Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Australian Journal of International Affairs

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/caji20

Simply another practice among others? Analysing the rise of strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region

Jack D. Butcher

To cite this article: Jack D. Butcher (10 Jun 2024): Simply another practice among others? Analysing the rise of strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, Australian Journal of International Affairs, DOI: 10.1080/10357718.2024.2362143

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2362143

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 10 Jun 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=caji20

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2362143

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Simply another practice among others? Analysing the rise of strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region

Jack D. Butcher

Department of Politics and International Relations, the University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

ABSTRACT

Strategic partnerships (SPs) have grown exponentially over the last decade in the Asia-Pacific. However, little remains known in the international security studies (ISS) literature regarding why they have proliferated now and how to best understand what they mean for regional security. In this article, I argue that SPs are best understood as a new security practice in the Asia-Pacific that allows states and multilateral actors to flexibly manage threats, strategic challenges, and interests through cooperation and common norm building. To evidence this argument, I adopt a functional approach to SPs that draws upon the mainstream ISS theories of realism, liberalism and constructivism and synthesises them where possible to draw attention to a wide range of causal factors responsible for them. Analyses guided by eclecticism can provide an all-encompassing tool for explanatory and comparative studies on Asia-Pacific security to draw a broader range of conclusions than any one approach allows for.

KEYWORDS

Strategic partnerships; security practice; Asia-Pacific; Indo-Pacific; analytical eclecticism

Introduction

In March 2024, Australia and Vietnam upgraded their bilateral relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' (CSP). In a media release entitled 'A New Era for Australia-Vietnam Relations,' Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described the CSP as embodying 'an ambitious agenda across climate change and sustainability, digital transformation and innovation, defence and security, economics and trade, and education' (Albanese 2024). The CSP reflected Australia and Vietnam's 'cooperation, strategic trust and a shared ambition' for the region while recognising the relationship's 'enormous potential' (Albanese 2024). Meanwhile, for Hanoi, the CSP with Australia followed declarations of CSPs with the United States (US), Japan, South Korea, and enhanced commitments to China's 'community of a common destiny' (Butcher 2024). Vietnamese Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son analogised the CSP as one of several 'flexible branches' of the 'strong roots' and 'sturdy stamps' of Vietnam's 'bamboo

CONTACT Jack D. Butcher jack.butcher@adelaide.edu.au

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

diplomacy,' which aims to promote 'creative' and 'flexible' relations with major powers in the Asia-Pacific as the strategic rivalry between the US and China intensifies (Bui 2024).

The recent CSP between Australia and Vietnam symbolises the rise of an increasingly salient form of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific over the last decade—the 'strategic partnership' (SP). As of 2024, more than 100 SPs have been signed across the region, with almost every state and influential multilateral actor having entered at least one. So far, China has been the most active proponent of SP diplomacy, declaring them with every state in its periphery except Japan and North Korea (Li and Ye 2019). Although initially hesitant, the US has declared over ten SPs with emerging regional powers while strengthening its core alliances (Roulo 2019). The region's middle powers, namely states in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, and Australia, have all made SPs central to their 'Indo-Pacific' outlooks and strategies (ASEAN 2023; DFAT 2017; Japan 2023). Even the small powers of Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Mongolia have integrated SPs into their foreign and defence policies (China MFA 2022a; Koga 2022).

Despite the widespread proliferation of SPs across the region, not much is known in the international relations and security literature regarding why this is the case. Most studies on SPs have so far paid attention to bilateral interactions between two or more partners without addressing the growth of SPs at the regional level. Therefore, I pose the following questions in this article: why have so many SPs been signed over the last decade, and how do we best understand what they mean for regional security? I argue that SPs are best understood as a new security practice that allows states and multilateral actors to flexibly manage complex threats, strategic challenges, and interests through cooperation and common norm building. To evidence my argument, I adopt a functional approach to SPs that draws upon the mainstream ISS theories of realism, liberalism, and constructivism and synthesises them where possible to draw our attention to a wide range of causal factors responsible for them. I opt for an eclectic approach to SPs because it remains difficult to adequately analyse their proliferation, multifaceted functions, and the ramifications for security in the Asia-Pacific without referencing all three theories in some way.

I structure my argument as follows. First, I begin by introducing the concept of security practices in relation to realism, liberalism, and constructivism to show how and where SPs fit among the five existing security practices in the Asia-Pacific. Second, I expand upon SPs as a new sixth core security practice in the Asia-Pacific by introducing their common features to gain an understanding of what they are and what they aim to achieve at a fundamental level. Third, I begin my eclectic analysis of the emergence and functions of SPs in the Asia-Pacific through realism, liberalism, and constructivism and synthesise the three where possible to show how SPs have been used to facilitate cooperation and common norm building as the array of complex threats, risks, challenges, and interests grow and evolve. I end with a brief discussion on the ramifications of the growth of SPs by detailing what their proliferation tells us about the current state of security in the Asia-Pacific.

What security practices exist in the Asia-Pacific?

Since the end of the Cold War, what constitutes 'security' has expanded from simply war and threats of the use of force to encompass complex issues that were once perceived as

peripheral and others that had not yet existed (Collins 2010, 2). The process of globalisation and its resultant effects have led to an increased realisation among states that their security concerns are interlinked. Enhanced connectivity, which is more intense among states inside specific regional complexes than outside of them, has resulted in issues that were once internal to states, such as trade, investment flows, and supply chains, becoming externalised and previously external issues, like climate change, transnational terrorism, and distant conflicts, being internalised (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 11–12). One consequence of the blurring between internal and external issues has been the narrowing of the long-held assumption that security and prosperity are distinct. These two concepts now reinforce each other, which has expanded security to incorporate new referents, broadening its scope as a result (DeBrouwer 2020).

As the security agendas of states widen, so have the perceived means to secure. These means, which I refer to as 'practices,' are 'socially meaningful patterns of action that are repeated in different interactions of practitioner behaviour, which depend on shared background knowledge regarding their purpose, function, and meaning' (Envall and Hall 2016, 89). Although distinct, security practices are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Neorealism, which argues that states consist of rational actors who prudently monitor changes in the distribution of power, views security practices as designed to increase the state's chance of survival in a world defined by enduring anarchy (Waltz 1979). The most effective security practice for neorealists is alliances, which are 'formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force in specified circumstances against states outside of their own membership' (Snyder 1997, 5). In ISS, alliances are connected to Waltz's (1979) conceptualisation of 'balancing' and 'bandwagoning' where states 'balance' with other powers when a rising power challenges the status quo or 'bandwagon' with a rising power hoping to share the spoils of victory.

The most defining feature of alliances as a first core security practice in the Asia-Pacific is their binding character and tendency to be directed towards other entities (Liska 1962). Alliances can be bilateral between two states or consist of multiple states within a multilateral framework. The most prominent alliance arrangement in the Asia-Pacific has been the 'Hub-and-Spokes' system or the San Francisco system, in which the US has a web of bilateral alliances with Australia, New Zealand (suspended), Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand (Izumikawa 2020). The recently extended 'Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance' between China and North Korea is considered another (Nanto and Manyin 2011, 94). Although often signed for specific purposes, alliances can endure well past their perceived use-by dates. The Hub-and-Spokes system and the Sino-North Korean friendship treaty notably outlived the Cold War, evidencing their continued relevance as a security practice in the region.

Alternatively to realism, liberalism views security practices as facilitating cooperation through repeated interactions between states with the purpose of mitigating anarchy. Liberalism in ISS traces its philosophical roots to Immanuel Kant's 'three conditions for perpetual peace'—'a federation of free states, universal hospitality, and republican constitutions' (Simpson 2019, 109). The most influential liberal tradition in the ISS literature, neoliberal institutionalism, holds that the most effective security practice is multilateralism, which refers to 'the coordination of national policies in groups of three or more states through ad-hoc arrangements or by means of institutions' (Keohane 1990,

731). Neoliberal institutionalists argue that the effectiveness of multilateralism lies in its ability to reduce transaction costs, provide information, render commitments credible, establish focal points for coordination, facilitate reciprocity and enable complex interlinkages of issues (Keohane and Martin 1995).

The middle and small powers of the Asia-Pacific have used multilateralism as a second core security practice to manage shared challenges and persuade states, regardless of their size, to abide by internationally recognised treaties. Since the 1970s and 1980s, several core multilateral institutions have been established to help manage relations between great and small powers alike. These include ASEAN and its affiliates, such as the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM+), and the East Asia Summit (EAS). There are also non-ASEAN-based institutions like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Indian Rim Association (IORA), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The lower-level Track 1.5 (semi-official) and Track 2 (unofficial) dialogues also count as extensions of regional multilateralism, which include the International Institute for Strategic Studies's (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), among others.

Besides alliances and multilateralism, minilaterals and coalitions have been the third and fourth core security practices in the Asia-Pacific, which are best explained by combining liberalism and realism. Despite sharing characteristics with ad-hoc multilateralism, minilaterals can be distinguished as 'groupings of three, but sometimes four or five states that meet and interact informally to discuss issue areas involving mutual threats to their security, or more often, to go over tasks related to building regional stability and order' (Tow 2015, 24–25). The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD), the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), and AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States) have been the most prominent examples. Meanwhile, coalitions are groupings of 'two or more nations with a set goal united for specific purposes with no commitment to a durable relationship' (Pierre 2002, 2). Some states in the Asia-Pacific have joined coalitions when there is a multilateral consensus regarding a common threat to regional stability, notably seen during the Korean War (1950–1953), the East Timorese Crisis (1999–2000), and the US-led Invasion of Afghanistan (2001–2021).

Constructivism views security practices as not only influenced by material factors but also by ideational ones that originate from intersubjective understandings of appropriate conduct. These shared understandings, often referred to in the ISS literature as 'norms,' are 'a broad class of prescriptive statements—rules, standards, and principles that prescribe action in situations of choice, carrying a sense of obligation, and that they out to the followed' (Chayes and Chayes 1994, 65). Norms are influenced by actor identities, which constructivists argue are 'relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations' about the self that are formed by 'participating in collective meanings' (Wendt 1992, 397). Identities are inherently relational, denote specific roles and inform socially constructed interests, which then proceed to influence behaviour (Wendt 1992, 397). Constructivism argues similarly to, but more profoundly than neoliberals, that anarchy and power politics can be mitigated through the transformation of long-held behaviours and preferences, which ultimately leads to the creation of normative 'orders' that govern relations between states.

Although norms and identities constitute the ideational structures behind the four aforementioned security practices, explaining their longevity in some instances, constructivists separately highlight 'security communities' as a fifth core security practice in the Asia-Pacific. Security communities denote 'the integration of states to the point that they have a sense of community' where 'the use of violence against each other has become very unlikely or even unthinkable' (Adler and Barnett 1998, 30). Over time, a sense of identity emerges in a security community through the development and expression of shared understandings about peaceful conduct that guide interactions between its members (Acharya 2009). As of 2024, ASEAN is currently the only security community in the Asia-Pacific through a 'commitment to an overarching (and relatively binding) authority that lies between the state and a centralised regional government' (Adler and Barnett 1998, 30). ASEAN has already described itself as having built 'a Political-Security Community' with the aim of establishing a 'mature security community' by 2030 (Acharya 2013).

What is a strategic partnership?

SPs constitute the sixth core security practice in the Asia-Pacific after alliances, multilateralism, minilaterals, coalitions, and security communities. Most of the ISS literature on SPs to date has converged around SPs being 'forms of inter-state alignment' that emerged immediately after the end of the Cold War (Boni 2023, 741). SPs are structured and prioritised collaborative frameworks that allow the parties entering them to address shared threats, risks, challenges, and mutual interests that typical diplomatic relationships cannot. At the same time, SPs are more 'loose' alignments when compared to military alliances as they do not bind the partners to rigid courses of action that could entrap them or unnecessarily provoke third parties (Parameswaran 2014, 263–264; Wilkins 2008, 361). SPs can be both complex and straightforward and often have multifaceted functions subject to change (Blanco 2015, 53). Efforts to describe what the ideal SP looks like are complicated by their varied namings, the non-labelling of 'partnerships' resembling SPs, and the underperforming SPs that do not appear 'strategic' nor produce any substantial degree of cooperation.

Therefore, instead of creating an inclusion/exclusion criterion for SPs—something beyond the scope of this article, the best way to present the common features of SPs is by detailing their most basic and comprehensive forms parallel to the declaration, implementation, day-to-day functioning, elevation, and potential termination phases of SPs. When first signed, a SP exemplifies a relationship's political significance through a formal declaration, statement or agreement that outlines policy objectives and a commitment to deepening multifaceted ties (Nadkarni 2010, 48). A SP is informal by providing flexibility to void it if relations deteriorate and, more often than not, is bilateral, distinguishing them from multilateralism and minilaterals (Nadkarni 2010, 48; Wilkins 2008). Although some SPs are simply verbal declarations, there are often common interests and expectations upon which they are based (Holslag 2011, 295). These could be calls to 'enhance mutual understanding' or 'strategic communication' to 'become sincere partners of mutual trust,' with the partners defining expectations and objectives as the SP matures (Xi 2014). Some SPs fail to progress past the declaration phase, which renders them a SP in name only.

In the implementation phase, the strategic partners often seek to establish institutional links at both government and non-governmental levels to achieve reciprocity (Sautenet 2007, 705). This results in cooperative and administrative dialogues being established at the official, semi-official, and non-official levels. These dialogues can come in the form of summits between heads of state or governmental leaders in each partner's capital cities and more frequent meetings at the ministerial, sub-ministerial and bureaucratic levels (Nadkarni 2010, 48–49). Task forces may then be established to identify and further investigate joint threats, risks, challenges, and interests inherent to the partnership's creation and function (Nadkarni 2010, 49). These can consist of assigned or interested political representatives, policy advisors, diplomatic envoys, employees of governmental departments, academics, business people, engineers, and lobbyists.

In its day-to-day functioning, a SP aims to invariably deepen military and economic cooperation, which can be initiated by the SP itself or buttressed by existing agreements such as 'friendship treaties' or 'economic partnerships' (Holslag 2011, 295). A SP often seeks to improve relations between the strategic partners' militaries, which may include initiating joint military exercises, naval visits, and personnel exchanges (Nadkarni 2010, 49). A SP also aims to increase economic opportunities by expanding mutual trade and investment through Free Trade Agreements (FTA), tariff reduction schedules and investment deals (Nadkarni 2010, 49). Therefore, to strengthen awareness of shared interests and promote grassroots understanding, the strategic partners often establish youth associations, dialogues, and cultural expos focused on one another (ACYD 2024). Apart from military, economic, and cultural ties, the more recent SPs have highlighted 'non-traditional' security challenges and interests like climate change, mutual development, transnational terrorism, and cyber-security (Tyushka and Czechowska 2019).

The more successful SPs, which are those that have been implemented and subsequently produced deepened cooperation, are often based around certain 'system principles' that denote a purpose for the SP (Wilkins 2008, 360). System principles tend to be goal-based rather than task-oriented and can include 'preserving a rules-based international order,' building 'a community of a shared future for mankind,' or 'championing a multipolar world' (DFAT 2017; Wilkins 2008, 360–361). The most successful and long-lasting SPs often have a high degree of normative synergy. This will see the partners share a common understanding of their mutual values and objectives that enables their SP to go beyond their bilateral partnership with the potential to solve regional and global challenges (Renard 2013, 303). Despite this, a SP does not always need to possess a global range or shared values to succeed as long as the interests and objectives in any of the cooperative domains remain aligned (Li and Ye 2019).

Over time, a SP may be reaffirmed, upgraded, or renewed. Conversely, it may be forgotten or even terminated. The partnership may be upgraded as relations grow and the initial partnership is deemed successful, which can result in its elevation to a 'comprehensive,' 'special,' or 'all-weather' level (Li and Ye 2019, 68). Perceived changes in the systemic or regional distribution of power may make strategic partners more aware of the partnership's perceived importance even if it has failed to achieve concrete results, leading to its elevation or revival. In other instances, a partnership may be renewed because it did not produce deepened cooperation due to a worsening of the underlying bilateral relationship. Sometimes, cooperation will simply peter out due to irreconcilable

interests. Although rare, outright termination may be caused by a violation of the SP's expectations due to one party's actions towards the other or simply because one side deemed continued cooperation with the other unfeasible over the long term.

An eclectic analysis of the emergence and functions of SPs in the Asia-Pacific region

I structure the following analysis of the emergence and functions of SPs by weaving theory and practice together that is consistent with efforts to engage with and present the 'messy' realities of international security (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 418). This pragmatic approach to explaining SPs relies on the logic that the analytical components underpinning realism, liberalism, and constructivism can be 'separated from their foundations, translated meaningfully, and recombined as an original permutation of concepts, methods, analytics, and empirics' (Katzenstein and Sil 2008, 111). Realism draws attention to how certain 'threats' and 'risks' have led states and multilateral actors to cooperate through SPs. Liberalism focuses on how specific 'interests' and 'challenges' have resulted in states and multilateral actors declaring SPs. Constructivism highlights how states and multilateral actors have used SPs to shape 'norms' of conduct and create shared 'identities' with the aim of governing interactions and building order. Synthesising assumptions from the three theories where relevant widens the analytical scope enough to include equally important causes of SPs that would be missed if only applying one approach.

Realism and SPs in the Asia-Pacific

According to neorealism, SPs emerge and function as soft forms of balancing and bandwagoning that enable flexibility without a commitment to mutual defence while providing a degree of ambiguity that makes the strategic partners' alignment less likely to provoke third parties. Neorealism's predictions of alignment choices draw attention to SPs as a first step towards a formal military alliance if the strategic partners' mutual threat perception vis-à-vis a third-party increases. This has led some observers to erroneously describe successful SPs in the military domain as 'alliances in all but name' (Georgieff 2013). Offensive neorealism argues that SPs are a tool used by 'great powers or a group of states to maximise their political, economic, and military dominance' to achieve, maintain or extend regional hegemony (Kay 2000, 16). Although not as effective as alliances, particularly when the distribution of power begins to shift, and threat perception tends to increase, SPs remain consistent with the notion of primacy by offering a great power the opportunity to expand its sphere of influence and challenge its rival without directly provoking it into a security dilemma.

China and the US are two notable examples of rival great powers having used SPs in the Asia-Pacific to expand their respective spheres of influence and maintain their primacy without directly provoking one another. The growth of SPs in China's *zhoubian waijiao* 'peripheral diplomacy' can be connected to its desire to create a *pingdeng youxu shijie duojihua* 'more equitable and orderly multipolar world' as its relative power grows vis-à-vis the US (Wang 2024). Guided by a *jieban bu jiemeng* 'make partnerships not alliances' strategy, China has increased its power vis-à-vis the US in the Asia-Pacific without

resorting to alliances. Examples include a 'no-limits strategic partnership' with Russia, an 'all-round partnership of cooperation' with Singapore, 'comprehensive strategic partnerships' with Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia and 'comprehensive strategic cooperative partnerships' with Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar (Li and Ye 2019, 68). All of China's aforementioned strategic partners, with the exception of Australia, are signatories to its *yidai yilu* 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) in both the land and maritime realms, which offensive realists argue is designed to compete with the US for primacy over the Asia-Pacific region (Mearsheimer 2019).

Meanwhile, the US has signed SPs with India, Vietnam, New Zealand, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia in its 'pivot to Asia' to respond to China's growing power. All of these SPs mention enhancing strategic military cooperation to varying degrees. Arguably the most 'strategic' of them all, the US-India 'comprehensive strategic partnership,' committed to expanding 'joint naval exercises, industrial defense cooperation, 2 + 2 ministerial dialogues' and launching the 'US-India Defense Acceleration Ecosystem' in a recent joint statement (White House 2023a). The SP further solidified India's location as a 'hub for maintenance for forward deployed US Navy assets' as Washington's rivalry with Beijing intensifies in the Indian Ocean (White House 2023a). The US's 'comprehensive strategic partnership' with Singapore is another strategically significant SP due to Singapore's geographical proximity to the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. A recent joint statement pledged to enhanced military cooperation as the US reaffirmed its 'enduring commitment to maintaining a robust presence in Southeast Asia,' which included 'rotational deployments of US P-8 aircraft' and 'littoral combat ships' to Changi Naval Base (White House 2021)

Offensive neorealism tends to overlook the fact that middle and small powers enter SPs despite not being able to compete for hegemony in the same way the regional great powers can. Instead, defensive neorealism argues that states are more reserved about upsetting the status-quo and prefer moderate policies to gain security (Waltz 1979). SPs are one such policy that decreases uncertainty and structures coordination on risks and threats without provoking another state where an alliance might (Wilkins 2008). Recent studies have explicitly linked the proliferation of SPs in the Asia-Pacific to 'hedging' (Wilkins 2015; Wilkins 2021). Hedging refers to 'an insurance seeking behaviour under situations with high uncertainty and high stakes, where a rational state avoids taking sides and pursues opposite measures vis-a-vis competing powers to have a fallback position' (Kuik 2021, 300). Hedging has been documented among China's neighbours to mitigate the uncertainty its rise brings by actively engaging the US and Russia in military cooperation through SPs while expanding economic relations with Beijing (Kuik 2016).

Vietnam's recent declarations of 'comprehensive strategic partnerships' with Russia and the US best illustrate the use of SPs in hedging policies. Hanoi's upgraded SP with Russia emphasised increased collaboration on 'security and military-technical matters,' which included the procurement of Russian Sukhoi-30 fighters, Gepard-class frigates, and Kilo-class submarines (Poling, Huddles, and Natalegawa 2021). However, as Moscow's ability to project power into Southeast Asia has declined since the end of the Cold War, Vietnam has increasingly turned to the US as a strategic partner (Poling, Huddles, and Natalegawa 2021). Hanoi's recent joint statement with Washington on their CSP welcomed enhanced 'cooperation in defense industry and trade in

accordance with each side's conditions' (White House 2023b). This was further underlined by US commitments to 'assist Vietnam develop self-reliant capabilities in accordance with its needs' (White House 2023b). Vietnam's CSP with the US has led to growing alignment with the Quad while allowing it to continue exercising strategic autonomy through its 'four no's' policy of 'no alliances, no siding with one country to act against another, no foreign bases, and no threats of using force' as China's power grows (Pham 2019).

Japan's 'special strategic partnership' with Australia has allowed Tokyo to hedge both China and the US at the same time. First, the SP has reinforced the 'Hub and Spokes' alliance system in the Asia-Pacific by 'networking' another 'spoke' while continuing to engage Beijing economically and politically (Wilkins 2018). Second, the SP has 'de-centered' Japan's security dependency on the US as Washington's overt commitment to the Asia-Pacific waned under the Trump administration, which Wilkins (2015, 82) and Koga (2017, 633) have described as 'hedging against the breakdown of the Hub and Spokes system.' Fears of a weakened American commitment to the Asia-Pacific were compounded by the US's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, threats to decrease its military presence in Asia, and more recent calls for allies to share more of the burden for their security (Klingner, Pak, and Terry 2019). Subsequently, recent agreements forming part of the SP, such as the 'Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement' and the 'Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation,' have provided Tokyo a fallback option that avoids provoking China while reducing its reliance on the US (DFAT 2022).

SPs have also been used in 'wedging strategies' whereby a middle power (the wedger) competes against a great power or another middle power by declaring an 'asymmetric strategic partnership' with a smaller state in their periphery (Koga 2022). Inversely, the smaller state can hedge by avoiding military, economic or political dependence on the wedger's rival, hence increasing the smaller state's strategic autonomy (Koga 2022). Koga (2022) highlighted that Japan's 'comprehensive strategic partnership' with Cambodia has allowed Tokyo to compete peacefully with China to prevent it from gaining hegemony in Southeast Asia by opening new avenues for Phnom Penh to attract Japanese investment and official development assistance (ODA) (Koga 2022). This 'asymmetric strategic partnership' between Japan and Cambodia has thus reduced China's political leverage over Phnom Penh through the potential withdrawal of investment or ODA if it pursues policies that Beijing dislikes (Koga 2022).

Both offensive and defensive neorealism do not reveal much about who a state will likely partner with and why as it ultimately posits that states consist of rational actors who respond to structural factors. Instead, neoclassical realism proposes that intervening variables on state responses to power shifts and intent at the domestic level, such as leader preferences, strategic culture, civil groups, and institutions, affects preferences towards certain states as partners (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). Although China's 'no-limits strategic partnership' with Russia conforms to soft balancing, Beijing's preference for Moscow and its assignment of such a high priority would go unexplained if viewed through structural realism alone (Ferguson 2012). Neoclassical realist analyses add that Chinese Paramount Leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin's mutually described 'dear friendship' and the norm of 'sovereign democracy' have intensified the Sino-Russian alignment over time, which is ultimately directed at

limiting US influence in Central Asia and eroding Washington's overall primacy in the Asia-Pacific (Ferguson 2012; Wertsch 2023).

Although defensive neorealist studies have brought the balance of power, threat, and economic interests into conversation to explain hedging and wedging on the proliferation and function of SPs, neorealism has difficulty explaining SPs that are not driven by threats regarding the use of force. Since the end of the Cold War, the scope of security for Asia-Pacific states has broadened to include 'non-traditional' risks and threats such as climate change, pandemics, resource scarcity, supply chain disruptions, 'grey zone' activities, cyberwarfare, irregular migration, terrorism, and organised crime (Caballero-Anthony 2016). Most, if not all, of the SPs declared over the last decade have sought to address these challenges once masked by the geopolitics of the Cold War under which neorealism was developed and new ones that have emerged since. Therefore, synthesising discussion of the risks and threats that neorealism highlights with the interests and challenges that neoliberal institutionalism argues drive multilateral cooperation can draw our attention to the 'non-traditional' security challenges and threats that lead to the formation and influence the function of SPs.

Despite sometimes incorporating norms to explain the emergence and function of SPs, neoclassical realist accounts have difficulty accounting for those SPs influenced by shared identities and norms. This is because neoclassical realism treats norms as secondary to challenges and threats due to its aim to explain deviations from rationality (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). The US, Japan, India, and Australia have all identified their growing alignments as stemming from shared norms associated with their identities as liberal democracies (Wilkins 2011). Norms and identity do not only influence which partners they are likely to prioritise and how the SP will perform but also who and what they would identify as the source of threat. Therefore, synthesising discussion of the risks and threats that neorealism argues cause SP cooperation with norms and identities constructivists say influence SPs can help increase our understanding of how threat perception and identity act in mutually reinforcing ways. If combined further with the interests and challenges liberals pinpoint where necessary, it becomes easier to explain partner preferences, identify the potential state-based and non-state-based threats influencing the SP, and determine the likely depth and breadth of cooperation.

Liberalism and SPs in the Asia-Pacific

Liberalism views SPs as emerging and functioning to better enable states and multilateral actors to jointly fulfil interests and cooperate effectively on shared challenges that alliances would undermine due to their tendency to spur competition (Menon 2003). Liberals hold that SPs are a suitable security practice in a region defined by increased economic and security interdependence. Liberalism provides compelling explanations for the proliferation of SPs in the Asia-Pacific after the end of the Cold War. The expansion of liberal market capitalism into developing countries and free trade led most states to prioritise domestic development over pursuing narrowly defined politico-security objectives (Qobo 2010, 17). Economic interdependence theory, a key perspective in liberal IR and IS theory, argues that SPs emerge and function to strengthen and diversify economic relationships. Its core argument is that increased trade linkages between states limit the potential for competition and conflict, which ultimately brings a degree of order

to the international system that would otherwise be non-existent (Nye and Keohane 1989).

China and its Asia-Pacific neighbours have increasingly leveraged economic interdependence with each other through SPs to mutually benefit while aiming to mitigate the potential effects of competition. Beijing's emphasis on mutual trade and investment in practically all its SPs with its neighbours can be interpreted as enhancing economic interdependence to reassure them of its *heping jueqi* 'peaceful rise' as its relative power grows (Yu and Sui 2023). Successive joint statements on China's 'comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation' with Vietnam have committed to increasing trade and investment volumes through *yi renmin wei zhongxin de fazhan* 'people-centred development' (China MFA 2022b). Beijing and Hanoi recently aimed to establish 'further joint mechanisms' to expedite agricultural development, digital economy, corporate investment, and rail transport for imported and exported goods' to further enhance economic connectivity (China MFA 2022b). Vietnam is a key signatory to China's BRI and has recently joined its 'community of common destiny' to allay Chinese concerns that it has begun aligning with the US and its allies (Butcher 2024).

Inversely, some of China's neighbours have used SPs to enmesh Beijing into the regional trading system to dissuade it from becoming a revisionist or even an expansionist power (Goh 2007, 121). Singapore has repeatedly encouraged China's growing role in trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific through their SP to give Beijing 'every incentive to choose international cooperation' through 'access to overseas markets' to ensure that it 'grows peacefully' (Lee 1996). Thailand has used FTAs and investment projects in their 'comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership' to increase China's engagement with regional markets to ensure long-term stability (Goh 2007, 128). Australia's CSP with China and the agreements that form the architecture of the partnership, like the China-Australia FTA, can be explained by a desire to discourage China from forcefully dislodging the US as the foremost great power in the Asia-Pacific to ensure continued stability. Canberra's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper emphasised potentially 'bringing China and the US together in a region-wide FTA' that would aim to reduce tension and 'help maximise regional growth prospects' (DFAT 2017).

Alongside economic interdependence, neoliberals propose that SPs complement regional multilateralism at the bilateral level. SPs can help reaffirm joint commitments and even remind partners to abide by mutually agreed treaties with the purpose of managing tensions. A core element of ASEAN's CSPs with Asia-Pacific nations has been strengthening ASEAN-based institutions and respect for international treaties by connecting with key regional powers. The action plan of the ASEAN-China 'strategic partnership for peace and prosperity' mentioned ASEAN and China as 'endeavouring to pursue cooperation in conformity with obligations under international law' amid growing tensions between some ASEAN members and China due to overlapping maritime claims in the South China Sea (ASEAN 2022). To mitigate tensions and build confidence, ASEAN and China have committed to 'deepening political and security cooperation' through the 'ASEAN-China dialogues, the APT, the EAS, the ARF, and the ADMM+' (ASEAN 2022). The SP has further prioritised consultation over arms control in Southeast Asia and pledged to 'fully implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea' in order to prevent any future conflict (ASEAN 2022).

Apart from simply responding to China's growing power by initiating military cooperation with new partners, the US has used SPs to make 'joint commitments to a rules-based order' with its strategic partners in the Asia-Pacific with the purpose of promoting regional stability and deterring conflict. Joint statements on the CSP between US and Indonesia have outlined 'a shared responsibility and abiding interest to address strategic challenges on the international stage' (White House 2023c). The original 2015 SP emphasised the 'safeguarding of maritime security and upholding internationally-recognised freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea' (White House 2015). Washington and Jakarta further called for 'the peaceful resolution of disputes as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea' (White House 2015). In 2022, the US-Indonesia CSP reaffirmed commitments to 'enhancing cooperation in regional fora, such as APEC, ASEAN, and the EAS' and recognised 'the importance of strengthening and developing a positive and constructive regional architecture by supporting the IORA' (White House 2023c).

Although helpful in explaining the influence of economic interdependence and joint commitments to promoting regional stability on the emergence and functions of SPs, liberals tend to overestimate the intent of states to set aside competition for enduring cooperation. This hinders liberalism's ability to explain why and how SPs break down. The high degree of economic interdependence between China and Australia failed to prevent the deterioration of their CSP after 2017. Canberra's emphasis on improving economic relations with Beijing without expanding military ties and official cultural exchanges has been described by Thakur (2013, 388) and Bisley (2018, 379) as 'transactional' and even 'greedy.' By contrast, realists could argue more compellingly that Australia's pre-2017 behaviour towards China conforms to hedging. Therefore, bringing both liberal and realist assumptions of human nature into discussion when explaining and comparing cases helps pinpoint when states act in self-interested ways or for the perceived 'greater good,' which represents the Grotian *via media* 'seeking the middle way' between power politics and utopianism when analysing the creation and function of SPs (Wight 1992).

Contrary to neoliberal assumptions, SPs have been known to undermine multilateral consensuses due to a tendency to be used by states sceptical of multilateralism to cooperate on a narrower range of interests and challenges (Renard 2016). It can be argued that Japan's SPs with Australia and India to encourage greater linkages with the US and among themselves sidestep widely endorsed ASEAN-led multilateral security institutions. Enhanced bilateral collaboration through their SPs notably played a role in the revival of the Quad in 2018 (Choong 2018). Although no official ASEAN view exists on the Quad, some ASEAN member states have expressed concerns about the Quad sidelining ASEAN-based institutions and driving the broader multilateral agenda (Laksmana 2020). Therefore, synthesising discussion of the interests and challenges that liberals argue drive multilateralism with the risks and threats realists say influence state behaviour draws our attention to how 'disappointed multilateralism' has led to SPs emerging. If combined further with discussion of norms and identities where necessary, an eclectic analysis can explain how SPs can function as precursors to minilateral groupings and even new multilateral institutions.

Constructivism and SPs in the Asia-Pacific

Constructivism views SPs as possessing norm-setting agendas that help states and multilateral actors shape certain standards of behaviour that proceed to govern interactions between the strategic partners and, ideally, a wider range of states at the regional level. Constructivists hold that SPs have transformational effects on the long-held preferences for action of target partners through deliberation, persuasion, and socialisation (Katzenstein and Sil 2008, 9). Extensive interaction and association over time can lead strategic partners to constitute social identities that are expressed through shared norms. This may see the strategic partners become permanent partners with whom parting company would be unthinkable. This is similar to how alliances have a tendency to become 'the natural order of things' for allies despite the original causes for their alignment having minimal or even no influence on the alliance's endurance (Wallis and Powles 2021, 1048). Constructivism notably draws attention to SPs as the first step towards more potent forms of alignment, particularly the formation of security communities, through the negotiation and development of shared norms and identities.

In the Asia-Pacific, SPs have often reflected the worldviews of their initiators and their perceptions of the organising principles of regional system (Pan and Michalski 2019). Besides 'wedging' China and diversifying economic relationships, Japan's SPs with Asia-Pacific states have helped it promote its vision for a regional order based on liberal norms. The joint statement on 'intensifying the Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership' mentioned their shared identities as democracies and enduring commitments to safeguarding the norms of 'human rights, political pluralism, open societies and the rule of law' at the bilateral level (Japan 2014). This was accompanied by further pledges to realise a *jiyū de hirakareta indotaiheiyō senryaku* 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' based on regionally-defined norms of 'rules, territorial integrity and the peaceful resolution of disputes' that is 'free from coercion' (Japan 2014). Like Japan, the US has used SPs to encourage illiberal states to democratise internally and abide by liberal norms externally. In its CSP with Vietnam, Washington established human rights and labour dialogues to facilitate 'frank and constructive' discussions on liberal interpretations of human rights norms, which shows the US's use of deliberation through a SP to transform Vietnam's domestic conduct with the hope of influencing its international conduct long term (White House 2023b).

Alongside strengthening ASEAN-based institutions and respect for international treaties, ASEAN has used CSPs with key dialogue partners in the Asia-Pacific to affirm its centrality to order building and to promote the 'ASEAN Way' with the purpose of altering the conduct of the region's great powers. Successive joint statements with the US and China have endorsed ASEAN's vision for an 'inclusive regionalism' that is 'closely integrated, one of dialogue instead of rivalry, and development and prosperity for all' (ASEAN 2020). ASEAN's joint statement on its SP with the US committed to a 'rules-based approach in Asia, respect for international law, the peaceful resolution of disputes, strengthening democracy, and enhancing good governance' (White House 2015). Despite committing to seemingly similar norms, constructivism highlights that ASEAN and the US each have different interpretations. ASEAN emphasises consensus-building, external non-interference, territorial integrity, and the peaceful settlement of disputes (Acharya 2009). Meanwhile, the US has previously used a mixture of soft

power and coercive diplomacy to persuade illiberal states to abide by liberal norms—the latter a method ASEAN expresses scepticism towards.

China's SPs with Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam have helped Beijing promote a *renlei mingyun gongtongti* 'community of a common destiny for mankind' through harmonious relationships based on *qiutong cunyi* 'common ground while preserving differences' as its military and economic power grows (Song 2020, 236). China's CSP with Cambodia committed to 'unswervingly developing their ever-lasting friendship, with a view to promoting a high-quality, high-level and high-standard China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future' (MFAIC 2023) The China-Indonesia CSP recognised shared identities as *fazhanzhong guojia* 'developing countries' in Asia who 'uphold a philosophy of seeking a people-centred development' and 'shared common ideas, interests and a closely connected future' (China Embassy 2023). Despite ongoing tensions in the South China Sea, China's CSP with Vietnam committed to being *haolinju, haopengyou, haotongzhi, haohuoban* 'good neighbours, good friends, good comrades, good partners' (China MFA 2022b). A recent joint statement highlighted shared identities as *shehuizhuyi guojia* 'socialist countries,' with commitments to improving ideological education in Marxist theory through training cooperation agreements between senior party officials (China MFA 2022b).

Historical memory and perceived familiarity can influence the partners states and multilateral actors gravitate towards. Besides a shared desire to balance against US hegemony, China's preference for a 'no limits strategic partnership' with Russia can be traced to a historical memory in China of the former Soviet Union as its *lao da ge* 'big brother' (Wang 2009). Although mutual hostility defined Sino-Soviet relations from the 1960s-1980s due to territorial disputes and ideological divergences, China and Russia reconciled their differences during the mid-1990s that has since developed into 'common positions on several important international issues' (China 2022). In particular, the 'no limits strategic partnership' has allowed Beijing and Moscow to reach a consensus on the norms of democracy and sustainable development that differs from liberal interpretations. They defined democracy as 'a universal human value rather than of a privileged number of states' and 'sustainable development' as contingent upon 'a state's national conditions and developmental prosperity' in reference to shared animosity towards liberal interventionism and western-backed 'colour revolutions' (China 2022).

Unlike liberalism and alternatively to realism, constructivism can explain why certain SPs fail to achieve their objectives or break down entirely. The identities, norms, and worldviews between partners may diverge as the SP evolves or simply be incompatible from the beginning. The Australia-China CSP has shown little convergence between norms and identities since it was declared. This has made defining standard benchmarks for cooperation challenging seen by the lack of a publicly available joint statement or action plan. Constructivism tells us that the perceived disharmony in their relations, starting with Australia's ban on Chinese tech firm Huawei's entry into its 5G market on 'national security grounds,' has stifled any healthy development of their CSP (Hawes 2022). China's emphasis on preserving harmony and Australia's outspoken stance against China over alleged foreign interference and calls for an independent inquiry into the COVID-19 origins transgressed Chinese norms on the proper conduct of relations (Gao *et al.* 2023). This led China to implement tariffs on Australian

exports to express its displeasure, which Canberra perceived as 'economic coercion' that violated liberal trading norms and the Australia-China FTA.

Despite highlighting the influence of norms and identities on the emergence and functions of SPs, constructivist accounts often underestimate the influence of material factors. This makes it difficult for constructivists to explain why states and multilateral actors act similarly when faced with uncertainty as they can have trouble accurately predicting intent (Agius 2010). Although perceptions of external threat are contingent upon their endogenisation at the domestic level, power often presents itself to states and multilateral actors as a brute fact. The growth of 'Indo-Pacific' strategies over the last decade has coincided with China's growing military capabilities and increased assertiveness towards issues it deems as its internal affairs. As of 2024, Australia, Japan, South Korea, India, ASEAN, New Zealand, Bangladesh, and the US have adopted Indo-Pacific strategies emphasising 'peace' and 'prosperity'. Therefore, synthesising constructivist assumptions regarding the spread of norms and identity formation with realist understandings of the emergence of threats and risks helps explain how similar discursive terms have spread between states and multilateral actors when a particular state's power capabilities begin to expand that may lead SPs to proliferate within a particular region.

Interactions between norms and threat perception have further implications for understanding what drives military build-ups. Evidence suggests that the 'Indo-Pacific' concept has not only operated as a social construct for states and multilateral actors to define their visions of regional order vis-à-vis one another but also contributed to accelerating China's military build-up due to Beijing perceiving the Indo-Pacific concept, the Quad, and the associated SPs as a US-led containment strategy (Li and Jiang 2023). Veiled warnings from the Quad to China about 'changes to the status quo' on Taiwan and unofficial commitments to Taipei's defence from the US, Japan, and Australia have been interpreted by China as 'creeping away' from their respective 'One China' policies. Beijing perceives this as interference in its internal affairs in line with one of the *heping gongchu wuxiang yuanze* 'five principles of peaceful co-existence' that Chinese officials have repeatedly stated requires a military response if Taiwan successfully declares independence (Zhou 2022). Therefore, combining constructivist understandings of discourse and the spread of norms with realism's assumptions regarding the emergence of threats helps explain how discourse has contributed to driving military build-ups and changes in behaviour, which can spur the emergence and influence the functions of SPs in response.

Finally, despite arguing that structure and agency are mutually constitutive, constructivist studies tend to 'privilege structure over agency and forget that institutional stability and change are the result of conscious decision-making and the wielding of political power' (Menon and Welsh 2011, 85). Wallis (2021, 460) argues that this is because 'constructivism became more structuralist over time, which saw scholars focus on norms and modes of legitimacy at the expense of actors.' A renewed focus on individual actors shows how they help construct and influence shared identities, interests, risks, threats, and even fuel changes in the regional distribution of power. The acceleration of SPs in the Asia-Pacific can be traced back to Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's 'Confluence of the Two Seas' speech proposing the linkage of India, Australia, and the US in a *jiyū to hanei no ko* 'arc of freedom and prosperity' (Abe 2007). Thus, synthesising constructivism's focus on actors with realism and liberalism where necessary helps explain how

influential individual actors define specific threats, risks, interests, norms, and identities within specific institutional settings, and pinpoint when they influence different security practices, which can contribute to the emergence and shifting functions of SPs as a result.

What do SPs mean for Asia-Pacific security?

Over the last decade, SPs have taken their place alongside alliances, multilateral institutions, minilaterals, coalitions and security communities as the core practices that manage security in the Asia-Pacific. The rapid emergence of SPs can be attributed to both the effects of growing competition and interdependence in the region. First, the distribution of power between states has shifted away from unipolarity towards a more diffused multipolar structure where the US, China, and other rising powers can influence regional outcomes in their favour more so than at any time since the early 1990s. The effects of this power transition have made the region increasingly unstable. Therefore, instead of accepting predictions that conflict is inevitable, states and multilateral actors have aimed to manage and mitigate growing competition through more informal means. SPs have become a preferable security practice due to their informality that avoids intensifying existing security dilemmas and provides the flexibility to engage with a diverse range of partners in the hope of enlisting their support in managing competition and, in some circumstances, altering long-held preferences for behaviour through the development of shared norms to create and govern order.

Second, the rapid proliferation of SPs signifies the growing nexus between complex interdependence on the one hand and the evolving threats, risks, and strategic challenges caused by that interdependence on the other. Ever-deepening connectivity between states in the Asia-Pacific has led to a new range of issues and challenges emerging that alliances and regional multilateral institutions have been unable to address due to the inflexibility of alliances and the lack of a multilateral consensus on what constitutes a threat and how to secure. SPs allow states and multilateral actors to continue fulfilling their shared interests in a targeted way that does not impinge upon their interdependence or allows issues to fall to the wayside that risk fracturing the regional economic order. This is because, more so than ever, states and multilateral actors in the region have become reliant upon each other for their security and prosperity. This manifests most prominently regarding how secure supply chains, the stability of financial markets, and access to natural resources for clean energy transitions now feature as much on individual security agendas as do threats regarding the use of force.

Although the growth of SPs in the Asia-Pacific shows us that the US's unipolar moment and narrow conceptualisations of security are far behind us, the good news is that states and multilateral actors do not view war and chaos as inevitable. Historical memories of Japanese expansionism, the ideologically-fuelled Cold War conflicts during decolonisation, and the groundwork laid from the 1980s onwards to develop a regional economic order that states could benefit from still feature to such a large degree that fears of a return to unrestricted violence remain palpable. The growth of SPs shows that states and multilateral actors, particularly many of the middle and small powers, are doing what they can despite their inherent political, religious, and cultural differences to enhance regional security and prosperity. However, the challenge remains whether the US and China can follow their smaller counterparts' lead by

setting aside their differences and managing tensions by rebooting the 'US–China strategic partnership.' Future studies should seek to more profoundly examine and compare individual cases of states and multilateral actors using SPs in the Asia-Pacific and beyond, which this article has laid the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for with its eclectic approach.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Jack D. Butcher is a PhD Candidate in Political Science and part-time Teaching Lecturer at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Adelaide. His research focuses on the emergence and functions of strategic partnerships in the Asia Pacific through the strategic policies of the US, China, ASEAN, Japan and Australia.

Jack holds a Master of International Security and a Bachelor of International Studies with minors in Asian and Chinese Studies from the University of Adelaide.

References

Abe, Shinzo. 2007. "'Confluence of the Two Seas': Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Accessed August 22, 2007. https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html.

Acharya, Amitav. 2009. *Security Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*. London: Routledge.

Acharya, Amitav. 2013. "ASEAN 2030: Challenges of Building a Mature Political and Security Community." ADBI Working Paper No.441. Asian Development Bank Institute, Tokyo, Japan. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2350586.

ACYD. 2024. "Home." Australia-China Youth Dialogue. https://www.acyd.org.au/home.

Adler, Emanuel, and Michael Barnett. 1998. *Security Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Agius, Christine. 2010. "Social Constructivism." In *Contemporary Security Studies*, edited by Alan Collins, 48–69. New York: Oxford University Press.

Albanese, Anthony. 2024. "A New Era for Australia-Vietnam Relations." The Prime Minister of Australia. Accessed 7 March 2024. https://www.pm.gov.au/media/new-era-australia-vietnam-relations#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAustralia%20and%20Vietnam%20share%20an,shared%20ambition%20for%20our%20region.

ASEAN. 2020. "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific." Association of Southeast Asian Nations. June 22 2019. https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf.

ASEAN. 2022. "Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (2021–2025)." Association of Southeast Asian Nations. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ASEAN-China-POA-2021-2025_Updated-with-ANNEX.pdf.

ASEAN. 2023. "Strategic Partnership." Association of Southeast Asian Nations. https://asean.org/tag/strategic-partnership/.

Bisley, Nick. 2018. "Australia's Engagement with China: From Fear to Greed and Back Again." *International Journal* 73 (3): 379–398.

Blanco, Luis Fernando. 2015. "On the Uses and Functions of 'Strategic Partnership' in International Politics: Implications for Agency, Policy and Theory." PhD diss., Bielefeld University.

Boni, Filippo. 2023. "Strategic Partnerships and China's Diplomacy in Europe: Insights from Italy." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 25 (4): 740–757.
Bui, Thanh Son. 2024. "US-Vietnam Relations: A Conversation with Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son." Brookings. Accessed March 26, 2024. https://www.brookings.edu/events/us-vietnam-relations-a-conversation-with-vietnams-foreign-minister-bui-thanh-son/.
Butcher, Jack. 2024. "Australia-Vietnam: A Partnership Made in China." The Lowy Interpreter. Accessed March 14, 2024. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-vietnam-partnership-made-in-chinav
Buzan, Barry, and Lene Hansen. 2009. *The Evolution of International Security Studies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 8–20.
Caballero-Anthony, Mely. 2016. *An Introduction to Non-Traditional Security Studies: A Transnational Approach*. London: Sage Publications.
Chayes, Abram, and Antonia Hadler Chayes. 1994. "Regime Architecture: Elements and Principles." In *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century*, edited by Janne E. Nolan, 65–131. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
China. 2022. "The Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the International Relations and Global Sustainable Development in a New Era" (zhonghua renmin gongheguo he eluosi lianbang guanyu xin shidai guoji guanxi he quanqiu ke chixu fazhan de lianhe shengming). Central Government of the People's of Republic of China. 4 February 2022. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-02/04/content_5672025.htm.
China Embassy. 2023. "Full Text: Joint Statement on Deepening Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia." The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Indonesia. http://id.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyyn/202310/t20231020_11164587.htm.
China MFA. 2022a "President Xi Jinping Meets with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202211/t20221118_10977822.html.
China MFA. 2022b. "The Joint Statement on the Strengthening and Deepening of the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership between China and Vietnam" (guanyu jin yibu jiaqiang he shenhua zhongyue quanmian zhanlue hezuo huoban guanxi de lianhe shengming). https://www.mfa.gov.cn/nanhai/chn/zcfg/202211/t20221102_10795594.htm.
Choong, William. 2018. "The Revived 'Quad' - and an Opportunity for the US." International Institute for Strategic Studies. Accessed January 10, 2018. https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis//2018/01/revived-quad.
Collins, Alan. 2010. "Introduction: What is Security Studies?" In *Contemporary Security Studies*, edited by Alan Collins, 1–13. New York: Oxford University Press.
DeBrouwer, Gordon. 2020. "Bringing Security and Prosperity Together in the National Interest." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 12 2020. https://www.csis.org/analysis/bringing-security-and-prosperity-together-national-interest#:~:text=More%20than%20ever%2C%20they%20reinforce,reduces%20economic%20and%20security%20risks.
DFAT. 2017. "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper." Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf.
DFAT. 2022. "Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/japan/australia-japan-joint-declaration-security-cooperation.
Envall, H. D. P., and Ian Hall. 2016. "Asian Strategic Partnerships: New Practices and Regional Security Governance." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8 (1): 87–105. https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12241
Ferguson, Chaka. 2012. "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35 (2): 197–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.583153
Gao, Mobo, Justin O'Connor, Baohui Xie, and Jack Butcher. 2023. *Different Histories Shared Futures: Dialogues on Australia-China*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Georgieff, Jack. 2013. "The US-NZ Partnership: An Alliance in All But Name." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed June 7, 2013. https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-new-zealand-partnership-alliance-all-name.
Goh, Evelyn. 2007. "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies." *International Security* 32 (3): 113–157.
Hawes, Colin. 2022. "Huawei: Critically Assessing the 5G ban and Commonly Cited Risks." Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI). 18 August 2022. https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/20220818%20UTS%20ACRI%20Analysis_Huawei%20-%20Critically%20assessing%20the%205G%20ban%20and%20commonly%20cited%20risks_Colin%20Hawes.pdf.
Holslag, Jonathan. 2011. "The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU-China Strategic Partnership." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 49 (2): 293–313. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02121.x
Izumikawa, Yasuhiro. 2020. "Network Connections and the Emergence of the Hub-and-Spokes Alliance System in East Asia." *International Security* 45 (2): 7–50. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00389
Japan. 2014. "Japan-India Joint Statement: Intensifying the Strategic and Global Partnership." Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000025064.pdf.
Japan. 2023. "New Plan for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)'." Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100477660.pdf.
Katzenstein, Peter J., and Rudra Sil. 2008. "Eclectic Theorizing in the Study and Practice of International Relations." In *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, 109–133. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kay, Sean. 2000. "What Is a Strategic Partnership?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 47 (3): 15–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2000.11655882
Keohane, Robert O. 1990. "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research." *International Journal* 45 (4): 731–764.
Keohane, Robert O., and Lisa L. Martin. 1995. "The Promise of Institutionalist Theory." *International Security* 20 (1): 39–51. https://doi.org/10.2307/2539214
Klingner, Bruce, Jung H. Pak, and Sue-mi Terry. 2019. "Trump Shakedowns are Threatening Two Key Alliances in Asia." Brookings. Accessed December 18, 2019. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trump-shakedowns-are-threatening-two-key-u-s-alliances-in-asia/.
Koga, Kei. 2017. "The Concept of 'Hedging' Revisited: The Case of Japan's Foreign Policy Strategy in East Asia's Power Shift." *International Studies Review* 20: 633–660.
Koga, Kei. 2022. "How Strategic is 'Asymmetric' Strategic Partnership? Japan's Partnership Diplomacy Toward Cambodia and Laos." *Asian Security* 18 (2): 93–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2021.1982898.
Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. 2016. "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior Towards China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 25 (100): 500–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714.
Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. 2021. "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective." *China International Strategy Review* 3: 300–315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5.
Laksmana, Evan A. 2020. "Whose Centrality? ASEAN and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific." *The Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3 (5): 106–117.
Lee, Kuan Yew. 1996. "Acceptance Speech at Architect of the New Century Award." Nixon Center, Washington D.C. Accessed November 11, 1996. http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/YEW96.html.
Li, Li, and Tianjiao Jiang. 2023. "From Conceptual Idea to Strategic Reality: 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' from the Perspective of Chinese Scholars." *Asian Perspective* 47 (1): 101–119. https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2023.0004
Li, Quan, and Min Ye. 2019. "China's Emerging Partnership Network: What, Who, Where, When and Why." *International Trade, Politics and Development* 3 (2): 66–81. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITPD-05-2019-0004

Liska, George. 1962. *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Lobell, Steven E., Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro. 2009. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mearsheimer, John J. 2019. "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order." *International Security* 43 (4): 7–50. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342.
Menon, Rajan. 2003. "The End of Alliances." *World Policy Journal*, 20 (2): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1215/07402775-2003-3008.
Menon, Anand, and Jennifer Welsh. 2011. "Understanding NATO's Sustainability: The Limits of Institutionalist Theory." *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 17 (1): 81–94. https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01701006
MFAIC. 2023. "Joint Communiqué Between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Government of the People's Republic of China." Accessed September 16, 2023. https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/posts/2023-09-16-Press-Release-Joint-Communiqu%C3%A9-between-the-Royal-Government-of-Cambodia-and-the-Government-of-the-People-s-Republi-18-33-30.
Nadkarni, Vidya. 2010. *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing Without Alliances*. London: Routledge.
Nanto, Dick K., and Mark E. Manyin. 2011. "China-North Korea Relations." *North Korean Review* 7 (2): 94–101. https://doi.org/10.3172/NKR.7.2.94
Nye, Joseph, and Robert O. Keohane. 1989. *Power and Interdependence*. Scott: Foresman.
Pan, Zhongqi, and Anna Michalski. 2019. "Contending Logics of Strategic Partnership in International Politics." *Asia Europe Journal* 17: 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-019-00553-3
Parameswaran, Prashanth. 2014. "Explaining US Strategic Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific Region: Origins, Developments and Prospects." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 36 (2): 262–289. https://doi.org/10.1355/cs36-2d
Pham, Van Dung. 2019. "Events and Comments: Viet Nam National Defence White Paper Clearly Expresses the Nature of Peace and Self-Defence." *National Defence Journal*. Accessed May 14, 2020. http://tapchiqptd.vn/en/events-and-comments/viet-nam-national-defence-white-paper-clearly-expresses-the-nature-of-peace-and-selfdefence/15489.html.
Pierre, Andrew J. 2002. *Coalitions Building and Maintenance: Gulf War, Kosovo, Afghanistan, War On Terrorism*. Georgetown: Georgetown University.
Poling, Gregory B., Simon Tran Huddles, and Andreyka Natalegawa. 2021. "The Unlikely, Indispensable U.S.-Vietnam Partnership." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed July 6, 2021. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210706_Poling_USVietnam_Partnership.pdf?VersionId=LGO812csRRGAwO9TofEcJ4vJb76d1Tk1.
Qobo, Mzukisi. 2010. "Refocusing South Africa's Economic Diplomacy: The 'African Agenda' and Emerging Powers." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 17 (1): 13–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461003763833
Renard, Thomas. 2013. "The EU and Its Strategic Partners: A Critical Assessment of the EU's Strategic Partnerships." In *The Routledge Handbook of European Security*, edited by Sven Biscop and Richard Whitman, 302–314. London: Routledge.
Renard, Thomas. 2016. "Partnerships for Effective Multilateralism? Assessing the Compatibility Between EU Bilateralism, (Inter-)Regionalism and Multilateralism." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29 (1): 18–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2015.1060691
Roulo, Claudette. 2019. "Alliances vs Partnerships." United States Department of Defense. Accessed March 22, 2019. https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1684641/alliances-vs-partnerships/.
Sautenet, Antonie. 2007. "The Current Status and Prospects of the 'Strategic Partnership' Between the EU and China: Towards the Conclusion of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement." *European Law Journal* 13 (6): 699–731. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2007.00395.x.

Sil, Rudra, and Peter J. Katzenstein. 2010. "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms Across Research Traditions." *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (2): 411–431. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001179

Simpson, Sid. 2019. "Making liberal Use of Kant? Democratic Peace Theory and Perpetual Peace." *International Relations* 33 (1): 109–128. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818811463.

Snyder, Glenn. 1997. *Alliance Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Song, Weiqing. 2020. "China's Normative Foreign Policy and Its Multilateral Engagement in Asia." *Pacific Focus* 35 (2): 229–249. https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12163.

Thakur, Ramesh. 2013. "Australia's Engagement with Asia: Strategic or Transactional?" *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 69 (4): 335–350. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928413503746.

Tow, William T. 2015. "The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, Minilateralism, and Asia-Pacific Order Building." In *US-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges*, edited by Yuki Tatsumi, 23–35. Washington D.C.: Stimson Center. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep11008.7.pdf.

Tyushka, Andriy, and Lucyna Czechowska. 2019. "Strategic Partnerships in International Politics and IR Theory." In *States, International Organizations and Strategic Partnerships*, edited by Lucyna Czechowska, Andriy Tyushka, Agata Domachowska, Karolina Gawron-Tabor, and Joanna Piechowiak-Lamparska, 8–43. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wallis, Joanne. 2021. "It's the Little Things: The Role of International Interveners in the Social (re)Construction of the International Peace Architecture." *Global Society* 35 (4): 456–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2021.1942798.

Wallis, Joanne, and Anna Powles. 2021. "Burden-sharing: The US, Australia and New Zealand Alliances in the Pacific Islands." *International Affairs* 97 (4): 1045–1065. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab081.

Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Wang, Dong. 2009. "Theory and History of Research on the China-Soviet Relationship" (zhongsu guanxi yanjiu de lilun yu lishi)." *Quarterly Journal of International Politics* 20 (4): 63–91.

Wang, Yi. 2024. "Wang Yi Explains the Connotations of a More Equitable and Orderly Multipolar World and Inclusive Economic Globalisation" (wang yi chanshu pingdeng youxu shijie duojihua he puhui baorong jingjihua neihan). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. Accessed March 7, 2024. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbzhd/202403/t20240307_11254898.shtml

Wendt, Alexander. 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46 (2): 391–425. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764

Wertsch, James V. 2023. "Possible Limits to Putin and Xi's No-Limit Friendship." Wilson Center. Accessed October 20, 2023. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/possible-limits-putin-and-xis-no-limits-friendship.

White House. 2015. "*Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Indonesia*." 26 October 2015. https://usindo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Strategic-Partnership-Joint-Statement.pdf.

White House. 2021. "Fact Sheet: Strengthening the U.S.-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership." 23 August 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/08/23/fact-sheet-strengthening-the-u-s-singapore-strategic-partnership/.

White House. 2023a. "Joint Statement from the United States and India." 22 June 2023. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/22/joint-statement-from-the-united-states-and-india/.

White House. 2023b. "Joint Leaders' Statement: Elevating United States-Vietnam Relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership." 11 September 2023. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/11/joint-leaders-statement-elevating-united-states-vietnam-relations-to-a-comprehensive-strategic-partnership/.

White House. 2023c. "Fact Sheet: President Joseph R. Biden and President Joko Widodo Announce the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership." November 13 2023.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/13/fact-sheet-president-joseph-r-biden-and-president-joko-widodo-announce-the-u-s-indonesia-comprehensive-strategic-partnership/.

Wight, Martin. 1992. *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. New York: Holmes and Meier.

Wilkins, Thomas. 2008. "Russo–Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 29 (2): 358–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260802284365.

Wilkins, Thomas. 2011. "Japan's Alliance Diversification: A Comparative Analysis of the Indian and Australian Strategic Partnerships." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11: 115–155. https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcq022.

Wilkins, Thomas. 2015. "From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Alliance?: Australia-Japan Security Ties and the Asia-Pacific." *Asia Policy* 1: 81–111. https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2015.0028

Wilkins, Thomas. 2018. "After a Decade of Strategic Partnership: Japan and Australia 'Decentering' from the US Alliance?" *The Pacific Review* 31 (4): 498–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1391867.

Wilkins, Thomas. 2021. "Middle Power Hedging in the era of Security/Economic Disconnect: Australia, Japan, and the 'Special Strategic Partnership'." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 23 (1): 93–127. https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcab023

Xi, Jinping. 2014. "Xi Jinping's Speech to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia" (xi jinping zai aodaliya lianbang huiyi de yanjiang). *Government of the People's Republic of China News*. Accessed November 17, 2014. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-11/17/content_2780007.htm.

Yu, Lei, and Sophia Sui. 2023. *Complex Interdependence and China-Australia Relations*. London: Routledge.

Zhou, Bo. 2022. "China's Red Lines on Taiwan are Clear, Whatever the US Says About Its Policy of Strategic Ambiguity." Tsinghua University Center for International Security and Strategy. Accessed June 28, 2022. https://ciss.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/Opinions/5023.