

Growing German-Japanese Engagement in Indo-Pacific

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Abstract

China's perilous rise has led to its securitization by its neighboring states, particularly given its precarious maritime claims in the strategic waters of the Indo-Pacific. Extra-regional states, too, fear the threatened rules-based international order in the region, as more than half of the world's maritime trade is conducted through these waters. Such a development in the region has allowed Germany and Japan to strengthen their strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The securitization of China, coupled with Germany and Japan's common interests in safeguarding rules-based international order and deterring unilateral changes to the status quo, contributed to the emergence of this engagement. Moreover, the growing engagement provides Southeast Asian states a hedging option as China's assertion of its territorial claims increases. This paper uses securitization theory to analyze the emerging German-Japanese cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Germany's policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy have been analyzed to show the emergence of German-Japanese cooperation.

Keywords: Germany, Japan, Indo-Pacific, Securitization, engagement

Introduction

China's rise to a global economic superpower and its increased military capability pose a significant threat to world stability (Bergsten et al., 2008). Its perilous rise in the twenty-first century presents several opportunities and challenges to the Indo-Pacific regional order. Though the opportunities remain abundant in the economic sphere, the challenges accompanying China's rise can potentially undermine the region's stability. China's increasingly assertive maritime policies in the Indo-Pacific region have been of particular concern. These policies clash with the established normative order as well as the interests of

several pivotal states in the Indo-Pacific region. The South China Sea (SCS) has become the bone of contention where these divergent interests have clashed in the last decade.

Three reasons have broadly constituted this development of China in the region: first, the geo-strategic importance of the South China Sea as a significant sea lane through which half of the world's maritime shipping passes; second, the potential reserves of oil and gas as a tremendous economic opportunity, which China wants to exploit ignoring the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); and third, the islands such as the Spratly, Paracel, and Scarborough in the South China Sea on which China claims its sovereignty. Also, China has militarised these islands over the past twenty years. Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines contest China's territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea. Hence, the increasingly assertive Chinese politics have led to the deterioration of regional order and stability, which resulted in the securitization of China by its neighboring states (Chand & Garcia, 2017).

The Indo-Pacific region consists of 65 percent of the world's population. It also accounts for 63 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP). Over 60 percent of the world's maritime trade passes through the region. Therefore, several nations' economic interests and future growth in the region and beyond are associated with the freedom of navigation and free trade flow through the Indo-Pacific region's vital Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs). As an extra-regional state, Germany is economically interested in the Indo-Pacific region. Around 20 percent of its total trade is with the countries in the region. Most of this trade is conducted through maritime routes. Although Germany has no territorial claims in the South China Sea, it became involved in the region after signing a bilateral agreement on information security in Tokyo in 2021 (Narayan et al. 2017).

Germany is not immune from the impacts caused by the shift of geopolitical power structure in the Indo-Pacific region. The economies of the European nations and the countries of the Indo-Pacific region are connected through global supply chains. Major trading routes of the world pass through the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. The disputes and conflicts in the region adversely affect the order, security, and stability of the region, and hence, it has repercussions for Germany too. That is why the German government is looking to expand cooperation with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region for its economic growth and prosperity (Narayan et al. 2017).

Indo-Pacific

After the Cold War, Asia-Pacific was a dominant geographical construct. It consisted of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and significant Pacific Rim powers. The concept of Asia-Pacific was based on the shared understanding of what constituted the region. In recent years, a new regional construct, 'Indo-Pacific,' has started taking shape (Beeson & Wilson, 2018). The Indo-Pacific is a geographical and geostrategic construct that has gained popularity over the last decade in the foreign and security discourses of the Indian Ocean and Pacific Rim countries such as India, Australia, Japan, the United States, and some Southeast Asian states. For the first time, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe used the term 'Indo-Pacific' to describe 'the coupling of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans in a dynamic way as seas of freedom and prosperity' (Medcalf, 2013). He also referred to the emergence of a 'broader Asia' in his speech at the Indian Parliament in 2007, indicating the regional construction shift. The Shift was from an Asia-Pacific identity to Indo-Pacific construction. The regional contours in Asia are not limited to its geographical boundaries but are moving based on strategic importance. Although there is no exact definition of what constitutes an Indo-Pacific region, several countries have adopted the terminology based on the changing nature of geopolitics in Asia, such as maritime disputes between China and other regional governments, the emergence of India and Japan as security providers, and increasing US-China rivalry (Wilson, 2018).

The European Union (EU) considers itself a significant stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific because of trade with the countries in the region. China is the second largest trading partner of the EU after the US. Consequently, the EU developed a common approach to the region under 'EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,' which focuses on deepening cooperation with like-minded partners to balance China's influence. However, it is interesting that the strategy is not anti-China. After Brexit, the EU is keen on searching for new markets, defending its economic interests, and deepening its economic engagement with the Indo-Pacific nations. French President Emmanuel Macron spoke about a French plan for the Indo-Pacific in 2018. The following year, the French Ministry of Defence published the strategy paper 'France and Security in the Indo-Pacific.' After France, Germany became the second European Nation to announce its Indo-Pacific guidelines on 1 September 2020 during its EU Presidency (Awasthi et al. 2019).

Securitization Theory

The main goal of this paper is to examine how the securitization of China pushes Germany and Japan to increase their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Securitization theory belongs to the broader premises of Critical Security Studies. It derives its legitimacy from the Constructivist School in international relations. The theory deals with security as an outcome of a specific social process rather than an objective condition. Speech acts initiate the securitization process and bring politicized or non-politicized issues into the security realm (Williams, 2003). In other words, security is not an objective fact but a socially constructed phenomenon. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies originally developed the theory of securitization, which included Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. It involves mainly three components: first, a referent object that is perceived to be existentially threatened has a legitimate claim to survival; second, a securitizing agent initiates speech acts by proclaiming the object to be threatened; and third, functional actors shape the dynamics of the security sector (Buzan et al., 1998). However, the securitizing move of the actor alone does not cause the issues to be securitized. It is decided by the audience to whom the actor performs the speech acts (Buzan et al., 1998). Balzacq emphasizes the importance of the audience rather than the securitizing agent in the securitization process because the success or failure of securitization depends primarily on the securitizing actor's ability to connect with the audience's interests and sentiments (Balzacq, 2005). Further, Salter argues the importance of the audience's cultural background and social context and advises the securitizing actor to pursue a specific audience (Salter, 2008). Hence, securitization is neither an objective conception of a threat nor a subjective perception of a threat but rather an intersubjective process (Coskun, 2011).

On the other hand, de-securitization happens when the securitized issues slip off the security agenda (Wæver, 1995). In other words, de-securitization is when a threat is no longer perceived as a threat or not an existential threat. In such cases, no extraordinary measures are taken to manage the issues. Everyday politics deals with them (Salter, 2008).

Securitization of China

The economic rise of China in the 21st century brings several opportunities and challenges to the nations in the region. Although China has recently become the major trade and investment partner for several countries of the Indo-Pacific, it also makes the countries highly vulnerable to economic compulsion. China's military modernization and assertive maritime claims also make them highly susceptible to their national security. The East and South China Seas are highly troubled by significant territorial and maritime disputes. China,

Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam each claim sovereignty over the parts of the South China Sea. Also, China, Japan, and South Korea have had conflicts in the East China Sea. The Sino-US rivalry has recently added another chapter to the region (Chand & Garcia, 2021). Japan fears China's precarious maritime claims that threaten freedom of navigation and hurt its trade with other Southeast Asian countries (Narayan et al. 2020).

Besides the South and East China Sea, China keeps increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean through its notorious debt diplomacy. It has been developing ports in major littoral countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project opens the door to the major world markets. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2015) connecting Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Pakistan gives access to the Arabian Sea, while the China-Myanmar Corridor gives access to the Bay of Bengal. These corridor projects are aimed at easing China's Malacca dilemma. More importantly, they link the land and maritime dimensions of the BRI. China's built ports in the Indian Ocean are of dual-use (Babu et al. 2020).

Germany and China have long been observing their diplomatic relations. Berlin classified its relationship with Beijing as a strategic partnership for global responsibility in 2004. Later, in 2014, both upgraded their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Germany and China have been holding intergovernmental consultations at the level of cabinet ministers and heads of government since 2011. China is Germany's most important trading partner in Asia. It was the largest importer of German goods in 2017 (Taussig, 2019). China is also the world's largest market for German automobiles. However, their relationship has recently become complicated as China's economic and military power has grown rapidly. Germany is increasingly concerned about China's military advancement and highly ambitious infrastructural development.

Consequently, Germany embarks on shifting its policy regarding Chinese investment. It has taken major steps to restrict the acquisition of German companies, particularly its strategic industries, by Chinese state-owned companies. Germany's 2018 government coalition agreement underlines the rising concerns regarding China. The document warns the German government not only to view opportunities but also to examine the threat emerging from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Although Germany still prioritizes its economic relationship with China, it is now hedging in the Indo-Pacific by forging deeper economic and security ties with Indo-Pacific nations like India and Japan.

Such developments have contributed to the successful securitization of China, not only by the regional states but also by the extra-territorial states like Germany. Consequently, China

and its assertive maritime policies have become the referent objects of securitization. The securitizing agents are China's neighbors and extra-territorial states like Germany. The audiences, in this case, include both domestic and international. Finally, successful securitization depends upon the coherence between securitizing agents, their speech acts, and the audiences' views on how the securitizing moves were embraced. Identifying and assessing the securitizing speech acts made by China's neighbors and extra-regional states, who are securitized, and by whom and why can be known. Ultimately, the audience poll data can inform whether securitization succeeds or fails.

China's securitization can be observed by the speech acts made by its neighbors and extra-regional states. Although the list of speeches targeted at China is far from exhaustive, speeches from heads of state governments and other cabinet members responsible for initiating the securitizing processes have been mentioned.

Germany's Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific

The Federal Government of Germany adopted its Indo-Pacific policy guidelines '*Germany-Europe-Asia: shaping the 21st century together*' on 1st September 2020. With its policy guidelines, Germany wants to work with the Indo-Pacific countries to promote rules-based order in the region. For the first time, the Federal Government of Germany officially adopted the terminology 'Indo-Pacific,' which indicates a strategic shift in German Foreign Policy caused by the region's increasing geopolitical importance. Germany's policy document on the Indo-Pacific was welcomed by its Asian partners, such as India, Japan, and Australia.

Germany's Indo-Pacific guidelines are developed from the understanding that the region's increasing instability affects Germany's prosperity and security. Broadly, three factors resulted in German and European renewed engagement towards the Indo-Pacific. First, the Indo-Pacific is an engine of global growth; the Indo-Pacific countries accounted for almost 70 percent of the global economic growth in 2019. Also, the combined economy of Asia was larger than the rest of the world's economy. Second, the imbalance of power in the Indo-Pacific; China's global political rise has led to the imbalance of power in the region. Its territorial and maritime expansion challenges the rules-based order and stability in the region, as China has territorial disputes with many of the Indo-Pacific countries in the South China Sea. Germany also faces several challenges emerging from China's political system and its power projection in the Indo-Pacific. The dependence of the European Union (EU) on China, an attempt to unilaterally change the multilateral liberal order, and a threat to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific are some of the challenges that Germany addresses in its policy guidelines. Third, Sino-

U.S. rivalry: China's economic rise and military modernization have caused great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. It started with the trade war between China and the US during the Trump administration. China's maritime claims in East China and South China seas undermine the rules-based order and pose a threat to the sovereignty of many countries in the Indo-Pacific. China threatens not only the sovereignty of Indo-Pacific countries but also attempts to influence the politics of extra-regional states through its 'wolf warrior diplomacy.'

Germany agrees with Australia, the US, and France that the Western policy toward engaging China has completely failed. Also, every German interest mentioned in the Indo-Pacific policy guidelines indicates to China, nonetheless obliquely and with positive language. Germany has repeatedly expressed that its Indo-Pacific guidelines are not against China and is careful enough to manage its resistance towards Chinese hegemony in the region. Also, the title of the Indo-Pacific document is guidelines, not strategy, which indicates that Germany does not want to endorse a confrontational attitude towards China (Grare, 2020). Berlin has refused to take any side in the Sino-US rivalry. Heiko Maas says China is not only Germany's partner but also a competitor. Germany also believes China to be a systemic rival, particularly in its political system. The communist rule in China opposes the Western-promoted political system based on democratic principles and values worldwide.

Nevertheless, some states still practice communist rule, and China wants to lead it. Hence, Germany has reviewed its Foreign policy towards China. Germany and the EU started looking at strengthening cooperation with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region, such as India, Japan, and Australia, to diversify their dependence on China. On 19 April 2021, the European Council agreed to draft an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Later, in September 2021, it came up with a Joint Communication that provided a rationale for the EU strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The document defines the Indo-Pacific as a vast region extending from the east coast of Africa to the western coast of the US, including the Pacific Island States. The EU members and the Indo-Pacific nations account for more than 70 percent of the world's trade in goods and services. They also account for more than 60 percent of foreign direct investment inflows. The total trade exchanges between Europe and the Indo-Pacific are higher than other regions worldwide. The Indo-Pacific region is the second largest market for EU exports, and four of the EU's ten biggest trading partners come from the region. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific emphasizes the need for cooperation in seven priority areas: sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance, digital governance, and partnership; digital connectivity; security and defense; and human security. China is the second largest trading partner of the EU. The trade between the EU and China has

increased since China became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. The EU has become China's biggest trading partner (Singh, 2020).

However, China's trade and investment policy and recent assertive maritime claims in the South China Sea have caused a change in European perceptions of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The EU's Joint Communication 'EU-China- A Strategic Outlook' 2019 defines China as a cooperative partner, a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, or a systemic rival. Also, China's disrespect for human rights, for example, the repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang, contributes to the changing strategy of the EU in the Indo-Pacific (Maizland, 2021). Recently, the Chinese Communist Party's misinformation during the outbreak of COVID-19 antagonized European countries. The EU's Joint Communication highlights the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region, which has led to territorial and maritime conflicts. It states that the increasing military build-up and its projection in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait directly affect the European economy and security. It also believes that authoritarian regimes threaten democratic principles and human rights. The disruption in the supply chain management during the Covid crisis forced the EU to review its policy towards China.

Hence, the European Union focuses on strengthening cooperation with other countries in the region who believe in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Multilateral cooperation with ASEAN is the core of the EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, as ASEAN is mentioned 31 times in the EU's joint communication (Lin, 2021). Most of the principles drafted in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, like connectivity, economic and maritime cooperation, and sustainable development goals, are reflected in Germany's Indo-Pacific guidelines and the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. During Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in December 2020, the EU and the ASEAN elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership. Together, they want to promote rules-based international order in the region to ensure a stable and prosperous trading environment.

Being the only EU member with its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, France has been strengthening its maritime security ties with the countries in the region. France was the first EU member to develop the Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018. When Germany developed its Indo-Pacific guidelines in September 2020, it read Germany-Europe-Asia: shaping the 21st century together. The Federal Government of Germany aimed to promote a European Indo-Pacific strategy with its policy guidelines and offered an opportunity for deeper cooperation at the European Union level. Two major goals of Germany's Indo-Pacific guidelines also reflect the EU's regional commitments. First, the structures of international cooperation, particularly with

ASEAN, must be strengthened. Germany wants to work with the Indo-Pacific countries in traditional and non-traditional security fields, such as climate change, green energy, sea piracy, human trafficking, human rights, cyber security, rule of law, etc. Second, the EU's dependence on China must be diversified. The German government wants to diversify the EU's dependence on China by enacting EU free trade agreements with many Indo-Pacific nations.

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is a diplomatic strategy launched by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Kenya in August 2016. The FOIP aims to make the Indo-Pacific region a free and fair international community, free from force and intimidation, as some countries in the region have not yet developed their laws and could not face foreign countries correspondingly, even though they account for half of the world economy. Japan has contributed to the infrastructure and human resource development. Japan seeks to become a leading force for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region while also supporting Japan's growth into the future.

Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) consists of three main pillars: first, strengthening the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade; second, pursuing economic prosperity through economic and investment agreements and connectivity; third, ensuring peace and stability through building maritime law enforcement capacity, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief package (Writer, 2023).

There are many similarities between Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) is a maritime initiative of the Government of India. It is based on India's 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)' initiative, announced by Indian Prime Minister Modi in 2015. It encourages the regional states to cooperate towards a stable and prosperous maritime domain. SAGAR also focuses on making the maritime domain secure and sustainable for the states in the region. India has embraced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept, initiating maritime projects like SAGAR and IPOI (Mishra, 2021).

India's IPOI has seven pillars, namely, Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology, and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport, to make the region stable and prosperous (Mohan, 2017). Broadly, both Japan's FOIP and India's IPOI cover the same fields. Both aim at the region's economic growth with a rule-based international order governing the region. Japan has also assured investment

for infrastructure development. The centrality of the ASEAN community is common in both initiatives (Saha & Mishra, 2020).

The Growing German-Japanese Engagement in Indo-Pacific

The German-Japanese engagement represents a convergence of interests primarily galvanized by the common securitization of China and its precarious maritime assertive actions in the Indo-Pacific region. The increment of this engagement is an important development for the Indo-Pacific region because Japan, a great power, and Germany, a great extra-regional European power with great power potential, have become centerpieces for each other's vision of regional security and stability.

In September 2020, the Federal Government of Germany adopted its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific. This set the essential guidelines for German foreign policy for a region of increasing geopolitical significance. One central component is the expansion of cooperation with key partners that share common interests and values with Germany. The security policy sector plays a special role in this context. One section of the policy guidelines is devoted to strengthening peace, security, and stability with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific. The prime motive behind this engagement is to secure a significant presence in the discourse of the Indo-Pacific. Compared to the earlier security strategies centered around the economic sphere, Germany has now taken a broader and more pragmatic outlook. This shift has been evident through Berlin's political, defense, and economic engagements in the region, coinciding with the release of the Policy Guidelines in September 2020.

Following the Indo-Pacific policy guidelines, Japan and Germany strengthened their cooperation in a spirit of trust on 22 March 2021. The German-Japanese Agreement on the Security of Information was signed in Tokyo. The agreement allows confidential information to be exchanged between authorities and companies in the two partner countries. This makes it possible to step up cooperation on security policy and military technology. Further, Germany and Japan want to cooperate more closely in cyber security, space, and electromagnetism. Signing the information security agreement between Germany and Japan is a further step towards implementing the strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. After a long history of diplomatic relations between Japan and Germany, Japan has become a key partner for Germany in the Indo-Pacific (Orth, 2022). The basis for cooperation is provided by democratic structures and the two countries' shared commitment to multilateralism, freedom of navigation, and a rules-based international order. Both believe that Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Partnership

(FOIP)' and Germany's Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific align with each other and have affirmed huge scope for future engagement.

The recent high-level interactions between Berlin and the regional powers during the first week of November 2022 witnessed an increase in German interest in the Indo-Pacific region. On the first of November 2022, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier met Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio in Tokyo for a 2+2 meeting between foreign and defense ministers of Tokyo and Berlin. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the two-day Foreign Ministers gathering of G-7 countries in Germany. Earlier, the newly elected German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Japan, marking his first official visit to the region (Kaur, 2022).

One of the major components of Germany's security outlook towards the region is to enhance its regional presence through port visits and defense drills in Southeast Asia. Germany's Brandenburg-class frigate Bayern was deployed in the Indo-Pacific for seven months, from August 2021 to February 2022. On 2 August 2021, the frigate Bayern left the northwest German port of Wilhelmshaven for Asia. The frigate Bayern set sail to monitor the UN Sanctions against North Korea. During its seven-month Indo-Pacific deployment, the frigate docked at partner countries' ports and participated in multilateral activities. It covered the vast water from the Horn of Africa to the East China Sea. The frigate docked at many Indo-Pacific nations and Islands: Diego Garcia, Australia, Palau, Guam, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and India. It also took part in several international missions. After a seven-month successful voyage in February 2022, the frigate Bayern returned to the naval base in Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Berlin viewed this mission as 'one of diplomacy and security policy' and as the first German warship to be deployed in this region in almost two decades. The Frigate's visit included participating in maritime exercises with the regional partners and underlined Berlin's interests in upholding a rules-based international order (Herzinger, 2022).

However, considering the current geopolitical realities, Germany is trying to secure its economic and long-term security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. This is reflected in Germany's recent high level of communication with Japan and China side-by-side. Japan has been Germany's preferred partner in the Indo-Pacific region, as is evident from the commonalities in their vision of regional cooperation over the years. Both share fundamental values, face similar challenges, and have the same interests in many areas. As Former Foreign Minister Maas stated, We want to prevent both hegemony and the formation of blocs; instead, we advocate a rules-based, transparent, and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific region. Cooperation with Japan is important in this regard. Since Germany's Policy Guidelines

released in 2020, high-level visits and defense cooperation through joint military exercises have increased between Berlin and Tokyo. The major thrust behind these frequent interactions has been the growing divergence between Germany and China over Beijing's assertive maritime behavior in the region. On 1 November 2022, Japanese PM Kishida met German President Steinmeier. Both sides acknowledged the significance of Asia for Europe's security. Both leaders also expressed their common concerns about using force to unilaterally change the status quo in the East and South China Seas.

The Federal Republic has continued its engagements with China as Germany's largest trade partner in goods— not only in the Indo-Pacific region but globally. Without mentioning Beijing in its Progress Report, Berlin acknowledges the legal position on the situation in the South China Sea to uphold the law of the sea. While the documents- the 2020 Indo-Pacific Guidelines and the 2022 Progress Report, project China as a challenger to the international rules-based order, Germany still lacks a consistent strategy to address this challenge. The prospects of the EU and Germany in the Indo-Pacific would depend on how categorically they address China in their respective Strategies (Grare, 2020).

Conclusion

During the past few years, the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan initiated their securitizing move after China's military power projection in the South China Sea. Their securitizing speeches and practices took concrete shape in their policy documents. However, the Indo-Pacific discourse dominated the Asia-Pacific discourse in the last decade of the 21st century. Germany endorsed the Indo-Pacific discourse in 2020 with its Indo-Pacific guidelines. In September 2020, Germany officially adopted the new discourse and used it several times in its policy guidelines. The beginning of the securitization process already assumes an inextricable link between order and security. Germany's Indo-Pacific guidelines and Germany's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) constitute the first texts of the securitization discourse.

In contrast, the speeches of Germany's and Japan's governing political elites form the securitization move. These delivered speeches and policy documents rhetorically use the phrase 'rules-based international order' in the Indo-Pacific, threatened by China's ambitious maritime policy. China's creation of artificial Islands in the South China Sea and its militarisation threaten the freedom of navigation and the marine environment. The discourse of Indo-Pacific and rhetoric of rules-based order in the region were the dominant themes in Angela Merkel's government. And it continues to be the primary area of concern for the

coalition government in Germany after Olaf Scholz became Chancellor in December 2021. During his visit to Japan, the German chancellor Olaf Scholz emphasized intensifying their engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Both governments' rhetoric of rules-based international order reflects an attempt at securitization in the Indo-Pacific region since all major elements of the securitization process can easily be found in the analyzed speeches and policy documents. China's global rise and its recent military power projection threaten the freedom of navigation. China's assertive maritime policy also threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of many of the countries in the Indo-Pacific. The existential threat to the rules-based international order, i.e., the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and human rights, has frequently been mentioned in speeches and policy documents.

Determining whether the targeted audience has accepted the securitization move is very hard to decide as the role of the audience is complicated. However, Balzacq believes that when the speech acts are performed in the context, there is a greater possibility for the audience to be convinced. Underlining the limitations of the Copenhagen School, Balzacq finds the audience to be more important than the securitizing actor. Therefore, looking at who is securitizing 'what' and 'when' and how threats are constructed becomes important. From the rhetoric of rules-based international order by political elites of Germany and Japan, it is clear that they use the grammar of security to raise the issue of China's ambitious maritime agenda in the Indo-Pacific, which can cause a severe threat to the peace, security, and stability in the region. The Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Survey of 2020 shows that negative views of China have reached its highest among the world's developed economies. 71 percent of the German population has unfavorable views against China after the COVID-19 crisis (Silver et al., 2020). China's ambitious policy, its military projection, and human rights violations constitute its unfavorable views across the world. However, Germany is trying to balance its engagements with Japan and China, its important regional partners. While Berlin needs Beijing for market access, which is crucial for its economic growth, Tokyo is an ideal security partner to counter Beijing's growing regional influence.

Hence, Germany and Japan's common securitization of China causes increasing engagement and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The convergence of their interests has led to a powerful partnership, where the like-minded partners Germany and Japan seek to strengthen economic and maritime security relations to promote the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

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