

Camilleri, Joseph, Larry Marshall, Michael, Michális S. Michael and Michael T. Seigel, Michael, eds. 2007. *Asia-Pacific Geopolitics: Hegemony vs. Human Security*. 264 pages. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. ISBN 978 1 84720 098 3.

Three's a crowd?: declining US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific

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This edited volume brings together 13 scholars from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, largely based in Japan and Australia, to consider the tension between the American hegemonic order and the progressive notion of 'human security'. Working in concert with the United States, Japan and Australia constitute one of the most important 'sub-regional triangles' in the Asia-Pacific. Recent developments such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (2006) attest to the increasingly close security cooperation between these powers, around which a burgeoning academic literature is now appearing.¹ Placing these three powers at the centre of their analysis, the contributors cast a critical eye over Tokyo and Canberra's complicity in maintaining the American hegemonic system and point to the vulnerabilities of the trilateral accord.

The volume is divided into four parts, plus introduction and conclusion. In the Introduction Michális Michael and Larry Marshall establish the overarching framework of the book; that is, the contradictions between hegemony and human security in the prevailing regional order. First they establish a working definition of 'hegemony' as 'used both in its traditional definition as inter-state predominance/rule by force and its Gramscian meaning as an organizing principle' (p. 5.). They note that Washington's attempts to bolster fading US hegemony poses the danger of 'entrapping' Tokyo and Canberra in policies detrimental to their real interests. Moreover, they contend that pursuit of hegemony is largely incommensurate with basic 'human security', defined by The United Nations *Human Development Program Report* (1994) as 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' and by Sean Kay as focusing on 'the problems that affect the basic safety and wellbeing of individuals.'² Human security presents an alternative to the traditional notion of military security by relocating the security 'referent' to the individual, rather than the state 'level of analysis'. Furthermore, human security expands the very definition and scope of 'security' to concentrate not solely on military-territorial threats, but to incorporate democracy, human rights, demographics, food scarcity and health risks and the environment (known as broad' or 'extended' security). The whole project is thus a challenge to the dominant Realist and state-centric paradigm of International Relations.

A global 'state of emergency?'

In part one, entitled 'Hegemony and East Asia Relations', Mustapha Kamal Pasha records how the hegemon constructs and employs the 'war on terror' as the necessary global 'state of emergency' that justifies the maintenance and expansion of its imperium. This results in a binary, and arbitrary, division of the region into 'friend and foe' that distorts regional interactions and degrades efforts to provide for human security. In the following chapter Nick Bisley identifies how Japan and Australia, by acting as the north and south 'anchors' of the American forward military presence, are estranging themselves from wider engagement in the region. He argues that the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (1951) and ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-US (1951)) are outmoded legacies of the Cold War and impediments to a more stable regional order. Chandra Muzaffar reinforces these views. He claims that the PRC is also made to serve as a useful 'bogyman' for justifying American hegemony, and that the 'China threat' is greatly exaggerated by certain groups in the US for their own political ends. Since they have colossal trading interests at stake in China, willing participation in the 'containment' of the PRC runs serious risks for Japan and Australia. He concludes that 'there is no reason to contain China. But there is every reason to check Washington's global hegemony' (p. 59).

Part two – 'Japan's Security Dilemma' – examines the ongoing transformation in Tokyo's international relations towards a more assertive posture. Essentially, this part addresses the 'Japan rising' thesis, one that is now gaining serious traction among policy-makers and academics.³ The authors of chapters 5-7, Michael T. Seigel, Jiro Yamaguchi and Yoshikazu Sakamoto, dissect some of the key aspects of this thesis, focusing their attention on the political efforts to revise Japan's 'peace constitution' and the ramifications this would have on regional security. Naturally, such questions feed into the controversial role that Japan's colonial history, in particular its alleged lack of contrition for its wartime excesses, plays in shaping identity politics around the region.

A new role for 'middle powers?'

The potential of Japan and Australia as 'middle powers' is the focus of Part three. Here the central question is whether these two states can con-

U.S Pacific Island Territory of Guam.



tribute individually, or in tandem, to a more effective system of regional security cooperation. Once again, this builds on an important debate surrounding the recent augmentation of bilateral ties between these states, as shown by the 2007 Joint Security Declaration.⁴ Michael Hamel-Green's chapter contends that Tokyo and Canberra's loyalty, subservience even, to Washington undermines their efforts at multilateral solutions and support for the UN. He cites their intensified diplomatic and military relationships with Washington, and their participation in coercive military exercises such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), as evidence. Next Allan Patience looks at the role these two powers have played in the South Pacific 'arc of instability'. He suggests that if these countries can overcome the legacy of 'neo colonial arrogance' there may be a chance for 'niche diplomacy' in which their middle power identity is reinvented to address issues of poverty, governance failure, and aid delivery more constructively. In this way they could prevent the small/weak countries of the South Pacific becoming 'failed states' – breeding grounds for violence, instability, and terrorism.

The subject of Part four is 'Global Governance and Sustainability' in which Tetsuya Yamada and Shigeko Fukai interrogate the complex question of regional (and global) governance and present their cases for how states and civil society compete for influence in a multipolar world. Yamada reveals his scepticism over whether the reform of the UN can effectively challenge the hegemonic power of the West/US since the very institutions upon which the structure of the international system is predicated are manifest instruments of its propagation (APEC, IMF, World Bank, UN Security Council). Fukai rejects the American *Realpolitik* assumption, as articulated by Condoleezza Rice, that 'national interest' should override the development and function of the 'international community'. She addresses the vital issues of managing global resources in a sustainable fashion and one that represents a more equitable distribution between the global 'north' and 'south'.

When contemplating 'Future Possibilities' in the book's conclusion, Joseph Camilleri asserts that Japan and Australia are unduly constrained in reforming their security outlooks because of their close alliance relations with the US. These defence pacts were forged over half a century ago at a time when the geopolitical landscape looked completely different and the Cold War security agenda was basically confined to opposing the alleged 'Soviet threat'. Camilleri suggests that both countries would do well to reevaluate their alliance ties by breaking free of their dependence upon their 'great and powerful friend' to pursue security policies that better reflect broader human security and regional integration priorities. For Japan and Australia they advocate joining the growing list of countries that now uphold the human security foreign policy paradigm, which includes Canada (another 'middle power'), most of Scandinavia, and Ireland.

One of the great strengths of this volume is the way it addresses so many of the key intellectual and policy debates appertaining to Asia-Pacific security. These include 'hegemony' and 'human security', but also US-Japan-Australia 'trilateralism', 'Japan rising', and the 'future of the UN'. One of the core arguments of the book, that of declining American hegemony, fits well with Realist predictions in International Relations, which posit that states will seek to maximise power/security through internal mobilisation of resources and alliance formation/strengthening. The US is currently pursuing both, though for how long this can be sustained with an economy teetering on the brink of recession and in the face of waning public support among its traditional allies, is uncertain. The current crisis

of American ideology and 'soft power', triggered by the 'war on terror' and invasion of Iraq, has 'severely eroded America's international credibility and legitimacy' meaning that partnership with Washington has become a much less enticing prospect (p. 6.). Being seen to act as America's 'deputy' in the Asia-Pacific now incurs substantial costs. First, Washington has become a more demanding protector, pressuring Japan and Australia to increase their 'burden sharing' through military integration and participation in overseas expeditions, in order to ameliorate the effects of its own 'imperial overstretch'. Second, elite support in Japan and Australia for the alliance through involvement in American wars in the Middle East not only attracts international opprobrium, but is also manifestly unpopular with very large sections of domestic opinion. In light of these factors, the contributors suggest that Japan and Australia should detach themselves from such encumbrances and seek more independent paths as middle powers.

The contributors effectively juxtapose the second major aspect of the book – an advocacy of 'human security' – with 'hegemony', demonstrating how this new paradigm better captures the complexity of International Relations as it is today. As the discipline adjusts to the globalised security environment of the new millennium, human security is therefore increasingly seen as 'a concept whose time is approaching' (p. 18). For the Realists labouring to defend the state-centric paradigm that has so long monopolised the discipline, this is another battlefield in which American theoretical hegemony finds itself out of step with the rest of the world and thus under siege.

In conclusion, this volume should appeal both to academics and to policy-makers interested in the dichotomy of Asia-Pacific geopolitics. The diversity of the contributor's backgrounds – public policy, social ethics, defence, human security, and sustainability – is a notable strength when looking at the multifaceted dimensions of geopolitics. Though the book may be considered a 'critical' project – in the sense that security is equated with 'emancipation', rather than 'national defence' – the arguments presented are measured and never slip into polemic, while at the same time add up to a persuasive case for the reassertion of human security priorities in the destructive wake of the American 'war on terror'.

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Notes

- 1 See Tow, William T. et al. eds. 2007. *Asia-Pacific Security: US, Australia and Japan and the New Security Triangle*, London: Routledge and Wilkins, Thomas S. 2007. 'Towards a "Trilateral Alliance?" - Understanding the Role of Expediency and Values in American-Japanese-Australian Relations,' *Asian Security*, Vol. 3 No. 3: 251-278.
- 2 Kay, Sean. 2006. *Global Security in the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 258.
- 3 Pyle, Kenneth B. 2007. *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose*, New York: The Century Foundation and Hughes, Christopher. 2006. *Japan's Re-emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power*, Adelphi Paper, Oxford: IISS.
- 4 See: Williams, Brad and Newman, Andrew. eds. 2006. *Japan, Australia and Asia Pacific Security*, London: Routledge.