



# The Indo-Pacific concept: An Australian perspective

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# Outline

- Attraction for Australia
- Conceptual critiques
- Indo-Pacific implications

# Attraction for Australia

- Suite of concepts
- Indo-Pacific
- SLD 2012 vs 2018
- Rules-based order
- 2016 DWP, 56 times
- Asian Quad
- 2017 FP WP, Adamson



# Attraction for Australia

- Long use of concepts
- British Empire
- Mid-1960s (ANU)
- Internal paper (2005)
- RBO more recent (Rudd)
- Supports ideas/institutions
- Minilateralism (FPDA, TSD)



# Attraction for Australia

- Fear of exclusion
- ‘Torn country’
- EAEC (1990s)
- EAC (2000s)
- EAS assuages somewhat
- Indo-Pacific counters enduring questions



# Attraction for Australia

- Fear of decline
- 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy (70s)
- Technological edge
- Defence budget vs SEA
- PwC projections
- Economic → strategic weight
- Turnbull SLD (2017)



# Attraction for Australia

- Favourable BOP
- China's challenge
- Like-minded response
- Binding in US
- Bringing in India
- Showing commitment
- Hedging US withdrawal



# Attraction for Australia

- Deepening ties with SEA
- Further strengthens BOP
- Unlikely outcome
- Indonesia key
- PwC estimates
- Indo-Pacific power
- India-Indonesia agreement





# Conceptual critiques

- Provoking China
- Lead trading partner
- Troubled relationship
- Doesn't acknowledge China's growing power
- Who's rules?
- *Liberal* rules-based order



# Conceptual critiques

- Undermining SEA engagement
- Jakarta's embrace
- Implications for ASEAN?
- Singapore & the Quad
- 'No rival blocks' (2018)
- ASPI study (Huong Le Thu)
- Methodological questions



# Conceptual critiques

- Policy incoherence
- Talk versus action (Bisley & Schreer)
- E.g. SCS FONOPs
- Would Australia fight for RBO? (White)
- Quad divergent interests (Curran)
- Indo-Pacific advocates: ‘unfair standard’
- But conceptual ambiguity a weakness

# Conceptual critiques

*‘There is, of course, no such thing as the Indo-Pacific. Like the Asia Pacific or Asia itself, the Indo-Pacific is simply a way for governments to frame the international environment to suit their policy objectives.’*

-Allan Gyngell



# Indo-Pacific implications

- Two dominant foreign policy traditions
- Dependent ally tradition
- Middle power tradition
- Indo-Pacific consistent with both
- ‘Pragmatic’ tradition more influential
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Not conducive to overarching frameworks

## Indo-Pacific implications

*‘In running its foreign policy Australia does baling wire diplomacy – practical, pragmatic and usually makeshift. Rural tradition decrees a bloke with baling wire can fix the gate or fence or shed, and so our baling-wire foreign policy is adequate to the moment rather than ambitious...Great powers to the architecture and the grand strategy. Australia pitches in with the practical stuff.’ (Graeme Dobell)*

# Indo-Pacific implications

- Some decisions supportive
- Manus naval base
- Blocking Huawei and ZTE
- Some undermine
- AIIB, Japanese subs
- Muddled foreign policy?
- Implications for concept





# Questions/comments?

