

A decorative background at the top of the page featuring a mosaic of irregular, light-colored tiles in shades of blue, grey, and white, arranged in a pattern that resembles a map or a complex geometric design.

CHAPTER ONE

**FINDING SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC MOSAIC**

James M. Minnich

*Unity is strength...when there is teamwork and collaboration,  
wonderful things can be achieved*

— Mattie J.T. Stepanek, American Poet

**Abstract**

The Indo-Pacific faces unprecedented pressures from disruption, division, and competition, yet has tremendous potential for cooperation and shared security. This chapter explores the historical forces and contemporary drivers shaping the region's complex security landscape. It emphasizes the agency of all states, particularly smaller actors, in navigating great power rivalries and building a stable and prosperous future through comprehensive security cooperation.

**Framing the Indo-Pacific Mosaic**

The Indo-Pacific is not merely a geographical region; it is a vibrant and intricate mosaic of diverse cultures, economies, and strategic interests. This mosaic, however, is facing unprecedented pressures. Disruptive forces such as technological advancements, cyber threats, and climate change, alongside divisions stemming from sovereignty disputes, rising nationalism, and intense competition among great and regional powers, threaten to shatter the Indo-Pacific's delicate balance, jeopardizing the promise of a shared and secure future. Yet, amidst these challenges lies the potential to not only preserve this mosaic but to strengthen its intricate patterns through comprehensive security cooperation.

This book, *The Indo-Pacific Mosaic: Comprehensive Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, serves as a guide to navigating this

complex landscape, offering diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to understanding the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The Indo-Pacific is a global powerhouse, encompassing South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and Oceania. It holds 65% of the world's population,<sup>1</sup> generates over half the global GDP and 60% of world trade,<sup>2</sup> and boasts unparalleled connectivity with 18 of the top 25 shipping ports globally.<sup>3</sup> This remarkable economic and demographic weight underscores its critical importance in shaping the global economy, security, and political order.

While the U.S.-China rivalry often dominates headlines, the Indo-Pacific is far more than a mere backdrop for their competition. This diverse region comprises over 40 nations,<sup>4</sup> each contributing its unique perspective to the regional order. From the bustling economies of Southeast Asia to the vibrant islands of Oceania, these countries are not passive bystanders; they are active agents, shaping their own destinies and contributing to the evolving patterns of the mosaic.

In this era of uncertainty, the Indo-Pacific faces a choice: allow the forces of disruption, division, and competition to shatter its delicate balance or embrace cooperation, innovation, and a balance of competing interests to strengthen its intricate patterns. This volume argues that the future of the Indo-Pacific hinges on the ability of its nations to choose the latter path—to recognize their interconnectedness and work together to preserve and enhance the vibrant mosaic that is the Indo-Pacific. However, achieving this vision requires a new approach to security—one that recognizes the interconnectedness of challenges and embraces collaboration across all levels. This is where the concept of comprehensive security cooperation becomes essential.

*Comprehensive Security Cooperation:  
A Framework for the Future*

Comprehensive security cooperation, as envisioned in this book, goes beyond traditional alliances and military partnerships.<sup>5</sup> It encompasses a multifaceted approach to addressing the interconnected security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>6</sup> This includes not only traditional security concerns such as territorial disputes and military competition but also non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity, transnational crime, and pandemics.<sup>7</sup>

This framework is evident in the Indo-Pacific's collaborative efforts against climate-induced threats. For example, Pacific Island nations have spearheaded initiatives for climate resilience, with countries like Fiji advocating for international cooperation on climate adaptation strategies.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, regional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic—such as ASEAN's joint health initiatives and information sharing—demonstrate how transnational threats can be managed through cooperative action.<sup>9</sup>

Comprehensive security cooperation also recognizes the agency of all states, regardless of size or power, in contributing to regional security. Countries like Singapore and Vietnam have shown how even smaller states can play significant roles in shaping maritime security protocols and engaging in dialogue platforms like the ASEAN Regional Forum.<sup>10</sup>

Inclusivity remains a cornerstone of this approach, ensuring that the security needs of all individuals and communities are considered.<sup>11</sup> This commitment to inclusivity is also evident in regional frameworks like the 2024 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), which emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive approaches in peacebuilding and security efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, comprehensive security cooperation promotes a collaborative approach to addressing shared challenges, recognizing that collective action is essential for achieving lasting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. This approach, encompassing traditional alliances, non-traditional security concerns, and the agency and inclusivity of all states, forms the foundation for navigating the complexities of the Indo-Pacific security environment.

### *Organization of the Book*

To guide the reader in mapping the complexities of disruption, division, and competition in the Indo-Pacific and the imperative for cooperation to build a more secure and stable region, this book is organized into four parts, each exploring a distinct aspect of the Indo-Pacific mosaic:

- *PART I, DISRUPTION AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC* – Establishes the foundation by examining forces reshaping the regional security environment, including globalization, China’s rise, and technological advancements.
- *PART II, NAVIGATING GREAT POWER COMPETITION* – Explores the complexities of great power dynamics, analyzing China’s actions in the South China Sea and the strategic implications of the Myanmar crisis.
- *PART III, THE IMPERATIVE FOR COOPERATION* – Highlights the crucial role of cooperation in addressing shared challenges, focusing on the potential for U.S.-China collaboration on environmental issues and the significance of regional institutions like ASEAN.
- *PART IV, BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SECURITY* – Provides concrete strategies for enhancing security and stability, addressing challenges like sea slavery, and empowering women in governance to strengthen regional resilience.

The Indo-Pacific mosaic is not a static entity; it is a dynamic and evolving composition shaped by historical forces that continue to influence its intricate patterns. To fully understand the complexities of the modern Indo-Pacific and the imperative for comprehensive security cooperation, it is essential to delve into these historical layers.

### **The Making of the Modern Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific's security landscape is intricately linked to its colonial past, which has profoundly influenced its security structures, political institutions, and patterns of cooperation. European powers—Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands—spent centuries carving up vast territories across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, imposing colonial rule and disrupting indigenous political orders.<sup>13</sup> The divisions they created continue to fuel modern territorial disputes, such as those in the South China Sea, and underpin many of the region's current security dynamics.<sup>14</sup>

The post-colonial era ushered in newly independent states, but they emerged into an international order dominated by the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> Great power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union cast a long shadow over the Indo-Pacific, influencing everything from proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which solidified U.S. military presence in the region.<sup>16</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a turning point, allowing new actors, most notably China, to expand their influence.<sup>17</sup> The region's security dynamics shifted from ideological struggles to a focus on economic growth and regional integration. Nations like India asserted greater independence on the world stage, and institutions like ASEAN emerged as vital frameworks for managing regional security and economic cooperation. This shift toward economic growth and regional integration laid the

groundwork for the modern Indo-Pacific, where globalization and interconnectedness have become defining features of the security landscape.

### *The Modern Indo-Pacific*

Today, the Indo-Pacific security environment is a complex interplay of economic interdependence, military shifts, and the resurgence of regional organizations. Globalization has intensified interconnectedness,<sup>18</sup> creating new dimensions of security and requiring a more comprehensive approach to cooperation, as Sebastian Kevany explores in Chapter 2. The rise of interconnected supply chains, for instance, has transformed the Indo-Pacific into a critical hub of global commerce.<sup>19</sup> The region's economies have experienced remarkable growth, fostering an environment where geoeconomics and geopolitics are inextricably linked.

This economic dynamism is accompanied by shifts in military power, including China's nuclear expansion,<sup>20</sup> as analyzed by Bill Wieninger in Chapter 19. China's expanding military presence and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have fueled anxieties among its neighbors and rival powers.<sup>21</sup> In response, the United States has sought to reaffirm its influence through its Indo-Pacific Strategy and partnerships like the Quad.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, countries like Vietnam,<sup>23</sup> Indonesia,<sup>24</sup> and South Korea are bolstering their own military capabilities to hedge against uncertainties.<sup>25</sup>

Amidst these shifts, regional organizations such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum have assumed renewed importance. Though hampered by internal divisions and external pressures,<sup>26</sup> these institutions provide crucial platforms for dialogue, helping to mediate tensions and foster cooperation.

In essence, the Indo-Pacific's journey—from its colonial past through the Cold War and into the modern era—has shaped the intricate security landscape we see today. Understanding these historical layers is essential for appreciating the region's

contemporary challenges and the potential for cooperation amidst intensifying competition. This historical context provides the foundation for understanding the complex dynamics at play in the Indo-Pacific today,<sup>27</sup> where states are navigating a dynamic environment characterized by disruption, division, and competition. These forces are reshaping the regional order and testing the limits of interdependence among nations.

**Disruption, Division, and Competition:  
Defining Forces Shaping the Indo-Pacific**

Buzan and Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a framework for understanding how interdependence among states shapes regional security dynamics.<sup>28</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, this interdependence is tested by forces of disruption, division, and competition.<sup>29</sup> Technological advances, cyberattacks, and climate change disrupt stability; sovereignty disputes, nationalism, and civil conflicts like those in Myanmar create deep divisions; and great power competition, regional rivalries, and ideological clashes intensify pressures on security alignments. Navigating this complex landscape, many countries adopt a strategy of "pulling sideways" or multialignment, seeking diversified foreign policies to avoid exclusive alignment with either the United States or China.<sup>30</sup>

This approach, seen in nations like India and Vietnam, allows them to balance relations with competing powers, maximizing their autonomy and minimizing dependence on any single influence.<sup>31</sup> However, navigating this complex landscape requires addressing the diverse forces of disruption that are reshaping the Indo-Pacific security environment. These disruptive forces include the rapid advancement of technology, the growing impact of cyberattacks, and the escalating challenges of climate change.

### *Disruption*

Beyond great power competition, technological disruption is a major force in the Indo-Pacific. Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming industries, increasing productivity, and enabling new military capabilities, such as autonomous weapons systems and enhanced surveillance.<sup>32</sup> However, this increasing reliance on digital technologies also brings new vulnerabilities. The Indo-Pacific is now susceptible to cyberattacks, which pose risks to national security, economic stability, and privacy.

Moreover, the increasing convergence of the cyber and space domains presents new vulnerabilities and challenges for security cooperation. As China, India, and Japan rapidly expand their space exploration and satellite capabilities,<sup>33</sup> the risks of disruption to critical satellite systems—which underpin global communication, navigation, and financial transactions—are growing. China’s advancements in reusable rocket technology, in particular, have significant implications for the United States and its allies, as explored by Elliot Fox in Chapter 4. This convergence of cyber and space threats demands a more integrated and collaborative approach to security.

Adding to these technological disruptions, environmental challenges further complicate the Indo-Pacific security environment.<sup>34</sup> Climate change, rising sea levels, and resource competition, including the critical issue of water security explored by Ethan Allen in Chapter 5, are intensifying pressures on the region’s natural reserves. These challenges are particularly acute for island nations and coastal states, where competition for resources like fisheries, energy, and freshwater is increasing. Beyond these environmental and technological disruptions, political fragmentation further destabilizes the region, creating obstacles to cooperation and raising the specter of conflict.



*Division*

Political fragmentation is becoming increasingly pronounced across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>35</sup> Sovereignty disputes and rising nationalism are straining relationships and undermining previously cooperative arrangements.<sup>36</sup> The crisis in Myanmar following the 2021 coup further exemplifies this fragmentation and its potential consequences, as explored by Miemie Winn Byrd in Chapter 9. The South China Sea remains a volatile flashpoint, where China's expansive territorial claims and militarization of artificial islands have created friction with Southeast Asian nations, as Denny Roy analyzes in Chapter 8. Similarly, the ongoing border dispute between India and China over Aksai Chin continues to generate periodic military standoffs.<sup>37</sup>

The rise of exclusive economic zones (EEZ) has further complicated regional politics.<sup>38</sup> These zones, which grant nations exclusive rights to resources within 200 nautical miles of their coastlines, have become arenas for competition over fisheries, oil, gas, and minerals. Overlapping claims within EEZs, particularly in the South China Sea, have led to frequent confrontations, exacerbating tensions between nations.<sup>39</sup>

Adding to these divisions, the resurgence of nationalism across the Indo-Pacific is driving countries inward.<sup>40</sup> Governments are increasingly prioritizing domestic political considerations over regional cooperation. Nationalist policies and rhetoric, whether manifested in China's assertive foreign policy or India's economic protectionism,<sup>41</sup> are straining diplomatic ties and hindering multilateral solutions to shared challenges.<sup>42</sup> This inward focus and the pursuit of national interests contribute to the intensifying competition between states in the Indo-Pacific, particularly among the major powers vying for regional dominance.

### *Competition*

Great power rivalry, particularly between Washington and Beijing, is intensifying, creating a tense environment across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>43</sup> China's rise as a global economic and military power has been dramatic, but as Ryan Agee analyzes in Chapter 3, there are questions about whether this ascent has reached its peak. Both powers are vying for influence through trade agreements, military alliances, and strategic infrastructure projects. The United States aims to maintain its regional leadership through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Strategy and security partnerships such as the Quad and AUKUS. China, meanwhile, is expanding its footprint through BRI and an increasingly assertive military presence.<sup>44</sup>

This competition for influence is not confined to military posturing; it extends deeply into the economic realm, where a new era of industrial policy is unfolding. In Chapter 16, Srinivasan Sitaraman explores the resurgence of industrial policy among major powers is driving alliances, fueling technological races, and influencing the region's landscape. This interplay between economic strategies and geopolitical objectives is characterized by efforts to secure critical supply chains, dominate key industries, and assert influence through trade and investment. For smaller Indo-Pacific nations, this economic rivalry presents both strategic opportunities and challenges, compelling them to navigate between competing economic models, address vulnerabilities, and leverage partnerships to bolster their resilience in an increasingly dynamic global economy.

North Korea, increasingly described as a “small great power”—a state with dubious conventional military strength but substantial strategic influence due to its nuclear capabilities—adds a significant and complex dimension to the Indo-Pacific security landscape.<sup>45</sup> Although often perceived as a secondary actor, Pyongyang exerts disproportionate regional influence through its nuclear arsenal and ballistic missile tests, regularly heightening tensions. North Korea's

relationships with China and Russia,<sup>46</sup> particularly reports that North Korean soldiers are supporting Russian operations in Ukraine, highlighting the expanding military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow.<sup>47</sup> These provocative actions, combined with missile launches and nuclear threats, require enhanced coordination among Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo. The 2023 Washington Declaration exemplifies this trilateral cooperation,<sup>48</sup> bolstering nuclear deterrence and reinforcing defense ties to counter Pyongyang's threats and maintain regional stability.

While this partnership addresses one aspect of regional security, the Indo-Pacific faces additional shared security threats beyond the competition between major powers. Transnational terrorism, for example, continues to challenge the region, necessitating collaborative counterterrorism strategies, as Sam Mullins explores in Chapter 7. Despite recent gains, this persistent threat requires continued vigilance and cooperation among nations.

In navigating these complex challenges, many Indo-Pacific nations are adopting diverse strategies to manage great power rivalry. Countries like Indonesia,<sup>49</sup> Vietnam,<sup>50</sup> and Singapore are pursuing strategic autonomy,<sup>51</sup> balancing relationships with both the United States and China. Meanwhile, others, like South Korea, are shifting from ambiguity to more defined security approaches, as analyzed by Lami Kim in Chapter 13.

Competition in the Indo-Pacific extends beyond the U.S.-China dynamic. Smaller but still significant regional rivalries also shape the security environment. The enduring conflict between India and Pakistan remains a critical flashpoint in South Asia.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, tensions between Japan and South Korea, rooted in historical grievances and territorial disputes, continue to hinder genuine cooperation despite recent reconciliation efforts.<sup>53</sup> These smaller rivalries, while often overshadowed by U.S.-China competition, nonetheless contribute to the Indo-Pacific's overall instability and complicate efforts to build a cohesive regional security framework.

In the broader context, disruption, division, and competition are the defining forces shaping the Indo-Pacific today.<sup>54</sup> As the region grapples with technological advancements, environmental challenges, and geopolitical rivalries, it must also contend with growing divisions that hinder cooperation. Navigating these challenges effectively demands a comprehensive approach to security cooperation, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of these forces and fosters collaboration among all actors in the region.

Yet, amidst this complex and competitive landscape, the need for cooperation has never been more urgent.<sup>55</sup> To fully grasp the imperative for cooperation, it is essential to understand the potential costs of inaction and the multifaceted benefits of collaborative security efforts.

### **The Imperative of Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific is at a critical juncture. While competition between major powers, particularly the United States and China, is intensifying, the region also faces a multitude of shared challenges that demand collaborative solutions. Climate change, resource scarcity, and the risk of pandemics, among other threats, transcend national borders and require collective action. The consequences of inaction, of prioritizing narrow self-interest over cooperation, could be devastating, not only for regional stability but also for the global economy.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Cooperation Amidst Competition*

Averting a future defined by conflict requires a nuanced and strategic approach. Indo-Pacific states must navigate the complexities of cooperating on shared challenges while maintaining competing interests. This delicate balancing act necessitates a willingness to compromise, build trust, and invest in multilateral institutions and regional dialogues that facilitate collective action, reduce tensions, and encourage innovative solutions. Such

cooperation may require setting aside past differences and focusing on shared interests, even nations with a history of conflict, as Peter Haymond illustrates in Chapter 17.

Cooperation on environmental issues, for instance, is essential for the region's survival.<sup>57</sup> Climate change, with its rising sea levels and extreme weather events, poses an existential threat to island nations and coastal states alike, as Joanna Siekiera highlights in Chapter 6. Addressing this challenge effectively requires setting aside territorial disputes and economic rivalries in the interest of regional stability.

Crisis management mechanisms offer another avenue for cooperation. As Andreea Mosila explores in Chapter 15, strategies employed during the pandemic, such as early action and community engagement, can be adapted to address the complex challenges of climate change. Natural disasters, pandemics, or major security incidents demand swift, coordinated responses that transcend borders. Countries with competing interests may find that collaboration in these areas serves their national security interests, even amidst disagreements on other geopolitical issues. However, while cooperation on crisis management and other shared challenges offers significant benefits, the costs of inaction are even greater, potentially jeopardizing regional and global stability.

### *The Cost of Inaction*

The stakes of failing to cooperate are exceptionally high.<sup>58</sup> A great power conflict in the Indo-Pacific would have catastrophic consequences, potentially triggering economic devastation on a global scale.<sup>59</sup> Trade networks would crumble, investment would evaporate, and regional economies—especially those reliant on global supply chains—would face severe hardship.<sup>60</sup> The interconnectedness of today's globalized economy means that any major conflict in the Indo-Pacific, with its dominance in world trade and maritime traffic, would send shockwaves far beyond its shores.

Beyond the economic risks, a lack of cooperation could also lead to a security spiral, with increased military spending, arms races, and a heightened risk of miscalculation and conflict. The human cost of such a scenario would be immeasurable.<sup>61</sup> These risks underscore the urgent need to overcome the obstacles that hinder cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and forge a path toward a more collaborative and secure future.

### *Overcoming Obstacles of Cooperation*

Despite the undeniable need for cooperation, achieving it is becoming increasingly difficult. The challenge stems from the complex interplay of geoeconomics and geopolitics, where economic interests are intertwined with strategic calculations. Control over critical technologies, energy resources, and key infrastructure, including submarine cables, as Divya Rai explores in Chapter 24, is no longer just an economic advantage; it is a means to project power and influence.<sup>62</sup> The competition between the United States and China over 6G technology, supply chain dominance, and energy corridors exemplifies this fusion of economic and geopolitical interests.<sup>63</sup>

Trade disputes further complicate the pursuit of cooperation. The rise of protectionist policies and retaliatory tariffs has strained relationships, even among allies.<sup>64</sup> Competition for energy resources adds another layer of complexity. As energy security concerns intensify, nations are reluctant to rely on rivals for critical resources, hindering long-term cooperation.<sup>65</sup>

The shift away from multilateralism toward bilateral or regional spheres of influence also poses a significant obstacle. Some countries are retreating from multilateral commitments, prioritizing narrowly defined national interests or bilateral alliances. This approach undermines broader regional cohesion. The United States, for instance, has focused on strengthening ties with allies like Japan and Australia, while China has cultivated its own network through

initiatives like BRI. This fragmentation of regional cooperation into competing spheres of influence erodes the prospects for collective action on shared challenges.<sup>66</sup>

The cost of inaction in the Indo-Pacific is substantial. Failure to cooperate could lead to devastating economic consequences, heightened political tensions, and an increased risk of conflict. However, the path to cooperation is fraught with obstacles. Geoeconomic considerations blur the lines between economic competition and strategic rivalry, making multilateral collaboration more challenging.<sup>67</sup> To avert a future marred by conflict, regional actors must embrace difficult compromises, recognizing that cooperation, even between competitors, remains the only viable path to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. Fortunately, the Indo-Pacific possesses a diverse network of institutions that can facilitate such cooperation and contribute to regional stability.

### **Regional and International Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific is a region where regional and international cooperation is essential for navigating the complex security challenges of the 21st century. A diverse network of institutions plays a vital role in fostering this cooperation, providing platforms for dialogue, coordination, and collective action. These institutions facilitate cooperation between major powers and empower smaller ones, shaping the rules and norms that govern the Indo-Pacific. To better understand the mechanisms of cooperation in the region, it is essential to examine the key institutions and their unique contributions to the Indo-Pacific security landscape.

#### *Key Institutions and Their Contributions*

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a prime example of a regional institution promoting peace and cooperation. As Scott McDonald argues in Chapter 18, ASEAN has the potential to solidify its position as a leader of consequence in the Indo-Pacific.

Founded on consensus-building, ASEAN has played a crucial role in preventing conflicts and fostering dialogue, contributing to regional stability.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has been instrumental in advancing economic cooperation across the Indo-Pacific. By fostering trade agreements and encouraging economic integration, APEC has benefited both developed and developing economies. Its focus on trade liberalization and economic development provides a counterbalance to rising geopolitical tensions, reminding states of the stabilizing power of economic interdependence.

The Quad, comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, has emerged as a key platform for strategic and security coordination. Its objective is to ensure a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific by coordinating security strategies and aligning interests in areas such as maritime security, disaster relief, and cyber defense.<sup>68</sup>

The AUKUS partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, established in 2021, adds another dimension to the regional security architecture. Focused on military cooperation and the development of advanced technologies, AUKUS enhances the region's defense capabilities. While lacking the multilateral scope of ASEAN or APEC, AUKUS highlights the trend of great powers forming strategic alignments to address emerging security challenges.<sup>69</sup>

Other forums, such as the Pacific Islands Forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), empower smaller states. These platforms allow them to voice concerns, advocate for their interests, and collaborate on pressing issues like climate change, fisheries management, and disaster resilience. However, despite their vital contributions, these regional and international institutions are not without their challenges. They face mounting pressures that



threaten to undermine their effectiveness in promoting cooperation and stability. These challenges include internal divisions, uneven development among member states, and the disruptive influence of great power competition.

*Strengthening Regional Institutions:  
The MERCI Approach*

The Indo-Pacific's regional institutions face significant challenges, including internal divisions, uneven development, and the influence of great powers that threaten to undermine their effectiveness in promoting cooperation and stability.<sup>70</sup> To address these, the *MERCI* approach offers a strategic focus on multilateralism, economic development, resilience, crisis response, and influence balancing to strengthen regional institutions.

- *M – MULTILATERALISM*: Deepening partnerships with global organizations, going beyond mere participation in dialogues to tackle shared challenges collectively.
- *E – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*: Bridging economic gaps to build balanced regional prosperity.
- *R – RESILIENCE*: Strengthening governance structures to adapt to shocks.
- *C – CRISIS RESPONSE*: Creating rapid-response mechanisms to leverage shared resources and coordinate logistics to minimize the impact of crises.
- *I – INFLUENCE BALANCING*: Empowering smaller states to navigate great power competition independently.

Implementing the MERCI approach, aligned with the principles of comprehensive security cooperation, aims to create a more resilient and cooperative regional order. Central to this vision is a robust understanding of what security cooperation entails and how it can be effectively implemented in the Indo-Pacific.

## **What Is Security Cooperation?**

Security cooperation is the cornerstone of a stable and secure Indo-Pacific. It involves a collaborative effort among nations to enhance stability, prevent conflict, and manage crises through defense partnerships,<sup>71</sup> diplomatic engagement, economic ties, and coordinated responses to traditional and non-traditional threats.<sup>72</sup> As James Minnich articulates in Chapter 25, comprehensive security cooperation must be inclusive, addressing the diverse needs of all while promoting peace, economic development, and effective crisis management. This holistic approach is essential for fostering a cohesive and resilient regional environment. To further guide the development and implementation of effective security cooperation strategies, this section introduces the PEACE principles, which provide a framework for addressing the evolving security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

### *Shaping Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific: The PEACE Principles*

Shaping security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific requires a strategic and comprehensive approach. There is no single model for success, but core principles remain essential for effective application and adaptation to the region's unique challenges. The PEACE principles—partnerships, engagements, adaptability, collaboration, and empowerment—provide a framework for fostering stability and resilience in this dynamic region.

- ***P* – PARTNERSHIPS:** Building robust military alliances and defense pacts that enhance interoperability and enable cooperative regional threat responses.
- ***E* – ENGAGEMENT:** Facilitating diplomatic forums for dialogue, dispute resolution, and trust-building to reduce conflict risks and promote regional stability.

- *A – ADAPTABILITY*: Developing strategies to address evolving security challenges like cyberattacks, terrorism, and climate-induced threats, ensuring agile and effective responses.
- *C – COLLABORATION*: Strengthening maritime security to safeguard critical sea lanes, counter-piracy, and promote freedom of navigation.
- *E – EMPOWERMENT*: Encouraging inclusive economic partnerships that foster trade, investment, and development, laying a foundation for long-term peace and prosperity.

The PEACE principles demonstrate that security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific goes beyond traditional military concerns, encompassing diplomacy, economic empowerment, and adaptability to emerging threats. By adhering to these principles, nations can collectively foster a secure, stable, and inclusive regional environment, addressing complex security dynamics through collaboration. However, realizing this vision of cooperation requires overcoming significant obstacles that hinder collaborative efforts in the region. This section examines the HARD challenges—historical grievances, alienation, resistance to multilateralism, and the dominance of great powers—that impede the progress of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

*Challenges to Security Cooperation:  
HARD Challenges*

While Indo-Pacific security cooperation offers numerous advantages, it faces significant HARD challenges, including non-traditional security threats that demand greater regional alignment and response. Forced labor in the fishing industry, as detailed by Anny Barlow in Chapter 20, represents a significant barrier to effective regional cooperation. Such issues complicate collaborative efforts by highlighting human security and ethical concerns. In addition to these non-traditional security challenges, other obstacles

impede the progress of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. These include:

- **H – HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES:** Longstanding tensions rooted in colonialism, territorial disputes, or past conflicts continue to shape relationships, hindering trust and cooperation.
- **A – ALIENATION:** Smaller nations often feel marginalized in discussions dominated by larger powers, leading to reluctance to fully engage with regional security initiatives.
- **R – RESISTANCE TO MULTILATERALISM:** Rising nationalism and inward-looking policies create friction, reducing the willingness to engage in cooperative security arrangements.
- **D – DOMINANCE OF GREAT POWERS:** Larger powers can impose their agendas, discouraging smaller states from contributing to collective solutions.

Security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific must overcome these HARD challenges to build a stable and inclusive regional security framework. Embracing principles that address these obstacles can empower countries to work collectively to foster peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. This includes strengthening partnerships with smaller states, as advocated by Kevin Stringer and Madison Urban in Chapter 23. However, while fostering cooperation among all states is crucial, the dynamics between the Indo-Pacific’s major powers, particularly the United States and China, play an outsized role in shaping the region’s security landscape.

### **The Indo-Pacific’s Great Power Challenge**

The Indo-Pacific’s security landscape is dominated by the intricate maneuvers between great powers, particularly the relationships between the United States and China. Their interactions ripple through the region, shaping political, economic, and security dynamics. However, the Indo-Pacific is not solely defined by this

great power competition. It is a complex ecosystem where over 40 nations, each with its own agency and aspirations, contribute to the regional order. Navigating this intricate web of relationships requires a nuanced understanding of both the challenges and opportunities presented by great power dynamics, particularly the complex interplay of cooperation and competition between the United States and China.

*Cooperation and Competition Between  
The United States and China*

The United States and China are indispensable actors in the Indo-Pacific. Their interactions, whether cooperative or competitive, set the tone for regional stability. While their rivalry has intensified in recent years, critical areas remain where cooperation is not only possible but essential, such as climate action, disaster response, and environmental security.<sup>73</sup> However, as explored in Chapter 14 by Scott Hauger, Chen Xue, and Jiahao Cao, this cooperation faces challenges due to the complex dynamics of their relationship. Realizing this potential requires deliberate engagement from both sides, including formal diplomacy, sustained dialogue, and confidence-building measures. However, while cooperation between the United States and China is essential, it is not sufficient to ensure regional stability. The active participation and leadership of smaller states are also crucial for navigating the complexities of great power competition and fostering a more inclusive and cooperative Indo-Pacific.

*The Role of Smaller States*

Crucially, averting great power conflict in the Indo-Pacific also demands the active participation and leadership of smaller states. Nations like Singapore,<sup>74</sup> Indonesia, and Vietnam have historically played a vital role in balancing U.S.-China competition, acting as intermediaries or maintaining non-aligned positions to foster cooperation.<sup>75</sup> The region's smaller and medium-sized powers must

continue to advocate for inclusive solutions that benefit the broader Indo-Pacific. Their role in mitigating tensions and fostering cooperation is crucial for averting the potentially devastating consequences of great power conflict. Should these efforts falter and tensions escalate between major powers, the risks of confrontation could have severe repercussions for the entire region.

### *The Risk of Great Power Conflict*

While full-blown conflict between the United States and China is neither imminent nor inevitable,<sup>76</sup> the risks of confrontation remain a significant concern for the Indo-Pacific. In particular, territorial disputes in the South China Sea,<sup>77</sup> East China Sea,<sup>78</sup> and over Taiwan are particularly volatile flashpoints. Any miscalculation in these areas could escalate into a broader conflict with severe regional and global consequences.

Beyond the immediate risks of military confrontation, the growing trend of economic decoupling between the United States and China poses a significant threat to regional and global stability. As these two major powers disengage from shared trade and technology frameworks, tensions could further escalate, destabilizing global markets and jeopardizing decades of economic integration. This decoupling can manifest in two primary forms: trade fragmentation, where countries reduce their reliance on each other for goods and services, and technological decoupling, where they restrict the flow of technology and knowledge. Both forms pose significant risks to global economic stability. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns that trade fragmentation alone could result in a long-term loss of up to 7% of global GDP, with some countries facing declines as steep as 12% if technological decoupling is also factored in.<sup>79</sup> Amplifying these concerns, a study by McKinsey estimated that the full costs of decoupling could range between \$22 trillion and \$37 trillion in economic value, equivalent to about 15% to 26% of global GDP.<sup>80</sup> This fragmentation of capital flows, including foreign direct investment, could trigger a cascade

of negative economic consequences, hindering growth and development for years to come.

Should tensions escalate further and spiral into a great power conflict, the economic and human costs would be catastrophic. A large-scale confrontation, especially one involving Taiwan, could have a devastating global impact. Bloomberg Economics estimates that a potential conflict over Taiwan could inflict a loss of around \$10 trillion, or roughly 10% of global GDP, surpassing the economic shocks from the Ukraine war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Global Financial Crisis.<sup>81</sup> Such a conflict would disrupt global supply chains, triggering a global recession and resulting in significant civilian casualties and displacement. The long-term geopolitical effects would also be far-reaching, potentially fracturing the international order and hindering global cooperation on shared challenges.

The U.S.-China dynamic will remain central to the Indo-Pacific's future, but it is not the only determinant. The risks of great power conflict are real but avoidable. If both sides can find common ground on critical issues and smaller states continue to advocate for inclusive cooperation, a more positive future is possible. The fate of the Indo-Pacific rests on the ability of all actors, great and small, to navigate this complex environment, avert the catastrophic costs of conflict, and work toward a stable, prosperous, and peaceful region. This requires a commitment to comprehensive security cooperation, where all states, regardless of their size or power, contribute to shaping a regional order that prioritizes stability, inclusivity, and shared prosperity. While the actions of the United States and China are undeniably significant, it is crucial to recognize the agency of the many other nations that call the Indo-Pacific home. These smaller and medium-sized states play a vital role in comprehensive security cooperation, contributing their unique strengths and perspectives to shaping a more stable and inclusive regional order.

### **Agency Within the Indo-Pacific Mosaic**

While the actions of great powers, undoubtedly shape the Indo-Pacific, the region's future is not solely determined by their decision. The Indo-Pacific is a dynamic composition formed from the contributions of nearly one-quarter of the world's nations, each contributing its unique strengths to the region. These nations are not passive bystanders; they are active agents, wielding considerable influence through diplomacy, economic strategies, and security partnerships.

Just as each tessera in a mosaic contributes to the overall beauty and complexity of the artwork, each Indo-Pacific nation plays a vital role in shaping the regional order. Their agency is not merely a matter of self-determination; it is an essential component of a diversified and resilient regional security architecture.

For example, the smaller nations of South Asia face the challenge of balancing their sovereignty and development goals while being caught between the competing ambitions of India and China. As Shyam Tekwani and Saumya Sampath explore in Chapter 12, these states can leverage multilateral platforms to diversify their alliances, amplify their voices on the global stage, and reduce reliance on dominant powers.<sup>82</sup> Their strategies exemplify how geopolitical vulnerabilities can be transformed into strengths through careful navigation of a multipolar world.<sup>83</sup>

This agency is also evident in Vietnam's multialignment strategy,<sup>84</sup> balancing relationships with both the United States and China, Indonesia's role as a regional leader and its efforts to promote ASEAN centrality,<sup>85</sup> and Singapore's strategic autonomy and its focus on economic diplomacy.<sup>86</sup>

As the region navigates an increasingly complex and competitive global landscape, these states are demonstrating remarkable agency in shaping both their own futures and the broader



Indo-Pacific order, contributing to a more diversified and resilient regional security architecture.

*Active Agents, Not Bystanders*

Indo-Pacific countries are actively shaping their trajectories, often by renegotiating existing agreements and advocating for greater autonomy, as exemplified by the Freely Associated States' efforts to reimagine their Compacts of Free Association with the United States, as explored by Rachele Rodriguez in Chapter 10. Regional organizations like ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum also demonstrate the influence that smaller nations can wield by working together. ASEAN, in particular, has been instrumental in providing a diplomatic platform that fosters cooperation and engagement with external powers.

These collective bodies amplify the voices of smaller states and serve as stabilizing forces in the region. By fostering dialogue and cooperation, they help prevent conflicts from escalating and ensure that smaller states are not relegated to the sidelines of great power politics. This agency, however, is constantly tested, which requires a delicate balancing act to preserve autonomy and avoid entanglement in larger rivalries.

*Navigating Great Power Rivalries*

Many Indo-Pacific countries are actively seeking to preserve their agency and avoid becoming entangled in the escalating tension between Washington and Beijing. To achieve this, these nations are often pursuing a strategy of pulling sideways or multialignment, engaging with both the United States and China without fully committing to either.<sup>87</sup> This approach allows them to maximize their economic and strategic benefits while maintaining autonomy in decision-making.

Countries like Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia have mastered the art of multialignment, engaging diplomatically with

both superpowers while avoiding deep entanglement in their rivalry.<sup>88</sup> This middle-ground approach offers greater flexibility in shaping their national policies. By eschewing binary alliances, these countries retain the ability to act in their own best interests and leverage the competitive dynamics between Washington and Beijing to their advantage.

India exemplifies a more prominent application of multialignment on the world stage. As Shyam Tekwani and Saumya Sampath explore in Chapter 11, India adeptly balances its relationships with major powers like the United States, China, and Russia, employing “strategic autonomy” to protect its national interests while fostering diverse partnerships. This approach highlights India’s growing influence and its ability to shape the regional order in an increasingly multipolar Indo-Pacific.

This pragmatic approach reflects the desire of many Indo-Pacific nations to prioritize regional cooperation over global power struggles. By focusing on economic integration, sustainable development, and shared security challenges, they can pursue growth and stability without being drawn into geopolitical friction between great powers.<sup>89</sup> However, this pursuit of regional unity is not without its challenges. Despite their agency, Indo-Pacific nations must actively overcome significant obstacles to achieve a truly collaborative and secure regional order.

#### *Challenges to Unity and the Path Forward*

While Indo-Pacific countries have demonstrated significant agency in shaping their own destinies, they also face formidable challenges to regional unity. These challenges, stemming from national interests, economic disparities, and sovereignty disputes, often hinder collective action and impede the realization of a shared vision for the region.<sup>90</sup>

The South China Sea dispute exemplifies the difficulty of finding common ground on territorial and sovereignty issues.

Economic disparities, historical grievances, and tendencies to “otherize” also pose significant barriers to cooperation. Countries must resist the temptation to “otherize,” recognizing that this tendency can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, fuel mistrust, and undermine collaborative efforts.<sup>91</sup> For example, historical grievances between Japan and South Korea, rooted in past conflicts and differing interpretations of history, continue to impede cooperation on critical security issues. Similarly, the exclusion of certain ethnic or religious groups from decision-making processes can create internal divisions and hinder societal resilience. Embracing inclusivity and respectful engagement with all regional actors is essential for achieving collective security and economic prosperity.

Beyond these geopolitical challenges, the region must also cultivate societal resilience—a cornerstone of stability in an era defined by polycrisis. As Beth Kunce explores in Chapter 21, societal resilience hinges on fostering social cohesion, building trust in institutions, and cultivating the capacity to adapt to interconnected and evolving threats.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering societal resilience and overcoming these challenges. As Roxane Turner and James Minnich demonstrate in Chapter 22, transformative leadership can unite fragmented communities and build resilience against interconnected threats. They highlight the examples of former President Atifete Jahjaga’s focus on reconciliation in post-conflict Kosovo and former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s compassionate crisis management in New Zealand, illustrating the power of inclusion, empathy, and trust in inspiring collective strength. These examples highlight the necessity of leadership in uniting fragmented communities and building resilience against interconnected challenges.

To overcome these challenges and foster a more unified and resilient Indo-Pacific, a shared vision of comprehensive security

cooperation is essential. This vision, where all states contribute to maintaining the regional order, is crucial for navigating the complexities and uncertainties of the Indo-Pacific. It is also a crucial component of comprehensive security cooperation, which recognizes the agency of all actors, great and small, in building a more stable and prosperous future.

### **A Vision for Comprehensive Security Cooperation**

The Indo-Pacific, with its diverse mosaic of cultures, economies, and security interests, stands at a critical juncture. While facing the challenges of disruption, division, and competition, the region also holds immense potential for cooperation and shared prosperity. To realize this potential and ensure a secure and stable future, embracing comprehensive security cooperation is essential. By embracing comprehensive security cooperation, the region's nations can choose to strengthen the bonds that hold this mosaic together, ensuring a future defined by peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

To achieve this vision, the region's countries must resist the temptation to be consumed by the shadows of today. A focus on short-term rivalries and anxieties about great power conflict can obscure the long-term benefits of cooperative security and shared prosperity. Instead of allowing tensions to escalate unchecked, regional actors must invest in diplomacy, multilateralism, and security cooperation.<sup>92</sup> By doing so, they can cultivate an environment where peace and stability prevail and economic development flourishes without the threat of conflict.

Security cooperation, even among competitors, is not only possible but essential to avoid the devastating costs of war. History has repeatedly demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of great power conflict, both for those directly involved and for the global community. In the Indo-Pacific, a breakdown in relations between key actors would unleash economic turmoil, human suffering, and political instability.<sup>93</sup> Averting this outcome requires deliberate and

sustained engagement, not just between Washington and Beijing but among all nations in the region.

Ultimately, the future of the Indo-Pacific hinges on the ability of its countries to collaborate and compromise, recognizing that the region's prosperity depends on collective action, not division. In this complex and rapidly evolving landscape, cooperation is not merely an option; it is a necessity. The challenges of the 21st century—from security threats to economic instability—are too vast for any nation to confront alone. By embracing comprehensive security cooperation, the Indo-Pacific can better forge a future defined by peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

This book, *The Indo-Pacific Mosaic: Comprehensive Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, offers a vital contribution to understanding the complexities of security cooperation in this dynamic region. By bringing together diverse perspectives and insightful analyses, it illuminates the path toward a more cooperative and secure future for the Indo-Pacific. The future of the Indo-Pacific is not predetermined; it is a mosaic formed by the choices its nations and actors make today. This book serves as both a guide and an inspiration for that journey, encouraging all actors to choose cooperation, innovation, and a shared commitment to building a more secure and prosperous future for all.

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