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### An Indo-Pacific norm entrepreneur? Australia and defence diplomacy

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## An Indo-Pacific norm entrepreneur? Australia and defence diplomacy

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The Indian Ocean is a region of increasing importance, with booming economic opportunities, shifting power dynamics and rising geopolitical competition. To manage this transition some Australian policy-makers are advocating the practice of defence diplomacy as a mechanism to help mould cooperative practices and to build regional trust while dissipating potential or ongoing regional flashpoints. Australia's 2013 Defence White Paper identified Australia as an agent who can play a critical part in the emergence of certain types of norms as a means of conflict prevention and crisis management in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper explores the use of defence diplomacy as a means for seeking regional influence. It uses an innovative new framework of norm entrepreneurship to examine the choices facing Australian policy-makers in increasingly complex security environment. This paper argues that while Australia should aim to promote defence diplomacy as a central part of rising security dialogue and practice with 'like-minded' countries, there must also be careful reflection to ensure that this objective is a constructive use of a middle power's limited resources and influence.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific; defence diplomacy; middle powers; statecraft; norm entrepreneurship

### Introduction

Many states are now using the language of norms to describe their foreign policy ambitions and to identify national security goals. Not only great powers such as the USA for whom 'norms and values permeate ... foreign policy declarations and documents' (Hamilton, 2008, p. 4) but increasingly smaller states as well. Countries such as Australia are devoting time and attention to the construction of particular criterion to direct the emergence of collaborative security benchmarks and to encourage the development of cooperative international principles. Such a focus over time implies active efforts to craft a 'standard for appropriate behaviour for actions with a given identity' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 887).

Facing enormous economic and strategic stakes in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as substantial regional tensions and great power competition, Australia views improved military to military engagement as a mechanism for building and developing relevant regional norms. Such a task is seen as a practical means to induce orderly cultural change and information dissemination – an effort to reduce the chance of collective misunderstandings, to promote confidence building and to build perceptions of shared

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interest on defence and security issues. K. A. Muthanna (2011, p. 3) sums up the practices of defence diplomacy as the establishment of 'sustainable cooperative relationships, thereby building trust and facilitating conflict prevention; introducing transparency into defence relations; building and reinforcing perceptions of common interests; changing the mindset of partners; and introducing cooperation in other areas'. Others have reiterated the concept of defence diplomacy as a soft power instrument to encourage a 'disarmament of the mind' (Jha, 2011, p. 47).

This article uses a framework of norm entrepreneurship to examine the way a middle-power state like Australia can seek to promote, shape and legitimise a collection of rules, beliefs and practices as a new security standard for the Indian Ocean region. The article will present a four part model of norm entrepreneurship – framing, institutionalism, socialisation and resilience – to examine the stated policy ambitions of the Australian Government: to elevate the Indo-Pacific construction and defence diplomacy as central mechanisms to shape strategic thinking and identity and to help direct inter-linked norms across the Indian Ocean region.

This use of defence organisations and the targeted peacetime use of military assets can be seen as moving beyond coercion and narrow realpolitik calculations to advance diplomacy and towards an emphasis on co-option and fostering reciprocal relationships, expectations and linkages between nations (Laksmana, 2012; Taylor, 2011). The Indian Ocean is a highly important area for Australia, representing a test case for the implementation of its new 'Indo-Pacific' regional nomenclature as well as Canberra's enduring claim to an activist middle-power status and capacity. The 2014 Defence Issues Paper, released to help guide public discussion during the development of Australia's 2015 Defence White Paper, also highlights the importance of refining Australia's approach to the Indian Ocean (DOD, 2014, p. 19). Such a geopolitical vision pointing to the benefits of enhanced defence diplomacy has seen a steady increase in political discourse and represents a bipartisan policy in Australia in recent years (Johnston, 2014; Smith, 2012).

The article begins by examining norm entrepreneurship and outlining a new four part model. It will address Australia's adoption of the Indo-Pacific paradigm as well as the idea of integrating defence diplomacy into decision-making to shape the communal incorporation of national security priorities. The article will then critically assesses Australian policies in the Indian Ocean against the norm entrepreneurship model and its potential implications for regional strategies and structures.

Australia does have a notable opportunity to act as both an enabling and stabilising regional power with a significant impact on cooperative understandings and perceptions in a highly dynamic geopolitical zone. However Australia must also be wary of many potential hurdles, including unrealistic expectations of what its influence capabilities can actually achieve. Critically, this will require balanced and clear-eyed objectives and priority areas. Without a resonating frame to capture norms and a strategy that acts, in part, to entice band-wagoning effects, stated normative goals are likely to remain ephemeral and elusive.

It is worth underscoring that while theory construction is often founded on testing claims against historical experience, it can be equally useful to apply theory to emergent cases as a way to explore predictive capacity and fresh hypotheses. Investigative in nature, the norm entrepreneurship model aims to offer policy-makers a directive framework to frame discourse and assess possibilities for action and institutionalisation in a regional community context. It also endeavours to provide a richer understanding of

a geo-political setting that invokes ideas about the relationship between military power, political objectives and security constructions. As such, while a fuller exploration of the norm entrepreneurship model can be found elsewhere (Carr, 2015), this article predominately aims to identify a middle-power experience whereby Australia has set itself a series of norm-based and co-optive tasks. We wish to bring attention to this case as a way to inform future theory building as well as policy practice.

### **Norm entrepreneurs: a four part model**

Since the late twentieth century's 'constructivist turn', norms have been explicitly identified by scholars and policy-makers as an important feature of international relations. A norm can be simply pictured as a standard of behaviour and broadly viewed as serving two primary functions. Chiefly they are regulative, acting as 'collective understandings of the proper behaviour of actors' (Bellamy, 2004, p. 21). This is achieved through a second role of providing 'stable structures acting as constraints on agents' behaviour' that are 'constitutive of identity and interests, and provid[e] a cognitive framework with which agents are able to make sense of a complicated world' (Flockhart, 2006, p. 91). Of special importance for a middle-power country like Australia, international norms that shape behaviour 'are obeyed, not because they are enforced, but because they are seen as legitimate' (Florini, 1996, p. 365). So how do norms successfully emerge and take on conditions of legitimacy, institutionalisation and internalisation – an inferred, inferential position?

While there are a number of structural explanations for norm change, actors themselves are an increasingly popular explanation for the shift and adoption of norms and correlated cultural and political changes. Drawing on a long line of public policy research around policy entrepreneurship, scholars have developed the concept of a norm entrepreneur as an actor who deliberately seeks to transmit and promote new standards of behaviour that achieve widespread communal incorporation (see Kratochwil, 1984; Price, 1998). As such, national governments remain significant actors in the empowerment of international norms, able to raise the salience of particular issues, convince others of the benefits of change and critically turn this into practice through their resources and behaviour (Nagtzaam, 2009).

This involvement can occur through undirected behaviour, such as the role of great power states in establishing (and enforcing) the norm of state sovereignty (Ramos, 2013). In this way large actors 'are able to pursue their material agenda but with norm evolution as the by-product' (Haas, 2005, p. 3). Or middle-power states, while unable to enforce norm compliance, can undertake deliberate campaigns for change as an explicit objective and anticipate that coalition-building or a band-wagoning effect might occur. Notable examples include Canada's agenda setting campaign to limit the use of landmines (Wexler, 2003) or Scandinavian countries advocating environmental and foreign aid standards that have become habitual (Ingebritsen, 2002). These examples reflect an assumption in the middle-power literature that traditional middle powers should be expected to enunciate norms applicable to 'niche' situations, provide diplomatic fleet-footedness and generate a spirited 'leadership as morally cosmopolitan norm entrepreneurs' (Acharya, 2010, p. 159).

By and large, the overall aim of norm entrepreneurs is to develop a normative structure and supportive framework (such as relevant institutions, laws and codes appropriate to requirements) which identify an agenda and then establish rules for

conduct, therefore creating potential expectations that can facilitate improved relations in a wider context. Norm entrepreneurship is thus defined as *a deliberate and sustained campaign to create, change or maintain shared social norms and intersubjective practices to enable practical cooperation*. Nadelmann's (1990, p. 482) early description of the role is still an authoritative guide (Acharya, 2010, p. 15). These are actors who:

mobilise popular opinion and political support, both within their host country and abroad; they stimulate and assist in the creation of likeminded organisations in other countries... directed towards persuading foreign audiences, especially foreign elites that a particular prohibition regime reflects a widely shared or even universal moral sense, rather than the peculiar moral code of one society.

In a classic paper by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), the authors identified a number of common requirements for norm entrepreneurs that included 'framing' the norm and establishing relevant organisational platforms to apply and maintain the norm. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 914) argue the first requirement of norm entrepreneurs is to persuade a 'critical mass' of actors to subscribe to a specific norm as 'persuasion is the process by which agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the intersubjective'. In other words, framing a persuasive argument remains an essential task for norm entrepreneurs to enhance the probability of a norm as the new standard (Onuf, 2002, p. 134; Sterling-Folker, 2006, p. 119). At its simplest, framing is the art of persuasion with the expectation of generating a political momentum towards proper and voluntary state behaviour (Nagtzaam, 2009, p. 75).

At the same time, not all frames will have equal resonance. Any push for a new normative consensus will compete with existing 'perceptions of interest' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). Those frames that connect with self-interest and/or emerging local concerns – such as improved security – have a higher likelihood to be intuitively seen as rational and provide incentives to adapt regular behaviour. So norm entrepreneurs must design their frame with the intended norm-receiving audience in mind and be prepared for ideas to be transformative but relatable and germane. Thus along with fitting or cultivating frames to suit overarching strategic thinking, a frame which builds 'congruence between transnational norms ... and local beliefs and practices' has greater potential to be positively received and internalised (Acharya, 2004, p. 241).

Along with developing a frame, norm entrepreneurs need to apply energies and resources towards building institutions to help normative tasks. This search for organisational platforms to give Australian ideas prominence will demand the careful investment of resources, both financial and intellectual. From this perspective, a number of governments in the Indo-Pacific region do appear receptive to new institutional innovations or, at the very least, are displaying a growing willingness to incorporate ideas about the peacetime usage of military to military cooperation and infrastructure (Capie, 2013; Taylor, 2011). Conversely, the more institutionalised an issue, the greater the chance that regional actors and its leadership will be part of a wider domestic internalisation of the norm in its own right (Rushton, 2008). Further, it can be argued that moves towards managing the Indian Ocean will be intuitively attractive for bureaucracies and politicians with an eye on gaining popular credit in unpacking regional complexities and – for middle powers in particular – to act as a platform to catapult ideas and practices that might grab and hold the attention of more powerful actors with influence.

Indirectly covered by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) is a third important task: connecting the frame and the institutional regime via a socialisation strategy. The existence of a proper strategy is fundamental to the success or failure of the norm entrepreneur (Nagtzaam, 2009, p. 67). Socialisation strategies link resources and frames to give the maximum chance for the proposed norm to be accepted by the target audience on its own accord. This socialisation occurs at two levels. First, certain states 'may adopt the norm to avoid international shaming, and/or they may embrace the norm for the material incentives it brings' (Griffiths, 2014, p. 463). Certainly, states increasingly value international legitimacy and recognise that there are significant costs with being an outside or 'rogue' state in international affairs, affecting reputation and credibility (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 903). The second and fuller meaning of socialisation sees a norm move well beyond a transactional choice and become effectively 'taken for granted' as the correct, rational form of behaviour. When legitimated through social learning a dominant norm will start to shape a state's identity and outlook – changing not only how states try to achieve their national interests but what they see as their best national interests.

While the first three parts of the framework go to preparatory settings, a final part is connected to the implementation of, and political endurance for, any push for change. Norm entrepreneurship will involve the adaptation or even removal and replacement of existing norms. Richard Price (1998, p. 627) has labelled such processes of norm germination as 'grafting' – when active persuasion appears to complement or harmonise with local norms in an existing political setting. Yet such a development does not happen in a vacuum but within a 'highly contested normative space' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). New norms might clash with existing old norms. Given norms define what 'appropriate behaviour' is, it should be anticipated that norm transplantation could trigger degrees of negative reaction by those actors invested in the existing and popular or expedient norms. In this sense, the more radical or subversive a proposed norm is from existing standards of behaviour and local hierarchies, the greater the likelihood of it triggering concern and being rejected by the target community.

The point is that resilience in international norm entrepreneurship can be an intimidating task (see Sikkink, 2011, p. 11). Many past sponsors of normative change have failed to mobilise support and achieve their desired variation of international realities in the wake of sustained criticism – a failure to produce what has been called a 'norm cascade' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Alternatively, when an international norm 'is salient in a particular discourse, its invocation by relevant actors legitimates a particular behaviour or action, creating a prima facie obligation, and thereby calling into question or delegitimising alternative choices' (Cortell & James, 2000, p. 69).

Together, these four parts – framing, institutionalisation, socialisation and resilience – represent a blueprint for middle-power norm entrepreneurship. They can offer a pathway for scholars to assess how actors like Australia seek to communicate, negotiate and advocate resonant transnational norms and 'rules of the road' to pre-empt disputes and even expand moral codes in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, past studies into norm entrepreneurs have often lacked linking theoretical and contextual blueprints. In this sense, the Australian Government's declaration in its 2013 Defence White Paper that it would seek to establish 'habits of cooperation and dialogue as the norm' (DOD, 2013, p. 55) in the Indian Ocean provides a useful case study to apply and test a model of norm entrepreneurship.

**Australia looks west: implementing the Indo-Pacific?**

Australia's 2009 and 2013 Defence White Paper identified the Indian Ocean as an area of fundamental national importance. This was an expansion over previous White Papers which have tended to limit Australia's principal interests to the Asia-Pacific. While Southeast Asia is still the focal region, the vast and diverse territory of the Indian Ocean and surrounding coastal countries have been added to Australia's areas of growing strategic attention and defence repositioning.

The extent and capacity of the Australian Government to achieve influence in the Indian Ocean represents an important test case for Australia's concept of an 'Indo-Pacific' region. The Indo-Pacific is a highly complex environment comprising one-third of the world's population, high trade intensity, multiple potential flashpoints, global power dynamics and a wide variance in culture and identify – which stretches from the USA, through Asia to India (Kaplan, 2010).

Despite these challenges, attempts to distinguish a single regional zone have remained 'irresistible' (Wesley, 2011). Both the USA and India have endorsed a similar 'Indo-Asia Pacific' concept – strongly revolving around regional naval power and deployments (Medcalf, 2013). Critics however counter that this is an artificial regional construct, whose sheer size and diversity are beyond even America's capacity to engage as a coherent strategic operating environment (Bisley & Phillips, 2013). As such, there are real concerns of overstretch for a middle power like Australia to try to seek influence across a vast, fragmented area which encompasses as much as one-third of the world's stage (Rumley, Doyle, & Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 8).

Yet bipartisan Australian support for the concept of Indo-Pacific system has emerged. The adoption of such a worldview is primarily built around three central issues. The first is the expansion of regional naval power and fears of military competition and confrontation. Driven by the simultaneous development of Chinese and Indian blue water navies, the Indian Ocean is an increasingly important location of geopolitical great power competition – with global ramifications. Australia follows the USA in seeing India as a way to help manage, and possibly counter, the emergence of China. At the very least, it can be argued that adoption of the Indo-Pacific concept is a recognition that China's influence is more than just a north-east Asian affair (Medcalf, 2014, p. 4).

This viewpoint has particular significance given the immense trade and energy routes which traverse the Indian Ocean. The preservation of these are Australia's second major concern. The Indian Ocean is designated to be the world's most important and busy trade and energy transmission belt (Kaplan, 2010). As such, overarching cooperation in areas like maritime domain awareness cannot be taken for granted. Here Australia has a dual role as both a major source of supply as well as demand in Indo-Pacific trade due its rich mineral deposits. The final concern driving Australia's interest in the Indian Ocean is the growth of non-traditional transnational security issues, such as irregular migration, food security, piracy, environmental harm, organised crime and natural disasters in a regional community context. The successful management of all three above challenges will require a more holistic security paradigm, diplomatic creativity and a push for consensus-based regional cooperation. They also all demand future-oriented thinking.

Over the same period, the Australian Government has come to view defence diplomacy as a vital mechanism for managing regional security challenges. While the identification of

'an integral link between the defence of Australia and our increasing defence engagement with regional nations' (DOD, 1993, p. iii) has had a role in Australian defence planning for at least two decades, the elevated standing of current ambitions can be seen through the devotion of an entire chapter in the 2013 White Paper to 'Defence Engagement'. The White Paper states that Australia's strategic planning 'needs to be geared towards building security by seizing the opportunities and managing the risks within the Indo-Pacific. Shaping the development of the Indo-Pacific is critical to our objective of long term regional security and prosperity' (DOD, 2013, p. 23). And while mechanisms for this strategy are not explicitly identified, by reading between the lines, much of the weight can be seen to fall into the area of defence diplomacy. This includes those activities which are seen by scholars and policy-makers as an apparatus of statecraft to promote interoperability and build regional resilience and identity: regular military-to-military meetings, joint bilateral or multilateral military exercises, ship and port visits, the provision of military equipment, the hosting of foreign military on training courses and engaging with local populations while on operational deployments. Ongoing examples include the Australian Defence Cooperation Scholarship programme, the Rim of Pacific Exercise series, and biennial Kakadu warfare exercises that combine the naval and air forces of neighbouring countries.

Such formulations fall in line with the 'new' vision of defence diplomacy as both a conflict-prevention mechanism and as supplying the normative underpinnings for a security community. Where the concept was once used to discuss a continuation of dialogue and engagement with allies and partners, it now likewise involves the military reaching out to the armed forces of former or potential adversaries (Cottey & Foster, 2004, p. 7). This characteristic of defence diplomacy with a focus on former and potential adversaries is tailored towards supporting security sector reform, helping to promote democratic civilian control of armed forces and strengthening regional peacekeeping capabilities. As such it is sometimes described as a 'foreign policy force multiplier' (Floyd, 2010, p. 6).

The 2013 White Paper identifies that

Australia's defence international engagement must work towards helping to build effective mechanisms to manage regional and transnational security issues and risks arising from rivalries and the possibilities of miscalculation ... The goal will be to consolidate habits of cooperation and dialogue as the norm. (DOD, 2013, p. 55)

Nonetheless it does remain vague and inexplicit about how these imperatives might materialise and be maintained. The White Paper hints that

the Government will engage closely with other countries with interests in the region to ensure that Indian Ocean dynamics are supported by the evolution, over time, of a more robust regional security architecture that provides mechanisms for the exchange of perspectives and management of the region's security challenges. (DOD, 2013, p. 65)

### **Australia as a norm entrepreneur in the Indian Ocean?**

This section of the paper applies the four part model of norm entrepreneurship as a way to better examine and implement the Australian Government's support for defence diplomacy and interrelated push for norm development in the Indian Ocean.

**Framing – norm resonance**

The first major task facing would-be norm entrepreneurs is to develop and articulate a language to build consensus around the benefits of a desired change. This involves the construction of a specific ‘frame’ for a particular idea or claim. This frame should set out clearly what is unsuitable or insufficient with established approaches and practices and provide a compelling argument for a fresh approach that might suit varying states purposes. Certainly, increased attention has been given to the development and benefits of articulating a particular norm that resonates with shared understandings of the advantages of practical cooperation within targeted audiences. ‘Insightful reframing of a competitive situation can create whole new patterns of advantage and weakness. The most powerful strategies arise from such game-changing insights’ (Rumelt, 2011, p. 9).

One of the more successful examples of framing by a recent Australian Government was the ‘securitisation’ of irregular migration by the Howard Government in 2001–2002. This involved re-defining a migration issue as a security concern, thereby enabling both the greater devotion of government power and resources, as well as helping to explain the need to accept greater regional cooperation in proposing collective solutions to interdependent people movement issues (Emmers, 2004, p. 65; McDonald, 2005, p. 300).

In short, frames can help to interpret concerns and amplify both problems and solutions. The notion of the Indo-Pacific as a coherent, extended neighbourhood serves as the Australian Government’s frame. Such a shift in language and a concentration of efforts towards the Indo-Pacific regional concept is an attempt, in part, to provide a justification for defence commitments and political interpretations for future security actions. Importantly, this language of the region being a ‘centre of gravity’ for world affairs is one which foreign governments of the area – and India in particular – find appealing. ‘As India’s regional and global profile increases, it will inevitably gravitate towards the centre of this expanded geopolitical and geo-economic space. The concept of an Indo-Pacific theatre fits neatly with this evolving trend’ (Saran, 2011). Undeniably, India will be the critical state to enlist in supporting Australia’s work towards forging an integrated regional identity. Advantageously, many elements of Australia’s current discourse in defence diplomacy also do appear to have resonance with core facets of India’s ‘Look East’ policy of coalition building to secure strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region (see Jha, 2011).

However, this does not discount that New Delhi’s foreign officials and military officers might also keep an apprehensive eye about the level of commitment of the Australian Government to any emerging concept of an extended Indo-Pacific security theatre. Nearly twenty years before the 2013 Defence White Paper, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced a ‘Look West’ strategy – full of rhetorical ambition but which fizzled due to a lack of political energy and clear goals. Recent shifts in economics, critical sea lanes, great power struggles and demographics have renewed a desire by policy-makers to again ‘look west’. But Indian officials and other regional stakeholders can be expected to wait for evidence of Australia’s priorities and consistent behaviour towards a distinctive geography and corresponding intermediary role in seeking integrative security engagements (Goldsworthy, 1997, p. 204).

The other framing device that the Australian Government has used to alert and articulate resonate ideas is that insecurity and tension in the Indian Ocean can be addressed through transforming and expanding the use of defence diplomacy to increase transparency and build habits of confidence while minimising the prospects for accelerated tension and distrust. Nonetheless, any potential for Australia’s case for enhanced defence diplomacy in

the Indo-Pacific to resonate with other actors will remain dependent on the contours of power and position in the region. Norms do not transpire in a vacuum.

In an illustrative case, the rise of defence diplomacy in Southeast Asia provides grounds for optimism for its capture in the Indo-Pacific. The re-energised management of defence diplomacy, and subsequent dovetailing of support for the ongoing benefits for closer military cooperation, has resonated in Southeast Asia with the region witnessing a rapid proliferation of forums and meetings based around distinct notions of defence diplomacy (see Capie & Taylor, 2010). These shifting perceptions have been due to fluctuations to accommodate new realities, including concerns based on non-traditional security issues as well as China's military modernisation. In this sense, changes in mindsets as well as the multilateral institutional landscape have taken place despite increased geo-strategic competition and tensions in the region. 'Indeed, a strong case can be made that this apparent growth in cooperative activity is actually a manifestation of intensifying strategic competition in Asia brought about largely by shifts in the regional balance of power occasioned by China's rise' (Taylor, 2011). Evan A. Laksmana (2012, p. 252) has identified the formula of multilateral defence diplomacy as focusing on "soft institutional balancing" vis-à-vis extraregional powers, while "enmeshing" them to regional norms and rule'.

Accounting for the incorporation of defence diplomacy initiatives in Southeast Asia cannot be isolated within a monocausal rationalisation. However, the establishment of regimes like the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) should be seen as part of the evidence of a mounting 'institutionalisation' of new activities with issues like defence diplomacy becoming more prominent (Ikenberry & Mo, 2013, p. 359). In short, defensive diplomacy can be seen as an increasingly dominant strategic imperative by regional stakeholders. And a range of scholars of Asia's defence diplomacy have placed inclusive social networks, joint threat perceptions (including great-power China US politics) and a broadening security agenda that entails non-traditional security threats as all variables as part of an 'erosion of the norm favouring bilateral defence cooperation and the creation of new defence diplomacy arrangements' (Capie, 2013, p. 19).

Overall, both of these arguments (that the Indo-Pacific is a rational strategic arc and that defence diplomacy can help build a 'long peace') are nascent in Australian thinking. If Australia is serious about these 'building blocs' for mutual expectations – as opposed to seeing them as fashionable rhetorical slogans or feel good but ultimately expedient vehicles to only gain limited political millage – then careful and consistent development of frames, identifiable to the needs and concerns of the Indian Ocean region, will be required. While the 2013 Defence White Paper might be a good start, it is only the first step. Increased attention is also needed to bring a necessary level of detail to its agenda and ambitions, with potential implications for budgetary bottom lines and military allocations and alliances. It is one thing to claim you want to emphasise defence diplomacy and coalition building but it is not clear from the White Paper how the Australian Government actually intends to achieve this ambition. Additionally, defence diplomacy should not be assumed to be a quick-fix or low-cost exercise.

### ***Building organisational platforms***

Organisational platforms are (sometimes literal) concrete foundations for norm entrepreneurship. This involves the dedication of time and energy towards durable security outlets and institutions – from small internal committees to global forums – to facilitate

orderly change and to promote confidence-building developments. However, for some, Australia's stated ambition to support institutional representations of defence diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific will continue to be tested due to historical tensions, 'problems of distance and a lack of common interests ... (Previously) establishing associations that bring together countries of the Indian Ocean region as a whole has proven difficult' (Bateman, Bergin, & Channer, 2013, p. 61). Expectations should therefore be measured, inherently practical and judged against local experience not global standards.

Unlike Southeast Asia, there are only a handful of multilateral institutions which specifically focus on the Indo-Pacific region. The most significant is the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which with India's support, has seen an ad hoc but significant rejuvenation in recent years. Current full membership of the IORA includes India, Indonesia and Australia while other central actors – such as China, Japan and the USA – have the status of observers or 'dialogue partners'. Its membership is incrementally expanding due to countries such as the Maldives and Myanmar that are now eager to join. The other institution of note is the more maritime focused Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which Australia hosted in March 2014. It is worth noting that these institutions are not mutually exclusive. As Anthony Bergin (2014) points out that 'it's a pity that little attention appeared to be given to closer connections between the IONS and IORA in addressing maritime confidence building measures in the region'. Bergin notes that this potential for cooperation had already been underlined at the Trilateral Dialogue on the Indian Ocean (TIDO) in September 2014.

Australia therefore faces a generic choice for norm entrepreneurs with constrained influence capabilities: a willingness to work within and between existing regional structures or an attempt to generate a brand new forum with high-level representation to 'sell' its ideas.

The politically ambitious path for promoting a regional defence diplomacy agenda would be one of institutional creation. The arrival of new institutional settings could create an opening to pursue a revised stream of regional dialogue that is based around the idea of maintaining a vital 'defence community'. The 2013 Defence White Paper hints at initiating such a change, noting that Australia will seek 'the evolution, overtime, of a more robust regional security architecture that provides mechanisms for the exchange of perspectives and management of the region's security challenges' (DOD, 2013, p. 65). This community vision, alongside political lobbying, is one potential pathway to pursue 'linkage strategies' in noteworthy areas (Keohane & Nye, 1997, p. 36). For instance, in 1989 the Australian Government – backed by Japan – proposed and successfully established the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which has provided a significant boost for the cause of trade liberalisation in the Asia-Pacific (Dobell, 2000, p. 25). Likewise the 2002 'Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and related Transnational Crime' (Bali Process) established by Indonesia and Australia has become a valuable and creative avenue for 'facilitating dialogue on policy formulation' in Southeast Asia (Douglas & Schloenhardt, 2012, p. 3).

Yet there are risks in proactively sponsoring calls for new institutions that bind a disparate region as former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd discovered when he advocated an 'Asia-Pacific community' (APC) multilateral forum in 2008. While arguably a laudable goal, the initial proposal was unclear in meaning and scope. Its announcement surprised many nearby governments who had not been consulted or who felt marginalised as dialogue partners (Thayer, 2009). Further, the rationale for a new-fangled institution was questioned given a political-security environment that was seen by some as characterised

by a proliferation of multilateral forums. As a result, the idea was soon abandoned to Australia's embarrassment (Carr & Roberts, 2010, p. 249). In this particular circumstance, Rudd's ideas failed to find consensus, relevance and build from the bottom up. Australia's middle-power voice flopped in imposing a new institutional organisation and convincing applicable partners for the impetus for organisational change and coalition building with resultant shifts in the status quo.

It can also be argued that a crucial reason the APc idea struggled (or alternatively why APEC and Bali Process succeeded) was the absence of a weighty regional actor to help act as a powerful sponsor in backing or adopting Australia's regional ideas. In the Indo-Pacific context, the most obvious and important agent for such a process would be India. However, whether New Delhi elite would validate a preference for a new regional security forum based around defence diplomacy remains hard to gauge. India already participates in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus and the SLD, with the latter now widely viewed as the premier forum for defence engagement in Asia (Ikenberry & Mo, 2013, p. 360). And while the SLD excludes Gulf and African states which have interests in the Indian Ocean, most of the major actors such as Indonesia, Australia, Pakistan, Myanmar, the USA and China are in attendance.

Regardless, the normative and institutional trends in the region will be dependent in large part upon the adoption of such ideas and issues by India. India's role will remain at the heart of Indo-Pacific security constructions. As such, Australian policy-makers need to remain aware of the critical importance of shaping persuasive messages and actions that resonate with India's own interpretations of regional problems and search for appropriate solutions. Arguably, some of his ground work has already been set in the work of the TDIO. A November 2014 'Framework for Security Cooperation' agreement between Australia and India also commits the two countries to cooperation in IORA and the IONS on regional security issues (Modi, 2014).

Similarly, another vital state in harnessing the development of defence diplomacy trends, and in the support and projection of any Australian-based initiatives, will be Indonesia. Thanks to its growing size and leadership capacity, Jakarta could act as a 'potential leader' in the Indian Ocean region (Bateman et al., 2013, p. 65) especially on issues of overlapping concern for all maritime neighbours like Sea Lines of Communication, freedom of navigation and multilateral maritime search and rescue – a concern highlighted by the MH370 tragedy. In turn, a gradual strengthening of the India–Indonesia relationship could expand the rationalisation for future middle-power coalitions to enhance repeated military-to-military engagement (Medcalf & Mohan, 2014). In this sense, the first India–Indonesia Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting in June 2007 reflected a keenness to advance mutually agreed defence diplomacy activities. Such intended internalisation was evident, in March 2012, when Indian and Indonesian armies conducted their first-ever joint training exercise codenamed 'Garuda Shakti' in Mizoram, though the relationship remains underdeveloped (Supriyanto, 2013).

Alternatively, rather than a preoccupation with grand institutional plans, a more immediate and practical goal could be for Australian policy-makers to push for merits of an organisational consensus around an existing architecture like IORA – a goal coincides with India's preference for the IORA to be a primary vehicle for shaping standards of behaviour around the Oceanic rim (Taylor, 2014, p. 2). Australia has been the 2014 chair of the IORA – taking over from India – with Indonesia the next chair. Such interactions will provide renewed opportunities for officials to push for an overhaul of IORA's focus

towards not just protecting economic interests but a more 'harmonious sea' through better maritime security cooperation.

Although the IORA charter makes it clear that the primary focus of its agenda is economic cooperation (and contributions to domestic economic growth), this stance does appear to be softening with its current ambit being highly sympathetic to the enhancement of defence cooperation. At the same time, the IORA has the potential to initiate diverse security dialogues and more closely align itself with Australia's rolling preference for an open, inclusive management of a cohesive regional order directed towards common goods – with a hope that such partnerships agreements are something that other key actors like China will display an ongoing attraction towards. These reaffirming dynamics that military infrastructure can be leveraged for diplomatic gains is being comprehended on many levels. It is worth noting that the first-ever MoU signed by Indian and Chinese defence ministers in 2006 was meant to promote step-by-step enhancement of military exchanges.

IORA does appear to be shaping as a suitable multilateral vehicle in the Indian Ocean. Its *raison d'être* could include a push to streamline efforts towards defence diplomacy as one of its priority areas. But Australia needs to ensure that any re-energised IORA does not become an inward looking and static vehicle that hinders rather than harnesses the development of an Indian Ocean identity. Australia should position itself to play a key role in facilitating regional exchanges – that could involve informal talks with key partners including India and Indonesia to allot them as net security providers – and addressing whether such an institutional mechanisms offer a sufficiently robust and representative forum for the Indo-Pacific. Further, given the small size of IORA's secretariat in Mauritius, Australia should consider offering further resources, not only funding but seconding capable staff to offer immediate extra capacity.

### *A socialisation strategy*

Closer to home, Australia needs to reflect on the impact and implications of its domestic allocation of resources in the context of this task. There are long-standing questions about the coherence and effectiveness of Australia's Defence Cooperation Programme (DCP) which nominally guides Australia's defence diplomacy activities. This is not only a question of financial resources but also of intellectual focus and political commitment. In addition, deciding how many resources to dedicate to the task, and whether existing structures are sufficient or a reorganisation is required, cannot be answered in isolation but must be closely drawn from a consideration of the third role of norm entrepreneurs, the establishment of an overarching strategy.

A serious question facing the Australian Government's stated desire to promote defence diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific is whether it has a clear strategy to match means with ends to achieve any vision (Frühling, 2013, p. 48). It should be noted this is true of the government's overall approach to defence diplomacy, not just in the Indian Ocean. While there is a classified Defence International Engagement Plan which provides country specific guidance on defence diplomacy, there is no public explanation of how Australia is going to achieve its goal of 'consolidat[ing] habits of cooperation and dialogue as the norm' (DOD, 2013, p. 55). These are not original concerns. Worries about the overall direction and effectiveness of Australia's DCPs have been an enduring and unresolved theme of over two decades of public and private reports on the issue (e.g., Shephard, 1993).

This is where the framework of norm entrepreneurship can offer some practical insights. It highlights the need for the construction or expansion of organisational platforms to support a strategy that seeks to gain influence in the context of finite resources and constrained capabilities. It also helps to clarify the bigger questions faced in the ranking of national interests and deciding on the most appropriate mechanisms to create relevant 'norm cascades'. For example, does the Australian Government prefer formal multilateral or bilateral defence diplomacy within the Indo-Pacific? To what extent is it prepared to allocate political capital and military resources to consolidate multilateral defence diplomacy frameworks? How does the rest of the government, including DFAT, support Defence's long-term normative goals? Which individual security relationships are more important and which states should be prioritised to achieve these goals? How are tensions regarding maritime regionalism to be managed, implemented and reviewed within Defence? Where should a concentration of planning and burden sharing take place – on military-to-military exercises, port visits, maritime crisis management tools, officer education programmes, the sale and co-production of defence equipment or something else?

The Australian Government can work towards spreading defence diplomacy in a wide variety of ways, but it will face a host of practical and resourcing limits. Critically, unless it is clearly identified what the intended 'standard of appropriate behaviour' sought is, and the practices and policies by which the government will seek to spread defence diplomacy in the Indian Ocean context, any effort to encourage change has little hope of producing tangible and sustained policy success. The promise to seek to establish 'habits of cooperation and dialogue' – and hoping for an immediate and automatic internalisation of particular norms with regional partners – is simply far too one dimensional to be viable. The development of a co-optive strategy and identifying specific intended behaviours and capacity-building foundations will help guide not only the frame used but the devotion and concentration of resources to assist with the strategy that links the two. Taking these steps should then be linked to a political willingness to endure with a recommended Indo-Pacific rebalancing and engagement orientation that might face opposition and regional (or domestic) political wrangling.

### *Sustaining criticism*

It is an expectation that norm entrepreneurship is controversial. Yet the Australian Government's advocacy of values like trust, cooperation and dialogue for the Indian Ocean is, on most readings, unlikely to cause any great concern. Furthermore, forming networks to further their cause towards the diplomatic use of militaries in the Indian Ocean remains a functional issue that might be somewhat easier to adopt in a more fluid Indo-Pacific context. Agenda setting can be viewed as more challenging in well-entrenched, deeply rooted regions with a strong sense of identity. This is to suggest that the more there are established norms and pre-existing institutional groupings in support of them, such as are found in NATO or ASEAN, the potentially more difficult and provocative the task of norm creation and maintenance and therefore associated cultural and institutional change can be.

The implication of this absence of a broader united regional identity for the Indian Ocean is that there are less institutional and ideational templates to restrict additional or revised patterns of behaviour. This is not to say actors have not previously advocated (or implemented) common standards of conduct in the region before, such as those designed

to facilitate the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes. After all, the Indian Ocean contains some of the world's busiest trading lanes and has done so for centuries (Kaplan, 2010, p. 7). But it is only much more recently that there have been efforts to build a cohesive approach to security constructions and these are still relatively rudimentary (Bateman et al., 2013, p. 61). At a more concrete level, with the growing interest in the Indian Ocean region and with a host of large actors seeking to expand their influence (especially India, China, the USA and now Australia), the window for establishing appropriate 'rules of the game' and supportive bureaucratic and departmental structures is currently open, but it is not clear for how long.

The downside to underdeveloped cooperative ideas and mechanisms is that regional norms and organisational structures are likely to also be far more disjointed and irrelevant, at least initially, with regional identity less able to act as a constitutive force on regional countries. Peer pressure will be easier to avoid if countries do not see themselves as an intuitive, in-built part of the Indo-Pacific construct as they might in other more established regional architecture. It is therefore likely the 'who' (membership) rather than the 'what' (defence diplomacy) will be the main source of controversy faced. So policy-makers will need to contemplate whether Australia goes for a wide approach involving as many states as geographically possible so as to achieve this inclusion? Or does it hope to contain membership to those seen as most vital for regional security – and in particular issues of concern to Australia and its traditional alliance partners like the USA? To what extent should IORA or TDIO be an inclusive or exclusive grouping? And as reinforced by Rumley et al. (2012, p. 16), 'inclusion in or regional constructions or organisations can be used as a mechanism for creating or reconstituting some form of regional identity'. As such, Australia might have to address 'sensitive issues', like a more versatile region-wide membership for instance within IORA that includes Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (despite inescapable Indian and Iranian objections) – even if only as dialogue partners – as well as mediating the role of China in any new Indo-Pacific construct and diplomatic repositioning.

For the moment however, despite continuing divergences, proposing new rules and integrative regulations is not likely to have unintended negative consequences in the Indian Ocean region as it might have in other areas of the world. And Australia as a norm entrepreneur can act as a catalyst to articulate and deepen specific regional norms and networking, particularly through supporting inclusive regionalism and defence diplomacy ventures. In this sense, although not without risks, IORA does appear an underexploited regional architecture. Of course, the enormous potential of multilateral institutionalised defence diplomacy practices does not preclude other sub-groupings and bilateral arrangements nor eliminate contested regionalism and a competition for influence. India and China have both proven willing to use regional forums membership as a way to reward or punish other states behaviour (Fernando, 2012). Australia will need to carefully navigate such waters, with a focus on sounding out the wishes of all countries on likely dimensions of regionalism – and outlining its ideas in private first – in order to avoid another APc-style embarrassment.

That said, provocation can occasionally be a useful track for norm entrepreneurs. As David Capie (2013, pp. 16–18) has demonstrated, Southeast Asia's move from bilateral to multilateral defence diplomacy forums can be partially explained through ASEAN's desire to pre-empt the initiatives of 'outsiders' who were propagating new security assessments and approaches. Similarly the debate over the APc did increase the pace of reform for existing governance institutions in the region. The end result – inviting the

USA to join the East Asia Summit – was firmly in line with Australia’s desired outcome, even if it occurred indirectly and at the temporary expense of Canberra’s regional standing. But there are also costs to provocation, especially as activity in the Indian Ocean Australia risks offending three great powers – India, China and the USA – as compared to the small and mid-sized states of Southeast Asia. Still, norm entrepreneurs need to be open to the use of provocation as part of their tool box in attempts to create and maintain resonant international norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897).

## **Conclusion**

Although there is no uniform regional embrace of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ concept, there is currently a strong bipartisan undercurrent in Australia for the development of a security construction that encompasses both the Pacific and Indian Ocean to be integrated into decision-making. To that end, this article has explored Australia’s ambitions and capacity to promote the Indo-Pacific as well as defence diplomacy as tools of statecraft.

Australia, working closely with actors like India and Indonesia, is well-placed to support norm development via defence diplomacy and form the core of middle-power coalition building around an Indo-Pacific construct. However, giving norms material expression will demand a norm entrepreneurship that is prepared, in part, to frame and to support or establish applicable organisational platforms as an apparatus to institutionalise identities and standards of behaviour. In search of a ‘glue’ to hold the Indo-Pacific together, other steps for change will need to provide identifiable frames that convince others of the benefits for change, acknowledge a track record of past institutional underperformance in the region and be prepared for potential blowback in confronting other ‘logics of appropriateness’ related to emerging beliefs, standards and practices.

Australia has already put significant effort into the Indian Ocean region. In a variety of ways, it has been operating as an intellectual leader. This paper argues that the adoption of a norm entrepreneurship model will allow for a more structured reassessment and re-evaluation of the existing security architecture in the Indian Ocean region. Australia has the potential to play a critical intermediary role and be an effective ‘catalyst’ in igniting new forms of cooperation and codifying approaches to manage future risks. At the same time, valuing and investing such a framework can help the Australian Government develop a more cohesive, long term and utilitarian approach to guide decision-making that will involve policy options and political openings; endeavours that might allow any anticipated band wagoning to take place. The pursuit of such policy interests should also be expected to include the search for areas for closer military to military engagements based on feasibility and resource commitments.

Given the scale of pressing challenges, and to make the concept of an Indo-Pacific community a reality in national security orientations, Australia will need to go beyond platitudes about ideal types of regional cooperation and consider how it might best act as an agent of change as a norm entrepreneur to address dynamic security problems. In addition, Australia is still a comparatively small country that needs to be attuned to the realities of power and its relative position and profile. As a starting point, strengthening relevant and representative multilateral institutions will be essential. India will also be indispensable to any processes directed towards shared regional responsibility and security construction. The nature and substance of Australia–India relationship, as well as the particular membership, ambit and structure of regional organisational mechanisms, will continue to play a critical role in upholding the salience of defence diplomacy and the

subsequent construction of conditions for a more forward looking, shared and peaceful Indo-Pacific regional context.

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