

***Blue Security in the Indo-Pacific.* Edited by Ian Hall, Troy Lee-Brown and Rebecca Strating. London, UK: Routledge, November 2024. Hardcover: 226pp.**

With growing recognition of the “blue acceleration”—a competitive scramble among states, companies and communities for maritime resources, materials and space—the academic world has witnessed a “blue turn”. Scholars across various disciplines have begun to reframe their conventional concepts through a maritime lens, giving rise to ideas such as “blue economy”, “blue governance”, “blue crimes” and even “blue geopolitics”. *Blue Security in the Indo-Pacific* carries this reframing into the security domain, offering an ambitious and timely perspective on maritime security within the Indo-Pacific region. By assembling an interdisciplinary range of contributions, the editors aim to show that maritime security cannot be reduced to mere strategic competition. Instead, Ian Hall, Troy Lee-Brown and Rebecca Strating argue that different security threats and approaches are interlinked, and that maritime order emerges through their interaction.

The introduction draws on the English and Copenhagen Schools to overcome a persistent divide between military (traditional) and non-military (non-traditional) understandings of maritime security, which has led to overly narrow analyses. While many recent studies seek to bridge this gap, the editors of this volume go a step further by also examining the diverse approaches to maritime security provision that such integration entails. Indeed, the editors argue persuasively that maritime order is not a given but must be actively produced through responses to multifaceted, interdependent challenges.

The editors engage with foundational questions in security studies more broadly, including civil-military relations, the role of international law in the face of new threats and the relationship between security, development and the economy. To structure this ambitious vision, they explore five interrelated domains of blue security: strategic, legal, civil, economic and environmental. Each pillar is deemed essential for an “integrated and comprehensive approach to maritime security that can shape better understanding of how states envisage and pursue maritime order” (p. 4).

The bulk of the volume then applies this framework across the diverse range of states in the Indo-Pacific, a supra-region that the editors convincingly argue is characterized by a distinct maritime identity. The breadth of national case studies is a key strength of

this book, and contributors include established scholars, emerging voices and policy practitioners, producing a fruitful mix of theory and practice.

In line with the emphasis on inclusivity and equity in blue security, the volume moves beyond the usual spotlight on great power narratives. It includes chapters on the United States, China, Japan and India. Yet equally important are the chapters on middle and smaller states, such as Indonesia, Australia and the Philippines. Particularly noteworthy are the contributions on often-overlooked states, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka. Each country is afforded equal analytical space to unpack state interests, threat perceptions and policy approaches and gaps.

To maintain coherence, the editors required each author to structure their chapter around a common set of guiding questions: What are a state's maritime priorities? What strategies does it adopt? What are the gaps or shortcomings in its current approach to blue security? Yet, even with this shared framework, the chapters diverge significantly in emphasis. For instance, the chapter on Australia allocates considerable space to Canberra's concerns over distant sea lanes of communication and challenges such as irregular migration, while the chapters on Fiji and Bangladesh concentrate on nearer-shore concerns, including fisheries, coastal development and blue economic growth.

A dominant theme that emerges is the security-development nexus: for many states, pursuing blue economic growth is itself a security imperative. Environmental sustainability and climate change are also recurring preoccupations. But tensions soon become evident. The pursuit of maritime resource exploitation frequently collides with sustainability goals, as the chapter on China illustrates. The potential for blue economic expansion to reinforce security, rather than simply depend on it, remains underdeveloped. Moreover, despite the editors' initial critique of the traditional/non-traditional divide, a few chapters slip into treating issues in isolation rather than as interconnected dimensions of maritime security.

One striking feature across the chapters is how large and small states face similar structural limitations. Chief among these is a deficit in material capability: limited hulls, manpower and funding constrain even well-resourced powers such as the United States, Japan and Australia. Equally pervasive is the lack or incoherence of national maritime security strategies. Some states, such as Fiji or Bangladesh, lack a formal strategy. Others, including France or Japan,

suffer from overlapping and contradictory documents. Consequently, the creation of a coherent, integrated maritime security strategy is a common policy prescription.

Institutional fragmentation is another shared obstacle. Even smaller states with modest capabilities, such as Papua New Guinea and New Zealand, struggle to coordinate across multiple agencies. Notably, higher-capacity states are not immune to this problem. Australia, for instance, must navigate between up to 21 agencies. Although the volume does a strong job detailing bureaucratic complexity, most chapters focus primarily on state actors and pay limited attention to non-state and hybrid stakeholders, who are now integral to maritime governance.

One missed opportunity is the absence of a concluding synthesis. A final chapter reflecting on whether the conceptual framework of blue security itself might resolve some of the challenges it highlights would have strengthened the volume. Nonetheless, *Blue Security in the Indo-Pacific* succeeds in translating its normative commitments, especially equity, into practice, capturing an unusually diverse array of state perspectives. For scholars and practitioners concerned with Indo-Pacific maritime security, particularly in the context of the intensifying US-China rivalry, this volume offers both breadth and depth. Its comparative structure, theoretical ambition and policy relevance make it a significant contribution to an evolving field of maritime security.

SCOTT EDWARDS is a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. Postal address: Pengajian Jabatan Antarabangsa dan Strategik, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; email: scottedwards@um.edu.my.