challenges in the form of rising separatism, violent extremism, and terrorism are further corroding the security situation in the Indo-pacific. The region additionally entertains major [geo-economic completion among emerging economies](#) who are all increasingly vying to consolidate trade and shipping routes, and strengthening crucial supply chains, making the Indo-pacific a major hotspot area shaping global political and economic discourse; one where all actors are jousting for a piece of the pie.

The EU and India similarly maintain strategic interests in the Indo-pacific. The EU aims to play a greater, more active role in the region in order to secure long-term value chains and enhance its strategic autonomy, whereas India aspires to play a leading role building key partnerships in the neighbourhood and shaping regional dynamics. Thus, ensuring peace and stability in the region is critical for both actors. The effects of climate change on the other hand can significantly worsen security vulnerabilities and undermine strategic interests of both actors. For instance, extreme weather events are already eroding coping capacities and affecting food, water, and livelihood security of populations vulnerable to the onset of droughts, cyclones, or sea level rise. With community grievances worsening, climate-induced displacement on the rise, and security situations complicating, there is considerable room for catastrophic risks to emerge in the future.

Therefore, there is a clear and urgent need for both Brussels and New Delhi to adopt policy measures addressing and integrating climate-related security risks in national security strategies and cooperation agreements. The severity of the risks, coupled with common strategic objectives offers the EU and India an opportunity to enhance cooperation addressing climate-related security risks. Ultimately, their ability to navigate across these broad umbrella of climate risks will reflect well on their commitment to enhance political relations and their competency to tackle world problems. To this end, this paper argues for the EU and India to consider forming a strategic partnership addressing climate-related security risks in the Indo-pacific.

Political frameworks guiding EU-India cooperation

[Political relations between the EU and India](#) have been marked by a degree of oversight, and unfulfilled action. Many strategy papers and roadmaps have charted a path for a prosperous strategic partnership, but those hopes have been let down by the inability of both, the EU and India to materialize proportionate outcome. Recognizing these symptoms of malaise, the proposed 'EU-India Climate Security Partnership in the Indo-Pacific' offers a clear path forward towards deepening relations, and expanding cooperation beyond the traditional trade and energy outcomes, to an area severely impacted, and equally bereft of redressal efforts.

Central to India's Indo-pacific policy is engagement. New Delhi is increasingly scanning for opportunities to [form issue-based coalitions](#) to deepen ties with likeminded actors that have similar strategic interests vested in the region. India's active participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), strengthened engagement with individual ASEAN countries, and establishment new and formative initiatives such as Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) – are all fitting examples helping India become a credible power in the Indo-pacific region. There's also an added terse and forthrightness to India's Indo-pacific approach to consolidate and maintain its strategic interests. For instance, in June 2023, [India recognized the legitimacy of Philippines' sovereignty claims](#) against China in the South China Sea for the first time. India's expanding naval footprint through periodic naval exercises and first-respondent activities are testament to the same. Altogether, if there is realistic potential for New Delhi to politically benefit from strategic partnerships addressing climate-related security risks, New Delhi will welcome all possibilities with sincere ambition and eagerness.

From Brussels's end, there are many policy instruments and established political pathways in place that can be exercised to guide collaborative action mitigating climate-related security risks. For instance, at the heart of EU's climate efforts both, within the bloc and worldwide is the [European Green Deal](#). To help mitigate the broader effects of climate change, the external dimension of the European Green Deal encourages the bloc to formulate [tailor-made and jointly owned cooperation agendas](#) with like-minded partners.

To help advance these foreign policy objectives, Brussels has doubled down on its climate diplomacy engagements seen particularly in the March 2023 [Council conclusions on Climate and Energy Diplomacy](#). The Conclusions reaffirm EU's recognition of "climate change increasing risks to human,

state and regional security and may aggravate conflict drivers and dynamics, as well as dimensions of fragility”. In recognition of the same, the EU has also published a [Concept for an Integrated Approach to Climate and Security](#) expressing the EU’s objective of integrating the climate and security nexus in relevant EU instruments and policies, to ensure comprehensive action plans are designed to meet climate-related security risks.

Similarly, the [EU Climate Adaptation Strategy](#) promotes enhanced climate adaptation measures as a vital solution to address climate-related security risks. The Strategy outlines the pressing need for Brussels to engage and increase cooperation in areas of climate resilience and preparedness, scaling-up climate finance, and support national adaptation plans and policies in partner countries.

With a specific view towards the Indo-pacific, in April 2021, the EU first adopted the [EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#), communicating its intent to building strategic partnerships in the region. As a next step under the Global Gateway strategy, the EU re-articulated an [EU Indo-Pacific Strategy](#) in May 2023 identifying seven main priority areas with a mandate for deeper and stronger EU engagement. Importantly, certain priority areas such as ‘Human Security’ within the strategy document align with many climate-security considerations.

Clearly, there is much policy alignment and political apparatus laying the groundwork and providing the necessary impetus, especially from Brussels’s end, to consider extending a hand of friendship. Complemented with India’s considerable strategic realignment towards the Indo-pacific under the Modi Government, India is increasingly looking to form partnerships with key global powers. As there are also no overarching regional institutional frameworks in the Indo-pacific that bring together Brussels and New Delhi, building strategic partnerships is therefore a natural cooperation pathway for both that is further in concurrence with strategic autonomy strategies of the EU and India. Hence, formalization of a bilateral agreement will meet strategic objectives of both powers, and help the EU and India become nerve centres determining the contours of future activities in the region.

Climate-related security risks affecting India

Despite substantial strategic alignment, at the heart of India’s core motivations behind pursuing a partnership agreement with the EU will be the sheer scale of climate-related security risks affecting the country. On the receiving end of much of the climate-related security risks, India faces a host of complex internal and external security challenges from climate change.

On an inter-state level, border disputes with China and Pakistan dominate the agenda. In this backdrop, climate impacts can heighten tensions and significantly damage relations with neighbouring countries. For instance, disrupted river flow patterns or climate-induced flooding along the Indus river basin and Brahmaputra river basin can instil deep distrust between rivalling states. With considerable dam project activity along the rivers, and acute dependence of communities on river-water resources, erratic water flows or flooding causes misconceptions of [water manipulation heightening security tensions](#).

[Climate-induced migration](#) is another major security challenge for India. Due to floods, cyclones and sea level rise in South Asia, vulnerable populations are often uprooted or forced to migrate in order to adapt and overcome constraints on livelihoods. The inflow of migrants, especially in ethnically-fractionalized contexts can exacerbate underlying social and political tensions and cause intercommunal conflicts or even lead violent clashes. When the [goals, identities and cultures](#) between host and migrant communities clash within exist social, political and economic contexts, it leaves considerable room for conflict aggravation. To put this into context, Indian states of Assam, Nagaland and West Bengal receive many climate-displaced migrants from Bangladesh. With sharp ethno-religious divides between host and migrant communities in northeast India, the region witnesses periodic occurrences of communitarian violence especially involving migrant groups entering from Bangladesh.

Climate change also poses major challenges to internal security in India. In the backdrop of increasing consumption within populations, the effects of climate change are constraining natural resources. Thereby, climate and resource induced pressures are creating situations of tension and competition among federal states over [issues water management and rights irrigation rights](#). Food and water insecurity is another major challenge which can lead to internal hostilities. Majority of the population in India is dependent on the agricultural sector that is highly vulnerable to climate shocks. Intense dry and wet spells of rain, spread of disease, and other forms of environmental degradation are increasingly affecting crop yields and food production overall. These conditions can lead to major instability within communities and harm community-state relations as agriculture-dependent livelihoods suffer from income pressures, and may compete over scarce natural resources risking the outbreak of conflict.

For India, additional internal security challenges emerge when communities face climate-induced livelihood pressures. Populations facing severe economic pressures find recruitment in armed groups to secure access to natural resources or in search of alternative income opportunities. If the state is unable to ameliorate the issues of affected populations that are worsened by extreme climate events, patterns of armed group recruitment tend to exacerbate. These security risks are pressing for India considering major ongoing hostilities such as the [Maoist insurgency or existence of armed groups](#) in Kashmir. Thus, climate impacts are aggravating security situations while decreasing state capacity to address the causes of hostility.

As climate events are becoming more extreme, security situations will worsen over time. For India, this is a major cause for concern since security risks continue to embed themselves, while the country has no climate security policymaking mandate in its domestic and foreign policy. In order to build capacities addressing climate-related security risks, India will urgently need to recognize the saliency and encumbrance of these risks, and engage with partner countries to reduce risks and enhance security across the wider region. The next section will propose several recommendations on potential avenues that ought to be considered and incorporated if the EU and India were to formalize a bilateral agreement addressing these risks.

Avenues for cooperation

The last section of this report will present two broad areas of cooperation for the EU and India to consider as part of the 'EU-India Climate Security Partnership in the Indo-Pacific'. These areas play a critical role in mitigating climate-related security risks, and offer substantive pathways for real cooperation suited for the EU and India.

i. Climate Adaptation

Climate adaptation reduces the vulnerability of communities and ecosystems affected by climate change, and [enhances their ability to cope with and recover from them](#). Building climate resilience leads to increased stability in society since populations build capacities to withstand the effects of climate change without major impacts on livelihoods.

Moreover, climate adaptation efforts can not only prevent or reduce security risks, but certain adaptation strategies can be directed towards facilitating peace. This is possible when adaptation strategies are specifically tailored to suit social, political and economic circumstances in climate-sensitive regions where populations can use and access resources differently. For instance, if adaptation strategies are designed to bolster community livelihoods, or to improve local resource governance, the protection efforts will pervade stability in the region.

Thus, recognizing the saliency of climate adaptation in reducing security risks and enhancing population resilience, the EU and India should consider the following recommendations for cooperation:

- **Design strategies dedicated to climate adaptation.** Key areas to consider are food systems, water management, biodiversity conservation, mangrove restoration among others. All adaptation strategies should be sensitized to fragile-conflict settings in order to avoid aggravating situations.
- **Establish an 'Expert Committee' composed of experts, academicians and civil society representatives belonging from the EU and India for effective knowledge exchanges on climate adaptation.** Together, the EU and India under the partnership should facilitate the creation of regular technical dialogues to allow for most-appropriate adaptation actions and research to be deliberated.
- **Establish a 'Joint Working Group' on climate security.** The EU and India must constitute a Joint Working Group consisting of officials from both parties to ensure strong monitoring and review processes for implementation of adaptation activities mapped under the EU-India climate security partnership.
- **Scale-up climate adaptation finance.** The EU should mobilize financial support for climate adaptation activities that hold major security-risk reduction implications. Improved international adaptation finance can be denominated via the EU-India bilateral channel as part of this climate security partnership to accomplish adaptation activities identified for the region.

- **Expand the geographical scope of Climate-ADAPT to include the Indo-pacific.** Clime-ADAPT is an information platform that guides EU adaptation policy and practice. Expanding its scope will generate important adaptation-relevant data for the Indo-pacific. Utilizing the knowledge and data from Clime-ADAPT can accelerate adaptation activities in the Indo-pacific.
- **Explore opportunities for environmental peacebuilding.** Adaptation can be a valuable mechanism for conflict prevention and mediation. Together, the EU and India must identify adaptation activities in fragile and unstable conflict settings that can build resilience in populations and promote peace.

ii. Climate Risk Assessment and Disaster Risk reduction

Climate risk assessment models and disaster risk reduction efforts play a critical role in preventing climate impacts from gravely affecting populations. With the help of advanced technologies and geo-spatial programmes, it is possible to acquire information for early and coordinated action against climate hazards in order to [protect livelihoods and save lives](#). Other benefits include the support for climate-proofing infrastructures and scaling nature-based solutions that build resilience in climate-vulnerable populations. As populations are able to withstand climate impacts and avoid catastrophes, climate-security risks subdue. Following are some important considerations for the EU and India to cogitate for future cooperation addressing climate-related security risks.

- **Enhancing coordination in early warning systems (EWS) and multi-hazard early warning systems (MHEWS).** To increase community resilience from extreme weather events and elevate disaster preparedness, the EU and India must consider collaborating in EWS and MHEWS. Collaboration in areas of data collection, risk assessment, information dissemination, best practices, technological advancements and innovative approaches concerning early warning systems will ensure better operation and application.
- **Create vulnerability assessment models.** The EU and India should collaborate to create comprehensive vulnerability assessment models that accounts for socio-economic circumstances, climate changes and its projected impacts. Vulnerability assessment will develop an understanding of population exposure to climate hazards. The assessment matrix must be impact-based and people-centric.
- **Establish a ‘Knowledge Network’ on climate security and disaster risk.** To increase cooperation, coordination, and expertise, the EU and India should establish a Knowledge Network to connect scientific and technical experts, enable partnership facilitation opportunities and offer training programmes in the field of climate-related security risks.
- **Scale up EU-funding for prevention, preparedness and humanitarian response projects.** The EU should scale up financial support for the implementation of disaster risk reduction efforts.

Humanitarian aid and assistance for vulnerable and displaced groups in the Indo-pacific will help considerable in improving the economic and livelihood conditions of affected populations.

- **Establish climate-proofing methodology.** India has no official climate-proofing methodology. The EU and India can together design a climate hazard and security risk-friendly methodology. Establishing a taxonomy-of-sorts for infrastructure projects that prepares for and adapts to climate conditions will build resilience and reduce security risks.
- **Incorporating gendered lens to climate security risk assessment.** In trying to identify and understand climate-related security risks, the EU and India must consider applying a gendered and intersectional lens for a deeper understanding of risks, and determine more granular mitigation approaches helping disproportionately affected population groups.