Building Resiliency
A New US Approach to East Asia

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The United States faces headwinds from several directions in East Asia: a rising global power in China, a declining Japan, instability on the Korean Peninsula, and complex human security issues in Southeast Asia. These challenges do not have clear solutions, and current US strategies that vacillate between maintaining liberal hegemony and retrenchment have so far been ineffective. Specifically, the United States has failed to cultivate the relational and liberal aspects of its regional alliances, instead focusing on building a military counterweight to China. This approach has resulted in a series of bilateral alliances with East Asian nations that work with the United States on specific security issues but not with each other to advance regional solutions. This article offers key steps the United States should take to ensure a stable and prosperous region.

In its long-standing post–World War II role as a superpower, the United States faces an unprecedented challenge in East Asia. Unlike during the Cold War, the region is not neatly divided into two ideological camps. Instead, it is a complex mix of national identity issues, economic integration, and power standoffs. East Asians’ desire for national autonomy means that they will tend not to cooperate based on shared values but will instead prefer to cooperate with major powers in areas of shared interests. This reality does not fit neatly into American desires for a liberal world order, leaving the United States to pursue more limited—yet attainable—policy goals. Simply recycling the Cold War policy of containment will only exacerbate the security challenge, as China possesses a military, economy, and national will to break such containment attempts.

The concept of societal resilience must underpin US strategy toward East Asia, as strengthening allies’ and partners’ societies provides the best method for constraining China’s aggressive activities. The current US focus on Chinese capabilities has resulted in a misguided approach to the region. Although pragmatic and continual engagement in the economic sphere is important, the United States must improve its efforts to advance core liberal principles. An expansive diplomatic and information campaign to move Asian nations beyond ethnic-based nationalism toward a civic identity based on equality and pluralism among key allies will help produce a more resilient region. A new US approach should also recognize human security threats as equally destabilizing as traditional military conflicts. The US military must complement this “liberal push” with regional military capabilities that empha-
size a defensive and flexible posture that rapidly collects and shares information, employs more law enforcement forces, and takes advantage of long-range strike capabilities to both deter and counter Chinese activities.

**Shifting US Focus from China to Partners**

The US preoccupation with Chinese military capabilities continues to obfuscate a more holistic approach to East Asian security and has consequently resulted in a national strategy that does not align with core American values. Much of the current discussion on China revolves around its transitional power status and the subsequent security implications—namely, whether this transition will be violent or peaceful. America and its partners are concerned with how China is using its power to realign the existing order to support its own interests. Traditional notions of power and influence such as the size of China’s military and economy underpin these concerns and the assessments that inform them.

Realistically, there is little the United States can do to stop China’s increasing power in these areas short of a shooting or economic war. It has instead tried to create a network of alliances that will help it push back against Chinese expansion; however, East Asian geopolitical realities make this an unreliable strategy.

A US emphasis on its partners’ resiliency has two primary benefits. First, it focuses on nations that are already amenable to US influence. Second, it recognizes that resiliency across all forms of security threats will shape regional and international power dynamics. Historical examples of Germany’s rise under Bismarck or the United States overtaking Great Britain in the twentieth century help to shape the current understanding of security issues associated with a rising China, but today’s complex threats lack easy historical precedents. Instead, a region that begins to address societal tensions and complex human security issues that cross borders will provide the best defense against both China and nontraditional threats such as overfishing and climate change. A key challenge for the United States will be to measure its partners’ progress in terms of overall national resilience rather than simply how they compare to China in traditional forms of power.

**Limits of Economic Power to Change Regional Dynamics**

This article will include only a brief discussion on using economic power to increase resiliency. This is not to suggest that economic issues are not important for resiliency; rather, the size of China’s economy and existing multilateral economic agreements limit the United States’ ability to achieve meaningful influence on traditional trade issues, with the result that there are more opportunities to be had in the diplomatic, information, capacity-building, and military realms. American
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power in East Asia must contend with China’s economic clout, insofar as it will continue to grow as the dominant economic actor. The large democracies of Japan, Australia, and South Korea trade more with China than they do with the United States. This situation presents a predicament for increasing resiliency within the region, because increased dependency on China for economic progress makes Asian nations more vulnerable to an authoritarian regime even though an open Chinese market helps increase regional wealth, leading to increased stability within societies. To date, East Asia has tried to balance these issues through multinational agreements that respect national sovereignty while opening trade markets.

America’s approach to international economic agreements has typically been at odds with East Asia’s desire for national autonomy. Its liberal approach emphasizes good governance through Western-led institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The region tends to view these institutions with suspicion due to the widespread belief that they exist to advance US priorities. East Asia is connected via a dense series of economic agreements that tend to reflect the region’s preference for state-to-state agreements centered around free trade and bilateral dealings. Besides states such as North Korea and Cambodia, which have become highly dependent on Chinese assistance, this system has produced a fairly stable region that has benefited many of the participants. The United States has largely participated in this system, but its promotion of multinational corporations, free flows of capital, and market deregulation is at odds with the region’s emphasis on sovereignty even in the economic sphere. Thus, this Western strategy’s success in Europe is unlikely to be repeated in East Asia.

In short: The United States can more fully participate in the East Asian system to provide an alternative option to China, especially in Southeast Asia, but China’s economic size does pose real limits. Additionally, if the United States is to focus on building up regional resilience, it is uniquely suited toward helping to reduce intersocietal tensions among its partners and strengthening their security capabilities.

Reducing Intersocietal Tensions in Northeast Asia: Japan’s Wartime Past

Japan and South Korea are two of the United States’ most important regional military, economic, and societal allies. However, Japan’s historical relationship and societal tensions with South Korea pose a significant challenge to security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Japan’s unwillingness to adequately address its wartime past on issues such as Korean comfort women, mass atrocities, and present-day Yasukuni Shrine visits, combined with South Korea’s increasingly nationalist desires for Japanese repentance on South Korean terms, represent sources of signifi-
cant tensions between the region’s leading democracies. The Yasukuni Shrine, built to commemorate those who died in Japan’s wars, exemplifies Japan’s and South Korea’s contentious wartime past. Visits to the shrine by various Japanese leaders, particularly since the enshrinement of 14 Class A war criminals in 1978, has received heavy criticism from South Korea. Whereas Japanese leaders view these visits as paying respect to their wartime dead, both South Korea and China see them as glorifying Japan’s militaristic past. These societal issues prevent the United States from presenting a united democratic approach to security issues with China. Therefore, the United States should exert maximum diplomatic and informational efforts to help reduce intersocietal tensions between its allies. While this effort is exceedingly complex, the United States should first work to improve this situation by strengthening domestic Japanese civil society.

The United States can support Japanese civil society and its engagement with South Korea through concerted state-level diplomatic, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic engagements. Engagements at the civic society level are necessary as official Japanese–South Korean talks have repeatedly failed in practice. Although US and Japanese NGOs and academic efforts to help overcome these issues will be slow and uneven, they hold the only real hope for progress, as nongovernmental dialogue may be able to avoid the national spotlight and work below the media’s radar. Additionally, the US government can put back-channel pressure on conservative Japanese officials not to undermine these efforts in exchange for potential US concessions on issues such as US basing and greater Japanese autonomy within the alliance. This process will also be hindered by the continual decline in NGO activity between the United States and Japan. The United States should work to rebuild these relationships and encourage funding and support for these efforts from a variety of sources: US and Japanese private donors, academic institutions, and business organizations. If successful, a common societal understanding of Japan’s wartime role will help build a more resilient society that will avoid promoting extremist elites and politicians while laying the groundwork for reconciliation with South Korea.

The United States can also promote this reconciliation by giving Japan more flexibility to chart its own path within the US-Japanese alliance and give power to a broader set of voices within Japanese society. The United States should not simply support Shinzo Abe–type nationalists for their military support, as America has to deal with a Japanese public that has serious concerns with the current US basing structure and the belief that US intentions are more about staging its own forces rather than defending Japan. Rather, it should also maintain ties with what Richard Samuels has dubbed “middle power internationalists.” These internationalists want to better balance Japan’s relationship between America and its Asian neigh-
bors, and they tend to posit that Japan should derive security policy legitimacy from international institutions and a “balanced” approach to China’s rise that goes beyond the lens of military threats. This part of Japanese civil society more closely aligns with America’s liberal values than promilitary conservative elements. America’s force presence on Okinawa is a contentious issue that provides the United States an opportunity to support a broader set of Japanese factions.

To make its posture more sustainable as well as to create better relations with all of Japan’s domestic sociopolitical factions, the United States should seriously consider reducing its force presence on Okinawa to communicate its commitment to building a new relationship with Japan. The United States could demonstrate its commitment to bolstering Japanese civil society by finding a permanent solution to the Okinawa basing issue. This issue has caused turmoil for the US–Japan alliance and for Tokyo’s relationship with Okinawa’s inhabitants.

Okinawan civic instability has roots in Japan’s imperial past in that it was annexed in 1872 and has a distinct identity, is geographically remote from Tokyo, and contains most of the US bases in Japan. A reduction in US forces would show Okinawans that they have a meaningful say over their territory and that the United States and Tokyo can be responsive to their demands. Although the United States has typically been resistant to this idea due to operational concerns, it can take advantage of its increasing capabilities in unmanned platforms, long-range strikes, and intratheater tactical airlifts to scale down its Okinawa presence and diversify its force presence. US flexibility on this issue would demonstrate a strong commitment to its liberal values while also respecting those elite elements in Japanese society that desire more autonomy in the alliance for purposes of integrating more strongly with Asia. Specifically, these elements desire the flexibility to engage and balance Asian nations outside of the confines of its US alliance.

The United States may have to accept a Japan that values international institutions and trading relationships more than military capabilities, which may convince Japan’s neighbors that it is not seeking to be a great power. This would help strengthen the alliance over the long term by promoting and emphasizing shared liberal values in addition to military concerns.

The United States should advocate for these changes, because if Japan remains a society divided about its international role, then the United States cannot effectively work with Japan and South Korea on a unified approach to regional security issues. This is crucial for stability due to China’s increasing power and its mutual animosity with Japan.

To be clear, this policy prescription is not based on a rosy assessment of Chinese practices or motives. The Chinese Communist Party has promoted an anti-Japanese narrative and supported demonstrations against Japanese activi-
ties. China’s national identity is deeply entrenched in its victimhood status within Japan’s imperial history. This deep-seated Chinese identity, combined with current geopolitical rivalry on questions such as the status of the Senkaku Islands, make a Japan–China diplomatic breakthrough highly unlikely.

Nonetheless, the United States’ near-term focus in greater Asia should remain on Japan and South Korea, because it is these two powers that can provide an effective hedge against China—if, that is, the two countries can extend their domestic democratic values to their international relationship. If unsuccessful in bridging relations based on a more common historical understanding, South Korea may gradually align with Chinese interests on security issues including a nuclear North Korea and Japan’s role in Asian security affairs. The United States must change its strategy in Northeast Asia to build a resilient and healthy Japanese society that can establish meaningful ties with South Korea and develop as an Asian power that does not cause security concerns for the region.

Human Security in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia poses a unique challenge for any American strategy because it comprises a diverse group of nations that faces complex developmental challenges. Alongside the traditional security threat posed by China, Southeast Asia is a subregion that bears the weight of significant human security threats. Climate change is intensifying the severity of natural disasters, while illegal fishing threatens the sustainability of the region’s fish diets and ocean ecosystem. The United States should therefore increase its soft power influence in the subregion by helping to combat these threats. It should promote multilateral solutions in conjunction with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); in fact, ASEAN provides the entry point into Southeast Asian geopolitics and is the forum through which outside powers can engage the region.

The challenge for the United States is that China’s soft power is gaining influence in Southeast Asia and that Southeast Asian domestic issues preclude individual nations from taking a side on US versus Chinese security issues. America’s economic withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and its focus on domestic initiatives have enhanced China’s influence and resulted in a non-antagonistic approach by ASEAN to Chinese activities in the South China Sea. ASEAN’s perception that the United States is not as interested as China in Southeast Asian economic and political issues has resulted in declining US influence. Additionally, the US tendency to view every issue in terms of its strategic competition with China underappreciates the geopolitical realities of Southeast Asia. The island and peninsula geography allows the nations there to avoid being consumed culturally, economically, or militarily by larger powers, yet they can also experience domestic turmoil caused by transnational economic integration and “contested national
identities” among various ethnic groups. These nations emphasize political autonomy and noninterventionist principles, relying on agile diplomacy to cooperate in areas of overlapping interests rather than permanently aligning with any major power. Consequently, the United States needs to partner with ASEAN on regionwide threats to maintain influence within the bloc.

A US pledge to help Southeast Asia deal with the impacts of climate change, illegal fishing, and all kinds of illicit trafficking will demonstrate to the subregion that the United States can address more than just traditional security threats. A multilateral approach through ASEAN would also demonstrate that the United States respects the position ASEAN occupies between two great powers. Both the United States and China can lead the way in reducing causes of climate change while also helping to provide technologies and capabilities that can respond to natural disasters. Climate change solutions can avoid nationalist pushback because they do not have origins in contested issues such as ethnicity, national identity, and past imperialism. Rather, nations broadly recognize climate change as a threat that requires transnational solutions.

China is a major cause of the region’s illegal fishing problem, which has greater connections to regional territorial disputes. Additionally, fishing disputes exist between many of the subregion’s states. This politically fraught issue provides the United States an opportunity to show that it is a responsible actor that respects ASEAN strategic concerns, and, because it is not a party to the problem, it can help mediate the dispute. Even if progress is slow or uneven, the United States could be seen as a responsible and important actor in ASEAN issues beyond traditional military disputes. These steps can help increase US soft power and positively affect its relationship with individual ASEAN states, which may influence future economic agreements, security partnerships, and political support for US positions.

**US Military Posture to Reinforce Regional Resiliency**

Although the centerpiece of any US strategy should focus on liberal norms of multinational collaboration and intersocietal (e.g., Japan–South Korea) understanding, China's military buildup requires a US force posture that aligns with its liberal values while also providing a strong deterrent. Additionally, any force posture and contingency planning efforts must also account for regional preferences of noninterference and skepticism of collective security missions. Specifically, the United States should drop any notion of a NATO-like structure in East Asia that will collectively respond to China across a range of activities.
Japanese society is broadly skeptical of collective security missions, and South Korea views its military alliance with the United States as solely focused on peninsular issues. Southeast Asian nations, especially those that maintain a maritime buffer with larger powers, are unwilling to align permanently with major powers or give up national prerogatives in pursuit of multilateral security arrangements. For example, Malaysia has been deepening its bilateral military ties with the United States due to Chinese activities yet has not promised any support to a crisis not involving Malaysia. This challenges US military planning efforts because the United States will have to help develop regional military capabilities that will be useful in a crisis yet do not automatically commit small and middle powers to getting involved in a China crisis.

East Asian middle and small powers’ lack of desire to fully commit to US efforts to counterbalance and contain China greatly complicates US military planning efforts. Asian powers typically pursue regional economic cooperation while also maintaining credible power projection capabilities. They tend to use these capabilities to balance their interests among the great powers and do not see military conflict as beneficial in a globalized world. This stands in contrast to the US military that values military capabilities for their deterrent effects but also perceives benefits in employing them. The US military views basing rights, logistical support agreements, intelligence sharing, and combat power integration as providing a deterrent and yet expects them to be available during military operations.

This mismatch in strategic culture requires the United States to develop partnered capabilities that align with East Asian nations’ propensity to balance their interests between the United States and China, respect national autonomy, and help individual economies while still creating shared regional capabilities that can be beneficial during a conflict. Domain awareness facilitated by space capabilities provides a good start.

**Domain Awareness from Space**

Today’s world is an information contest, and this is true across all forms of national power. A nation’s ability to collect data and rapidly turn it into useful information supports diplomatic, economic, and military power. Therefore, the US military should focus on establishing regional domain awareness capabilities through increased space assets; space capabilities match the geopolitical complexities of East Asia because of their inherent flexibility. Focusing on domain awareness provides East Asian nations their desired flexibility, as this capability is
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a less threatening form of power but still supports economic development, humanitarian responses, military power projection, and leadership decision-making. Asian powers’ concerns are vast and include military operations by other nations in the maritime and air domains, significant weather events, and illicit economic activities such as illegal fishing and wildlife trafficking by China. Domain awareness can therefore also support crisis responses and military operations if deterrence fails. Using space assets incentivizes regional cooperation because those assets operate in the “global commons” and are at the forefront of technical progress.

Space assets are best suited to overcoming inherent challenges in domain awareness across East Asia’s vast geography because they possess the speed, range, and permanence not available to other forms of military and commercial capabilities. Additionally, space access does not pose the same political challenges as other domains. A network of imaging and sensing satellites in low-earth orbit could provide nations the ability to accurately find, identify, and track both commercial and military activities, thereby providing a foundation to curb illicit activities or to deter nefarious nation-state activities that try to operate undetected. These capabilities have become much more cost-effective thanks to advances in commercial launch technology and payload size, which have provided robust space sensing capabilities to entities beyond great powers. The dual-use nature of space power is an important factor for incentivizing East Asian states to increase their space capabilities. The same assets that can alert nations to a Chinese troop buildup or fishing flotilla could also support construction projects or disaster management. The United States is well-positioned to help Asian partners, as it has the most experience with building and using these technologies.

Space assets provide a unique partnering opportunity for the United States even though many East Asian powers tend to avoid aligning too closely with any single nation. The physical characteristics of space power make it less threatening than other assets that can contribute to domain awareness. Nations legally accept that national boundaries do not extend into space. A space intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) asset, especially one with commercial origins, does not possess the political sensitivities of a naval or air collection asset operating just outside 12 nautical miles of a nation’s borders. Military activities are a significant cause of many of the disputes in the East and South China seas; therefore, reducing naval and air intelligence platforms can help reduce tensions. Nations can then use space to more openly employ intelligence assets. Ideally, the United States would complement these efforts with a regional data-sharing network, but even if domestic situations prevent that, allies and partners that make better-informed decisions still benefit the United States. If partners employ space technologies on a consistent basis, the sharing capability could be scaled up in a crisis. This would
create a more resilient region better able to understand and react to Chinese activities, providing flexibility as part of a national or multinational response.

Law Enforcement and Security Capabilities

Domain awareness is necessary for building regional resilience, but it is not sufficient. Chinese activities in the East and South China Seas have resulted in multiple territorial crises in the twentieth century. The United States and its allies have been slow to counter these provocations because US blue-water warships are insufficient to respond to increasing Chinese fishing or activist behaviors and because many smaller powers do not typically possess the necessary capabilities to effectively respond. The United States and its partners require maritime law enforcement capabilities that can respond to Chinese gray-zone provocations without immediately becoming a military confrontation. Aided by robust domain awareness, the United States and its partners could better counter Chinese gray-zone activities by utilizing rapid response forces that are trained in maritime law enforcement and low-level security operations.

Japan provides the most prominent example of building law enforcement capabilities for dealing with the complexities of East Asian maritime issues. It has significantly increased the size and scope of its Coast Guard to project influence without appearing to be destabilizing as a traditional military buildup.42 The Japanese Coast Guard was involved in firefights with North Korean vessels in 2001 and was at the center of the 2004 and 2010 Senkaku crises with China.43 It proved to be important in these situations despite still causing international crises. It was better suited than larger navy warships to respond to Chinese activists landing on the Senkakus and illegal activities by Chinese fishing trawlers. China’s ability to advance its sea claims via these gray-zone methods requires a law enforcement capability that can deal with provocations without immediately escalating to a larger military standoff.

The United States should make extensive use of a forward-deployed Coast Guard presence to conduct patrols with regional partners and should also aid in developing allied capabilities. It is counterproductive for the United States and its allies to respond to Chinese Coast Guard and fishing fleet activities with advanced US Navy assets, as this misuses critical power projection capabilities for law enforcement activities while also helping to create a Chinese narrative of a belligerent US Navy. Although these capabilities would not address underlying legal issues stemming from the United Nations Law of the Sea and China’s maritime claims, they can help defuse local crises.44 The multiple rounds of crises surrounding the Senkakus also showed that political engagement and dialogue are key ingredients to keeping a crisis under control, but these disputes were aided
by the fact that engagements were not happening between military vessels.\textsuperscript{45} Future disputes will continue in East Asian waters, and law enforcement capabilities with personnel trained in the complexities of these operations provide a more effective response than military options. This being said, China’s traditional military threat is significant, and the threat of conventional military power must continue to support US and partner interests.

\textbf{Survivability and Long-Range Strike}

Advanced forms of conventional capabilities remain paramount even though this analysis has been on softer forms of military power. Advanced Chinese capabilities necessitate that the US military put resilience at the center of its force posture. The US military must be highly responsive to changing situations and be able to operate while under attack in multiple domains. This article will not identify every aspect of what the US military needs to change; rather, it will focus on key capabilities that can be successful considering the geopolitical realities of East Asia.

East Asian states’ desire for national autonomy and their unwillingness to fully commit to the United States on all military issues should force the United States to rethink its force posture. Security cooperation such as mutual intelligence support, basing rights, and partnered operations will likely be limited to the few select countries that are involved in a crisis. The United States should not expect a broad coalition that actively participates in a counter-China operation. US troops in the region, such as those in South Korea, may be able to leave their locations to participate in operations but will be unlikely to come back for maintenance and resupply.\textsuperscript{46} Regional powers will not want to get involved in a China scenario unless it directly threatens their nation due to China’s overwhelming military and role as the region’s largest trading partner. These realities should force the United States to emphasize long-range and unmanned strike capabilities as the backbone of its conventional military deterrence.

The United States does not have to establish an overly offensive presence to create a credible military deterrent. It should ignore calls for a heavy offensive posture that will only aggravate the security dilemma with China and instead convey a posture of advanced defense with nonoffensive purposes.\textsuperscript{47} Long-range precision-strike capabilities in both manned and unmanned platforms provide the foundation of this deterrent capability. These include all types of platforms in the air, land, and sea, employing traditional in addition to hypersonic weapons. Other capabilities such as the previously mentioned domain awareness, robust command and control, electronic warfare, and mine warfare capabilities will surely become critical components as well.\textsuperscript{48} However, long-range strikes will provide the key components around which the United States should posture its forces.
Long-range strike capabilities can help with the basing rights challenges, as the United States can project power from large distances. Guam, Hawaii, and the continental United States all provide staging areas from which to launch operations. Advances in hypersonic missile technologies will also help cover these large distances in ever-shrinking amounts of time. These systems could disrupt potential Chinese military operations when aided by a robust ISR capability that can identify operational movements and provide targeting information. This may help military planners avoid having to secure every island and chokepoint to restrict Chinese movements, as a Chinese blue-water navy could be held at risk at far greater distances from China’s shores. This could also help alleviate Japanese concerns about Chinese activities if Japan is confident that the US military and perhaps its own military could threaten the Chinese military, especially its navy, nearly anywhere in the region.

Long-range strike capabilities do not negate the need for forward-based troops. These will still be necessary to help defend allies especially Japan and South Korea. However, they do provide the political opportunity to scale back some of these forward-based forces while still ensuring that adequate combat power is available for defending US allies. Long-range strike capabilities will also not be able to single-handedly defeat the Chinese military in a Taiwan scenario; however, they can help deny China a quick and easy victory.

The United States should not underestimate this benefit for two reasons. First, China does not have any operational military experience since its short 1979 border war with Vietnam. It lacks experience with modern command and control, joint operations, and rapid targeting. A prolonged engagement may put China at a disadvantage given the recent decades of US combat experience in these areas. Second, a protracted engagement would likely cause the international community to put China under extreme pressure to settle the dispute and even risks dragging regional states directly into the conflict. Neither of these scenarios plays to China’s operational strengths. If the United States can implement a force posture that puts long-range strike capabilities at the forefront, it can help provide a more flexible basing structure that better aligns with regional states’ desire for political flexibility.

**Conclusion**

The United States can most effectively address East Asian geopolitical realities by pursuing a strategy of bolstering regional resilience both in societies and militaries. China’s economic clout means that the United States should focus its initial resilience-building efforts on helping Japanese society overcome its wartime past internally and with its neighbors, particularly South Korea. Any attempts at reconciliation will be slow and halting and will require NGOs and academic engagements to do the bulk of the work. This process is critical for regional stability;
otherwise, Japan will be unable to take an active regional security role that diffuses, rather than exacerbates, tensions. The United States must also advance its soft power in Southeast Asia by focusing on a multilateral approach to human security threats. Issues such as climate change, illegal fishing, and environmental forms of trafficking pose an existential threat to Southeast Asia’s continued development and exist alongside traditional state-to-state security issues. These issues cut across societies and require multinational responses that, if successful, will increase regional resilience to twenty-first century challenges.

If the United States focuses on making progress on historical, identity, and human security issues, it must still commit to providing the hard military power necessary to deter Chinese aggression. It can do this by helping its partners build domain awareness through space capabilities and competing with China in a law enforcement manner. The United States can then use its advanced long-range strike capabilities to reduce its forward presence and diversify its basing structure while continuing to hold Chinese forces at risk in the region. Advanced defensive capabilities would significantly raise the cost of any major Chinese military action. This strategy requires the United States to take a more nuanced approach to the region by addressing long-term regional challenges that, if left unattended, will ultimately undermine any short-term gains. A successful East Asia is one whose societies, aided by the United States, are proactively working toward addressing the region’s important security issues while enhancing their resiliency to moderate China’s growing ambitions.

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Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Dr. Michael Kraig and Maj Holly Giroux, USAF, for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. All errors found herein are my own.

Notes


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