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Rethinking Non-Traditional Security in the Indo-Pacific: Governance, Resilience, and Regional Cooperation

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Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the defining geopolitical and geoeconomic arena of the twenty-first century. Scholarly and policy debates surrounding the region have largely focused on military modernization, maritime disputes, alliance politics, and the intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China. Yet the contemporary Indo-Pacific is increasingly shaped not only by traditional geopolitical competition but also by a broad range of non-traditional security (NTS) threats that transcend territorial borders and conventional defence frameworks. Climate change, democratic erosion, energy insecurity, cyber threats, transnational crime, pandemics, environmental degradation, disinformation, and disaster vulnerability now interact with geopolitical competition in ways that fundamentally reshape governance, regional order, and strategic stability. These developments challenge traditional understandings of security

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that prioritize territorial defence and military capabilities while marginalizing societal, environmental, and institutional vulnerabilities. As a result, security in the Indo-Pacific can no longer be understood solely through the lens of hard power. Rather, contemporary security increasingly depends upon the resilience of institutions, communities, ecosystems, and governance systems themselves.

This special issue of the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* examines how non-traditional security challenges are reshaping the Indo-Pacific strategic environment and redefining Canada's engagement with the region. Originating from the 2025 Thompson Rivers University conference "Building Resilience: Canada's Engagement with the Indo-Pacific on Non-Traditional Security Threats," the collection brings together interdisciplinary perspectives that collectively rethink the relationship between governance, resilience, and security in an increasingly uncertain global order. The articles in this special issue argue that contemporary Indo-Pacific security can no longer be adequately understood through narrow military-centric frameworks as governance fragility and transnational risk increasingly interact in mutually reinforcing ways. Security in the region increasingly depends upon institutional resilience, cooperative governance, and the ability of states and societies to manage interconnected vulnerabilities across political, environmental, economic, and societal domains.

The Indo-Pacific as a Contested Regional Construct

Like security, the Indo-Pacific is not a fixed or politically neutral concept. Although the term appears to denote the space linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, its boundaries, membership, coherence, and strategic meaning remain contested.[3] Scholars have questioned whether it possesses the proximity, shared interests, and collective identity necessary to constitute a viable region at all.[4] The Indo-Pacific is therefore better understood as a strategic and socially constructed regional framework through which states and institutions define interests, organize partnerships, and advance competing visions of order.

[3] Dan Ciuriak, "The Contested Framing of the Indo-Pacific," *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 4 December 2020.

[4] Michal Kolmaš, Guangyu Qiao-Franco, and Aleš Karmazin, "Understanding Region Formation through Proximity, Interests, and Identity: Debunking the Indo-Pacific as a Viable Regional Demarcation," *The Pacific Review* 37, 6 (2024): pp. 1067-1089.

Its rise reflects a shift away from the earlier Asia-Pacific framework. Whereas the Asia-Pacific centred East Asia and Pacific economic integration, the Indo-Pacific places greater emphasis on the Indian Ocean, maritime connectivity, India's growing role, and the strategic linkages connecting South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, and the Pacific.[5] Wilson describes this as a rescaling of regionalism from a primarily economic framework toward one increasingly shaped by security concerns.[6] The shift is thus not merely semantic, but reflects changes in regional diplomacy and the distribution of power associated with India's rise, China's growing influence, and intensifying strategic competition.[7]

The boundaries of the Indo-Pacific remain unsettled, and these variations matter politically because they shape which actors are recognized as stakeholders and which issues are treated as regional priorities.[8] The concept also carries competing political and normative visions of order. Many governments, including the United States, Japan, Australia, India, Canada, and several European states, associate it with a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order, but its meaning remains contested even among its advocates.[9] China has often regarded the term with suspicion when it appears linked to strategic balancing, underscoring the extent to which Indo-Pacific politics are entwined with US-China competition.[10]

ASEAN advances a somewhat different interpretation. The *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* frames the region as an inclusive space for dialogue, cooperation, connectivity, and development rather than rivalry.[11] Ciuriak similarly distinguishes between framings centred on geopolitical alignment and those emphasizing trade,

[5] Rory Medcalf, "Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific," in *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India*, ed. Gilbert Rozman and Joseph Chinyong Liow (Singapore: Springer, 2018), pp.9-28.
[6] Jeffrey D. Wilson, "Rescaling to the Indo-Pacific: From Economic to Security-Driven Regionalism in Asia," *East Asia*35, 2 (2018): pp. 177-196.
[7] Mark Beeson and Troy Lee-Brown, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Diplomacy in a Contested Region," in *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Diplomacy in a Contested Region*, ed. Patrick Köllner, Robert Patman, and Balazs Kiglics (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 1-20
[8] Kolmaš, Qiao-Franco, and Karmazin, "Understanding Region Formation," pp. 1067-1089.
[9] Joanne Wallis, "Contested Concept: Unpacking Australia's Indo-Pacific Debate," *Asian Politics & Policy* 12, 1 (2020): pp. 71-83.
[10] Kai He and Mingjiang Li, "Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors, and Beyond," *International Affairs* 96,1 (2020): pp. 1-7.
[11] Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (Jakarta: ASEAN, 2019).

connectivity, and geoeconomic cooperation.[12] In this sense, the Indo-Pacific is less a single region than a contested regional imaginary in which questions of membership, leadership, and legitimate order remain open.

Recent scholarship pushes this argument further by suggesting that there is no single Indo-Pacific, but rather multiple Indo-Pacifics constituted through state strategy, historical narratives, economic relationships, transnational networks, and the lived experiences of communities across the region.[13] This broadens analysis beyond great-power strategy and highlights the social, economic, and ecological relationships through which regional interconnectedness is actually experienced.[14] Such a perspective is especially important for the study of non-traditional security, because it makes visible vulnerabilities and cross-border challenges that narrower geopolitical accounts often marginalize.

This debate is particularly relevant for Canada. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy identifies the region as central to the country's future prosperity, security, and international influence.[15] Yet Canada must navigate the tension between strategic competition and inclusive regional cooperation. Ciuriak argues that Canada would benefit from an approach oriented more toward trade diversification, connectivity, and engagement with ASEAN than toward an exclusively confrontational geopolitical framing.[16] Treating the Indo-Pacific as a diverse and politically constructed space, rather than as a coherent geopolitical bloc, therefore provides a stronger basis for analyzing both regional order and non-traditional security. Just as the Indo-Pacific is constructed and contested through competing geographical, strategic, and normative visions, the meaning of security within the region is also subject to continuing conceptual and political negotiation.

[12] Ciuriak, "Contested Framing of the Indo-Pacific."
[13] Rory Medcalf, "Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance," *Asia Policy* 14, 3 (2019): pp. 79-95; Mark Beeson and Troy Lee-Brown, "From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific"; Han Cheng, Priya Chacko, Fathun Karib, David M. Malitz, and Yang Yang, "The Indo-Pacific: In What Sense a Region?" *Dialogues in Human Geography* 16, 1 (2026): pp. 245-253.
[14] Cheng et al., "The Indo-Pacific."
[15] Government of Canada, *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2022).
[16] Ciuriak, "Contested Framing of the Indo-Pacific."

From a Canadian perspective, the growing prominence of non-traditional security (NTS) challenges reflects an important transformation in how security itself is conceptualized and governed. Traditionally, Canadian security policy focused heavily on military defence, territorial sovereignty, and alliance commitments through institutions such as NATO and NORAD. However, contemporary security threats increasingly emerge from climate change, pandemics, cyber insecurity, foreign interference, democratic erosion, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, misinformation, and transnational crime, many of which transcend conventional military frameworks. Recent Canadian scholarship and policy debates suggest that Canada remains insufficiently prepared for the scale and interconnected nature of these evolving threats. Leanne Smythe argues that contemporary security environments require a broader *whole-of-society* readiness posture in which institutional resilience, civilian preparedness, and cross-sector coordination become central components of national security itself. [17] Similarly, Canada's recent defence and security discussions increasingly emphasize resilience, adaptability, and integrated governance approaches in response to the growing complexity of global and domestic risks.[18] Rather than existing separately from traditional geopolitical concerns, these non-traditional security challenges increasingly intersect with strategic competition, domestic polarization, and regional instability in the Indo-Pacific, thereby reshaping both Canada's understanding of security and its engagement with the region.

Reconceptualizing Security in the Indo-Pacific

The concept of security itself has evolved significantly over time. Traditionally, security was closely associated with territorial defence, military power, and the preservation of state sovereignty. Realist approaches to international relations conceptualized security primarily in terms of interstate rivalry, military balance, deterrence, and geopolitical competition. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that security is neither a fixed nor purely military concept. Rather, security reflects broader concerns surrounding state vulnerability, from

[17] Leanne J. Smythe, "Civilian Readiness and National Security Threats in Canada: A Lesson from the Military," International Journal 81, 1 (2026): pp.65–82.
[18] Department of National Defence, Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2024).

existential harm across political, societal, economic, and environmental domains.[19] The accelerating impacts of climate change, pandemics, technological disruption, environmental degradation, and governance fragility increasingly demonstrate that many of the most destabilizing contemporary threats emerge beyond the battlefield. Similarly, globalization and technological interconnectedness have transformed the nature of insecurity itself by linking domestic vulnerabilities to transnational pressures and regional instability.[20] These developments challenge rigid distinctions between internal and external security while exposing the limitations of conventional military-centric frameworks in explaining contemporary insecurity.

Recent Canadian scholarship has increasingly emphasized the need to rethink Canada's engagement with the Indo-Pacific beyond traditional geopolitical and military considerations. In particular, the 2023 special issue of the Canadian Political Science Review on "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategic 4wEnvironment" highlighted the growing importance of plurilateral engagement, migration, subnational diplomacy, disaster relief, economic interdependence, and regional governance in shaping Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy. The contributions collectively demonstrated that contemporary strategic dynamics in the Indo-Pacific are deeply interconnected with societal resilience, development, diplomacy, and governance challenges rather than confined solely to conventional defence concerns.[21] Building upon these emerging debates, this special issue further expands the analytical focus toward non-traditional security by examining how governance fragility, climate insecurity, democratic erosion, environmental vulnerability, transnational crime, and institutional resilience increasingly shape the regional strategic environment and redefine contemporary understandings of security.

It is within this broader intellectual transformation that the NTS framework emerged. NTS scholarship developed most prominently within Asian security studies during the post-Cold War period in response to the growing inadequacy of traditional security paradigms.[22] Rather than focusing exclusively on military threats and territorial

[19] David A. Welch, *Security: A Philosophical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[20] Ashok Swain, *Understanding Emerging Security Challenges: Threats and Opportunities* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[21] Robert J. Hanlon, ed., "Special Issue: Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategic Environment," *Canadian Political Science Review* 17, 1 (2023)
[22] Mely Caballero-Anthony, Ralf Emmers, and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Dilemmas in Securitization* (London: Routledge, 2006).

defence, NTS scholarship emphasizes how transnational and societal challenges undermine both state stability and human well-being. Contemporary insecurity increasingly encompasses climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics, migration, cyber insecurity, transnational crime, democratic instability, and governance fragility.[23] Unlike conventional security approaches centred on military competition and deterrence, NTS frameworks emphasize human welfare, institutional resilience, multilevel governance, and regional cooperation. In doing so, NTS scholarship expands the referent object of security beyond the state to include individuals, communities, and ecosystems.

The Indo-Pacific illustrates particularly clearly how contemporary insecurity increasingly blurs the boundaries between domestic and international politics. Climate-induced disasters affect migration, economic stability, and regional cooperation. Democratic erosion weakens institutional accountability and reshapes foreign policy behaviour. Economic nationalism disrupts environmental governance and multilateral coordination. Cybercrime and transnational criminal networks exploit institutional weaknesses across borders. NTS threats therefore increasingly reshape governance structures, bureaucratic authority, and state-society relations themselves.[24] In this context, borderless threats are not merely additional policy challenges but drivers of political and institutional transformation that alter how states exercise authority and legitimacy within an increasingly interconnected global order.

Closely connected to the NTS framework is the concept of human security, which broadens the referent object of security beyond the state to include individuals and communities. Human security scholarship emphasizes that insecurity frequently emerges not only from military conflict but also from poverty, environmental degradation, political exclusion, weak governance, inequality, and institutional fragility. The human security concept conceptualizes human security through the dual principles of *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*, highlighting how physical insecurity and structural vulnerability are deeply interconnected dimensions of contemporary

[23] Mely Caballero-Anthony, ed., *An Introduction to Non-Traditional Security Studies: A Transnational Approach* (London: SAGE Publications, 2017).
[24] Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones, *Governing Borderless Threats: Non-Traditional Security and the Politics of State Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

insecurity.[25] Human security approaches are particularly relevant within the Indo-Pacific because many states in the region continue to face uneven governance capacity, rapid urbanization, widening inequality, dysfunctional rule of law, and high levels of climate vulnerability. Human security, therefore, is concerned with the *protection* and *empowerment* of individuals at the grassroots as it considers how marginalized communities can build resilience.

Climate Change, Resilience, and Governance

Climate change has emerged as one of the most significant non-traditional security challenges confronting the Indo-Pacific region. Beyond its environmental consequences, climate change intensifies societal vulnerability, displacement pressures, food insecurity, economic instability, and governance fragility. Mely Caballero-Anthony and Lorraine Elliott argue that climate change should be understood not merely as an environmental issue but as a multidimensional human-security challenge affecting institutional resilience, political stability, and regional security.[26] Across Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific, environmental disruption increasingly exposes governance weaknesses while amplifying social inequality and institutional fragility. Similarly, natural disasters are not simply environmental events but governance and security challenges shaped by institutional capacity, political response, and societal vulnerability.[27] Moreover, pandemics and large-scale disasters expose governance fragility and institutional weakness, illustrating how public-health crises and environmental disruption increasingly function as central dimensions of contemporary security governance.[28]

These developments have contributed to the growing importance of resilience governance within contemporary security studies. Over the last two decades, resilience has become a central concept within environmental governance, disaster management, public policy, and security studies. Resilience refers broadly to the capacity of institutions, societies, and systems to absorb shocks, adapt to crises, and recover from

[25] Robert J. Hanlon and Kenneth Christie, *Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: An Introduction to Human Security* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
[26] Mely Caballero-Anthony and Lorraine M. Elliott, *Human Security and Climate Change in Southeast Asia: Managing Risk and Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[27] Christopher Hobson, *Human Security and Natural Disasters* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[28] Natasha Lindstaedt, *Human Security in Disease and Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2022).

disruption. Unlike traditional security frameworks that prioritize deterrence and threat elimination, resilience approaches emphasize adaptation, preparedness, institutional flexibility, and societal robustness. The Indo-Pacific increasingly confronts overlapping and persistent disruptions rather than isolated crises. Climate disasters, technological disruption, economic volatility, and geopolitical uncertainty therefore require governance systems capable of responding to complex and rapidly evolving challenges.

The concept of resilience also bridges traditional and non-traditional security concerns. While resilience is defined in multiple ways across disciplines, it generally refers to the capacity of states, institutions, and societies to adapt, absorb, recover, and transform in response to crises, disruptions, and uncertainty. Philippe Bourbeau conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic political process through which actors respond to vulnerability, uncertainty, and external shocks through adaptation and transformation.[29] Similarly, Humbert and Joseph define resilience as involving processes of self-organization, adaptation, and survival in the face of adversity and complexity.[30] Energy transition policies, for example, are increasingly framed not solely in terms of environmental sustainability but also in relation to economic resilience, technological competitiveness, supply-chain security, and strategic autonomy. Environmental governance increasingly intersects with industrial policy, geoeconomic competition, and technological rivalry. These developments illustrate how security increasingly operates through economic, technological, and environmental systems rather than solely through military institutions.

Complexity, Political Economy, and Cooperative Security

Contemporary security challenges also cannot be fully understood without accounting for broader transformations in the global political economy. The erosion of the liberal international order, the rise of economic nationalism, technological competition, and the weaponization of economic interdependence increasingly reshape global governance and regional security dynamics. Previous scholarship on corporate social responsibility and human security in China demonstrates how economic

[29] Philippe Bourbeau, *On Resilience: Genealogy, Logics and World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[30] Clemence Humbert and Jonathan Joseph, "Introduction: The Politics of Resilience: Problematizing Current Approaches," *Resilience* 7, 3 (2019): pp. pp. 215–223.

governance, environmental sustainability, and social welfare increasingly intersect with broader questions of political legitimacy and security governance.[31] Economic systems therefore increasingly function not merely as instruments of prosperity but also as arenas of strategic rivalry, governance transformation, and societal vulnerability.

At the same time, the growing complexity of contemporary insecurity further underscores the importance of cooperative governance and multilateral coordination. Climate change, cyber insecurity, pandemics, transnational crime, and environmental degradation cannot be effectively managed through unilateral state action alone. Many contemporary security threats are fundamentally cooperative problems because they transcend borders and require collective governance mechanisms capable of addressing shared vulnerabilities.[32] This perspective is particularly relevant for middle powers such as Canada, whose Indo-Pacific engagement increasingly emphasizes climate governance, institutional partnerships, resilience-building, and multilateral cooperation rather than solely military balancing.

Contemporary insecurity is also increasingly characterized by complexity, interdependence, and cross-sectoral interaction. Contemporary non-traditional security threats operate through interconnected systems in which environmental, political, economic, technological, and societal vulnerabilities frequently reinforce one another.[33] Rather than emerging in isolation, non-traditional security threats often generate cascading effects across multiple governance and security domains. For example, climate-induced disasters in South Asia have intensified migration pressures, strained state capacity, and exacerbated domestic political instability, while disruptions in global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the close relationship between public health, economic resilience, and geopolitical competition. Similarly, cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure increasingly blur distinctions between economic security, technological vulnerability, and national defence. These interconnected dynamics complicate conventional policy responses based on rigid sectoral distinctions and

[31] Robert J. Hanlon, *Human Security and the Politics of Corporate Social Responsibility in China* (London: Anthem Press, 2012).
[32] Walter A. Kemp, *Security through Cooperation: To the Same End* (London: Routledge, 2023).
[33] Anthony J. Masys, ed., *Exploring the Security Landscape: Non-Traditional Security Challenges* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

reinforce the need for integrated, adaptive, and resilience-oriented governance approaches.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for this special issue. NTS frameworks conceptualize security as multidimensional, interconnected, and increasingly shaped by governance and societal resilience. Human security highlights the centrality of individuals and communities as referent objects of security. Resilience governance emphasizes adaptation, institutional capacity, and crisis management. Political economy approaches reveal how geoeconomic competition and economic nationalism reshape security relations. Cooperative security frameworks emphasize multilateral governance and collective resilience in addressing shared vulnerabilities. Together, these approaches allow this special issue to move beyond narrow military-centric understandings of security and instead conceptualize the Indo-Pacific as a space where governance, environmental change, technological transformation, economic competition, and societal resilience increasingly determine regional stability. Collectively, the contributions in this special issue argue that non-traditional security threats are no longer peripheral to Indo-Pacific geopolitics but increasingly constitute central arenas through which governance legitimacy, regional order, and strategic competition are negotiated.

Overview of the Special Issue Contributions

The contributions in this collection examine these transformations through diverse empirical cases while remaining connected through a shared analytical concern: how governance structures, institutional resilience, and regional cooperation mediate the relationship between non-traditional threats and broader strategic stability.

Sun Ryung Park's contribution, *Energy Security in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Implications for Canada*, examines how energy transition governance has become deeply intertwined with geopolitical competition and economic security across the region. The article demonstrates how China, Japan, and South Korea increasingly deploy forms of "green energy statecraft" to secure technological leadership, supply-chain resilience, and strategic autonomy in emerging clean-energy sectors. Rather than treating decarbonization solely as an environmental issue, governments increasingly frame the energy transition as a matter of national resilience, industrial competitiveness, and

geopolitical positioning. The article further explores the implications of these developments for Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, arguing that Canada can strengthen regional engagement through critical mineral partnerships, hydrogen cooperation, and energy-transition diplomacy.

Ryan Seay and Alvin Camba's contribution, *Acting on the Corridors: A Minilateral Coalition Design for Southeast Asia's Scam-Compound Crisis*, examines the rapid expansion of scam compounds and illicit economies across Southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, where criminal networks increasingly operate under conditions of state capture. The article demonstrates how cyber fraud, forced labour, human trafficking, cryptocurrency-based money laundering, and elite corruption have merged into integrated transnational criminal systems that undermine governance capacity, financial integrity, and regional stability. Drawing on the concept of minilateralism, the authors argue that traditional bilateral partnerships and ASEAN-wide multilateral approaches have proven inadequate because consensus rules and compromised state institutions obstruct effective enforcement. Instead, the paper proposes a coalition of willing ASEAN states — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam — supported by middle-power partners such as Canada, to target the financial, logistical, and human-flow corridors sustaining scam-compound operations. The article further outlines a five-mechanism strategy centred on joint investigation teams, coordinated financial sanctions, regulatory pressure on virtual asset service providers, support for the UNODC Emergency Response Network, and victim-centred protection and repatriation frameworks.

Bala Nikku's contribution, D*isaster Governance as Strategic Infrastructure and Non-Traditional Security in the Indo-Pacific: Insights from South Asia for Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*, reconceptualizes disaster governance as a form of strategic infrastructure central to regional resilience, governance stability, and Indo-Pacific security architecture. Drawing on empirical evidence from Nepal's 2015 earthquakes and recurring cyclones along India's eastern coast, the article argues that disasters are no longer isolated humanitarian crises but systemic non-traditional security stressors that strain governance systems, intensify displacement, disrupt livelihoods, and expose institutional vulnerabilities. Nikku demonstrates that the effectiveness of disaster response depends not merely on hazard magnitude, but on the quality of governance, institutional

coordination, community participation, and anticipatory resilience planning. Through detailed analysis of India's evolving cyclone governance frameworks and Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction and displacement challenges, the article highlights how centralized governance structures, coordination failures, bureaucratic fragmentation, and the exclusion of marginalized communities undermine long-term recovery and societal resilience. At the same time, the paper emphasizes the importance of participatory governance, localized decision-making, Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems, and the co-production of resilience strategies between governments, researchers, and affected populations. Extending the analysis to regional governance, Nikku evaluates the limitations and possibilities of SAARC, BIMSTEC, and India's expanding humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) diplomacy within the Indo-Pacific. The article concludes that disaster governance must be integrated into broader non-traditional security and regional cooperation frameworks, arguing that Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy should place greater emphasis on climate resilience, disaster interoperability, community-centred governance, and soft-power engagement through disaster diplomacy and capacity-building initiatives.

Terry Kading's contribution, *The Environmental and Climate Impacts of Nationalism and Trade Wars – Implications for Canada and the ASEAN*, examines how resurgent economic nationalism, protectionist trade policies, strategic resource competition, and the *weaponization of trade* are reshaping environmental governance across North America and the Indo-Pacific. Framing these developments through a non-traditional security lens, the article argues that intensifying geopolitical and geoeconomic competition increasingly undermines multilateral environmental cooperation while accelerating climate insecurity, aggressive resource extraction, and ecological degradation. Drawing on comparative analysis of Canada and Southeast Asia, Kading demonstrates how middle powers deeply integrated into global trade networks remain highly vulnerable to the environmental and economic consequences of US-China rivalry despite having limited capacity to shape the broader strategic competition. The article further highlights how strategic mineral competition, energy insecurity, supply-chain restructuring, and climate-related disruptions increasingly intersect to create cascading governance and security challenges across the Indo-Pacific and North America. Ultimately, the paper argues that stronger Canada-ASEAN cooperation on climate adaptation, environmental

governance, and sustainable economic coordination will be essential for mitigating the destabilizing effects of protectionist competition and climate change.

Saira Bano's contribution, *Democratic Backsliding as a Non-Traditional Security Challenge: India's Nationalism and the Changing Dynamics of Power in the Indo-Pacific*, examines how democratic erosion within India functions as a structural non-traditional security challenge with broader implications for governance, societal resilience, and regional stability. Moving beyond analyses that treat democratic backsliding solely as a domestic political phenomenon, the article argues that India's democratic recession reshapes governance capacity, social cohesion, and information environments in ways that generate both domestic and transnational security risks. The article develops a cumulative causal framework in which democratic backsliding contributes to institutional erosion, governance failures, social fragmentation, and information disorder, while simultaneously encouraging a more assertive and nationalist foreign policy posture toward Pakistan and China. The article further demonstrates how these internal transformations increasingly spill across borders, contributing to strategic uncertainty and instability within the broader Indo-Pacific security environment.

Conclusion

Taken together, the contributions in this collection reveal several broader themes central to understanding contemporary Indo-Pacific security. First, governance capacity and institutional resilience increasingly function as central components of security itself. Whether examining democratic erosion, climate governance, disaster response, environmental fragmentation, energy transition, or transnational crime, the articles consistently demonstrate that weak institutions and fragmented governance structures amplify societal vulnerability and undermine state effectiveness. Second, the collection highlights the growing intersection between domestic political transformation and regional strategic dynamics. Internal developments such as populism, economic nationalism, governance instability, and social polarization increasingly spill across borders through environmental degradation, institutional fragmentation, crisis escalation, supply-chain disruption, and information disorder. Third, the special issue underscores the interconnected nature of contemporary insecurity, demonstrating how environmental, political, economic, technological, and societal vulnerabilities increasingly reinforce one another across the Indo-Pacific. Finally, the collection

highlights the limitations of purely militarized or state-centric approaches to security. Many of the region's most pressing challenges are transnational, multidimensional, and deeply embedded within governance and societal systems, requiring cooperative, resilience-oriented, and multilevel responses. In this context, middle powers such as Canada increasingly play important roles in supporting regional resilience through climate governance, institutional partnerships, disaster cooperation, and sustainable economic engagement.

The collection also demonstrates that the Indo-Pacific should not be treated as a self-evident or purely geographical region. The cases examined in this special issue reveal an Indo-Pacific constituted through intersecting environmental systems, economic networks, political relationships, migration routes, criminal economies, and governance institutions. Different understandings of the region privilege different security concerns. A strategic framing centred primarily on great power rivalry highlights military competition, maritime disputes, and balancing behaviour, while an NTS perspective reveals how climate vulnerability, disaster governance, democratic erosion, illicit networks, and energy insecurity also shape the character and boundaries of the regional order. The special issue therefore contributes not only to the reconceptualization of security but also to a broader understanding of how the Indo-Pacific itself is politically constructed through shared vulnerabilities, competing institutional visions, and uneven patterns of regional interconnectedness.

For Canada, these developments carry important strategic implications. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy emphasizes economic engagement, regional partnerships, and support for a *free and open Indo-Pacific*. However, the contributions in this special issue demonstrate that meaningful engagement with the region also requires greater attention to governance, environmental sustainability, institutional resilience, and societal security. Canada's comparative strengths in climate governance, energy transition, disaster resilience, multilateral diplomacy, and critical minerals position it to contribute constructively to emerging regional challenges. At the same time, the collection demonstrates that Canada cannot treat NTS as separate from broader strategic competition. Rather, issues such as democratic governance, climate resilience, energy transition, and transnational crime increasingly constitute central arenas through which geopolitical influence and regional order are contested.

Ultimately, this special issue contributes to broader efforts to reconceptualize both security and regional order in the twenty-first century. The Indo-Pacific illustrates with particular clarity that contemporary security challenges emerge not only from military confrontation but also from governance failures, environmental crises, technological disruption, and societal fragmentation. These threats are deeply interconnected and often mutually reinforcing. In an era increasingly defined by overlapping geopolitical, environmental, technological, and governance crises, the Indo-Pacific demonstrates that the future of security will depend not only on military power, but on the resilience of institutions, societies, and cooperative regional orders themselves.

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