

# Embassy of the State of Palestine

General Delegation  
of Palestine to Australia,  
New Zealand, and the Pacific



**INTERN POLICY REPORT**

**Palestine and the Indo-Pacific:**  
How can the State of Palestine enhance its role  
within the Indo-Pacific region through a bold  
regional policy and approach?

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## **Executive summary**

The Indo-Pacific region is one filled with political and economic opportunities, especially with the rise of global powers such as China, India, Japan and the Southeast Asian countries. Having said that, there are still many states in the region that remain politically disengaged from broader geopolitical interests and networks. Israel and the emerging Palestinian State are competing to establish and maintain bilateral relations with these states, and to join the multilateral organizations, forums and networks in the region to enhance their presence in this part of the world. This policy brief researches in detail what constitutes the Indo-Pacific as a region, its key actors (particularly countries and multilateral organisations), the region's pressing political and economic issues, and the role and influence of both Israel and Palestine vis-a-vis these key actors. Through literature reviews and interviewing key stakeholders, this brief seeks to recommend policies to the Palestinian government that should be enacted in order to fulfil the Statement of Issue.

This brief found that the Indo-Pacific is considered to be a region with much economic and geopolitical importance. The countries that are included in this region are those in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia, as well as Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands. With regard to the Statement of Issue, it has been established that the most influential actors in the region are the US, China, and India, and the main multilateral organisations are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), and the Conference on Co-operation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). Finally, and as previously stated, the outcomes of this research are all potential policy options, the pursual of which will be specifically recommended to the Palestinian government.

## **Statement of issue**

How can the State of Palestine enhance its role within the Indo-Pacific region through a bold regional policy and strategic approach?

## Statement of organisation's interest in this issue

The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific (GDOP) is the diplomatic representation of the State of Palestine in Canberra that: establishes and strengthens relations with government departments and private-sector and civil-society organisations, provides consular services to the Palestinian diaspora community, and informs the wider public on and advocates for Palestine and her interests. There is also a focus on promoting the recognition of Palestine in its mandated countries. With the Indo-Pacific region increasing in importance and global status,<sup>1</sup> this research found that there is some common ground between Palestine and states in the Indo-Pacific region. As the State of Palestine is under Israeli military occupation, and is internationally recognized as being so, economic and political development have been considerably hampered,<sup>2</sup> and so this common ground can be used by Palestine to co-operate, enhance its overall legitimacy, and strengthen and sustain its bilateral and multilateral relations with countries and organizations in the Indo-Pacific region through the development of a bold regional policy and strategic approach.

The objective of this policy research is to therefore suggest an engagement strategy for Palestine by achieving the following: first, expounding the influence of the key actors in the Indo-Pacific region; second, evaluating the role of Palestine in the region; third, suggesting ways in which Palestine can increase its political footprint in the region; fourth, how Palestine can be included in the agendas of the relevant multilateral organisations. Similarly, attention will be given to how Palestine can participate in the forums and conferences of these organisations.

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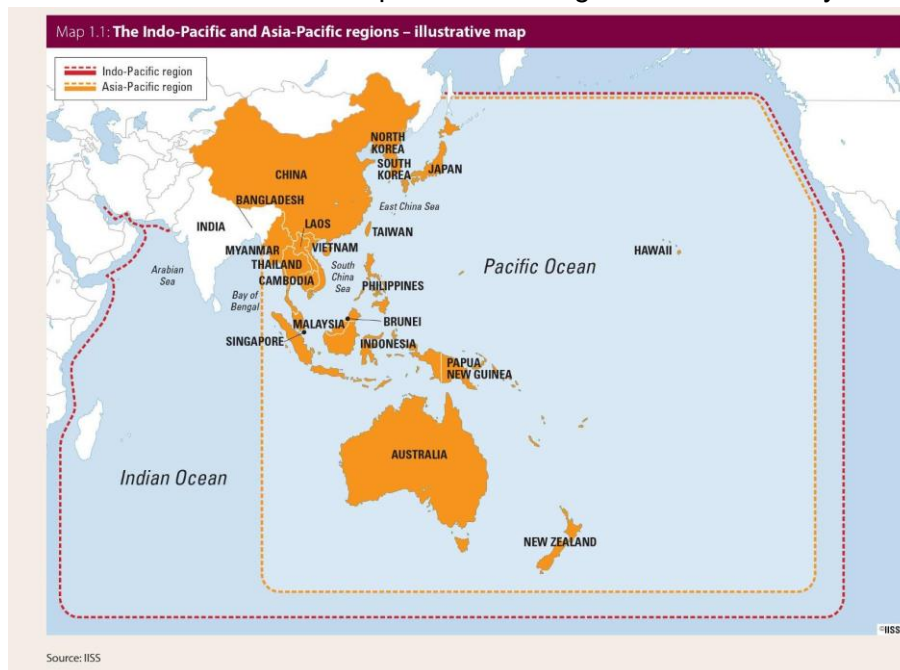
<sup>1</sup> Alexander Pearson, "Why is the United States interested in the 'Indo-Pacific'?", *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, November 11, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-the-united-states-interested-in-the-indo-pacific/a-41335289>.

<sup>2</sup> Mona Chalabi, "How does Palestine's economy work?", *The Guardian*, October 15, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/oct/14/palestine-economy-how-does-it-work>.

## Background

### Indo-Pacific as a region

In order to classify an area as a region, according to Barry Buzan, Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, there are three things that need to be identified. First and foremost, the geography of the region. Geographically, the Indo-Pacific region constitutes all the countries in Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australasia and the Pacific, in addition to South Asian countries including those in the Indian ocean, hence its name (fig. 1.1). The second criterion is high-intensity interaction in the region. The term 'Indo-Pacific' itself was formally coined in 2005 by a United States (US) think tank which was concerned about China's growing military assertiveness in the Indian ocean.<sup>3</sup> China's assertiveness concerned other major countries as well, such as India and Japan, and led to their forming a co-operation to counter Chinese influence, thus increasing interaction in the region.<sup>4</sup> The rising importance of Southeast Asia economically and militarily also feeds into these dynamics and the increasing interaction in the region.<sup>5</sup> The last criterion: a status consciousness of the region. A status consciousness means that the region needs to be recognized both by countries within the region itself and by the international community.<sup>6</sup> Since the term was first formally applied by the US, it has been broadly used by countries in the region at official occasions and through formal publications and correspondence, such as Australia in its Defence and Foreign Policy white papers, Indonesia during a lecture by its foreign minister, and Japan via its foreign minister.<sup>7</sup> The Indo-Pacific therefore qualifies as a region based on Barry Buzan's criteria.



<sup>3</sup> Mercy A. Kuo, "The Origin of 'Indo-Pacific' as Geopolitical Construct," *The Diplomat*, January 25, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-origin-of-indo-pacific-as-geopolitical-construct/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Southeast Asia and the Trump Administration: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 1 (2017): 11. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/docview/1892974229?accountid=8330>.

<sup>6</sup> Barry Buzan, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Dingding Chen, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Background Analysis," *Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/indo-pacific-strategy-background-analysis-201714>.

(fig. 1.1: The Indo-Pacific region from International Institute for Strategic Studies) (<https://medium.com/@angelowijaya/refocusing-strategy-time-for-an-indo-pacific-region-deae9b1ba6d1>)

## **A prominent issue in the Indo-Pacific: The US-China nexus**

### *Trade War*

In July 2018, US President Trump imposed a 25% tariff on 818 Chinese goods worth \$34 billion, and applied it to more Chinese goods in the following months<sup>8</sup>. This imposition was presumed to be based on three reasons: first, China's massive trade surplus; second, the allegations that China was deliberately saturating Western markets with inferior goods; and third, the fear of China's rise to global-power status.<sup>9</sup> In retaliation, China applied import tariffs on US automotive and agricultural goods worth \$50 billion.<sup>10</sup> This tit-for-tat tariff imposition marked the beginning of a strained relationship between Trump and Chinese President Xi.

The US-China trade war bore negative implications for both countries, as well as for the region. The trade war is, consequently, beginning to reach a truce. The US's previous trade deficit with China has only widened (and significantly) since the trade war. This is due to the replacement of cheap Chinese imports with more expensive ones from other countries.<sup>11</sup> It also resulted in more job losses in the US. Likewise, China's soybean and automotive industries also bled from the import tariffs, suffering from the lack of supply and the mounting cost of capital.<sup>12</sup> Aside from China and the US, the trade war also triggered a decrease in the overall trade growth of the Indo-Pacific, and could have led to a financial crash in the regional market.<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, the Chinese Ministry of Finance announced that China, from January 2019, would start to alleviate the tariff percentages on US automotive spare parts.<sup>14</sup> In response, the US will not continue with its original plan of tariff impositions, and will also refrain from increasing tariffs on Chinese goods.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Pramuk, "Trump to slap 25% tariffs on up to \$50 billion of Chinese goods; China retaliates," Politics, CNBC, 15 June 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/15/trump-administration-to-slap-a-25-percent-tariff-on-50-billion-of-chinese-goods-threatens-more.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Tao Liu and Wing Thye Woo, "Understanding the U.S.-China Trade War," *China Economic Journal* 11, no. 3 (4 October 2018): 320.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Schoen and Jacob Pramuk, "This timeline shows how the US-China trade war led to the latest round of talks in Beijing," CNBC, 6 January 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/04/timeline-of-us-china-trade-war-and-trump-tariffs-as-talks-in-beijing-start.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence J. Lau, "A Better Alternative to a Trade War," *China and the World* 1, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Dorcas Wong and Alexander Chipman Koty, "The US-China Trade War: A Timeline," Topics, China Briefing, 1 February 2019, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>.

<sup>13</sup> Shihoko Goto, "What do US-China tensions mean for Asia?," World Economic Forum, 6 December 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/how-will-the-us-china-trade-war-impact-asia/>.

<sup>14</sup> "The State Council Tariff Commission issued an announcement deciding to suspend US Automotive spare parts," Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China, 14 December 2018, [http://gss.mof.gov.cn/zhengwuxinxi/gongzuodongtai/201812/t20181214\\_3093440.html](http://gss.mof.gov.cn/zhengwuxinxi/gongzuodongtai/201812/t20181214_3093440.html).

<sup>15</sup> Dorcas Wong and Alexander Chipman Koty, "The US-China Trade War: A Timeline," Topics, China Briefing, 1 February 2019, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>.

## South China Sea

The South China Sea possesses economic and geopolitical importance to countries in the Indo-Pacific, especially as \$5.3 trillion worth of goods is traded across the sea annually<sup>16</sup>. There are disputed territorial claims over the islands in the South China Sea, involving mostly by China and some Southeast Asian countries. To exercise its leadership as the hegemon, the US conducts the Freedom of Navigation Operations Program (FONOP) to ensure that countries with disputed claims in the Sea still adhere to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Recently, it has been observed that there are increasing tensions between the US and China in the South China Sea. As China continues to rise in the global economy, it is simultaneously expanding its military power, and has aggressively showcased this force in the South China Sea. Since 2014, China has released over 100 military choppers, maritime vessels and fighter jets from their own territories to areas further north, crossing Vietnam's sovereign territory<sup>17</sup>. As of 2017, China has also constructed at least three harbors and twenty military camps in the disputed Paracel Islands.<sup>18</sup> These unilateral, militaristic advancements have boosted China's status in the region, threatening the US's once-firm leadership.

In response, the US has intensified training and workshops with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) to strengthen the maritime security capabilities of Southeast Asian countries<sup>19</sup>. The US also heightened its security interaction with Vietnam, the Philippines, India, and Indonesia. In March 2018, US Naval ships and aircraft carriers arrived in Da Nang city, which marked the largest US military presence in Vietnam after the Vietnam War<sup>20</sup>. The US did the same with the Philippines, through its '2+2' dialogue and military aid<sup>21</sup>, and with India and Indonesia, through the intensifying of joint military exercises<sup>22</sup>. All of this shows that the US is prepared to be more assertive in inhibiting China's rise, and, from these interactions, it can be concluded that the South China Sea is among the most prominent flashpoints in the US-China nexus.

### US-China and the Pacific Islands

The latest battleground for the US-China conflict is in the Pacific islands. The conflict started with China's plan to increase its diplomatic efforts in these countries to both limit Taiwan's international influence and obtain more sources of raw materials by increasing its economic bind with the Pacific islands through trade, aid, investment, and tourism. This has made it an important actor in the Pacific islands, and one that now

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<sup>16</sup> Satu P. Limaye, "ASEAN matters for America/ America matters for ASEAN," *East-West Center* (2017): 14.

<sup>17</sup> Irene Chan and Mingjiang Li, "New Chinese Leadership, New Policy in the South China Sea Dispute?" *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20, no. 1 (16 January 2015): 35.

<sup>18</sup> "Update: China's Continuing Reclamation in the Paracels," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 9 August, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/paracels-beijings-other-buildup/>.

<sup>19</sup> Aileen Baviera and Larry Maramis, *Building Asean Community: Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Reflections*, (Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2017), 152.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Maresca, "U.S. 'supercarrier' USS Carl Vinson makes historic port call in Vietnam," News, USA Today, 5 March 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/03/05/uss-carl-vinson-arrives-vietnam/394324002/>.

<sup>21</sup> Euan Graham, "Southeast Asia in the US Rebalance: Perceptions from a Divided Region," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 3 (December 2013): 313.

<sup>22</sup> PTI, "India, United States to carry out joint military exercise on September 16," News, The Economic Times, 11 September 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-united-states-to-carry-out-joint-military-exercise-on-september-16/articleshow/65771735.cms>.



rivals the US.<sup>23</sup> The US, along with the allied powers (Australia, France and Britain), responded by increasing its diplomatic establishments in the Pacific, such as opening new embassies and increasing staff at existing missions.<sup>24</sup> The Pacific countries are being used as a battleground for influence by the US and China as they each have a vote at international organisations (especially the UN), as well as an abundance of natural resources such as fisheries and oil.<sup>25</sup> This conflict could further strain the Indo-Pacific region as the Pacific countries become directly involved in the US-China battle for geopolitical influence.

While the US is increasing its efforts in the Pacific countries in order to gain influence in the region, it seems that China's influence still overpowers that of the US. During the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Conference in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in November of 2018, China's President, Xi Jinping, elevated his influence by giving \$4 billion worth of infrastructure aid to PNG.<sup>26</sup> On top of the aid, the absence of President Donald Trump and Xi's apparent indifference to other global leaders at the conference<sup>27</sup> are other indications that China is still ahead of the US and the allied powers in terms of geopolitical influence in the Pacific countries.

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<sup>23</sup> Ethan Meick, Michelle Ker, Han May Chan, *China's Engagement in the Pacific Islands: Implications for the United States*, (Washington: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Staff Research Report, 2018), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Colin Packham, "To counter China, West plans bigger footprint in Pacific: sources," *Reuters*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pacific-diplomacy/to-counter-china-west-plans-bigger-footprint-in-pacific-sources-idUSKCN1LE0PM>.

<sup>25</sup> Kerry K. Gershaneck, "China's plan for conquest of the South Pacific," *Asia Times*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2018/09/article/chinas-plan-for-conquest-of-the-south-pacific/>.

<sup>26</sup> John Lee, "China hoped for a soft power win at APEC, instead Xi Jinping left dissatisfied," *CNN*, November 19, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/18/asia/china-apec-analysis-intl/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Simon Tisdall, "Despite Apec drama, China is winning the fight for the Pacific, step by patient step," *The Guardian*, November 20, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/20/despite-apec-drama-china-is-winning-the-fight-for-the-pacific-step-by-patient-step>.

## **Prominent Countries in the Indo-Pacific**

### *The United States*

The US recently experienced a change of leadership which significantly affected its foreign relations. The US inaugurated its 45th President in 2017, Donald Trump. Trump is regarded as a protectionist, prioritizing domestic issues and interests above foreign policy, as seen with his 'America First' policy<sup>28</sup>. In contrast to the 44th US president, Barack Obama, Trump prefers, for a variety of reasons, bilateralism over multilateralism – a position which runs against the interests and functions of the many multilateral organisations in the Indo-Pacific, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Trump is a realist if defined according to international relations theory, which means he believes that the US should only co-operate with other nations who share similar interests<sup>29</sup>. In accordance with his realist view of the world, Trump is hostile towards China because of its expansionist policies in the Indo-Pacific, its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (which incidentally involves Israel as a willing participant), and its having the second-largest economy in the world. Under Trump, therefore, the US views China as a competitor instead of an ally<sup>30</sup>.

### *China*

China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region largely hinges on its economic interactions. China's most prominent economic interaction in the region is its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). The BRI launched around 2013 when Chinese President Xi Jinping started visiting multiple Central and Southeast Asian countries, as well as European, Middle Eastern, and African countries<sup>31</sup>. During his visits, he proposed a regional economic and infrastructure model, the BRI, and asked these countries to support it<sup>32</sup>. The BRI is planned to be fully implemented before the year 2020<sup>33</sup>, and will be the world's biggest multilateral trade network with the highest economic interactions<sup>34</sup>.

Within the Indo-Pacific region, the BRI sparked several controversies. Countries like the US and Australia argued that the BRI is designed to challenge the US's influence in the region, and would disrupt the "US-led liberal order"<sup>35</sup>. In contradiction, China, backed by a few countries like Cambodia and Vietnam, clarified that the BRI would increase interconnectedness in the region and promote greater economic

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<sup>28</sup> Tamara Coffman Wittes, "Trump's 'America First' is America the Small," *Brookings*, June 2, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/06/02/trumps-america-first-is-america-the-small/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Perez, "China Is Confronting New U.S. Hostility. But Is It Ready for the Fight?," *New York Times*, September 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/23/world/asia/china-us-trade-war.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Christina Lin, "The Belt and Road and China's Long-Term Visions in the Middle East," *ISPSW Strategy Series*, no. 512 (October 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Yiping Huang, "Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment," *China Economic Review* 40 (30 July 2016): 314.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> B K Sharma and Nivedita Das Kundu, "One Belt One Road: China's Perspective," In *China's One Belt One Road : Initiative, Challenges and Prospects*, (New Delhi: Vij Books India Private Limited, 2016), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Dziedzic, "Why Australia wants to build its own 'Belt and Road' scheme with Japan and the US to rival China's investment," *Politics*, ABC News, 1 August 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-31/australia-japan-us-alternative-to-china-belt-and-road-initiative/10055060>.

interdependence, two things that are consistent with any liberal order”<sup>36</sup>. Most countries, such as those in the Middle East, and India, Indonesia, Thailand, and most European countries, have seen value in China’s arguments<sup>37</sup>.

## *India*

“We talk about ‘Indo-Pacific’ in part because that phrase captures the importance of India’s rise.” That was the statement made by the Trump administration in 2018 which began the mainstreaming of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’.<sup>38</sup> India has significantly increased its bargaining power on the global stage since its independence in 1947. India’s GDP has approximately increased seventy-fold from 1960 to 2018, making it the seventh-largest economy in the world, and its population increased approximately four times from 1950 to 2018, making it the second-largest country in the world.<sup>39</sup> Other than its remarkable economic growth, India’s non-interventionist and multilateral agenda fits comfortably with the rise of multilateral organisations in the Indo-Pacific,<sup>40</sup> such as ASEAN and APEC. Most importantly, however, the narrative of a strong India is strongly backed by the US and its allies, such as Australia and Japan, as it provides a counterbalance and even a pushback to China’s supposedly aggressive rise on the global stage.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Zheping Huang, “China got 30 countries to take a stand on climate change and protectionism- mostly tiny ones,” Quartz, 16 May 2017, <https://qz.com/984399/obor-china-got-30-countries-to-take-a-stand-on-climate-change-and-protectionism-mostly-tiny-ones/>.

<sup>37</sup> Zheping Huang, “China’s summit for its new Silk Road is missing 44 heads of state from the 65 nations involved,” Quartz, 12 May 2017, <https://qz.com/982202/chinas-summit-for-its-new-silk-road-is-missing-44-heads-of-state-from-the-65-nations-involved/>.

<sup>38</sup> PTI, “Donald Trump: ‘Indo-Pacific’ over ‘Asia-Pacific’ reflects India’s rise: US official,” *The Economic Times India Times*, July 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indo-pacific-over-asia-pacific-reflects-indias-rise-us-official/articleshow/61519684.cms>.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Wright, “8 things you need to know about India’s economy,” *World Economic Forum*, October 1, 2017, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/eight-key-facts-about-indias-economy-in-2017/>.

<sup>40</sup> Samir Saran, “As a rising global power, what is India’s vision for the world?,” *World Economic Forum*, August 14, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/what-is-indias-vision-for-the-world-modi/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## **Multilateral organisations in the Indo-Pacific: ASEAN, APEC, and CEAPAD**

### *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)*

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, commonly referred to as APEC, is a regional economic conference conducted to recognise and to harness the increasing economic interdependence of the Asia-Pacific region in order to increase economic growth. APEC was initiated by Australia in 1989, and as of 2018, had twenty-one member-countries.<sup>42</sup> Its key members include powerful economies in the Asia-Pacific<sup>43</sup>, such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam.<sup>44</sup> It is worth mentioning, for the purpose of this research, that most of APEC's members are firm supporters of Palestine.

APEC has grown to become one of the most significant regional forums in the Asia-Pacific. As a result of APEC's work, real GDP in the region has increased by USD 23 trillion from 1989 to 2015.<sup>45</sup> In its 29 years of existence, APEC has also managed to achieve other significant milestones, such as reducing tariffs in the region by 12%, increasing the ease of doing business in the region by 14.8%, and promoting trade in environmental goods by reducing trade barriers and increasing the markets for them.<sup>46</sup>

The last conference of APEC was held in PNG in 2018 and witnessed huge disagreements between China and the USA. As a result, it was not able to issue a final, joint statement.

### *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, commonly referred to as ASEAN, is an organization established in 1967 to promote regional unity and prosperity. Since then, the number of ASEAN member states has grown to include ten Southeast Asian countries, and its external partners include East Asian, European, and Western countries. The most prominent external partners are China, South Korea, India, Japan, US, EU, and Australia<sup>47</sup>. Based on the frequency of ASEAN's interactions, it is known to be the most crucial organization in the region<sup>48</sup>. ASEAN's interactions are based on three pillars: politico-security, economy, and socio-cultural development. For politico-security, under Singapore's chairmanship, ASEAN prioritizes counterterrorism, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and confidence building in the South China Sea<sup>49</sup>. For the economy, ASEAN seeks to increase economic liberalism, particularly

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<sup>42</sup> "About APEC," Asia-Pacific Economic Forum, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC>.

<sup>43</sup> "Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," Countries & Regions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, last modified March 2, 2014, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/me\\_a/me1/palestine/page24e\\_000038.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/palestine/page24e_000038.html).

<sup>44</sup> "History," Asia-Pacific Economic Forum, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC/History>.

<sup>45</sup> "Achievements and Benefits," Asia-Pacific Economic Forum, accessed December 5, 2018, <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC/Achievements-and-Benefits>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> "ASEAN External Relations," ASEAN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, <https://asean.org/asean/external-relations/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Asia-Pacific: Regional Organizations," Mappings, Youthpolicy.org, <http://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouthfunding/asia-pacific/regional/>.

<sup>49</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship: What's on the Security Agenda?," Asia Defense, The Diplomat, 17 April 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/singapores-asean-chairmanship-whats-on-the-security-agenda/>.

through infrastructure<sup>50</sup> and innovation in research and technology<sup>51</sup>. On the pillar of socio-cultural development, ASEAN promotes human rights and environmental protection<sup>52</sup>.

*The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)*

The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, commonly referred to as CEAPAD, was initiated by Japan and formally established in 2013.<sup>53</sup> The goal of the conference is for countries and organisations to share their experiences, increase understanding, and provide assistance to Palestine in its ongoing development process.<sup>54</sup> The ultimate objective and measure of success of this conference, however, is to produce workable strategies for achieving the two-state solution.<sup>55</sup> The forum consists of thirteen member countries and four international organisations. The thirteen members are: Japan, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, Singapore, Laos, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, and Palestine. The four international organisations are: The United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and the United Nations' Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).<sup>56</sup> Because its members are strong economically, politically, and militarily in the international sphere, and coupled with the greater awareness of the importance of the Israel-Palestine conflict, CEAPAD has the potential to increase its relevance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Since its establishment, CEAPAD has conducted a total of three conferences. In all of them, the member states and key organizations discussed the political developments concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict, some economic strategies for more efficient state-building in Palestine, methods to increase the frequency of interaction among their members, and the reiteration of the commitment of the organization.

The first CEAPAD conference was convened in Tokyo in 2013. It focused on channeling the different interests of the member countries into one commitment: **'To provide effective assistance to the Palestinians through exchange of knowledge and resources'**<sup>57</sup>. The members also affirmed their full

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<sup>50</sup> Lee Jones, "Explaining the Failure of the Asean Economic Community: The Primacy of Domestic Political Economy," *The Pacific Review* 29, no. 5 (2016): 661.

<sup>51</sup> Capannelli, Giovanni. "The Asean Economy in the Regional Context: Opportunities, Challenges, and Policy Options." In *ADB Working Paper Series on Regional Economic Integration*, (Asian Development Bank, 2014): 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Asean Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025*, (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> "Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," Regional Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, last modified February 14, 2013, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/palestine/ceapad\\_20130214.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/palestine/ceapad_20130214.html).

<sup>54</sup> "Press Release : Thailand to Host the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development," Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, last modified June 18, 2018, <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/90621-Thailand-to-Host-the-Third-Ministerial-Meeting-of.html>.

<sup>55</sup> "Joint Statement The Third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, last modified June 27, 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000377305.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)."

<sup>57</sup> "Joint Statement: The Third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," edited by Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018).

support for the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity – a Japanese-proposed, agro-industrial park to ease the distribution and transport of goods to and from the West Bank and the Gulf states via Jordan<sup>58</sup>.

In 2014, Indonesia hosted the second CEAPAD conference, concentrating on capacity building and the Palestinian private sector. The second conference outlined several capacity training programmes to share with the Palestinian Authority<sup>59</sup>. For the Palestinian private sector, the conference agreed to engage the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, an international organisation of south-south cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea, to provide assistance programmes for Palestinian businesses and start-ups<sup>60</sup>. Member states also agreed to organise trade facilitation programmes for the Palestinian private sector, most notably trade fairs, expos and workshops, in their respective countries<sup>61</sup>.

In 2018, the third conference was held in Thailand and covered both the various contributions of each member state and the mooted incentives to improve Palestine's information, communication, and technology sectors<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> "Japan's Concept for Creating the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity (Background Paper)," Regional Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, July 2006, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/wef/2009/fact2.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> "Joint Statement: The Third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," edited by Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, (Jakarta: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> "Joint Statement: The Third Ministerial Meeting of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)," edited by Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018).



## **US on the Israel-Palestine conflict**

Regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, Trump, as a realist, is staunchly and unapologetically pro-Israel, proven by, among other things, the recent decision by his administration to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem<sup>63</sup>. Aside from the alliance and Israel's strong security position in the Middle East<sup>64</sup>, Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are in harmony when it comes to Iran, unlike Obama.<sup>65</sup>

In regards to Palestine, the US does not recognise the existence of the State of Palestine, despite the overwhelming 2012 UN General Assembly vote to recognise it as a non-member observer state<sup>66</sup>. In addition to the hostile stance towards the Palestinians by moving the US embassy, Trump has also cut all aid to UNRWA, the largest refugee agency for Palestinians<sup>67</sup>. Moreover, it cut official ties with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) when it shut down its office in Washington in September 2018<sup>68</sup>. However, the possibility of future US support for Palestine from the Democratic Party remains, which in recent years has shown a tendency to be less uncritically pro-Israel and more vocal in opposing Israel's occupation and treatment of Palestinians<sup>69</sup>.

## **China on the Israel-Palestine conflict**

Over the years, China has been supportive of Palestine and its attempts to secure rights and international status. In the 1960s, China was the first non-Arab country that interacted diplomatically with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)<sup>70</sup>. In all the resolutions concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict in the United Nations General Assembly, China has always voted alongside Palestine. China has also hosted three symposiums to assist Palestinian and Israeli politicians and advocates in achieving a peaceful two-state solution on the 1967 borders<sup>71</sup>. This in itself proves that China is in favor of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

China's support of Palestine has continued under the Xi Jinping administration. In December 2018, the Chinese Ambassador to the UN stated that his country believes that the Palestinian people must receive

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<sup>63</sup> Laurie Kellman, "Trump closing Palestinian mission in pro-Israel move," *AP News*, September 11, 2018, <https://apnews.com/22ab439a410042169cf96b0612fb8e5a>.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Zunes, "Why the U.S. Supports Israel," *Institute for Policy Studies*, May 1, 2002, [https://ips-dc.org/why\\_the\\_us\\_supports\\_israel/](https://ips-dc.org/why_the_us_supports_israel/).

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "What will the Trump presidency mean for Israel?," *BBC News*, February 3, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38856289>.

<sup>66</sup> Zack Beauchamp, "Why are the US and Israel so friendly?," *Vox*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080080/israel-palestine-us-alliance>.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Beaumont and Oliver Holmes, "Trump aid cuts hitting Palestinians hard, agencies warn," *The Guardian*, August 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/aug/30/trump-aid-cuts-hitting-palestinians-hard-agencies-warn>.

<sup>68</sup> Reuters, "Trump administration announces closure of Washington PLO office," *Al Jazeera News*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/trump-administration-close-plo-office-washington-dc-180910064915646.html>.

<sup>69</sup> KC Johnson, "Why Democrats are abandoning Israel," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/08/18/why-democrats-have-soured-on-israel/?utm\\_term=.b920437bc5ad](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/08/18/why-democrats-have-soured-on-israel/?utm_term=.b920437bc5ad).

<sup>70</sup> John K. Cooley, "China and the Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 19.

<sup>71</sup> Charlotte Gao, "China Takes Bigger Role in Palestine-Israel Issue as UN Rejects Trump's Jerusalem Move," *Flashpoints, The Diplomat*, 22 December 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-takes-bigger-role-in-palestine-israel-issue-as-un-rejects-trumps-jerusalem-move/>.

their legitimate national rights, and that it supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital<sup>72</sup>. He also emphasised that a peaceful resolution of the conflict is a primary way to achieve peace in the Middle East<sup>73</sup>. Furthermore, out of respect for Palestine's internal affairs, the Chinese government has so far refrained from referring to Hamas as a terrorist group<sup>74</sup>. This was recently seen by China's negative vote on the 2018 UN General Assembly resolution: 'Activities of Hamas and Other Militant Groups in Gaza' which condemned Hamas for "repeatedly firing rockets into Israel and for inciting violence, thereby putting civilians at risk".<sup>75</sup> In conclusion, China, until now, continues to align its foreign policy in support of Palestine.

Despite its support for Palestine, China does have growing relations with Israel. As China's total trade with the Arab countries is around USD 171 billion, its long-standing support of Palestine is often argued to be part of China's effort to maintain and enhance its economic relationships with these countries. But, as Israel possesses greater economic importance globally, China has taken this opportunity to increase its economic interactions with Israel, particularly in the purchasing of military equipment and other technologies (Israel is now China's second-biggest weapons supplier).<sup>76</sup> Moreover, following the fourth meeting of the China-Israel Innovation Committee, there are indications of new military and technological investments between the two countries, which are seen to be increasingly more beneficial than China's existing investments with the Arab countries<sup>77</sup>.

As a result of all this, China is being careful not to overtly condemn or support either side in the long-running conflict. This is clear in China's 2017 four-point peace proposal, which is far less direct and specific than a similar one released in 2013.<sup>78</sup> However, with the Arab states still possessing great importance and trade potential to China, and in view of the long-standing relationship between China and Palestine, the latter still has an opportunity to maintain and further strengthen China's support.

### **India on the Israel-Palestine conflict**

India and Israel have a good relationship, particularly in the market of military technology. Nearly 45% of Israeli defense exports go to India<sup>79</sup>. For this reason, in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Israel, with this being later reciprocated when Netanyahu visited India on an official trip. These two visits further strengthened their relationship as both sides signed and exchanged a total of seven MoUs and nine other agreements in multiple sectors, including technological innovation, agriculture, space science,

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<sup>72</sup> "Statement by Ambassador Wu Haitao at the Security Council Debate on the Palestinian Question," Meetings & Statements, Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 25 January 2018, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/hyyfy/t1533667.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ramzy Baroud and Romana Rubeo, "Will China abandon the Palestinians?," Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/china-abandon-palestinians-181020114611052.html>.

<sup>75</sup> "US resolution to condemn activities of Hamas voted down in General Assembly," Peace and Security, UN News, 6 December 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027881>.

<sup>76</sup> Elliott Abrams, "What's Behind Israel's Growing Ties With China," In *Expert Brief*, (Council of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

<sup>77</sup> (Ramzy Baroud and Romana Rubeo, "Will China abandon the Palestinians?," Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/china-abandon-palestinians-181020114611052.html>).

<sup>78</sup> AP and Toi Staff, "China pushes four-point Israeli-Palestinian peace plan," The Times of Israel, 1 August 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/china-pushes-four-point-israeli-palestinian-peace-plan/>.

<sup>79</sup> Kadira Pethiyagoda, "Time for India to Play a Role in Israel-Palestine Peace," The Diplomat, 17 February 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/time-for-india-to-play-a-role-in-israel-palestine-peace/>.



transportation, medicine, and film production<sup>80</sup>. The India-Israel CEO forum also conducted its first meeting, resulting in twelve MoUs being signed worth over US \$4.3 billion between Indian and Israeli companies<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, the 'India-Israel Innovation Bridge' was recently established to promote Israeli investments in India. These new agreements and initiatives signify a notable increase in bilateral co-operation between India and Israel, which has the potential to firm up India's position on the conflict in favor of Israel, or at least make it more sympathetic to the Jewish state and her ambitions.

Despite this, India and Israel are still seen to have different value systems. India remains a supporter of the Palestinian cause and, specifically, of the Palestinians' internationally recognized right to self-determination. While Israel tends to align its policies with Western values, India prefers a multipolar world with no overarching values<sup>82</sup>. Thus, in 1974, against the position of most Western countries, India was the first non-Arab state to refer to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the ultimate representative of the Palestinian people<sup>83</sup>. Also, like China, India has been consistent in its voting in favor of Palestine in relevant resolutions at UN fora<sup>84</sup>. India has also financed multiple construction projects in Palestine such as schools, libraries and technological training institutions. The India-Palestine relationship is further manifested in demography; the vast majority of Indian Muslims support Palestine. Through the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other initiatives, they have been in recent time vocal advocates of the Palestinian cause, frequently lobbying the Indian government to adopt firmly pro-Palestine foreign-policy positions<sup>85</sup>. The organisations that are affiliated with BDS come mainly from within the Muslim community in India, such as the India-Palestine People's Solidarity Forum<sup>86</sup>.

This friendship makes it difficult for India to withdraw its support for Palestine. In fact, under Prime Minister Modi, India and Palestine are establishing new ties. This current relationship can be represented by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's awarding Modi the highest civilian honour, the Grand Collar of the State of Palestine, in 2018. It is also worth noting that Modi is the first prime minister to have visited Palestine. During his visit he announced six new projects for the West Bank, the greatest in monetary value being the construction of the India-Palestine Super-Specialty Hospital at Beit Sahour in the Bethlehem Governorate<sup>87</sup>. Modi also announced an increase in both the number of India's annual scholarships for Palestinian students and India's contribution to UNRWA<sup>88</sup>. This firming up of the India-Palestine relationship is argued to be largely due to India's high and ever-increasing dependency on the imports of oil and natural gas from the Middle East. In conclusion, and in view of these developments, Palestine has the opportunity to turn this linkage with India into something broader and longer-term if and when it achieves statehood.

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<sup>80</sup> Tamar Lafontaine, "Why do Israelis flock to India," Israel News, The Jerusalem Post, 8 December 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Mother-India-573686>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kadira Pethiyagoda, "Time for India to Play a Role in Israel-Palestine Peace," The Diplomat, 17 February 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/time-for-india-to-play-a-role-in-israel-palestine-peace/>.

<sup>83</sup> "India-Palestine Relations," In *Documents of Ministry of External Affairs*, (Government of India, 2018)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Guy Burton, "Explaining India's Position on Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," Middle East Institute, 13 March 2018, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/explaining-indias-position-jerusalem-and-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

<sup>86</sup> Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions National Committee, "16 Million-Strong Organization in India Joins the BDS Movement," Update, BDS, 23 October 2017, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/16-million-strong-organization-india-joins-bds-movement>.

<sup>87</sup> "List of MoUs/Agreements signed during visit of Prime Minister to Palestine," In *Bilateral/ Multilateral Documents*, (Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India, 2018).

<sup>88</sup> "India Strongly Supports The Cause of Palestine, Says PM Modi," Press Trust of India, NDTV, 29 November 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/prime-minister-narendra-modi-says-india-strongly-supports-the-cause-of-palestine-1955453>.

## **Israel and multilateral organisations in the Indo-Pacific**

While Israel does not have an official relationship with any multilateral organisation in the Indo-Pacific, such as ASEAN or APEC, it has established bilateral relations with several countries in Southeast Asia because of its strong economic growth and their largely unexploited markets.<sup>89</sup> Even though there is a clear barrier between Israel and some countries in Southeast Asia, i.e. those with a Muslim majority, economic co-operation in the form of trade still exists and is increasing as Israel continues to sell its expertise in areas of technological, agricultural, medical, and cultural development.<sup>90</sup> For instance, even though they don't have official diplomatic relations, Israel listed Malaysia as its seventh largest export market in 2013, valued at 1.5 billion USD.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, "Israel and ASEAN Relations: Opportunities and Obstacles," *Huffington Post*, November 25, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/muhammad-zulfikar-rakhmat/israel-and-asean-relation\\_b\\_8608342.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer\\_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_c\\_s=RpK9SwGM-yFHFToxTSQERQ](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/muhammad-zulfikar-rakhmat/israel-and-asean-relation_b_8608342.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_c_s=RpK9SwGM-yFHFToxTSQERQ).

<sup>90</sup> Benedict Lynn and Grace Tate, "Israel's Economic Relationship with the Asia-Pacific, Part 2: India and ASEAN," *Asia Briefing*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.asiabriefing.com/news/2015/01/israels-economic-relationship-asia-pacific-part-2-india-asean/>.

<sup>91</sup> Rakhmat, "Israel and ASEAN relations."

## **Palestine and multilateral organisations in the Indo-Pacific**

### *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)*

APEC is primarily focused on economic initiatives for its member countries<sup>92</sup> and does not have an interest in conflicts outside its region. APEC does not, therefore, have any established connections with Palestine. However, Palestine can establish a connection with APEC by being an observer either through the participation of Palestinian businesses, or through direct political co-operation with the forum based on its capacity building initiative.

### *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*

ASEAN is focused on promoting regional trust, peace, and prosperity. It seeks to increase the status of its members on the international stage, and thus, to be a dialogue partner of ASEAN, the country must share and assist in achieving ASEAN's vision<sup>93</sup>. The specific definition of 'assisting' remains vague, and so far, Germany is the only country that has satisfied this criterion<sup>94</sup>. Similarly, the criteria to be accepted as an observer member state or guests of ASEAN meetings are unclear. Timor-Leste, for instance, applied for membership in 2011 but is still not an observer state, only a guest. For this reason, and since there is currently no relationship between Palestine and ASEAN, it is improbable for Palestine to be admitted to ASEAN's meetings as a dialogue partner, observer, or guest. Nevertheless, through beneficial south-south co-operation with ASEAN, Palestine can still expand its interaction with the organisation.

### *The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)*

Through CEAPAD, the members of the forum have suggested many initiatives and committed considerable financial resources to help Palestine's development. A few of the many contributions are:<sup>95</sup>

- Japan led the training of 700 Palestinians after the second CEAPAD conference, including 130 in East and Southeast Asia. It also provided \$21m worth of development aid for the agro-industrial park, which has so far created more than 200 jobs for Palestinians and is estimated to create an extra 3,400 jobs in the near future. (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/asean-plus/30348782>)
- Korea conducted seminar and trainings, while Thailand, in co-operation with Japan, ran study trips and training sessions for Palestinians to help them effectively promote and facilitate tourism in Palestine. Thailand and Japan have agreed to finance and oversee an additional two training courses on tourism for Palestinians. (<http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/90621-Thailand-to-Host-the-Third-Ministerial-Meeting-of.html>)
- Since 2013, Singapore has hosted a total of four study visits for Palestinian students. It has also launched a five-year technical programme, worth 5 million SGD, for Palestinians to visit various educational institutions and to develop, through training packages, similar models in Palestine.

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<sup>92</sup> "Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)," Australian Government: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/organisations/apec/Pages/asia-pacific-economic-cooperation-apec.aspx>.

<sup>93</sup> Moe Thuzar, "What Does It Take to Join Asean?," *Yusof Ishak Institute Analyse Current Events*, no. 36 (2017): 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> "Outcome Document of the CEAPAD Senior Officials Meeting," edited by Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, (Hakone: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016).

<https://www1.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2014/02/MFA-Press-Statement-Visit-by-Senior-Minister-of-State-for-Foreign-Affairs-and-Home-Affairs-Masagos-Z>

- Since 2008, Indonesia has held 143 programs for 1,364 Palestinians on good governance, agriculture, sports, diplomatic training, tourism and antiquities, archive management, and religion.
- Vietnam has completed its training courses for Palestinian police officers and continues its annual scholarships for Palestinian students. It has also contributed to Palestine's agriculture and education sectors.

In summary, the CEAPAD, by employing an integrated and streamlined model which utilizes what its members have to offer, has taken concrete actions to foster a more effective state-building process in Palestine.

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## Policy options

### *The US*

As mentioned in the background, the US's Democratic Party has a tendency to be less pro-Israel than its Republican counterpart. According to the Pew Research Center, 25% of members of the Democratic Party now sympathize with Palestinians over Israel, while 27% of the party sympathize with Israel over Palestine, creating a 25:27 ratio that is much closer in margin than what it was in 2016 where the ratio was 29:43.<sup>96</sup> Democrats tend to favor the two-state solution, and progressive Democratic members of the House of Reps, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, criticize the Israeli 'occupation of Palestine'.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, two thirds of Democratic members in the Senate, including prominent members such as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, have also condemned the US embassy move to Jerusalem and the cessation of aid to UNRWA<sup>98</sup>. With this in view, Palestine can:

#### 1. Build co-operation with Democrats

Show them support by thanking them for promoting the viable two-state solution and establish regular correspondence via e-mail or on other platforms of communication. Establishing a working relationship with the Democrats is important as it reassures them that Palestine recognizes and appreciates their efforts, and that by working together, both sides can strengthen their positions and refine their arguments. Palestinians actively working with the Democrats might also help to curtail public hostility in America towards Palestine and her ambitions, and firm up support for a two-state solution.

Another avenue for the Palestinian government would be to work closely with J Street, a liberal, secular advocacy organisation that promotes the merits of a two-state solution. While it is pro-Israel, it works closely with the Democratic party and frequently denounces Israeli policies that further suffocate a two-state solution. Palestine can therefore:

#### 2. Build co-operation with J Street

As with the Democrats, Palestine should establish an official and meaningful relationship with J Street and similar lobby groups that advocate a two-state solution. J Street is one of the few organisations that genuinely support the two-state solution in the US, and its influence is growing. By approaching them and offering them assistance with and resources for their advocacy work, Palestine has an opportunity to further temper what has become a stridently pro-Israel US foreign policy.

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<sup>96</sup> Harry Enten, "Democrats may be approaching a turning point on Israel," *CNN*, May 16, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/15/politics/democrats-views-on-israel-shifting/index.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Catie Edmondson, "A New Wave of Democrats Tests the Party's Blanket Support for Israel," *The New York Times*, October 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/07/us/politics/democrats-israel-palestinians.html>.

<sup>98</sup> "34 Senate Democrats ask Trump to restore aid to the Palestinians," Israel, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, last modified September 21, 2018, <https://www.jta.org/2018/09/21/politics/34-senate-democrats-urge-trump-restore-aid-palestinians>.

## **China**

Based on China's current agenda and its Arab policy paper, I suggest that the Palestinian government consider the following:

### 1. Sign China's BRI and suggest other Arab countries do the same

44 out of 65 countries included in the BRI model have not yet signed the initiative's blueprint, including most Middle Eastern countries.<sup>99</sup> Possibly for this reason, China has formulated its first Arab policy paper in which it emphasizes that support from the Arab countries for the BRI is one of its key priorities.<sup>100</sup> This shows that signatories of the BRI are highly valuable for China, and indicates that China would appreciate and reward any country that takes the bold step to endorse this policy. For this reason, I recommend Palestine sign the BRI and persuade other Arab countries to do likewise. It would mean that Palestine could play a central and noticeable role in a mutually beneficial project, and, in turn, China would likely harden its stance in support of Palestine, increase its investment in the territories, etc.

### 2. Attract China to invest in tourism in Palestine

For the past few years, China has shown an interest in the area of global tourism. For instance, in 2017, China signed the Dubai Hala China Initiative to increase its tourism-related investment in Dubai, and to incentivize and ease the travel of Chinese visitors to the United Arab Emirates<sup>101</sup>. As a result of initiatives like this, in 2018, China's direct investment in global tourism is estimated to be around 218 billion USD<sup>102</sup>. In China's Arab policy paper, it similarly sought to increase joint projects in tourism with the Arab countries.

According to United Nations World Tourism, Palestine is considered to be one of the world's best tourist destinations. Palestine contains significant historical and religious sites for Jews, Christians and Muslims, as well as attractive and authentic cities, markets, and archaeological sites<sup>103</sup>. Therefore, if Palestine actively promotes (through official, worldwide campaigns, etc.) its tourist destinations to Chinese audiences and the Chinese government, it will have the capacity to attract and facilitate Chinese investment in its tourism industry while simultaneously strengthening China's support for Palestine.

### 3. Information sharing on extremism and strategies for peaceful coexistence

According to Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi, China is increasing its measures to combat terrorism<sup>104</sup>. China fears the rising number of Uighur Muslims, and there are allegations that, as of 2017, it

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<sup>99</sup> Zheping Huang, "China's summit for its new Silk Road is missing 44 heads of state from the 65 nations involved," Quartz, 12 May 2017, <https://qz.com/982202/chinas-summit-for-its-new-silk-road-is-missing-44-heads-of-state-from-the-65-nations-involved/>.

<sup>100</sup> "Full text of China's Arab Policy Paper," Xinhua, 14 January 2016, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2016-01/14/content\\_37573547.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2016-01/14/content_37573547.htm).

<sup>101</sup> Christian Nelson, "Dubai's Hala China tourism initiative signs first agreements," Travel and Tourism, The National, 15 July 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/travel-and-tourism/dubai-s-hala-china-tourism-initiative-signs-first-agreements-1.750481>.

<sup>102</sup> Mengjie, "China tourism investment to top 1.5 trillion in yuan in 2017," Xinhua, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/19/c\\_136298871.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/19/c_136298871.htm).

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Palestinian Ambassador, Izzat Abdulhadi, to Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific.

<sup>104</sup> "Ignore Gossip. Trust Authorities: China on Inspection in Xinjiang Camps," NDTV, 13 November 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/ignore-gossip-trust-authorities-china-on-inspection-in-xinjiang-camps-1946609>.

has detained and sought to 're-educate' over one million Uighurs<sup>105</sup>. However, since China has never referred to Hamas as a terrorist group, there could be an opportunity for Palestine to establish a better relationship with China through information sharing on how to mitigate and deter extremism and outbreaks of violence. In addition, Palestine is considered to be a model of religious diversity, inclusion and tolerance, since Palestinian Muslims, Christians and Jews (mostly Samaritans) have a strong sense of brotherhood and live in a society where one's religious affiliation is not an encumbrance<sup>106</sup>. In conclusion, information sharing on effective strategies to both suffocate Islamist extremism and to promote religious tolerance and inclusion would foster a better Palestine-China relationship and firm up the latter's stance in supporting Palestine.

### ***Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)***

APEC's 'capacity building' goal is aimed at increasing their member countries' economic capacity by funding comprehensive training programs so that key skills and the technological know-how can be acquired.<sup>107</sup> Since Palestine has excellent human capital (many citizens have started their own technology ventures such as Gaza Sky Geeks, Sadara Ventures, and Ibtikrar),<sup>108</sup> Palestine can utilise this strength in its efforts to engage with and assist APEC by conducting the following:

1. Establish economic co-operation with APEC through an expertise area in capacity building

Despite the many barriers to development, Palestine is developing its technology sector and now has several successful ventures, which can contribute to APEC's 'capacity building' goal. An example of a successful venture is Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG), a company that helps entrepreneurs to establish start-ups, and enables freelancers to learn and innovate. GSG was launched in co-operation with Google and is based in Palestine.<sup>109</sup> Palestine, through Gaza Sky Geeks, could therefore meaningfully contribute to APEC's capacity building goal by presenting successful business models that can be emulated by APEC's members.

2. Become a non-member participant

According to APEC's rules and guidelines, Palestine, through the aid of its technology start-ups, can become a non-member participant as long as it is able to 'facilitate the attainment of APEC goals' by providing 'relevant insight and expertise'. Based on APEC's capacity-building goal, Palestine is able to contribute to it by providing relevant expertise (which has been won through tried and tested strategies and under the rigours of occupation) on technological know-how. Through this platform, Palestine can also win more international support and further legitimize its advocacy efforts.

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<sup>105</sup> Jen Kirby, "China's brutal crackdown on the Uighur Muslim minority, explained," Vox News, 6 November 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/8/15/17684226/uighur-china-camps-united-nations>.

<sup>106</sup> Rasem S.M. Bisharat, "Palestine as a Model of Tolerance and Religious Brotherhood," *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 22, no. 10 (October 2017): 13.

<sup>107</sup> "About APEC": <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC>

<sup>108</sup> Lubna Hamdan, "Palestine: Business beyond the wall," *Arabian Business*, January 6, 2018, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/386973-palestine-business-beyond-the-wall>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



## ***Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)***

In the pillar of politico-security, ASEAN is in pursuit of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, focusing in particular on information sharing and border checks, to promote religious tolerance and to limit the smuggling of humans and weapons<sup>110</sup>. Following the siege of Marawi, ASEAN has been concerned about the widespread recruitment of Southeast Asian Muslims by the Islamic State (IS) group<sup>111</sup>. In this context, Palestine can:

1. Conduct information sharing on how best to curtail extremism from experiences in Palestine with Hamas and other groups

As with China, structures and systems that enable and promote religious tolerance in Palestine can be used as models for ASEAN countries to learn from and apply in their own countries. For this reason, Palestine should propose a mechanism for information sharing on counterterrorism and religious tolerance that aligns with ASEAN's requirements and broader agenda. This way, it can interact more with ASEAN and increase its legitimacy on the international stage.

In the pillar of economy, under Singapore's chairmanship, ASEAN seeks to be a region of technological innovation. Similar to the policy recommendation regarding APEC, the Palestinian government is advised to:

2. Co-operate with ASEAN business sectors and have Palestinian start-ups provide ASEAN with expertise in technology

Business ventures like Gaza Sky Geeks, Palestine's Information and Communications Technology Incubator (PICTI), and Ibtikrar have provided mentorship to other Palestinian start-ups and small to medium businesses<sup>112</sup>. They have proven to be very successful in empowering and increasing the number of Palestinian start-ups. These mentorship programs would no doubt be beneficial to ASEAN businesses, and thus, Palestine can use these programs to spark the interest of ASEAN and promote formal relations.

In the pillar of socio-cultural development, ASEAN is concerned exclusively with human rights and environmental affairs in Southeast Asia<sup>113</sup>. Hence, the likelihood of putting the Israel-Palestine conflict on their agenda seems remote. However, about 42% of the population of the ASEAN member states is Muslim, and thus, I conclude that the Islamic communities and organisations in these countries are a powerful potential lobbying force. For this reason, it is suggested that Palestine:

3. Persuade the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to engage more with ASEAN and its member states

Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia are Muslim-majority countries and are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It is therefore proposed that the Palestinian government lobby the OIC to

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<sup>110</sup> The Hon Peter Dutton MP, "Opening address to the ASEAN Counter Terrorism Conference – Sydney, Australia," In *Transcripts of Minister for Home Affairs*, (Sydney: Minister for Home Affairs, 2018)

<sup>111</sup> Marguerite Borelli, "Asean Counter-Terrorism Weaknesses," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 9 (2017): 14.

<sup>112</sup> Rachel Ronca, "Investment Mechanisms Driving the Tech Startup Boom in Palestine," *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy*, 2 April 2018, <http://djilp.org/7103/investment-mechanisms-driving-the-tech-startup-boom-in-palestine/>.

<sup>113</sup> *Asean Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025*, (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2016).



conduct more meetings and official summits in these countries, as well as specifically invite the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) to these events. With more participation from ASEAN and its member states in the OIC, Palestine can increase its lobbying power by having the OIC expose more of the Israel-Palestine conflict to ASEAN and its members.

***The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)***

1. More involvement from the Palestinian representative's side in the Indo-Pacific through advocacy and publication

This is so that countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific island nations, can be aware of its existence and possibly lend support to, or at least endorse, its mission statement and programs. It will also increase awareness of the issue in these foreign publics.

2. Extend the lobby to other Indo-Pacific countries

Contacting (via their official representatives) other Indo-Pacific countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific island nations, to join the forum in exchange for greater co-operation and enhanced bilateral relations with the member countries of the CEAPAD.

## **Concluding remarks**

This policy brief shows that while Palestine is an occupied state and is not formally recognised by some major countries in the world, it can still co-operate with countries and organizations in the Indo-Pacific region to increase its legitimacy and, ultimately, receive worldwide recognition. It was found that in each country and organisation above, there are segments and factions that, while differing in the extent of their reach and influence, can provide a solid base of support for Palestinian rights. For Palestinian policy-makers, these areas and actors are certainly worthy of further investigation. Taking this into account, alongside Palestine's capacity and potential, the final recommendation for the relevant Palestinian officials is all the policy options above. They should go some way in enhancing Palestine's role in the Indo-Pacific region.

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