

Aspiration and Leadership Research of the Diffusion of Indo-Pacific

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Abstract. The Indo Pacific concept (IPC) may be one of the hotspots in IR during the past decade. This ancient geographical concept was originally packaged by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe into the so-called Free and Open Indo Pacific (FoIP). After being highly politicized, this concept has been officially adopted by Australia, the United States and India. After President Biden took office in 2020, the Indo Pacific strategy has undergone further diffusion around the world. Especially in Western democracies. By 2022, the Biden government has taken the promotion of FoIP into the primary strategic goal in the *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* [11]. At the same time, the report emphasized that protecting the democratic values of regional allies from interference is the direction of the US efforts. Leading by values has become an important accelerator for the United States to boost the diffusion of Indo-Pacific strategy. However, it is implausible for observers to explain the global diffusion of IPC after 2020. This article adheres to the viewpoint of constructivism and holds that the IPC, as an idea, has been recognized and accepted by states with common values. When the IPC was put forward and used by states platform as an initiative, it was constructed as a blueprint of "Democratic Alliance". The Western-dominated international order based on the values of democracy and freedom is socially, politically, and historically 'embedded'. This article argues that the diffusion of IPC could be understood as a political aspiration. Such aspiration contains the expectation of reuniting states sharing values of western democracy and freedom.

1 Introduction

Since the second decade of this century, the concept of 'Indo-Pacific' was gradually replacing the "Asia Pacific" and be widely used by the United States, Australia, Japan, and India. Drawing mainly on the Indo-Pacific states developing relations, observers accordingly point to the growing importance of state actors, explaining their agency with regional attributes such as the structural contradiction with regional power, degree of institutionalization, and member state cohesion. This article challenges this dominant explanation of the dynamic process in Indo-Pacific. By introducing Politics of Aspiration, this paper understands IPC as a construction of values. Western countries have built the concept of Indo Pacific in order to maintain the crisis of the continuous decline of free order, in the real world, it is also developing in the direction of "Democratic Alliance". the IPC is actually the national collective identity based on the democratic and liberal international order. Aspiration is motivating the global dissemination of this IPC. Further, the construction of IPC was strengthened by the Biden administration. Different from Trump's "America First" policy, Biden integrated allies with IPC, and develop this concept into the national strategy of the United States by 2022, so as to promote regional freedom and democracy to unite more allies and curb China's rise in the region.

In general, this paper will be divided into three parts. Firstly, this paper briefly reviews the past and the latest diffusive development of the ICP, and critically reviews the existing interpretations. Secondly, this paper introduces the concept of the Politics of Aspiration. It argues that the IPC is derived from the Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP) political vision put forward by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The FOIP aimed at promoting cooperation among states with common democratic values. This part argues that aspiration provides a dynamic narrative of this idea, while the practice of aspiration needs the response and support of leadership. Part three, drawing on the perspective of constructivism, argues that the United States made different leadership responses to this political aspiration during the administration of Trump and Biden, resulting in different results. The Democratic Party attaches much more importance to the values of freedom and democracy than Trump. The Biden government clearly inherited Abe's view and wrote it into its national Indo-Pacific strategy. The FOIP has become the strategic goal of the U.S. Building FOIP will become an important strategic tool for the United States to ensure leadership and export Western values. With the integration of aspiration and leadership, the FOIP is accelerating expansion.

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2 Indo-Pacific: Circumstances before 2020

In August 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe mentioned in a speech during his visit to India that “the conference of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific should develop into a sea of freedom and prosperity (Abe 2007) [15].” Since then, the view on “conference of two seas” (futatsu no UMI no majiwari) occasionally appeared in Japan's international policy discourse. Later, with Abe's resignation and Australia's withdrawal from Malabar arrangement, this initiative has been shelved. After a transient hiatus, the Australian government became the first country to write Indo-Pacific into official government documents. The Australian Defense White Paper 2013 defined the Indo-Pacific as a logical extension of this the wider Asia-Pacific region. In the same year, India's “Look East” policy also fuelled the back of “Indo-Pacific”. This trend followed Japan's vision of “Free and Open Indo Pacific”(FOIP) in 2016, and it was immediately adopted by the trump administration written into the US NSS. In June 2019, Long-awaited Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) (DOD, 1 June 2019) Officially released [27]. After 2019, the policies and documents related to the “Indo-Pacific” strategic concept have frequently occupied the headlines in Japan, Australia, India and the United States.

Hitherto, Lots of scholars believe that the so-called Indo Pacific strategy only belongs to the political vision constructed by a small number of national groups based on consciousness. Many strategists are not optimistic about the institutionalization of Indo Pacific strategy. Hugh White (2016) believes that there is a long distance between “talking about it” and “make it real” in the Indo Pacific strategy [30]. Medcalf (2018) believes that the Indo Pacific is a construct is used to replace Asia Pacific but with obvious limits [13]. Wilkins and Kim (2020) describe the “Indo-Pacific” as evolving from new “mental maps” via ideological drivers to a new “vision of regional security order” [29]. Kai he and Huiyun Feng (2020) believed that the Indo Pacific strategy remained at the conceptual stage of Japan, Australia, the United States and India, and they held a negative attitude towards the possibility of Indo Pacific becoming an institutionalized region like the Asia Pacific [12].

However, this paper argues the explanations and prospects given by most scholars do not fit the latest development of the current Indo Pacific concept. First of all, Quad 2.0, established by Japan, the United States, Australia, India and China, was the first four countries to participate in the Indo Pacific strategy and charged in the front line The four countries not only actively participated in military operations in the Atlantic and the bay of Bengal, but also expanded non-traditional security cooperation in the Indo Pacific region, almost covering climate change, key and emerging technical cooperation, regional infrastructure construction, cyberspace cooperation Education and people to people and cultural cooperation. Second, quad is pulling more countries into the Indo Pacific gang. In September 2021, the heads of state of the United States, Britain and Australia announced the

establishment of a trilateral security partner “AUKUS”, which is a good example. In the same year, After France and Germany successively released their national Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU also released the Indo Pacific Cooperation Strategy Report.

It is difficult for IR strategic analysts to explain why the development of Indo Pacific idea has not developed as they expected. It is true that Indo Pacific has not attracted more countries in the region, but Quad's cooperation is more comprehensive and deepened, rather than the crusading enthusiasm of European countries in the region. This paper holds that the motivation of Indo Pacific itself originates from the common counterattack against the challenge of the liberal international order. Therefore, although Indo Pacific is a geographically broad region, it is more like an international political vision constructed among countries with collective identity, which can also help to understand the eyes of many European countries not in the region on Indo Pacific. To understand the spread of Indo Pacific, we must explore the driving force for the construction of this concept. Undoubtedly, the fear of China's rise is the starting point for countries in the region to join the track. But only by understanding the Indo Pacific as a political aspiration against the decline of free value can we better answer where the Indo Pacific strategy comes from and where it will go.

3 The Origin of Aspiration: FOIP

Why the diffusion of Indo-Pacific ideas more successful than critics think? More importantly, why is the IPC accepted in those non-Indo-Pacific states? This paper holds that to understand the new development of the global diffusion of the IPC, we still need to start from the internal perspective of constructivism and learn from the newly proposed “The Politics of Aspiration”(Martha, 2020) [13] to reasonably explain the latest development of the IPC, delimit the boundary of the Indo-Pacific strategy and explore the possibility and limitations of the development of the concept in the future.

The diffusion of political vision among states is promoted by identities and values. Aspiration can help constructivism clarify the origin and motivation of collective norms. As Martha (2020) points out, Aspiration is an essential component of politics. It articulates goals, affirms identities and values, and structures action at all levels of social life [12]. “aspirational politics” that differs from our international relations models of both norm-driven social activism and interest-driven rational choice.

When we look back on the origin of IPC, we can find that the Western democracies bound by this vision are derived from the political aspiration of OFIP.As the predecessor of IPC, FOIP originated from the vision speech delivered by former Japanese Prime Minister Abe in the Indian Parliament on August 22, 2007. Shinzo Abe believes that “through Japan and India coming together in this way, this' wider Asia 'will evolve into a huge network across the Pacific, including the United States of America and Australia. This network will be open and transparent, allowing the free flow of people, goods, capital and

knowledge." In today's diffusion and institutionalization of IPC, we can still see the vision of freedom and openness emphasized by Abe, and the cooperation between the United States, Australia, India and Japan has become a reality. further, Abe's vision for regional order is also based on the values of freedom and democracy. "Democracies in the two oceans must deepen the friendship between their citizens at all possible levels," he said. At the same time, Abe's government has implemented a long-term value oriented diplomatic strategy called "arc of freedom and prosperity". In May of the same year, Abe and American Vice President Dick Cheney promoted the first quadrilateral strategic dialogue. The political aspiration of freedom and democracy has taken the first step in practice. Although the Rudd government briefly withdrew from Quad in 2008 due to pressure from Beijing, but the development of Quad has not stalled. Since then, in 2012, Abe directly used "Asia's democratic security diamond" to describe the Quad proposed by him.

A major political role of aspiration is the "articulation of goals" (Martha 2020) [12]. The IPC originated from the FOIP political vision. This vision articulates the goal of greater political cooperation among democracies in the Pacific and Indian Oceans to preserve the liberal international order. The international order of freedom and democracy, as a political aspiration, helps us to explore the origin of IPC. As a psychological map or political concept, in the development of IPC, the broader cooperative among democracies states and liberal international order has been the mainstream narrative goal of this concept. As Yuichi Hosoya (2019) deems the Abe administration believed it is the core values such as democracy, freedom, and the rule of law that bind the United States, India, Australia, and Japan to become the main architects for FOIP and the defenders of liberal international order in Indo-Pacific [31]. And these important core values played another role in the proliferation after the IPC. Because "In addition to articulating goals, aspirations also serve as affirmations of identity and values." This is magnified in the Biden administration's foreign policy of emphasizing allies and emphasizing democratic alliances. Countries that have embraced the IPC as a political strategy are all countries that share similar democratic liberal values. While these countries embrace the aspiration of IPC, they also use it to affirm each other's identities.

This part discusses that the origin of the IPC is derived from the political vision of the OFIP of Abe government. As a prelude to the IPC, this political vision embeds the traditional values of democracy and freedom in Western democratic countries, makes the IPC a political aspiration, and establishes the goal of strengthening wider cooperation among countries with similar values such as democracy and freedom. Although IPC is indeed attractive as a political goal, political commitment requires leadership and accountability costs to achieve. As the core actor of Western democracies and the main leader of Indo-Pacific strategy, the United States has experienced different foreign policies of President trump and President Biden in its response to the IPC. In the following, we will discuss how the Trump administration's American First policy leads to susceptibility of the

IPC aspiration to regulation and Co-optation (Martha 2020) [12], and how the Biden administration's Return to Allies policy provides leadership for the IPC and promotes substantive progress in this political aspiration.

4 American First and Political Manipulation of the IPC

The important promotion of the political aspiration of IPC by the United States began when trump entered the White House in 2017. The 2017 US national security strategy report and the 2018 national defense strategy report upgraded the "Indo Pacific strategy" to a national strategy. In May 2018, the US Pacific Command was officially renamed Indo Pacific Command, which echoed the changes of US Asia Pacific Policy in terms of institutional setting. In June 2019, the US Department of Defense issued the Indo Pacific strategy report, marking the formal formation of the US "Indo Pacific strategy". However, the trump administration's obedience to the IPC is more out of the consideration of curbing China's rise. When IPC intersects with the conservative foreign policy of "American priority", IPC, as a political aspiration, falls into the risk of "sustainability of aspiration to regulation and Co- optation" worried by Martha (2020) [12]. On the one hand, the trump administration strongly advocates the importance of IPC and the role of democratic countries in the international order. However, what trump expects is not the multilateralism IPC expected by traditional US allies, but to manipulated the IPC as a political confrontation tool for American First.

The Trump administration's adoption of the US priority foreign policy is essentially a diplomatic strategic orientation of protectionism distinguished by Green (2017) [9]. Protectionism means unilateralism in diplomacy. When the American First embedded in the aspiration of the IPC, the Trump administration does show enthusiasm for the IPC. However, such enthusiasm is not used to construct a regional free order as emphasized by Abe, but to manipulate the IPC become a containment strategy for China's rise. In the 2018 US Defense Strategy Report, China is directly called "strategic competitor", In particular, the document pointed out: "China is rebuilding its favorable Indo-Pacific order with the help of military modernization, influence action and predatory economic coercion. China seeks regional hegemony and replaces the global dominant position of the United States in the future." The strategy of containing China is seen as a top priority of Trump's diplomacy [25]. As Medcalf (2018) said, strategic competition with China is a single defining of U.S. security strategy that extends to the Indo-Pacific [14].

In July 23, 2020, the U.S Secretary Michael R. Pompeo Remarks at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum: "Communist China and the Free World's Future" [15]. The speech of Pompeo fully demonstrates how the trump administration uses values such as freedom and democracy as political rhetoric to serve the competition of great powers. Pompeo called core values such as freedom and democracy the power of the free world, and entrusted the United States with the noble

mission of defending the free world. In fact, the core of the speech is to take the opportunity to provoke ideological confrontation to the audience in order to achieve the goal of strategic competition with China. Although the diplomatic rhetoric of the trump administration uses political aspects such as freedom and democracy, it essentially constructs an ideological enemy, hoping to tie the Indian Pacific countries to the train of confrontation through the IPC. Not out of the maintenance of the liberal international order, but out of the realistic consideration of the competition between great powers. IPC is no longer the goal of the common maintenance of the core values of democratic countries, but has become a tool for big countries to compete for hegemony. When aspirational goals run the risk of political regulation It is not difficult to understand why the trump administration has responded to the IPC, but this concept has not been more widely accepted.

5 Leadership - Boost by Biden Administration

After 2017, IPC relying on Quad only spread in a small range within the four countries. Biden's victory in 2020 is the turning point of the boosting of IPC in global. The Biden administration inherited Trump's "Indian Ocean Pacific heritage", but compared with Trump's Indian Ocean Pacific strategy, the biggest change in Biden's foreign policy is that it weakens the elements of realism, strengthens the guidance of democratic aspiration, and reshapes the leadership of the United States among its allies. The trump administration's America First + IPC has changed to Return to Ally + FOIP.

In February 2022, the United States defined five strategic objectives in the national *Indo Pacific Strategy*. The first is to promote the construction of the FOIP, and others include: to strengthen the ties between the United States and its allies; Promote the implementation of the Indo Pacific economic framework; Strengthening military security cooperation; Respond to non-traditional security challenges such as the COVID-19. It can be seen that the emphasis on the values of freedom and democracy has been put in the first place, and the following strategic goal is the specific means of concrete practice. The report also elaborated that the United States will support an open society, ensure the Indo Pacific states able to make independence political decisions, and ensure democracy and freedom of expression, including "freedom and openness" in the political, air, sea and technological fields. It opposes "economic coercion" and interference by major power [11]. Biden regards the FOIP as the standard of regional order. The purpose is to contain the rise of regional powers, such as China, and maintain the political influence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.

On March 3, 2021, the Biden Administration issued the Interim National Security Strategy Guide, which proposed to include Europe, NATO allies and India Pacific allies Japan, India, Australia and South Korea into the "global alliance and partnership" needed to deal with China's rise [19]. The most effective way for the United

States to surpass a more confident China is to invest in our people, economy and democracy, work with allies and partners to defend our values and confront threats to our collective security, prosperity and democratic way of life. " Since then, IPC has developed into a powerful fulcrum for the Biden government to unite its allies with democratic politics and promote the maintenance of the liberal international order.

On February 19, 2021. Biden's speech at the Munich Conference, Biden called on European allies to prepare for long-term competition with China [21]. A month later, the United States, Japan, India and Australia convened the "quadripartite security dialogue", which broke through the "2 + 2" dialogue mode of the trump administration and exchanged views in the form of a summit for the first time. Although it was an online conference, it was Biden's first international multilateral conference. A White House spokesman said, "this event shows that the United States attaches importance to close cooperation with allies and partners in the Indian Pacific region". U.S. national security adviser Jack Sullivan said that the "Quartet security dialogue" is the basis of the "India Pacific policy" [17]. After the "Quartet security dialogue", the United States actively developed relations with three Indian Pacific allies, Japan, South Korea and Australia, and won the support of major allies in the Indian Pacific region. Secretary of state Blinken and Secretary of defense Austin visited Japan in March 16th and held "2 + 2" talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Shigeki Minimitsu and defense minister Kishi Nobuo [17]. The United States and Japan have the same vision of the "free and open India Pacific region", and the US Japan alliance is still the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity in the Indian Pacific region. This consensus undoubtedly inherits and develops the diplomatic heritage of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe FOIP.

As a political aspiration, IPC has played its greatest leading role under the foreign policy of Biden government's return to allies. Biden's vision for the rapid spread of democracy in the region is seen by his allies. Biden made it clear that the most basic advantage of revitalizing the United States is American democracy, claiming that "democracy is the key to freedom, prosperity, peace and dignity". He believes that in the Indian Pacific region, which the United States attaches importance to, there is a "war between democracy and autocracy in the 21st century". By injecting democratic factors into the "Indo Pacific strategy", the Biden administration can bridge the tensions and differences among allies caused by trump and reunite allies and partners. Biden pointed out at his first press conference after being elected president that "this is a contest between democracy and autocracy in the 21st century" and "we must prove that democracy is effective"[22]. The summit for democracy was held on December 9, 2021 in the form of online conference. Biden believes that if the United States cannot play a democratic role, it will not be enough to meet the global challenges posed by strong and capable authoritarianism. Biden's strong democratic attachment to the outside world is to promote the political aspiration of American ally diplomacy. This means that the Biden government has a higher enthusiasm to invest in the global leadership

construction of IPC.

As a veteran politician of the Democratic Party, the Biden administration has an excellent resume in diplomacy. Many scholars regard trumpism as the impact of populism and nationalism on the decline of a free international order. Obviously Biden is also aware of this. But Biden's approach is more traditional and not as direct as trump's. It has a "turning point", trying to describe the competition between China and the United States as part of a larger "competition with dictators". It can be seen that Biden already has a view that "the old rule-based international order has collapsed and replaced by two camps: one is the camp of democratic countries and the other is the camp of authoritarian countries" [23]. Democracy has become the most decisive factor in the Biden administration's foreign policy. Secretary Blinken said: "in recent years, Authoritarianism and nationalism are on the rise around the world." [1] "Shoring up our democracy is a foreign policy imperative. Otherwise, we play right into the hands of adversaries and competitors like Russia and China, who seize every opportunity to sow doubts about the strength of our democracy. We should not be making their jobs easier." [1] In the Indo Pacific region, the democratic alliance has become the political slogan for the United States to united its regional partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and India. While slandering China, it advertises the United States and its allies and partners as "democratic defenders". Furthermore, as the largest political common divisor of traditional western countries, democratic values are the best choice for a perfect political aspect. Perhaps there are specific differences between Brussels and Washington across the two oceans. However, it is the consensus of these countries to respond to the decline of the liberal international order. As a political aspiration, IPC is so charming that it has successfully become a motivation to help Western democracies reach agreements across regions.

6 Effectiveness of Leadership and the Diffusion of IPC

In September 2021, the heads of state of the United States, Britain and Australia announced the establishment of a trilateral security partnership "AUKUS", which aims to strengthen comprehensive defense and security cooperation, deepen information and technology sharing in the Indian Pacific region and improve each other's security capabilities [20]. This is the first step in the substantial expansion of IPC to countries other than quad. Just six months before AUKUS was officially signed, the British government repeatedly stressed the importance of protecting democratic values in the British government's official strategic document global Britain in a competitive age. For our values – we need to deep and expand our partnerships to promote open societies and to hold the international rules and norms that underpin free trade, security, and stability [25]. UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss viewed AUKUS as the beginning of a "Network of Liberty"[24]. This title literally echoes the greater Asian Free Network advocated by Abe at the time of the origin

of the IPC.

With Britain's strategic focus on the Indo Pacific region, European traditional Western democracies have also joined the broader network of freedom of the IPC. In September 2020, Germany released the landmark document of its "India Pacific strategy" - *Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together*, which clearly put forward that "the Indian Ocean Pacific region is the priority agenda of Germany's foreign policy" [8]. At the G7 summit in May 2021, France, India and Australia held a trilateral ministerial dialogue and issued a joint statement, deciding to "work to promote common values and strive to achieve a free, open, inclusive and rule-based Indian Pacific region" and "promote a rule-based maritime order based on respect for sovereignty and international law". Two months later, the French government issued the *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy* [6]. After Germany and France the EU released the *EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* on September 6, 2021. In the report, the EU said that the fierce geopolitical competition among major powers in the Indo Pacific region has exacerbated the tension in the political, security and ideological fields of the international community [7]. These developments have increasingly threatened the core values and regional order dominated by the West, Directly affect the interests of the EU. In the Indo Pacific cooperation strategy report, the EU called for building an Indo Pacific region based on "democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law", emphasizing the need to promote cooperation with "like-minded partners" who share the same "principles, values or common interests".

Today, the IPC has evolved from the FOIP political vision put forward by Shinzo Abe to the political aspiration of traditional Western democracies. Quad, which was initially established, has also been continuously deepened and developed, forming a multi-level, fixed and full coverage cooperation network. After the G7 meeting in June 2021, the states leaders issued a joint statement, which reaffirming the importance of the Indo Pacific strategic relationship of upholding common values [3]. In the same year, the "Malabar" maritime joint military exercises jointly participated by the United States, Japan, India and Australia were held in the Western Pacific and the bay of Bengal respectively. At the same time, the Indo Pacific idea has also spread around from security issues. The four countries have expanded their cooperation in the Indo Pacific region to cover almost all fields, such as climate change, key and emerging technology cooperation, regional infrastructure construction, cyberspace cooperation, education and people to people and cultural cooperation, and launched "The Quad Vaccine Partnership" in March, Cooperate in medical technology and vaccine supply [28].

It is true that the IPC has not received a warm response from enough states in the region, like China and ASEAN. However, the Indo Pacific concept has been echoed and supported on the other side of the unexpected Pacific Ocean. By reviewing the development of IPC, we can see that the initial IPC was only a political vision put forward by Abe, which was also resisted by all parties in the initial development stage. However, the theory based

on political aspiration emphasizes the powerful role of ideas in the construction of national interests, which also helps us understand why IPC will spread to countries outside the region. The common maintenance of democratic values and liberal international order is the collective concept of IPC countries. On the contrary, China has never accepted IPC. Therefore, as a democratic alliance, IPC has fulfilled the blueprint of political aspiration by responding to the challenges to the traditional liberal international order. At the same time, the second point that this paper needs to emphasize is that the institutionalization of political aspiration needs the promotion of leadership. This is also discussed in the Kai's article. Review the development of IPC. 2017 and 2020 are two crucial time nodes. These two points are exactly the time when two US presidents take office. As the leader of Western democracies. The United States has played a vital role in promoting and developing IPC.

7 Conclusion

IPC is born out of the political vision of FoIP, which binds the core values of freedom and democracy shared by western traditional democratic countries. With the promotion of values, FoIP has developed into a broad political aspiration. Therefore, the heart map of IPC has been spread and shaped in democratic countries. The IPC aims to promote cooperation among democracies with similar values. On a broader level, the IPC includes a political aspect of defending the liberal order. This aspiration encountered the risk of politicization during the trump administration. After the Biden administration came to power in 2021, the foreign policy of returning to allies accelerated the global spread of IPC. Regarding IPC as a grand political aspect helps us understand why the proliferation of IPC takes place in Europe rather than locally. One belt, one road, is also worth noting that IPC is also a aspiration, and it is also subject to alternative competition and the internal interests of members. After all, the characteristic of aspiration is that it provides goals and motivation, but it requires long-term coordination and efforts.

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