

THE UNITED NATIONS, INDO-PACIFIC AND KOREAN PENINSULA: An Emerging Security Architecture | Edited by Shin-Wha Lee and Jagannath Panda

*Routledge Studies on Think Asia. New York: Routledge, 2023. US\$136.00, cloth; US\$43.00, ebook. ISBN 9781032460680.*

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*The United Nations, Indo-Pacific and Korean Peninsula: An Emerging Security Architecture*, edited by Shin-Wha Lee and Jagannath Panda, brings leading foreign and security policy experts together to dissect the relevance of the United Nations (UN) in the Indo-Pacific region, through both historical and policy approaches. Aimed at academics and practitioners, it not only sheds light on different countries' perspectives on the role of the UN in Asia over the past century, but also paves the way for conceptualizing future UN initiatives in what has now been redefined as the "Indo-Pacific." This book builds on emerging Indo-Pacific scholarship that predominantly characterizes it as a space of great power competition. Yet it nuances that narrative by shifting the focus away from "the extended spotlight on the Indo-Pacific region's connection to power" (123) to instead probe the UN multilateral structures that have historically shaped the Pacific side of the region. Tracing the history of great power competition back to World War II, it effectively anchors the Indo-Pacific in the *longue durée*. At the same time, it starts a conversation about the successes and failures of the UN system. This implies a fundamental question: Can a UN-centred multilateral system adequately support an Indo-Pacific vision of Asia? In addressing this interrogation, the book contributes to ongoing debates about the relevance of multilateral institutions in an Indo-Pacific order.

The book is structured into three parts and fourteen chapters. The first part explores the UN's role in the Indo-Pacific through the perspectives of key regional actors, including the United States, China, Korea, and Japan. The second part addresses critical challenges faced by countries in the region, including maritime disputes in the South China Sea, potential synergies between the UN and the Quad, the partial success of UN humanitarian aid projects in Myanmar, and the particularities of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. It further highlights how bilateral, minilateral, and UN-

led efforts have attempted to resolve these issues. The third and final part of the volume illustrates the interactions between multilateral and regional orders through their local manifestations. It notably accounts for the impact of UN actions in the Korean Peninsula, including the evolving status of the UN Command (UNC), and more recent Korean engagement with UN initiatives on non-proliferation, SDGs, and humanitarian aid.

The main strength of the volume lies in its ability to address an array of thematic issues whilst also demonstrating their interconnectedness. The detailed history of China's engagement in the UN, for instance, is presented in view of Chinese attempts to curb North Korea's nuclear activities. This enables the book to address macro-level issues such as great power rivalry very concretely, by drawing on the history of the UN in Northeast Asia. In doing so, it provides a much-needed analysis which goes beyond standard accounts of the Indo-Pacific that primarily depict it as both a space of abstract enlargement and a temporal marker of radical rupture.

The volume's structure allows it to bring forth many perspectives not merely as case studies of great power competition, but as relevant objects of research. This case-study-based approach allows the book to make three other important contributions. The first is to remind us that the search for an Indo-Pacific multilateralism is not unfolding in a vacuum. This is essential when determining whether the United Nations can play a part in the region's changing security architecture. The volume does so by recalling the forgotten history of the Indo-Pacific. Here the book's eleventh chapter on the role of the UN in Korea is a much-needed historical reminder and starting point for thinking about the region's prospects and not repeating the mistakes of the past. Second and most importantly, by focusing on Northeast Asian viewpoints, it manages to paint a picture of the Indo-Pacific as a space of agency, and not just of interest. It reminds us that just as much as "large-scale armed conflict is still a reality, and is not merely confined to the pages of history" (5), the Indo-Pacific, which encompasses many of these conflicts, cannot be understood solely from the perspectives of major powers. Rather, the views of countries caught in the middle must be at the centre of the analysis. Lastly, part 3 provides a historically informed analysis of UN actions in the Korean Peninsula; it nuances the role of the organization and suggests areas for improvement. However, while each section

addresses critical themes and the book's policy focus is very rich in detail, a more sustained effort to connect all three parts, through a concluding chapter for instance, would have greatly contributed to the argument.

This book primarily speaks to academics and policy experts; nevertheless, the diversity of chapters and the overarching argument can also be of interest to history enthusiasts. Overall, the volume demystifies too often abstract accounts of the Indo-Pacific by unpacking the interplay of the multilateral and regional considerations at work. It invites us to look at what is tangible in the Indo-Pacific idea, notably its poignant war legacies, without which contemporary dynamics cannot be fully understood. It also enables a reading of the Indo-Pacific not simply as the addition of multiple perspectives but rather as an assemblage of experiences. To sum up, this edited volume accomplishes the impressive three-legged job of pluralizing views on the history of UN multilateralism in the region, of historicizing the context leading to the emergence of a new regional Indo-Pacific order, and finally, of making a pragmatic case for maintaining a UN-centred multilateral architecture going forward. In that sense, this timely volume is a must for anyone interested in the history of the Indo-Pacific and looking for a nuanced reading of the UN's future role in Northeast Asia. This book also opens avenues for further research on what the emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept tells us about the successes and pitfalls of the UN's involvement in the region in the past decades.

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