

## **Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia Pacific**

Ralph Emmers and Sarah Teo  
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Reviewer: Dr Andrew Carr

In 2013 there was a fascinating case of life imitating theory. The G20 was increasingly driven by the dynamics of two rival groups of great and major powers, the G7 and the BRICS. Left over were five smaller 'middle powers'. What united them was what they did not share (membership of the other groups) rather than anything distinctly common to themselves. Just as scholars have long identified yet wondered what to do with the middle powers, so too MIKTA (standing for Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia) has been a forum in search of a mission ever since.

Analytically, middle powers are an obvious class of states. On a spectrum of power where we can identify those great and small, some clearly fit 'in the middle'. Especially when ranked by population size, economic wealth or military capacity. Yet the real world group of states who fit into this middle category always seems defined by their heterogeneity. Some scholars have tried to wave such concerns out of the way by setting up ideal types of behaviour around the notion of 'Good International Citizenship'. Others have thrown up their hands in despair and declared there are multiple types of middle powers or suggested the whole concept should be abandoned.<sup>156</sup>

Enter Ralf Emmers and Sarah Teo's elegant new study on the *Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific*. In this tightly argued analysis of Asia's middle powers, the authors offer a valuable argument for resetting our thinking about middle power diversity. Rather than the obvious differences in behaviour and outlook between these states suggesting something problematic in our category of middle powers, Emmers and Teo argue that the real world distinctions are a product of deliberate choices by middle powers. These choices, they show, are shaped fundamentally by the nature of the security environment (low-high threat) and resources (low-high availability) of each state.

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<sup>156</sup> Eduard Jordaan, 'The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2003), pp. 165-81; John Ravenhill, 'Cycles of Middle Power Activism: Constraint and Choice in Australian and Canadian Foreign Policies', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 52, no. 3 (1998), pp. 309-27; Adam Chapnick, 'The Canadian Middle Power Myth', *International Journal*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2000), pp. 188-206.

When states face low threats and have low resources (for a middle power) they tend towards 'Normative' security strategies, involving the advocacy of "broad behavioural norms and rules, as well as promote confidence building, through multilateral and institutional platforms". By contrast states facing high levels of threat and with access to high levels of resources tend to 'Functional' strategies that "utilise their limited but still relatively substantial resources to address specific issues" (pp. 6-7).

Across their four cases, Indonesia, South Korea, Australia and Malaysia the authors show examples of Normative (Indonesia), Functional (South Korea) and balanced (Australia, Malaysia) security strategies. The case studies are blessedly parsimonious, allowing the authors to describe each country sufficiently to justify the differences, without needing extensive histories of their foreign policy behaviour or getting too distracted by tangential details.

The other credit to the authors is that as useful as this contribution is, they don't push it too far and are quite open about the challenges the argument faces (esp. pp. 33, 178). As Emmers and Teo stress, the two types of strategies, functional and normative are not exclusive, and none of the countries discussed follows only one approach. As good scientists should, in the conclusion the authors update their argument, refining the analysis to incorporate this diversity, while still affirming the underlying value of their framework for understanding middle power behaviour.

Perhaps part of the problem is that the two strategies are different in type, not just form. Functional strategies are defined by a particular aim the state is seeking, while Normative strategies are a method of achieving aims. As such, states can and do use both. Yet as the authors show, there seem clear areas of emphasis and the book's insights into the sources of behaviour for middle powers are valuable.

*Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific* is a praiseworthy contribution to both the middle power and Asia-Pacific security literature. It helps us move beyond tired concerns that middle powers are, *à la* the G20, simply a leftover grouping defined only by being not something else. Rather, as Emmers and Teo show repeatedly, these states possess some capacity to shape the regional order around them, and how they do so is partly a function of their power and partly the environment in which they operate. Thanks to their framework, the diversity of behaviour we find now becomes something that we can analyse and explore, without going back to question the essential value of the class of 'middle powers'. For regional security scholars, this book is a useful overview and reference for grappling with the impact of Asia's middle powers as well as a reminder that these states deserve and reward greater scholarly study than they have thus far received.

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