

## Book Review

### **Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Era.**

Edited by Brendon J. Cannon and Kei Hakata, published by Routledge, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, XXII+244.

The idea of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) was introduced by Shinzo Abe in 2016 and afterward, it was imitated by the Trump administration in the United States (US). Since then, it has become a buzzword for global politics and turned into an evolving discourse for scholars around the world. In light of China’s persistent revisionism, the Indo-Pacific is proposed as a strategy to reduce risks and maintain the status quo in terms of geopolitics. It serves as the rallying cry for those fighting to preserve the last bits of the current international order or American supremacy. This book refers to the Indo-Pacific idea as the epitome of a defensive notion to protect and preserve rule-based current international multilateral order and counter the imperialistic aims of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The book “Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Era” aims to look into the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region. The book offers indispensable insights and appropriate remedies to maintain the rules-based international order that is threatened by China’s increasingly assertive and bellicose posturing. It is an essential read for scholars, policymakers, students, and strategists in the field of international politics and area studies. This book examines critical aspects of Asian politics, with a particular focus on the current security and strategic complexities.

The book contains 244 pages along with a foreword by the former Prime minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, who, in his writing, set the tone for the whole book. He wrote, “I think this book is the timeliest attempt to bring together the wisdom of eleven people to present a multifaceted view of the FOIP [Free and Open Indo-Pacific]. As a reader, I would like to express my gratitude to the editors and contributors for their valuable intellectual contributions.” Shinzo Abe says, “The Indian and Pacific Oceans are becoming one. Indo-Pacific created a maritime identity that had not existed before. Japan is a country that knows the benefits of the Indo-Pacific more than any other. Any attempt to make it a confined and closed place is harmful and futile for everyone. This is why democratic countries that revere freedom and respect the rule of law must join forces. The nine authors, in 12 distinct chapters, which have been divided into four parts, have tried to put forth the multiple dimensions and brought together many different narratives along with diverse visions of Indo-Pacific strategies. The chapters, albeit not in a mutually exclusive manner, have taken into consideration several key areas ranging from construction of the idea, geographic proximity, different country lens, and their understanding of Indo-Pacific and late comes in different regional prism about

understanding and their visions for Indo-Pacific. Such policy-oriented questions are related to IPS and seek to look into the potentiality of the emerging idea and measures which can turn the frameworks and policies into reality.

The first part discussed “Contextualizing the Indo-Pacific”, which is divided into two chapters Kei Hakata’s piece on “The Indo-Pacific as an emerging geography of strategies” and Brendon J. Cannon’s part who wrote on “The Indo-Pacific’s evolving strategic landscape: Geopolitics as a framework for grand strategy?”. These chapters outlined region the Indo-Pacific as developing strategic geography with great power rivalry. The Indo-Pacific, according to the authors, is an invitation for ostensible regionalism. This chapter discusses important Indo-Pacific issues relating to Eurasia. Although it is understandable that the geographical counterpart to the maritime-focused Indo-Pacific narrative is frequently overlooked, the issue of Eurasia continues to provide a significant conceptual difficulty. Finally, these two chapters outline, structure, introduce the following chapters, and highlights the important intellectual contributions of different authors regarding the Indo-Pacific.

Part two of the book named “Indo-Pacific lynchpins” is divided into four distinct chapters that talked about the perspective of the US, Japan, Australia, and India. David Brewster in chapter three examined Australia’s adherence to the Indo-Pacific idea in light of the unusual strategic issues that arise due to its geographic location. It examined the unique strategic needs created by its geographic location and how Australia has attempted to address them. It supports the international interests of its great power ally, namely the US, while also promoting the growth of a stable and prosperous region. However, the inability to correctly balance these various and perhaps inconsistent strategic necessities has occasionally also led to grave concerns. The author makes the case that Australia’s historical failure to build a coherent regional strategy based upon a cohesive mental map of its region has served to worsen the issue caused by conflicting strategic priorities.

Jagannath P. Panda wrote chapter four on “India’s Indo-Pacific prism: Finding strategic autonomy in the face of Chinese adventurism”. Here the author shed some light on the rise of India in the region in the past decade. India maintains a tremendous allure for important powers in the region, including Japan, Australia, the US, France, China, and others. India is a significant developing force, a dynamic maritime democracy, and a geo-strategically important Indo-Pacific state. The Indo-Pacific is arguably the most significant geopolitical region in the world, and India holds a crucial advantage due to its geographical location which makes them a key stakeholder nation in the Indo-Pacific. The escalating US-China competition and the rise of assertive China, have contributed to the fact that India is the foundation of the Indo-Pacific. However, maintaining maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is a

relatively new foreign policy for New Delhi. The essential components of India's Indo-Pacific strategy include strengthening its marine posture, creating military-maritime alliances, and retaining an accepting but cautious attitude toward economic multilateralism. Therefore, as part of its policy of alignments without the corresponding political or military alliance structures, India has helped to construct "conjectural alliances", for example, the emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which included Australia, India, Japan, and the US.

Indian Ocean neighbours and Indo-Pacific partner nations have had a direct effect on India's strategic vision. This chapter explores the key features of India's Indo-Pacific prism. Firstly, it evaluates India's current strategies, plans, and goals for the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, it looks at Delhi's inclusive foreign policies. Thirdly, the chapter examines India's act of balancing with China and its targeted alignment with the Quad nations, stressing India's efforts to strengthen a more comprehensive foreign policy narrative outside the Indo-Pacific through speculative frameworks like the Quad Plus. In the last section, power-balancing theorems are used in an Asian context to assess India's Indo-Pacific strategy. It concludes that India's partnerships—with both China and the Quad states—should serve as the cornerstone for New Delhi's attempts to strengthen its national security and sovereignty while attaining its vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

"Japan and the Indo-Pacific: The formation of geostrategy" written by Kei Hakata who argues, that Japan is now in a particularly difficult circumstance. In order to preserve its peace and prosperity in the face of US-China strategic rivalry and rising Chinese assertiveness, Tokyo must carefully navigate tumultuous geopolitical seas. Japan expanded its diplomatic reach outside of its immediate vicinity in the post-Cold War era. It made further efforts to mould what is undoubtedly the most dynamic area in the globe in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to do this, Japan has enthusiastically embraced the Indo-Pacific as both a diplomatic and geographical concept. Perhaps Japan's most serious attempt at innovative diplomacy since the 1990s is the FOIP strategy, which was formally unveiled in 2016. The FOIP is currently regarded as "the most significant asset of Japanese diplomacy" in Tokyo. Tokyo effectively embraced the "Abe Doctrine," a bold yet well-planned foreign policy, during his government.

Despite many difficulties, Japan has remained a powerful, affluent nation because of its dynamic people and captivating culture. However, according to the author, the security situation around Japan has significantly worsened, and China's imperialist actions directly threaten Japan's sovereignty. Here, an example can be Japan's Senkaku Islands' territory and surrounding waters. Such threats will increase the level of militarisation and create further tensions between Japan and its neighbours.

Another challenge author found is that Tokyo now faces a challenging security issue as a result of Japan's growing economic links with China and the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between the US and China. The nuclear and missile programs of North Korea as well as Russian expansionism are seen as persistent dangers for Japan. So, Tokyo's diplomatic advancement is crucial in this context.

Overall, Japan's embrace of the Indo-Pacific is a component of a grand strategy motivated by geo-economic realism, security considerations, and its desire to establish a regionalism founded on norms. It is ultimately and fundamentally about the future order of the area, which Japan and many other nations want to see. Thus, by working with like-minded lynchpin governments, the administrations of Abe and his successor, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, have been actively engaged in developing the Indo-Pacific area.

The insightful issue this chapter seeks to address is how Japan's adoption of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic road map has aided Tokyo in its foreign policy in light of this environment of instability and unpredictability. As a result, this chapter sheds light on how Japan's Indo-Pacific discourse was created from a geostrategic perspective and explores how the Indo-Pacific idea supports Japan's strategic objective. Second, the chapter examines how Tokyo's diplomatic initiatives during the Abe administration were developed. Thirdly, it focuses on the realignment and expansion of Japan's diplomatic and security alliances.

David Scott is the author of chapter six of "Indo-Pacific positioning of the United States: Evaluating dis/continuities". According to the author, the Indo-Pacific region has gained prominence among US officials and is now seen as a crucial geopolitical region. This chapter used an evaluative method to explore continuities and discontinuities and highlight the strengths as well as weaknesses of the US Indo-Pacific policy. It takes into account US presence, political leadership, government and military command structures, US response to China's Maritime Silk Road plan, as well as its deepening of current ties and pursuit of new relationships.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has made significant political, military, and economic endeavours in the Indo-Pacific, pushing the US to adopt the countermeasure, the Indo-Pacific as a strategic framework. Nevertheless, there have been and continue to be many uncertainties, conflicts, and even inconsistencies in the American policy for the Indo-Pacific region toward China. Under the Trump administration the national security strategy was the first to provide a specific diagnosis of the China issue. Later in 2018, the US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, which was declassified in January 2021, had a section on the rising Chinese threat.

China, according to Washington, is the issue and the reason behind US Indo-Pacific conceptions and ambitions. China's inclusion in those endeavours would only increase the likelihood of their effectiveness being hampered or stopped. According to the author, many concerns arise in light of the differences and continuities between US policies toward China and the Indo-Pacific between administrations..

Part three of the book brings us the evaluation of East Asia's perspective on the Indo-Pacific and most importantly brought China's narrative for it has been examined. Chapter seven of the book is "China's foreign policy transformation and its implications for the Indo-Pacific" authored by Tien Sze Fang. Xi's "Chinese Dream" is arguably China's most powerful self-portrait (Zhongguo meng). He soon connected the "Chinese Dream" to the "strong country dream" (qiangguo meng) and the "strong military dream" at the Guangzhou Military Command (qiangjun meng). Since then, China has worked to implement Xi's "strong nation dream" policy through initiatives like the Made in China 2025 plan and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). And more importantly, the author noticed that China's attitude towards foreign policy has significantly changed. It has switched to an assertive approach from the prior strategy of "hide one's capability and bid one's time". Despite being extensively discussed in this chapter, understanding China's increasing assertiveness requires closer examination to understand their approach. Therefore, the study of Chinese aspirations to become the dominant global force and the terminology employed by the CCP leadership to express that goal forms the foundation of this chapter. As a result, it explored topics and Chinese-language resources that have, up to now, been comparatively understudied in English literature. The author contends that changes in China's professed state identity are responsible for the remarkable transformation of Chinese foreign policy. Thus, the author concludes that China will no longer maintain a low profile in world affairs. This chapter has covered the changes in China's foreign policy and their effects on the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter eight, "ASEAN in search of a common strategy in the Indo-Pacific", authored by Renato Cruz De Castro, identified that due to the strategic competition between the US and China, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries are facing significant security challenges. China has been pursuing its expansive claims in South China as its territory, threatening four ASEAN nations—Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. As a result, China and the four littoral states are having conflicting maritime claims and it has raised concerns about US dominance, security obligations, and forward deployments in Southeast Asia, putting the region in a major security dilemma. The US increased its presence in Asia, it also turned Southeast Asia into a battlefield for an intensified geopolitical rivalry between the US and China.

Southeast Asia is now directly in the heart of the escalating US-China strategic competition in the South China Sea as a result of these events and others connected to them. So, ASEAN is currently in the extremely precarious position of having to negotiate between two giants in what is quickly devolving into a highly antagonistic environment according to the author. This chapter answers the following key queries: How has ASEAN, as a regional organization, handled the aforementioned security issues of the twenty-first century? How is ASEAN handling the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China? Last but not least, how effective is ASEAN's strategy for addressing the classic security issues in a developing Indo-Pacific region?

Part four of the book brings different stakeholders and affected regions' narratives and perspectives regarding the Indo-Pacific strategies. In chapter nine "Small Island states' security in the Indo-Pacific" the author of the chapter, Mohan Malik examined the perspective of the "Small Island nations" concern and their prism about the Indo-Pacific.

The author sees that Small Island states (SISs), which are present in the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific, are affected by this great power struggle. The world's most powerful states are looking for small states and medium powers to form new alliances and install compliant regimes to gain leverage in their favour. The author interestingly pointed out how much the dominant trend of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century resembles the maritime rivalry in the past. There are now more sites of contention in the Indo-Pacific as a result of the heated competition among major maritime countries for influence and forward presence. The regularity with which the warships of China and the US in the Pacific and China and India in the Indian Ocean cross paths is growing. Rival major powers are increasingly colliding in third nations according to the author. Even if each power is vying for dominance, SISs still form major power rivalries and have an impact on their relationships by shifting allegiances in one direction or the other. Major competing powers seek the assistance of small and middle-sized governments in this attempt. Despite their little size, SISs play a significant role in this competition due to their location in a contested security environment and their exposure to a variety of security risks and possibilities.

This chapter focuses on the security and diplomacy of SISs in the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating how and to what effect they have used the different instruments and methods at their disposal in light of an increasingly competitive international context. Firstly, it focuses on the huge geopolitical significance that the SISs have for major states. In addition to this, this chapter discusses the tactics and policies aimed at a free and open Indo-Pacific while examining the position of SISs in the Pacific Ocean (FOIP). The last section of the chapter examines the SIS situation in

the Indian Ocean as the chapter ends with a contextual study of the future of SISs in light of the Indo-escalating Pacific's great power competition.

Chapter ten titled "Europe's Indo-Pacific puzzle: In search of an independent foreign policy", written by Eva Pejsova, focuses on the evolving geostrategic dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, an area that is being increasingly changed by the Chinese and American big power rivalry. Consequently, how regional and global performers' reactions to the idea mostly reflect their positions, objectives and potential contributions they may make to reshape the regional power politics. A growing number of European nations, including The Netherlands, Germany, and France have all entered the fight. However, there is still no European voice. This chapter seeks to shed some light on the lively Indo-Pacific discussion occurring inside the European and study the numerous internal and external factors that affect the European Union (EU).

The author said the EU always has to strike a balance between the diverse strategic objectives of the 27 member nations. Recently, China's growth and the existing domestic political and economic conditions growing dependence is the result of several EU member states' considerations. The EU has not yet expressed any worries about Beijing's increasing influence and objectives. Therefore, Brussels has the apparently insurmountable challenge of simultaneously representing all EU countries and establishing a single EU policy on China and the Indo-Pacific. The chapter begins by dissecting and analysing the key element in the EU's Indo-Pacific conundrum: the necessity for Brussels to negotiate the great power conflict between its old friend, the US, and its new and beneficial partner. The chapter then places the discussion within the context of Brussels' developing strategy toward Asia and examines how the continental geostrategic axis interacts with the Indo-Pacific agenda. Finally, the chapter examines the intergovernmental dynamics of the internal European debate and assesses the EU's desire to advance the "European Way" in Indo-Pacific and international affairs.

Chapter eleven named "The Arab Gulf States in the Indo-Pacific: The limits of ambiguous hedging strategies", authored by Jean-Loup Samaan, sees that the "Indo-Pacific" discussion is strangely absent throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' diplomats and political leaders have mostly abstained from using such terms, and local think tanks have only somewhat discussed the issue according to the author. Given that GCC member nations maintain relationships with all of the key actors in the Indo-Pacific region, this may seem odd.

The lack of an Indo-Pacific discussion in the capitals of the Gulf states does not imply that the area is unimportant or uninteresting. In a way, GCC nations may be even more vulnerable to the effects of the Indo-Pacific power struggles than

ASEAN nations given their reliance on the US for security and growing reliance on China for global commerce. Thus, the Gulf states are faced with a crucial dilemma: to what extent can they disentangle their requirements for security from their economic prosperity, and how long they will be able to stay in the great power competition between the US and China.

The chapter suggested that the Arabian Gulf nations must work to avoid any potentially divisive policies due to the rising great power competition in the Indo-Pacific. In light of this, the chapter studies the rationale behind Gulf hedging strategies and how they naturally conflict with the US strategy for the Indo-Pacific. Then it examines how the Gulf nations have changed their stances toward China's rise, lastly, the writing emphasises how these relations with China developed as GCC countries continued to depend on US security assistance and, in some circumstances, even enhanced it. The chapter added a demonstration of how the COVID-19 conflict solidified the precarious balance established by Gulf nations between the US and China rather than upsetting it.

In the final chapter of the book, chapter twelve, author Brendon J. Cannon looked into eastern Africa which is suggested in the name "Influence and power in the Western Indo-Pacific: Lessons from Eastern Africa". Due to a number of socioeconomic, security, and political issues, the geopolitical environment of Eastern Africa is complicated and unstable. This large region, which is home to states and populations that are incredibly diverse, is also abundant in natural resources like oil and gas. Because of the ports and safety of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), this region plays a crucial role in the economic and political stability of all Eastern African republics.

In this context, the author believes it is important to consider and assess Eastern Africa's position in relation to the changing power dynamics occurring throughout the Indo-Pacific. Due to the region's abundance of Chinese loans and infrastructure, it is here that these changes are felt most keenly. Due to recent closer ties and engagements this region of Africa is under limelight from the QUAD and China over their potential and their resources.

The chapter examined the gap between beliefs of Chinese influence in Eastern Africa and the actual situation. It is followed by a discussion on the FOIP goal of Tokyo in relation to Japan's position in the area. The last part presents recent survey work conducted in Kenya. The chapter's concluding is a prescriptive analysis by the author who argues that, while vigilance and newly designed engagement mechanisms are needed in Eastern Africa, the QUAD's worries about China gaining influence and power in the area lack context and are thus erroneous.



The twelve chapters of the book illustrate twelve different aspects of the prism of the Indo-Pacific discipline. The authors deserve a firm appreciation for the construction of language and literary art of the book. Even though the book has a general framework based on great power politics, any enthusiast person from another field can go through the book without any exertion. The analysis is easy to comprehend and each argument is backed by detailed information and precise evidence. The authors have not negated the contrasting argument stating that the asymmetrical distribution of state capacity and provided comparative analysis to understand and visualise their arguments.

The book rigorously describes and examined the Indo-Pacific Strategies. After conceptualising the IPS concept, the book discussed the vital areas that need to be addressed. The authors have successfully undertaken all the issues extremely well. Presenting effective quantitative and qualitative data, the authors identify the current situation as well as future possibilities, numerous variables, and determinants. The book also takes into account the Chinese perspective as well as the western one. The book clearly addresses the driving forces behind the tension between states and their conflicting interest in the IPR. It used a different model of analysis to identify the impacts of the driving factors. The analysis of the book is strong in its methodology. But the IPS got many more advancements in the process. Therefore, a critique can always be enunciated referring to the limited scope and focus of the book.

In every case, where there is a determined argument or conceptual framework, the authors have tried to furnish them with significant policy schemes. To actualise the policies, the book also comes up with the rationale behind formulating them and discussed with necessary policy responses. Moreover, the book essentially goes deeper into the conceptual level of IPS. Hence, the authors must be praised for spelling out the reality and acknowledging the complexities. In the book, analyses were distinguished based on many different parameters like region, stakeholders and country perspectives. It also acknowledges that typology is not mutually exclusive or collectively exhaustive. The book provides specific recommendations to the policymaker and answers some critical questions regarding the discourse.

Overall, the book has been organised in a meticulous way with eloquent analysis and strong arguments. The empirical depositions and argumentative thought-provoking ideas are fresh, cohesive, and derived from authentic sources. The authors have managed to make an intriguing mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis which makes the reading experience more enjoyable. Each of the chapters is equipped with methodological or analytical qualities.

Albeit the book is precise, compact, and rigorous on its own, it is not completely free of criticism. Apart from the issue of limited scope and linear focus discussed above, it also lacks ample reference to other secondary literature and

research. Surprisingly, the twelve chapters focus on totally different dominions, bringing a strange literary harmony.

In conclusion, it can be said that *Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Era* is definitely a significant contribution to the existing literature on Indo-Pacific, great-power politics, and foreign policy. With its multidisciplinary approach, it sketches out some considerable frameworks and policies as well as the earlier development in the conceptual areas of IPS. It can, hence, lead to greater scholarship in this evolving and emerging discipline.

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