

Commentary



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An Indo-Pacific regional order? Frameworks for cooperation and the future of geopolitical competition

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Overview

The policy brief is organized as follows. First, it briefly analyses the nature of the “Indo-Pacific” concept itself, which is still subject to much misapprehension, multiple interpretations and not a little controversy. Revealing the positive and negative aspects behind the concept informs the subsequent analysis of the policies and frameworks it has spawned and that are actually integral (or opposed) to it. The main text offers a pan-regional overview and appraisal of the most prominent competing mechanisms of alignment and other institutional frameworks that constitute the foundations of a nascent Indo-Pacific regional order. It concludes that regional states will continue to value participation in the wide array of multilateral dialogues, but will increasingly stress closer alignments with corresponding states that share common interests and values, resulting in an ever-deepening spiral of divisive geopolitical competition.

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Outlook

- The adoption of the “Indo-Pacific” as a new framing device principally by the US, Japan, India and Australia, reflects a changed geopolitical reality and portends a different trajectory for the future regional order. Yet it potentially contains the seeds of further and deepening divisions between these “Indo-Pacific powers” and China, with small and middle power states potentially caught in the crossfire.
- Pan-regional frameworks that adopt the Indo-Pacific concept are unlikely to appear for the foreseeable future due to the contested acceptance of the concept itself, the sheer magnitude of such an enterprise, the lack of appetite among ASEAN countries, and opposition from China.
- Instead, existing “Asia-Pacific”-oriented institutional arrangements (e.g., East Asia Summit, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) will be partially adapted to an Indo-Pacific context, whilst champions of the concept will form select minilaterals, such as the Quad, in order to prosecute the objectives of their individual/collective Indo-Pacific strategies in close affiliation with a reformed US-alliance network.
- The Indo-Pacific concept and the policies that constitute the Indo-Pacific strategies of the democratic powers (Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Quad) are actually a reaction to alternative Chinese-led efforts at regionalism through the Belt and Road Initiative and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This has now eventuated into an interactive and competitive cycle that contributes to the emergence of a new bifurcation in regional affairs. ASEAN meanwhile will struggle to uphold its relevance as its vast multilateral apparatus increasingly becomes an arena in which Sino-US rivalry plays out.
- Tensions will continue to arise between desires (sometimes only at rhetorical level) for *inclusivity* in emerging frameworks, and the realities of *exclusivity* based upon more focused US-alliances and other circumscribed minilaterals working toward a common purpose. It is not realistic to expect every framework to be comprehensive in its membership, especially when there are direct clashes of interests, but at the same time exclusion from certain frameworks creates uncertainties and insecurities among those outside their membership.
- Separate economic and security frameworks (and some “mixed” ones) increasingly emblemize the disjunction of the economic and security spheres, with China largely dominating the former and the US the latter. This “economic-security disconnect” creates dilemmas for regional states as they try to reconcile such divergences in their interests and their preferences for appropriate frameworks.

Introduction

With the introduction of the “Indo-Pacific” concept into economic and security policy-making discussions over recent years has come a greater need to rethink the ways in which extant, emerging, and future regional frameworks for regional cooperation will operate and interact. Comprehending the scope and complexity of regional frameworks, from bilateral alliances and minilateral groupings to pan-regional multilateral organizations, is a crucial element in understanding the economic and security dynamics of a region that is now widely considered to represent the geopolitical and geo-economic epicenter of the world. As rivalry between the United States and China accelerates, commentators have begun to discern the inception of a “new Cold War” marked by geopolitical, economic and military rivalry across the region as spheres of influence collide, ideological values clash, and the uneasy transformation toward a new security order proceeds.

Increasingly, the Indo-Pacific has taken on an image of the geopolitical “arena” in which these struggles will unfold. This is underscored by the prevalence of trade wars, cyber-attacks, misinformation campaigns, military modernization, and disputes over international law and norms, set against the chaos wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore pertinent to ask to what degree the necessary regional frameworks are in place and whether they are sufficiently fit to deal with these multifarious challenges and what the introduction of the Indo-Pacific concept and the policies associated with it mean for how regional order will be structured in the future.

This policy brief highlights the importance and implications for regional order associated with the emergence of the “Indo-Pacific” concept and explores how this new construct has shaped the national policies of many of the region’s major powers, including the US, Japan, India, Australia, and even extra-regional powers from Europe (which will be referred to as the “Indo-Pacific powers” to distinguish them from opponents or non-advocates of the concept). In particular, it shines a light on the assorted frameworks for security cooperation and economic regionalism that are vying for acceptance as the principal mechanisms of regional cooperation and governance.¹

Japan was a pioneer in promulgating flagship national policies with its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy/vision in 2016. But it was the Trump administration’s adoption of the term, most prominently in its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) and FOIP statement in 2019, that gave added impetus to its establishment as a pivotal concept in regional security and economic discussions. With the inauguration of a Democrat administration headed by President Joseph Biden in January 2021, it is too soon to speculate on how American policy on the Indo-Pacific may change, though given how thorough-

ly it is embedded in the existing US National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS), as well as the foregoing documents, it appears unlikely it will be precipitously or substantively altered.

From “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific”?

The origins of the “Indo-Pacific” concept have now been well-documented elsewhere, but essentially it represents a new consensus among policy-makers and analysts in the US, Japan, India, and others (the “Indo-Pacific powers”), that the former “Asia-Pacific” regional descriptor has passed its sell-by date as an appropriate way of mapping the political and economic currents at the geopolitical heart of the world (Medcalf 2020).

By expanding and redefining the earlier Asia-Pacific map, the new concept realizes a number of desired goals for its proponents. First, it accords India a deservedly prominent place in the spotlight, both in recognition of its rising geostrategic and economic weight, and the expectation that it will adopt a more proactive regional role alongside the other major democratic powers. This rectifies its somewhat peripheral status in the “Asia-Pacific” focus, which led to its semi-exclusion from some of the relevant regional frameworks.

Second, the Indo-Pacific concept, given its two-ocean geographical purview, emphasizes the maritime domain (though it gives necessary due to the continental Asian “heartland”). Given the critical importance of maritime issues for the Indo-Pacific powers themselves and the region as a whole in respect to trading routes and strategic arteries known as sea lines of communication (SLOCs) this is entirely appropriate; what Australian National University Professor Michael Wesley (2011, 89) dubs “The Indo-Pacific power highway.” Third, by expanding the scope of the “region,” particularly by forging trans-regional linkages with India and other Indian Ocean littoral and Gulf states, it dilutes the otherwise inevitable dominance that a hegemonic China would exercise on a more tightly defined Asia-Pacific/East Asian conception, thus prefiguring a more “balanced” (effectively “multipolar”) regional order.

While this new geopolitical construct serves the aspirations of its champions well, despite some differing interpretations among them, other countries have been less than enthusiastic about this recasting of the regional discourse, ensuring the concept has attracted its fair share of controversy (Wilkin and Kim, 2020). Leaving aside scholarly objections to the geographical integrity of this new and “artificial” region, it has attracted criticisms on several counts from non-proponents. First, Beijing has justifiably viewed the attempt to introduce the new concept as a political project by its advocates, especially the US. *The Global Times* (2020), the unofficial mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, shows a clear rejection of the new nomenclature, declaring that “The ‘Asia-Pacific’ involves economic and cooperative connotations, while the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ is directly associated with geopolitical competition and alliance

confrontation.”

Secondly, at the behest of Indonesia – an enthusiast for the term – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has tentatively engaged with the concept through its *Indo-Pacific Outlook* statement. Yet many Southeast Asian countries remain skeptical of its purpose and wedded to the existing Asia-Pacific descriptor, not least due to initial fears (since addressed) that it would undermine ASEAN’s “centrality” to the region. Thirdly, other “middle power” states such as Korea (and possibly Canada) view the concept as potentially divisive and likely to exacerbate, rather than quell, regional tensions (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada 2020). Though a security ally of the US, South Korea, like many regional states, is highly integrated and dependent on the Chinese economy as the engine of regional growth, while it is simultaneously wary of the Japanese origins of the FOIP policy due to its unresolved historical tensions with Tokyo (Kim and Wilkins 2020). The result is that many states are caught in a quandary between reconciling their economic advantages and their security fears, leading to what might be dubbed an “economic-security disconnect”: a factor that runs throughout the following analysis.

The constituent frameworks of a putative Indo-Pacific regional order

It is now appropriate to subject the frameworks that have come to populate the concept – including contending initiatives – to scrutiny. It is by analysing these that the contours of future regional order can be unpacked and assessed. In an attempt to simplify what Georgetown Professor Victor Cha (2011) dubbed a “complex patchwork” of regional frameworks, this policy brief concentrates on three main pillars of the regional order: (1) a reformed US-led alliance “network”; (2) ASEAN-led pan-regional multilateralism; and (3) a Chinese-led alternative regional model. These three distinct types of framework together compose the main props of the regional order and by outlining and assessing each of these in sequence, we can arrive at a composite picture of the present and potential future regional order.

1) A reformed US-led alliance “network”

The so-called “hub and spokes” system – based on bilateral security alliances including Japan, Australia (ANZUS), South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand – has been cardinal to American efforts to date to maintain a stable and prosperous regional order. In a changed environment, where the balance of power is shifting against the US, notwithstanding its own prolific national efforts to retain military primacy, the “old” system is no longer fit for purpose and is in need of reformation. In order to rectify shifts in the geostrategic en-

vironment, the central document in America's Indo-Pacific Strategy, the IPSR, outlined Washington's intent to create a "networked security architecture" as a means of upholding a rules-based regional order. Indeed, Washington views its reformed alliance network as critical to the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Outline

There are several (interlocking) aspects to the current US approach toward its alliance network. Natural changes over time have reduced the importance and value of some alliances – certainly Thailand, but to a degree, or at times, South Korea and the Philippines – whilst accentuating that of Japan and Australia in American thinking. The result is that while bilateral alliances with the former have languished or been quietly downgraded, the latter have been strengthened or tightened. US alliance relations with Japan and Australia have been enhanced through new agreements such as "collective self-defence" with Japan and the rotational deployment of US Marines in Darwin, Australia. In addition, through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) inaugurated in 2006 and now operating at the Ministerial level, these three countries are now more directly connected and form a reinforced "core" of the US alliance network; a fact further buttressed by the robust and direct security partnership ("Special Strategic Partnership") between Canberra and Tokyo.

Such minilateralism has now been extended to the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD, or "Quad") founded in 2007 with the addition of India, and recently revitalized in 2017. As a result of shared concerns about Chinese assertive actions that seem to challenge the regional security order and underwritten by a broader constellation of shared democratic values, the Quad has assumed great prominence in debates surrounding the Indo-Pacific concept, and represents a key element of each member's national Indo-Pacific strategy. The Quad now engages in multilateral naval exercises such as *Malabar* and acts as a sorting house for information-sharing and cooperation on a range of issues, including maritime domain awareness, economic connectivity and other non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism.

Moreover, the US has sought to build or enhance bilateral Strategic Partnerships with other key regional states. In addition to its Strategic Partnership with New Delhi, it has developed strong security partnerships with Singapore and Vietnam, most prominently. The Quad itself has also attracted a number of regional and extra-regional adherents including several Southeast Asian countries as well as European powers such as the UK and France under the "Quad-Plus" process. Closer relations with Taiwan are also an adjunct to this bid to connect together all US allies – close and distant – alongside new strategic partners into a "networked" alliance structure. Added to this are burgeoning "strategic triangles" such as the Australia-India-Japan Trilateral Dialogue, which exclude the US but arguably represent a proactive stance from like-minded secondary powers in the region eager to assume more responsibility to maintaining regional order, whilst "hedging" against any perceived US

unreliability going forward.

Assessment

Strategic policy-makers in the US increasingly recognize that America's alliance system, while remaining the preeminent platform for regional security engagement for Washington and a core element of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, needs to adapt to new circumstances. In particular, the damage done to some of the key alliance relationships through the unguarded comments by the former president require that the Biden administration take action to restore trust and credibility among its allied partners. The US should be able to capitalize on its long track record of stabilizing the region and many allies still look primarily to Washington to continue in such a role.

Many countries in the Indo-Pacific fear an American withdrawal from leadership would result in a Chinese hegemonic future that would be inimical to their interests. But there is increased recognition in Washington as well as allied capitals that the allied states themselves will have to shoulder a great "alliance burden" by contributing more in terms of defence spending or financial contributions (host nation support). There is ample evidence of this through notable defence spending increases in Japan and Australia, as well as their efforts to improve "inter-spoke" cooperation through their Special Strategic Partnership (and TSD, Quad). Here again, the Quad is highly pertinent in forming a "balancing" mechanism of major and middle powers (relatively) united in their vision of an open and rules-based order, as expressed in the FOIP.

However, the alignment of Indo-Pacific powers, and additional adherents in Quad-plus, has created a rather exclusive arrangements that pointedly do not include China, allowing Beijing to denounce it as a mechanism of "containment" and a new "Asian NATO." This raises fears of a more divided regional security order and a return to Cold War-style "blocs." Whether the Quad will further institutionalize in the direction of a typical mutual security alliance pact, as then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had called for, remains uncertain, but at present it is viewed by the Indo-Pacific powers as a new and functionally useful prop of the regional security order.

Lastly, it remains to be seen how the US, never a noted enthusiast for regional security multilateralism, will find points of convergence between its reformed alliance network and key organizations such as ASEAN, and whether American emphasis on security cooperation fits with regional priorities to further *economic* integration (thus sharpening the economic-security disconnect). An American return to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) process would be a major step in rectifying this predicament.

2) ASEAN-led pan-regional multilateralism

The second set of regional frameworks is embodied in the “noddle bowl” of multilateral organizations and international regimes that compose the (non-alliance) institutional architecture of the region. These include security and economic frameworks and are largely (but not entirely) anchored in or influenced by ASEAN. However, it must be noted at this juncture that there are issues relating to the regional demarcation of the “Indo-Pacific” and “Asia-Pacific.” There are only a couple of specifically *Indian Ocean* organizations – the Indian Ocean Rim Association and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – and these are currently of peripheral significance (notwithstanding the Quad above). Thus, the majority of institutional architecture officially still resides within the Asia-Pacific ambit even as it adjusts in some cases to the Indo-Pacific conceptual rescaling.

Outline

The majority of these organs are institutionally centered on ASEAN (i.e., “ASEAN-plus”). Indeed, ASEAN, a grouping of ten small and middle-sized countries from that sub-region, has set many of the parameters for pan-regional institutions based upon their Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and norms of consensus building and quiet diplomacy embodied in the “ASEAN way.” ASEAN has provided the foundation for larger East Asian groupings such as the ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN plus Korea, China and Japan), and the pan-regional ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meetings-Plus. The sheer multiplicity of such organizations ensures a very crowded institutional environment and though ASEAN does not “lead” every pan-regional framework, its influence upon them remains pervasive in deference to “ASEAN centrality.”

ASEAN has generally not welcomed the Indo-Pacific concept and views the American-led Indo-Pacific Strategy as potentially divisive. It was nonetheless compelled to engage with these concepts and views by releasing its *Indo-Pacific Outlook*. This declaration is effectively a restatement of the centrality of ASEAN and its offshoot institutions as the core drivers of regionalism and consequently puts these forward as the best instruments to manage the Indo-Pacific concept (even as it studiously attempts to side-step it).

The economic architecture driving regionalism and regional integration also remains anchored in their Asia-Pacific roots. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) mechanism, and more recently, the CPTPP and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), are the main pan-regional platforms that also nominally appertain to the Indo-Pacific concept. Economic cooperation under the auspices of APEC, and potentially CPTPP and RCEP,

has been or looks promising, given that such multilateralism in the economic realm avoids sensitive security issues and concentrates on the mutually agreed objective of increasing regional prosperity. Newer initiatives such as the Blue Dot Network as well as issue-specific minilateral economic initiatives, with an Indo-Pacific focus, by, for example, the TSD/Quad partners, also fill out the picture.

Assessment

The prodigious multilateral regional architecture provides an impressive institutional framework as the basis for expansion across the Indo-Pacific region, but it is not without drawbacks. Though ASEAN-led institutions such as the ARF and EAS are relatively inclusive meetings that contain all of the region's major stakeholders, this inclusivity is an impediment to consensus among such diverse and sometimes conflicting parties. The application of the non-confrontational and lowest-common denominator approach of the ASEAN way ensures little concrete agreement or progression.

Furthermore, on this basis, they are ill-equipped to actually resolve the important questions that threaten the regional security order such as the North Korean nuclear issue, South China Sea and other territorial disputes, and the anomalous status of Taiwan. ASEAN itself was even unable to deal with the Rohingya crisis among its own membership. As such, while valuable as forums for security dialogue and confidence-building, they are often dismissed as “talk shops.” Tellingly, the various member states prefer to entrust their national security to indigenous military capabilities, “hard” security alliances, supplemented by other functional Strategic Partnerships and minilaterals. Even ASEAN members themselves fall back on informal security alignment with the US or mechanisms such as the Five Power Defence Arrangement.

Notably, the existing (Asia-Pacific) institutional architecture is being undermined by the currents of geopolitical rivalry pulsing through the region. The US and China in particular seek to prioritize their preferred organizations, the EAS and ARF respectively, to the detriment of others. In addition, the pan-regional organs of ASEAN-plus, and ASEAN itself, are now emerging as battlegrounds for great power rivalry, split between the competing gravitational pull of the superpowers. To cite one example, China's claims to the South China Sea ensure that ASEAN is not able to uphold a common position, or even protect the interests of some of its own members, due to the influence that Beijing wields on selected states.

That such institutions may become duplicative or competitive, or marginalized, especially when Chinese-led enterprises such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are added (see below), casts a potential shadow into the future. Indeed, geostrategic competition is increasingly spilling into the economic sphere through the use of economic statecraft for strategic purposes including economic coercion, exploitation, and rival financial and technological standards. This may portend the creation of economic “blocs” as well as

emerging security blocs, thus in some ways “reconnecting” the currently divergent economic and security fault lines previously identified.

Finally, the construction of an economic or security-oriented institutional architecture that geographically coincides with the new Indo-Pacific regional concept is highly unlikely to emerge, ensuring that the organizational components of the regional order remain anchored in their Asia-Pacific antecedents. The sheer scale and diversity of the Indo-Pacific as a coherent “region,” twinned with the lack of appetite for new pan-regional institutionalization, precludes the possibility. The failure of former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s “Asia-Pacific community” cautions against such lofty enterprises.

3) A Chinese-led alternative regional model

While the US alliance system seeks to reinvent itself as a “network” and current regional institutions in the security and economic fields partially adapt to the Indo-Pacific context, a new “third rail” has emerged over the last couple of decades. Driven by Beijing, the foundation of economic, security or “mixed” frameworks is now an institutional fact, though tellingly, these are not tied to the “Indo-Pacific” concept. These have great potential to shape the future regional order in all spheres and provide a counterpoise to the existing US alliance and (mainly) ASEAN-driven multilateral frameworks above.

Outline

China was initially reluctant to participate in earlier (ASEAN-led) multilateral dialogues, fearing it would be singled out for criticism. Yet, as it became more comfortable with such venues and amassed economic power and strategic weight, it has initiated an unprecedented institution-building spree of its own. Chinese-led regional ventures have an apparently economic focus, as demonstrated by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) founded in 2016 and 2013/2017 respectively.

The AIIB provides at least a partial alternative financing framework for regional infrastructure to those offered by the Asian Investment Fund and the IMF and includes US allies such as Australia, Canada and South Korea, (though the US and Japan are absent). The BRI is a bolder and more controversial powerplay by Beijing. Ostensibly predicated on regional economic integration through infrastructure building, it has assumed geopolitical/strategic connotations as a counterpoint to American influence in the Eastern hemisphere. Ambitious in scope, it contains a Eurasian continental element, as expressed through the “Silk Road Economic Belt” as well as a theoretically more Indo-Pacific orientated “21st Century Maritime Silk Road.”

Interestingly, the former focus connects with the other major multilateral institution formed by China – alongside Russia – the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Formed to deal with the common security threat pre-

sented by the “three evils” – terrorism, separatism and fundamentalism – the SCO has assumed traditional security activities such as military exercises, and also begun to exhibit some economic elements. While originally centered on the bilateral Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership, the accession of India and Pakistan, with several other membership candidates waiting in the wings, has resulted in a very unusual “hybrid” form of multilateral security institution (it pointedly excluded the US from Observer Status). Notably, many of the professed values of the SCO dovetail, or are at least compatible with those of ASEAN, though not with the US and its allies.

Thirdly, in another departure from alliances/multilateralism, Beijing has consistently crafted a range of bilateral Strategic Partnerships with states surrounding the Indo-Pacific region, such as Pakistan (occasionally equated with an “alliance”), several Central Asian states, and others on the Indian Ocean littoral. These Strategic Partnerships open the door for bilateral security cooperation through enhanced diplomatic interactions while concurrently leveraging economic relations. Such partnerships have since been widely emulated, especially by Japan and India, and eventually, by the US itself (see above).

Assessment

Beijing’s approach toward populating the institutional architecture of the region on its own terms has some distinctive traits in juxtaposition with the US alliance network and ASEAN-led suite of multilateral dialogue forums. Firstly, Beijing is on record as denouncing US “alliances” as “Cold War mentality” and views them as confrontational and un conducive to regional stability and security. This puts China squarely at odds with regional stakeholders directly or indirectly invested in the US alliance network and challenges their interests. Yet, there is mounting evidence that the initial primarily economic nature of China’s architecture-building has increasingly begun to take on security dimensions per se, in addition to the economic aspects assuming security dimensions themselves, allowing Beijing to partially exploit or surmount the economic-security disconnect.

Secondly, China’s vision of regional order is quite distinct from the previous US-hegemonic order or the recalibrated “rules-based order” now championed by the US and its allies. In place of this, Beijing offers a series of slogans such as “harmonious world,” “common destiny” and “win-win relations.” Though it vehemently denies aspirations toward “hegemony” on its part, behind these inclusive slogans one must pay attention to the intent and content of more nationally focused ones such as the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and “China dream,” by which it partly contradicts itself. Either way, visions of a Sinic regional order are largely incompatible with those of the Indo-Pacific democratic powers.

To further its own vision of regional order, China has also sought to shape or control regional security narratives to advance its own interests and values,

examples of this being the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures and Xiangshan Forum. Through such friendly venues, Beijing seeks to create a narrative to tell its side of the story and counter its critics, while concomitantly condemning that of the Indo-Pacific powers. Thus, Beijing vociferously rejects the Indo-Pacific concept itself, which represents a larger scale regional security complex that includes India and many others on a scale where China's own influence is diminished. This is explained by its preference for "Asia-Pacific" frameworks, or better still, exclusive "East Asian" ones (with President Xi declaring "Asia is for Asians"). China would be better placed to achieve its national objectives in a more "closed" regional system rather than the "open" format preferred by the US and many other allies/partners. Beijing is also hostile to the ("anti-China") Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US, where it is labelled a "revisionist Power," and in particular to policies and alignments such as the FOIP and Quad, both of which it (ironically) condemns as exclusive rather than *inclusive*.

Conclusions

The security and economic frameworks that putatively support the "Indo-Pacific" concept are largely drawn from their "Asia-Pacific" antecedents. These evolved sequentially during the Cold War, first with the US "hub-and-spoke" system of bilateral alliances, and then with the foundation of ASEAN and later its ASEAN-plus suite of pan-regional multilateral forums (Yeo 2019). These were also supplemented by issue-specific regimes, such as the Six Party Talks (now defunct) or Proliferation Security Initiative, for example. These two pillars are now adapting to differing degrees to accommodate the Indo-Pacific concept as an alternative to populating this new regional format with scratch-built pan-regional institutions that would in any case be perhaps insurmountably difficult to realize. Minilateral and bilateral strategic partnerships fill the gaps between. On the other side of the equation, Chinese-led or inspired frameworks such as the BRI and SCO respectively provide alternative and competing visions of how the region should be ordered.

Notable tension between the sustainability of compartmentalized security and economic frameworks is becoming increasingly apparent and the ability to square the circle between a desire for inclusivity and the inherently exclusive nature of some arrangements, especially US-alliances, creates further friction amongst the components of the complex patchwork of regional architecture. As economic issues become increasingly "securitized," the distinction between security and economic arrangements may become less granular and possibly result in a re-convergence of the present economic-security disconnect in the form of consolidated geopolitical blocs.

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Endnotes

- 1 The term “frameworks” employed here encompasses institutions in the broadest sense, including formal and informal organizations, alliances and other forms of alignment, major policy initiatives or treaties, and *ad hoc* agreements or regimes. Together these constitute what is sometimes dubbed “regional architecture” or “security architecture.”

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The Honourable Irwin Cotler

May I congratulate **MLI** for a decade of exemplary leadership on national and international issues. Through high-quality research and analysis, **MLI** has made a significant contribution to Canadian public discourse and policy development. With the global resurgence of authoritarianism and illiberal populism, such work is as timely as it is important. I wish you continued success in the years to come.

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre

The **Macdonald-Laurier Institute** has produced countless works of scholarship that solve today's problems with the wisdom of our political ancestors. If we listen to the **Institute's** advice, we can fulfill Laurier's dream of a country where freedom is its nationality.

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