

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Alliances in Asia and Europe: The Evolving Indo-Pacific Strategic Context and Inter-Regional Alignments*

**Edited by Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, Yōichirō Satō, and Tom Sauer,  
London: Routledge, 2023\***

Mattia DELLO SPEDALE VENTI\*\*

*Alliances in Asia and Europe: The Evolving Indo-Pacific Strategic Context and Inter-Regional Alignments* is a co-authored book edited by Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, Yōichirō Satō and Tom Sauer and published in 2023 by Routledge. Six of the ten chapters composing the book — Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 — were originally published in *Asian Affairs* (vol. 53, issue 3, 2022),<sup>1</sup> while the remaining four — Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 10 — are original to the volume. The book has 212 pages, and the price is GBP 135 for the hardcover version and GBP 44.99 for the e-book version on the Routledge website.

The text focuses on the US-led alliances in Europe and Asia in the post-bipolar era amid the shifting security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. The end of the Cold War structurally changed the international system, and what initially seemed to emerge as *Pax Americana* in the 1990s gradually transformed into more complex global and regional scenarios. The editors present three major issues challenging the US-led liberal order in the post-Cold War system: the weakening of the rationale underpinning the American alliances' system, the relative decline of the US's power, capabilities, and influence throughout the globe, and the involvement of a major nuclear power (Russia) in a conflict on the European continent. In addition to these elements, the chapters identify two key actors who destabilized the post-bipolar order. On the one hand, Russia demonstrated a pronounced inclination towards conflicts, most notably through its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which exacerbated pre-existing tensions with neighboring countries and contributed to regional instability. On the other hand, China's economic and military rise undermined the US influence in Asia. The book illustrates how these seemingly disjointed phenomena had a profound impact on US alliances in Europe and Asia. Going forward from these assumptions, the chapters investigate the direction of the US-led coalitions in the shifting Indo-Pacific theater and highlight the existing

---

\* 212 Pages, ISBN 9781032550435

\*\* Canon Foundation Europe Fellow 2024, Kobe University

Email: mattiadellospedaleventi@gmail.com

Published online: June 17, 2025

1 Hereafter, the link to the issue: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/raaf20/53/3>

interplays between regions and their state actors.

Chapter 1, written by Thomas Wilkins, analyzes the US “Hub-and-Spokes” security system in Asia and its recent transformation. The chapter is divided into three main sections, with the first introducing and defining two core concepts underpinning the book: the distinction between “alliance” and “alignment.” The second section looks at the “Hub-and-Spokes” system from a macro-political level taking into consideration its historical background and the elements shaping its recent configuration, whether through persistence or change. The third section is a granular analysis of the US security system in Asia, including its traditional allies (Japan, Australia, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand) and its most recent partnerships (Taiwan “revised,” India, Singapore, and Europe). The study analyzes the evolution of these alignments in light of the recent changing international environment. Wilkins observes a “reshuffling” of traditional treaty allies and the transition to a “Hub-and-Spokes Plus” system composed of new non-treaty partnerships and spoke-to-spoke connections.

Chapter 2, authored by Sten Rynning, examines NATO’s options and prospects for formulating a coordinated China policy. Divided into three sections, the chapter traces the transformations of NATO’s China policy from 2017, highlighting its immaturity in framing China as a threat and its consequent lack of an integrated political-military strategy. At the same time, the author observes an increasing convergence of visions and approaches among the Alliance’s members in addressing the China issue. Rynning concludes that NATO should adopt a more explicit stance on China, especially due to Beijing’s implicit support for Russia’s foreign policy.

In Chapter 3, Tom Sauer proposes a comparative analysis of the US extended nuclear deterrence in Asia and Europe. Introducing the concept of extended nuclear deterrence in comparison to those of nuclear deterrence and extended conventional deterrence, the chapter draws similarities and differences between Asia and Europe in this security mechanism. In the chapter, Sauer examines three global trends that could influence extended nuclear deterrence in these regions, ranging from its strengthening to its dismantling: the deteriorating security regional environments, the global shifting balance of power, and developments in nuclear arms control and disarmament regimes. If the regional security threats from Russia, China, and North Korea have the potential to strengthen the extended nuclear security within the US-led coalitions, the global power shift and the evolution of the nuclear weapons-related regime could either sustain its persistence or lead to its replacement.

The study in Chapter 4, by Elena Atanassova-Cornelis and Yōichirō Satō, investigates Japan’s alignment policy with Asian and European partners, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The authors start by tracing the historical and political roots behind Japan’s regional and extra-regional partnerships and highlighting their strategic motivations. Atanassova and Satō observe a dual rationale in Tokyo’s development of strong relations with specific Asian neighboring states: the maintenance and support of the liberal regional order, and the “exploitation” of their geopolitical and geoeconomic position in Asia amid the growing Chinese influence. The authors argue that these partnerships would represent a supplement to the Japan-US security alliance. Differently, Japan’s alignment policy towards European countries was mainly driven by global and regional security challenges, like the proliferation of WMDs, and the upholding of the internationally accepted rules of law, such as the freedom of navigation of the seas. The authors conclude that Japan’s alignment policy is characterized by a strategic division of labor among its regional and extra-regional partners aimed at influencing the regional and global security environment.

In Chapter 5, Sakai Hidekazu explores the development of Japan-UK security cooperation, investigating the reasons behind their post-Cold War alignment. The analysis reveals that interconnected strategic goals led these maritime nations to perceive each other as desirable

partners. Sharing a distinct security perception of Beijing, the UK viewed Japan as a reliable actor to collectively restrain the US's reckless behavior *vis-à-vis* its confrontation with China. At the same time, the UK improved its relations with Tokyo to secure its political and economic interests in Asia. Furthermore, Japan sought to strengthen its relations with Washington's allies, including the United Kingdom, to anchor the US presence in Asia and deter China. Finally, Sakai explores the domains encompassed by the UK-Japan cooperation (maritime security, defense equipment, and technology development), observing the formation of a quasi-alliance between the two countries.

Chapter 6, written by Titli Basu, analyzes India's diplomatic choices in the 21st century tracing the evolution of Indian foreign policy and its underlying drivers since the Cold War. Within this context, Basu contends that the American diplomatic stance of "with us or against us" failed to resonate with Indian policymakers, who have historically favored non-alignment and multipolarity. Moreover, the chapter highlights how, over the past three decades, India expanded and reinforced strategic partnerships with other democracies and like-minded countries, particularly in areas of shared interest, such as maritime security, economic security, infrastructural development, and technological advancement. Basu concludes by suggesting that India, Japan, and the US could cooperatively address China's rise through a three-dimensional framework of individual, bilateral, and trilateral engagement.

Chapter 7 keeps the focus on India and investigates New Delhi's relations with the US, China, and Russia before and after Donald Trump's presidency. Rajesh Soami argues that Trump's transactional approach and unilateralism in foreign policy between 2017 and 2020 prompted Indian policymakers to reconsider their pro-American tilt and revert to a more traditional policy of non-alignment. To support his hypothesis, Soami analyzes the informal, unplanned summits held by the Indian government with China and Russia in mid-2018, where the Modi administration sought to reassure these countries about India's international position. The author demonstrates that despite these efforts, India's attempts to reset its relations with Russia and China were largely unsuccessful, listing three main factors. First, the Indo-Chinese relationship experienced a one-year upward trend, only to deteriorate again due to persistent tensions over disputed borders, as evidenced by the event of 2020. Second, the improvement of India-Russia relations was more rhetorical than substantive, reflecting a lack of shared economic and political purposes. Third, with the election of Joseph Biden to the White House, India resumed its post-Cold War trajectory of closer alignment with Washington.

In Chapter 8, Emil Kirchner examines the main trends in security cooperation between European and Asia-Pacific states from an EU perspective. Kirchner identifies two interconnected factors driving closer alignments between European countries and their Asian counterparts: the significance of Asia for the EU's geoeconomic security, in both positive and negative terms, and the rise of new major powers, along with the consequent shift in geopolitical dynamics in Europe and Asia. The chapter further explores the EU's efforts to establish new partnerships across the Asian continent, detailing the actions taken at bilateral, sub-regional, and inter-regional levels. Kirchner identifies connectivity policies and economic partnerships as the primary tools employed by the EU to foster cooperation, emphasizing how these instruments underpin security provisions in both traditional and non-traditional components.

Wilhelm Vosse's analysis in Chapter 9 focuses on the Indo-Pacific "security order" and presents two main arguments, one broader and one specific. First, the author contends that the debate on the Indo-Pacific "security order" should be expanded beyond maritime security to include the cybersecurity domain. As the chapter illustrates, ICT technologies are now playing a crucial role in the definition of global and regional geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics and constitute a fundamental part of the current power competition to shape the future characteristics of the cyber

order. In this framework, the Indo-Pacific holds a pivotal position particularly due to the rapid technological development of China and its efforts to become a technological superpower, especially in ICTs and AI. Second, Vosse empirically analyzes the role of the EU and Japan, both individually and cooperatively, in shaping the process of the cybersecurity order. The chapter illustrates that the EU, its member states, and Japan, have the potential to shape the future of cyberspace. Sharing a similar vision—a human-centered approach—and a similar objective—the creation of a stable, open, transparent, and thus *sustainable* cyber order—the EU and Japan advocate for the importance of data privacy and trust in the Internet for all users. This joint approach offers a significant third option to the US surveillance capitalist model and the Chinese state-controlled approach to cyberspace.

Chapter 10, by Bart Dessein, examines the historical transformations of China and Taiwan's foreign policies and strategic visions within the broader framework of the shifting international system. Dessein describes China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as extensions of the PRC's "periphery policy" initiated under Deng Xiaoping. If Deng's policy primarily focused on fostering economic ties with Central Asian states, the SCO and the BRI were employed by the Chinese government to expand China's political influence in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Identifying the post-Cold War international developments and the expansion of Chinese influence globally as key drivers, Dessein argues that President Tsai Ing-wen's upgrade of the "Southbound Policy" aimed to reduce Taiwan's economic dependency on mainland China and enlarge its strategic partnerships, particularly in Southeast Asia. The author concludes with an analysis of the EU's stance on China and Taiwan, observing that, while the EU remains unwilling to revise its application of the "One China" principle, recent tensions with Beijing led its member states to be more open in their support for the Taiwanese system. Dessein concludes the chapter by recommending a strategy inspired by "principled pragmatism" and the compartmentalization of Formosa's (Taiwan's) foreign policy, which would enable greater efficiency in managing Taipei's complex relationships with the US, China, and the EU.

As a whole, this co-edited volume presents thematic and theoretical coherence. In line with the main topic of the book—the transformations of the US systems of alliance in Europe and Asia—the authors provide a comprehensive outlook on post-Cold War changes in the Eurasian mega-continent, with a special focus on the impact of the new security dynamics characterizing the Indo-Pacific, from a US/US-led coalitions' perspective. This thematic coherence is complemented by the lens employed by the authors to investigate Indo-Pacific dynamics: Realism. In the book, *security*, in its traditional and non-traditional facets, constitutes simultaneously the subject under analysis and the *primum movens* on which states and policymakers ground their judgment. Methodologically, each chapter presents its own theoretical framework, with a predilection for historical analysis and the use of International Relations (IR) theories and models. Furthermore, the authors adopt a qualitative approach by analyzing and interpreting primary sources, generally consisting of official (government) documents, speeches, and newspaper articles. Chapter 3 constitutes an exception, as its main objective is to predict the potential developments of extended nuclear deterrence in Europe and Asia. Furthermore, the book can be considered a comparative study that investigates single-state, bilateral, and multilateral responses to the same phenomena.

The innovativeness of this book rests on two core elements. First, the book provides a multifaceted insight into the evolving security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region from the end of the bipolar order up to the early years of the 2020s. To differing extents, each chapter highlights how the evolving security context of this macro-region is crucial in the policy-making process of both intra- and extra-regional powers. The Indo-Pacific became home to post-Cold War ascending powers, especially China and India, whose international role could no longer be ignored for their

geopolitical and geoeconomic influence. From the chapters' analysis, Beijing in particular, emerges as an alternative model to the current US-led order, representing a techno-economic competitor and a potential security spoiler for the American coalitions. Second, the book adopts a valuable perspective — the above-mentioned Indo-Pacific dynamics — to address and explore the topic of new security alignments within the US-led alliances in Europe and Asia in the aftermath of the Cold War. The chapters update existing models and provide fresh insights into the US allies' strategic visions and policies. More specifically, the book highlights that, as the Indo-Pacific gained more strategic value, internal and external regional actors reoriented their foreign policy to secure their national interests. This phenomenon led to a rise of inter-regional entanglements, which, in turn, produced security alignments and strategic cooperation between the states of the two regional formations. This outcome was also reinforced by the decline of US influence across the globe and more evidently in the evolving Indo-Pacific chessboard, which, according to the authors, drove the coalitions to address the emerging challenges by following alternative paths. Among these, a general pattern followed by the US coalition's members can be identified in the expansion of their security networks beyond those established during the Cold War, as is evident in the cases of Japan, Taiwan, India, and the EU. Furthermore, two distinct behaviors emerged among states, based on their national interests, threat perception, and historical background. On the one hand, nations like Japan were more outspoken and assertive in addressing the Chinese issue; on the other hand, the European powers, India and Taiwan, each with their own goals and motivations, tended to be more cautious in adopting an openly confrontational posture with Beijing, despite their growing concerns over its assertive international stance.

In conclusion, this volume focuses exclusively on the actions of great and middle powers, reflecting the editors' intention to provide an analysis of the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by those actors capable of shaping the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. The original perspective offered by the editors and authors could be further enriched by future research into the effects of Indo-Pacific regional developments on the strategic thinking and policymaking of small powers in Europe and Asia, particularly those traditionally allied or aligned with the US. While already partially analyzed in this volume, future works could look in greater detail into developments on the other side of the fence — China's perceptions and reactions to the new security agenda and network of the US coalitions.

Considering what has been said above, this book is a recommended reading for students and scholars interested in Politics, International Relations, and Regional Studies, especially those engaged in post-Cold War European and Asian politics.