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India, the Blue Dot Network, and the “Quad Plus” Calculus

DR. JAGANNATH P. PANDA

Abstract

A debate on moving away from alignments and inching toward alliances is beginning to figure prominently in the Indian foreign policy outlook. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to an upsurge of anti-China rhetoric internationally; this has only increased due to continued aggressive posturing by China on land and maritime territories. After the Galwan border clash, New Delhi, too, is reviewing its “China Connect” and “power-partner” parity with Beijing. Hence, India has started looking into other sustainable non-Chinese alliance frameworks, including the Blue Dot Network (BDN), a multilateral Indo-Pacific initiative comprising the United States (US), Japan, and Australia. Aimed at improving standards of infrastructure investment and hailed as a counter initiative to China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the BDN could mark the beginning of a new “economic alliance” for India in the Indo-Pacific. This article argues that India’s prospective inclusion in the BDN is a geostrategic necessity that can pave the way for alternative global supply chain networks and quality infrastructure promotion in Asia and beyond as well as allow New Delhi to enhance its long-desired objective of forming a “continental connect” through a “Quad Plus” network.

Introduction

The global geopolitical narrative is becoming increasingly anti-China post the outbreak of COVID-19, which was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The backlash is primarily focused on Beijing’s initial mishandling of the novel coronavirus crisis and suppression of the flow of information about the disease. In May 2020, several member nations of the World Health Organization (WHO), including India, called for an independent probe into the origins of the virus.¹ Additionally, US president Donald Trump has been openly attacking China for spreading the pandemic, and various global citizen groups and “some governments want to sue Beijing for damages and reparations.”²

For India, the military clash in the Galwan Valley in the Himalayan territory of Ladakh, on 15 June 2020, has only amplified this anti-China view and given it a nationalist trend. Following this incident, boycotting Chinese apps and goods, reviewing engagements with China as a “developmental partner,” and aligning

more with the United States and US alliance partners in the Indo-Pacific have emerged as trending story lines in India. Trump's plans to include India in the expanded G7 (Group of Seven), New Delhi's new "Comprehensive Strategic" partnership with Australia, and the United Kingdom's offer to include India in the new D-10 alliance, a prospective grouping of 10 democracies including South Korea, Australia, and the G7 nations that aims to counter China's monopoly on 5G technology, all highlight India's importance as a regional and global power in the evolving structure of the Indo-Pacific. Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar's statement that the Galwan border incident will have "a serious impact on the bilateral relationship"³ indicates that India is set to review its China policy and perhaps transform it significantly.

To state briefly, over the last one and half decade or so, India's relations with China have been primed on a "power-partner" contention.⁴ Even though the "China threat" phenomenon was on the rise at the beginning of the twenty-first century, India decided to perceive China more as a multilateral partner within the rubrics of emerging powers narrative. For instance, when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Beijing in 2003, he acknowledged China as a "rising economic power," envisioning "comprehensive" bilateral ties in the years to come.⁵ The intent of such a partnership was to gain economic advantage, both within and outside the Bretton Woods institutions, without India worrying too much about the authoritarian rise of China in world affairs and the threat posed by a rising Chinese military to India's security.⁶ India's affiliation with China in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) association of five major emerging national economies, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was primarily a culmination of this process. In other words, a partnership with China in multilateral forums was a conscious Indian stance to balance Beijing's rising threat as a military power while aiming to take advantage in its association with China as an emerging economic partner. The Galwan border incident will have a serious impact on this established twenty-first-century Indian policy stance that started in 2003, as India already seems to be moving away from its partnership inclination with China, aiming to align more and more with the United States.⁷

In this increasing alignment toward Washington, India's strategic consonance with the United States has become more Indo-Pacific-centric, which will perhaps transcend from the economic to the strategic-security spheres in the region. A good sign is that the US-India understanding is not only gearing for an alternative supply chain network in the post-COVID period but also about to likely expand maritime-military cooperation (via Malabar) with a fourth partner, namely Australia, thereby strengthening the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) process

in the Indo-Pacific, along with Japan. However, it remains to be seen to what extent India will depart from its existing China policy in the post-Galwan period. There is no dearth of opportunities and challenges, which will test New Delhi's foreign policy resolve to forge a strategic alliance that would be commensurate with its economic, maritime, and security mandate in the Indo-Pacific region. The BDN, a multistakeholder initiative launched by the United States, Japan, and Australia, which primarily aims to advance an economic alliance framework for quality infrastructure promotion in the Indo-Pacific, is one such opportunity for India.

India has largely positioned itself as an anti-BRI nation. Rather than endorsing a US-led anti-China narrative, however, New Delhi has promoted a policy of “engagement with equilibrium” with Beijing.⁸ Post-Galwan, this narrative can see change with an inclination to behave as an anti-China nation, motivating New Delhi to become a part of alliance frameworks with partner nations and join initiatives like the BDN. During President Trump's maiden visit to New Delhi in February 2020, India and the United States discussed the prospects of the BDN;⁹ however, India refrained from making any commitment to join. New Delhi's official stance is that “there is a certain level of convergence when we talk about ideas . . . but the initiative is a new one, we need a little bit of time to examine it, to study it and to revert on this issue,”¹⁰ which indicates India's inclination to join the network. The recent G7 invitation from Trump has certainly raised the prospects of India joining the BDN. The BDN is promoted as an exclusive program that is widely perceived as an initiative to challenge China's unilateral and nontransparent infrastructure investment and financing pattern in the Indo-Pacific, which Xi Jinping's BRI promotes.¹¹ Via the Indo-Pacific Business Forum (IPBF),¹² the BDN intends to bring government, private sector, and civil society together through stronger trade and economic ties, as well as foster finance, investment, and technological cooperation.¹³

Given the rising anti-China narrative across the globe, the scope for promoting the BDN as an alternative to the BRI has risen tremendously. So will India, an Indo-Pacific partner of the United States and a member of the Quad process (the United States, Japan, and Australia being the other members)¹⁴ consider joining the BDN in the near future? This article aims to examine these prospects in conjunction with the transformation that is taking place in Indian foreign policy.

Blue Dot Network, Belt and Road Initiative, and India

Building and financing quality infrastructure has been a matter of significant debate among the United States and other like-minded countries, such as India and Australia, particularly in light of the expanding BRI in the Indo-Pacific. The BDN, which was initially proposed at the 35th Association of Southeast Asian

Nations (ASEAN) summit in Thailand, is an international certification program to promote quality infrastructure with a focus on transparency and sustainability—on expediting quality infrastructure in the lower- and middle-income countries particularly. Thus, the BDN aims to set a “standard of excellence” against the rising debt traps and cheap infrastructure that boosts quantitative and nontransparent aspects. In other words, the BDN envisions promoting a transparent and sustainable infrastructural environment as a strategic retaliation to Beijing’s BRI. BDN’s main feature is that it follows a project-based investment approach rather than the country-based engagement that the BRI conducts, which has promoted debt traps.

Besides, the network, which was launched by the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC),¹⁵ draws its basis of cooperation on the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, the G7 Charlevoix Commitment on Innovation Financing for Development, and the Equator Principles—focusing on transparency and universality ahead of any form of unilateral mechanism.¹⁶ Such commitment allows the BDN to endorse the “free and open” Indo-Pacific essence that the Quad countries advocate. Further, with the recent expansion of the Quad process that included countries such as New Zealand, South Korea, Brazil, Israel, and Vietnam as new members, a conjectural alliance called “Quad Plus” has been created. This expanded strategic consultative framework points to the rapid creation of alignment structures in the Indo-Pacific that do not necessarily conform to a US-led alliance structure.¹⁷

India joining the BDN would emerge as a critical factor, given New Delhi’s opposition to the BRI.¹⁸ By joining the BDN, India will be inching much closer toward an alliance framework, moving away from alignment structures it has followed until now in its China, and global, policies.¹⁹ Since 2013, India has been firm in its stand to not endorse the BRI on the grounds that the initiative not only overlooks “sovereignty and territorial integrity” of other countries but also ignores universally guided norms that ensure “openness” and “equality” in the region.²⁰ Moreover, under the pretext of its principal slogan, “Community of Shared Future of Humanity,”²¹ the BRI is China’s nationalist geo-economic strategy. India has displayed its resolute stance by not participating in the two BRI forums held in Beijing in May 2017 and April 2019.²²

Since its inception, the BRI has posed multiple challenges for India. First, as an initiative primarily aimed to enlarge China’s strategic networks throughout the neighborhood, the BRI has constrained India’s strategic choices across the immediate and extended neighborhood. New Delhi cannot match Beijing’s financial clout, which the latter uses to offer advanced connectivity as well as infrastructural development in the region. The initial reported capital of 40 billion USD in 2014

has been key to Beijing’s Silk Road diplomacy, which seems to have only increased in the process.²³ More importantly, Beijing has emerged as a greater trading partner with most of India’s neighbors in South and Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Second, India is concerned that the BRI investments in the region are slowly changing the status quo by interfering in a country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, for example, in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), where China is violating India’s historical claims by building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The same has also been noticed in the case of the South China Sea, where Beijing seems to be emerging as an assertive and revisionist maritime colonial power with massive military-maritime infrastructure build-up so as to change the existing status quo. China’s approach aims to create a strategic divide among the claimant countries, particularly after the landmark Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the dispute between the Philippines and China, which denied China’s “historic” claims in the region. In this regard, with the US government releasing its official “position” on the SCS on 13 July 2020 that deems Chinese claims “completely unlawful,” the scope to build US–India SCS synergy has increased.²⁴

Third, the BRI’s Maritime Silk Road component that controls port financing and establishment, as well as builds commercial points and maritime assets, poses future strategic risks for India in the IOR. In other words, India’s major concerns include rising instances of unpayable debt load in the BRI beneficiary countries—in effect, worries about an impending debt crisis in region—and Beijing’s growing assertive posture owing to its military-commercial infrastructure construction activities: e.g., building ports and new naval bases.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, Beijing’s “charm offensive” strategy of pursuing a stronger public diplomacy through project financing across the Indo-Pacific region has constrained India’s strategic choices significantly.²⁵ However, due to the lack of an effective international coalition against the BRI, thus far, India’s firm opposition has held little relevance. The relevant question, therefore, is: can the BDN, which is increasingly being regarded as a balance to China’s nontransparent investment outreach, act as such a coalition?

India’s Indo-Pacific Outreach—the BDN Advantage

Under the aegis of its Act East Policy, India has revamped and restructured its Asia ties and Indo-Pacific outreach. Indian initiatives like Sagarmala, Project Mausam, the Cotton Route, and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) can provide collaborative opportunities. Some of their key aspects are as follows:

1. Sagarmala (a Hindi term that literally translates as “ocean necklace”) is India’s ambitious port development initiative. As part of the project, a National Perspective Plan (NPP) was released at the National Maritime Summit 2016; the NPP aims at revitalizing 7,500 km of India’s coastline; 14,500 km of navigable waterways; and its maritime sector.²⁶
2. Under Project Mausam, the aim is to study monsoon patterns in order to better connect Indian Ocean littoral nations by building on cultural connections to empower maritime livelihoods.²⁷
3. The revival of India’s Cotton Route initiative comes as a low-key counter to China’s Silk Route and aims at improving India’s ties with Central Asian nations (major producers of cotton) by not only building “dialogue and co-ordination” between them but also reviving ancient routes of cotton trade.²⁸
4. SAGAR highlights India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific, and it is not an anti-China initiative. The program underscores India’s Indo-Pacific engagements by promoting the Indian Navy’s ties with nations of the region and beyond.²⁹

These four initiatives cover infrastructural, cultural, trade, and security factors of India’s Indo-Pacific and broader Asiatic ambitions. Among these neighborhood policy frameworks, India’s port development programs and other maritime initiatives in the IOR are of utmost importance,³⁰ and this is where the BDN could be of strategic advantage to India. The (re)introduction of these aforementioned maritime initiatives is aimed at reestablishing the bygone structural connections between India’s export-import supply chain networks in the IOR.³¹ India has identified a total of 577 commercial coastal projects between 2015–2035 for port modernization and development, port-linked industrialization, connectivity promotion, and community-based development.³² Linking some of these initiatives with the BDN is bound to exemplify India’s strategic standing in the IOR.

Furthermore, India’s Indo-Pacific outlook, as emphasized by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in 2019, is “for something” rather than “against someone.”³³ The spirit of SAGAR is inward-looking, and its policies look oceanward. The free-and-open spirit resonates with other like-minded partners—the Quad members—and focuses on how countries together can progress faster through an *inclusive* rather than an *exclusive* policy. Yet, a practical implementation of these ideas or an actualization of such policy prophecy necessitates capital investment, capacity building, and a consultative-cooperative mode of practice that a proposition like the BDN could shape. In the post-Galwan framework and post-COVID world order, India’s Indo-Pacific inclusivity approach will also see a more nuanced and guided China angle that is both welcoming and wary.

The rise of an assertive China, the eastward trajectory of global economic and geopolitical centers, the onset of the "Asian Century," and a dwindling US presence in the East at present form the crux of strategic transitioning in the international order. These factors, coupled with national security interests and internal developments, have allowed India to enhance its presence, both on land and sea, in its strategic neighborhood as well as the world. About 95 percent of India's total trade by volume and over 65 percent in terms of value is transported via the sea; hence, the maritime zone is a strategic priority.³⁴ The United States' growing focus on the Indo-Pacific and Asia, coupled with India's active efforts to create new opportunities for mutual growth and development in the region, provides convergence opportunities between like-minded nations. The Trump administration, in its 2017 *National Security Strategy*, while putting "America First," named India "a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner."³⁵ Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, had highlighted in his address before the US Congress in 2016 that "a strong India-U.S. partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from Indian Ocean to the Pacific."³⁶

Connectivity promotion and infrastructure diplomacy have emerged as key features of India's neighborhood diplomacy. Making use of its strategic location, India is currently expanding its tactical wings through its Act East Policy, Link West Policy, and SAGAR program. India's acceptance and endorsement of the Quad Plus narrative also points to New Delhi's growing embrace of Washington's worldview and policy overtures. Sharing the common aim to defend the liberal world order, the Quad has found new like-minded partners in South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam—all strongly connected to China economically and with large-scale infrastructural needs of their own. The BDN, too, has the same primary policy ambit of free and rules-based world order. Thus, if India decides to join the network, it will pave the way for a Quad Plus inclusion, as a growing synergy between the nations seems to be actualizing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. India's decision to join will hold important significance in maintaining status security for the United States, promote India's own net-security provider role as an Indo-Pacific power, and check China's rise as a revisionist power. In this regard, BDN is critical to the US Indo-Pacific strategy vis-à-vis China and the BRI.

The United States needs a strong and stable India to further America's China-containment strategy, and India's domestic economic stability and strength will develop only with successful implementation of its projects. Sagarmala can proceed much faster and stronger with US investments. The project involves large-scale infrastructural spending, ranging up to 70,000 crore INR, with a thrust on port-led infrastructure development.³⁷ One of the primary goals of this initiative is to reduce logistics costs and make India more competitive in the global market:

India's current logistics costs are almost thrice that of China's.³⁸ Meanwhile, Project Mausam has the potential of serving as a major technology cooperation opportunity for the United States and India.

India's Cotton Route connectivity initiative with Central Asian nations has been facing the brunt of the ongoing US–China trade war, as international cotton markets have suffered severe losses. Further, the existing US–India trade tensions are not providing any impetus to economic growth either. Nonetheless, India is a major defense and strategic partner of the United States, and SAGAR is already receiving positive results with exercises like Tiger Triumph. Therefore, a more nuanced cooperative partnership that converges strategic and domestic initiatives can provide more complementarity to budding US–India ties. India must tap into potential cooperative engagement with the United States via initiatives like the BDN. With Japan and Australia as partners, BDN offers a ready-to-use platform for heightened cooperation across the region by building on the Quad strategic forum as well.

The BDN aims to function on a regional partnership model; implementation of this model has already seen entry into India via investments in education and a training project for procurement workers in Maharashtra.³⁹ Being nondependent on taxpayers' money, the US International Development Finance Corporation has, with Congressional approval, managed to raise 60 billion USD for the project at present. Though the BDN is still not clear about its long-term strategic intent, it is, however, safe to assume that the primary focus is going to be increasing the US presence in the Indo-Pacific region. India has much to gain from the initiative: most importantly, even though Beijing, being aware of the implications of the BDN, has been criticizing it for being anti-China—for the moment that is all China can do. Beijing cannot oppose, at least on principle, private investments in the region. It is here that India must find its leeway in the post–COVID-19 order to sell New Delhi's strategic presence in the BDN as an anti-BRI, a pro-development, and a leading economic recovery power, especially in a world that will be facing the reverberations of this health pandemic for a long time. Also, with animosity between Beijing and New Delhi growing post-Galwan, India's ties with its Quad partners take on more importance than before.

A Coalition of “Like-mindedness”—India's Choice

The BDN has certainly raised the possibility of an international coalition of like-minded countries ready to question, and possibly engage in a counter-capacity building exercise, the controversial BRI. The scope of the BDN is exclusive: to offer an alternate platform on quality and sustainable infrastructure while creating strategic awareness over the unilateral, nontransparent, and colonialist aspects of

the BRI. The BDN aims to “grade infrastructure financing through a certification process” that is compliant with international standards.⁴⁰ The objectives are two-fold: improving transparency, quality, and legitimacy for infrastructure financing and development, while raising questions on unilateral and nontransparent financing patterns that the BRI encourages in region. Thus, as also mentioned above, the scheme becomes significant for a range of middle-income countries, including India, seeking infrastructure development financing, especially those that are skeptical of Chinese funding overtures.

The BDN addresses India’s concerns about the BRI in the region. The BRI exhibits China’s revisionist approach in the Indo-Pacific: Beijing has transitioned from a “neo-mercantilist power”⁴¹ to a “neo-imperialist power.”⁴² These concerns compliment the broader strategic apprehensions of the Quad too—as a neo-imperialist power, China exercises political command through economic leverage, transitioning from the low-profile risk-averse choices that a neo-mercantilist power would generally exhibit.⁴³ Arguably as the richest government in modern history, China’s more than 3 trillion USD foreign reserves⁴⁴ allow it to pursue a strategy of “charm offensive” through impressive project financing strategies that India can hardly rival. Unsustainable practices, nontransparent financing, and stronger political contacts in the region have further complicated India’s choices. Thus, China’s neo-imperialist power base in India’s backyard might encourage New Delhi to consider joining the BDN in the post-COVID period.

More than this, India choosing to join the BDN will imply a move toward improving quality infrastructure and connectivity beyond domestic needs. As an Indo-Pacific initiative, the BDN aims to grade infrastructure financing across the Indo-Pacific through a ratings system of international standards.⁴⁵ By implementing a certification process, it will ensure transparency and confidence among economically weaker countries. As an emerging economy and a rising Indo-Pacific power, India’s quest for quality infrastructure domestically and search for finance to promote its connectivity network across the immediate and extended neighborhood might make the BDN a natural choice.

A partaking in the BDN would imply a strategic modification in India’s Indo-Pacific narrative. For long, New Delhi’s policy drew on its SAGAR vision,⁴⁶ which emphasizes inclusiveness, without engaging in a “power containment” strategy. In fact, the India–China chronicle suggests that India’s approach to China was always based on a case-by-case model; for example, India, as a founding member along with China, fully accepted the establishment of the AIIB for infrastructure financing and connectivity promotion in the region.

Perhaps India’s post-Galwan China policy will decidedly change this process: China will no longer be seen as a partner, economic or otherwise. The new policy

will likely focus on today's realities, putting India's security and sovereignty interests above other benefits. India will also not hesitate to resort to a confrontational measure, if needed. Thus, India's foreign policy will actively pursue alignments with new partners, those who can potentially facilitate its emergence as an Indo-Pacific power. Hence, the US strategic frameworks like Quad Plus and BDN will take a primary place in the foreign policy overtures of New Delhi in times to come.⁴⁷

By endorsing the Quad Plus ambit, India seems to be embracing the US world-view. Washington has reciprocated by involving India in the newly expanded G7. The Galwan incident can be expected to further build this synergy with the United States, which is "closely monitoring" the situation between India and China. In such a scenario, the BDN allows India to create an "economic alliance exercise" poised to shape the post-COVID world order, which is expected to exact a heavy price on international trade and supply chain networks.⁴⁸

The BDN is a strategic launch that focuses on the US interests in the Indo-Pacific. It is meant to strengthen the US alliances and security partnerships across the region that have roots in the "China containment" policy. Moreover, it is similar to the other US initiatives in the region, such as Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), Infrastructure Transaction and Assistant Network (ITAN), Asia Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy (Asia EDGE), and the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018.⁴⁹ Accentuated indirectly by these other US initiatives, BDN will seek to strengthen a conjoined US attempt at rebuilding American presence in the Indo-Pacific.

For long, the US "carrot-and-stick" policy (primarily implemented for Iran)⁵⁰—a combination of US diplomacy and economic and military prowess that was implemented mainly during the Barack Obama administration—was unable to totally dissuade Beijing from challenging the former's security order. Rather, massive Chinese adventurism through the BRI has challenged US supremacy in the Indo-Pacific. The Trump administration's initiatives such as the BDN, the DCCP, ITAN, Asia EDGE, and the BUILD Act, therefore, intend to not only challenge Chinese adventurism in the Indo-Pacific but also strengthen Washington's strategic outreach. To this effect, the United States would prefer an "India plus BDN" framework. This would also enhance the Quad's "sphere of influence" in the sub-regions of the Indo-Pacific, namely Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the IOR, where Beijing has emerged as the number one trading partner, much to the credit of its BRI diplomacy.

The BDN is the first multistakeholder, multilateral project in the Indo-Pacific advocated by the United States, and Indian presence in the network is vital for Washington. US Indo-Pacific strategies largely focus around India as a strategic

partner; the South Asia office of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) functions out of New Delhi and is responsible for the implementation of ASIA Edge and ITAN in the region. In addition, the United States considers the Quad members as central to its Indo-Pacific strategy; Washington’s Asia Re-assurance Initiative Act (ARIA) of 2018 regards the grouping as “vital to address the pressing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.” While India is cautious about its role in the Quad, Indian presence in the BDN will go a long way in strengthening the US’s Quad ambition.

“India Plus BDN” Strengthens the Quad Process

India’s prospect of joining the BDN has substantially grown following its recent Ladakh standoff with China. It will rest on whether India finds strategic consonance in its partnerships with the United States, Japan, and Australia in an age of Quad Plus. An “India plus BDN” will not only strengthen the Quad process but also trilateral frameworks like India–Australia–Japan, US–India–Australia, and US–India–Japan, providing a much-needed economic synergy boost in post-COVID ties. Nevertheless, a prospective India plus BDN setup is primarily dependent upon the India–US partnership.

The United States has accorded a special standing to India as a partner in its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy, as also in its energy and defense sectors. For example, Asia EDGE has strengthened India–US energy cooperation. USAID under Asia EDGE is working with India to promote New Delhi’s energy mission for providing “Power for All,” targeting 175 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2022 and modernization of the large energy sector.⁵¹ India’s involvement in the BDN might encourage a much more serious energy-specific cooperation across the Indo-Pacific, especially considering the growing relevance of the sea lines of communication.

Also, a cooperation framework like the BDN will allow India to address the urgency borne out of China’s increasing military-maritime-commercial footprint in the IOR. For instance, China’s warship presence in the IOR during the Maldives political crisis in 2018 signaled Beijing’s growing ambitions.⁵² Earlier, in 2017, Maldives had signed a free trade agreement with China as part of the Maritime Silk Road.⁵³ Moreover, in September 2019, Chinese vessels entered the Indian exclusive economic zone near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which was perceived as a strategic challenge to Indian maritime superiority.⁵⁴

A stronger regional partnership with Japan could be another motivating factor for India joining the BDN. Tokyo’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision has a stronger anti-China perspective, apart from other national security imperatives in the maritime domain.⁵⁵ China’s charm-offensive economic strategy and maritime

coercive diplomacy have increasingly constrained Japan's strategic choices across Asia. Japan's infrastructure investment is witnessing a growing contest from BRI investments in Southeast Asia.⁵⁶ China has not only replaced Tokyo as the top development financier in Southeast Asia but is also seeking to overthrow Japan in providing better "quality infrastructure." The large-scale Chinese economy, which currently is roughly two-and-a-half times the size of the Japanese economy, high military expenditure, and increasing infrastructure investment packages to Southeast Asia have compelled Japan to look for new partners through the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI). Therefore, Japan needs reliable partnerships, both within and outside the region, and India's Act East Policy emerges as a natural partner to the EPQI. The BDN comes in handy in this regard; India's decision to join will only strengthen Japan's strategic forte in the region.

Further, this changing distribution of wealth, influence, and power in the region could also be a strong motivating factor for India to consider joining the BDN. Japan is a long-term economic investor in India, having emerged as the third-largest investor.⁵⁷ For India, the benefits will be wider access to Japanese technologies and infrastructural projects, which enjoy a high reputation of ensuring transparency and quality products. Also, at a time when India's domestic infrastructure needs massive upgrading, a partnership with Japan under the framework of the BDN will be to India's advantage. Moreover, such a partnership could aid in scuttling the prospects of China's BRI in the region. In the post-Galwan period when India is reviewing Chinese investments in the country, this partnership looks even more promising.

More importantly, in India's consideration, Tokyo's FOIP is primarily aimed at securitizing Japan's strategic interests and assets in the Indo-Pacific. Japan's involvement in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Comprehensive Partnership of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Japan-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement are still not enough to replace the strong consumer market that Beijing has built over the years and the large manufacturing powerhouse of Chinese industries.⁵⁸ China is Japan's top import and export destination; hence, a continued engagement is vital. At the same time, Japan's involvement in the BDN is an attempt to gradually break away from this overdependence, which has been made starkly evident post the COVID effect on the global supply chains. The BDN provides a West-centered counter to China's BRI but does not espouse an outwardly China-containment policy. Tadaashi Maeda, governor of the JBIC, has said that the BDN draws on "the promotion of quality infrastructure investment committed by G20 countries."⁵⁹ Hence, Japan aims to expand a quality infrastructural campaign through the BDN while pursuing a China-disentanglement strategy with its Quad partners. Finally, for

the two countries, India joining the BDN would further reinforce the bilateral India-Japan resolve to expedite the process of developing industrial corridors across the Indo-Pacific (e.g. “Platform for Japan-India Business Cooperation in Asia-Africa Region”).⁶⁰

Likewise, for Canberra, participation in the BDN strengthens its “Pacific Set-up” program, which is aimed at augmenting Australia’s stature in the regional and global order.⁶¹ A greater desire for India and Australia to work together in the region as custodians of the liberal order has been visible through the latter’s announcement of the new South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity (SARIC) initiative, which would support regional economic connectivity along with quality infrastructure in South Asia through a 25 million USD investment over four years.⁶² Moreover, Australia is looking toward India and other potential partners to boost infrastructure in the Pacific Islands through developmental projects as part of Canberra’s Pacific Set-up initiative, especially amid the increasing Chinese footprint in the region. Nevertheless, infrastructural cooperation between India and Australia remains at a nascent stage, and the India plus BDN could transform the bilateral ties into a developmental partnership.

Of late, Canberra has been showing greater signs of caution regarding China’s grand infrastructural initiative, particularly in response to the BRI’s autarkic governance, project transparency, amorphous rules for the dispute mediation, and increasing instances of debt-trap diplomacy in the Pacific Ocean region. Six Pacific governments are currently in debt to China: Fiji, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Cook Islands, and Vanuatu.⁶³ It is against the backdrop of China’s opaque developmental projects that Australia has introduced its new debt-financing initiatives as part of its broader Pacific Step-up, besides spearheading the BDN. Australia reiterated these reservations in its foreign policy white paper in 2017, which noted China’s intent to use economic power and infrastructural projects to meet strategic ends.⁶⁴ Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull further echoed the sentiments in his statement in October 2017, in which he propounded that Canberra would be engaging in “specific projects and investments rather than engaging in generalities.”⁶⁵

At the same time, Australia is one of the founding members of the China-led AIIB.⁶⁶ In fact, Australia is the sixth largest shareholder in the AIIB,⁶⁷ having contributed 738 million USD to the organization over the last five years. In other words, Australia’s China policy has been similar to India’s: both perceived the AIIB as a plausible model for a China-led multilateral initiative that promotes rules-based operations, transparency in lending practices, and an accountable and differentiated governance model, unlike the BRI. This complementarity between the Indian and Australian developmental approaches could be fortified through

the BDN. The envisioned infrastructural initiatives could be a promising platform for them to enhance their respective influence in the region.

Further, moving investments out of China in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which has highlighted extreme dependence on China-based supply chains, is a difficult task for nations that cannot afford relocation costs.⁶⁸ Investing in infrastructure needs instead, which allows boost in domestic growth and, in turn, creates prudent locations for industrial growth, is a far more feasible angle. The BDN can help in improving the “ease of doing business” ranking, making infrastructural promotion far more feasible for nations like Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, and India, all are part of the Quad Plus process, which are looking to attract large-scale investments but have more stringent policies.

Summing Up

India is still rightly weighing its options as far as joining the BDN is concerned: Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla has stated that despite convergence on the BDN, important foreign policy decisions require due process.⁶⁹ While the BRI is a national security and sovereignty threat to India, Trump’s “America First”⁷⁰ policy and the US–India trade concerns are no simplistic ordeals either.⁷¹ India and the United States first need a common minimum program that outlines their mutually shared priorities on China and its BRI upon which the New Delhi and Washington can hash out their differences.

India must keep in mind that the growing tensions between the United States and China are unlikely to disappear soon. In the post-COVID world, Washington and Beijing are likely to maintain their mutually confrontational stances. Graham Allison, in his recent *Foreign Policy* article, talks about the increasing chances of the two falling into the “Thucydides trap.”⁷² India, as an emerging power in the Indo-Pacific, must walk a fine line and must not adopt a blatant anti-China approach. At the same time, India must not appear to snub the United States by rejecting the BDN outright. As has been discussed already, the BDN needs to be considered carefully, as it offers several regional benefits that are strategically significant to India.

The BDN will help strengthen ties with all the Quad members: Japan and Australia were disappointed by India’s withdrawal from the RCEP; the BDN has reignited those hopes. Moreover, as a multistakeholder initiative, the BDN would not only be able to involve important regional powers under the same umbrella but also improve their bilateral ties. Such a developed-developing coalition that aims to counter Chinese aggressiveness in the region has immense potential in this imaginary Asian Century.

The BDN will also strengthen third-country cooperation, especially in supply chain and value networks. India and the United States have mutually agreed to include third-country cooperation as part of their strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific: in February 2020, the leaders of the two nations talked about cooperation in third countries through a new partnership between USAID and India's Development Partnership Administration.⁷³ Earlier, in 2019, they signed the First Amendment to the Statement of Guiding Principles (SGP) on Triangular Cooperation for Global Development;⁷⁴ and the second US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue envisioned further cooperation in new areas via joint-judicial workshops between third-country partners.⁷⁵

The Quad alliance can transform into one of the most dynamic economic and strategic Indo-Pacific partnerships of the post-COVID times. The Quad Plus grouping should for now though focus on recoveries from the COVID-induced economic setbacks, while formulating ways toward achieving economic self-sufficiency. For example, members should consider eliminating trade and investment barriers and invest in strategic initiatives like the BDN.⁷⁶ As Xi Jinping's China comes under greater global scrutiny in the post-COVID era—the BRI in particular has attracted controversy because of debt-ridden nations unable to pay off loans in these financially difficult times—the United States, Japan, and Australia must utilize this opportunity to strengthen the BDN. They must carefully induce India to join and also extend the invitation to the new Quad Plus countries.

India must see the BDN as an extension of the Quad (as also the Quad Plus now) that has allowed New Delhi to create a “continental connect” and “corridor of communication.”⁷⁷ It should therefore actively pursue engagements with non-China friendly countries, such as Japan, Australia, and the United States. India has to become more self-reliant and less dependent on China-led global supply chain mechanisms. Joining the BDN is a step in the right direction toward creating alternative supply chain and value mechanisms, boosting infrastructure investments, and protecting national interests in the wake of a resurgent and hyper-aggressive China. ★

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All Quiet on the Eastern Front?

Japan and Russia's Territorial Dispute

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Abstract¹

Japan has disputed Russian ownership of the Northern Territories/Southern Kurils since the end of World War II. Security analyses of Asia-Pacific border disputes generally focus on the multilateral South China Sea or bilateral East China Sea disputes, with only occasional attention paid to the Southern Kurils/Northern Territories disagreement. Should this decades-long territorial dispute between Japan and Russia escalate or become resolved through a stable condominium, strategic stability in Northeast Asia would be affected. Given the numerous failures to resolve the dispute since the end of World War II, this continuing dispute remains overlooked despite clear implications for regional US national security interests. An escalation of this disagreement could affect the implementation of regional ballistic missile defense infrastructure, maintenance of an effective deterrent against North Korea, and China pressing claims on US allies as part of its rise as a regional power. What is the likelihood that Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and President Vladimir Putin's elevated discussions will positively resolve the dispute? Through a two-level game analysis of this territorial dispute, this article argues that while the elite circumstances have never been better to resolve this dispute, popular forces remain significantly divisive, such that the status quo over the Northern Territories will remain in place.

Introduction

At the close of World War II, the Soviets seized the four southernmost Kuril Islands from Japan. In 1951, the Soviet Union rejected conditions set forth by the San Francisco Peace Treaty that would have provided a process to resolve this territorial dispute. High-level negotiations between the two states ensued until the early 1970s, when Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev declared that there *was* no territorial issue.² Lack of traction ensued over signing a peace treaty, with the territorial dispute remaining the chief obstacle to improving relations between Japan and the Russian Federation. Remarkable events since 2016 indicate renewed and positive efforts, however, the likes of which have not been observed in decades. In December 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe welcomed

Russian President Vladimir Putin to Japan for the first time in 11 years, hosting Putin as the first-ever foreign leader in Abe's home prefecture. The two leaders subsequently unveiled a new agreement for the joint economic development of the four disputed Northern Territories under a "special arrangement." While the specifics of such an agreement continue to be negotiated over successive meetings, the potential economic activity under consideration could herald the arrival of a condominium arrangement (shared sovereignty). As negotiations continue over the border dispute, Abe has demonstrated his willingness to move ahead in drawing Russia closer to Japan through other economic ventures. Just one year after the 2016 meeting, Abe's administration had encouraged private-sector investment in the Russian Far East through a cooperation plan that spurred 21 projects, worth over 16 billion USD.³ The high volume of meetings between Abe and Putin, coupled with incremental progress on the dispute, has fostered optimistic expectations on the Japanese side for a major breakthrough.⁴

Recent events since 2016 appear to present a distinctively new "window of opportunity"⁵ for resolution of the territorial dispute. Japan experts observing each encounter and statement by Putin, Abe, and their close advisers have renewed hope for a resolution. This position expresses optimism that the Northern Territories dispute may be resolved through a condominium territorial arrangement⁶ or even bilateral security cooperation.⁷ For much of the territorial dispute's history, however, severely circumscribed bargaining room prevented Japanese leaders from moving past an initial stage of asserting claims. As Putin and Abe now plumb the linguistic incertitude of previous bilateral statements on the territorial dispute,⁸ creative bargaining maneuvers have become necessary to achieve a solution that can satisfy the important audiences in each country. While recognizing the significant obstacles that have derailed success in past negotiations, the optimistic camp tends to emphasize the positive developments as evidence that there is space for resolution before Abe leaves office. In contrast, this article argues that powerful barriers will likely impede Abe's desire to take major steps toward resolution, given the time constraints and other important regional security challenges.⁹ Putin may also lack the incentives to soften the shock to Russian citizens of ceding Russian land gained victoriously from the Japanese in World War II.¹⁰ In the end, there may simply be no room for acceptable compromise.¹¹ Using Robert Putnam's two-level game analysis, this article finds that, despite the recent favorable conditions for resolution of the territorial dispute, popular forces in Japan—and especially Russia—will foreclose the possibility of overall successful diplomatic efforts before Mr. Abe leaves office in 2021.

Two-Level Game Analysis

Putnam's "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics"¹² analyzes the interrelationship between domestic politics and international diplomacy as a "two-level game." Putnam explicitly considers the process in which state leaders negotiating an agreement with their foreign counterparts and the subsequent process of submitting the agreement for ratification by their particular domestic "selectorates," whether democratic, autocratic, or semidemocratic. As Putnam states:

The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.¹³

Each "sovereign" ignores one of the two "levels" of the negotiation at its peril. Negotiators, on behalf of their sovereign leaders, need not only secure agreement with their foreign negotiating counterparts (the Level I tentative agreement, in Putnam's parlance) but also with their authoritative domestic constituency (the Level II legal ratification). For any likely agreement, the respective negotiating parties' "win-sets" (space for negotiation) must overlap.

Putnam makes two key counterintuitive points on the dynamics of these win-sets, however. First, while more room to maneuver at Level 1 makes an accord more likely, negotiators will be fixated on the "deliverability" of the accord at the domestic level. As Putnam describes it, the fear of involuntary defection with the respective domestic political processes completely undercuts the practical realities of the delivered accord—a factor that we will return to in the Japan–Russia negotiations over the disputed Northern Territories. Second, Putnam cautions us to consider how the size of the Level II win-set (the conditions the domestic constituency will accept to ratify) affects the distribution of the joint gains from the international accord reached in Level I. That is, the more limited a negotiator is by the prospects of ratification, the less her position can reasonably change—as Putnam says, the less she can be "pushed around."

The successful negotiator will have a firm grasp on both her own Level II political constraints as well as her opponent's. Win-set uncertainty can be a stumbling block to overcome (in terms of evaluating the likelihood of "unintentional defection") as well as a useful bargaining device (in overstating one's political constraints). Japan's territorial dispute with Russia fundamentally involves the type of territorial

sovereignty claims that have invoked nationalism on both sides, but it also includes potential access to resources, along with strategic military positioning. This analysis thus employs Putnam's two-level game framework by focusing on the interaction between governments and domestic nationalist concerns—specifically how domestic institutions interact with the strategies of negotiators. We explore how Japanese and Russian political preferences, economic priorities, risk assessments, historical memories, potential side payments, and institutional constraints affect the likelihood of a near-term successful international accommodation.

Historic Japanese–Russian Relations and the Disputed Territory

A Century of Shifting Control: 1850s–1950s

Prime Minister Abe's opening comments to the 2018 Diet reflect an important reality: Japanese–Russian relations have much potential. Tense bilateral relations have historically derailed prospects for cooperation, instead encouraging competition for land, resources, and regional power. Ambitious British and American efforts at expansion into the Far East in the 1850s motivated Russian officials to build good relations with then-isolationist Japan.¹⁴ The Russian fears were not ill-founded, as Great Britain and the United States each signed treaties with Japan in 1854. Both agreements encouraged diplomatic and economic interdependence between each state and Japan by facilitating easier port access and granting most-favored-nation treatment.¹⁵ Russian and Japanese officials subsequently adopted and expanded similar conditions in their 1855 Treaty of Shimoda, setting in motion the process for discussing other potential areas of disagreement. Among these was the important issue of territory demarcation. The Treaty of Shimoda drew a boundary between Etorofu and Uruppu, allotting the four currently disputed islands south of Uruppu to Japan and the remaining islands north of Etorofu to Russia.¹⁶ Sakhalin remained under joint control for another 20 years, until the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg settled the issue by giving Russia complete possession of Sakhalin and Japan complete possession of the Kuril island chain.¹⁷

The newly established borders between Russia and Japan, both now expansionist powers, changed once again—this time through force—during the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–05; the victorious Japanese gained the southern half of Sakhalin through the Treaty of Portsmouth.¹⁸ By the outbreak of World War II, Japan had solidified its position as a major regional power in the Far East. While Japan agreed to sign a Neutrality Pact with the Soviet Union in April 1941, both powers continued to maneuver in anticipation of major territorial shifts that could result from the war. These expectations became a reality on 8 August 1945, when

Soviet troops abruptly abrogated the Neutrality Pact by swooping in with a massive offensive in Manchuria, circumventing Japanese fortifications.¹⁹ Soviet fighting persisted after Japan announced its surrender on 15 August, leading to the Soviet takeover of all of the Kuril Islands, including the four currently disputed ones, by 5 September.²⁰

Japan's shock over this episode profoundly shaped its perceptions about Soviet intentions and trustworthiness by the beginning of the Cold War. The US-crafted San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 formally ended the war between Japan and the Soviet Union, though the Soviets withheld assent over certain treaty stipulations. On the other hand, Japan signed the treaty with Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida verbally affirming the status of Kunashiri and Etorofu being "of the South Kurils" and Shikotan and the Habomais as part of the Japanese territory of Hokkaido.²¹ Yoshida took this stance knowing that Article 2(c) of the treaty stipulated that Japan "renounces all right, title and claim to the Kuril Islands" and all other territory gained through the Treaty of Portsmouth. At this crucial juncture, then, the official Japanese position acknowledged only two islands as inherent territory. Operating in light of this principle, Japan today seems justified in requesting rightful ownership of perhaps only the smallest two of the four disputed territories.

Yoshida's comments notwithstanding, the San Francisco Peace Treaty's imprecision aggravated the territorial dispute in two important ways. First, the treaty failed to delineate the borders between the Kuril Islands and the territory belonging to Hokkaido. Second, the treaty avoided designating the rightful owner of the Kuril Islands after Japan ceded this territory. The Soviet Union's decision to avoid signing the treaty and submitting to its dictates thus complicates Russia's rightful claims to the territory, according to the Japanese position. This territorial dispute quickly became known as the "Northern Territories Problem" (*hoppo ryodo mondai*) in Japan, gradually deepening into the most inveterate thorn in the relations between the two states today. Although the two sides still have not signed a peace treaty, the 1956 Joint Declaration relieved much of the postwar tension.

The Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration of 1956 poses significant questions about what could have led to a different regional power alignment had the United States not intervened in negotiations. Beginning only a decade after the Soviet takeover of the Kuril island chain, Soviet-Japanese negotiations nearly resolved the territorial dispute. Still recognizing Etorofu and Kunashiri as part of the Kuril Islands, the Soviets nonetheless prepared to return Shikotan and the Habomais while tabling discussion of the remaining two islands for "future discussion."²² Importantly, the proposal guaranteed conclusion of a peace treaty before "the Soviet Union would benevolently return Shikotan and the Habomai Islets to Japan."²³ Such a prospect generated fears in the Eisenhower administration of

closer Japanese–Soviet relations. Due to these fears, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles pressed his Japanese counterpart to take a stronger stance on all sovereignty claims northeast of Hokkaido. US support augmented efforts by conservative Japanese political elites, who strove to fixate national policy on grouping the four islands as a single issue endowed with an indivisible nature. Instead of two islands being the starting point in negotiations, then, the Japanese side soon demanded the return of all four disputed territories from the Soviet Union.

In return for Japan's newly delimited bargaining room, the United States agreed to the eventual return of Okinawa to Japan. A stalemate ensued thereafter in Japanese–Soviet negotiations, hardening the future stances of both parties. Japan's renewed security treaty with the United States in 1960 prompted the Soviet Union to proclaim that no territory would be returned to Japan until after the withdrawal of all US military forces from Japanese territory.²⁴ In 1961, the Soviet Union declared that “territorial issues between Japan and the Soviet Union are resolved,” closing off the opportunity for further negotiation.²⁵ The Soviet Union continued publicly asserting that no dispute existed, even after private comments during 1973 negotiations between Secretary-General Brezhnev and Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka indicated otherwise.²⁶ Both sides failed to make any progress throughout the remainder of the Cold War.

Formation & Entrenchment of Japan's “Inherent Territory” Rhetoric: 1950s–Present

In the years leading up to the Soviet Union's collapse, the official Japanese narrative on the Northern Territories problem crystallized, as the islands became endowed with greater symbolic worth. Such discourse cemented the status of these islands in the minds of the Japanese people, setting the stage for difficult bargaining in the future. Maps produced by Hokkaido government officials and individual explorers prior to 1945 treated only the Habomai archipelago as an integral part of Hokkaido and the other islands as integral to the Kuril Islands.²⁷ Gradually, the Japanese government began to consider all four islands as “inherent territory.” This position originated in a grassroots movement initiated by Nemuro mayor Ishisuke Ando shortly after Soviet occupation of the islands.²⁸ The city of Nemuro originally served as the hub of economic activity for northeast Hokkaido and the southern Kuril Islands. After the islands transitioned to Soviet control, most of the former Japanese inhabitants moved to Nemuro. Consequently, concerns over economic pragmatism formed the basis for Nemuro's irredentist movement, which petitioned the central government in Tokyo only for the return of the four islands closest in proximity to Nemuro. The other Kuril Islands, like Sakhalin

Island, lacked the same emotional connection for these Japanese citizens, who had spent their entire lives on the four Northern Territories. Nemuro-based activists thus made their demands while acknowledging Kunashiri and Etorofu as part of the Kuril island chain and claiming both the Habomais and Shikotan as part of Hokkaido.²⁹ The first two islands stood a lesser chance of being transferred back to Japan compared to the other two, but the irredentists committed themselves to securing the return of all four islands.

Political considerations joined economic considerations over the “inherent territories” when the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) identified a means to counter its political rivals. The language of *inherent territory* initially became manifest on the national level during the Soviet–Japan negotiations of 1955–56. Halfway through the negotiations, Japanese diplomats argued for the first time that “the four islands are inherently part of Japanese territories,” going so far as to label all four islands “Northern Territories” instead of “Southern Kurils.”³⁰ As such, Japan would no longer consider any of these disputed islands part of the territory ceded after signing the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. A subsequent national directive by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in 1964 repudiating the term “Southern Kurils” in reference to the disputed territories cemented the official status of the “Northern Territories” among the public.³¹ The Japanese government later established a holiday to commemorate the “Northern Territories” on 7 February, the anniversary of the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda. Necessity soon propelled the LDP to embrace a strong position on the “Northern Territories” issue for domestic political reasons as well. The LDP co-opted and emphasized the language used by the grassroots irredentists in Hokkaido to shift domestic focus away from the rival socialist party’s opposition to the LDP’s Okinawa stance of allowing American bases to remain after the island’s reversion to Japan.³² Perceived worldwide Soviet aggrandizement needed to be countered, whether on Japan’s northern border or within its borders in the form of dangerous ideologies opposed to Japanese national security.

Just before the Soviet Union collapsed, Japanese officials believed the time was finally ripe for settling the dispute. One particular Japanese diplomat played a crucial role in orchestrating an event never before seen in Japan. On 18 April 1991, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev became the first leader of either Tsarist Russia or the Soviet Union to visit Japan.³³ The diplomat Gorbachev traveled to meet was the LDP secretary-general, Shintarō Abe. Using a new approach that he termed “creative diplomacy,” Abe focused on building mutual trust with Gorbachev. This concept accentuated a feature of the bilateral relationship noticeably absent since the nineteenth century.³⁴ Emblematic of this approach, Abe’s USSR visit to meet with Gorbachev the year before eschewed talk of “territorial dispute”

in favor of more general reforms.³⁵ Recognizing the potential for fruitful discussion after decades of failed progress, Abe viewed trust building as possible only within a broader framework of Japanese–Soviet relations. Enlarging the sphere of constructive dialogue would gradually pave the way for expanding future bargaining room on the territories.

During this meeting, then, Shintarō Abe only indirectly referred to “the difficult issue” while insisting on cooperation to solve the issue with “sagacity” and “prudence.”³⁶ In taking this stance, Abe implicitly acknowledged constraints that simultaneously limited the meeting’s possible outcomes and obliged him to display political acumen in ways hitherto unseen in Japanese diplomacy. Abe’s softened stance in this meeting reciprocated a similar response from Gorbachev, signaling a modification in the Soviet stance on the territorial issue. Official Soviet acknowledgement of the dispute reemerged after being shelved decades earlier.³⁷ To cement the foundation of this new relationship, Abe unveiled an eight-point cooperation plan that centered on establishing economic, cultural, and academic projects within the disputed territories and the USSR more generally.³⁸ Both states would carry out these projects in a long-term manner, constantly evaluating the intentions and trustfulness of the other side, en route to eventual negotiations over the territories.

Unfortunately for these prospects, Shintarō Abe died in May 1991, one month after Gorbachev’s visit to Japan. Without the dedicated efforts of this eminent statesman, Japanese diplomacy toward Russia returned to a position that reaffirmed the inseparability of economics and politics. Japanese skepticism about the possibility for true Russian reform undergirded this position. As much of the West became optimistic about Russian integration into the liberal international order, Japanese policy makers and citizens hazarded a more cautious view. The prevailing Japanese narrative about Russia emphasized the “original form” of an essentially Russian “paradoxical, traitorous, cunning, and calculating character [that] was contrasted with Japanese consistency and integrity.”³⁹

In many ways, the advent of Russian President Putin opened the most important chapter in the territorial dispute’s history. During his first term as president, in March 2001, Putin signed the Irkutsk Declaration with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshirō Mori. This document explicitly reaffirmed the Joint Declaration of 1956 as the starting point for negotiating a peace treaty, adding that attribution of the four disputed territories must be resolved in this process.⁴⁰ Holding the weight of a written statement instead of verbal promises, this declaration announced the official resumption of efforts that had been tabled four decades earlier. Putin’s hold on power nearly two decades later provides additional hope to the similarly

stable Shinzō Abe administration in Japan. Still, progress between the Russian and Japanese governments remains largely incremental.

Russia's Newly Energized Asia Policy: Necessarily a Pivot?

Russia has had high hopes for rapprochement with Japan. While the primary object of Russia's own Asian pivot has been China, a successful Asia policy fundamentally involves Japan. In September 2012, newly re-elected President Vladimir Putin hosted the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit meeting in Vladivostok. Later, in June 2013, he announced a series of economic initiatives at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum to integrate the Russian economy into the Asia-Pacific region rather than in European markets.⁴¹ Taken together, analysts equated these actions with the US "Asian Pivot," declaring it "Russia's Pivot."⁴² A key difference, however, is that Russia faced east to *cooperate*, not *compete*, with China in both economic and security terms. Also, it is wrong to say that Russia was *pivoting* to Asia, especially since they are already geographically present there. Most of the Russian land mass is Asian, and the Russian Federation already had key economic and political interactions with Asian states.

Asia has much to offer Russia: close customers for its gas and oil exports, investment to develop Russia's energy infrastructure in Siberia and the Russian Far East, and an alternative to Russian economic dependence on the West. Yet Mr. Putin's words forecasted the trajectory of Russian policy for the next five years. China, not Japan, was the primary object of Russia's newly energized Asia policy. However, new possibilities would emerge in the Russia-Japan relationship. Russia explicitly sought to mitigate the dependence on China this "pivot" might create by pursuing a trilateral relationship involving Japan.

In 2003, Dmitri Trenin's *End of Eurasia* thesis attempted to answer the prevailing question of Russia's alliances. Trenin argued that Russia, given its myriad regional challenges, should integrate with the European Union and pursue cordial relations with the United States, thereby essentially joining the West.⁴³ Since independence in 1992, the Russian Federation had been struggling with how best to integrate with Western political and economic institutions. Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov's foreign policy from 1996 to 1998 abruptly rejected US leadership; his airplane's sudden turnaround after the US bombing of Belgrade was named the "Primakov Loop." His "statist" view of the national interest attempted to reconfigure Russia's presence in the international system as a great power, this time in a multipolar world. He opposed Prime Minister Andrei Kozyrev's "liberal westernism" that emphasized integration into Western institutions and non-interference in former Soviet states.⁴⁴

Mr. Putin's first presidential term would attempt to cooperate with the United States and the West in pragmatic rather than ideological terms. As he moved into his second term, he sought to renew Russian assertiveness. Despite the Russian invasion of Georgia, Dmitri Medvedev's presidency would attempt a new pragmatism with the United States, as he sought Western economic support for his modernization program. His program included the "reset" of relations with the United States, the conclusion of the new START treaty that limited strategic nuclear missiles, a unified front to contain Iran's nuclear program, and cooperation on US efforts in Afghanistan. President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin certainly emphasized the Asia-Pacific region as well but not at the expense of Russia's relation to the West—at least not until 2013.

Underlying Russia's economic vision for investment in its Far East are its national security concerns. Upon returning to the presidency in 2012, Putin declared development of this region one of his chief priorities. The massive Far East is rich in resources but lacks the infrastructure to harness those resources. High levels of bureaucratic corruption and interference dimmed the prospects for attracting investment, leading to Putin's decision to establish a "Free Port of Vladivostok" in 2015. Seen as the bridge to connect Russia to Asia, Vladivostok represents the key to unlocking access to Asian economic markets and security partnerships as Russia turns its gaze from Europe. Vladivostok, which is protected by the Kuril island chain to its east, also serves as Russia's point for eastern power projection, housing the Pacific Fleet headquarters.

The ascendancy of Mr. Putin in 2012 also saw the marginalization of pro-Western elites in the Russian government. Elites who favored defending Russia's sovereignty and cultural distinctiveness returned. There was also a renewed emphasis on Russia's Orthodox Christian cultural distinctiveness. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that there would be a fundamental Russian break with Western institutions. After Putin emphasized Russian conservative values—national unity, sovereignty, and the traditional family—he was at odds with the liberal Western principles of minority rights, democratization, and institutional human rights. States along Russia's eastern border required no such compliance with international norms. Mr. Putin's return marked a reinvigoration of Russian efforts to move the international system closer to multipolarity and away from the US-led liberal international order.

Russia had been nurturing a closer relationship with China since 1994, when the two countries legally resolved their border disputes. Since then, whenever Russia has moved away from the West, it has made greater diplomatic, economic, and military cooperative overtures to China. Still, despite treaties and good relations, Russia's 2013 Asia policy was driven by its continuing anxiety about the

vulnerability of its southeastern border and by its desire to boost its economic and political presence in the Pacific. Though Russia was once again drifting from the West in 2013, there was still the possibility that it might backtrack, in accordance with Trenin's admonition to integrate westward. A series of actions, however, culminating with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, would forestall any westward movement in the near term. The invasion represented a fundamental shift in Russia's departure from Europe and entrance into Asia.

Russia headed east primarily for economic reasons—its prosperity would be better served by Asia's more dynamic economies—but it also has strong geopolitical considerations for the move. It needs to develop its Russian Far East (RFE) and Eastern Siberia regions into manufacturing hubs and reroute its energy transportation infrastructure to supply energy to the rest of Asia. In order for Medvedev's own reset to be successful, he needed to deliver a security framework acceptable to the United States, Europe, and Russia. It was his failure that compelled Russia in another direction. Since then, Russia has attempted to build an eastern multilateral security framework that is more multipolar rather than centered on US power.⁴⁵ The strategic and economic constraints imposed by US and EU sanctions after the Ukraine invasion enhanced Russia's relations with China. Since 2014, Moscow hoped to counter the sanctions primarily by strengthening its energy and defense alliance with China. Russia's international aspirations, however, are at odds with dependence on China. Their relationship is already an unequal one; Russia's Asian strategy thus necessarily includes cultivating ties with other Asian states such as India, Vietnam, and Japan. These states have historically had discordant relations with Russia.

Russia's 2016 Foreign Policy Concept fundamentally postulates that the center of the world is shifting to the Asia-Pacific region away from the "traditional western powers."⁴⁶ As in previous versions, Russia emphasizes its geographic position as the key transit zone between Europe and Asia as well as its desire to integrate with the Asia-Pacific region to develop the RFE and Siberia. Russia maintains a leading role in the Eurasian Economic Union and envisions a similar role within the Shanghai Cooperative Organization and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations to facilitate such "integration." Since 2012, and especially 2016, Mr. Putin has increased the pace of his official visits to China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. Trade with Asia has certainly increased with the opening of new oil and natural gas pipelines along with liquefied natural gas shipments.⁴⁷

Japan has a key place in Russia's energized Asia policy. Russia has reached the limit of its political and economic expansion. This is a constraint in its relationship with Japan. As discussed above, the key obstacle to Russia's more cordial relationship with Japan is the disagreement over the ownership of the Northern

Territories/Southern Kuril Islands. Japan and Russia remain far apart on the issue of sovereignty of these islands, preventing a final agreement like the one reached by Russia and China in 1994. The US–Japan security relationship has been reinforced by the resurgence of China, particularly given China’s muscular foreign policy position over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute. If a peace treaty could be concluded, Japan would become Russia’s partner—an even more logical partner than China. Japan poses no threat to Russian security, and Tokyo would be a more accommodating economic partner. Japan’s technology would be a greater boon than China’s.

Seven years after Russia’s Asian Pivot,⁴⁸ most analysts consider this move to be either only a partial success or a failure.⁴⁹ Russia was able to conclude a 400 billion USD natural gas deal with China, but China is paying less than what Russia was getting from Western Europe. Furthermore, Chinese investment in the RFE and Siberia has not materialized like Putin had anticipated.⁵⁰ China has many energy options, soon to include Iran, whereas Russia has fewer and fewer hydrocarbon customers. Beijing still has a more similar worldview to Russia than Europe (and vice-versa), but Russia remains in a disadvantaged position in its relations with China.

An Unmistakable (and Final?) Window of Opportunity: The Abe–Putin Relationship

Since the end of 2016, the convergence of a remarkable number of events suggests considerable potential for resolution of the territorial dispute and conclusion of a peace treaty between Japan and Russia. Mr. Putin and Mr. Abe have often publicly declared support to resolve the Northern Territories dispute, and the conditions for doing so have rarely been better. Nonetheless, popular forces likely remain sufficiently opposed to any terms of a resolution such that the status quo over the Northern territories will remain between Japan and the Russian Federation.

The relationship between Putin and Abe represents perhaps the greatest opportunity for resolution in the territorial dispute’s history. Recognizing the need to directly work with Putin on the dispute, Abe orchestrated the Yamaguchi Summit at a hot springs hotel in his hometown on 15–16 December, 2016.⁵¹ As Putin’s first visit to Japan in 11 years as president, Abe planned an extravagant setting for their sixteenth official meeting to make significant progress on securing denouement of the territorial dispute. Highlights of the summit included the unfolding of proposed Joint Economic Activities (JEA) to be initiated in the Northern Territories under a “special agreement.”⁵² Last proposed in 1998 by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in talks with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the

previous JEA plan failed over lack of agreement on issues of jurisdiction and sovereignty.⁵³ While the specifics of this “special agreement” to create a type of condominium agreement remain undeveloped, Japanese officials view the JEA as an indispensable means to soften Russian nationalistic sentiment.

Diplomatic events in 2018 accompany progress made on the economic front between Japan and Russia, thereby encouraging prospects for resolving the territorial dispute. National elections in May and September 2018 cemented the legacies of both President Putin and Prime Minister Abe as the longest-serving leaders of their countries since the end of the Cold War and World War II, respectively. After parliamentary elections in October 2017, Abe’s LDP holds a two-thirds supermajority in both houses of Japan’s Diet.⁵⁴ Further, Abe retained his position as LDP president with support from 70 percent of his party parliamentarians in the September 2018 leadership election, highlighting strong support of his policy agenda from within the government. Overwhelming LDP power in the government helps provide ample room for Abe’s negotiations with Putin, pending public support for this and other issues, like constitutional revision.

Favorable events notwithstanding, Russia’s military modernization on the disputed territories poses a challenge to resolution of the issue. In January 2018, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev approved Etorofu’s civilian airport for war-plane deployment just prior to exercises held on the four disputed islands by 2,000 Russian troops.⁵⁵ Taking place around Japan’s holiday commemorating the Northern Territories, these exercises stung Japanese politicians. Since 2015, Russia has concentrated its efforts to modernize its military capabilities on the Northern Territories. Indeed, post-2014 Japanese sanctions on Russia after the Crimea annexation led Russia to step up “military maneuvers, new infrastructure, and military modernization” on and near the Northern Territories.⁵⁶ Then-President Medvedev’s visit to the disputed territories in 2010 initiated the Russian buildup, but the process accelerated after his second visit following Russia’s annexation of Crimea.⁵⁷ In December 2015, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia planned to actively develop military facilities to support its tanks, self-propelled artillery, multiple launch rocket system, surface-to-air systems, and helicopters that defend the islands.⁵⁸ The Japanese Ministry of Defense also reported that Russia equipped its forces on Etorofu and Kunashiri with Bastion and Bal coastal defense missiles in November 2016 before Etorofu’s civilian airport received Su-35 air-defense fighters in March and August 2018.⁵⁹ In fear of increased militarization, Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera has asked his Russian counterparts in 2+2 security talks to reduce Russian military activities on the islands.⁶⁰

Finally, the US–Japan security alliance’s answer to the North Korea missile threat poses another challenge to resolution of the territorial dispute between Russia and Japan. Criticism from Russia on the heels of a 2+2 meeting between Japanese and Russian foreign and defense ministers in July 2018 characterized Japan’s then-decision to initiate deployment of the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense system as a “deployment of the US global missile defense.”⁶¹ Even though many within the Japanese government argue defensively against Russian opposition to this technology, some Japanese experts contend that Russian officials believe that US-produced technology will never be controlled completely by those nations to whom Washington sells the equipment.⁶² Moreover, Japanese Defense Minister Onodera explicitly stated the need to counter “cruise missiles approaching Japan” in a January 2018 visit to Aegis Ashore systems in Hawaii.⁶³ With cruise missile capabilities employed more by China and Russia than North Korea, Russia portrays Japan’s actions as another step away from developing a relationship based on trust. Without such a relationship, no significant progress may be made to resolve the territorial dispute. Japan’s recent decision to cancel its Aegis Ashore purchase, prompted largely by domestic and budgetary considerations,⁶⁴ thus does little to allay Russian concerns about the ultimate direction of the US–Japan security alliance.

Japan and Russia’s Two-Level Game

In Japan, developments since 2016 have created perhaps the largest potential win-set size since the initial stages of Japan’s 1955–56 negotiations with the Soviet Union. As described earlier, Level I and II negotiations historically faced constraints due to the high symbolic worth of the Northern Territories and concomitant challenges in dividing “inherent territory” of Japan. This narrative gradually united politicians from all parties eager to contrast a Japan respectful of the rules-based international order with an aggressive Soviet Union actuated primarily by *raison d’état*. To divert scrutiny from pre-1945 Japanese “authoritarianism, militarism, and imperialism,” conservative politicians in particular juxtaposed Japan with the Soviet “other.”⁶⁵ When post-communist Russia began transforming from a threatening “otherness” through increased global engagement and decreased troop presence in the RFE, Japanese leaders built trust with their Russian counterparts through greater socialization.⁶⁶ Greater cooperation between the two states has not been substantively derailed by Russian aggression in 2008 and 2014. Prime Minister Abe is personally committed to resolving Japan’s territorial dispute and looks to take advantage of relatively recent major shifts in both levels of negotiations.

As the chief Level I negotiator on the Japanese side, Abe’s decision to emphasize his support of the 1956 Joint Declaration risks running afoul of political

opposition groups. In November 2018, the head of the main opposition party remarked that “our predecessors were striving to get the four islands back together, so I hope the negotiations will be headed for that.”⁶⁷ Abe’s return to the Joint Declaration as a starting point with Putin raises the perennially intractable questions of attribution for each of the four islands. Even the process of ascribing the term “return” or “transfer” of Shikotan and the Habomais leading to a peace treaty becomes problematic when discussing future sovereignty of these islands, as President Putin has pointed out.⁶⁸ Even so, Abe has the potential support he needs from LDP parliamentarians after recent elections in order to overcome elite opposition to more creative negotiations. Furthermore, sizeable support in public opinions polls from 2013 indicate Level II support may be open to a compromise.⁶⁹ Whereas tremendous opposition to compromise existed until recently, weariness over lack of progress coupled with increasingly pressing strategic concerns permit Abe to expand his win-set size.

The major shift in Japan’s acceptance of territorial divisibility comes on the heels of its changing perceptions about the symbolic worth of the islands. As memories of the Soviet Union recede into the annals of textbook-based history, the public knowledge of the Northern Territories dispute also subsides. The younger generation of Japanese come to understand geostrategic challenges stemming from the east and south without understanding the issues surrounding the dispute with Russia.⁷⁰ Furthermore, James Brown notes that “while 81.5% have at least some knowledge of the dispute, only 3.2% would campaign actively for the islands’ return, according to Cabinet Office data.”⁷¹ Taking advantage of the essentially democratic attribute of short-term memory, Abe conspicuously avoided using the language “inherent territory” in advance of the 2019 celebration of Northern Territories Day.⁷² Without extensive coverage of the territorial dispute, particularly in branding the four islands “inherent,” Abe further expands the Level II wiggle room he needs to achieve compromise with Putin.

The final obstacle that narrows Abe’s win-set is the reputational cost to Japan in negotiating its other territorial disputes with South Korea and China. The Takeshima/Dokdo dispute with South Korea surfaces from time to time, with South Korea recently lodging a complaint in response to the Japanese government’s 2018 decision to sponsor an exhibition exerting its territorial claims in a newly opened museum in Tokyo.⁷³ Japan’s territorial dispute with China rightly receives more attention, given the greater likelihood of gray-zone conflicts quickly escalating into armed ones. Japan’s strategic documents orient the state toward such a prospect. For this reason, a second F-15 squadron added to Okinawa in 2016 enabled the Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) to conduct an average of two intercepts of Chinese aircraft per day beginning in April 2016.⁷⁴

Additionally, Chinese Coast Guard vessels have “intruded at least a few times a month into Japanese territorial waters around the disputed Senkaku islands.” Japan has grown increasingly concerned after China’s 2018 decision to transfer administrative control of its coast guard from civilian to military authority.⁷⁵ Among these concerns is the perception that China continues to move away from pursuing a “non-militarized, peaceful and stable environment” near disputed territories.⁷⁶ Conversely, the bilateral Maritime and Aerial Mechanism was launched in June 2018 after 11 years of talks about its proper functionality.⁷⁷ This arrangement encouragingly provides a direct communications link between Japan and China to deescalate potential tensions that may threaten an outbreak of conflict. Despite these positive developments, the Senkaku and Takeshima disputes provide a moderately significant barrier for reputational costs to a Japan in pursuit of resolution with Russia. Abe would need to be mindful both of Level I negotiators involved in these other disputes as well as Japanese interest groups that may seek to politicize an agreement with Russia for their benefit. The latter would include political opposition groups and business interests tied to the vast natural resources in the East China Sea.

President Putin’s effective management of the Russian Federation’s political system ensures that the Russian Duma and Federation Council, along with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and the Russian judiciary, will pose little domestic Level II threat to any accommodation with Japan over the Northern Territories/Southern Kurils. Institutions in competitive authoritarian systems, as described by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, are incentivized by leadership to support the critical initiatives of the state with no meaningful political opposition.⁷⁸ The meaningful opposition in the Russian case would come from the citizens of the Russian Federation. Putin’s basis for legitimacy rests on the Russian people, not institutions, with his idea of “sovereign democracy.”⁷⁹ Any surrender of Russian territory is likely to erode domestic support for Putin’s regime. Russian experts have suggested that any decision of this type is “certain to provoke fierce protests in Russia and undermine public support for Putin’s government.”⁸⁰ Mr. Putin started 2018 with an 85 percent approval rating, yet in mid-2020 he has seen his support decline to 59 percent.⁸¹ In the face of declining earnings from oil exports and the growing indeterminacy of the Ukraine crisis, amid Russia’s struggle in containing the coronavirus, Putin has little domestic capital to expend on resolving the dispute with Japan—even in handing over the smaller Habomai islets and Shikotan.

Conclusion

Longstanding territorial disputes can unexpectedly escalate into the deadliest of conflicts. Currently the dispute between Russia and Japan over the Northern

Territories/Southern Kurils is not militarized, is not escalating, and lacks the imminent danger of the East and South China Sea disputes. Yet resolution of this Russo–Japanese dispute would change northeastern Asian strategic stability. This article has demonstrated the range of complex issues facing elite (Level I, in Two-Level Game terms) resolution of the conflict between Japan and Russia. Domestic pressures, however, compound the low probability that this dispute will be resolved in the near term, forestalling Japan and Russia’s drawing closer and keeping Japan nearer to the United States and further from Russia. As time runs out for the long-serving Japanese prime minister, Abe may explore a greater number of novel solutions to achieve breakthrough on an issue that has eluded both his father and him. To what extent, then, can Abe successfully leverage this electoral limitation in his negotiations with Putin? The Russian side hesitates on rushing the process, instead offering a unique interpretation to Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka’s 1973 poetic remarks to Brezhnev: “Although man is not eternal, the human kind will exist always.” Elite circumstances have never been better to resolve this dispute; however, domestic pressure within both Japan and Russia will continue to prevent fundamental dispute resolution—the status quo over the Northern Territories will remain in place. Contrary to Tanaka’s intended meaning, Russian elites may be patient enough to delay the territorial dispute’s resolution to future generations more disposed to benefit. ★

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Notes

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Repression and Revolt in Balochistan

The Uncertainty and Survival of a People's National Aspirations

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Rife with historical tensions, the region of Balochistan has erupted into insurrections against the Pakistani state since 1948. Convinced of being historically wronged, the Baloch view their fight as one against repression and for self-determination. Though residing in the same region, the ethnic identity of the Baloch has remained in sharp contrast to the ultranationalism that defines the Pakistani state. Therefore, the Pakistani security forces, who see many of the Baloch nationalist groups as terrorists, have crushed any opposition or demand for reform. This, in addition to a deteriorating human rights scenario has further cemented Baloch opposition against Pakistan. Across the border in Iran, the Baloch face a similar fate, with extreme deprivation and marginalization by the Iranian theocracy. While undoubtedly possessing unique identities and aspirations, repression and ignorance on both sides of the border have resulted in a common desire for liberation. However, the fact that an international border separates two distinctive Baloch communities, one motivated by secular aspirations and the other by Sunni Islam, any progress toward a unified front is hindered. Drawing on such dynamics, this article will seek to highlight the fact that even though the fight for Balochistan is one of international significance, most observers have ignored the situation, leaving the Baloch in a drawn-out insurgency with no support and an increased feeling of uncertainty. In this context, many have termed the Baloch freedom movement as dying or dead. Nevertheless, recent instances have shown that the tensions in the region are still relatively on the rise. This article will seek to highlight and contextualize such events and happenings in a gradually deteriorating environment.

A Historical Note

Today, the land of the Baloch is divided among the countries of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Almost evenly portioned between Pakistan and Iran, it is categorized as the provinces of Balochistan and Sistan-Baluchistan respectively. Within Afghanistan, a small portion of the Kandahar, Helmand, and Nimruz provinces are also part of Balochistan. The division of the region among three different countries goes back to the era of empires in southern and western Asia.

Sandwiched between the Persian and Indian empires on either side, the region has been at the crux of power play throughout history. In the 1500s, Balochistan was carved up between the Mughals to the east and the Safavids to the west.¹ However, after the consecutive demise of these vast empires, the region collapsed into a number of principalities, with Kalat emerging at the forefront of these. The Khans of Kalat emerged as the primary forces behind attempts at sovereignty and consolidation of the state of Balochistan in the years to come. Nevertheless, in the 1800s, with the emergence of the British Raj in India and the Qajar empire in Persia, Kalat and the larger region of Balochistan was once again at the center of the regional power play. While the British transformed Kalat into an associated state of the British Empire in 1854,² Persia reconquered western Balochistan, a region that Iran retains to this day.

While it has been assumed and held as the truth by many that Balochistan was accorded the status of a Princely State under British administration during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, the Baloch themselves hold a different position. According to both separatists as well as Baloch politicians today, Balochistan or more specifically, the Khanate of Kalat, was never a part of British India and, thus, could not be treated as a part of Pakistan. Treating Balochistan as a state of the erstwhile empire would be a violation of the treaty agreements between the Kalat state and the British Raj. The aforementioned treaty is that of 1876 between the Viceroy and Governor General, Lord Lytton, and the Khan of Kalat, Mir Khudadad Khab, which mentioned that the British government would respect the independence of Kalat as long as it would act in “subordinate coordination.”³ In accordance with this, the Baloch observe that the Kalat state had a different direct relationship with the British government that was separate from the British Raj in India. Nonetheless, during the process of Indian independence, before the Partition was decided upon, even Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru held that Balochistan was an integral part of India.⁴ A border state of a newly emerging nation could not be allowed to gain independence after all.

In this context, the independence of Pakistan in 1947 brought increased pressure on the Khan of Kalat to allow for accession of the Kalat state to the state of Pakistan. However, the lower house of the Balochistan parliament unanimously passed a resolution declaring that relations with Pakistan should be established as between two sovereign states and not by accession.⁵ It is to be noted that when Pakistan declared independence in August 1947, so also did the Khan of Kalat declare independence for Balochistan. While this signified a unified Balochi dissent against accession to the Pakistani state, the newly formed Pakistani government would not adhere to it. Largely motivated by the fear of Indian influence in a strategically critical region, Pakistan sought to carry out the accession forcefully.

Initially capitalizing on the rivalry and feuds between the Khan and the surrounding regions, it motivated many of Kalat's feudatories to join Pakistan. This, along with the mounting pressure of a possible military offensive against Kalat, served as the final straw. The Khan eventually signed the instrument of accession in March 1948, less than a year following Balochistan's declared independence.

This forceful accession of Kalat to Pakistan signified the end of the brief period of national sovereignty for the Baloch and, thus, immediately caused anti-Pakistan protests to engulf Balochistan. This marked the beginning of a struggle that has endured for decades. Pakistan's penchant for ignoring the concerns and identities of the minor ethnic groups fueled rebellion and restiveness throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. While certain achievements were made within the autonomy provided for the Baloch in the 1970s, Islamabad quashed this too. The 1970 election that brought to power the prominent National Awami League, a coalition of Baloch parties, which began to make significant structural changes in promotion of the Baloch people, was ousted by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Islamabad.⁶ Such interference sparked a renewed rebellion in Balochistan, which resulted in the loss of 3,000 Pakistani soldiers and about 5,000 Baloch guerrilla fighters, in a conflict that lasted nearly four years. And while the Pakistani army and government were able to quell the insurgency in the 1970s, they were not able to win over the Baloch, who once again led an insurrection against the quasi-military government of Pervez Musharraf in the early 2000s.

Even though this latest uprising has shown signs of faltering or completely dying out over the past two decades, it persists today. Numerous groups that carry out acts of political violence against the Pakistani forces have emerged over the years. However, the fight for Balochistan now shows signs of desperation. Provoked by the neglect of the Pakistani government in ensuring economic or social stability and development in the region, the Baloch see a great need in separating from Pakistan. Today Balochistan's Human Development Index (HDI) ranks below 0.40 as compared to the other provinces of Pakistan that lie above 0.50.⁷ In sharper contrast, a 2016 study by the Social Development and Policy Centre showed certain districts in Balochistan ranking below the 0.30 mark.⁸ In fact, out of the 15 districts with the lowest HDI indexes in Pakistan, 11 were from Balochistan. According to a United Nations Development Programme report from 2003, nearly 47 percent of the 31 districts with the lowest HDI indicators were in Balochistan.⁹ In the context of the 2016 study, it is evident that not much has changed.

Today there has possibly been increased development in the region due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). However, this merely serves greater strategic aspirations and is not to be understood as beneficial to the Baloch in any way. The neglect meted out by the Pakistani state to the region of Balochistan has

always been a sticking point. It is a clear indication of the lack of attachment Pakistan shares for a people and land it sought to possess rather than assimilate.

Pakistan's Repression

For decades, Pakistan has suppressed and ignored the Baloch people, infuriating them and yet reducing their capabilities of protest. Out of fear of a resurgence and possibility of a united Balochistan, the government in Islamabad has only sought to consolidate more power and maintain complete control of the region through Pakistan's security forces. However, this has resulted in a deplorable human rights situation in Balochistan. The general approach adopted by the Pakistani state toward any dissent in the region has been that of force, often disproportionate to the threat. Using the military to quell any Baloch uprising into submission has become a norm, and any attempts at protest have been reduced to naught. The main cause of the Baloch failure to launch an all-out offensive against the Pakistani army has been a shortage in numbers. While undoubtedly empowered by a feeling of commitment to the Baloch nationalist cause, the fact that the Baloch comprise less than 5 percent of the total population of Pakistan, hinders any progress. Though the province of Balochistan accounts for nearly 44 percent of the Pakistani state, its population is equal to only 12.3 million as compared to approximately 200 million in the rest of Pakistan.¹⁰

Such contrast in the numbers has meant that none of the uprisings against the government have been able to sustain themselves. Additionally, not only is the region of Balochistan sparsely populated but also the Baloch themselves only account for 60 percent of the population in Balochistan. The rest of the population consists of Pashtuns, Sindhis and Punjabis.¹¹ In countering such contrasting difficulties, the Baloch have adopted tactics of guerrilla warfare, which has given rise to groups like the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and the Balochistan Republican Army (BRA). In dealing with these groups as well, the Pakistani government has not sought methods of mediation or resolution but instead once again delegated the task to the military. To this end, activists and politicians like Naela Qadri Baloch, who fled Pakistan in 2016, have accused the Pakistani government of committing genocide in the region.¹² Even though such accusations are plentiful, the international community has largely ignored the Baloch cause.

While some may perceive claims of genocide as exaggerations, they are not baseless, and certain activities currently occurring in Balochistan lend support to such accusations. There are two primary methods of repression adopted by the Pakistani state: bribes and all-out bludgeoning of the Baloch.¹³ The military has thus been accused of destroying and depopulating Baloch as well as being responsible for a multitude of forced disappearances in urban and rural Balochistan. Any

person considered a supporter or sympathizer of the Baloch freedom movement is considered a threat and kidnapped, tortured, or killed. This has not only affected the common people but also high-ranking officials. The 2006 arrest of Akhtar Mengal, the Chief Minister of Balochistan, is a glaring example. He was arrested and denied basic rights of medical treatment or bedding while being imprisoned. Adding insult to injury, he was also kept in a cage during subsequent court proceedings.¹⁴ Nonetheless, such denial of basic prison rights is the least the Pakistani state has done. Their atrocities in the region are far worse.

The number of cases of disappearing Baloch being attributed to either Pakistan's security forces or Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) has slowly been on the rise. Many political activists, members of the Baloch Students Organization, and journalists have been abducted in broad daylight by pro-Pakistani gunmen and security forces. For example, Hamid Mir, a senior Pakistani journalist, hosting a program on Balochistan in 2014, was shot in a suspected assassination attempt by ISI gunmen—although Mir survived, the case highlights Islamabad's extreme attempts to censor media coverage of tensions in Balochistan.¹⁵ A year later, a famous human rights activist, Sabeen Mahmud, was killed by gunmen in Karachi for hosting an event called "Take 2 of Unsilenced Balochistan." While the attack was pinned on random Pakistanis who felt threatened by a woman talking about human rights issues in a province of Pakistan, fellow activists have accused Pakistan's powerful ISI of playing a role.¹⁶ These are just two in a number of other cases that have plagued both Baloch and other activists fighting for their rights. This has continued to such an extent, that with hundreds of bodies being uncovered every year, Balochistan is now being viewed as Pakistan's land of mass graves.¹⁷ Thus, it is evident that Naela Baloch's accusations of genocide are perhaps not too far from the truth.

However, Pakistani repression does not stop there. Not only have the Baloch people been ignored and repressed but the Pakistani state has also exploited the resource rich region for oil and mining—with no benefits to the people of the province. While gas was discovered in the province in the 1950s, it was largely used to supply Karachi and Punjab, with Quetta, the capital of Balochistan only receiving access to these local resources in the 1980s.¹⁸ Since then, Islamabad has provided this natural gas only to supply the army cantonments in Balochistan, and as of 2014, 59 percent of the urban population of Balochistan did not have access to the resource. As of January 2020, the Sui Southern Gas Company, which supplies gas to Sindh and Balochistan, reported the shortfall of gas at nearly 40 percent.¹⁹ The federal government's continued marginalization of the province stands as the cause of this problem and is also at the crux of Baloch dissent against Chinese investment and the CPEC. Such deprivation, combined with the repres-

sion and blatant disregard for the Baloch people, is held as justification for their increasing resentment and larger aspirations for freedom.

Across the Border in Iran

In the Shia-dominated country of Iran, the Baloch are disregarded in much the same way as in Pakistan. While on the Pakistani side, nationalist and federalist aspirations factor highly, for the Iranians, the tensions and repression of the Baloch are a result of the religious divide. With the predominantly Sunni Baloch accounting for scarcely 2 percent of Iran's 82 million in an overwhelmingly Shiite nation, Tehran has largely neglected or suppressed the minority. A lack of reporting as well as immense repression from the Iranian government has not allowed for Baloch struggles to reach a tipping point. There has been a rise in radical movements and terrorist groups across the province, but the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other such security forces have been largely suppressed such organizations. Nonetheless, throughout last year, attacks in the region have increased significantly, with numerous reports highlighting the possibility of a growing Sunni insurgency in Sistan-Baluchistan.²⁰

Like other minorities in Iran, the Baloch have faced political, cultural, and socioeconomic discrimination at the hands of the government. Not only are the Baloch underrepresented in the government and the security forces, but much like their distant kin in Pakistan, they also live in one of the poorest provinces in Iran. Areas with larger Baloch populations are severely undeveloped, with reports indicating that nearly 70 percent of the population lives under the poverty line.²¹ As a result, four prominent militant groups have arisen in Iran. Historically, the first and most prominent of these was Jundallah or the "Soldiers of God." This rather radical group has played a role in the extreme radicalization and instability in the province. Being responsible for a number of attacks and bombings on both government and civilian targets, the organization was highly active from 2003 until 2010, when its founder, Abdolmalek Rigi, was tried and hanged.²² The execution of Rigi caused Jundallah to splinter into the Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) and the Harakat Ansar Iran (Movement for the Partisans of Iran) groups, which are prominent and active even today. While the Harakat Ansar Iran group merged with another and transformed itself into the Ansar al-Furqan (Guardians of the Criterion) militant group, Jaish al-Adl has remained the most powerful of the splinter organizations.²³

Jaish al-Adl has carried out a number of prominent attacks against the Iranian government, which considers the organization to be the successor of the Jundallah. However, while Tehran categorizes as separatists, the group has identified themselves as "Iranian," with merely the need to gain Sunni representation in the

Shiite-dominated country.²⁴ Thus, the group has adopted tactics of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, carrying out some of their deadliest attacks within the last few years. On 16 October 2018, 12 IRGC members were kidnapped from an outpost in western Iran in retaliation to the death of four Sunni Baloch militants.²⁵ Government forces were only able to recover five of the abductees. Within the next few months, the group carried out another attack against the IRGC, killing at least 27 in a suicide bombing in February 2019.²⁶ In December 2018, another three people were presumably killed and 40 others injured in an attack in the port city of Chahabar conducted by either Jaish al-Adl or Ansar al-Furqan.²⁷ Thus, the Iranian government sees Jaish al-Adl as a prominent security threat, alleging interference and support from external actors like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.²⁸ However, the US government designated the group as a global terrorist organization in 2019.²⁹

While Jaish al-Adl and its counterparts on the Pakistani side have similar aspirations for the liberation of the Baloch, the ideologies of the various organizations are not harmonious with one another. While organizations like the Balochistan Raaji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS, Balochistan National Freedom Front) in Pakistan is motivated by secular and nationalist aspirations or at least the need to launch coordinated attacks against the Pakistani military and Chinese interests in the region, sectarian and religious currents govern the motivations of Jaish al-Adl. This has resulted in regular cross-border conflicts between both groups.³⁰ Thus, it is understood that the overemphasis of the religious identity that Jaish al-Adl seeks to instill in the Baloch is in complete contrast to the secular aspirations of the militant groups in Pakistan.

Baloch Uprising, Aspirations, and Leaders

While Jaish al-Adl dominates the landscape on the Iranian side, the BRAS does so on the Pakistani side. Launched in November 2018, the BRAS is a unification and consolidation of three Baloch subnationalist groups, the BLF, the Baloch Republican Guards (BRG), and a splinter faction of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA).³¹ However, this unification is symbolic of recent developments, and the fight under such militant groups has continued since the beginning of the fifth uprising in 2002. Initially adopting a hardline approach against the military, the militants' use of guerrilla warfare has drawn out the conflict for almost two decades. The early years of the conflict saw Balochistan descend into an all-out insurgency, with militants capturing and controlling vast regions under the BLA, the primary group at the time. The key leaders of the insurgents at the time were Akbar Bugti and Balach Marri, two tribal *sardars* who held influence over a large number of Baloch.³² It was claimed at the time that nearly 2,000 Bugtis and an

equal number of Marris, among others tribes spread across Balochistan, were resisting the Pakistani forces.³³ Today, many key leaders of the Baloch have been exiled from the country or killed by the Pakistani state in a bid to reduce dissent in the region. This has undoubtedly reduced the intensity of the insurgency of the early 2000s. However, the BRAS and other militant groups active in the region still carry out frequent attacks against the Pakistani establishment.

Table 1. Major Attacks against the Pakistani Armed Forces and Chinese projects³⁴

Date	Killed	Injured	Attack Details	Location	Perpetrator
30 AUG 2018	0	3	Suicide attack by son of Baloch leader injured Chinese engineers	Dalbandin, Pakistan	BLA
23 NOV 2018	4	0	Hour-long shootout at the Chinese consulate, killing police and civilians	Chinese Consulate, Karachi, Pakistan	BLA
14 DEC 2018	6	14	Attack on Frontier Corps	Kech District, Pakistan	BLA, BRAS
29 JAN 2019	9	21	Bombing and firing at the Office of the Deputy Inspector General, killed 5 police and 4 civilians	Office of Deputy Inspector General, Loralai, Pakistan	Unknown
16 FEB 2019	2	0	Attack on Frontier Corps	Loralai, Pakistan	Unknown
18 FEB 2019	4	0	Attack on Frontier Corps	Panjgur District, Pakistan	BLA
29 MAR 2019	Not Specified	Not Specified	22-vehicle convoy attacked by remote-controlled bomb, killing several Chinese engineers and workers. This attack coincided with the visit of the Pakistani Prime Minister to Gwadar	Hamdard University, Karachi	BLA
18 APR 2019	14	0	15 attackers stopped a bus and killed 10 naval, 3 air force, and 1 coast guard officers.	Makran coastal highway, between Karachi and Gwadar, Pakistan	BRAS
12 MAY 2019	5	0	Bomb on Pearl Continental Hotel in retaliation to Chinese projects in the region, killed 4 hotel workers and a naval officer.	Gwadar, Pakistan	BLA
13 MAY 2019	4	11	Blast near a police van	Mini Market area, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
20 JUL 2019	1	10	1 policeman killed	Double Road, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
27 JUL 2019	4	0	Attack on Frontier Corps across the Pak-Afghan border	Turbat District, Pakistan	Unknown
30 JUL 2019	5	32	Blast near a police van	Quetta, Pakistan	Taliban
26 SEPT 2019	0	3	Three policemen killed by a bomb	Bypass, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
29 SEPT 2019	3	12	Bomb blast	Chaman, Pakistan	Unknown

Repression and Revolt in Balochistan

Date	Killed	Injured	Attack Details	Location	Perpetrator
16 OCT 2019	1	5	Attack on bypass, possibly by Tehrik-e Taliban (TPP) or other extremist groups	Bypass, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
21 OCT 2019	3	9	Attack, possibly by TPP or other extremists	Spinny Road, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
30 OCT 2019	1	0	Suicide bomber on motorbike killed 1 policeman	Loralai, Pakistan	Unknown
16 NOV 2019	3	4	Roadside bomb killed 3 paramilitary troops	Kalach, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
10 JAN 2020	15	20	Suicide bomber targeted a mosque in Quetta, possibly by a religious extremist group	Satellite Town, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
17 FEB 2020	10	35	Suicide bomber hit a police vehicle	Quetta Press Club, Quetta, Pakistan	Unknown
19 FEB 2020	16	0	16 Army personnel killed by BLT	Singsila area, Dera Bugti District, Pakistan	Balochistan Liberation Tigers
20 FEB 2020	5	3	Attack against a Frontier Corps check post	Turbat District, Pakistan	Unknown
19 MAY 2020	6	0	Frontier Corps vehicle targeted by improvised explosive devices	Mach District, Pakistan	Unknown
13 JUN 2020	1	1	Attack on state-backed "death squad" members operating under the ISI and army	Panjgur District, Pakistan	BRA
16 JUN 2020	1	0	One man shot dead in retaliation for murder of Baloch woman in 2019	Panjgur District, Pakistan	BRA
3 JUL 2020	0	Not Specified	Attack on levies post in Chappar Lat area, where militants confiscated ammunition	Harnai District, Pakistan	BLA
5 JUL 2020	Not Specified	Not Specified	Militants attacked Security Forces checkpoints with heavy weaponry	Harnai District, Pakistan	BLA
7 JUL 2020	5	Not Specified	A convoy of the Frontier Corps was ambushed on its way to a military camp at Narom	Kech District, Pakistan	BRAS
9 JUL 2020	0	Not Specified	36-inch gas pipeline destroyed with an explosive in Pir Chata area	Dera Bugti District, Pakistan	BLT
11 JUL 2020	0	2	Unidentified gunman opened fire and critically injured two policemen	Mastung District, Pakistan	Unknown
14 JUL 2020	3	8	Militants carried out a "fire raid" on Security Forces patrolling convoy near Kahan area	Panjgur District, Pakistan	BLF
17 JUL 2020	2	6	An Anti-Narcotics Force team of the Pakistani Security Forces was attacked and bombed	Kharan District, Pakistan	Unknown
19 JUL 2020	0	Not Specified	Unidentified militants attacked the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited gas field and attacked security posts around the field	Dera Bugti District, Balochistan	Unkown

The attacks listed in table 1 are a clear indication that while the intensity of the uprising has been reduced, it has not been quelled completely. With this, the Bugti–Marri areas, the Quetta region, central Balochistan, and the Makran belt have continued to bear the brunt of these attacks. A possible reasoning behind the same is the support the movement still receives. Even though many key leaders of the Balochistan militant groups have been exiled from Pakistan, they still direct affairs from abroad. Brahamdagh Bugti, the grandson of Akbar Bugti, is currently in the United Kingdom, apparently still in control of the Balochistan Republican Army, the alleged militant wing of his Balochistan Republican Party (BRP).³⁵ Balach Marri's brothers have also been exiled from Pakistan but are still viewed as influential among the continuing nationalist movements. Mehran Marri, who was granted political asylum in the United Kingdom, is allegedly the leader of the United Baloch Army, a splinter faction of the BLA, which was apparently led by Hyrbyair Marri, his other brother.³⁶ Finally, the Lashkar-e-Balochistan, another nationalist group in Balochistan, is allegedly headed by Javed Mengal, the son of former chief minister Ataullah Mengal and brother of Akhtar Mengal.³⁷ While unable to directly contribute to the groups in Balochistan, they have apparently sourced funding and seek to globalize an issue that has failed to garner international attention and aid.

On 9 September 2019, banners calling attention to the acute human rights violations in Balochistan appeared in Geneva, Switzerland, in front of the venue for the 42nd session of the UN Human Rights Council.³⁸ The key drivers of such protests and campaigns have been the BRP and the Free Balochistan Movement (FBM), headed by Hyrbyair Marri.³⁹ The BRP and the World Baloch Organization have also held a number of campaigns across the United Kingdom, raising banners of “End Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan.”⁴⁰ In 2019, there was an increase in the campaigns across London, in the form of newspaper advertisements, billboard signs, and joint awareness campaigns. In the month of June, the BRP also flew “Free Balochistan” banners during a Pakistan–Afghanistan cricket match in Headingley Stadium.⁴¹ Such campaigning has not only been prominent in London but also at events held in Switzerland, South Korea, and across Balochistan. A conference titled “The Humanitarian Challenges in Balochistan” was also held in Germany by the Human Rights Council of Balochistan, the Baloch Human Rights Organization and the Baloch Human Rights Council—three organizations dedicated to the Baloch cause.⁴² However, it is doubtful that this has resulted in much for the movement as a whole.

Nonetheless, within Balochistan, inflammatory actions aimed at escalating tensions with the Pakistani government have surfaced once again. Leaders like Khalil Baloch, the current chairman of the Balochistan National Movement (BNM),

have vowed support for Balochistan's "freedom fighters." In an e-mail interview in 2019, he was quoted as saying "the recent escalation in militant attacks is a direct reaction to the growing atrocities committed by the Pakistani army in Balochistan and China's relentless plunder of Baloch resources."⁴³ In the same interview, he also said that the BNM, once one of the strongest parties in Balochistan, would no longer negotiate autonomy with the Pakistani government and seek a separate state for itself. Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, the leader of the BLF, has also made such statements within the last year. When asked in an interview why democratic means have not been used to resolve grievances with Pakistan, he said that "there is no democracy in Pakistan and the Baloch are compelled to rebel against oppression."⁴⁴

Such statements have seemingly coincided with the increasing attacks in the region over the past few months, as can be seen in table 1. Largely centered around Balochistan's capital city of Quetta, the attacks draw attention to the increasing unrest in the province. This unrest also reached a tipping point in the beginning of June 2020, with mass protests being held across the province in retaliation for the shooting of a mother and her child by Pakistani army-supported criminals. Protests have erupted across Balochistan demanding justice for four-year-old Bramsh, who was shot along with her mother, Malik Naz, in Turbat city in southern Balochistan.⁴⁵ According to reports, thousands of protestors pelted stones and burned a number of military establishments, forcing Pakistani Army soldiers to abandon their border patrol posts.⁴⁶ The problem with the situation in Balochistan is that protests or campaigns do not suppress the brutality of the Pakistani forces but seem to only incite more of the same.

While reports of the large protests in the province surfaced on 11 June, the Pakistani military abducted eight Baloch youths four days later.⁴⁷ It is alleged that nearly 47,000 Baloch have been illegally abducted by the Pakistani armed forces.⁴⁸ Since the protests on 11 June 2020, reports have shown a significant increase in the number of enforced disappearances, raids, and arrests being carried out by the Pakistani Security Forces.⁴⁹ While the Baloch have strived endlessly for either a separate state or at the very least autonomy, representation, and an end to exploitation, none of their uprisings have gained them much in these regards. It remains to be seen if the recent protests and an increase in attacks will serve to change the current scenario.

Geopolitical Considerations

The increased chances of protest and uprisings in Balochistan have not only destabilized the region but also affected the interests of a number of external actors. While undoubtedly compromising for some, it has also been used as a strategic tool by others. It goes without saying that a united Balochistan, how-

ever unlikely that possibility may be, is an existential threat to both Pakistan and Iran. In 2009, the Khan of Kalat, Mir Suleman Dawood, formed the Council for Independent Balochistan, which was meant to signify a renewed fight for the freedom of Balochistan. This council was to grant representation not only to other separatist leaders like Brahamdaght Bugti but also to Baloch from Iran.⁵⁰ While the initiative never gained traction, it is nonetheless indicative of the Baloch aspiration for a nation comprising of people on either side of the border. It is undoubtedly out of the fear of such aspirations that the governments of both Pakistan and Iran have adopted disproportionate uses of force in countering any uprisings in their provinces.

Another consideration that the Iranian government has to make with regard to the insurgency in Balochistan is that of strategic and economic needs. In light of increasing sanctions from the United States, Iran is seeking a way out into the international market and sees cooperation with China as the next best alternative. Already having shown support for Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Tehran has also recently shown immense interest in the CPEC. In a joint statement in April 2019 between Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan and Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, the two countries pledged to support regional connectivity, raising concerns over a possible China–Iran–Pakistan nexus.⁵¹ In such a scenario, any attacks by the Baloch on Chinese infrastructural projects in Pakistan are detrimental to Iranian interests as well. Therefore, during the meeting in April, decisions over the creation of a Joint Rapid Reaction Force in countering terrorism were made.⁵² While this agreement may serve the strategic purposes of Iran, it could be highly compromising to Pakistan's neighbor to the east, India, with whom Iran has traditionally enjoyed good relations.

With Iran discussing the possibility of a liquefied natural gas pipeline being connected with the CPEC as well as greater cooperation between the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, tensions in India have been stoked, as the latter port was developed with Indian investment.⁵³ For New Delhi, Chabahar was meant to be a means in circumventing Pakistan and solidifying India's access to Central Asia. The project was also part of New Delhi's larger aspirations of countering Chinese influence in the region through the development of India's own counter port. Supposed intervention by India in the region has thus been repeatedly used by the Pakistanis as a tool to link India with the Balochistan freedom struggle.⁵⁴ A separate, friendly, united Balochistan would undoubtedly serve India's greater strategic interests of containing Pakistan's ambitions. However, the question of whether the Indian government has truly intervened in the region is up for debate. Nonetheless, Pakistan has accused India of supporting militant groups in Balochistan since the very first uprising in 1948.

The reference to Balochistan in Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's speech in 2016 was also viewed by Islamabad as an intrusion into Pakistan's affairs.⁵⁵ However, with no references to Balochistan since then, it can be understood that the reference was merely meant as anti-Pakistan rhetoric related to the Kashmir issue rather than any actual support for the freedom movement. Nonetheless, the repercussions of such a statement were manifold. While the statement invigorated a few in Balochistan, it also had serious ramifications for others. According to Hybyair Marri, "If one had checked social media 10 days after the statement, one would have seen that Pakistanis killed about 60–70 Baloch each day," goading them to call on support from their Indian friends.⁵⁶ Thus, Pakistan sees external influence by India as the biggest threat to Balochistan.

On the other hand, for the Baloch, the biggest external threat comes from China. The Baloch approach toward Chinese investment, which was initially accusatory of Islamabad and Beijing's exploitation of Balochistan's resources, has gradually turned violent. Within the last two years, militants have carried out a number of shootings and bombings against Chinese infrastructural projects and Chinese workers. In March 2019, the BLA attacked a 22-vehicle convoy with a remote-controlled bomb that killed several Chinese engineers and workers.⁵⁷ The BLA, which is greatly opposed to further Chinese investment in the region, also targeted the Chinese consulate in Karachi in November 2018.⁵⁸ The organization also claimed responsibility for an attack on a bus carrying Chinese mining workers in August of the same year.⁵⁹ This increase in attacks against the Chinese stems from the Balochs' feeling of being exploited and cheated out of their rightful resources. With the region already being majorly ignored and deprived by the Pakistani government, additional exploitation is unacceptable to the Baloch.

What the Baloch see as exploitation, Islamabad sees as development and Beijing sees as strategic influence. As part of the BRI, the CPEC has been touted as one of its biggest and most controversial projects yet. Initially valued at 46 billion USD, the total cost had risen to 62 billion USD as of 2017,⁶⁰ which has undoubtedly increased even more by now. With infrastructural projects spanning the length and breadth of Pakistan, it is perhaps the biggest project undertaken under the BRI. However, a majority of these projects are found in the province of Balochistan. The Gwadar International Port as well as its airport, along with a vast array of pipelines, railways, and highways all run through this region. These projects are meant merely to facilitate trade and mining for Pakistan and grant China access to the Arabian Sea. For the Baloch, however, there is not much to gain—not only are their resources being exploited but also their land. Gwadar, which constituted the crux of China's strategic plans for the region, has seen an entire special economic zone leased to China for a total of 40 years.⁶¹ Recent reports

regarding the construction of a high-security compound near Gwadar Port, which will apparently be used as a naval base by China, have also surfaced.⁶²

There is also another problem that the Baloch face from increased Chinese investment in the region. As is the case with other Chinese projects around the world, projects and investment under the BRI, including the CPEC, bring with them an influx of Chinese workers. It is believed that China plans to settle nearly 500,000 Chinese in Gwadar port as part of the CPEC, which will have serious repercussions on the national, economic, and historic rights of the Baloch.⁶³ With so many Chinese set to enter Balochistan, the Baloch fear irreversible demographic changes and increased marginalization.⁶⁴ In this context, Mir Suleman Dawood has not only touted the CPEC as an existential threat to the original inhabitants of Balochistan but has also called on both the United States and India to support an independent Balochistan.⁶⁵ While the Baloch have begun a series of attacks against CPEC projects within the region, their leaders are unsuccessfully attempting to draw in support from external stakeholders, terming the CPEC as “threatening to the interests of both India and the US.”⁶⁶

Nonetheless, while such appeals have been directed at the US government time and again, Washington has largely turned a deaf ear. The role the United States plays in Balochistan is undoubtedly one of interest. Under the Obama administration, while some voiced support for a separate Balochistan, the official stance of the government was one against “carving out Balochistan from Pakistan”;⁶⁷ thus, leaving the Baloch to an uncertain fate. In recent times, the uncertainty of US support has increased, with Pres. Donald Trump going so far as to label the BLA as a terrorist group. Coming merely a year before the US presidential elections, this has been viewed as a move to appease the Pakistani government and spur on the Afghan–Taliban peace negotiations.⁶⁸ Amid the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the Trump administration considers the support of Pakistan to be critical to the peace process. Therefore, Washington has finally banned the BLA after years of Pakistani appeals for such action. This approval, however, has had serious ramifications for the Baloch freedom movement, reducing its autonomy and freedom to revolt.

While other issues within Asia have gained significant attention, the Balochs’ freedom struggle has been largely unreported or ignored. The conflict over Kashmir, for example, has featured widely in the international media as well as international government statements for decades. While the US government accepts Balochistan as the territory of Pakistan, it holds that the territory of Kashmir is disputed. Though Washington has expressed concern over the human rights abuses in Balochistan, it remains adamant in its opposition to self-determination for Balochistan.⁶⁹ In July 2019, 16 members of the European Parliament sent a

letter to President Trump, urging him to take cognizance of the human rights violations and exploitation in the region in response to him terming the BLA as terrorists.⁷⁰ While this may mark a certain divergence in stance by a portion of the international community, there has been minimal mention of Balochistan by EU member countries themselves. In sharp contrast, some EU member countries have issued statements on Kashmir, and the EU parliament has also extensively discussed the Kashmir issue.⁷¹ Likewise, the international media has often castigated the Indian armed forces for perceived abuses in Kashmir, while largely ignoring the atrocities committed by the Pakistanis in Balochistan. The international community's contrasting approach to both these issues is quite questionable, lending itself to the politicization of strategic interests. In this scenario, the Baloch are yet again left to fend for themselves.

Conclusion

The future of the Baloch and their freedom movement is embedded in uncertainty. While there are many who see the possibility of a resurgence as likely, the odds are stacked strongly against the Baloch. Lacking in both military prowess as well as economic financing, the Baloch have only been able to sustain their movement for this long due to sheer determination. Thus, the Baloch freedom struggle has suffered a shortage of numbers that will never be a match for the Pakistani military. However, this is not the only obstacle to a united state of Balochistan: the lack of international support and internal unity have also had similar effects. Most of the current leaders of Balochistan are subsumed by their own self-interests and internal political tensions and lack the motivation to form a common front against the Pakistani state. Not only have some sought to fight their own fight, causing the movement to splinter, but many leaders have also been wooed by the government in Islamabad and have thus turned against their own.⁷²

The insufficiency of support from the international community for the movement has become apparent. Though the issue is one of international significance, owing to a number of external stakeholders and cross-border aspirations, it has still been ignored. What is quite apparent is the Baloch will never be able to make any significant gains or even win their freedom from the Pakistani state without external assistance. This has granted the Pakistani government a free hand in dealing with the region, allowing the military to sustain much of its activities in repression of the Baloch. A member of the Indian National Security Advisory Board stated in December 2019 that the insurgency in Balochistan was likely to intensify.⁷³ However, even if there is an iota of truth in this, it is more likely that this too will result in no gains for the Baloch, as the Pakistani state's repression against the Baloch is in fact intensifying in like fashion. According to the Human

Rights Council of Balochistan, the attacks and military raids against the Baloch have also significantly increased, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown.⁷⁴

The determining factor for the Baloch in the end will be that of external influence, whether for benefit or for harm. While India and the United States have chosen to either remain silent or make decisions that are detrimental to the survival of the Baloch freedom movement, the Chinese have been able to retain their presence in the region and almost complete the CPEC. This is clearly indicative of the fact that the Pakistani state has the influence and ability to constrain the insurgencies in the region and carry on with its projects and plans for Balochistan. Already deprived of their resources and repressed by the Pakistani state, it is likely that the Baloch may soon become a marginalized population in their own land. With the military becoming more repressive, the cases of enforced disappearances mounting daily, and the insurgency failing, it has become evident that the Baloch are running out of time. ☛

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Fresh Whole Blood for the Near-Peer and Immature Theater Conflict

Closing a Critical Gap

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Abstract

Living in South Korea during the fall of 2017 through spring of 2018 proved to be politically tense and professionally exciting for the medical enterprise. Increased rocket testing and inflammatory political rhetoric from North Korea increased global scrutiny and media coverage of the region. A very real concern for renewed kinetic war permeated almost every strategic staff meeting. Provision of blood products in the theater to sustain force preservation became a top priority for operational health service support (HSS) planning. According to a report from the United States Institute of Surgical Research in 2018, “US forces in Korea lack an adequate blood supply system, adequate capability to administer damage control resuscitation in the field or during evacuation, and lack adequate surgical treatment capabilities to support combat operations.”¹ Currently, the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) has sustainment plans in place for mature theater operations; i.e., operations greater than 30–60 days post commencement of hostilities. Multiple systemic reviews of operational plans and rehearsal of concept exercises illuminated a critical blind spot in the event of a renewed fight in Korea. The United States lacks a realistic and standardized process to provide an adequate blood supply system for the first 30–60 days of conflict. “Current USFK [United States Forces Korea] efforts to improve training in walking blood bank (WBB) procedures are a step in the right direction toward improving blood availability, but are inadequate to bridge the capability gaps identified in combat casualty care resources.”² The concept of operations for blood supply to US forces is urgently needed in the event of a transition to hostilities in Korea. This article provides a framework to enable readily available fresh whole blood (FWB) to bridge the critical time gap between the first shot being fired and plausible execution of current medical supply plans that rely on functional air and sea supply chains.

Introduction

The Air Force Medical Service's (AFMS) FY19 Strategic Communication Plan contains three main themes. Strategically, it aims to achieve full-spectrum medical readiness, drive AFMS transformation, and strengthen the joint warrior medic with priorities of delivering integrated operational support and trusted care with a readiness focus on expeditionary medicine, partnerships, and innovation. The ability to deliver blood products in the area of responsibility (AOR) in a manner that saves cost (in terms of dollars and lives), reduces time (logistics on delivery of blood products), and impacts quality (both preservation of a fighting force and life itself) is a necessity. The amount of WB required during the initial 30–60 days cannot be overlooked. Modeled casualty estimates do not account for US or host-nation casualties or biological or chemical munitions, nor do these models take high-rise housing into consideration. Seoul represents a true modern megacity, with an estimated population of ~10,000,000 people in Seoul proper and ~25,000,000 in the metropolitan area.³ Blood requirements for traumatically injured soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan provide a systematic framework to comprehend the total amount of blood that will be needed. The civilian population can be considered as having the same risk for traumatic injury as combatants in the event of a kinetic strike on the Seoul metropolitan area. The chairman, Coagulation & Blood Research Department, US Army Institute of Surgical Research, states the criticality of this issue well:

Recent experience (Afghanistan and Iraq) shows that for every 1,000 wounded, at least 10% are at risk of early death due to exsanguination (first 3–6 hours) and will need substantial blood support. These 10% represent [over 40%] of transfused WIA [wounded in action] who will receive massive transfusions (>10U RBCs or WB in 24 hours). For 1,000 wounded, we would anticipate 100 patients consuming about . . . 1,500+ WB units mostly in the first 3–6 hours after injury during damage control resuscitation and surgery. One could estimate that for every 1,000 wounded, at least 2000 WB units or component equivalents (roughly 2,500 RBCs, 2,500 FFP, 400 apheresis platelets, etc.) would be required in the first 3–6 hours following injury. Clearly, this blood requirement cannot be met solely by relying on WBB resources. A plan for rapid supply of blood from forward-deployed [INDO]PACOM units and CONUS must be established and rehearsed.⁴

The complex logistics required in contested environments pose an increased risk to mission and force. As complexity increases, so does the possibility the chain can be disrupted by a failure, constraint, or attack upon any portion of the supply chain. Stringent regulatory requirements ensure the quality of stored blood products. They require proper cold-chain management; inventory tracking; skilled

personnel to collect, monitor, and administer the blood supply; and specialized shipping capabilities.

Transition from armistice to kinetic hostilities results in an immediate increase in the requirement for HSS, including access and distribution of blood products. Blood is central to modern trauma strategies to save lives and conserve the fighting strength. An effective operational plan that can overcome the logistical complexities requires a well-defined process map and identification of key stakeholders in the flow of the process. Establishment of standardized guidance via the implementation of a Department of Defense (DoD)-wide prescreening process will identify and provide the essential ingredient: the blood donor. These identified personnel provide a source of fresh whole blood (FWB) available at day zero of conflict at the time an emergency occurs without further logistical requirements. This article proposes a strategy to provide blood products as far forward as possible to bridge the critical capability gap in a tactical, operational, and strategically economical manner compared with current HSS plans.

The Contested Environment in Korea

Contested environments present significant additional considerations for the provision of HSS that differ from recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. The amount of blood required to effectively treat estimated trauma casualties sustained in the first 30 days of a North Korean attack would be astronomical. The 2019 Committee on Tactical Combat Casualty Care (CoTCCC) guidelines recommend whole blood as the preferred resuscitation fluid.⁵ The classic staple, normal saline, is absent from the recommendations due to a broad body of evidence showing that saline contributes to metabolic derangements causing harm in trauma. Currently, the 121st Combat Support Hospital (CSH) has approximately 30 units of packed red blood cells available. At best, this would resuscitate a couple of major traumas. Multiple factors such as lack of intensive care unit capabilities as well as robust host-nation hospital system result in trauma being deferred to the civilian system in Korea. The physicians assigned to the CSH for one- to two-year tours do not see a significant volume of trauma cases. When looking at the blood demand in the event of war, one cannot consider US casualties in isolation.

Incoming fires on South Korea are expected to include conventional explosives, chemical weapons, biological agents, or a combination of these. These fires would be expected to have a primary impact on the civilian population. The large number of expected Korean casualties will overwhelm the civilian medical system and prevent US forces from utilizing host-nation hospitals as currently done during armistice. Like at other OCONCUS locations, a significant number of US family members accompany their service members to bases in South Korea. The presence

of these civilians creates additional casualties that will strain the blood supply in a transition to hostilities.

Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) will consume significant manpower and resources. With sufficient warning of an attack, an orderly evacuation of noncombatants would follow a directive from the US Ambassador to South Korea. These NEO operations could be another source of fresh blood for US forces. Each eligible adult could donate a unit of FWB while at NEO assembly points awaiting evacuation. The collection at multiple locations would require personnel and equipment to collect, process, and store the blood. FWB is only good for 21 days under ideal storage conditions. NEO assembly points are neither staffed nor equipped to provide this service. Surprise attack poses increased strains on the NEO system.

A surprise attack by North Korea would be expected to make the roads out of Seoul impassable. The “fog of war” created by sudden panic and disorientation makes systematic collection of blood impossible. The service members would report to their war-fighting locations, while their dependents would report to NEO assembly locations with minimal baggage. The psychological impact on service members reporting for war without confirmation that their family members are safe cannot be underestimated. This could result in service members absence until their family members are transported to the NEO assembly point, resulting in a decrease in effectiveness of the fighting force. Medical professionals are not immune to this effect. Depending on a “tenuous at best” and “just trust us it will work” process with multiple unsupportable assumptions does not instill confidence in the war fighter. Current plans to import blood cannot meet the modeled casualty estimations and must be rewritten.

Current blood supply models depend on pre-positioned frozen blood stores or importing blood via air or sea shipment. Current in-theater ability to thaw frozen blood has a capacity of around 200 units per 24-hour period. This amount represents a minuscule contribution compared to expected blood requirements. There is no guarantee that the United States will have air and sea superiority early in a conflict with North Korea. Until air and sea routes of importation are secured, medical support functions will have to rely on blood already available in theater. Using the Korean Red Cross as a source of blood presents another possible alternative.

South Korean practices are very similar to the US blood bank system. In fact, if an American goes to a host-nation hospital and requires a blood transfusion, they receive Korean blood. We have, by practice, accepted that the Korean blood bank system meets acceptable quality standards by sending trauma patients to Korean hospitals. Thus, purchasing blood from the Korean system appears valid. This ar-

gument fails because it focuses solely on quality. The reality of early combat in South Korea will be an issue of quantity and capacity—not quality. In the event of war, the Korean medical system will be inundated with civilian casualties demanding care. The United States should not rely on contracts with the Korean blood system to provide the limited resource to the US military at the expense of Korean citizens. Could the United States utilize patients with clearly nonsurvivable wounds as potential sources of FWB?

Early in the war—when medical supplies, blood, and evacuation options are extremely limited or nonexistent—medics could use mortally wounded patients as a source of FWB. A unit under fire and running low on ammunition would take ammunition from a wounded teammate who is unable to contribute to the fight. Reallocation of resources to the area of greatest need is a well-grounded military principle. This logic would imply that to phlebotomize critically wounded patients who have no reasonable chance of survival would similarly reallocate a critical and finite resource. Current medical practice attempts to keep these patients comfortable with pain medication and companionship while iteratively evaluating their status. Rather than use limited medical resources on these patients, why not use these soldiers as a medical resource for salvageable war fighters? This option represents an emotionally extreme ethical dilemma, though it does not factually differ from organ donation, which is a widely accepted medical practice in the United States.

Organ donation exists in the United States, though typically limited to brain-dead or terminal patients (and specific instances of living donors for bone marrow and kidney transplants). War differs from peacetime medical operations, because military physicians are forced to make quick and calculated decisions between conserving the fighting strength or saving the few who may be more critically wounded with limited medical supplies. Reverse triage addresses this scenario. In war, some patients who may be salvageable during peacetime must be labeled as expectant. Hastening the inevitable death of an expectant warrior to save the life of one or more of his teammates represents an option under extreme circumstances. This drastic measure, while possible, would require a deeper ethics discussion before implementation. So far, discussion has focused on casualties and constraints based on fires into Seoul. North Korean ballistic missiles must also be considered.

North Korean ballistic missiles can reach the full length of the South Korean peninsula. Open-source reporting has also confirmed North Korean missiles capable of reaching Japan, Guam, and the continental United States. This places all major aerial and naval ports of embarkation, as well as major staging areas, within range. North Korea's possession and willingness to use chemical and biological agents further complicates the threat to those air and sea ports. If these

ports were to become contaminated with chemical or biological agents, it is doubtful command authorities would allow assets to land or dock in the contaminated areas. Before the air and sea supply lines can be optimized, the theater ballistic missile and chemical/biological threat must be eliminated or at least reduced to an acceptable level. Optimizing the air and sea supply lines will have a profound impact on delivery of all critical war supplies, including blood.

Once blood arrives in Korea, it must be transported to the patient, or the patient must be brought to the lifesaving resource. Due to the mountainous South Korean geography, a significant number of tunnels and bridges exist between the Greater Metropolitan Seoul Area and the southern port of Busan.⁶ Compromise of these bridges or tunnels will greatly impact evacuation efforts via train or automobile. Gridlocked roads and impassable bridges and tunnels, coupled with mass southward migration of the civilian population, will prevent timely distribution of blood. The same factors will complicate the evacuation of patients from the north to medical facilities located further south. Blood needs to move north from southern ports of embarkation, and the patients need to move south from the northern battlespace. The same movement-restricted environment applies equally to patients and blood supply. Ariel movement will also be disrupted.

Movement via air will be greatly restricted during the first 7–30 days of war. Limited rotary wing assets currently reside on the peninsula. The United States has finite capacity, which is unlikely to be tasked for purely medical reasons. Until incoming fires have been attrited, commanders cannot be expected to risk these limited assets to evacuate patients from frontline areas. Assuming personnel were dispatched to support patient movement, they will have limited options for receiving facilities to offload patients. The same restrictions will apply to areal movement of blood. Fixed-wing delivery options will also be extremely limited until enemy air defenses are reduced and air superiority is gained.

The US military medical system has been a victim of its own success in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recent experiences with 97-percent survival rates for wounded combatants have become the new expectation. Denied and contested environments inherently do not allow for the same level of medical care as locations with established and well-resourced theater combat support hospitals. To maintain the trust of the war fighter, the United States will do everything possible to ensure survival of wounds. The United States must establish a plan to provide life-sustaining and lifesaving medical care in contested or denied environments. Low-titer FWB represents a proven, safe, and economical manner to provide point of injury blood for combat resuscitation.

“Low titer group O whole blood can be considered the standard of care in resuscitation of major hemorrhage.”⁷ Currently, many military units prescreen their

personnel to act as emergency blood donors.⁸ This practice is most commonly referred to as a walking blood bank (WBB). In the Special Operations Forces community there are two notable programs: the Ranger O Low Titer (ROLO),⁹ utilized by the 75th Ranger Regiment, and the Standardized Tactical Universal Donor-Korea (STUD-K) program, utilized by Special Operations Command Korea (SOCKOR)¹⁰ and United States Forces Korea (USFK).¹¹ The WBB does not replace the formal blood bank system. The intent has always been to augment the blood supply in times of exceptional need. Now is the time to move beyond conventional thinking and create a standardized DOD-wide system that is simple, yet responsive enough to provide blood any time and any place that US service members find themselves in harm's way. "Severely injured combat casualties requiring transfusion have a significant mortality rate (range 10–20%) and have the greatest potential to benefit from early and appropriate transfusion strategies."¹² Recent analysis of casualties from Afghanistan clearly shows, "Among medically evacuated US military combat casualties in Afghanistan, blood product transfusion prehospital or within minutes of injury was associated with greater 24-hour and 30-day survival than delayed transfusion or no transfusion."¹³ FWB is the solution, especially in contested or denied environments.

The use of FWB resuscitation decreases mortality and morbidity in war fighters wounded in combat.¹⁴ Transfusion of FWB at the point of injury (POI) can decrease mortality rates of "potentially survivable" injuries. The use of low-titer type O whole blood has been used during many prior conflicts. Low-titer type O blood can be given to anyone on the battlespace with extremely low and acceptable risk of adverse reaction. The current military definition of "low-titer" is less than a 1 to 256 dilution of Anti-A/Anti-B antibodies.¹⁵ Lt Col Ethan Miles of the 75th Ranger Regiment has spearheaded a recent revitalization of this very old concept. SOCKOR used a modified version of his program to scale for use in the Korean theater. This protocol was adopted by 8th Army and implemented by units throughout USFK.

Fresh low-titer whole blood represents a safe cost-effective method to make blood available at the POI. A prescreened donor requires only a simple blood donation bag to be able to provide a unit of warm whole blood. Prescreening donors within the combat units prior to deployment eliminates any need for the supply and distribution chain, because the donor pool has already been established. Use of prescreened WBBs also eliminates very expensive and potentially unreliable infrastructure that requires power to cool and rewarm blood products and the associated technical personnel. FWB from a living donor can be directly infused to a patient without the need for any additional expensive equipment.

Currently the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps all have varying levels of involvement and operating procedures for use of FWB. Most of the programs are run by junior medical officers. Their supervisors possess varying levels of expertise or comfort with this type of program. A plethora of data shows low-titer whole blood can be used safely and efficiently.¹⁶ The required level of safety and certainty during mass casualty in wartime scenarios cannot be expected to match peacetime levels. This is supported by a 2010 policy from the Under Secretary for Health Affairs, Dr. Charles Rice: “The use of non-FDA-compliant blood is sometimes necessary to save lives and may be the only alternative during combat operations or mass casualty events.”¹⁷

Current DOD protocols for accessions require testing for blood type, HIV, hepatitis, sickle cell disease, G6PD deficiency, and other conditions based on a premise of population health, its impact to readiness, and safety. Antibody titer testing should be added to the accession predeployment test profile on all personnel with type O blood. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of the US population has type O blood. Additionally, 25 to 75 percent of personnel with type O blood will have low Anti-A/Anti-B antibody titers. A recent 2019 study in Texas showed that 87 percent of 3,274 type O+ male donors were low-titer.¹⁸ With successive titer testing, it appears that individuals display a tendency toward lower titers. This indicates that titer testing may not be required after the second test if donors have been identified initially as low-titer.¹⁹ Due to the significant cost associated with current models that perform titer testing prior to every deployment, the military should establish service members’ titer with a onetime test. Testing for transfusion-transmitted diseases should be completed concurrently with titer testing.

Current accession testing includes hepatitis and HIV as noted above. Many of the additional confirmatory tests at the ASBP included on standard blood bank panel include Chagas disease, West Nile virus, human T lymphocytes virus, malaria, Zika, babesiosis, among others. While this broader level of testing is appropriate for safety in the much larger and regulated blood banking system, it is not required in the context of this program, because the mortality rate is reduced and all those potential issues in morbidity can be treated afterward.

The risk of a transfusion-transmitted disease will be higher under this program than the formal blood banking system. This recognized risk can be mitigated. HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) do not represent the same threat they did 50 years ago. HIV has become a chronic disease that can be managed, not the relative death sentence it was in the 1980s. HCV is still a major issue, but modern drugs are almost capable of a complete cure.

Conclusion

US servicemembers may be asked to put their lives directly in harm's way. These warriors deserve every opportunity to survive their period of service, whether one tour or an entire career. Exsanguination has been a leading cause of death in every conflict. The use of tourniquets greatly decreased loss of life due to extremity hemorrhage, but this success has been predicated upon early evacuation and early surgical intervention. The situation described above as well as unseen future conflicts in a peer-to-peer or near-peer fight will prevent early evacuation and early damage control resuscitation. A well-established program to prescreen all military members and identify eligible donors, coupled with trained and empowered medics able to perform pre-hospital blood transfusions, will provide the best option to close the critical capability gap.

Now is the time for the DOD to establish a uniform process to prescreen and standardize training and procedures across all military departments. Establishment of a DoD-level program will improve joint medical interoperability. Economic feasibility and interoperability are critical to programmatic sustainability. Establishing a safety net against future disruptions of conventional supply and distribution is vital for combatant survivability in contested environments. Programs established by the 75th Ranger Regiment and SOCKOR serve as proof of concept. These proven and established programs must be scaled and implemented across the whole of the DOD. 🌟

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India's Deterrence Goldilocks Dilemma in South Asia

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Abstract

In the last two decades, the world has experienced a massive shift. Developing countries have economically and militarily advanced and are more aggressively pursuing their national interests. The two largest of these countries, China and India, have been at odds for decades over border disputes. Compounding this, China's closer relations with Pakistan and attempts to encircle India have pushed the two countries on a collision course, one that the United States, which views China as a great-power rival, would be well-positioned to exploit. However, the nuclear standoff between Pakistan and India makes this a difficult task. According to Vipin Narang's works, Pakistan has adopted an asymmetrical escalation nuclear posture that effectively deters India from pressuring it, even in the face of terrorist actions like the 2008 Mumbai attacks. In my research, I seek to present the unique Goldilocks dilemma that balancing China and Pakistan presents to India and examine how closer Indo-American collaboration is the best path to prevent rapid instability and possible nuclear war in the region. This article examines why a closer future US-Indian partnership is needed to finesse India out of its Goldilocks dilemma.

The Deterrence Goldilocks Dilemma

During the Cold War, deterrence was comparatively straightforward: have enough nuclear weapons and well-positioned ground forces to ensure that your enemy felt that their ability to act against your side was restricted. However, the bipolar world of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union is 30 years behind us, and while the economic integration of the world has increased dramatically, political integration and alliances have lagged. The result is that we live in a far messier multipolar international system, what author Ian Bremmer defines as *G-Zero*, a situation where “no country or bloc of countries has the political and economic leverage to drive an international agenda.”¹

In the realm of deterrence, one of the conundrums that this new normal presents to states is the Goldilocks dilemma. The Goldilocks principle is when something must be “just right,” not too much and not too little. The Goldilocks dilemma is a balancing problem where this cannot be achieved. When two forces

create a situation where “just right” is impossible, either you need more to avoid one problem or less to avoid another one.

This deterrence conundrum was less of an issue in the past during the more structurally bipolar Cold War but will become an increasingly common issue as more countries achieve nuclear breakout and the structures shift to a more multipolar paradigm. Recently, a great example of a state experiencing this dilemma was the United States and its Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia. On the one hand, this treaty helped maintain strategic stability with Russia and increased European confidence in American promises by ensuring that no local nuclear conflict at shorter range could leave the United States untouched. However, China was not bound by this treaty and possesses 2,650 land-based missiles that would be in violation of the treaty if Beijing were a member. The United States felt the need to counterbalance these weapons with assets banned by the treaty to establish strategic stability and reassure its allies in East Asia.² Thus, on 2 August 2019, Washington withdrew from the treaty after a war of words with Russia regarding Moscow's compliance with the treaty—only to immediately turn around and test its own medium-range missile on 20 August.³

The situation the United States found itself in was a result of two different rival forces acting upon it and challenging Washington's deterrence plans. However, America is far from alone in this regard, and its situation is, relative to others, stable. The award for the worst deterrence Goldilocks dilemma must go to India, which must contend with two rivals: a revisionist nuclear Pakistan, paranoid about its security situation and constantly supporting terror attacks across the border, and the rising regional power of China, with its territorial claims on Indian territory and ambitions to expand Beijing's control into the Indian Ocean. Like the American dynamic, India is faced with a conundrum where New Delhi must choose between having either stability on one front or deterrence on the other. Worse, either choice will result in disastrous consequences in the future for India

Quadrilateral Nature of the South Asian Security Situation

The root cause of the South Asian security situation can be traced back to Kashmir. Ever since the bloody event that was the 1947 Partition of India occurred, there has been bad blood between India and Pakistan. Despite the shared linguistic and culture heritage, the Hindu–Muslim divide that Partition exacerbated resulted in a situation that was destined to produce war and strife. India was far from united when it won its independence, and the myriad of Princely States and their rulers had, in theory, the choice to accede to either India or Pakistan. Fifteen million people were forced to move, and 10 million lost their lives in the ensuing chaos.⁴ India's Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Patel, now famously known

as the Bismarck of India, worked endlessly to create a politically integrated India and managed to coerce all but three states into the Union.⁵ In late 1947, Patel used force to bring Hyderabad and Junagadh, both states with Muslim rulers, to join the Union. On the other hand, Kashmir's Hindu ruler decided to join willingly, but his Muslim-majority population and Pakistan did not accept this, resulting in the 1947 Indo-Pakistan War that split Kashmir in two. It is this territorial conflict that keeps Pakistan and India perennially fighting and makes close relations realistically impossible.

Making the conflict even more complicated, Beijing's claims on northeast Kashmir and other parts of North India brought China into the mix in 1962, when, while the rest of the world was distracted by the Cuban missile crisis, Chinese troops took Indian-held territory in the Sino-Indian War.⁶ Later that year, Pakistan ceded the territory China claimed that it held in Kashmir to end all disputes and foster better relations with Beijing. This was the start of the "All-Weather Friendship" between the two countries, forming, in India's view, an anti-Indian alliance. Pakistan would later go on to facilitate relations between China and the United States during the Nixon administration. Nowadays, China is Pakistan's most significant military ally and has referred to Pakistan as "our Israel."⁷

However, in India's corner there is now the United States, which, while having supported Pakistan in the past for Islamabad's help in Afghanistan, has slowly shifted to a strongly pro-India stance since 2000.⁸ Washington sees in India a natural democratic partner that can help the United States maintain its position in the Indo-Pacific and greatly frustrate Chinese efforts at hegemony and power projection. As a result, Washington has sought closer relations with New Delhi since Pres. Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia." As of now, the United States and India have signed the 2012 Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) and, in 2014, the Declaration on Defense Cooperation.⁹ Later, President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi met during India's 66th Republic Day and hammered out a framework for the US-India defense relationship and a joint strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific region, in addition to four projects under the DTTI. This all served, from the US point of view, to cement the partnership with India. One sign of the strength of this new partnership is how it has continued to blossom during the Trump administration, at a time when America has experienced fraying relations with most of its other major allies.¹⁰

From the Indian point of view, the United States is a welcome interloper whose support could help tip the scales in India's favor at bit. China is much more developed militarily and economically than India, and Beijing has used its financial resources to slowly cultivate relationships on India's borders, making New Delhi nervous and mistrustful of China's "peaceful rise." In addition, Chinese assistance

to Pakistan's military, nuclear programs, and in international bodies has become an unacceptable thorn in the side of India—not to mention the constant issues of territorial disputes that have existed since 1962 and which were exacerbated by the Doklam Standoff in 2017 and the ongoing situation in the Galwan Valley. At this moment, India is a defensive power under great pressure, pushed by a revisionist nuclear Pakistan on one side and a now superpower China on the other.¹¹ Something not often appreciated by Washington is that India is not warming to the United States out of some feeling of brotherhood among democratic states but rather out of need and a shared interest in seeing the status quo in South Asia maintained.¹² Which brings us to the main point of this article: How can a US–Indian partnership work to finesse India out of its Goldilocks dilemma?

In answering this question, we must understand more in-depth the two sides of India's Goldilocks dilemma, the forces that are acting upon it and have pushed the country that founded the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) into aligning itself with the United States. The first is what New Delhi can do to more effectively deter China from encroaching on Indian territory and New Delhi's sphere of influence. The second, and much trickier, issue is the South Asian nuclear dyad. According to Narang's work, Islamabad has already adopted an asymmetrical escalation nuclear posture that effectively deters India from pressuring Pakistan but also increases the risk of nuclear theft and accidental launch. This means that Pakistan has operationalized its nuclear capabilities to deliver a first strike against India should conventional conflict arise between the two. Since the events of the 1971 war, Pakistan has been very sensitive about the relative balance of power between itself and India, and with Pakistan's nuclear program, Indian plans for grand strategy has been consistently constrained. Thus, India has tried different strategies to reestablish deterrence that have only further increased instability. Essentially, this leaves New Delhi in a Goldilocks dilemma, where India must increase its capabilities so Chinese decision makers fear it, without causing Islamabad to panic.¹³ Therefore, the key to the Goldilocks dilemma for India is maintaining stability with or deterring Pakistan while simultaneously freeing up enough resources to be able to deter China. An extremely tall order for India on its own.

Deterring China

One of the main goals of a US–India alliance, especially from the viewpoint of India, would be to deter China from further action and expansionism along the Indian border, in terms of both claimed territory and attempts to limit New Delhi's relations with India's neighbors. When it comes to understanding and conceptualizing deterrence, I find it most helpful to remember the *Doctor Strangelove* quote: "Deterrence is the art of producing in the mind of the enemy . . . the

fear to attack.”¹⁴ What is key here is the mind of the enemy, and as such we need to know what China thinks of India. To properly do this I would need to know Mandarin, but since I do not, I have based this part of my work on the scholarship of Xiaoping Yang of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and more recent work done by Yun Sun of the Stimson Center’s East Asia Program.

My first and foremost takeaway from Yang’s work is the simple fact that Beijing is not worried about New Delhi and does not view India as a security threat.¹⁵ There are two chief reasons at work for this thinking. First is that there is a capability gap, especially in technology, between the two countries in favor of China. The second factor is the no-war bottom-line threshold, which simply means China believes neither side wants war and Beijing must merely avoid pushing any issue to that point. All of this is further built off the assumption that China does not need to respond to India as a nuclear power. Again, there are two reasons for this assumption. One is that Beijing does not fully believe the story that New Delhi developed India’s weapons to deter China. While Beijing does understand that India feels pressured by the Sino–Pakistan alliance, Chinese leaders feel that, since China’s nuclear capability is concentrated on the United States, India’s worries are baseless. Instead, Chinese strategic circles believe that India went overtly nuclear for political reasons of prestige and that there is no real intention on New Delhi’s part to threaten China. Secondly, China does not worry about India’s nukes due to New Delhi’s “no first use” policy and limited nuclear capability, again Beijing does not believe India seriously intends to fight China. Essentially, at the root of China’s threat perception of India lies the fact that Beijing does not see a situation in which the two countries would involve themselves in a full-scale war, conventional or nuclear.

However, despite this outlook, Yang points out several current events have given China some concern, all of which are tied with India’s recent alignment with the United States. The US–India nuclear deal in 2008 was the first, though Beijing’s main worry was the wavering support for the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime in Washington; furthermore, China expressed concern about the possibility of dual-use technology that could help lead to an arms race in Asia.¹⁶ The second event was when, in 2010, India’s no-first-use policy seemed to evolve from a “no-first-use” to a “no-first-use against nonnuclear weapons states” policy. Again, this goes back to China’s reasoning that if it sees no aggressive intention from India, Beijing does not need to worry, and these changes could snowball.

A further step in the wrong direction, from China’s point of view, was the initiatives that India rolled out as a partner of the United States. Next, was India’s formation of a special border force specifically meant to deal with Tibet and China-related border issues. Finally, there was the launching of India’s nuclear

submarine, the *Arihant*, in 2016, which, while not worrying China due to the ship's lack of technical sophistication, was yet another step that increases the chance of future crisis. Again, China does not yet feel that India is a security threat, but Beijing is not happy with the direction New Delhi is going.

According to Sun's work, these previous actions, a more assertive Modi government, and a closer relationship with Washington have been enough to push Beijing to attempt forming better ties with New Delhi, with high-profile visits in 2019.¹⁷ While Beijing believes in China's superiority, Chinese leaders realize that their nation suffers from an asymmetry of threat perceptions. New Delhi views China as its primary threat, while Beijing only views India as one of many secondary challengers. Beijing realizes this could possibly result in China's own Goldilocks dilemma and as such wishes to avoid conflict with India. However, Chinese leaders find themselves unable to work with India diplomatically, since New Delhi's prerequisites for trusting China, resolutions to border issues and halting attempts to stop Pakistani backed terrorists via the UN, are hard commitments, while Beijing's need, that India becomes neutral, is ephemeral and easy to change. As such, the trajectory for Sino-India relations to become more conflictual in nature over time is high.

According to Yang, Beijing's future threat perception of India will be shaped by three factors: foreign support for India, the enhancement of India's conventional military, and how China's interactions with India regarding border disputes and Tibet play out. Sun's more recent work has shown that the situation has shifted enough to warrant Beijing's attention but not enough to result in any shift in policy. This is due to Chinese observers maintaining their low expectations for the US-India partnership. They believe there are too many issues, in strategic culture and choice of partners, for cooperation to go further and that the alignment of the two countries is merely tactical with little real depth. Therefore, Beijing believes that when a conflict arises cooperation will fall apart, unlike other US alliances with binding agreements. This understanding of how China views India gives us a basic road map about the direction the US-India partnership can go and what types of support would help India to be taken more seriously by China.

Pakistani Nuclear Strategy and Full-Spectrum Deterrence

On the other end of the Goldilocks dilemma, there is the matter of Pakistan's nuclear capabilities, which Narang's work outlines meticulously. Pakistan has operationalized its nuclear capabilities to create an asymmetric escalation posture, where a state, historically a state conventionally inferior to its adversary, operationalizes its nuclear capacity so that it can launch a first strike, thus deterring the use of both nuclear and conventional capabilities against itself. For this

posture to be credible under circumstances when an adversary attacks, there must be some level of delegation of authority, and the state's nuclear capabilities must be married to its armed forces. This is to ensure the enemy understands that any aggressive action is likely to trigger a nuclear response despite how the enemy might try to sow confusion. Additionally, this means this posture relies partially on the state being unambiguous about its capabilities and deployment to get the maximum deterrence effect.¹⁸

Currently only Pakistan employs this posture, given the extreme difference in the power of its conventional forces and India's. Seared into the minds of all Pakistani commanders is the memory of their nation's humiliating defeat in the 1971 war, when India succeeded in splitting Pakistan in half in a mere 13 days, making Bangladesh, which had been East Pakistan, an independent country.¹⁹ While Pakistan would prefer a strategic restraint regime of some kind with India, which would limit conventional and nuclear forces, Islamabad understands that this will never happen due to India's security concerns regarding China. Furthermore, Pakistan does not view stability as possible until New Delhi shows India is serious about solving territorial disputes, which given India's advantageous position is highly unlikely.²⁰ Therefore, the perceived growth in Indian capabilities, combined with the view that diplomatic solutions are a pipedream, has resulted in the current Pakistani strategy of full-spectrum deterrence, threatening nuclear first use in conventional conflict through its nuclear posture.

In his experiment, Narang looks at the history of conflict between India and Pakistan since they gained nuclear capacities and evaluates the deterrence effect that each posture had while employed. His results are very straightforward in that the asymmetric escalation posture has been "deterrence optimal" for Pakistan. The evidence for this lies in the fact that while the United States was able to help deescalate and end conflicts for Pakistan while it employed the catalytic posture, such did not deter India from using conventional means against Pakistan at times. On the other hand, since employing the asymmetric escalation posture Pakistan has had, at the time of Narang's article, no Indian conventional forces setting foot on Pakistan's soil, even in the aftermath of two major Inter-Services Intelligence-supported terrorist attacks.²¹ This posture has served as a shield from which Pakistan can use subconventional means to attack India with no fear of reprisal, resulting in a stability-instability paradox. The idea behind the paradox is that the nuclear weapons will deter major actions by an opponent resulting in strategic stability, which paradoxically makes lower levels of violence safer since the other party cannot escalate in response without threatening nuclear conflict.²²

However, this has led to even greater escalation and instability in the region, as use of subconventional attacks has led India to become frustrated and desperate for reprisal, and New Delhi has attempted strategies, such as Operation Cold Start, which it believes will allow India to strike Pakistan in a limited fashion without crossing the nuclear red line.²³ However, this did not deter Pakistan, and New Delhi has likely been driven to skirt the edges of India's no-first-use policy to reestablish deterrence. Outlined in Narang's newer work, it is highly likely that India is putting the intelligence and weapons capabilities together to allow it to launch a preemptive counterforce strike that could credibly destroy Pakistan's nuclear capabilities²⁴—a plan that is highly destabilizing, since it would push Islamabad to use all of its nuclear weapons in the event of a crisis out of fear that Pakistan could lose them. Additionally, this will result in Pakistan delegating even more authority, spreading out their weapons caches, and increasing the risk of accidental use and theft to maintain the credibility of Islamabad's deterrent against Indian conventional forces, which Narang asserts would put the region on permanent crisis footing, as both countries are playing evermore dangerous games of brinksmanship.

Recent events have seen the issue of such South Asian brinksmanship pushed to the forefront. At the end of January 2019, Pakistan tested a nuclear-capable close-range ballistic missile—the Nasr. The development of the Nasr was in response to the Indian Cold Start doctrine.²⁵ Then on 14 February 2019, the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad killed 46 Indian soldiers in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, leading New Delhi to respond with an airstrike on 26 February at Balakot, in Pakistan-held territory, with an Indian jet shot down and its pilot captured.²⁶ In the ensuing chaos, India escalated massively, and it was reported that Prime Minister Modi threatened to use missiles if the Indian pilot was not returned to India.²⁷ For the first time in this brinkmanship game since acquiring nuclear weapons, it appears Pakistan blinked, and Islamabad promptly returned the pilot. Furthermore, Pakistan responded to the first Indian warplanes to cross the line control since 1971 not with nuclear forces but with conventional airpower.²⁸ While it is only a small concession, this small victory for India will undoubtedly serve to strengthen existing plans to pursue preemptive counterforce strike to deter Pakistan. However, Pakistan will not sit on its hands and will likely be putting together its own plans, via increased survivability of weapons and/or more advanced designs, to break Indian confidence in its capabilities. The result appears more volatile than most of the Cold War, with no winners, and it is clear alternatives must be found to fix the situation.

The Lukewarm Porridge: A Formal US–India Alliance Is the Only Option of Unappetizing Options

After considering the issues India has at both ends of its Goldilocks dilemma, it is clear how the dual pressures have pushed New Delhi into aligning with the United States. It deserves to be reiterated how big of a change this is for the country that founded the NAM during the Cold War. While this is a big step, it is also still not enough to allow India to fix its Goldilocks dilemma. The apparent brittleness of the US–India partnership means it does little to deter Beijing or constrict Chinese action in the region. At the same time, the nuclear dyad between Pakistan and India has only become more unstable, with India having barely managed to achieve what appears to be a short-term pyrrhic victory. The Modi and Trump administrations have continued to ramp up ties. However, this has still fallen short of a formal treaty alliance, which, as unappetizing as it might be, is New Delhi's best shot at solving India's Goldilocks dilemma.

New Delhi currently faces three possible paths India can pursue to escape its dilemma. The first path is the current one, where New Delhi continues to try to solve the matter with India's own power, maintaining some of its neutrality, only making some tactical partnerships at its convenience. However, as we can already see, this path fails to deter China from making moves against India, and the preemptive counterforce strategy will result in more crisis instability and is highly unlikely to reestablish deterrence with Pakistan in the long term. In fact, it will most certainly result in an arms race that will put the region at greater risk and drain resources needed to compete with China and restart the growth engine of the now sputtering Indian economy. In short, we already know that this path is going to fail.

A second path would be an attempt to work with China rather than the United States on fixing these issues. However, according to Sun's work, this path would likely be doomed to failure. Frustratingly, China finds itself pulled in two directions when it comes to India; on the one hand, Beijing has a genuine interest in maintaining peace so it can focus on China's conflict in the Indo-Pacific with the United States and not divert forces to its front with India. However, at the same time, Indian and Chinese plans and visions in South Asia are incompatible and a source of strife. Compounding this is the fact that South Asia is India's primary theater but only a secondary one for China; thus, there is an asymmetry of actions and demands. As previously stated, China only demands India remains neutral, while India demands actions from China that Beijing could not take back and that would strengthen India in the region. This is intolerable to Beijing, which views the demands as too much and feeding into India's internal politics. Beijing believes

that if China gave India any kind of victory, it would embolden New Delhi further. China's core interest here is that India remains struggling to control South Asia and neutral in China's conflict with the United States, as such it is clear that diplomatic attempts to find solutions to New Delhi's Goldilocks dilemma will be stalled by China, whose main goal is Indian passivity. In short it is a waste of time.

The third path is a formal alliance between the United States and India against China, and the extension of American security guarantees could be the most powerful deterrent that India could hope for against Beijing. While China might view its capabilities as far ahead of India's, Beijing is under no illusions about China's gap with the United States. Additionally, as mentioned before, this would force China to deal with a new front and split its forces, giving both India and the United States a better chance in the region. For dealing with Pakistan, an Indo-America alliance offers several possibilities. First it creates a problem for Islamabad, as India would, officially or unofficially (since the United States would never allow a nuclear attack on its troops to go unpunished), be under an American nuclear aegis, and the credibility of Pakistani threats that would escalate to attacks on Indian territory would be less believable. More importantly would be the possibility of India opening new options to increase costs of subconventional attacks committed by Pakistan via sanctions through the US alliance network. Finally, is the possibility that the response to a US-India alliance is a closer Sino-Pakistan alliance. Naturally, there are negatives to this eventuality; however, there could be two major positives. First, this would end the Goldilocks dilemma, since the conflict would become bipolar in nature and create two united fronts facing off. The second is that this bipolar scenario would more easily allow for treaties to prevent nuclear arms races and could generate some real strategic stability in the region. Everything considered, it is not guaranteed that a formal alliance would allow India to escape the Goldilocks dilemma, but it certainly gives New Delhi the best chance of deterring Beijing and new tools for dealing with Islamabad.

With this said, neither New Delhi nor Washington is quite ready for a formal alliance, as there are some speed bumps that need to be considered and remediated. Trump has furthered cooperation in meaningful ways and signaled a willingness to work more closely with the rebranding of US Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command. However, his attitude and policies on immigration have not been well-received in New Delhi. Additionally, India's purchase of Russian missile defense systems, bought to enable India's new counterforce posture, according to Narang, and other weapons have made it difficult for the United States to work toward interoperability and position some of its most sensitive technologies in India. The US-India relationship is a relatively new one, and these are some of the kinks. However, there are going to be costs that New Delhi must deal

with to secure the alliance; namely, India will need to abandon its counterforce posture against Pakistan and the Russian missile defense that is a key part of it.

Furthermore, there are questions as to whether this alliance is desirable for the United States, given the current situation. India is facing major domestic challenges, and there are some real questions about New Delhi's ability to deliver on the hopes that US policy makers have for it. US interests are very much at the periphery of Indian domestic politics; while both countries are democracies, this has never led to especially good relations in the past as it did in the West. The Indian economy is growing fast but also generating massive income inequality, underemployment, brain drain, and drought. Militarily India's forces are primarily focused on Kashmir and Pakistan, tying down large quantities of manpower and military spending.²⁹ As much as India would like to remove itself from the India–Pakistan dyad, issues in Kashmir and growing nationalism constantly draw New Delhi back into a fight Washington would much rather not take part in.³⁰ The caution on both sides to solidify a defense relationship are built upon some major hurdles that will take time to overcome, but given it is India's best option to surmount the Goldilocks dilemma and America's best option to open a second front for China, Washington should continue pushing for a treaty alliance.

Finally, as American strategy clearly wants the Indo-Pacific to play a major role in its future plans for countering China, supporting India might be the cost Washington must bear to open another front against China in this new Cold War. Furthermore, the current state of Pakistan's and India's nuclear forces demands US attention, and given that China will be as useless in solving this crisis as it has proven to be with North Korea, a strategy to reestablish strategic stability by changing the conflict from multipolar to bipolar is one worth contemplating.

Conclusion

India is in a Goldilocks dilemma in which New Delhi must increase its capabilities vis-à-vis China, but at the same time, Islamabad harasses and constrains India. Pakistan has used its nuclear capabilities to create an asymmetrical escalation posture and is seeking full-spectrum deterrence against India. In doing so, Islamabad has created a security situation with risks with which both the region and wider world must concern themselves. With this article, I have pointed out that to achieve both of its aims India's only feasible option is a formal alliance with the United States. Continuing the old Indian policy of nonalignment will never allow New Delhi to escape the Goldilocks dilemma, as India lacks the strength to do this on its own. Aligning India with China to solve the issue is doomed to fail, as Beijing views India, by virtue of New Delhi's position and level of power in South Asia, as a rival that must be subjugated to secure Chinese he-

gemony. The extent of Beijing's goodwill is limited, as China only wants to avoid conflict with India, while Beijing still must concern itself with the United States. These factors have already served to push India into aligning itself with America; the question remains if India and the United States can agree to the formal alliance necessary to counter China. If not, India is merely pushing off inevitable conflict with China over the Indo-Pacific—possibly to a time when New Delhi might not have the United States and US allies to help keep Indian borders and waters where they are today. ♣

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Untapped Potential between India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific

Pursuing International Military Education

VINDU MAI CHOTANI

DR. SHUTARO SANO

The geopolitical and strategic space created by the India and Japan Special Global and Strategic Partnership has put both states in a position to focus on deepening the connective tissue in their bilateral partnership. In the Indo-Pacific region, some of these primary issues have been connectivity and infrastructure projects, security and defense relations, and trade ties.

However, a study of regional trends demonstrates that the region is also faced with increasing incidences of instability and unpredictability. The most recent examples being the US-China trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic. In analyzing this rising uncertainty, there is a growing need to explore the underlying, secondary, and/or more untapped potential of the Indo-Japan bilateral partnership.

One crucial area emphasized is the need to pursue a more profound international military education program, with a focus on cadet-level trainings and exchanges. This article argues that there is a need for dialogue on this issue and also a need for the implementation of potential collaborative exchanges, programs/courses, scholarships, and conferences between Indian and Japanese cadets. The idea behind these policy recommendations is that in the short- and long-term, such endeavors would essentially give more heft and consistency and deepen trust in this bilateral relationship, especially in the realms of defense and security.

Importance of Cadet-Level International Military Education Exchanges

International military education exchanges, if pursued at the cadet level, could have a number of short- and long-term benefits. Firstly, while it is important to acknowledge the importance of maintaining defense exchanges at senior levels, initiating defense exchanges at a younger stage can be foundational as this when the cadets—the future top-level officers—cultivate their personalities, qualities, and beliefs with regard to the outside world. Thus, while friendship or comradeship can also be fostered at a later stage in life or when senior officials conduct exchanges, cultivating enduring or meaningful friendships is much more compli-

cated and difficult. Primarily because officials at this stage in their lives and careers have multiple “calculations” based upon their professional and social positions.

Secondly, cadet-level exchanges are important to enhance better military education and to foster stronger ties through mutual understanding between the two countries. Visits of this nature, while giving wide exposure to general cadets, also helps in comparing military standards with other contemporary institutes and thereby carry out introspection with a view to reviewing syllabi and positive changes/upgrades of training infrastructure. Along these lines, one can gauge the reasons why so many military academies, including the National Defense Academy of Japan (NDA), the Indian Military Academy (IMA), and all three military academies in the United States welcome so many international cadets to study alongside their own.

Thirdly, at a soft-power level, these exchanges provide cadets access to important tools for decision making, such as cultural sensitization, knowledge sharing, and language skills—all of which enhance professionalism and ties among cadets. Some of these cadets may also go on to hold senior positions in their home countries. Thus, in the future, they carry the potential to aid states to work toward their broader goals of creating peace and stability: regionally and internationally.

An Assessment of International Military Education in Japan and India

To understand the gaps that could potentially be filled, taking stock of both country’s military education programs and international exchanges is important.

The National Defense Academy of Japan (NDA)

Cadets in Japan are trained and educated at the NDA in Yokosuka.¹ The uniqueness of the academy lies in its dual education/training structure in which its educational curricula are in full conformity with the Japanese university standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), while the standards of the academy’s basic defense studies and training are set by the Ministry of Defense (MOD). This has been an important factor for the cadets to cultivate their identities within the realm of Japanese society.

The academy is also unique for its long history of incorporating international cadets into its educational system, starting from 1958. As of 2019, Japan has accepted more than 2,000 foreign cadets.² Through their daily interactions with international cadets, the exchanges have widened the international awareness and perceptions held by the Japanese cadets. This reception of international cadets at the academy has been extremely important for the Japanese cadets, who have

mostly been brought up in a mono-ethnic society that lacks firsthand knowledge of non-Japanese people. Simultaneously, the exchanges have enabled the international cadets to acquire a value of internationalization and a more nuanced and deeper understanding of Japanese culture and lifestyle.

At the cadet level, the NDA has both long- and short-term exchanges with key Indo-Pacific states such as the United States, Australia, and a majority of ASEAN states. With respect to its long-term, five-year program, the NDA receives about 120 international cadets—25 cadets each year, from about 10 countries—mainly from Southeast Asia.³

The international cadets who enroll in the long-term exchange program are initially required to complete a one-year *Nihongo* (Japanese language) course. At this point, they are called “zero-class” students and are not yet categorized as “cadets.” Upon completion of the first year of language training, they will become “freshmen” cadets and study and train together with other Japanese cadets for the following four years until their graduation. One of the main reasons for the full year of Japanese language education is that the courses taught at NDA are primarily in that medium.

With regards to shorter programs, the NDA has a two-year program (for sophomore and junior years) for cadets from countries including the Republic of Korea (ROK). In addition, the NDA receives cadets from the United States (army, navy, and air force), Australia (joint institution), and France (air force) for one semester—which is approximately four months. The NDA also offers 10-day visits to the academy for cadets from Australia, India, the ROK, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Further, the NDA also sends more than 50 Japanese cadets, many of them juniors, overseas each year. Those studying in the ROK do so for a year for the air force cadets, and one semester for the army and navy cadets. Other one-semester exchanges include those in Australia, France (army, navy, and air force), Germany (army and air force), Qatar, and the United States (army, navy, and air force).⁴ NDA cadets also engage in one- to three-week visits to the service academies of Brazil, Canada, China, India, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The training and exchange of military officers and personnel is a vital component of the strategic partnership between Japan and its partner states in the defense and political-security arenas. For example, Rear-Admiral Edwin Leong from Singapore graduated from the NDA in 1998. Having majored in aerospace engineering at the NDA, he is now Head of Naval Operations in Singapore.⁵ Another key example is with Thailand, with which the NDA's international exchange program has its longest relationship, starting in 1958. Two, four-star generals (one from the

Air Force and one from the Navy) have been graduates from NDA and have become prominent and influential leaders in the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

Finally, in addition to the exchange programs listed above, the NDA annually holds the International Cadets' Conference and invites cadets from about 20 countries, including India and China.

To laud these achievements, in November 2018, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a Reception for the Gathering of the Foreign Cadet Graduates of the National Defense Academy. The prime minister emphasized that this gathering was the first of its kind to build a network with foreign cadets who graduated from the NDA.⁶

The Indian Military Academy (IMA)

India has several defense training institutions and military academies. While Indian cadets train at a number of institutions, such as the National Defence Academy and Army Cadet College, international cadets, known as the Foreign Gentleman Cadets (FGC), are trained at the Indian Military Academy.

Since 1948, a limited number of cadets from African and Asian countries with close ties to India have received "pre-commission training" at the IMA.⁷ These countries have included Angola, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Ghana, Iraq, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Singapore, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia. In recent years, Sudan, the Maldives, Botswana, and Lesotho have also sent cadets to IMA.

Due to the fact that more underdeveloped or weaker states have small armies and lack the infrastructure to train their military officers, they seek help from larger and better-equipped countries such as India for the training of their officers. This trend is reflected in the number of FGM graduates. For example, as of 2016, a total of 1,961 foreign cadets graduated from the academy, with the highest number of the cadets coming from India's neighborhood: Bhutan, 551; Afghanistan, 422; Sri Lanka, 263; Nepal, 141; and Tajikistan, 144.⁸

Neighborhood states and smaller nations aside, it should also be noted that other states with more developed militaries too, such as France and Singapore, have previously sent their cadets to India to receive a military education and to foster stronger ties between the two countries.⁹

India has a steady number of FGC intakes every year. In 2016, 53 FGCs graduated from the IMA;¹⁰ in 2018 and 2019, there were 80 and 77 such graduates respectively.¹¹

However, more recently, the Indian government announced that it has prohibited its armed forces personnel from partaking in training courses that are funded by foreign governments.¹² New Delhi has stated that it would allow armed forces

personnel to attend training in foreign countries only when deemed utmost necessary and that the Indian government would pay for such training.¹³

Against this background, it is worth noting that despite being one of the most professional providers of military training in the world, India still faces significant gaps in terms of military education, beyond tactical and operational issues. Given the increasingly interdependent and complex nature arising in Indo-Pacific region, collaborating and expanding its military education scope with like-minded, trusted partners could be beneficial.

Potential Areas of Collaboration between India's and Japan's Cadet Programs

Scholarships and Exchanges

Starting in 1996, the Japanese government has a scheme to annually offer full scholarships to international cadets to study at the NDA, under the NDA's international exchange program.¹⁴ If a foreign cadet is enrolled at the NDA, she/he is exempted from paying for tuition, rooms, uniforms, food, and all medical treatment at the academy or other medical institutions of the Japan Self-Defense Forces.¹⁵

While this may be difficult for Indian cadets to access due to the limitations on receiving foreign training, it should be noted that Indian military personnel can themselves identify suitable foreign institutions for training courses and seek government funding.¹⁶ Further, it is worth acknowledging that the "US and UK have for a long period primarily sponsored the Indian military officers' training. Many times, it is done on a reciprocal basis."¹⁷

Given the strong bilateral ties between India and Japan, both countries can work to establish a scheme wherein both states can reciprocate with scholarships, therefore allowing for Indian cadets to apply to study at the NDA and Japanese cadets at the IMA. This could first start with short-term semester exchanges and then graduate to long-term exchanges.

Further, another area for opening up potential exchange collaborations is with India's National Cadet Corps (NCC). Through its Youth Exchange Programme (YEP), India has sent over 100 young cadets to participate in NCC activities of the host country to create an increased awareness and appreciation of each other's socioeconomic and cultural realities.¹⁸ While countries have included Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam, exchanges with an important bilateral partner such as Japan are yet to be seen.

Finally, in 2014, the Indian Naval Academy in Ezhimala, Kerala, opened its doors to foreign cadets, albeit only cadets from the Indian Ocean region: Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius.¹⁹ While it is key for India to engage its neighboring, smaller states, given the importance that both India and Japan place on maritime security and a large array of maritime issues, cadet-level exchanges could go a long way toward deepening higher-level ties. Thus, it is worth exploring complementarities here as well.

Soft-power Engagements

Soft-power engagements have always been important in deepening ties between states, and in a number of ways, it is no different in the realm of professional military education.

Host-family relations. Unlike the Japanese cadets, international cadets are assigned to Japanese host families who will take care of the students outside the NDA. The system is aimed to give international cadets some “relief” time so that they can learn more about the Japanese culture and system without having to cope with the various stresses they usually have at NDA. Some international cadets become so close psychologically with their host families that they would call their Japanese host-family members as “fathers/mothers/brothers/sisters.”

As mentioned previously, if India and Japan were to initiate either short- or long-term cadet exchanges, they would have the opportunity to provide their cadets with this unique and invaluable human experience.

Language. Taking stock of India’s important bilateral partnerships, Indian cadets are trained in a number of foreign languages. Cadet courses in Russian, English, Arabic, and French are offered. In 2012, given the importance India places on China, and as part of a pilot project of the Indian MOD, Indian cadets studying at one of the oldest Rashtriya Military Schools (RMS), located in Chail, Himachal Pradesh, also started studying the Chinese language.²⁰ However, there has been no introduction of Nihongo yet.

Further, Japan’s NDA offers Nihongo training for one full year to those international cadets who engage in the five-year exchange program. However, since India does not partake in this long-term cadet-level exchange, Indian cadets do not have access to this opportunity as well, to take up the study of Nihongo. Thus, despite Japan being one of India’s increasingly important bilateral partners, there is yet to be an option for Indian cadets to learn Nihongo, either at the IMA or even at the NDA.

On the other hand, for the Japanese cadets, at Japan’s NDA, academic education and training are, in general, held in Japanese. The NDA also offers foreign language courses for the cadets: it is mandatory for the cadets to take English lan-

guage courses, as well as one of the following languages as their secondary foreign language: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Korean, Portuguese, and Russian. Here as well, there is no option or possibility to learn Hindi.

Further, while these foreign language courses are certainly beneficial in improving the basic foreign language skills for the cadets, the effects of these courses are somewhat restricted in a way, because they do not necessarily provide Japanese cadets with an adequate level of language skills to effectively engage in other academic courses and training in a foreign language.

Thus, as India's ties deepen with Japan, offering academic and training courses in English for the Japanese cadets, for example, could well be a meaningful step.

Cultural Clubs. As part of the extracurricular activities, the cadets of Japan's NDA can join a number of cultural and/ or athletic clubs.²¹ As part of cultural clubs, Indonesian, Mongolian, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and East Timorese cultures are among the topics and activities that NDA cadets have access too.

Once again, if Indian cadets were able to take part in the long term or short term exchanges (or vice-versa), they could actually form their respective country clubs and promote a deeper understanding of India or Japan at a much earlier and younger stage, rather than waiting for mid-level or senior officer level exchanges to do this.

While, this can be viewed as a very small step, cultural activities and cultural clubs in universities go a long way in deepening people to people ties.

Faculty exchanges and syllabi content analysis. The academic levels of international cadets differ greatly based upon not only their personal academic background but also the levels of educational systems of their countries of origin. For example, international cadets from countries such as East Timor had a harder time in their studies at Japan's NDA because of the lack of or insufficient educational systems in their home countries.

Additionally, in November 2018 one of the authors of this article visited Japan's NDA to deliver a guest lecture on India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific. This was attended by approximately 40 cadets from Japan, the United States, and a few ASEAN nations. Many cadets expressed how the scope of certain geographic areas such as the Bay of Bengal or other geopolitical and geostrategic terms in the Indo-Pacific region were completely new to them.

Given the growing role that both Japan and India are shouldering in the Indo-Pacific region, faculty exchanges give the academies an opportunity to review syllabi and also have an informed and updated understanding of what each academy is teaching and focusing on. This in turn would enable the cadets to have access to higher quality education.

Conclusion

Under the banner of the Special Global and Strategic Partnership, India and Japan have been strengthening their defense ties through various exchanges and conducting trainings at an unprecedented pace in recent years. In doing so, the two countries have begun to establish a foundation to deepen a sense of trust between their militaries.

However, there are still areas in this partnership that remain significantly untapped. One such key area brought forth in this article has been the lack of sound people-to-people networking at the cadet level between the two states. As such, this article has highlighted a number of potential areas of collaboration in this realm that could be further explored by India and Japan. A truly effective and sustainable relationship is developed through a sense of affinity that can be better cultivated at an early stage of one's professional career, a vital period in which people develop identity and awareness as well as learn to respect the value of diversity and mutual interdependence. 🌐

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Notes

1. In addition to the undergraduate courses offered for the cadets, the NDA also has graduate courses, both at the masters and Ph.D. level for Self-Defense Forces officers.

2. Cabinet Public Relations Office, Government of Japan, "Reception for the Gathering of the Foreign Cadet Graduates of the National Defense Academy," 28 November 2019, <http://japan.kantei.go.jp/>.

3. As of April 2020, Brunei is the only ASEAN country that has yet to send its cadets to the NDA.

4. In the past, the NDA also received cadets from the Virginia Military Institute (VMI).

5. Cabinet Public Relations Office, "Reception for the Gathering."

6. Cabinet Public Relations Office, "Reception for the Gathering."

7. "IMA trains growing number of young foreign army officers," *India Review*, June 2006, 5, <https://eoi.gov.in/>.

8. Times News Network, "53 Foreign Cadets from 8 Countries complete their training," *Times of India*, 10 December 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>.

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BOOK REVIEW

India and Nuclear Asia: Forces, Doctrine, and Dangers, by Yogesh Joshi and Frank O'Donnell. Georgetown University Press, 2019.

The China India Rivalry in the Globalization Era, ed. T.V. Paul. Georgetown University Press, 2018.

With a burgeoning economy and one-sixth of the global population, India's nuclear policy will be increasingly significant to its regional and global role. More specifically, India must navigate the strategic complexities of defense policy with two strategic competitors: China and Pakistan. India, which has been fighting Pakistan off and on since 1947, acts as the more sophisticated conventional force. However, Pakistan enjoys the backing of the much larger, much more powerful China. The second nuclear age is Asian-centric, and these three nuclear powers form the core of the debate.

Joshi and O'Donnell argue that growing regional force structures, technological sophistication, ambiguous nuclear policy, and potentially low escalation thresholds set the stage for deadly misperception between India, China, and Pakistan. This misperception could lead to inadvertent regional escalation through a naval domain that lacks multilateral regulation, dual-use platforms that shade strategic intent and mission, and conventional targeting seeking to seize operational advantages. Beyond the military operational environment, political leadership runs the risk of accidental escalation due to a lack of understanding of the potential nuclear consequences of their actions. These risks are prominent among India and its nuclear neighbors due to a lack of clear policy and a void of trilateral relations.

The book goes on to describe in detail the rapidly advancing nuclear forces of India and China and the growing force of Pakistan. It offers insights into the decision making of the three states with respect to one another and the composition and disposition of their strategic forces. The authors suggest that a murky Indian policy may be allowing its long-standing no-first-use and minimum deterrence policies to give way in practice to nuclear war-planning; including extremely punitive response measures and a Herman Kahn-esque flexible response option. Regional nuclear stability, as much as India can uniquely contribute to it, requires two things. First, India must execute a service-wide nuclear posture review to synchronize and stabilize its nuclear policy amid rapidly advancing technology and adversarial activity. Once internally sorted, India should push for meaningful trilateral dialogue between itself, China, and Pakistan to remove a degree of potentially costly strategic ambiguity from the political arena.

The authors ground their analysis on the concepts developed by Posen, Kahn, Schelling, Stoessinger, and the so-called "Third Wave" practitioners of nuclear deterrence theory. They have done a superb job developing the implications of various nuclear policies and postures, and they present careful discussions of policy challenges related to doctrine, force structure, technology, and leadership-driven dynamics. However, suggesting an entirely public defense review is probably unrealistic in such a contentious security environment. Additionally, there is a contradiction when the authors assert that a sea leg could help minimize forces while claiming this somehow conflicts with designs for a minimal deterrence posture. I believe they more accurately are suggesting the increasing complexity from a nuclear monad to a nuclear dyad breaks with traditional concepts of force expansion. The authors base much of their argument on the idea that excessive strategic ambiguity and mirror imaging national components of rationality will not add stability to the situation. They derive this argument from discussing the misperception inherent in the lack of declaratory policy between India and China and the assumed responses to conventional strikes or development meant to create parity. I tend to agree, yet these assertions could benefit from discussing or referencing a wealth of post-Cold War literature and documentation that supports such a claim. This includes but is not limited to Keith Payne's *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction*, in which the author demonstrates a fundamental US misperception of Cuban resolve to die for their cause in 1962—or the since declassified Soviet doctrine that incorporated nuclear weapons into warfare in Europe, very contrary to the US perception.

Ultimately, the dialogue stimulated in this book is informative, chilling, and logical. India's nuclear future has global implications for deterrence theory and stability. As the authors depict, the United States has had a significant degree of involvement in helping shape India's nuclear policy. I would look forward to seeing the trilateral discussions forwarded in this book expanded to include the United States. Other nuclear powers, particularly the United States, could help counterbalance a united Pakistan and China, should India find itself at a negotiating disadvantage—ideally leading to a more impartial and stable nuclear peace.

Moving beyond nuclear force structures and strategic escalation alone, T.V. Paul et al. seek to characterize the nature of the relationship between two rising Asian great powers, India and China. *The China India Rivalry in the Globalization Era* seeks to explain why, in some sense, these two Asian giants seem to be experiencing a degree of economic and political rapprochement; yet, maritime disputes, disagreements over international status, and a near territorial military conflict in 2017, according to Paul, suggest an “enduring managed rivalry.”

The book introduces the paradox of Chinese and Indian territorial conflict across the so-called McMahon Line. Currently, stability supports Chinese and Indian prosperity and development, yet each must remain uncompromising on settlement demands to placate political interests. The compilation offers a nuanced discussion of status, conceptualizations of international order, strategic culture, and strategy to shed theoretical light on the various fissures and bridges between the two nations. The discussion of resource scarcity and its effects on competitive policies provide reasons for hope in future renewable energy pursuits. Yet there is a grave potential for future contention over freshwater shortages. The work suggests macroeconomic interactions are becoming increasingly asymmetric (a destabilizing trend) as India is about eight times more reliant on Chinese imports than China is on Indian imports, and so forth. Moreover, certain Chinese investment practices and Chinese investment into Pakistan prove problematic for the hopes of a stabilizing economic interdependence between India and China. The paradoxical nature of this rivalry extends into global governance, where both nations seek greater institutional membership and eventually more influence in a reorganized system. However, instead of facilitating, they work to block the interest realization of the other in these institutions. Ultimately, this compilation of papers asserts that there exists a managed rivalry where status and influence are as much a source of disagreement as are substantive concerns. In fact, because the material and conceptual are bound together in this rivalry, the authors suggest that the asymmetry of Chinese and Indian power prevents large-scale traditional conflict while also enabling the persistence of general competition.

I am not sure if the ultimate assertion that each paper displaying a complex paradoxical relationship is always enough to draw the papers coherently together as a single narrative or common operating picture. The global contextualization of the theme of this book was a strength and something these authors had over O'Donnell and Joshi. O'Donnell and Joshi's in-depth engagement of Pakistan provides very useful context to a number of Paul's various sections. O'Donnell and Joshi's in-depth description of Pakistan's nuclear posture and doctrine drives home the operational complexities for India's posture and force development discussed in Paul's book. I would perhaps like to see both texts discuss Russian strategic interests, even if just to explain away their relevance if that is their reason for exclusion.

The China India Rivalry suggests that India does not, in the foreseeable future, pose a strategic threat to China. However, *India and the Nuclear Asia* makes a compelling case as to why Indian force structure is already problematic for China and provides evidence that Chinese policy has begun to recognize this. O'Donnell and Joshi emphasize the trilateral nature of regional nuclear dynamics, deftly displaying the interdependent policy and threat dynamics. In Paul's compilation, Narang mentions the nuclear relationship between India and China as almost negligible compared to Pakistan for India and the United States for China. While it is important to understand national priorities and a broader strategic scope, Narang seems to overlook the interdependent

security dynamic of Pakistan, India, and China that requires India to plan strategic contingencies for Chinese involvement in a conflict with Pakistan. This strategic planning drives force structure, weapon development, and operational plans that ultimately take a bilateral issue and turn it into a regional or global powder keg. Narang also suggests an utter acceptance of Schelling's principals for nuclear deterrence between China and India. However, O'Donnell and Joshi portray a much more ambiguous and contentious nuclear relationship, with potential brinksmanship tailored by something akin to escalation rungs. What Paul so critically adds is the asymmetric status dynamic between India and China that drives Indian ambitions for recognition, as well as the hard-balancing of the other leading to the internalization of a bilateral enmity identity. The perceptive American reader should see a direct correlation between the dynamics and potential perils of China ignoring Indian status contextualized through a reading of both books and the same factors that shape the status dynamics between China and the United States. Additionally, Paul's sections help the reader zoom out from the all-consuming nuclear dynamics of O'Donnell and Joshi and witness the broader implications and flashpoints for conflict, as well as an overall stability driven by very complex and intertwined interests.

Taken together, these works provide an excellent context for the Asian-centric future of global politics and the competition therein.

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The United States and South Korea in the Indo-Pacific after COVID-19

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Abstract

No matter who is in the White House come January, there is a clear and pressing need to update the US approach to the Indo-Pacific region. The scope of the damage from COVID-19 has emphasized the need for the US Free and Open Pacific strategy to better encompass nontraditional security concerns, particularly global health and climate change. While sufficiently addressing these challenges will only become more difficult as the rivalry between Washington and Beijing intensifies, all signs point to South Korea as not only being a crucial actor to help substantively address these issues but also to potentially bridge the cooperation gap with China in these areas. To illustrate why South Korea should be crucial in US Indo-Pacific policy after the pandemic, this article first outlines the limitations to Seoul's participation under the current US approach and how South Korea's contributions toward the same goals as the United States are currently undervalued. It then outlines why the needed changes to the US regional approach after the coronavirus will be most effectively pursued by greater cooperation with South Korea—or at the very least better recognizing Seoul's positive role in the region.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is shaping up to be the most transformative development of our time. How the virus quickly spread across the world and brought the global economy to a sudden halt will have a lasting, sweeping impact. Though we are still in throes of the disease and its fallout, there are expectations of widespread change, as the virus exposes fundamental weaknesses in social, political, and economic systems alike.

Washington's relationships in the Indo-Pacific region are, of course, not exempted from these coronavirus-induced changes. In this regard, perhaps the most significant consequence has been the heightening of tensions in the already strained ties with Beijing. US president Donald Trump has taken to blaming the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) attempt to initially cover up the virus in Wuhan for the worldwide spread of the disease, withholding funding for the World Health Organization for its alleged complicity in the CCP's dishonesty and insisting on referring to the disease as "Chinese." Existing sources of friction in the

relationship have also been heating up, with both countries ratcheting up measures against each other's media outlets and more assertive Chinese naval activity in the South China Sea. In short, great-power competition is intensifying.

Much as it is doing for nearly everything else, COVID-19 is likewise laying bare the shortcomings of existing US policy toward the region. The Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy may be multifaceted, but traditional security concerns have by far received the most attention, directed toward a rising China. However, the scope of the damage from the pandemic has emphasized the need for the FOIP agenda to better encompass nontraditional security concerns, particularly health. The current inflection point provides an opportunity to incorporate another important, hitherto underappreciated nontraditional security concern in the current strategy: climate change.

While the White House may look to the current crisis to catalyze a decoupling with China in certain areas, COVID-19 also highlights that key issues such as global health and climate change cannot be resolved with a complete severing of ties with Beijing. Thus, not only must the issues that fall under the FOIP strategy umbrella be reevaluated but so too must a wholesale competition with China.

In such a recalibrated Indo-Pacific strategy, Seoul should undoubtedly feature more prominently in Washington's approach to the region. The Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) has been reluctant to officially endorse the existing FOIP strategy over fears of incurring China's ire, potentially placing the large bilateral trading relationship and Beijing's support on North Korea at risk. The necessary adjustments to FOIP made clear by COVID-19, however, better align with South Korea's proven success in key nontraditional security areas. Furthermore, because South Korea is perceived as a more neutral actor in the Indo-Pacific and has actively taken on leadership roles in regional cooperation, Seoul could even help facilitate crucial cooperation between Washington and Beijing.

To demonstrate why South Korea should be critical in the reformulation of US Indo-Pacific policy after COVID-19, this article will first provide a brief overview of the FOIP strategy, the limitations to Seoul's participation under this structure, and how South Korea's contributions toward goals shared with the United States are currently undervalued. The article will then outline why the needed changes to the US regional approach after the coronavirus will be most effectively pursued by greater cooperation with South Korea—or at the very least better recognizing Seoul's positive role in the region.

Before COVID-19

The Trump administration's FOIP strategy was first introduced during the November 2017 APEC summit in Vietnam.¹ It is intended to enhance cooperation

with countries in the Indo-Pacific region to uphold the values and rules of the existing regional order, to include “free, fair, and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, good governance, and freedom of the seas.”² The strategy is built on the three pillars of economics, governance, and security and is augmented by close coordination with Japan, Australia, and India—collectively known as “the Quad.” While it is officially inclusive and does not require states to choose between partners, the vision has largely been perceived as urging countries in the region to pick either Washington or Beijing.

That a rising China is the impetus for the FOIP strategy is no secret. Though some official documents refer to the China challenge indirectly, using references such as *freedom from coercion* and *freedom of navigation* in the South China Sea, others are more direct in calling out Beijing as a revisionist power.³ To be sure, many countries in the region, including South Korea, share the same concerns shaping the FOIP strategy, but there are added complications that make the picture less clear-cut.

Constraints

South Korea knows the drawbacks of a more assertive China all too well. In July 2017, Washington and Seoul announced the decision to deploy a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense battery to South Korea. Concerned that the system was intended to defend against threats from China rather than North Korea as the allies stated, Beijing took a series of retaliatory economic measures against South Korea intended to compel the government to reverse its decision. Starting in fall 2016, China took aim at South Korean consumer and entertainment exports, tourism, and Lotte—the company that sold the land to base the THAAD battery to the government.⁴ The collective damage to the South Korean economy was substantial, with some industries and firms never fully recovering even after the “three noes” agreement between Seoul and Beijing was signed in October 2017 to ostensibly end the dispute. Some estimates put the financial losses as high as 25 billion USD.⁵ Still, Seoul cannot completely abandon the pursuit of close ties with Beijing for two reasons in particular.

The first is South Korea’s economic dependence on China through trade. South Korea’s exports represent around 45 percent of GDP, making it second only to Germany in terms of export dependence among the world’s 20 largest economies.⁶ In 2019, South Korea’s 136.2 billion USD in merchandise exports to China—by far the largest destination of goods—represented a quarter of all exports.⁷ So, in effect, exports to China last year represented over 8 percent of South Korea’s total GDP—a remarkably high amount. This dependence not only presents economic risks to South Korea as COVID-19 and the trade war between the

US and China in recent years has made clear but also provides Beijing significant leverage over Seoul as demonstrated by the THAAD incident.

There are, however, several mitigating factors to this dependence. A significant portion of South Korean exports to China are intermediary goods, meaning that final demand for a product comes from outside China, and thus lowering the ceiling for Beijing's direct interference in bilateral trade. Additionally, COVID-19 is causing many multinational firms to rethink their reliance on supply chains running through China, which could catalyze Seoul's ongoing efforts to diversify its trade partners. Nonetheless, South Korea's economic prospects will likely continue to be closely tied to China, at least in the near-term, with the knowledge that getting on Beijing's bad side could prove costly.

The second reason Seoul is not looking to rock the boat with Beijing is because of China's close ties with North Korea. China is North Korea's closest ally and by far its largest trading partner according to official statistics. Despite the limits of transforming this influence into changed policy direction, China's sway with North Korea has been on clear display in recent years, as diplomatic activity between Pyongyang and Washington has increased. Between March 2018 and June 2019, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Chinese president Xi Jinping met five times.⁸ These summits and other senior-level meetings coinciding with the broader effort by South Korea and the United States to engage with North Korea is reflective of Beijing's importance in making diplomatic—and ultimately political, economic, and security—progress with Pyongyang. For South Korea, faced with the brunt of the North Korean security issue and whose ultimate goal is reunification of the peninsula, China can either be a competitor or collaborator for influence in Pyongyang. Posing a direct challenge to Beijing elsewhere possibly risks critical support north of the border.

Consequently, the ROK has been hesitant to formally endorse the FOIP strategy. Seoul has been especially reluctant to get more involved in the security areas where the disagreement between Washington and Beijing is more overt, such as the South China Sea. South Korea has keenly avoided freedom-of-navigation operations through the disputed waters that the United States and several key allies have been conducting. This is highlighted by a September 2018 incident in which a South Korean naval destroyer entered waters claimed by China to avoid a typhoon, sparking a minor incident with Beijing in which Seoul adamantly denied the action was part of a larger political maneuver.⁹ Even for areas where there are clear overlapping interests—such as the Blue Dot Network launched in November 2019 by the United States, Japan, and Australia to advance high-quality infrastructure projects—Seoul has kept away from initiatives that could be perceived as containing China.¹⁰

Opportunities

Where there has been more room for direct cooperation in the region is on issues not as directly aimed at China, such as those that fall under the governance and economics umbrellas of the FOIP strategy. Under South Korean president Moon Jae-in's "New Southern Policy" (NSP), Seoul has been pursuing deepened ties in South and Southeast Asia along the lines of the "Three Ps"—peace, prosperity, and people—mirroring US efforts in many ways.¹¹ During the June 2019 Moon–Trump summit, President Moon stated, "Under the regional cooperation principles of openness, inclusiveness and transparency, we have agreed to put forth harmonious cooperation between Korea's New Southern Policy and the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy."¹²

As one would expect, this cooperation has mainly come outside of the military realm. Before the outbreak of the coronavirus, both countries agreed to expand development cooperation in the region through a September 2019 memorandum of understanding between their respective development agencies.¹³ A November 2019 joint statement resulting from a senior bilateral economic dialogue outlined areas for further cooperation in the region, including development, infrastructure, science and technology, digital connectivity, energy, and smart cities.¹⁴ Additionally, both the joint statement and a joint fact sheet issued earlier that month specifically mention examples of cooperation on climate change and the environment, such as working with Pacific Island nations to secure climate financing, as well as on health, including capacity-building in Cambodia through the Global Health Security Agenda.¹⁵

Even when the two countries are not in direct cooperation with one another, South Korea can still be seen as a "values multiplier" for the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁶ As one of the countries that has benefited the most from the rules-based order, South Korea has a vested interest in its continued success, shaping the country's outreach beyond the peninsula. Though the impetus for the NSP is to make new inroads into South and Southeast Asia while simultaneously weaning the economy off of China, the values underpinning the agenda generally align with those the United States is seeking to promote. This is embodied in the joint statement produced from the 2019 ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit, which reads similarly to what one might expect from the United States when referencing the FOIP strategy. This includes lines such as "[we] agreed to continue working closely together in support of global peace, security, prosperity, and sustainable development."¹⁷

In practical terms, this augments US efforts in the region. South Korea's cooperation with smaller, less developed economies that are potentially more suscep-

tible to coercion from Beijing—offering expertise in areas such digital infrastructure as well as financial assistance—represents material resources being directed toward the same ends that Washington is pursuing. Though both the ROK and the United States have been slow to ramp up funding to meet the massive development needs of the region, Seoul has been ambitious in its outlook, planning to double its grant aid to ASEAN members by 2022.¹⁸

The benefits from Seoul working with other regional partners outside of coordination with Washington also extends into the defense realm. As a 2019 RAND report concludes, “South Korea’s growing regional defense cooperation has been and is commensurate with US interests in the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁹ The report particularly emphasizes how South Korea’s arms exports to partners such as Indonesia and the Philippines help limit the spread of Russian and Chinese influence²⁰—both countries that the Pentagon has referred to as revisionist powers. South Korea’s participation in multilateral exercises, such as the Rim of the Pacific, that include regional partners as well as military hardware transfers like the donation of a Pohang-class corvette to the Philippines, which has been deemed “the most powerful ship” in the Philippine Navy, also furthers US goals in the region.²¹

In short, despite the clear limitations, South Korea has been an important player for the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. The tragedy of the pandemic and the corresponding changes it has highlighted as necessary for the US approach toward the region, however, suggest Seoul will need to feature more prominently in Washington’s regional outlook in the near future.

After COVID-19

The Need for Change

The novel coronavirus was far from a black swan event as some have argued. To use the parlance of former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, it was a “known unknown” that was underestimated. In the short time since COVID-19 has become a pandemic, there have been widespread calls to rebalance US national security priorities and trepidation about using the virus to heighten the rivalry with China.

A prevailing narrative among notable foreign policy pundits and former senior US government officials alike is public spending will need to be shifted from the military to health and other nontraditional security areas. Former US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power encapsulated this sentiment in a 14 April *Time* article, stating, “the shared enemy of a future pandemic must bring about a redefinition of national security and generate long overdue increases of federal in-

vestments in domestic and global health security preparedness.”²² Others have elaborated on this funding claim, pointing out that the Trump administration’s proposed increase of the war-related budget for next year to 1.2 trillion USD while cutting from the Department of Health and Human Services was “spectacularly ill-timed.”²³

Another warning that has emerged is a widening rift between the United States and China, supported by former top officials in Beijing and Washington. In April, former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson wrote in the *Financial Times*, “Strategic competitors and adversaries struggle to find common ground even when it is in their self interest. But there will be no lasting recovery if the largest economies, especially the US and China, cannot find a workable strategic framework.”²⁴ Fu Ying, former vice foreign minister for China, expressed similar sentiments in the *Economist* only a few weeks later.²⁵

As some have pointed out, this pivotal moment of reevaluating priorities and the US–Sino relationship is also an opportunity to direct more attention toward another “known unknown”: climate change. Much like the pandemic, climate change has the potential to destabilize the existing rules-based order, especially if not addressed more seriously in the near future. As China is the world’s largest emitter of carbon dioxide, sufficiently tackling this issue will not be possible without cooperation from Beijing.²⁶

To be certain, both the pandemic and climate change have been on the US government’s radar—including the Department of Defense.²⁷ But, given the impact of the current coronavirus outbreak and what it portends about the potential scope of future shocks to the system from nontraditional security issues, now is the time to critically rethink US foreign policy and defense priorities. This particularly holds true for the Indo-Pacific region, which will clearly play a major part in shaping the twenty-first century.

In increasing attention to nontraditional security areas like health and climate as well as dialing back a blanket zero-sum approach toward Beijing, Washington would, in effect, be opening the door for more regional cooperation with Seoul. This would not be cooperation for its own sake; rather it would tangibly buttress US interests in the region, due to South Korea’s proven expertise and capability in these areas as well as its ability to facilitate and even lead discussion among regional partners.

South Korea on Global Health

How South Korea went from being the global epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in mid-February to zero locally transmitted cases by the beginning of May is one of the most significant bright spots of the global pandemic. The gov-

ernment's fast and broad efforts to contain the virus through testing and contact tracing helped to curb the spread of the virus after an explosion of new cases linked to a religious community in Daegu. Although there are concerns of a second outbreak after initial measures to reopen the country saw a jump in new cases, containment efforts do not seem to be losing steam. The ROK's success, however, has far reaching implications beyond the peninsula.

Seoul's handling of COVID-19 has become one of the key models for countries around the world to follow, made all the more significant by how it is most often contrasted with Beijing's efforts. Both countries have been able to dramatically limit new infections but have pursued very different paths. After initial measures to cover up the virus, the CCP's enforced quarantines and quick buildup of health infrastructure has been touted as a triumph of the authoritarian system.²⁸ Though there are clear holes in this narrative, it nonetheless raised questions about the efficacy of democratic political systems over authoritarian ones against the backdrop of retrenching democracy and pluralism around the world.²⁹

The Moon administration's response to the virus—emphasizing openness, transparency, and civic engagement—has been credited with limiting the impact of COVID-19 and held up as a model for effectively combating pandemics.³⁰ As *New York Times* columnists Max Fisher and Choe Sang Hun summarized, there are four key takeaways from South Korea's pandemic response: intervene fast, before it is a crisis; test early, often and safely; contract tracing isolation and surveillance; and enlist the public's help.³¹ Additionally, South Korea's accountable, competent bureaucracy, and transparent daily disclosure of COVID-19 cases further highlight how key democratic institutions can help successfully contain the virus. While it may already be too late for many countries to apply this model to the ongoing crisis, South Korea is taking an active leadership role to help others with COVID-19, both within the region and around the world.

As South Korea's experience has proven the importance of testing for the disease in ultimately containing it, Seoul is actively working to send its diagnostic tests abroad. Faced with mounting demand from foreign governments, the Moon administration has actively engaged with private local producers of COVID-19 testing kits to help support exports.³² These efforts have largely been fruitful. In March, South Korea sent around 24 million USD worth of test kits overseas, expanding to just over 200 million USD in exports in April.³³ Tests have so far been exported to 117 countries, including those in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Vietnam, China, Australia, and Thailand.³⁴ More than just through commercial sales, Seoul is also striving to donate tests to important partner countries with less domestic capacity to handle the virus. Within the region, this has notably in-

cluded the donation of 50,000 kits to Jakarta through the South Korean conglomerate LG and its manufacturing operations in Indonesia.³⁵

Beyond bilateral cooperation, South Korea has also played an active role in helping to coordinate multilateral responses to the virus in light of limited leadership elsewhere. Whereas the G-20 served as the main focus of multilateral cooperation during the global financial crisis, the institution has been slow to muster a strong, collective response in the face of COVID-19—at least in part due to the China–US rivalry.³⁶ For its part, South Korea has been actively working with other international institutions to stem the growth of the disease. In early May, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Park Han-ki spoke with NATO leadership to discuss cooperation on the pandemic.³⁷ Around the same time, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-hwa spoke with the South Korean envoys to major international organizations, such as the UN and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, emphasizing the importance of multilateralism and asking them to utilize the country’s success in managing the virus to help build on this cooperation.³⁸

Seoul’s leadership has also been clear at the regional level through ASEAN+3—consisting of ASEAN members, China, Japan, and South Korea. In a special ASEAN+3 summit on 14 April, Moon expressed South Korea’s full support for ASEAN and that his government would be looking to utilize the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund—totaling over 110 million USD—to help combat COVID-19.³⁹ Moon also stressed the importance of keeping the flow of economic and people-to-people exchanges open.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most noteworthy acclaim for the South Korean government’s response has come from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. During a press conference in late April, Guterres praised South Korea for not only its handling of COVID-19 but also its continued emphasis on climate change—stating the country is a “remarkable example” of how “the two things can be put together.”⁴¹ Indeed, South Korea’s approach to climate change—both prior to the pandemic and its plans for after—suggests that it will have an important role to play on the regional and global stages in the near future.

South Korea on Climate Change

South Korean leaders from both ends of the political spectrum have pursued policies to limit the country’s carbon footprint in recent decades. Former president Lee Myung-bak was one of the first world leaders to embrace “green growth” as a development strategy, when he was elected in 2008. During the 2008 global financial crisis, 80 percent of the government’s fiscal stimulus plan went to green growth projects. The Lee administration also initiated a Five-Year Plan in 2009,

committing 2 percent of annual GDP to strengthening the use of sustainable technologies, such as goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent through 2020.⁴² These climate-conscious efforts were not just limited to the peninsula. Lee's Global Green Growth Institute was launched in 2010 and, only two years later, was transformed into an international treaty-based organization.⁴³

The current Moon administration has taken a similar path on climate. The cornerstone of Moon's efforts is his Renewable Energy 3020 Plan, intended to increase the renewable energy portion of the country's energy consumption from where it currently stands—nearly 8 percent—to 20 percent by 2030.⁴⁴ Of course, this is not without its challenges, as South Korea faces an uphill battle in moving away from coal.⁴⁵ But, there is some early evidence to suggest that the general public is willing to accept the trade-off of higher prices in exchange for the benefits of renewables.⁴⁶

The outcome of the National Assembly election in April stands to make the country's turn toward fighting climate change all the sharper. The big victory for Moon's Democratic Party, winning a majority of seats, has provided them with the political space to pursue their platform of enacting a "Green New Deal."⁴⁷ Released in the leadup to the election, the plan aspires to make South Korea carbon neutral by 2050, the first pledge of its kind in East Asia. To meet its ambitious goals, the plan includes large investments in renewable energy, the creation of a carbon tax, and the establishment of center to help workers transition to green jobs.⁴⁸

Though there is still much work ahead in terms of implementation, that South Korea could be the first country in Asia to enact sweeping climate-oriented policies amid the pandemic is certainly noteworthy. Much as Lee proved over a decade ago, South Korea would be showing other leaders in the region that it is possible to still incorporate climate into efforts designed to fight the current crisis. More than just a model, however, the current inflection point provides an opportunity to build on South Korea's existing cooperation within the Indo-Pacific on climate change.⁴⁹

It is not just the ROK's values, expertise, and emphasis on diplomacy that make it an attractive partner for countries in the region and, therefore, an indispensable actor for Washington. South Korea's position in the Indo-Pacific allows it to be seen as a more impartial player, which comes with its own set of advantages.

South Korea as a More Neutral Regional Middle Power and Facilitator

The structural limitations South Korea faces can also be seen to provide key structural benefits. While the regional balance of power places clear boundaries on Seoul's ability to more openly engage in efforts to counter Beijing, these same dynamics endow South Korea with less political baggage for partners in the Indo-

Pacific. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the enduring Sino-Japanese rivalry in the region tint cooperation with Beijing and Tokyo in a way that does not affect Seoul. Additionally, South Korea's efforts to shape itself as a middle power, both on the global and regional stages, has cemented its position as an effective diplomatic convenor.

Over the past two decades, each South Korean president has undertaken their own respective approaches to building the country's middle-power image. Starting in the early 2000s, Roh Moo-hyun conceptualized South Korea as a regional balancer between China and Japan, also serving as a hub for security and economic cooperation. President Lee's agenda looked beyond the region under the "Global Korea" slogan and operationalized South Korea's middle-power role through international institutions, most notably the G20.⁵⁰ Though the country's middle-power branding faltered under Park Geun-hye's agenda of "Trustpolitik," Moon's NSP can be seen as an extension of previous middle-power pursuits in the Indo-Pacific region.⁵¹

One of the clearest examples of the efficacy of South Korea's middle-power diplomacy is enshrined in the regional financial governance. When ASEAN+3 countries were in talks to create a new multilateral currency swap arrangement after the 2008 financial crisis proved the existing Chiang Mai Initiative ineffectual, the rivalry between Beijing and Tokyo proved a considerable obstacle. With both sides vying for greater voting power than the other in the new organization, Seoul broke the deadlock by proposing a quota system that now forms the structure of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization.⁵² China and Japan are on equal footing with the largest voting shares as the biggest would-be donors, South Korea's quota amounts to half of what is allotted to each of its larger neighbors, and ASEAN members have various smaller quotas.

South Korea's commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation and serving as an honest broker in the region shows no signs of letting up in the face of the pandemic. If anything, the country's successes in managing the virus appears to be redoubling these commitments as previously highlighted. In the face of a worsening US-China rivalry, South Korea's continued ability to fulfill this role is all the more important in light of diminishing goodwill and the need for coordination on key transborder issues like health and climate.

For Washington, this is crucial—not only because it ensures progress in these areas while its efforts may be concentrated elsewhere but also because South Korea could help serve as a bridge with China on these important, potentially less contentious issues. How difficult this appears to be in the current geopolitical environment only underscores how critical this role would be when thinking about the potential costs of a disjointed response in these areas.

Conclusion

No matter who is in the White House come January, there is now a clear and pressing need to update the US approach to the Indo-Pacific region. The scale of the impact of COVID-19 so far seems to only be outdone by the implications for how it will shape the future. The most obvious necessary changes to the current FOIP strategy—namely greater emphases on global health and climate change—also require the reevaluation of an agenda toward the comprehensive containment of and decoupling with China. In light of these needs, Washington's path forward with the region after the pandemic naturally runs more through Seoul than it has in recent years.

Moving forward, the first step for Washington's post-COVID-19 Indo-Pacific policy should be to amplify efforts on global health and climate change to include China where possible. There are clear limitations to what this would entail in terms of tangible outcomes as the US government continues to try to stop the spread of the virus at home and great-power competition intensifies, but effectively communicating this shift would engender its own benefits. While the United States should still look to make advancements with South Korea in these areas as a natural partner, voicing the importance of these issues carries its own weight, as it will effectively reaffirm the work Seoul is already doing.

In the short- to medium-term, differing priorities on traditional security concerns in the region will likely continue to prevent the ROK from officially joining a US regional approach that is perceived to be geared toward containing China. Even within a policy agenda consisting of mixed efforts to push back against Beijing in some areas and engage with it in others that this article advocates for, Seoul's endorsement would still not likely be forthcoming, due to existing concerns over its reliance on China for trade and influencing North Korea. However, there should be broader recognition of how Seoul's outreach in the Indo-Pacific region furthers the same values the United States is pursuing in the region, whether it is working directly with Washington or not—especially when it comes to formulating policy at the bilateral level.

US military strength in the region is a means to an end, not an end in itself. As the “free and open” modifiers of the current US strategy suggest, the promotion of values is its chief goal. In this sense, South Korea's diplomacy should not only be viewed as upholding shared values in the region but also as a values multiplier. This is ultimately worth just as much toward US goals as military cooperation and will likely be more so given the major nontraditional security challenges that lie ahead.

Consequently, Washington's second step in building a post-pandemic regional approach should be a shift from a piecemeal to more comprehensive view of the

ROK in the Indo-Pacific. The effective lack of support for Seoul in the face of Chinese economic retaliation over THAAD and recurrent demands for South Korea to dramatically increase its financial commitments in military burden-sharing negotiations suggest there is a disconnect between how South Korea is viewed at the regional and bilateral levels and what Washington's stated regional objectives are.⁵³ In practice, this would involve little more than reassessing the value of South Korea's existing work in the region to the United States that may be more intangible as well as fall outside the realm of direct cooperation with Washington. However, doing so will help better realize Seoul's existing contributions to US regional interests and make the most of opportunities to further shared regional interests in the face of major new challenges. ★

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Confronting China's Maritime Expansion in the South China Sea

A Collective Action Problem

DR. STEPHEN BURGESS

A collective action problem prevents the United States and its ally and partners from effectively countering Beijing as China moves forward in the South China Sea. The United States is unable to provide sufficient, appropriate security goods that would enable the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia to work together with America to stop China's advance, bring Beijing to the negotiating table, and force China to abide by international law. On a positive note, these four countries have taken collective diplomatic action in leading the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2020 to recognize the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the basis for resolving disputes. US freedom of navigation (FON) and overflight operations over China's outposts in the South China Sea (SCS) have caused protests and made the US position clear. Washington continues to provide security assistance and cooperation to the four countries and hold multilateral joint exercises with their armed forces. However, China continues to advance in the SCS and erode US credibility. If the US were to adopt a strategy of targeted denial, America's credibility could rise and the four countries' rights restored. China could be compelled by US-led collective action to negotiate a solution to the impasse.

The Collective Action Problem

For more than a decade, China has vigorously staked a claim to most of the SCS as its sovereign territory, within the so-called "nine-dash line." The rising power has been encroaching on territory within the 200-mile exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia; threatening force against US military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) activities in China's EEZ; and protesting against US FON and overflight operations near People's Liberation Army (PLA) outposts well outside China's EEZ. In particular, Beijing has encroached by using China's powerful coast guard, armed fishing fleet and militias, backed by an even more powerful PLA Navy (PLAN). Together, these measures have methodically pushed back the weaker maritime forces of Vietnam and the Philippines from parts of their EEZs and challenged

those of Malaysia and Indonesia. In addition, China has constructed artificial islands and positioned PLAN and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) units and surface-to-air (SAM) and surface-to-surface missiles in the Spratly and Paracel Islands, thereby expanding the antiaccess, area denial (A2/AD) capability that threatens the US and its allies and partners in the SCS. For more than two decades, China has harassed US naval and air operations and, since 2015, has protested US overflight and freedom of navigation operations (FONOP) in the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Today, China's maritime expansion activities enable it to potentially interfere with oil and gas exploration, and its antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities pose a challenge to the US Navy and Air Force operations and to maritime and air traffic. In sum, China poses a potential threat to trade flows, resource extraction, and military operations in a highly strategic body of water.

This article argues that a collective action problem impedes the United States and its allies and partners from effectively confronting China in the SCS.¹ The problem is that the United States, as a great power, can provide appropriate security goods for the four smaller regional states to block creeping maritime encroachment by China. However, the wider US grand strategy and US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater strategy hamper the provision of appropriate security goods to those allies and partners. US deterrence of aggression by China with escalation "off-ramps" in Northeast Asia prevents the adoption of a more assertive strategy that would include working alone or with allied and partner forces in denying China's advances in the SCS.² Instead, the United States has settled for FONOPs, overflight ops, and security assistance and cooperation, which have not deterred China from expansionist activities. The problem is that the United States acting unilaterally or with others in denying China's expansion against the four countries could lead to escalation and destabilize the entire Indo-Pacific theater. However, if Washington does not act more assertively, its allies and partners will increasingly question US credibility and become more susceptible to China's influence campaign.³

The second aspect of the collective action problem is that without sufficient supply of US security goods and a more assertive strategy, the four Southeast Asian states are too weak and divided in terms of interests, positioning, and capabilities to work together to stop encroachment. Vietnam has one of the strongest militaries in the region but has a land border and extensive trade ties with China and must counter expansion on its own, while exercising caution and confining interaction with US forces to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) exercises.⁴ Malaysia is further away than Vietnam but weaker militarily, has been seeking to cooperate with the United States and Vietnam in countering China in the Spratly Islands, but remains reluctant to expand its military partnership with the US be-

yond HA/DR and search and rescue (S&R) exercises. The Philippines is a US ally but is the weakest of the four militarily; the PLA has pushed back the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the Spratly Islands and consolidated control over Scarborough Shoal. To counter China, the AFP has sought to work with the United States in moving to a more assertive stance with enhanced security assistance and cooperation in preventing further expansion, but Pres. Rodrigo Duterte moved the country closer to China in 2016 and threatened to cut or reduce certain ties with the United States. Indonesia is strong militarily, furthest away from China geographically, and has been trying to stand up to Chinese forces' challenges in the North Natuna Sea (adjacent to the SCS) and around Natuna Island. However, Jakarta is not engaged in the Spratly Islands, has little incentive to lead the other three states in confronting China, and is nonaligned and the leader of the ASEAN, which means that it is limited in security cooperation activities with the United States.⁵ Cooperation and leadership by Indonesia and Vietnam could provide some capability to stand up to China, but both are reluctant to work too closely with Washington and are hundreds of miles away from each other.

If Southeast Asian countries are to stand up to China and help solve the collective action problem, they require stronger national leadership and will, as well as US commitment. In addition, they need more capable navies and coast guards as well as air forces and marines to deter aggression and deny expansion. For developing countries, the associated weapons systems are expensive to acquire and maintain and require constant training to operate and upgrade. Pro-army bias often stands in the way of maritime and air force development. Armies dominate in all four countries, with Vietnam's land border with China requiring a large and capable army and with the other three countries waging counterinsurgencies of varying intensity.

Concerning US allies, Japan has constitutional barriers that prevent it from even the most minimal actions in the SCS that could be interpreted as offensive. Australia has politico-economic constraints, as the decades' long beneficiary of massive mineral exports to China. Both countries cannot participate in overflight and FONOPs, much less denial operations.⁶ In sum, even if the United States took the lead in such operations, the four Southeast Asian states, Japan, and Australia would find it difficult to follow suit.

My argument that US power and influence in Southeast Asia are not enough to overcome the growing collective action problem in the SCS must be viewed in the context of East Asia expert David Shambaugh's analysis; ⁷ he asserts that China has not become hegemonic in Southeast Asia and that the United States has the advantage in soft power, foreign direct investment (with large US companies), naval power, and alliances and partnerships in the region. He points out that China

has the edge over the United States in proximity to Southeast Asia and in infrastructure development and lending. There is also considerable evidence that China tends to be heavy-handed, which has alienated several countries and their publics. Despite the remaining US advantages, most Southeast Asian countries—even partners and allies—now must hedge in their relations with the United States and a rising China, which makes collective action in the SCS increasingly difficult.

In contrast to my argument that China will be able to continue expanding in the SCS and make it increasingly difficult for the United States and the four Southeast Asian nations to stop, Michael Beckley, in a 2017 *International Security* article,⁸ asserts that China will be unable to dominate most of the SCS and exclude the United States and Southeast Asian countries from the area within the nine-dash line, including the sea lanes. He argues that the United States and its Southeast Asian partners can take collective action or act individually to deter China from using military force to gain control of most of the SCS. The armed forces of Southeast Asian countries have the defensive advantage, as they are closer to home than PLAN and PLAAF forces based on Hainan Island and the southern China mainland. Furthermore, the armed forces of Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines have A2/AD capabilities. Most have SAMs and fighter aircraft armed with antiship missiles, as well as submarines and mobile antiship missiles and mines.⁹ With the United States as a partner, their advantage is potentially even greater.¹⁰ The flaw in Beckley's analysis is in his principal question—does China have the capability to take over Taiwan?¹¹ He fails to acknowledge that a creeping takeover of the SCS is much less difficult for China to achieve than a successful attack on Taiwan.¹² Southeast Asian countries can use their A2/AD capabilities to defeat a Chinese attack on their land masses, but they cannot use them to block China's expansion in the SCS. In addition, Beckley argues that Japan, India, and Australia as well as the United Kingdom and France could work with Southeast Asian countries and the United States to guarantee FON and overflight. However, these countries have not been willing to engage more assertively to stop or slow China's maritime advance. Finally, US overflight and FONOPs have only amounted to symbolic protests against expansion.

In a May 2020 article, Oriana Skylar Mastro assesses different scenarios for military and diplomatic actions by China and the United States in the SCS. She starts from the premise that Pres. Xi Jinping may escalate military activity in the SCS to divert attention from the aftereffects of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. China could “intensify coercive strategies” that it has already been pursuing or “change the military balance of power” by deploying more forces and sophisticated weaponry to the SCS or “take military action” against the United States and its ally and partners, which could lead to conflict escalation. The United

States can respond by choosing “deterrence by punishment” through sanctions or proportionate military retaliation. Alternatively, it could choose “deterrence by denial” by thwarting China’s expansionist activities. Finally, Washington could “accommodate China’s objectives” and see the SCS become Beijing’s “lake.” Mastro sees deterrence by denial as the most effective option but doubts the willingness of Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia to risk their relations with China.¹³ I delve more deeply into deterrence by denial as an effective option and the collective action problem preventing the United States and the four Southeast Asian nations from pursuing this option.

The collective action problem in the SCS is more problematic than the one that has existed in NATO since its founding in 1949. In the beginning, the United States was willing to pay for the preponderance of inclusive public goods for “regional security through deterrence” against the Soviet Union.¹⁴ NATO member states were a relatively “privileged group,” and the issue of burden-sharing grew more contentious as US economic dominance declined and as West European states grew richer. In contrast, US efforts to provide collective security goods against communist expansion to poorer states through the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, 1954–77, collapsed after the Vietnam War. The ASEAN rose in its ashes as an organization to resolve disputes among member states and not to provide collective security against a rising China in the SCS. Only Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia have the level of interest in the SCS to lead the way in ASEAN diplomatic collective action. Furthermore, US interests in denying China’s expansion in the SCS are not as great as those in deterring the Soviet Union in Europe. The result is a lack of appropriate collective security goods.

A Different Approach

I examine the collective action problem by synthesizing the results from field research and previous articles and the works of Shambaugh, Beckley, Mastro and others.¹⁵ First, I assess China’s motivations, strategy, and tactics and demonstrate how China is using carrots and sticks in moving forward in the region. Second, I appraise US grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific and focus on the shortcomings of Washington’s SCS strategy, FONOPs, and overflight operations that are not deterring China from methodical expansion. Third is an examination of the characteristics and weaknesses of each of the four Southeast Asian states and diverging strategies and capacities, as well as the gaps between them and the United States.¹⁶ Fourth is a synthesis of the two parts of the collective action problem, demonstrating the strategic mismatch that is not stopping China from inexorably achieving Beijing’s goal of taking over most of the SCS. Finally, I assess a denial strategy that might slow or even stop China’s expansion and meet American in-

terests and those of its allies and partners, as well different obstacles that stand in the way of such a strategy.

Besides collective action theory, my analysis draws on structural realism, which has been used to analyze China's changing behavior.¹⁷ I argue that, after two decades of a "peaceful rise" grand strategy and largely defensive posture in the SCS and East China Sea (ECS), a rapidly growing China had the power to switch to a methodical offensive strategy in 2009 and challenged Japan in the Senkaku Islands and Southeast Asian states in the SCS and US credibility (after the Iraq War and 2008 financial crisis had weakened US power) and stepped up its influence campaign.¹⁸ When China realized that Japan would defend the islands and the United States promised to come to Tokyo's defense if Japanese forces were attacked, Beijing did not escalate but continued to press China's claim with periodic military maneuvers. Instead, Beijing realized that China had greater power to challenge the weaker Southeast Asian states in the SCS and that the collective action problem limited the options of the United States and US allies and partners.¹⁹

What Is China Actually Doing in the SCS? Sticks and Carrots

For five decades, China has been working to control increasing parts of the SCS, but this campaign accelerated in the 2010s. In the 1970s and 1980s, China took over control of much of the Paracel Islands in the northern SCS and Johnson South Reef in the Spratly Islands in the southeast quadrant of the SCS, both in Vietnam's EEZ. In 2009, a rising China switched to a more muscular grand strategy and asserted its nine-dash-line claim partly in reaction to a deal between Vietnam and Malaysia that divided their EEZs and continental shelves. Since then, Beijing has been carrying out a strategy to eventually secure sovereign control of the SCS by working to control the Spratly Islands, extending China's A2/AD capabilities and pushing back the United States. By advancing while avoiding conflict, China has been moving toward gaining a dominant position in the SCS and diminishing the role of the United States. China could continue to expand its claims in the SCS and become a dominant power without threatening FON and overflight. This appears to be the course China's leaders have followed, with occasional outbursts of aggressive behavior.²⁰

Since 2001, when PLAAF fighter aircraft forced a US P-3 surveillance aircraft over international waters to land on Hainan Island, China has chipped away at US influence in the region, while only occasionally engaging in provocative actions. China is engaged in active defense of its interests and rejects US military activities near its coast and in its EEZ. In particular, China interprets UNCLOS to mean that ISR activities are "unlawful" within its EEZ and has taken measures against US electronic surveillance of the PLA's Southern Command and nuclear

submarines around Hainan Island.²¹ China's posture toward the United States became even more confrontational when Beijing switched to more assertive strategy and tactics. In 2009, PLAN, PLAAF, and paramilitary forces intercepted the USS *Impeccable* and attempted to sever its towed sonar array 125 kilometers (75 miles) off Hainan Island. This started regular harassment of US Navy vessels within China's EEZ. For instance, in 2014, PLAAF combat aircraft flew close to a US Navy P-8 surveillance aircraft within China's EEZ, approximately 200 kilometers (120 miles) off the Chinese coast. China could eventually impose an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over part or most of the SCS, which would follow the ADIZ it declared in 2013 in the ECS. Evidence for this comes from warnings that have been given by the PLA against US military aircraft that have been flying over PLA outposts in the Spratly Islands.²²

China's leaders have viewed the US strategy in Asia with concern for years, especially with the US Department of Defense's 2010 Air-Sea Battle operational concept—renamed the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) in 2015—including the option of air strikes over China's mainland to counter its A2/AD capabilities. In addition, Beijing has feared that the United States is pursuing a containment policy, starting with the 2011 “Rebalance to Asia,” which had to be thwarted. Also, Chinese leaders have suspected that Washington has been behind challenges to China launched by the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan as part of a containment strategy.²³

In maneuvering to secure greater control over Beijing's interests in the SCS, China has used “gray zone” tactics, leading with its coast guard, militias, and armed fishing fleet, with the PLAN as a backup force against those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.²⁴ This approach serves two purposes, enabling China to: (1) flood an area with many armed actors to stop economic activities of adversaries and make an armed response as difficult as possible and (2) claim that its forces are carrying out “domestic policing” actions within the nine-dash line and that retaliation by adversaries' navies are escalatory and warrant using the PLAN in “self-defense.” In particular, China's forces prevent Hanoi from operating in much of Vietnam's EEZ in the Paracel Islands and parts of the Spratly Islands. In addition, China has been harassing Vietnam-backed oil and gas exploration in the Spratly Islands with little resistance. In recent years, China has been pushing Philippine forces out of positions in the Spratly Islands and, since, 2012, blocking access to Scarborough Shoal in Manila's EEZ, as the PLA prepares to possibly establish a military base there. The PLAN and China Coast Guard (CCG) continue harassing access to the BRP *Sierra Madre*, an LST-542-class tank landing ship built for by the US Navy during World War II—now in possession of the Philippine Navy, the rusting hulk was deliberately run aground on Second Johnson Atoll

in Manila's EEZ and manned by Philippine Marines to assert Manila's sovereignty in the country's dispute with China over ownership of the Spratly Islands. In Malaysia's EEZ, China is challenging oil and gas exploration.

China continues to expand exploration activities in the SCS as part of its hunt for much-needed energy and is now receiving oil and gas from the SCS. Chinese experts estimate that there is five times more oil and gas in the SCS than US Energy Information Agency estimates.²⁵ The Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) has been exploring for oil and gas in the EEZs claimed by Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, which has caused concern in those countries. CNOOC has been working with Russian oil and gas companies as well as other multinational corporations. In addition, Chinese fishing vessels now operate throughout the SCS to meet the country's rising demand for protein, and Chinese authorities are concerned about overfishing and force Chinese fishermen from the EEZ around Hainan Island into the EEZs of the Philippines and Vietnam, which leads to confrontations.

From 2013 to 2018, Beijing undertook major island-building projects on seven outposts and constructed military bases on them, improving China's strategic position, installing missiles, building runways, and enhancing its A2/AD capabilities. China continues to put pressure on other Philippine and Vietnamese outposts in the Spratly Islands. Furthermore, China has annexed the seven outposts and the area within the nine-dash line as part of "Sansha County" of Hainan Province, even though the Spratly Islands are more than 700 miles south of Hainan Island. In recent years, China has sent its fishing fleet, backed by the CCG and PLAN, into Indonesia's EEZ in the North Natuna Sea (just south of the SCS) and around Natuna Island. Jakarta responded by sending the Indonesian Navy, which caused the fishing fleet and CCG to retreat, but both inevitably returned. The fact that China is willing to challenge Indonesia in the farthest reaches of the nine-dash line indicates Beijing's intentions to eventually control the entire sea.

In 2013, President Xi presented his "Chinese Dream," which brought a more robust use of sticks and carrots.²⁶ China is using carrots, including aid and investment, to win over ASEAN countries. The first breakthrough came when China provided aid, trade, and investment to Cambodia and Laos, which led Phnom Penh and Vientiane to break with the ASEAN consensus on a Code of Conduct for the SCS in 2012. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which offers infrastructure development projects and loans, is the most prominent carrot. Malaysia, Indonesia, and other ASEAN states have welcomed the BRI.²⁷ China has launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), rivaling the World Bank. All 10 ASEAN states, Britain, France, and other US allies have joined the AIIB. In addition, China has countered Japanese efforts to promote the Trans-

Pacific Partnership (abandoned by the United States in 2017) by pushing for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Program, which excludes the United States. Besides the examples of Cambodia and Laos, China's offer of loans, infrastructure development, and other goods helped to undermine the resolve of the Philippines to insist that China abide by the 2016 UNCLOS ruling and helped to influence President Duterte to move the Philippines closer to Beijing and away from Washington. Also, China's imports from Australia keep Canberra from taking a stronger stand on the SCS.

In conclusion, China could interrupt military and commercial traffic by the four countries in the SCS if it wished to do so but realizes that such action would bring escalation by the United States and the disruption of oil and gas imports from the Middle East. China's gray-zone actions are such that it can maintain its military bases in the Paracel and Spratly Islands and advance in the area and know that it will not incite US countermeasures or collective action with allies and partners to deny expansion. As Beijing moves to take control of the waters in and around the Spratly Islands in the center of the SCS, China strengthens its position to control the sea lanes. Also, the United States is not sufficiently challenging China as the latter influences the four countries to lean toward Beijing and eventually accept the nine-dash line, dismantle their outposts, and renounce their EEZs. China cannot stop the US military from ISR activity near Hainan Island and FONOPs and overflight ops but will continue to intensify the threat environment to create greater uncertainty. At issue is how to counteract China's strategy and tactics now before it pushes Southeast Asian countries and the United States back further and assumes a more dominant position in the SCS.

US Strategy and Collective Action Obstacles

US strategy in the Indo-Pacific has prioritized Northeast Asia and the defense of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan above commitments in Southeast Asia, except during the Vietnam War, 1964–73.²⁸ The US strategy is to be prepared to defeat China if it attacks Japan and Taiwan and North Korea if it invades South Korea. This will be accomplished through massive conventional forces backed by nuclear weapons, providing deterrence as well as off-ramps to prevent escalation. Therefore, the United States has based most of its forces in Northeast Asia to prepare for war there. In addition, the United States, as a large distant power, has problems with resource deployment and sustainment, strategy and tactics, and credibility in the Indo-Pacific. Beijing knows the US strategy and its shortcomings and has designed its approach to coerce and influence US allies and partners without causing the United States to flow forces from the homeland to the SCS and elsewhere in the region.

The US traditional reliance on a “hub and spoke” alliance structure has limited Washington’s ability to organize and activate collective security against a rising China in the SCS and ECS. In the latter area, the United States has left it up to Japan to deny a Chinese takeover of the Senkaku Islands, and US forces are only prepared to come to the defense of Japanese forces if China uses a clash in the islands to escalate into a wider war with the Japanese Self-Defense Force. In the SCS, the United States did not come to the defense of its ally, the Philippines, in 2012 when China took over Scarborough Shoal and is not prepared to defend its ally’s claims in the Spratly Islands. While the United States welcomed the UNCLOS decision, Washington continues to abide by the ruling that none of the features in the Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal qualify as islands and will not defend the Philippines there. The US failure to take more robust action to help its allies and partners deny China’s advances has weakened some countries’ faith in US credibility and allows for its competitor’s continued expansion.

In conclusion, China’s carrots and sticks and the US approach have eroded the latter’s credibility and could eventually cause some partners to bandwagon with China and submit to Beijing’s will. On a positive note, US Navy FONOPS demonstrate defense of international law principles, that the US Navy can sail where it wants, and that the prospect of the PLA interfering with naval and other maritime traffic in the SCS is still a remote possibility. The same applies to US military overflight operations and freedom of air travel. However, these operations have not stopped China’s methodical advances in the SCS. China continues to push forward, not recognizing the UNCLOS ruling, the ASEAN Code of Conduct, and related principles. Therefore, in the short to medium term, the United States will be able to defeat China if Beijing blocks the SCS or escalates to war, but ultimately the PLA could escalate and stop military and/or commercial traffic in the SCS and achieve Beijing’s larger strategic goal of dominating the region.

Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia and Collective Action

Each of these Southeast Asian states has different interests, politics, and relationships with the United States and China, varying positions in the SCS, and divergent capabilities that must be overcome to enable collective action.²⁹ They also require more capable navies, coast guards, and other forces, as well as effective ISR over the SCS, if they are to stand up to China and its diverse and powerful forces. However, there is a basis for collective action in which the United States could become more involved. Manila, Kuala Lumpur, and Hanoi share interests in the Spratlys and in preventing China from expelling them from their outposts and

EEZs. Vietnam and Malaysia already have developed diplomatic cooperation in dividing their EEZs between them and are expanding them to include their continental shelves. The four states interact diplomatically and militarily through the ASEAN and bilaterally and support the UNCLOS ruling on the illegality of the nine-dash line. At the June 2020 ASEAN Summit, Vietnam led the way in regenerating consensus among the 10 Southeast Asian states in a strong statement that “UNCLOS should be the basis of sovereign rights and entitlements in the SCS.”³⁰ Let us examine in greater detail each country’s interests and capabilities.

Vietnam

Vietnam is located in the northwestern SCS, bordering China, and has overlapping claims with China over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. The country has long featured a strong nationalist movement, especially with armed resistance against France, the United States, and China. In addition, Vietnam has experience in waging low-level conflict with China over the Paracel Islands and SCS, with outbreaks in 1974,³¹ 1979, 1988, and 2014.³² China’s unilateral season fishing ban (from May to August) around the waters of the Paracels and oil exploration and militarization of the SCS continue to be sources of friction. Shambaugh classifies Vietnam as a “balanced hedger.”³³ It defends its land boundary, maintains significant economic relations, and manages its long-running dispute over the Paracel and Spratly Islands with China, as well as fostering a growing strategic partnership with the United States. While Vietnamese favor the United States over China (80 percent to 15 percent according to a US source),³⁴ the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam is cognizant of the need to balance relations with both Washington and Beijing. Vietnam’s security strategy centers around the “three Nos”: no alliances, no foreign bases on its territory, and no reliance on any country to combat others. Consequently, there are currently limits to the strategic partnership with the United States, and Vietnam will have to continue to confront China in the Paracel and Spratlys largely on its own.³⁵ At the same time, Hanoi has been reaching out to the United States and other countries to seek security partnerships and diplomatic support in its struggle against China. In May 2016, Washington lifted the lethal weapons ban against Vietnam, signaling strategic commitment and opening the door for greater security assistance and cooperation and arms sales.³⁶ In addition, Vietnam has diversified its arms suppliers and recently made purchases from India, Spain, and Japan, moving away from heavy reliance on Russian equipment.

One of the Vietnam People’s Armed Forces’ priorities is to guarantee sovereignty and ensure it has the capabilities necessary to protect the nation’s interests and enforce laws in the maritime territory Hanoi claims, including its SCS EEZ

and 21 small features, with two airstrips and mobile missiles, which it occupies in the Spratly Islands. The country has a rising GDP and relatively high state capacity, exemplified by a history of popular mobilization to defeat invaders, which has enabled the regime to increase the defense budget and expand procurement for all three services and its coast guard.

Concerning maritime capabilities and the SCS, the Vietnam People's Navy has 26 ships, including six Kilo-class submarines, purchased from Russia, which it has been operating for more than five years, as well as two mobile antiship cruise missile batteries with a 200-mile range that it can use as a deterrent threat in a confrontation with China.³⁷ Vietnam has been building up its coast guard, and the United States has provided Vietnam with excess defense articles, including a decommissioned US Coast Guard cutter in 2016. This opens the way for US–Vietnam coast guard security cooperation, particularly in HA/DR exercises and perhaps S&R. Above all, Vietnam can use the cutter for the Ministry of National Defense mission in the Spratly Islands and perhaps in the Paracel Islands. In addition, Japan has provided six multirole maritime response vehicles worth 40 million USD.³⁸

Vietnam has enough capabilities to defend its mainland in case maritime conflict escalates to a wider war. Beckley estimates that the Vietnam Air Defense–Air Force (ADAF) SAMs, including the SPYDER from Israel and the S-300 from Russia, can take down PLAAF fighter aircraft over Vietnam's mainland, exacting heavy losses. While much of the ADAF's aircraft are approaching obsolescence and still suffer serious limitations in areas of command and control (C2), domain awareness, and airlift, the air force provides credible support role of land and naval forces. The ADAF has no rapid deployment role other than providing routine air defense and troop reinforcement to the Spratly Islands.³⁹ The United States is supplying the ADAF with T-6 trainer aircraft, which could develop into Vietnam's procurement of F-15Es or F-16s. At present, the ADAF is handicapped by pilots who are unable to fly in bad weather or at night.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, despite the ADAF's shortcomings, its SAMs remain capable of providing air superiority over its landmass.

In conclusion, Vietnam is acquiring the capabilities to defend its outposts and EEZ in the Spratly Islands but is limited to unilateral efforts in dealing with China's expansion. China has more maritime assets and is able to mostly control the Paracel Islands and continue challenging Vietnam in the Spratly Islands. Concerning the collective action problem, the United States is confined to security cooperation and assistance, diplomatic support, and HA/DR exercises with Vietnam. Southeast Asian states can only provide diplomatic support, as witnessed at the 2020 ASEAN Summit in Hanoi.

The Philippines

The Philippines is located in the northeast SCS, and its military installations at Subic Bay and Basa Air Base are 600 miles from China's on Hainan Island. The country has had an alliance with the United States for more than seven decades, which seemed to be strengthening at the time of the 2016 UNCLOS victory over China. However, in July 2016, President Duterte took office and immediately sought lucrative deals with a China that was offering economic carrots. As a result, the Philippines backed off from its UNCLOS triumph over China. In 2016, the Obama administration pressured Duterte to stop extrajudicial killings and the regime's other human rights abuses, which caused relations to fray. Duterte curtailed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2016 with the United States and threatened to cancel the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in February 2020. In 2018, Shambaugh observed that the Philippines had become a "tilter" toward China because of President Duterte's actions.⁴¹ Until 2022, President Duterte will continue to be influenced by Beijing and protest against US human rights sanctions, and his hand-picked successor will probably continue to do so. The fact that the Philippines swings every six years or so from challenging China to appeasing Beijing is indicative of elite corruption and state weakness.⁴²

In contrast to Duterte, the AFP remains fully committed to maintaining the US alliance, resisting China's expansionist activities, and engaging in the EDCA to jointly develop bases. Ultimately, Duterte signed off on a limited implementation of the EDCA, which ensured joint construction of a few military bases and backed off terminating the VFA. In 2020, the defense and diplomatic establishment finally succeeded in pressuring Duterte to challenge China in the SCS instead of seeking deals.⁴³ Despite the Philippines' more assertive stance, the AFP will struggle against China's "salami-slicing" tactics in the SCS and remain dependent on the United States for defense. Given the political situation and Philippine weakness, Washington will be compelled to weigh its interests in the SCS and the value of its alliance with the Philippines against justly punishing the regime for human rights abuses.

Concerning the maritime and other capabilities necessary to confront China's encroachment against the Philippine's nine outposts and its EEZ and seizure of Scarborough Shoal, the AFP will be constrained by defense spending that is less than 5 billion USD per annum because of weak state capacity and inability to tax elites in addition to decades of dependence on the United States for defense. In addition, the Philippine Army remains dominant over the Navy and Air Force, and the AFP remains internally focused on counterinsurgency and HA/DR and requires US support to do both. Consequently, the Philippines has been slow to

develop its maritime and air forces and has no missile-armed ships or combat aircraft that can challenge China's forces.⁴⁴ The Philippines is developing its Coast Guard, which now has 24,000 personnel compared to the Navy with 16,000. However, the Philippine Coast Guard has no gray-zone tactics training to confront China's forces and cannot focus solely on the SCS, given the security challenges in the Philippine archipelago. The Navy has acquired new warships from the United States and has used them to make voyages in defense of the *Sierra Madre* on Pag-asa Island in the Spratly Islands. In case of conflict escalation with China, the Philippines does not have an air defense system like Vietnam's and will have to rely upon the United States.

The Philippines is struggling to defend itself and its EEZ and requires its US ally for defense of the homeland. The prospect of regaining its rights in Scarborough Shoal is remote, and standing its ground in the Spratlys is a struggle. If the United States were to adopt a more assertive strategy of denial, the Philippines might be able to take a stronger stand and regain its rights. Manila would be even stronger if Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia were to go beyond diplomatic support and provide military backing along with the United States.

Malaysia

Malaysia is located in the central and southern SCS and a thousand miles away from Hainan Island. For decades, Malaysia and Indonesia have cooperated in policing the Strait of Malacca, and Kuala Lumpur has a defense arrangement with the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore and has become a security partner with the United States. However, in 2018, Shambaugh characterized Malaysia as an "aligned accommodationist" with China, because Beijing had used aid, investment, and other incentives to influence the administration of Prime Minister Najib Razak.⁴⁵ His administration tried to suppress media attention regarding China's activities in Malaysia's waters. In 2018, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamed led a coalition that ended the six-decades-long reign of the National Party and formed a government that moved away from deals with China and toward the United States. In 2019, political instability developed, which weakened the government and its opposition to China's expansion. Political battles between government and opposition have made it difficult for Malaysia to take a strong stand on the SCS. In March 2020, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin assumed office and continued Malaysia's peaceful diplomacy, calling for adherence to UNCLOS and a binding code of conduct for the SCS.⁴⁶

Since 2012, Chinese actions claiming sovereignty over Malaysia's EEZ have caused concern in Kuala Lumpur, especially among military leaders. There was also dismay due to China's hard line over the Malaysian Airlines MH370 disap-

pearance in March 2014. In contrast, cooperation between the Malaysian and US militaries grew in the search for the airliner. In addition, Chinese oil-and-gas exploration and outpost construction has been moving southwest in the Spratly Islands for years, conflicting with Malaysia's EEZ and energy exploitation plans. In 2014, China and CNOOC occupied Luconia Shoal in Malaysia's EEZ to stop Shell and other companies moving northward to explore for oil and gas. At the time, Kuala Lumpur announced that the nation's oil and gas resources constituted the red line that China should not cross. However, Malaysia has sought not to provoke Beijing and has not pushed China for acceptance of the Code of Conduct for the SCS. In 2020, Malaysia is using the UNCLOS SCS ruling to expand its continental shelf claim. Also, both Malaysia and Indonesia oppose US naval patrols in the Strait of Malacca due to the sensibilities of the local populations.

The Malaysian military is dominated by the army, and security forces are concerned with violent extremist organizations (VEO), transnational criminal organizations, and smuggling. Malaysia has been focused on fighting insurgencies, particularly against rebel groups in East Sabah, which regularly cross over from the Philippines. In contrast, the military does not pay as much attention to China, the SCS, or the Spratly Islands. Concerning maritime capabilities, Malaysia's navy is small and outdated,⁴⁷ and the coast guard has recently been strengthened with US and Japanese assistance. However, neither service is capable of patrolling the vast maritime EEZ that the country claims. The government has been increasing its defense budget and buying new equipment, but Kuala Lumpur takes care not to provoke concern in its neighbors: Indonesia and Singapore. Malaysia has established three outposts in the Spratlys and developed a marine corps and a naval base at Bintulu in Sarawak in response to the claims made in 2014 by China's PLAN on James Shoal in Malaysia's EEZ. Malaysian-US cooperation over the MH370 search created some basic interoperability with the US Navy's maritime and air reconnaissance forces. Malaysia relied heavily on US P-3s, P-8s, and satellite imagery. Since 2014, Malaysia has been improving its air defense weaknesses exposed in the MH370 disappearance and has been developing ISR capabilities as well as an electronic communications link between maritime and air. Exercises with US forces included a focus on developing amphibious capabilities, which led Malaysia to consider buying attack helicopters.

Kuala Lumpur will continue to challenge China in the SCS through diplomatic means and claiming more of Malaysia's continental shelf as its EEZ. It has improved its ISR to keep track of China's activities. However, Malaysia will not join the United States in denying Chinese expansion in the Spratly Islands, even though China has been intruding in Malaysia's EEZ for much of the past decade. In April 2020, US Navy ships and an Australian frigate intervened when Chinese

vessels were harassing an oil-and-gas exploration vessel in Malaysia's EEZ,⁴⁸ but the government looked upon a more assertive United States with anxiety, because escalation would be disruptive to the economy.

Indonesia

Southeast Asia's largest nation is leading in promoting an ASEAN "rules-based international order," independent of the United States and China, and Shambaugh calls nonaligned Indonesia an "outlier."⁴⁹ It is cool toward China for cultural reasons (due in part to public hostility toward the Chinese-Indonesian merchant class) but remains nonaligned and does not want an alliance with the United States—just a partnership. Indonesia's human rights abuses in the East Timor conflagration of 1999 caused a rift in the security partnership with Washington that is still being repaired. Nevertheless, Indonesia provides the United States more potential for defense engagement and strategic partnership than any other Southeast Asia, given the country's size, control of the Strait of Malacca, ASEAN leadership role, and the current development of its forces.

In 2016, Pres. Joko Widodo introduced the "maritime fulcrum" to strengthen both internal and external security, including Indonesia's EEZ, which extends into the Natuna Sea on the southern edge of the SCS. China's aggressive activities around Natuna Island led Jakarta to develop a strategy to defend Indonesian interests. Recently, Indonesia lodged its strongest protest against China and an incursion by the CCG, referencing the 2016 UNCLOS ruling in favor of the Philippines and against China's nine-dash line.

Concerning maritime capabilities, Indonesia has home-field advantage against China and the PLAN, as Indonesia's Natuna Island is more than a thousand miles away from Hainan Island and takes several days for PLAN ships to travel to the Natuna Sea.⁵⁰ Indonesia has two bases within 300 miles of the island and four bases within 500 miles. It has established new bases on Natuna itself and has stationed air and maritime forces there as a deterrent, but the base is not well-maintained. Jakarta has also constructed a base at Mempawah, which is less than 200 miles from Natuna. The Indonesian Navy sank a Chinese fishing vessel near Natuna in 2016, following through on warnings to respect the country's EEZ. However, China has not been deterred from pressuring Indonesia in the Natuna Sea.

Indonesia is developing its forces, including major weapons purchases for the Navy, which already has five submarines with 35 years' operational experience and antiship missiles.⁵¹ Indonesian Air Force (TNI-AU) engagement in the Natuna Sea will help provide ISR as well as deterrence with combat aircraft. The TNI-AU is expanding into an operationally coherent and sustainable force and

is building its air defenses.⁵² However, the TNI-AU must cover 2,500 miles from Sumatra to Irian Jaya (Papua) and has only one squadron each for Commands West, Central, and East.⁵³

Jakarta is mainly concerned with ASEAN solidarity and Indonesia's EEZ in the Natuna Sea as well as internal defense against VEOs and separatists. It is another country that could work with the United States to overcome the collective action problem and challenge Chinese entry into its EEZ and those of Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. However, it will not join the United States in denying Chinese expansion in the Spratly Islands and elsewhere within the nine-dash line.

An Alternative Strategy: Targeted Denial

To effectively counter China's strategy and tactics, Washington could adopt a more assertive approach to selectively deny its competitor's moves. Such a change is in line with recent US elevation of China as a strategic threat that needs to be met.⁵⁴ The ends of a new strategy would be to deny China's forces in their efforts to pressure the ally and partners of the United States, take over more of their EEZs, and, most importantly, erode US credibility. From the start, the United States, its partners, and the Philippines would hold out the possibility of a negotiated settlement. The goal would be a binding SCS Code of Conduct, demarcation of EEZs in accordance with UNCLOS, and an end to the nine-dash line, as well as FON and overflight.

The ways would involve the US Navy, backed by the US Air Force, selectively countering China's aggressive maritime maneuvers by shadowing Chinese vessels and working with the navy and coast guard of its ally—the Philippines—to block attacks on Philippine fishing fleet, forces, and oil-and-gas research vessels and platforms, particularly around Pag-asa Island in the Spratlys and Reed Bank.⁵⁵ The US and the Philippine defense and foreign affairs establishment would have to convince President Duterte to agree to such actions, and lately they and public opinion have been causing him to back the navy and coast guard in taking a stronger stand. China could react in several ways: by protesting as it has with US FONOPs; by agreeing to pause activities and negotiate; or by retaliating and escalating in the SCS and elsewhere.⁵⁶ If this way fails to pause China's behavior and bring Beijing to the negotiating table, the next step would be for the US Navy to back the Philippines Navy and Coast Guard as they push back Chinese forces around Pag-asa and secure the area, ending Chinese pressure there. In addition, the United States could beach a decommissioned ship on Pag-asa to replace the *Sierra Madre*. To deter Chinese retaliation and escalation

in the Spratlys and the vicinity, the United States could place antiship missiles on nearby Palawan Island.

After advancing Philippine rights in the Spratlys, the ultimate step would be US support of Philippine forces as they take back rightful control of Scarborough Shoal, which could provoke China to escalate.⁵⁷ I propose these ways, because the Philippines has an alliance with the United States, and the Mutual Defense Treaty and the UNCLOS ruling provide a legal basis; whereas US partnerships with Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia do not. Supporting an ally—the Philippines—in accordance with treaty obligations would do the most to boost US credibility. Washington could also follow up on its effort to protect a Malaysian research vessel by intervening on behalf of other ones belonging to Vietnam and Malaysia, even if the two countries do not openly approve.

The means would be a sufficient number of US and Philippines navy and coast guard ships capable of intervening and blocking Chinese forces and backed by other surface ships, patrol boats, submarines, and aircraft. Philippine vessels would lead the way, backed by a US force. Targeted denial operations would require training and joint exercises, as well as improved ISR, communications, and interoperability. The United States would also boost air defenses on the Philippine mainland to protect against Chinese escalation. Finally, US and Philippine diplomats would have to work to gain and sustain approval at each step by the Philippine government and bring China to the negotiating table. Ultimately a maritime peacekeeping force might be required to police any agreement. The resource problem of a more assertive US strategy of targeted denial in the SCS would be the requirement to relocate ships and aircraft that are needed elsewhere.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis and evidence confirm that a collective action problem prevents the United States and its ally and partners from effectively countering China as it moves forward in the SCS. The United States is unable to provide sufficient, appropriate security goods in the SCS that would enable the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia to work together with America to stop China's advance, bring it to the negotiating table, and force Beijing to abide by international law. The primary reason is the divergent interests of the United States as a global power, which is concerned about FON and oversight and containing China, and the four Southeast Asian states, which are protecting their EEZs. The larger US Indo-Pacific strategy inhibits more authoritative action.

The secondary factor is the disparate foreign policies of the four Southeast Asian states and their leaders' susceptibility to China's use of carrots and sticks. "Free riding" on the US provision of security goods by its ally, the Philippines, has

left Manila defensively weak and susceptible to China's encroachment in the Philippines' EEZ. The other three countries have not gone beyond partnerships with the United States and are struggling with China on their own. Furthermore, the four Southeast Asian states require larger and more capable forces to stop China, maintain the status quo, and regain parts of the EEZs that they lost.

On a positive note, the four countries have taken collective diplomatic action in leading ASEAN in 2020 to recognize UNCLOS as the basis for resolving the SCS dispute. FONOPs and overflight operations over China's outposts in the SCS have caused protests and made the US position clear. The United States continues to provide security assistance and cooperation to the four countries and hold multilateral joint exercises with their armed forces. Despite this activity, China continues to advance in the SCS and erode US credibility. Therefore, the US strategy of protest has not deterred China and could require change to a strategy of targeted denial. If Washington were to adopt such a strategy, credibility could be restored and the four countries' rights upheld. China could be compelled by US-led collective action to negotiate a solution to the impasse in accordance with international law.

Structural realists predicted that a rising China would expand beyond its boundaries and seek regional hegemony, which could cause war. China has expanded, seeking to change the regional status quo, making sweeping claims based upon debatable historical evidence, and acting upon them by encroaching on the EEZs of four countries in defiance of international law. A stronger Japan and Taiwan, backed by the United States, have been able to thwart China's ambitions in Northeast Asia. However, China has been able to push forward against the weaker Southeast Asian countries where Washington has chosen not to guarantee their maritime security interests but protest against China based upon international law. China, as the weaker power, has been careful to act in such a way as to avoid bringing into these disputes the stronger status quo power—the United States—which could lead to escalation and war. If Washington was to carefully ratchet up its strategy from protest to targeted denial in alliance with the Philippines, China would probably not launch a war and could be brought to the negotiating table. However, any such calibrated actions are not without risk. Great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific between the United States and China is here to stay, and war is always possible in the future. ★

Dr. Stephen Burgess

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Notes

1. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). The collective action problem refers to the better-endowed actors failing to provide the bulk of the collective goods to overcome the problem of some of the weaker ones “free riding.”

2. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Area of Responsibility strategy <https://www.pacom.mil/>: “In concert with other U.S. government agencies, USINDOPACOM protects and defends the territory of the US, its people, and its interests. With allies and partners, USINDOPACOM is committed to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region by promoting security cooperation, encouraging peaceful development, responding to contingencies, deterring aggression, and, when necessary, fighting to win. This approach is based on partnership, presence, and military readiness.” The USINDOPACOM strategy in defense of Japan and Taiwan is to threaten defeat of Chinese forces, while offering off-ramps to prevent escalation. The same applies to the defense of South Korea from North Korea.

3. Interviews with US defense officials in Manila, Philippines; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Jakarta, Indonesia, June–July 2019.

4. Interviews with US defense officials in Hanoi, Vietnam, June 2019. Vietnam considers even search and rescue (S&R) exercises with the United States to be too provocative.

5. China was able to influence Cambodia and Laos, and they weakened the “ASEAN way” consensus on the SCS starting in 2012. At the 2020 ASEAN Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam and other states persuaded Cambodia and Laos to agree to the joint statement that UNCLOS should be the basis for resolving SCS disputes and that the nine-dash line was invalid.

6. Nicholas Huynh, “U.S. Navy, Royal Australian Navy team up in the South China Sea,” Commander, US Pacific Fleet, 21 April 2020, <https://www.Cpf.navy.mil>. Recently, the Royal Australian Navy joined the US Navy in shadowing Chinese “research vessels” that have been harassing Southeast Asian research and oil exploration craft, which is a step beyond FONOPS and closer to a denial approach.

7. David Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia,” *International Security* 42, no. 4 (Spring 2018): 85–127. He finds that Brunei tilts more toward China, as they are jointly developing energy resources. Malaysia was tilting toward China under former Prime Minister Najib Razak, but his successor, Mahathir Mohamed, moved the country away from Beijing’s influence. Thailand was an “aligned accommodationist” with China until the Trump administration lifted sanctions in 2017 and renewed alliance commitments.

8. Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 78–119. He observes that China could dominate the northeast SCS near the Philippines (e.g., Scarborough Shoal) with its air and maritime forces.

9. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 99. The Group of Five are Malaysia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

10. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 100. US Navy carriers plus air bases in Guam and the Marianas provide the United States with massive airpower to deter China from attacking US installations and allies such as Japan. In addition, Beckley asserts that the United States has contingency access at 100 airfields in five Southeast Asian states. He estimates that one USAF wing could destroy half of the PLAAF’s strike aircraft in three weeks, and two wings could do so in six days. With no air cover, the United States could destroy the PLAN. US sea-launched antiship cruise missiles have a 1,000-mile range, and USAF/US Navy air-launched antiship cruise missiles have a 570-mile range that would attack the PLAN. Finally, US

Navy submarines can outlast their PLAN counterparts, and the United States has the upper hand in antisubmarine warfare.

11. Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia," 101. Taiwan has the A2/AD capabilities that deter a Chinese invasion and estimates that the PLA faces an offense-defense ratio of 50:1 concerning the precision guided munitions needed to prevail against the United States and its allies and partners. Concerning the PLAAF taking out missile sites, Beckley points out that the USAF failed in attempting to take out missiles in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 and Yugoslavia in 1999. Finally, China has a slowing economy and homeland security concerns that could hamper or end its SCS campaign.

12. However, like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia in the Spratly Islands, Taiwan does not have the ability to stop China's creeping expansion in the SCS that could eventually lead to a PLA takeover of Taipei's Itu Abu outpost.

13. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Military Confrontation in the South China Sea," Council on Foreign Relations, 21 May 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/>. Mastro concludes by recommending the following for the United States: (1) increase the tempo of military operations with its allies and by greater use of the USAF and send ships to patrol the EEZs and prevent takeover of Scarborough Shoal; (2) respond immediately and proportionately to each aggressive act; (3) improve the quality of partner ISR; (4) couple escalation with a proposal for a way out of the ensuing crisis; (5) promote a binding code of conduct for the SCS; and (6) appoint a special envoy.

14. John R. Oneal and Mark A. Elrod, "NATO burden sharing and the forces of change," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1989): 435–56.

15. Interviews with Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian, and US officials and security experts, June–July 2019.

16. In addition, China is encroaching on the EEZ of the Sultanate of Brunei, which could qualify it for inclusion in this analysis, but the latter has acquiesced to China's actions and has not sought US security assistance.

17. John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105, no. 690 (2006): 160–62.

18. Zhang Baohui, "Xi Jin Ping, 'Pragmatic' Offensive Realism and China's Rise," *Global Asia* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 71–79. *See also* Dingding Chen and Xiaoyu Pu, "Correspondence: Debating China's Assertiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (Winter 2013/2014): 177–80.

19. Stephen F. Burgess, "The Changing Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific Region and Optimum US Defense Strategy and USAF Strategic Posture" (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Institute of National Security Studies, US Air War College, December 2015). Based on research in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, the report points out the change in China's strategy from defense of Hainan Island and other assets to "offensive assertiveness" in 2010 with the struggle over the Senkaku Islands with Japan and the rise to power of Pres. Xi Jinping in 2013. *See also* Chen and Pu, "Correspondence," 177–80.

20. Rockford Weitz, "Military Activities in an EEZ," in *Law of the Sea: A Policy Primer*, Tufts University, Fletcher Schools L.L.M. In International Law and Maritime Studies Program, 2018, Chapter 4, <https://sites.tufts.edu/>.

21. Andrew Erickson, "Make China Great Again: Xi's Truly Grand Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, 30 October 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/>. China may eventually want to conduct electronic surveillance off the coast of Guam or India, so its questionable claim of a 200-mile EEZ zone off Hainan Island may cause problems in the future.

22. Weitz, "Military Activities in an EEZ."

23. Peter Lee, "It's official: America has a China-containment policy," *Asia Times*, 17 June 2015.
24. Toshi Yoshihara, "The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle: A Campaign Appraisal," *Naval War College Review* 2, no. 6 (2016), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/>. China began using gray-zone tactics involving paramilitary forces in the 1974 clash over Woody Island with the forces of South Vietnam (defunct in 1975).
25. The US Energy Intelligence Agency estimates that the South China Sea has about 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas rated as proved or probable reserves. See Chris Horton, "China Zeroes in on Energy Potential of the South China Sea," *New York Times*, 28 October 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/>.
26. Erickson, "Make China Great Again."
27. Andrew Browne, "After Chinese Stock Plunge, a Hole Shows in Xi's 'China Dream,'" *Wall Street Journal*, 15 July 2015. While Beijing seems to be making major multilateral moves to gain influence in Asia, China has not always followed up on its pledges of aid. For example, China actually transferred only 6 percent of 66 billion USD in pledged aid to Pakistan from 2003 to 2011.
28. *US DOD Indo-Pacific Strategy*, 2018.
29. Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 85-127.
30. Jim Gomez, "ASEAN takes position vs China's vast historical sea claims," Associated Press, 27 June 2020.
31. Yoshihara, "The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle." The 1974 clash over Woody Island was between the forces of South Vietnam and China.
32. Jane Perlez, "China and Vietnam Point Fingers after Clash in South China Sea," *New York Times*, 28 May 2014. In 2014, Vietnam sent small boats to harass China's attempts to erect an oil rig in the Paracel Islands. Also, Vietnamese rioted against ethnic Chinese in the country.
33. Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 102.
34. US Embassy officials, Hanoi, Vietnam, interviewed 26 June 2019. The 2014 attempt by China to situate a giant oil rig in the Paracel Islands was met by violent protests in Vietnam and pushed Hanoi closer to the United States. Also, China's construction of seven military bases in the Spratly Islands also pushed Vietnam closer to Washington.
35. US Embassy officials, interview.
36. US Embassy officials, interview. The US programs of working with Vietnam and its Coast Guard in developing its force and the Air Defense and Air Force (ADAF) in developing its T-6 trainer force will be the keystones of the strategic partnership in the near future and need to be managed carefully. These programs are part of helping Vietnam move away from dependence on Russian weapons and China's influence and will bear fruit in the ongoing and future strategic partnership.
37. Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia," 100. Vietnam is acquiring the Russo-Indian Brahmos missiles with a 190-mile range and that fly at 2,300 miles per hour.
38. US Embassy official, Hanoi, Vietnam, interviewed 26 June 2019.
39. Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia," 100. The ADAF has 35 SU-30MK2V combat aircraft with Kh-31 antiship cruise missiles and 18 bases.
40. Mark Cozad and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "People's Liberation Army Air Force Operations over Water: Maintaining Relevance in China's Changing Security Environment," RAND Corporation, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/>. "Recent over-water flights have been termed as normal operations and part of the natural development of the Chinese military, but authoritative military commentary suggests that the utility of these flights extends beyond simply training

for maritime missions, as they are sometimes also intended to convey strategic signals to relevant countries during times of political tension with China.”

While the PLAAF has poor navigation skills over ocean and in bad weather, some PLAAF pilots and aircraft can fly at night, and the PLAAF can launch more than 1,000 fighter aircraft from nine bases in southern China that could eventually overwhelm the ADAF.

41. Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia,” 101.

42. Interviews with US defense officials in Manila, July 2019.

43. Richard Javad Heydarian, “Philippines challenging China in South China Sea,” *Asia Times*, 27 June 2020. The Philippines is attempting to open Reed Bank (between the Spratlys and Manila) to oil-and-gas prospecting without China’s participation or interference.

44. In 2014, the Philippines acquired KA/FA-50 light fighter aircraft from South Korea and rejuvenated the 5th Fighter Wing.

45. Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia,” 101.

46. Ivy Kinek and Chew Ping-Hoo, “Malaysia’s Rationale and Response to the South China Sea,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative Update*, 29 May 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/>.

47. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 104. The Malaysian Navy has two French submarines that it has maintained for years and is experienced in operating. In addition, it has 10 frigates and 12 patrol boats and Kh-31 antiship missiles. The Malaysian Air Force has eight airfields and 36 fourth-generation fighters, including 18 Su-30s.

48. Even though US and Australian navy ships backed Malaysia in April–May 2020, Malaysia still voiced concerns about great-power conflict and escalation. In addition, US Navy presence in the SCS and surrounding waters has increased. In May 2020, China ended its operation against oil exploration operations in Malaysia’s EEZ.

49. Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia,” 101.

50. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 103. At present, the PLAAF has only 13 tankers, 16 AWACS, and two aircraft carriers with 24 fighters, which means that it would struggle to sustain an attack to seize Natuna Island and fight off the Indonesian forces.

51. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 103. The Indonesian Navy also has 12 frigates, 20 corvettes, and 30 patrol boats.

52. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 103. The TNI-AU has 49 fourth-generation fighters, with 33 F-16s (and is acquiring 25 more), 11 Su-30s, and five Su-27s.

53. Interviews with US defense officials, Jakarta, July 2019. Also, TNI-AU pilots have difficulties flying in bad weather and at night.

54. “The United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China,” The White House, 26 May 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

55. Pag-asa is the second-largest island in the Spratlys, the largest administered by the Philippines, and 280 miles west of Palawan Island.

56. Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 101. The Spratly Islands are more than 700 miles from Hainan, and retaliation against hostile action would require 30 PLAAF fighters over the Spratly Islands at any one time—plus air refueling. Therefore, escalation could be difficult for China, leaving the PLAN and CCG alone to do so.

57. One US SCS expert that I interviewed in the Philippines in July 2019 recommended that the US Navy quarantine one of China’s militarized outposts in the Philippines EEZ in the Spratlys until Beijing agrees to negotiate. A more provocative suggestion was US Marines landing on an outpost and handing it over to Manila.

Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders

RODERICK LEE

How does the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) People's Liberation Army (PLA) treat senior military leadership development? This article answers this question by looking at what the PLA views as a good leader, how it develops such leaders, and when the new generation of PLA leaders will emerge.

But why does it matter? US Department of Defense operational concepts such as joint all-domain operations, multi-domain operations, and distributed maritime operations require our joint force to execute harder, better, and faster than our opponents. However, our opponents, namely China, are not static forces. China is also trying to build a military “system of systems” that will execute harder, better, and faster than ours. It is relatively easy to observe and measure how different hardware components of the PLA function. Measuring how the “software”¹ functions is a more difficult but equally important part of determining how well the system as a whole will operate. The leaders of the PLA are in some ways the operating systems of the PLA as a whole.

While we do not have access to canonical literature discussing the specific question of “How the PLA views senior leadership development,” we *can* extrapolate themes based on publicly available, native-language literature written by the PLA on the subjects of command and leadership. In an effort to break down the aforementioned question into more tractable terms, we look at the following three subquestions:

1. What does the PLA view as a good leader?
2. How does the organization develop such leaders?
3. When will these leaders show up?

The bottom line is that the PLA views a “good leader” as an expert strategic war fighter who always listens to orders. They plan to get there by first deliberately selecting only desirable officer candidates and second inducting them through a rigorous professional military education (PME) process focused on skill building. The PLA can expect their efforts to pay off between roughly 2035 and 2050.

Complicating Factors

To fully understand what the PLA wants out of its senior leaders, there are three complicating factors unique to the PLA that have major implications for the leadership within the PLA:

1. Military leaders in the PLA operate within a collective CCP leadership mechanism. This makes it difficult to find direct analogues to US military leadership concepts.
2. Until 2012 and possibly as recently as 2017, the PLA often promoted leaders based on a corrupt “pay-to-play” system rather than anything that resembled merit-based promotions. As such, the PLA cannot presently assume all its senior leaders possess competence in basic military leadership skills.
3. Current PLA leaders have a narrower range of experiences to draw on compared to US counterparts, because PLA career paths up to the present day emphasize depth of knowledge rather than breadth of knowledge.

The subsequent sections discuss these three factors in greater detail.

Factor One: Party, Collective, and Dual Leadership

True leadership over the PLA is entirely derived from the CCP and thus the Party core (presently Xi Jinping).² Stemming from that, the PLA operates within the larger CCP ideology that views unified leadership and central authority as key tenants of its philosophy.³ In some ways, one can view the PLA as the militant wing of a centralized religion with an individual leader representing the vanguard of that ideology (e.g., a highly centralized Catholic Church).

Within this centralized leadership mechanism, the PLA practices a form of collective leadership known as the “military and political dual-leadership system.” Under this system, a unit’s commander and the political officer serve as co-equals.⁴ Political officers and unit commanders share joint responsibility for issuing orders, giving directions to lower levels, and overseeing all daily unit work.⁵ The political officer and unit commander also share responsibility for leading their unit’s Party committee and usually serve as the Party committee secretary and deputy secretary, respectively.

The unit’s Party committee, of which both the political officer and the unit commander are members (along with varying numbers of other unit officers, all CCP members), holds the power at the heart of the command-and-control mechanism of the PLA. It is the embodiment of the CCP’s overall leadership over the PLA and thus is the formal decision-making mechanism for each PLA unit.⁶

Typically, decisions within a unit's Party committee are made through democratic centralism, wherein each committee member may voice opinions and vote on a decision, but once the committee makes a decision, it is the responsibility of all committee members to support that policy. In the event of a time-sensitive decision, the individual best suited to make a decision (typically the unit commander in a combat situation) is permitted to make a unilateral decision. However, the unit's party committee still shares collective responsibility for that individual's decision. As a result, the committee is likely to review such unilateral decisions at an appropriate time.

Factor Two: Corruption

The CCP's arrest of Central Military Commission (CMC) Vice-Chairmen Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong in 2014 as well as CMC members Fang Fenghui and Zhang Yang in 2017 on corruption charges represents a much larger problem within the PLA. President Xi's anticorruption campaign implicated dozens if not hundreds of PLA general and flag officers (GFO), many of whom were responsible for personnel appointments and promotions.⁷

Because the CMC must approve all GFO promotions, between 2002 and at least 2012 during the tenures of the corrupt officers Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong, it is reasonable to assume that most GFOs promoted in that period paid for that promotion.⁸ Although no complete "price list" is available, anecdotal evidence through official People's Republic of China (PRC) state media and unofficial press outlets suggests that a promotion to an O-9 or O-10 equivalent cost between 1.4 to 2.8 million USD.⁹ Unofficial sources claim that O-7 and O-8 promotions ran roughly 700,000 USD.¹⁰ To fund these promotions and the bribes necessary to stay in the good graces of senior officials, this system had a trickledown effect, wherein even field grade officers were forced to pay into the system.¹¹ This system may have persisted into 2017, when the PLA arrested CMC members generals Fang Fenghui (the officer in charge of overall military operations in the PLA) and Zhang Yang (the officer in charge of overall personnel issues in the PLA).¹²

The end result is a system that promoted individuals into senior leadership positions based on cash amounts rather than talent or competence. The handful of competent senior leaders in the PLA succeeded in climbing the ladder in spite of the system during this time—not because of it.

Factor 3: Lacking in Breadth of Experience

All PLA officers up to the present day are likely to have had a stove-piped career. Aviators will have only served almost exclusively in aviation units, likely of

the same type, until they reach roughly the O-6 equivalent level. The same can be said about submarine officers, tankers, surface warfare officers, and infantrymen.¹³ This trend is not only an observable career tendency in most PLA officers but also codified in official career trajectories. The PLA Air Force Officer's Handbook and PLA Navy Officer's Handbook both stipulate that, up to an O-6 equivalent level, an officer is expected to remain within the same discipline for virtually his or her entire career up to that point.¹⁴

Making matters worse was the total lack of joint assignment opportunities until 2016.¹⁵ Prior to 2016, the PLA had virtually no joint organizations and, thus, no opportunities for officers to gain joint experience. The closest equivalents the PLA had to institutionalized joint assignments were cross-service assignments, wherein an officer from one service (e.g., the Navy) would take up a position in another service (e.g., the Air Force). However, this was a rare occurrence.

This lack in career diversity results in exceptional depth in knowledge but little in the way of breadth. While this is advantageous early in one's career, it becomes a major handicap later in one's career. This major deviation in the career experiences that senior leaders in the PLA draw from versus the experiences that senior US military leaders draw from factors into how the PLA is now looking to develop its leaders going forward.

What Is a Good Leader in the PLA?

I feel that no matter how the system is adjusted and how missions change, we should all be politically sound, align with the Party, listen to the Party's command, and work hard to improve the joint operational command capability under realistic combat conditions.

—PLA National Defense University
Senior Officer's Course student in 2017

The PLA regularly talks about deficiencies within its force—many of which are associated with its people rather than its technical systems. The most commonly discussed deficiencies are seen below:

"Five Inabilities" ¹⁶	"Five Weaknesses" ¹⁷	"Two Insufficients" ¹⁸
Inability to analyze a situation	Ability to adapt to the circumstances	Insufficient ability to fight modern wars
Inability to understand the higher echelon's intent	Ability to manage and coordinate	
Inability to make a decision on a course of action	Ability to operate equipment	Insufficient ability of cadres at all levels to command modern combat
Inability to deploy forces	Ability to command operations	
Inability to handle unexpected situations	Ability to organize training	

While the inverse of some of these deficiencies suggest desirable leadership traits (e.g., inability to analyze a situation implies they want leaders who are good at analyzing situations), the PLA also discusses desirable traits that it wants its leaders to have. A survey of publicly available PLA literature since 2015 reveals the following broad trait categories that the PLA views as desirable in its leaders:

Politically Loyal: A PLA military leader's worldview is in lockstep with the CCP, and they understand their role within the CCP.

The PLA views politics as being an integral part of its identity and tradition. Understanding political factors within the scheme of the CCP is not just a fundamental skill that is necessary for leaders in the PLA. Military commanders in the PLA must always put ideological and political development first and foremost. This can be accomplished by strengthening political beliefs in communism, reiterating the philosophy of serving the people, and emphasizing the Party's absolute leadership in all matters.¹⁹

Strategically Aware: A PLA military leader should have a solid understanding of how what they are doing fits into the bigger picture, how various different parts interact, and how actions will play out over time.

Given that the PLA is moving toward becoming an "informatized force," wherein overall force effectiveness is determined by the extent to which the force is networked with access to information, the PLA not surprisingly sees strategic awareness as a crucial element that its leaders must have. Specifically, it wants its leaders to have a holistic understanding of where they fit in within the overall strategy, possess the skills to determine how different factors will interact with each other, and have the foresight to understand how a situation will evolve.²⁰ This also leads to PLA leaders being able to conduct mission command to a certain degree, wherein they are able to continue operating absent of direct command guidance based on their understanding of the situation.

Skilled in Military Affairs: A PLA military leader should have the requisite skills to command combat operations at their respective level of war.

As indicated in the section discussing the problem of corruption and breadth of experience, the PLA is essentially starting over in terms of military skills. Skills that the US military would consider prerequisites such as understanding joint operations, operational art, integration of new technical capabilities, and the importance of information superiority often must be taught to senior PLA leaders.²¹ The PLA views leaders that already possess such fundamental skills as extremely desirable, not just minimally successful.

Appropriate Military Culture: A PLA military leader adheres to a particular set of intellectual achievements, beliefs, and norms that the PLA collectively regards as canonical.

The PLA does not want leaders who are just there for the paycheck. It wants leaders who are passionate about military affairs and the PLA's legacy. This means it wants officers who are actively interested in combat command, the newest military literature and theory, and the overall art of war.²² The PLA also wants a "genetic inheritance," so to speak, wherein its current generations of leaders pull from the experiences of "past PLA greats."²³ Contemporary examples of "famous generals" include Peng Dehuai, Liu Bochong, and Xu Xiangqian. Although the PLA's National Defense University lists the Chinese intervention in the Korean War as a "famous modern campaign," all the famous "contemporary" generals listed are better known for their actions during the Chinese Civil War.²⁴

Adaptive: They can respond to new circumstances, develop innovative ideas, and incorporate new methodologies.

Not surprisingly, the PLA wants its leaders to be adaptive and innovative. Specifically, it wants leaders to learn new methods and military developments from other countries, incorporate future technologies that have not yet operationalized, and be more creative.²⁵ There is also a reasonably new emphasis on finding officers who are reasonably independent and willing to take the initiative on their own (within reason).²⁶

Other Intangible Traits: In addition to the aforementioned leadership traits, the PLA also discusses the value of leadership concepts that are intangible or not typically associated with the military. Examples include charisma, institutional leadership, leading from behind, flexible leadership, and intercultural leadership.²⁷ However, there is an absence of evidence regarding whether the PLA is systematically trying to implement such concepts across the force or not.

Development

Many of these desirable leadership traits are new to the PLA, but systematic implementation of mechanisms to promote such traits is an even more recent phenomenon. Although the PLA is relatively opaque when it comes to ongoing efforts to improve the force, leadership development within the PLA can be broken down into two categories. First, the PLA selects what it views as the optimal officer candidates. Second, it implements a fairly stringent series of PME requirements.

The Right Material

Before the PLA begins to mold officers into future senior leaders, the organization wants to ensure that the "material" that they are working with is appropriate. Specifically, PLA officer candidate prerequisites are designed to identify politi-

cally reliable individuals who have character traits aligned with some of the “soft” desirable leadership traits mentioned above. The PLA accomplishes this by conducting a series of unspecified psychological, political, and personality testing.²⁸ There is virtually no information on the PLA’s psychological and political testing, but the PLA provides broad guidelines for desired personalities.

The PLA currently uses a Myers–Briggs Type Indicator to filter out certain types of personalities. Persons who test as “INFP” (introverted, intuitive, feeling, and prospecting) are immediately flagged, while individuals who test as “ENFP” (extroverted, intuitive, feeling, prospecting), “INTJ” (introverted, intuitive, thinking, judging), or “ISTP” (introverted, sensing, thinking, prospective) require additional screening. The implication of this personality screening is that the PLA is trying to filter certain “undesirable” personalities, “INFP” being the archetype.²⁹

Professional Military Education

The aim of the PLA’s PME system likely is to build and develop military skills required to lead the next level of combat operations. There is little evidence to suggest that the PLA PME system is designed to inculcate habits of the mind, critical thinking, or intellectual integrity. This view is based predominantly on PME requirements for PLA officers and limited information about graduate programs at PLA PME institutions.

PLA PME requirements focus on training officers to conduct combat operations at the tactical and then operational level.³⁰ PME requirements can be met by attending any number of military academic institutions, but there are few opportunities for officers to attend higher-quality civilian institutions. Field grade officers attend a series of multimonth courses at military academies covering single-service and then combined arms tactics. Some junior and field grade officers that will be assigned to a larger headquarters staff will attend courses on campaign-level staff work.³¹ Senior officers will receive PME in single-service campaigns then joint campaigns at either their service’s command academy or the PLA’s National Defense University.³²

The concentrations and prerequisite readings at degree-granting programs intended for senior officers reflect the probable emphasis on building skills for war fighting. Most degrees issued are in military affairs, with concentrations in fields of military science, strategy, tactics, operational command, and military operations research.³³ The prerequisite readings cover military strategy, operations, and tactics exclusively.³⁴

Looking Forward

The PLA is clearly making efforts to fast-track the presence of some of these aforementioned desirable traits within its current generation of leaders. Through the massive culling of corrupt officers, institution of rigorous testing, and investment in PME, the hope is that the competent leaders of the current generation will form at least a solid basis for subsequent generations. However, a full generational shift in the PLA's officer corps is likely necessary before it observes substantive change in the quality of its senior leaders. Using standard trajectories for PLA officers, we can extrapolate how long that might take.

The starting point for the PLA is roughly 2017, when the PLA's anticorruption efforts peaked and the organization reformed its command-and-control structure to allow for joint operations and modernized its PME system to develop a new generation of human talent. Officers entering the "new-generation" PLA are more likely to be promoted based on merit rather than money, have a wider range of career experiences to inform their worldview, and undergo much more rigorous academic training. Based on standard career trajectories for PLA officers, officers in this new generation will reach their first major field commands around 2035 and their first senior commands around 2050.

Incidentally, 2035 and 2050 are broader benchmarks for the PLA's overall modernization. According to the PRC's 2019 Defense White Paper, the PLA is expected to, "basically complete the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035 and to fully transform the People's Armed Forces "into world-class forces by the mid-21st century."³⁵ Not only does this translate to a PLA that will be better equipped, trained, and networked but also a PLA that will be better led. ★

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India's Indian Ocean Region Strategy

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The Indian Ocean has emerged as a critical conduit for trade, commerce, and energy. The waters of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) have become a home for economic developments, disputes, conflicts, and competition for regional influence by regional and extraregional powers. All major powers, such as the United States, Australia, Japan, United Kingdom, India, and China have sought stakes in the security of the IOR. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union wanted direct access to the IOR; now, China is looking for the same. The India Ocean remains a pivot, being the world's busiest trade route. Around 80 percent of the world's maritime oil trade passes through the IOR. The rise of China across the maritime region has compelled nations (including India) to reshape their maritime strategies. This commentary aims at looking at the geostrategic importance of the IOR for India, China's presence in the region, and counterbalance strategies.

Geostrategic Importance of the IOR

The Indian Ocean, which lies at the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Australia, houses a number of littorals that play critical roles in the region. The IOR is a vital sea lane with choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab-el Mandeb, and so forth. These choke points are of immense strategic importance, as huge volumes of trade pass through them. These choke points are exposed to piracy, international disputes, political dissents, and accidents. To ward off such threats and to gain/maintain a strong foothold in this resource rich region, regional and external powers flex their muscles.

The islands in the Indian Ocean also work significantly to shape security architecture of the IOR. These islands play a vital role along the sea lines of communication (SLOC) by giving easy access to navies continued presence and allowing them to patrol and secure SLOCs during the time of peace and war. The Indian Ocean acts as an intersection for the transport of oil from the Middle East. This is also the reason why external powers are trying to strengthen their footholds, making it a region for them to showcase their vigor and potentiality.

When talking about the geostrategic importance, "security dynamics" in the IOR play an equally pivotal role. In the view of the same, the Persian Gulf in the Arabian Sea (northern Indian Ocean) also plays an equally important role for the security perspective of India. The main aim of India in this area is to protect the SLOCs, which are laden with piracy threats in the Horn of Africa and the Red

Sea. The Indian Navy has warships deployed in the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf to provide safe passage for Indian-flagged vessels operating in the region. India has also set up the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC–IOR) to keep a close watch on the movement of ships in the region. The IFC–IOR engages with partner nations to develop comprehensive maritime domain awareness and share information on vessels of interest.

Chinese Presence in the Backyard

The Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean remains a major concern across the region. Beijing is eager to have strong footholds in the IOR, Africa, and other island nations, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The presence of China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and other Chinese commercial vessels in the Indian Ocean, the Chinese interpretation of the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea, and so forth remain challenges to those who subscribe to the ideal of a free and open Indo-Pacific.¹ The geopolitical theory of the "String of Pearls" explains China's potentials and intentions of establishing commercial and infrastructural projects in India's backyard. China has invested in several projects from the Horn of Africa to the ASEAN nations and the Pacific Island nations.

The revival of the Chinese Maritime Silk Route can be seen through China's investment in the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, which Beijing gained control of through debt-trap lending, and the development of Pakistan's Gwadar Port as a part of China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).² In the Maldives, China had financed the China–Maldives Friendship Bridge, linking Malé to the island of Hulhumale and Hulhule. It is the first sea-crossing bridge for the Maldives and could play a vital role in the island nation's long-term economic development. The Maldives has also leased an uninhabited island, Feydhoo Finolhu, to a Chinese enterprise for 50 years at a price of around 4 million USD, with plans to develop infrastructure for tourism.³ Along the African coastal belt, one-quarter of all Chinese investment is concentrated in Nigeria and Angola. Nigeria has received relatively large funds from China for railways. Abuja also hopes that China will support peacekeeping in the Niger Delta region, which would better secure oil investments there. Beijing is backing two major rail projects—one from Lagos to Kano and the other from Lagos to Calabar.⁴

China's ambitious BRI,⁵ a 1 trillion USD investment project, is aimed at infrastructural developments. However, many have criticized Beijing's promises to build roadways, railways, and ports to revive the trade route linking China to Asia, Africa, and Europe as based upon debt-trap lending that financially burdens comparatively weak economies, allowing China to essentially gain sovereignty over

portions of these countries. The CPEC, which is a BRI project, has been a great concern for India, as it passes through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. China has often enticed leaders from countries with unstable economies to allow Chinese investment in their territories. However, India has always dissented against the same on grounds of security concerns.

Counterbalancing the Dragon on the Seas

The Chinese dragon might be obstructing India on land, disputing New Delhi's claim of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). However, Beijing's predominant geopolitical strategy of the great game lies in the Indian Ocean, where China has engaged in massive infrastructure projects for some time now. To counter the rise of China, India needs to up its game in the maritime sphere. New Delhi has been increasing India's military investments since the Modi government first came to power in 2014.

In the Bay of Bengal (BoB), India has modernized facilities in the Andaman Islands and at a base in Campbell Bay in the Nicobar Islands. In 2019, an infrastructure development plan worth 56.5 billion INR aimed at allowing additional warships, aircraft, troops, and drones to be stationed in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was finalized. On 24 January 2019, the Indian Navy commissioned the new naval station INS Kohassa in the BoB islands.⁶ While there has been a lot of stir claiming that this upgrade was aimed at countering the Chinese expansion at the IOR, Ding Hao, deputy director of the Asian–African Military Affairs Office of the Foreign Military Studies Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Sciences, said the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are overseas territories of the Dominion of India and that it is a normal move for the Indian military to establish military bases there. Beijing has defended China's moves in the IOR by stating that it aims for peace and stability in the region.

To counter the rise of China in the Indian Ocean, India needs to emerge as a strong maritime power, which would be possible with support from the island nations in the region. India has recently undertaken infrastructure development projects with dual-use logistics facilities in Mauritius and Seychelles. India aims to upgrade facilities on the Agaléga Islands of Mauritius. In 2015, India and Mauritius had signed a MoU to improve air and sea facilities at the Agaléga Island.⁷ Even though the Agaléga islanders know that construction of naval base would lead to their displacement, the Mauritian government have ignored this as they want India to continue routing its money through Mauritius, which is their largest source of FDI. India can take this to its advantage and get logistic helps from Mauritius as well. The 87 million USD project has been awarded to two companies: Afcons Infrastructure Limited and Rail India Technical And Eco-

nomic Services (RITES) Ltd., a Government of India enterprise. As per a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in 2015 by Indian prime minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritian counterpart, India would set up infrastructure for improving air and sea connectivity.⁸ Even though construction of the naval base would lead to the displacement of Agaléga Islanders, the Mauritian government is eager for India to continue routing its money through Mauritius, as it represents the nation's largest source of foreign direct investment. New Delhi can use this to India's advantage to gain logistical assistance from Mauritius as well.

With Seychelles, India has agreed on developing infrastructure on Assumption Island. India has also helped Victoria with ocean mapping to protect Seychelles exclusive economic zone and has donated aircraft and launched a radar project.⁹

However, it is also important to note that Mauritius and Seychelles, being the small islands that they are, may not align with India to the point of isolating China completely in the IOR. The United States, on the other hand, can definitely provide India with logistics. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) between Washington and New Delhi would enable India to gain logistical support from the many US facilities located throughout the Indo-Pacific.¹⁰

India is a part of several bilateral and multilateral military exercises in the Indian Ocean. Naval Exercise MILAN, hosted by the Indian Navy and most recently held on 8 November 2019, was attended by delegates from 17 foreign navies. The 2020 edition of the exercise has been postponed in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic but is expected to be the largest iteration of the exercise, with the projected participation of 30 foreign navies. Exercise Malabar is a trilateral maritime event between India, Japan, and the United States and aims at strengthening cooperation and enhancing interoperability among participants. In 2020, India prepared to expand the grouping by including Australia as well. Previously, India had been reluctant to invite Australia as it would appear to be connected to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an informal strategic forum among these same four nations, aimed straightforwardly against the China's rise. However, given the June 2020 Sino-India clashes at the LAC in eastern Ladakh's Galwan Valley, India is expected to make the decision of inviting Australia and in doing so enhance its strategic position vis-à-vis Beijing. Military exercises in the IOR are significant due to the increasing Chinese threat. Separately, in June 2020, the Indian Navy increased its surveillance and operational deployment in the IOR, with the Galwan clash as a backdrop. The Indian Navy also held an important exercise with its Japanese counterparts in the IOR, where Chinese naval vessels and submarines make persistent incursions. China's ventures in the IOR are seen as one of the most vital reasons for the Indian Navy to assert its preparedness to ward off security threats in the region.

Conclusion

As a move to strengthen itself at the IOR, India has increased its military capacity from operating only in the neighborhood to operating in the entire region—from the Malacca Strait to the waters off the African coasts. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world order is expected to witness a geo-strategic shift, India will aim at further strengthening its presence in the IOR. In this dynamic, India will look forward to building up the gambit with Indian Ocean littorals such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles to scrutinize the rise of China. India is also likely to develop a strategic plan with the United States, without overtly professing such measures as “anti-Chinese moves.”

The Indian Ocean will remain one of the world's most strategic locations, with more than 75 percent of the world's maritime trade and 50 percent of daily global oil transfers passing through the region. As a result, India's primary aim will be to maintain a stable and peaceful India Ocean, with a focus toward economic and military alterations obviating the menacing Chinese threat. ★

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Avoiding Thucydides' Trap in the Western Pacific through the Air Domain

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Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has arguably exercised the most powerful global military imbalance the world has ever seen. This domination; however, is perceived to be fading in the wake of a new possible contender. The tension and likelihood of conflict between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) has risen in recent decades. The inevitability of conflict has taken root in many academic and strategic forums such as 92nd Street Y with Graham Allison and Gen David Petraeus (US Army, retired), The Belfer Center, the US Army War College, and many others. The term "Thucydides' Trap" has echoed in many discussions among leading strategic, military, intelligence, and political science analysts. This is the notion of one rising power seeking to take its place in the sun by replacing the perceived declining power, which has caused many to fear a new kind of war. Dr. Graham Allison identified 16 scenarios over the past 500 years in which two nations competed within the parameters of "Thucydides' Trap," and of those scenarios, 12 have resulted in war.¹ At a war likelihood of 75 percent, the odds do not seem to be in Washington's or Beijing's favor.

The Pivot

Under the Obama administration, the United States formulated the "Pivot" policy, but these strategic redeployments have not fully taken shape. This strategic shift out of Europe and into the Indo-Pacific have shown the strategic danger China has represented, and many would argue resulted in a swift buildup of Chinese military capability unlike ever before. From a reorganization of naval capability to a revolution in long-range munitions, Beijing has demonstrated China's national will and determination to compete at the American level. The United States must adapt to a new method of thinking in the air domain to counter the potential reach by China for its place in the sun. American scholars like Dr. John Mearsheimer recognize that the current status of American grand strategy and the current commitment to NATO will be impacted by the rise of China and the potential for great-power competition between the United States and the PRC for global influence. This pivot out of Europe by American forces and the redeployment of massive American assets into the Indo-Pacific have become neces-

sary to counter a rising China. According to Mearsheimer, “The U.S. is faced with a possible near peer competitor. And that power is in Asia and the United States will have to go to extraordinary lengths to contain it [China].”² This rise will force the United States to pivot out of Europe and into East Asia in a massive movement of troops and materiel to contain the PRC. The outcome of any future conflict between the United States and China will be determined not only by the men and women operating the newest weapons and information systems but also by each side’s ability to identify weaknesses to exploit on day one of the fight.

AirSea Battle and Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons

With the threat of a rising China reaching great-power rivalry status, it has become necessary to counter this rise through military planning in the undesired likelihood of hostilities. These plans require doctrine and assets to meet objectives and capabilities that are essential to any modern war plan. Analysts and experts in the theater have been highly critical of the AirSea Battle (ASB) doctrinal concept. The newly established Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) doctrine, formed out of the AirSea Battle concept, has recognized some of that criticism and attempted to redesign the concept to meet realistic antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) threats posed by the PRC in the Western Pacific and to reestablish sea control in the area. These concepts are flawed to a degree. The notion of retaining or regaining sea and air control in the Western Pacific is unrealistic against the current power we face there. This is not Iraq, Iran, or even Russia. China presents the United States and our partners in the region with a completely different situation.³ ASB doctrine harps upon the ability for the United States to project significant power across all domains into the Western Pacific against the PRC to counter the adversary’s various A2/AD threats. It seeks to gain decision and information superiority to bring assets to the battlefield first with the necessary mass to achieve tactical and operational success. ASB emphasizes “getting on the same net” and decreasing the amount of time it takes to bring information to the combatant commanders. Multi-domain integration into real-time intelligence, information, and integration sharing is fundamental to this battle doctrine. For example, the integration aspect can be illustrated through the ability to train a USAF F-22 or F-35 pilot to take control and direct a US Navy-launched Tomahawk cruise missile. While this needs to be a priority for “the pivot” strategy, the concept of an offensive and deep-fires capability is flawed.⁴ This is not 1984 Western Europe. We are not dealing with a Soviet-equipped mass of forces along a physical border of significance. AirLand Battle doctrine defined the ability for

thinkers like Gen Don Starry and Col John Boyd to integrate air and land power to achieve a conventional blocking strategy to defeat Soviet and Warsaw Pact conventional forces behind the first echelons of Eastern Bloc category A (front line units such as Guards Tank or Guards Motorized Divisions) and category B (second echelon, reserve tank and motorized divisions) units. ASB and the modified JAM-GC concepts attempt to do the same in relation to air and sea integration, while also utilizing all other domains to create a joint environment in which decision making and information is shared instantly across all units. In the case of an American and PRC confrontation in the Western Pacific, this concept is heavily focused on an offensive mind-set without a significantly concentrated force that possess the necessary numbers to compete with China.

The Thucydides' Trap is not a prophecy that an offensive strategy can avoid. A major confrontation and battle for air, cyber, and sea control between the United States and a rising China is a war unlike any our society has ever experienced. We are slowly growing into an era in which no power can exercise complete sea control and the risk involved in placing surface forces into proximity of A2/AD assets grows. It is commonly accepted that the United States can project power on a scale rarely experienced in world history; however, that should not be taken for granted. It does not matter how much combat power can be projected off the African coast, in the Mediterranean, in the Persian Gulf, or in Europe. What matters in this case is how much power the United States can project in the Western Pacific against an integrated and deep A2/AD environment. For a moment, imagine a formidable and seemingly hostile foreign naval presence in the Caribbean or off the East or West coast of the United States. In this case, the United States would be able to deny or threaten any significant enemy naval force attempting to exercise control over the air or sea in proximity to North America. The United States would consider any power attempting to exercise this control as a threat to our national security. This scenario mirrors China's perspective of developments in the Western Pacific. ASB, as originated, is reliant on American offensive and preemptive action to lessen the threat imposed against American naval assets by A2/AD platforms. This posture is inherently dangerous and raises the likelihood of confrontation without the necessary mass to dominate the battlespace. JAM-GC identifies this problem and attempts to lessen the amount of risk to our assets by focusing on defeating the enemy's plan and intent, rather than disrupting and destroying his capability.⁵ We must identify what our strategic objectives are and how we can achieve them through operational and tactical superiority. We must identify what victory looks like in this scenario of sea control and breaking access denial. The objective cannot openly be regime change in Beijing. An embrace of human rights and a shift in Beijing's thinking toward totali-

tarianism can be a focus; however, the PRC's nuclear umbrella clearly limits our options of influence. If regime change were the case, we have little capability to project power to prosecute a land campaign against the People's Liberation Army. So, to be realistic, an obtainable goal is to counterbalance the growth of the PRC and provide a strategy that places doubt and uncertainty in the minds of Chinese leadership about external expansion. The ASB concept seems to identify an operational concept without a strategic context. The JAM-GC is a great improvement, but I would propose we go further to increase the amount of risk on the PRC to aggressively pursue external objectives and to hinder their ability to capitalize on their geographical and timing initiative in the first island chain.

Lessons to Consider

History has shown that perceived military weakness can motivate an aggressor. This example can be seen in June 1967. The overwhelming Israeli success over the armed forces of the combined Arab armies during the Six-Day War was birthed through the ability of Israeli Air Force (IAF) to overcome its perceived weakness in numbers of aircraft and available pilots. The Arab world had received a staggering number of aircraft from the Soviet bloc, and the combined Arab armies were poised to attack Israel. The Israelis took advantage of a perceived overconfidence and launched a crippling first strike against the powerful air arm of the strongest air force in the Middle East, Egypt.⁶ Operation Focus had been rehearsed for years prior to the launch of the Six-Day War to provide the Israeli Defense Forces with the critical element of air supremacy for a lightning ground offensive into the Sinai.⁷ The IAF had trained their ground personnel in the essential art of maintaining a fast turnaround rate for launching sorties of aircraft. With its small air force, Israel was able to gain the element of surprise over the Egyptian air crews and destroyed all major air bases in Egypt at the same time. The Israelis had chosen to destroy the Arab aircraft on the ground just as the Egyptian combat air patrols (CAP) had landed and started breakfast. The fog of war descended heavily on Egyptian command and control. Their inability to adapt and organize after the crippling Israel strike on their air forces led to the Arab defeat on the ground.⁸

Learning from this example, the United States must maintain and continue its practice of integrated combat turns (IGT) and increase drills in the region to maintain a high state of readiness to produce the maximum number of sorties possible to respond to an offensive action in the Western Pacific.⁹ The numerical and geographical advantage of the PRC presents a problem to any commander attempting to exercise control over the air and sea domains in the Western Pacific and the ability for American ground crews to turn aircraft will be decisive.

We Have Seen This Before

This notion of a fast and effective surprise attack is not new to the United States. Americans are aware of the consequences that result from a highly effective conventional attack on strategic assets in the theater of operations. The fear of such a disastrous beginning to a conflict has weighed heavily on war planners since the end of World War II. At Pearl Harbor, the American Pacific Fleet and her battleships were the symbol of American power in the Pacific. The mighty force along battleship row had represented the old doctrine that had shaped the power projection of the early twentieth century, and its destruction symbolized the innovation in doctrine that would come to define modern warfare in the Pacific. At Clark Field in the Philippines, the United States Army Air Forces Far East was similarly destroyed on the ground after their morning patrols, just as the Egyptians would be destroyed nearly two decades later.¹⁰

Limited War with an Unlimited Outcome

The possibility of a crippling first strike by the PRC against our forward bases near the first island chain may not only bring the world into a disastrous conflict but also extremely inhibit our ability to respond. The ability for the PRC to win a limited political victory by launching an effective first strike on our bases and assets in the region could destabilize the economic and geopolitical situation across East Asia and open the possibility of communist and nationalist Chinese unification through force.

The Sino–Russian Alliance

To take in the full possibility of another Great Pacific War, we must account for the Russian ability to project joint power in the Pacific. The Russian Pacific Fleet and the many air and ground assets available to the Russian Far East is not a force to take lightly in a possible confrontation between the allies and China. The introduction of Russian Far Eastern naval and air assets may be deemed as irrelevant regarding their effectiveness against the US and its allies but would nevertheless be welcomed by Beijing in any conflict. More Russian assets from the Baltic and Northern Fleets could be expected to make the necessary journey to reinforce the North Pacific and would require additional allied assets to deny them entry or engage them. The development of this relationship also provides the Chinese and Russians with the ability to share technologies and proliferate joint capability against our forces in the region. With Russia's introduction of hypersonic missiles to some operational units, the likelihood of Chinese missiles of similar class to be introduced to the theater is high. The ability by the aggressor to effectively land a

decisive blow early in the contest is key to victory in a limited offensive. During the Cold War, it was necessary to bring massive firepower and effective fires on the enemy in the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA).¹¹ Hypersonic munitions can avoid radar, fly low and fast, and maneuver at over 20 times the speed of sound. A conventional version of these missiles may determine the outcome of a highly concentrated and lighting strike on our bases in the FEBA near the first island chain. Such a strike by these weapons would render our ability to effectively stop an aggressive move by the PRC useless and vulnerable to further fires while the allied forces are rallying from around the world to respond and counterattack. Our forces must be alert and well-dispersed to avoid heavy concentration and destruction by a surprise attack. The PRC will employ the art of *maskirovka* or deception at all levels of diplomacy, information, military, economic (DIME) in such a war plan, and we can expect Russia to be more than willing to assist its Chinese comrades in implementing this art of operational surprise.¹²

Flexible and Integrated Response

It is essential that the United States and our partners in the Indo-Pacific reorganize our joint doctrine and that the United States Air Force play a key role in implementing adaptations to fill another layer in deterrence, beyond nuclear. This deterrence stems from the ability of the United States and our allies to exercise a wide array of flexible response and dispersion capability. We must be prepared to disperse our forces to make it more difficult for a PRC war plan to strike all the necessary targets to achieve success. This would require our forces to be placed on air bases in Thailand, the Philippines, our various territories in the Pacific, and northwestern Australia. I also believe in a renovation and addition to military installations in the Marianas as well as the introduction of more mobile and elusive naval airpower.

The Carrier Problem

During World War II, the US Navy outproduced their Japanese counterparts. The fleet carriers symbolized American resolve and industrial might over the Imperial Navy's inability to compete. The fleet carrier still carries the main weight of American naval airpower projection, but this asset is well-known to be vulnerable in a possible engagement with China. According to an article in *IBD Weekly*, Gillian Rich argues, "... aircraft carriers are one of the most potent weapons in America's arsenal. But they are also more vulnerable today as new ship-killing missiles threaten to turn these \$13 billion war machines into sitting ducks."¹³ The Chinese DF-21 and DF-26 missiles have the capability of destroying the pride

of America's navy, and if one were to be sunk by a Chinese land-based missile, a deep blow to American pride and self-confidence would limit the use of carriers in the remainder of such a conflict as a liability. The destruction and loss of one of our carriers would likely trigger another response: the possible unleashing of a nuclear exchange. We must find a way to allow the carrier's air wing to participate in the delivery of standoff munitions and within range of the employment of naval airpower to the battle area on day one without risking the escalation their loss may bring to the conflict. The solution may be long-range drone tankers and the deployment of another light support asset, like smaller and more-maneuverable carriers, to offset the ease of targeting large, expensive, and highly populated national assets.

Another key aspect to mobile and effective American airpower in the World War II were the so-called "jeep carriers" or escort aircraft carriers. These were light and fast, short-deck carriers that held a small but wide array of aircraft fulfilling bomber, fighter, torpedo bomber, antisubmarine, and reconnaissance roles. This class of warship may seem useless and outdated in modern warfare; however, I would argue that it is a valid necessity to maintain a mobile and rapid response capability to support the joint fight in the event of war in the Indo-Pacific. The jeep-carrier concept would envision a new class of ship that has both defensive and offensive capabilities, while utilizing the advantage of speed and mobility. The USS *America* (LHA-5), known as the "Lightning Carrier," is a promising start to this sort of initiative.¹⁴ However, this amphibious assault ship is not solely a carrier. It also acts as a platform to launch Marines in amphibious assault craft, transport helicopters, and attack helicopters. The F-35Bs assigned to this carrier can project power for the amphibious task force; however, the ability to project air-launched standoff weapons onto the battle area from fast and mobile ships could be a decisive deterrent. The PRC's land-based missiles would need to be able to track and destroy multiple smaller targets with significant air defense and escort opposed to large task groups.

Land-Based, Long-Range Precision Strike

The US Marines are introducing their continued contribution to long-range, precision-strike capabilities to the joint fight. The service is requesting Congressional approval of land-based antiship missiles. Two types of antiship missiles are being considered, including a "venerable" version of the US Navy's Tomahawk missile and an adaptation of the Navy's stealthy strike missile.¹⁵ In a recent *National Interest* article, David Axe stated, "Now anti-ship units are the Marines' top priority, the service told the U.S. Senate in written testimony associated with the budgeting process for 2021."¹⁶ This capability will allow the United States to for-

ward deploy land-based antiship assets in theater to provide joint support to a future fight. This may also serve as an integral part of conventional deterrence by providing another capability and dispersed unit that is necessary for consideration by any PRC offensive.

The Unsinkable Aircraft Carriers Are Sinkable

The various US and allied installations in the Indo-Pacific and within range of the first island chain must be maintained at full readiness, but many potential sites across the Indo-Pacific must be thoroughly analyzed and constructed to meet the need for a rapid introduction of forces with the ability to generate an immediate capability to launch and recover aircraft. The current installations are vulnerable and within striking range from Chinese, North Korean, and Russian standoff weapons.¹⁷ These islands may serve as “unsinkable aircraft carriers;” however, it is vital that they maintain a dense array of air defense capability. The US Army Air Defense Artillery as well as Marine and Air Force security troops should be given full capability to provide adequate antimissile and antiair batteries on these installations. Some examples of antiaircraft artillery we must update and deploy in larger numbers are the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and the Counter Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar (C-RAM) systems. The same must be considered for the airstrips and installations on other US possessions and allied territories to implement a credible dispersal and retaliatory capability. These island airfields are vital, but if they are not numerous and well-defended, they can be made ineffective to respond to a short and limited PRC thrust.

Dispersion and Mutual Support

Of course, various numbers of well-dispersed allied aircraft responding to any crisis within the first island chain would also support these naval forces. Just as the Israelis perfected the art of ground crew turn around rates, the USAF ground crews will have to perform as quickly and efficiently to obtain the maximum number of sorties. The allied aircraft, well-dispersed, must reintroduce a high level of quick reaction alert (QRA) standards. This will be key within the B-52, B-1, B-2, and future B-21 communities, along with other long-range standoff delivery platforms. I suggest that the strategic bomber force in the Indo-Pacific maintain well-dispersed and alert crews that are not easy money for a Chinese missile strike on Guam. I propose they be spread to multiple locations with multiple crews on standby alert. I also propose that we increase the numbers of standoff weapons delivery platforms in the area to increase our response capabilities. All these measures play into a role of deterrence. According to Diana

Stacy Correll, "Although the move signifies the close of a 16-year mission as part of the Continuous Bomber Presence mission, the change doesn't mean strategic bombers won't operate in the Indo-Pacific anymore, the Air Force said." According to the article, Air Force Global Strike Command put out the following statement, "U.S. strategic bombers will continue to operate in the Indo-Pacific, to include Guam, at the timing and tempo of our choosing."¹⁸ The removal of the continuous bomber presence in Guam presents Beijing with a new degree of uncertainty. The United States does not have all its eggs in the same basket in the Pacific, and this decision allows the US bomber force to exercise a more flexible and unpredictable response to any contingency. Any war plan constructed by the PRC would now have to adapt to a new reality. The American B-52s and B-1Bs will no longer be relied on to have a large percentage of their available assets on one island, within range of Chinese missiles.

It must be made clear in the minds of the Chinese Politburo that territorial expansion, even limited, would be too costly and too uncertain to execute. This method must work in conjunction with the alliance and other branches to create a credible, flexible, and assured conventional response capability.

The South Atlantic Example

In April 1982, Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) launched a bombing raid against the Argentine-occupied Stanley Airport in the Falkland Islands under the operational code name, "Black Buck." The Falklands War is an excellent case study to illustrate the importance of land-based airpower having the proper training to conduct antishipping operations. The Argentine Air Force's ability to launch air strikes from Stanley Airport against the British Task Force and their carriers would present the possibility of Argentine fighter bombers to threaten the Royal Navy's carriers, which comprised the only air component of the task force. The small number of Harrier fighters provided the sole fixed-wing air cover for the task force against a significantly larger Argentine Air Force and Naval Air Arm of attack and fighter aircraft.¹⁹ The RAF's elderly Vulcans, remnants of the once formidable "V-Force," prepared for a bombing raid that would render Stanley Airport useless to the Argentinians and would force the Argentine strikers to take off from air bases in Argentina to strike targets against the British task force. A significant number of Royal Navy ships were sunk or damaged by the end of the conflict, but the lack of antiship training and the loss of Stanley Airport as a usable forward base allowed the British to establish a beachhead at San Carlos and eventually clear the skies of Argentine aircraft. The stunning performance by the Israeli trained, Argentine pilots displayed to the Royal Navy that, despite their technology and history, they remained vulnerable to highly motivated and daring

aircrews.²⁰ The success of Operation Black Buck illustrates the importance of air defense and airstrip multiplicity in one's area of operations. It would have been significantly more difficult for the RAF Vulcan force, in 1982, to mount long-range bombing raids against multiple airbases from their base at Ascension Island. It is essential to note that the Stanley Airport was not the only operable airfield in the Falklands, but at other sites the Argentinians had only placed Pucara light tac-prop ground attack aircraft, providing no ability to project the much-needed strike capabilities to interdict the British carrier force and her escorts. The complexities of air, naval, and amphibious engagements in the South Atlantic may provide many lessons to be applied in the first island chain of the Western Pacific.

Chinese Marines

According to Capt Michael A. Hanson, USMC, "While the Chinese state has approved the reduction of its army by 300,000 soldiers, it plans to grow its marine corps by 400 percent, from 20,000 marines to more than 100,000 and the People's Liberation Army amphibious units will be folded into the PLANMC [People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps]." ²¹ This is a significant increase in amphibious assault capability and may signal Beijing's future strategic intentions that involve the use of these units to exercise operations well beyond the borders of mainland China. From an air domain perspective, amphibious assaults are extremely difficult and complex operations and to do them successfully requires much preparation and logistical coordination. Controlling the air during an amphibious landing is vital to the operation's success, and the Falklands War of 1982 is a prime example as to what a lack of air superiority can do to any landing force and its escorts. US land-based and naval air assets must retain and modernize their capabilities to conduct joint anti-amphibious air operations to deter such a build-up and ensure in the minds of the aggressor that an amphibious assault will be heavily contested at the water's edge by long-range precision strike against landing and logistics shipping. A key to signal an increase in PRC offensive strategic intentions will be shown through their expanded shipbuilding of vessels that provide an amphibious capability, and a joint angle the air must deter China's use of such assets in the Western Pacific and beyond.

Release the Gremlins

Another addition to an active defense of the Pacific would introduce the "Gremlin." In the article "DARPA's Semi-Disposable Gremlin Drones Will Fly by 2019," Evan Ackerman describes the new drone as "nearly disposable UAVs [unmanned

aerial vehicles] that could launch and be retrieved from flying aircraft carrier mother-ships in mid-air.”²² Dynetics, the drone’s manufacturer, describes their concept:

The Dynetics solution involves deploying a towed, stabilized capture device below and away from the C-130. The air vehicle docks with the device much like an airborne refueling operation. Once docked and powered off, the air vehicle is raised to the C-130, where it is mechanically secured and stowed. The key technologies can be straightforwardly adapted to allow under-wing recovery and bay recovery by other cargo aircraft.²³

This new capability for the C-130 can significantly shift US allies’ abilities to respond rapidly against any PRC initiation of hostilities. C-130 squadrons on QRA and a light undisclosed number on routine airborne alert can provide another conventional deterrent that can swarm the battle area and could target any amphibious or air forces that are used in an offensive within the first island chain. The Gremlins could serve as another uncertain threat in the minds of PRC war planners and provide an excellent platform to seek out and destroy Chinese amphibious groups. These drones would not only act as a strike capability but could also serve as escorts to the C-130s that are tasked with delivering them as well as any other allied aircraft called upon to respond.

Indian and Allied Cooperation

Recent border clashes between PLA and Indian forces along the disputed Sino-Indian border in the Galwan Valley have resulted in the deaths of several soldiers on both sides and much speculation as to future developments in the region. This is not the first border clash between the two nuclear-armed powers in the region and may serve as an opportunity to solidify the US-Indian relationship regarding PRC aggression in the Indo-Pacific. The recent border clash could motivate further cooperation and joint planning between US, allied, and Indian air and naval forces in the region and can provide the PRC with yet another factor to consider when planning or conducting future offensive operations in the region. The addition of Indian naval and air strength as well as cooperative bases could prove to be another headache for any war planners in Beijing.²⁴ Although the Indian relationship with Russia as an arms supplier could prove difficult in any relationship-building efforts with Washington, India’s recent arms procurements from the United States may prove to open the door to many possibilities for cooperation to counter the PRC. For example, it was recently reported that “India’s cabinet cleared \$2.6 billion purchase from Lockheed Martin Corp. of 24 multi-role MH-60R Seahawk maritime helicopters to Indian navy. The State Department has also approved a potential sale to India of \$1.8 billion in arms, including

air-defense radars and missiles, rifles and other equipment, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency announced.”²⁵ The Indian Air Force will also be receiving AH-64 Apache attack helicopters as a result of the deal.²⁶ The introduction of American military equipment into the Indian armed forces may prove to shift a future balance in the region regarding Russian supply and cooperation. The door to a stronger partnership of likeminded and democratic nations may provide the Indo-Pacific with a stronger web of alliances that will create problems for any Chinese first strike in the Western Pacific.

Too Fast and Too Costly to Respond

The ability for the allies to respond with maximum flights of combat aircraft and standoff munitions will be vital to the outcome of any PRC offensive. The PRC will have a key advantage with its short lines of supply and operational initiative. Any allied doctrine in the Indo-Pacific will be defensive in nature but also must be able to take the offensive to liberate any territory a PRC amphibious force may attempt to seize. This conventional avenue of deterrence is just as important as the nuclear element. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the United States and the NATO alliance took a hard look at their war gaming scenarios and projections in Central Europe.²⁷ The Egyptian and Syrian thrusts against the Israelis in the Golan Heights and Sinai proved that a limited war in West Germany by the Warsaw Pact would be too quick and costly for the reserves to respond. The concept of active defense and eventually the evolution of AirLand Battle took root to provide a counter to the growing Soviet military capabilities.²⁸ With the introduction of this new doctrine we saw a shift in the minds of Soviet leadership. By the late 1980s, it was well-understood that any conventional Soviet attack would be too costly and too uncertain due to allied superiority in both technology and doctrine. The Western alliance had learned the lessons it could not afford to in a time that tactically favored the Soviets.

Thucydides Trap and COVID-19

Cui bono? Does China benefit from the corona virus, and does its military readiness and response to the pandemic indicate any long-term game plan? Can this game plan encompass a short jab at taking air and sea control of South China Sea while Beijing’s adversaries rally to confront the current health and economic crisis? Richard Javad Heydarian of the *Asia Times* points out a significant increase in Chinese activity as a result of the outbreak: “While some see China’s nationalistic messaging as a bid to rally its people during difficult Covid-19 times, others

view the increasingly aggressive naval maneuvers as a bid to exploit America's weakened condition to secure new advantage in the hot spot theater.”²⁹

COVID-19 presents an opportunity to take advantage of the global economic and health crisis and political division within the United States during a critical election year. Military exercises in the South China Sea and mock drills planned to simulate an invasion of Taiwan suggest an increase in PRC readiness. According to the *Reuters*, “The Chinese military is planning to conduct a large-scale landing drill off Hainan Island in the South China Sea in August to simulate the possible seizure of the Taiwanese-held Pratas Island in the future, Chinese sources familiar with the matter have said.”³⁰ With the introduction of a second fleet carrier, the Chinese will be able to exercise joint air, naval, and amphibious capabilities on a large scale relatively close to the area of operations. Many planned military operations have developed from “training” or “exercises” and can quickly develop into a real-world attempt to seize these islands by force during these turbulent times—with little immediate reaction possible from the allied powers in the region. With the *Shandong* and *Liaoning* carriers able to combine with other surface assets, comprising their own air groups, along with land-based assets providing cover, the ability for the United States to respond effectively would be a difficult feat.³¹

In the media, the American public has seen firsthand what the virus can do to military readiness. Recently, the outbreak on board American naval assets created much consternation within domestic politics and fostered negative perceptions, at times false, but nonetheless damaging to the confidence in American ability to react in the Western Pacific. According to Brookings, “The naval services have been particularly careful not to let sailors and Marines get to sea if sick, since as we all know, ships are the perfect petri dishes for the virus’s spread. Not all of these measures can be sustained indefinitely. The armed forces will face an increasingly challenging path forward through the rest of the calendar year and into 2021.”³² In particular, the focus of the spread of the virus within the fleet has been our aircraft carriers. The USS *Theodore Roosevelt* has seen much media coverage due to its outbreak on board and the relieving of its captain due to a breach in the chain of command concerning the safety of the crew. The perception that this coverage creates in the eyes of the PRC can generate miscalculation when planning for future operations in the Western Pacific. The danger that these stories create is a possibility to take advantage of a “quarantined fleet.” The PRC, regardless of if its own readiness or problems with the virus, can regulate its media coverage to conceal and restrain information from getting out to possible adversaries.

The introduction of the virus into the global commons, regardless of the intent or lack thereof by the PRC, has created an opportunity for China to expand its influence. Such expansion may take the form of economic growth or an increase

in political reliability on the world stage compared to a perception of division within the United States over race relations and public health crises. Putting politics aside, the military situation in the Western Pacific is at a crucial crossroads within the Thucydides' Trap theory. Doors to conflict must open for the trap to be sprung, and a global pandemic combined with a domestic identity crisis at home may provide the PRC with the chance, in its leaders' minds, to take advantage of a miscalculated opportunity to begin exercising regional dominance that can lead to escalation and military confrontation.

Unfulfilling the Prophecy

In a modern sense, we cannot afford to learn a doctrinal lesson ourselves; in fact, I would propose we avoid having an ally or proxy learn a necessity to change as well. We must skip the learning process and find a new balance through containment and overwhelming preparedness to respond in theater. The nuclear umbrella, although necessary, does not fully deter a limited and conventional engagement. The US Air Force will play a defining role in a future conflict in the Western Pacific, and our ability to adapt to rapid response and antishipping with a new level of air and naval cooperation will determine the outcome. My greatest fear is that we may find ourselves in a similar situation to the British Empire during the Suez Crisis of 1956. We may wake up one day and find that we are not as capable as we had thought and that we significantly overestimated our position in the world. The combination of fear and pride creates the necessary ingredients for a war that neither side wants, but a third party may draw both sides beyond the brink into an unavoidable collision course.³³ Therefore, deterrence through strength, multiplicity, and a wide range of retaliatory long-range, precision-strike capabilities are less likely to spring the Thucydides' Trap prophecy. ☸

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