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Asymmetric Competition in the Arctic

Implications for North American Defense and Security

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Abstract

The current Arctic security environment is poorly characterized. In the past few years, it has been termed “a return to great-power competition” and now is oscillating around discussions of *hybrid threats* or *gray-zone warfare*. Whatever the term, these are methods and means designed to avoid notice, obscure intent and origin, and exploit the seams in the targets’ awareness and response capabilities. In this article we use the term *asymmetric competition* (AC) to describe such activities, which exist as a continuum of conflict below open warfare, rather than fitting neatly into the binary notion of war and peace. While many national security scholars and practitioners are aware of and concerned about the use of AC by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the ability of the United States and its allies to detect and protect against such behavior is limited. At the same time, the PRC has demonstrated a growing interest in the Arctic due to the region’s geostrategic importance and has taken an unusually aggressive posture toward asserting and securing Beijing’s interests there. We conducted an initial assessment to detect the extent, types, and tempo of AC using the Strategic Intelligence Framework (SIF)—a systems science methodology—to identify PRC asymmetric competition activities in the North American Arctic. Our results suggest an ongoing and pervasive AC campaign. We offer that integrative frameworks like the SIF can assist the United States, its allies, and its partners in detecting and characterizing AC with the accuracy and precision required for the development of strategy, policies, and response.

Great-Power Competition, Gray-Zone Warfare, and Hybrid Threats: Everything Old Is New Again

The PRC and the Russian Federation (Russia) are challenging the economic, military, and cultural dominance of the United States in the post–Cold War era. A range of literature exists in the political science and international policy realms

rich with references to great-power competition (GPC), gray-zone warfare, and hybrid threats, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The United States remains the most powerful conventional warfare force on the planet, with the greatest global reach;
2. Opposing the United States using direct military force in a geostrategic context is a dangerous and costly approach, with little chance of success, until hard-power parity is achieved; and
3. Those seeking increased national and global power at the expense of the United States will pursue indirect strategies (e.g., gray-zone warfare) and low-signature tactics (hybrid threats) designed to avoid detection, provide plausible deniability, and fall below thresholds that would trigger security/defense and protective responses.

However, this GPC is only new in the sense that it represents a change from the immediate past. The unquestioned dominance of the United States from the fall of the Soviet Union until today, or even the bi-polarity of the Cold War, and the clear emphasis on both the use and avoidance of conventional military engagement are the historical anomalies. Most human conflict has been something much less than all-out war, instead waged using many other methods.¹ This is something US policy makers previously recognized. One architect of post-World War II security, George Kennan, described it as *political warfare*, which he defined as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command short of [hot] war, to achieve its national objectives.”² In this article, to avoid the morass of terms and their previous or competing definitions, we refer to all these linked concepts collectively as *asymmetric competition* (AC), since the underlying principle is to avoid head-to-head competition using matching hard-power elements. We further define *threat* as some activity or action that gives the actor advantage, preferably at the expense of the target.

Asymmetric Competition as Geostrategic Environment Shaping

Since the end of World War II global norms have been rooted in what are usually termed liberal, internationalist ideas. This includes the concepts of universal human rights, freedom of the press, equality before the law, a representative form of government, and various civic freedoms. These ideas are liberal in the sense that they emphasize that individuals have certain intrinsic rights that cannot be morally or ethically violated by others—including the state. These ideas are internationalist because these asserted rights attach to the person, rather than ruled territory, and nations are expected to uphold them. For example, the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all people, everywhere, are “entitled to a

social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”³ Similarly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) embraces these standards in its opening articles, and the International Criminal Court was explicitly founded to try cases where a country fails to act on its own, or is “in reality . . . unwilling or unable” to do so.⁴ While the actual exercise of such ideals is never perfect, these basic principles form the foundation of existing global norms and standards for state behaviors.

Challenging these norms can—and often does—create internal and international backlash and consequences, even if they are applied unevenly. These range from internal protests (e.g., Hong Kong 2019–2020), to coercion through sanctions or military force up to and including full-scale invasions. In many ways this runs counter to a strict Westphalian construction, which emphasizes the absolute right of each state to be the “sole author of laws within its jurisdiction . . . hold a monopoly on the organized use of force,” and regards influence or interference in the domestic affairs of a state as a violation of sovereignty so severe it may prompt open war.⁵

The PRC and Russia are primarily authoritarian in their rule, and thus potentially subject to various negative consequences should their actions violate these standards. Both countries would naturally prefer a more permissive environment, where, for example, the PRC’s Uighur genocide, or its handling of Hong Kong, were not grounds for repercussions.⁶ As neither Russia nor the PRC can yet reasonably challenge the hard power of the United States, Moscow and Beijing seek to revise the existing rules in ways that favor their national and global objectives while simultaneously undermining current norms, institutions, and those that support them using “all the means at a nation’s command.”⁷ Some authors have attempted to reframe the PRC’s actions as more complex than revisionism, but none of the presented arguments adequately explain things like the prohibition on researching “Western constitutional democracy, universal values of human rights, Western-inspired notions of media and civil society independence . . . neo-liberalism, and ‘nihilistic’ critiques of the state,”⁸ the PRC’s pursuit of dissidents abroad, or its use of “sharp” power to erode trust in government and societies through censorship, dis- and misinformation, and interference in sociopolitical relationships and institutions that involve academia, culture, media, and economies (ACME). The latter has grown so strong so that even non-Chinese academics report self-censorship to avoid PRC entanglements.

Asymmetric Competition as National Strategy

The examples above demonstrate the PRC’s strategy for reshaping the political and security environment. In 1999 two senior PRC military officers wrote *Unrestricted Warfare*, explaining how the PRC could defeat the militarily superior

United States by using other elements of national power and avoiding direct engagements.⁹ The “Three Warfares” outlined in the book—psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare—have since been elevated to official PRC doctrine. Salient examples include: the use of “business, technology and science, education, culture and tourism,” as official state tools to achieve national objectives; laws that assert extraterritorial jurisdiction over PRC critics, including noncitizens; cyberattacks; coercive “debt diplomacy”; exportation of surveillance and social credit technology to other nations; use of China’s fishing fleet as a naval militia; and sharp power aimed at CAMP targets. Despite their security implications, few of these events trigger security responses under most national or international rule sets. These events exist in a “gray zone” of conflict—neither open war nor innocent coincidence—where the right response is unclear and the line between “regular” and threatening acts is blurred. Thus, AC is designed to take advantage of the seams in institutional awareness and response thresholds. The practical effect is that disaggregation of the “threat signal,” from the surrounding “normal” is a herculean task using existing methods—if they work at all.

Asymmetric Competition as Action

In direct implementation, AC consists of what are sometimes called *hybrid threats*. These threats combine multiple aspects of state power, and act below detection and response thresholds to achieve objectives. Recognition of such dangers as serious threats demanding national and mutual security options led to the establishment of the NATO European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) in 2017. The Hybrid CoE provides a clear and concise definition of hybrid threats:

The term hybrid threat refers to an action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm the target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state, or institutional level.

Such actions are coordinated and synchronized and deliberately target democratic states’ and institutions’ vulnerabilities.

Activities can take place, for example, in the political, economic, military, civil or information domains. They are conducted using a range of means and designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution.¹⁰

As a structural feature of liberalism—and by adversarial intent—this is an uncomfortable space for liberal states and institutions, which through their adherence to rule of law use legality as a proxy for what is threatening and what is not. The implication is that legal acts are not harmful, or at least not detrimental

enough to justify state intervention.¹¹ The Hybrid CoE notes that an “intensifying conflict of values” between liberal and authoritarian states, “an increasingly complex information environment,” and vulnerabilities inherent in open societies create a ripe strategic operating environment for hybrid actors, if left unchecked.¹²

Detection and Analysis of Asymmetric Competition is Lacking

AC below the nation-state level is difficult to detect, since these events have low-signature and are aimed at the seams identified above.¹³ Apart from the myriad information-sharing problems routinely lamented, or the treatment of analysis problems as though they are information-collection problems, there is the concern of analytic bias, in this case, what the US Intelligence Community (IC) calls “mirror imaging.” *Mirror imaging* is when analysts or organizations “project [their] thought process or value system onto someone else,” leading to mischaracterization and errors in estimative assessments. While the IC officially trains analysts to avoid mirror imaging, the practice remains pervasive throughout the community.¹⁴

This is a question of cognitive frameworks: information and data are evaluated through the lens of what is important, relevant, and sensible to the analyst/United States, rather than the analysis target. The result is a set of conclusions that are logical and internally consistent but may have no bearing on reality; “just because something seems logical to an analyst does not mean that the subject being analyzed will see it that way—especially when differences in thought processes and beliefs are factored into the equation.”¹⁵ Given that AC is explicitly employed to avoid *expected* confrontation points, it is easy to see how our intelligence enterprise has more often missed than detected it.

Methodology: Using the Integrative Frameworks of System Science to Detect and Characterize the AC Threat

To address these profound shortcomings in our broad intelligence processes, we used a systems science framework, in collaboration with diverse defense, security, and intelligence practitioners. The resultant Strategic Intelligence Framework (SIF) is an updated method for approaching intelligence problems using rule managers, diverse data ecosystems, data processing (analytics), and pattern development and relationships, here termed *pattern confluence* (e.g., analysis and conclusions), to detect AC. Developed in collaboration with agencies and personnel across the US and Canadian security and defense enterprises, the SIF is like an amplifier and noise reduction circuit in an electronic device. It boosts the targeted threat signals, while filtering out information that masks the target. Drawing from complex systems, mathematics, social science, and geographic information

science, the target signals are not analyzed in isolation but in relation to both their geographic context and each other. The result is a qualitatively and quantitatively accurate representation of the threat estimate. This provides clear, actionable, and precise strategic intelligence to consumers—something that remains sorely lacking for the Arctic.¹⁶

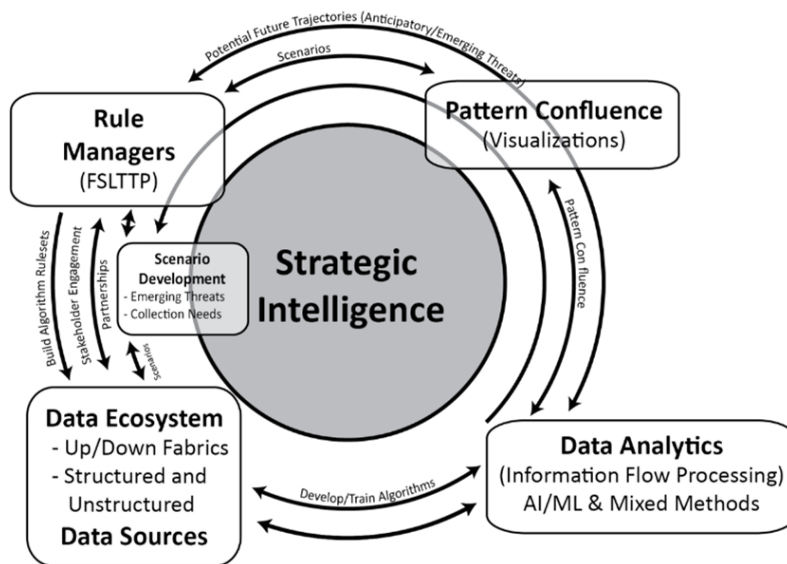


Figure 1. Strategic Intelligence Framework (SIF). FSLTTP refers to federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, and private partners. This graphic was developed with a large enterprise of connected organizations in mind. Data collection, algorithmic steps, analytics, and visualizations were executed manually in this research. (Alessa et al. 2021).

Challenge Question: Is the PRC Engaged in Asymmetric Competition in the North American Arctic?

Arctic Security Requires Integrated Analysis

As the Arctic changes and becomes more accessible, it has gained increased defense and security attention. The US Department of Defense (DOD), for instance, published its Arctic strategy as a report to Congress in 2019, and academic literature on Arctic security has exploded over the past 10 years, with the number of annual articles approximately doubling between 2012 and 2020 (fig. 3).¹⁷ This is capped by a nearly 25-percent increase from 2019 to 2020. Examination of article subjects and publishing journals shows a body of work from the “usual suspects” in security and defense matters: topics such as geopolitics, international relations and law, sociology, and political science contained in regional political, policy, and military/defense journals. Environmental science occasionally appears but usually within the context

of human or social security in a warming Arctic. Broadly, there is great conceptual depth, topical analysis, and interdisciplinary research, well-supported within the analysis and theory of the humanities and their careful evidentiary standards. The Arctic is an “interstitial region” as defined by Dylan Craig, to which the Arctic nations are “institutionally committed” but within which their “conventional tools of warcraft and statecraft are excluded by both practical and legal considerations.”¹⁸ The highly variable climate, low population density, and lack of infrastructure mean that law enforcement, military forces, regulatory organizations, and emergency services are sparse. This is compounded by a complex legal and sociocultural terrain in which Arctic nations make competing claims, and the rights and historical practices of indigenous populations overlap and sometimes conflict with the desires or even borders of sovereign states.

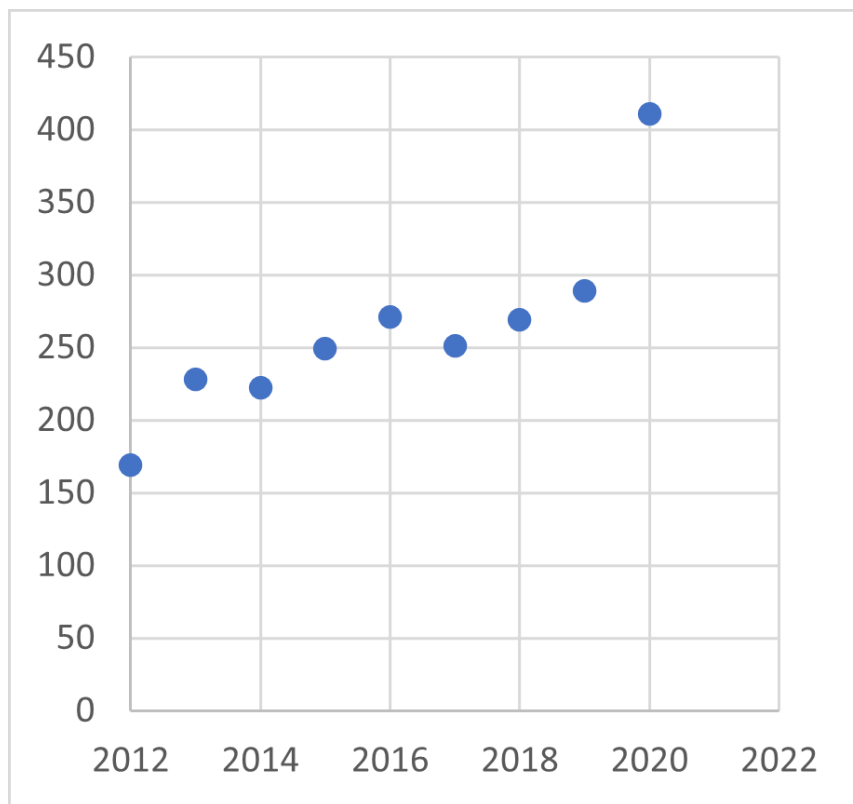


Figure 2. Arctic security. Peer-reviewed literature analysis for “Arctic Security” as the number of results per year.

These publication types and trends also mean that examinations of Arctic security are being made using methods that are qualitative, leading to highly generalized conclusions. Three main themes dominate existing Arctic threat narratives:

- An equipment and infrastructure “arms race” occurring between the United States and its allies, Russia, and the PRC;
- Concerns about militarization (e.g., Russian build up, etc.) or forms of cash diplomacy to gain access to the region (e.g., the Arctic Silk Road); and
- Prognostication of geopolitical dynamics and international affairs, based on any number of theories, and/or schools of thought.

If these are conducted by think tanks or contracted to the private sector, they often bear a substantial price tag to the US taxpayer. Realistically, none of these provide the degree of precision necessary to guide policy, workforce development, and resource acquisition such as targeted investment in technologies, education, or training, beyond “the Arctic has arrived as a policy problem and will require some kind of investment in these categories.” This is not a criticism of the humanities, think tanks, policy engines, or their adjacent fields. It is, rather, a recognition that data and information are not being leveraged for quantitative analyses to create better descriptive, explanatory, and predictive methods that serve operational needs and often by those far removed from not only the Arctic but also lacking the necessary expertise and skill sets. With that in mind, we apply the SIF here as just such an integrative method to analyze North American Arctic threats in the context of AC.

Rule Management, Scenario Creation

Through a meta-analysis of 12 workshops on Arctic security between 2017 and 2020, we established that many US and Canadian academic and practicing security experts are worried less about the hard militarization and financial footholds in the Arctic than apparent attempts by adversaries like Russia and the PRC to gain information, create local contacts and networks, “buy” influence and access, conduct tests of security measures, and other such activities. In practitioners’ views, such attempts are aimed at undermining local and national security. Often, practitioners expressed that what they were concerned about was perfectly legal, rendering law enforcement or criminal investigation moot. Their perspectives on this issue were often rooted in practical Arctic experience. For all the changes rendering the Arctic more accessible, it remains a remote region with significant barriers to military and other operations and logistics. So, while militarization was certainly a concern, they deemed the clearly described AC threats as being of greater immediate, strategic importance.

The study area for the North American Arctic was established as extending from the northernmost territory of the United States and Canada southerly to 51° N latitude—the most northern latitude that fully contains all Alaskan territory (fig. 3)

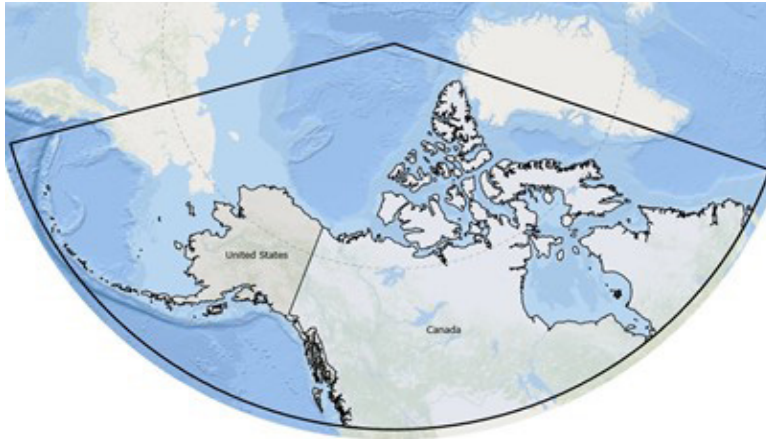


Figure 3. Study area. Starting at the North Pole and extending south to 51° N, to encompass the southernmost Aleutian Islands. Eastern and western boundaries include the Canadian-owned continental shelf (east), and the Komandorskiye Ostrova (Commander Islands), owned by Russia, which defines the westernmost Aleutian Islands.

Assumptions

Evaluation of PRC history, policies, doctrines, and strategic direction led to the creation of four evidence-based assumptions.

Assumption 1: The PRC's strategy for reaching national objectives is fundamentally different than that of liberal democracies. This includes conceptions about appropriate priorities, goals, objectives, institutions, and acceptable exercises of state power.

As an example, unlike Western democracies, which strive to divorce military and security institutions from politics, the PRC views such organizations expressly in political terms. This is established PRC political theory (e.g., Mao's declaration of the Red Army as a "mass propaganda" organ at the Gutian Conference) as well as practice: The first mission of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which comprises the entire structure of the PRC armed forces, is to safeguard the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), while the second is to safeguard China.¹⁹ The PLA is additionally ordered to "actively participate in the country's economic and social construction, and firmly maintain social stability, so as to remain a staunch force for upholding the CCP's ruling position and a reliable force for developing social-

ism with Chinese characteristics.”²⁰ State-owned companies, and even the PRC’s fishing fleet and research vessels, are explicitly deployed for political objectives, and so forth.²¹ This conception of state security as an inherently political function is reflected by Beijing’s policy, strategy, and doctrine, as discussed above.

Assumption 2: Events undertaken by PRC entities, such as resource extraction, infrastructure development, and institutional participation are political acts designed to not only erode the existing liberal norms and standards of international relations and global security but also acquire precise data on a range of topics. These erosions threaten the security of the United States and its allies by limiting our defense options and expanding China’s.

Viewed as individual events, the actions taken by China are rarely, if ever, illicit or illegal. In aggregate, however, patterns emerge that provide greater insight into not only the breadth and diversity of ACME activities but also the interrelationships that reflect a sophisticated synergy. For example, broad collaborations across academia provide continuous open-source data and information feeds that can accelerate and target the acquisition of natural resources or strategic facilities. Built into this structure is a level of redundancy that, despite prognostications of China as an overextended house of cards, allows for multiple failures at any given time.

Assumption 3: The PRC is actively interested in the Arctic for security reasons.

Examination of PRC statements, actions, and policies reveals a steadily increasing interest in the Arctic since at least 2003, when Beijing established the Yellow River Arctic Station in Svalbard.²² Since then, the PRC has racked up an impressive list of accomplishments in the Arctic for a country with no Arctic territorial claims. In 2013, China became a permanent observer on the Arctic Council.²³ In 2016, the PRC constructed a satellite ground station in Kiruna, Sweden.²⁴ In 2017, Beijing suggested an “Arctic Silk Road” concept. In 2018, the PRC established a research station in Iceland and published China’s own Arctic policy.²⁵ The last is notable for declaring that the PRC is a “near-Arctic state”—a term with no legal status or weight.²⁶ The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) described the PRC Arctic policy as intentionally ambiguous, designed to assure Arctic and Western nations that China intends to support and observe existing arrangements, and “more interesting for what it omits, such as the national security dimension that is a major driver of China’s Arctic ambitions.”²⁷

While the policy states that the PRC intends to pursue its goals in accordance with all relevant international law, it was also carefully crafted to directly

challenge the extant international norms that favor sovereign and regional governance of the Arctic in accordance with territorial claims in and around the Arctic Circle.²⁸ Of note are the PRC's interests in promoting tourism, infrastructure development, and respect for indigenous culture, rights, history, and self-rule. Each of these provides unique opportunities for the PRC to gain access to the Arctic; leverage PRC presence as an argument for participation in governance, security, and development arrangements; and engage directly with Arctic communities that possess various levels of autonomy.

Assumption 4: Open-source data will provide enough information to assess the nature and location of PRC AC events.

While intelligence communities and assessments frequently rely on, and accord higher status to, classified information and methods, the amount of openly available information simply dwarfs anything that can be collected via classified means. One National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) director “argued that unclassified information should no longer be seen as supplemental to classified sources.” Rather “classified sources can be used to ‘supplement an ever broader and richer and unclassified base of knowledge.’”²⁹

Emerging Threat Identification and Scenario Analysis, Data Collection, and Rule Set Generation

Further examination of the PRC's 2018 Arctic Policy reflects that a key unstated purpose is ensuring the PRC's security and defense advantage, while word frequency analysis shows that “security” is barely mentioned (fig. 4).

However, processing the text by category or theme reveals that security plays a much greater role than the raw text suggests. To do this, each word in the policy was grouped into one of six thematic categories: access, development, governance, research, resources, and security. Words that did not carry an individual thematic meaning (e.g., belongs, endeavored, related, furthermore, shoulders, etc.) were removed from the data set. The frequency of the remaining words was used to examine the difference between the policy's stated and implied priorities using normalized scores (fig. 4 and tables 1, 2, and 3).



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ν_{theme}	SP_{score}
	1.0000
	0.5632
	0.5298
	0.3263
	0.2632
	0.1877

Table 2. Implied Priority Score

$IP_{score} = \frac{\bar{W}_f}{\max \bar{W}_f}$	Theme	Unique Words	\bar{W}_f	IP_{score}
	Governance	94	6.1290	0.9398
	Knowledge	69	4.6522	0.7133
	Access	56	5.3929	0.8269
	Resources	31	6.0000	0.9200
	Development	23	6.5217	1.0000
	Security	21	5.0952	0.7813

The above equations use word frequency as a proxy for thematic importance. Equation 1 compares the total frequency of terms related to a theme to the maximum frequency for all themes to yield a normalized score. This provides a sense of the policy's stated priorities, as it is a straight comparison of frequency between themes. Equation 3 accounts for the unique words used for each theme, thus controlling for the quantity of different, but thematically related words, to arrive at an implied priority. The two figures are compared through what we have dubbed the "Janus Ratio," which compares what is *meant* versus what is *said* in the policy document. A value greater than one indicates the theme is a greater priority than stated, and the higher the value, the greater the discrepancy between the stated and implied priorities.

$$Janus\ Ratio = \frac{IP_{score}}{SP_{score}}$$

Table 3. Janus Ratio

$\frac{IP_{score}}{SP_{score}}$	Theme	IP_{score}	SP_{score}	<i>Janus Ratio</i>
	Governance	0.9398	1.0000	0.9398
	Knowledge	0.7133	0.5632	1.2667
	Access	0.8269	0.5298	1.5608
	Resources	0.9200	0.3263	2.8195
	Development	1.0000	0.2632	3.7990
	Security	0.7813	0.1877	4.1624

Based on the existing assumptions and policy analysis, the hypothesis for this study is:

The PRC is conducting AC in the North American Arctic in accordance with its Arctic policy. The purpose of these AC activities is to provide the PRC with a long-term, strategic advantage over both the United States and Canada in the Arctic theater while limiting our—and our partners' and allies'—defense options.

Data Needs and Rule Sets for Processing and Evaluation

The model for PRC behavior in the scenario was developed by stepping through three interrelated and well-established frameworks for military and national security analysis and planning: (1) ends, ways, and means; (2) the diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIME-FIL) model of national power elements; and (3) the political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical environment, and time (PMESII-PT) variables of the relevant operating environment. Ends, ways, and means connects the desired end states to the methods and capabilities required to realize them; DIMEFIL describes the arsenal of tools nation-states use to achieve their ends; and PMESII-PT is the location and placed based knowledge (LPBK) that must be gathered for success (fig. 5).

These were applied to the scenario to answer the following question: If the scenario is true, and the PRC is using hybrid threats in the North American Arctic, what exactly would the PRC seek to accomplish, how would it attempt to reach its goals, what forms of national power would it exercise, and what would its target sets be? An existing relevant body of knowledge ranging from official PRC statements, policies, and history to news articles, academic treatments, and non-PRC official documents (US government, EPRS etc.) was analyzed using the frameworks identified above to identify logical themes about PRC goals, doctrine, employment of national power, and possible targets for AC in the North American Arctic operating environment. This guided both data and information needs (i.e., what to research and gather), as well as established characteristics that, when present in the aggregate, indicated that an event or activity posed a threat when examined in an AC context.

Data Ecosystem, Sources, and Analytics

Data for this research was both structured and unstructured, collected manually (webcrawlers and other automated methods were not used) from openly available sources between 2020 and 2021 and spans the period from 2005 to 2020.³⁰ The

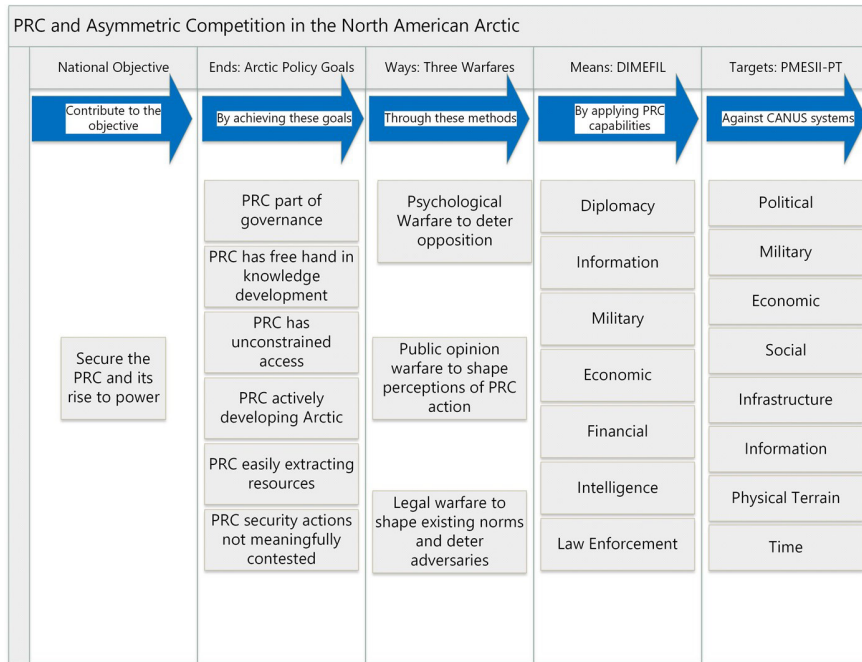


Figure 5. Development process for creating data needs and evaluation criteria

baseline for inclusion was some action taken by a PRC person, business, organization, or official within the study area. Data meeting these criteria were then subjected to the process in figure 6 (left-hand graphic). Personal blogs, social media, and other similar sites were not used to establish provenance. The types of data gathered and evaluated ranged from diplomatic and economic engagements to vessel positions, covering 73 unique events associated with 280 (non-unique) land coordinates and 17 vessel transits. These events were then scored (right-hand graphic, fig. 6), based on characteristics that, when present, indicated that the observed event carried a threat signature under the established scenario. These indicators included a range of considerations such as:

- How much access the event granted to gaining knowledge about, or altering, operating environment characteristics; for example, an oil well or mine is predicated on reams of geophysical, biophysical, hydrologic, cultural, legal, political, and other documentation.
- Direct connection to the PRC state apparatus through company ownership or other markers.
- Event alignment with the stated actions and elements of PRC strategic power exercise and objectives (e.g., tourism, resources, navigation/transportation, etc.).

- PRC use of methods previously identified in other places to extract a strategic power advantage (e.g., debt diplomacy, hacking, technology and infrastructure assistance, etc.)
- Actions that pitted the interests and desires of constituent components (communities, states, tribes, provinces, and so forth) against each other or the sovereign state.

Finally, each event was assigned a degree of estimative uncertainty based on a holistic examination of the event, its context, the actors involved, data quality and quantity, and other factors deemed relevant. This process mirrored the analytic standards of Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203 but was expressed as a quantitative (+/- percentage), vice a qualitative (approved “estimative language”) format.³¹

Pattern Confluence and Visualization

Collected information was visualized through commercial geospatial software (ArcGIS Pro 2.9). Vessel transits, expressed as ~180,000 time-ordered coordinates, were converted to line features then resampled at 100km intervals for spatial consistency prior to analysis. Each point then received a spatial adjustment to its score in accordance with figure 7. Locations inside the Arctic received the full weight of their score, while those outside the Arctic Circle were weighted by the ratio of the point latitude and the latitude of the Arctic Circle ($\frac{\text{Latitude}_{\text{Location}}}{66.5636}$). Maritime points received an additional spatial weighting based on whether the position was in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), contiguous zone (CZ), or territorial sea (TS) of either the United States or Canada, each of which confer different rights and privileges to the controlling state.³²

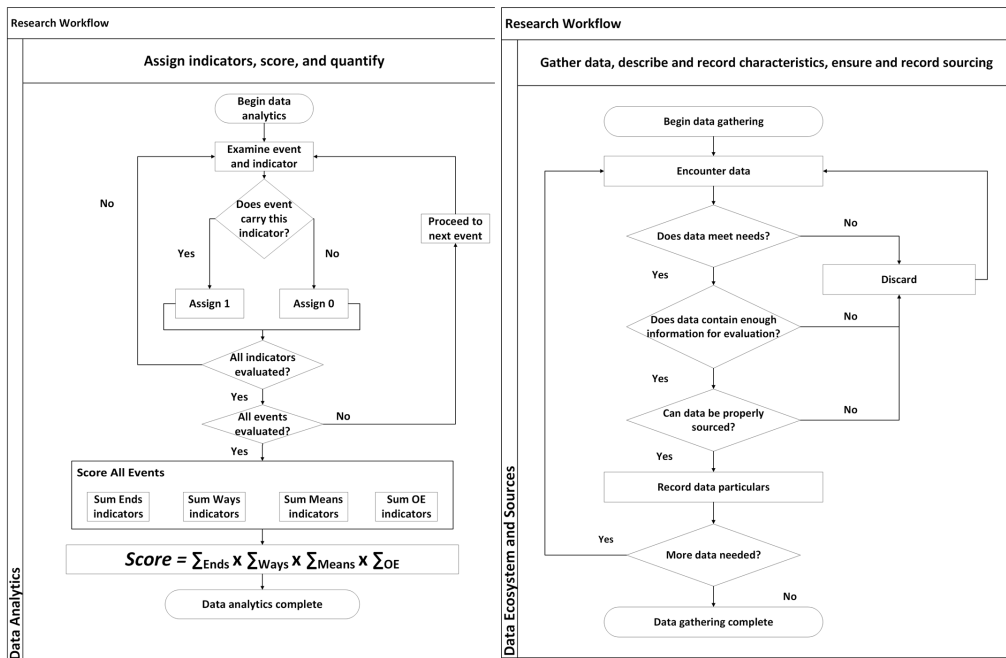


Figure 6. Research workflow. Data collection and inclusion process (left); Data scoring (right) based on the presence or absence of characteristics that were assessed to form the signature of PRC AC threats in the study area.

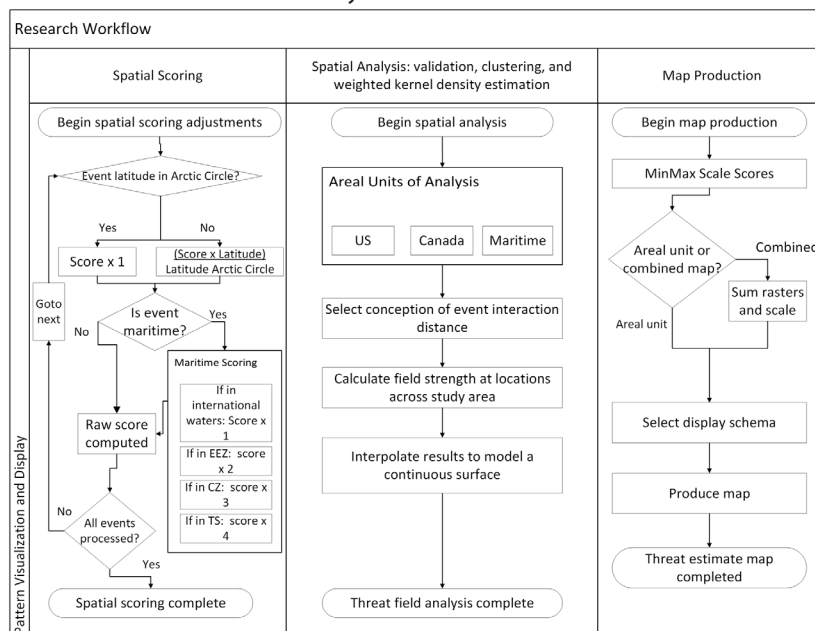


Figure 7. Spatial scoring, pattern creation, and visualization

Establishing Pattern Confluence through the Gravity Model of Spatial Interaction

The gravity model of spatial interaction rests on foundational premises of both geographic information analysis and complex systems theory: that the relevant pieces of a system impact every other piece of the system to a greater or lesser extent. Geographically, the strength of this impact is related to the distance between them. Military and security readers will note this is an expression of Boulding's Loss of Power Gradient, and more generally of Tobler's Law.³³ We treated each location as though it radiated a "threat field" from its center, which decreased in strength proportional to its distance. This conception of spatial interaction is called the *Gravity Model* as it bears resemblance to those of fundamental physical forces, such as gravity, electromagnetism, and so forth.³⁴ It follows that the threat in any location is the sum of the partial threat fields:

$$TF_{Location} = \sum_1^n \frac{Source_1}{d_{1 \text{ to } Location}} \dots \frac{Source_n}{d_{n \text{ to } Location}}$$

Where:

$Source_n$ is the threat score assigned to one of the analyzed events at location n ; $d_{n \text{ to } Location}$ is the haversine distance between the source location n and any point in the study area³⁵;

and,

$TF_{Location}$ is the "threat field strength" at any point in the study area.

Results: The Mesoscale Operational Situational Awareness Intelligence Composite (MOSAIC)

We selected a threat visualization that identified threat locations, the relative field strengths, and incorporated estimative uncertainty. The latter is critical for threat analysis but often unused apart from approved ICD 203 language. To accomplish this, we used equation 5 to calculate the threat field strength over an appropriately dense point grid to ensure spatial accuracy, and then interpolated between the grid points to model the strength of the threat field everywhere in the study area (figs. 8 and 9).

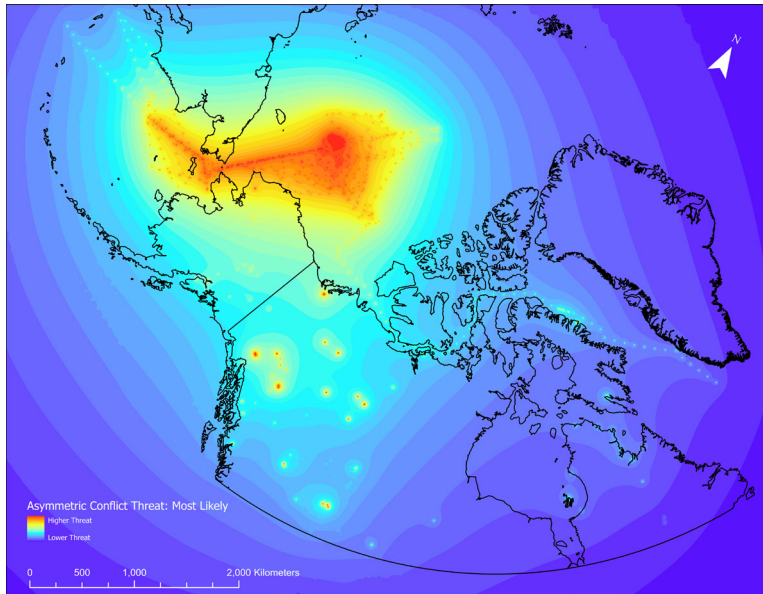


Figure 8. Most likely. The most likely state of the PRC asymmetric conflict threat in the North American Arctic.

By adjusting field strengths to account for uncertainty, we displayed a “best-case” and “worst-case” scenario map, where the threats were respectively as low and high as possible within the confidence bounds of the assessment (figs. 9 and 10). Because figures 8, 9, and 10 are geographically contextual representations of conclusions designed to provide awareness to national security consumers assembled with an integrative framework combining qualitative and quantitative methods, we call them Mesoscale Operational Situational Awareness Intelligence Composites (MOSAIC).

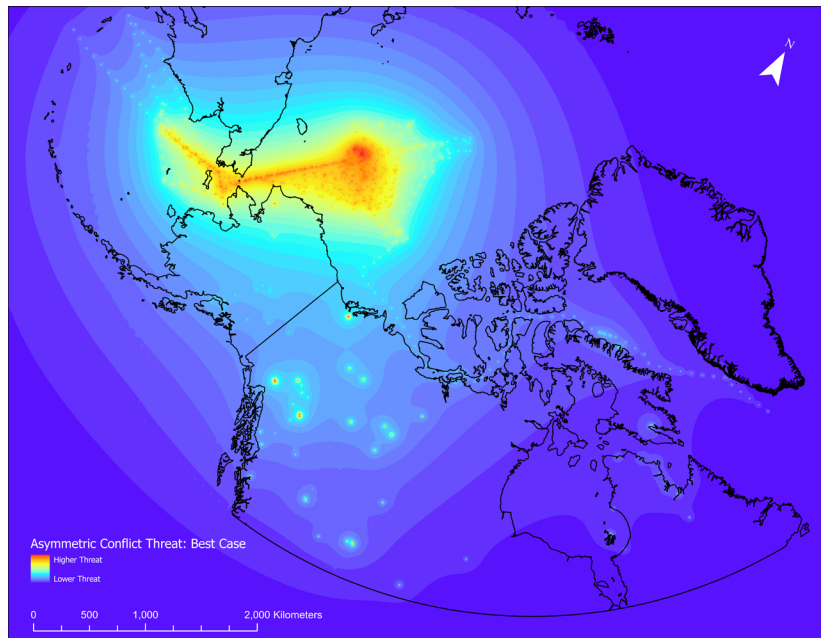


Figure 9. Best case. The best case for the state of the PRC asymmetric conflict threat in the North American Arctic.

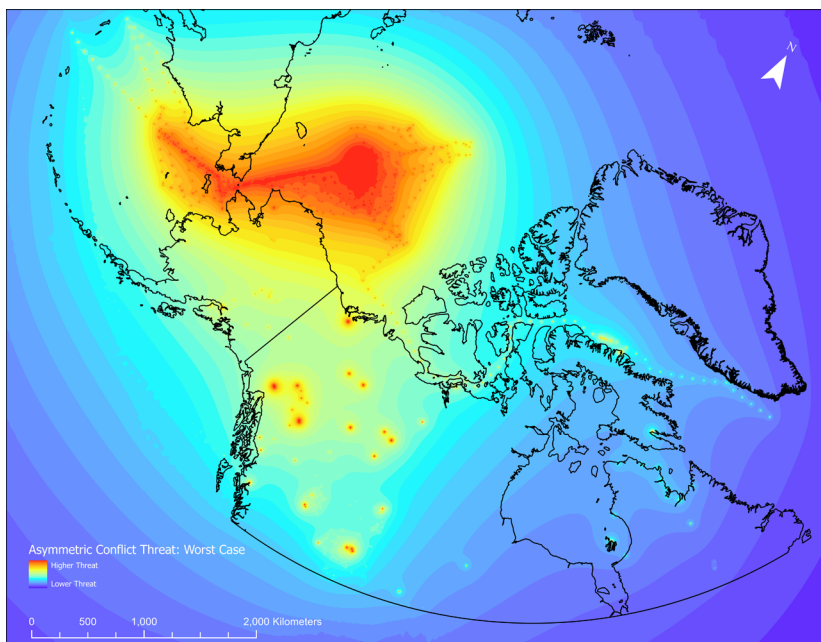


Figure 10. Worst case. The worst case for the state of the PRC asymmetric conflict threat in the North American Arctic.

The Arctic Is Experiencing a Sustained Level of Asymmetric Competition Activities

While the MOSAIC bears visual similarities to common “heat maps” created with spatial statistics, the differences in how they are calculated means that the MOSAIC provides a spatially and mathematically accurate map of estimative intelligence. It is, in essence, a georeferenced visualization of what analysts think about the threat. In this case study, three maps convey an intelligence research-and-analysis conclusion based on hundreds of (open) sources and a rigorous framework at least equal to, and certainly more integrative than, the structured analytic techniques taught and used in the US IC.³⁶ Furthermore, the MOSAIC accounts for and displays the impacts of estimative uncertainty in a quantitatively valid manner rather than relying on easily misused and misunderstood phrases inserted into findings.

The MOSAIC is also simply and rapidly updated. The evaluative rule sets are easily applied to new information, and the MOSAIC recalculated/revisualized. The integration of the data environment and sources into the SIF’s knowledge generation cycle allow them to be directly tapped and perpetually examined to ensure reliability and provenance both in part and in whole. Inspection of the MOSAIC by the rule managers can occur at any interval desired, providing feedback that improves or updates the scenario, data and sourcing, and evaluation rules. And—in what is perhaps a first in intelligence analysis—the SIF and MOSAIC provide a means of tracking accuracy and (one hopes) improvement over time: the results of the SIF and MOSAIC process at any time, in any location, can be compared to a “ground truth” established by a complete interdisciplinary, inter-agency investigation of selected events.

While such studies have been conducted previously, they were usually “post-mortem” looks at intelligence conclusions, driven by crisis or surprise, that compare a now-known negative consequence to the information that might have been used to predict or prevent it. Here, the analysis conclusions about any event—in this case, is it or is it not an instance of AC—can be thoroughly vetted before final and irrevocable outcomes.

The SIF and MOSAIC allow events, weighted for relevance, to be more readily visualized. MOSAIC delivers maps of data-driven and precise analytic conclusions containing both threat analytics and threat depiction. By using a systems science approach, we can see patterns that are only apparent when data are aggregated and analyzed with respect to their relevance to the ecosystems, communities, and technologies in which they occur. This allows us to build better scenarios from which we are better able to answer the real questions decision

makers have: what is the threat, where is it, and what kinds of activity are involved? Being able to leverage data-driven scenarios allows us to run through different types of responses regarding what are we going to do about it now, and in the future?

When it comes to the Arctic, these questions are less easily answered—not because we lack the technologies to do so but because our narratives about the Arctic are outdated and focused on geopolitical dynamics that miss the details of ACME. Compounding this is the tendency to review “security” in the Arctic through the lenses of politics, international affairs, and philosophy.

The initial assessment of asymmetric competition in the North American Arctic presented here is a snapshot that allowed the data to drive interpretation. The SIF and MOSAIC are not commodities for sale to the USG but rather a social ecological and technological systems science approach. From this snapshot, we derived three basic scenarios based on the best, most likely, and worst-case data products:

Scenario 1. Benevolent Overlord

AC winners, through a wide range of outreach, engagement, and support, establish relationships with a range of entities and institutions. The main focus is on shared goals toward ensuring resilience and sustainability under conditions of rapid and undesirable environmental and climate change. Engagements across academia and, in particular, nongovernmental groups such as think tanks, ensure that any perceptions of the PRC as a threat actor are softened through personal and professional collaborations. Over time, reliance and acceptance reach a threshold of comfort where subtly shifting values and practices are viewed as benign and, ultimately, desirable. No conflict is necessary and the co-opting of democratic ways of life is subtle and slow. Values are communicated through a range of outlets to include television, movies, investments in education, cultural exchanges, and support for local ways of life. Many of these values are, indeed, shared, such as those of strong and resilient communities. The veil of communism and control becomes so thin that it is no longer perceived.

Scenario 2. Resource Master

AC winners can acquire a remarkable range of assets at all scales, particularly those that fall beneath requirements of review (e.g., the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States) and those that bring tangible benefits to the communities in which they occur, such as jobs or amenities that improve quality of life. Eventually, a robust enough portfolio of acquisitions results in an extensive set of constellation

information. In other words, the AC winner ends up with the better and greater knowledge to leverage natural resources, possess the logistics to exploit them faster, and develop the markets that do not require the United States to be a buyer.

Scenario 3. Kill Switch

AC winners have acquired enough tangible control (e.g., information, resources, and infrastructure) as well as co-optation of citizens, who do not perceive a threat. Such winners have acquired better scientific understanding so as to possess levers of ultimate control: the kill switch. Such levers range from the ability to limit communications or supply chains to the means to prevent the defense assets of the target nations and their allies from mobilizing and/or being effective. The Kill Switch scenario is the Black Swan—a set of events whose probability of occurring is extremely low but whose consequences would be devastating.

These scenarios provide a tangible basis for collectively developing approaches to policy and planning for Arctic security and defense in the context of asymmetric competition—responding to the recent calls for “thoughtfully executing, evaluating, and improving the nation’s Arctic security strategies.”³⁷

Conclusions

The scale of adversarial activities within the United States and Canadian Arctic, a region of growing geostrategic importance, far outpaces the existing narrative of the Arctic as a defense backwater. While not presented in this article, our data also indicate similar patterns across other Arctic nations. These activities in the Canadian and US Arctic are being conducted in the open at the seams of our institutional authorities, awareness, and response threshold. Perhaps the most challenging issue is that the free and open nature of our liberal democracies provides competing powers like the PRC and Russia with scientific, cultural, sociological, and other information sets that would have been unthinkable during the Cold War. This vastly increases the adversaries’ options in areas such as influence campaigns, space-based communications, airborne offensive systems, and subsurface warfare, while limiting those of the United States and its allies. As our option sets become reduced, the very technologies we are targeting to enable defense and security assets may become maladaptive. In other words, because we lack the best available knowledge in the Arctic regarding AC activities and their consequences, we may literally be playing into a technology trap where our investments today have little effect in the future because national intelligence analysis about the Arctic is flawed and our scenarios misinformed.

We spend a disproportionate amount time, energy and money constructing narratives that “threats are emerging in the Arctic.” We spend considerably less

time applying systems science to (1) precisely formulate them, (2) build data-driven scenarios, and (3) enact true joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational strategies to accomplish 1 and 2.

Based on the scenarios offered above, we recommend the following actions to quickly update our approaches to responding to Arctic asymmetric competition.

Recommendation 1: Include the Arctic as part of the Indo-Pacific. For far too long the Arctic security and defense communities have remained static in their narratives and analyses. By recognizing that the Arctic is global in its biophysical and strategic influence, we will not only more readily detect patterns but also be able to apply them to other regions.

Recommendation 2: Leverage the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies as the next-generation venue for Arctic analyses and narratives that more accurately depict security threats in an era of asymmetric competition. The Stevens Center is an opportunity to truly understand the Arctic as well as educate, train, and build collaborations across Arctic operators and practitioners.

Recommendation 3: Establish Arctic Technical Requirements for Irregular Warfare and Asymmetric Competition by looking to the United States Special Operations Command and its expertise in the tactics, techniques and procedures inherent in AC. While technical requirements currently exist for conventional warfare, none exist that can effectively guide integrated deterrence. By doing this with international partners, for example, through NATO's Multinational Capabilities Development Campaign (MCDC), we can strengthen alliances.

To date, the PRC has obtained access to tangible resources, a wealth of geophysical, sociocultural, linguistic and biophysical information about the Arctic. Their multilayered access to competing sovereign claims and conflicting jurisdictions and strategic postures offers a range of options to equip them for success in the future. The knowledge the PRC has gained over the past 15 years, and Beijing's clear efforts to expand its Arctic presence show that China is pursuing—and may in fact have—the expertise required to expand its options in the region while limiting those of the United States and its allies. It will take an integrated approach across all federal agencies, not just the DOD, and new, innovative partnerships, particularly with academia, to develop and apply an effective set of responses to ensure US Arctic security. ★

Dr. Lillian “Doc” Alessa

Doc Alessa is serving on an Intergovernmental Personnel Act with US Special Operations Command. She is a President's Professor at the University of Idaho and Director of the Center for Resilient Communities (CRC) and has published more than 150 peer-reviewed papers on systems science. She has previously served as a Defense Intelligence Senior Level (DISL)-equivalent Special Advisor to the Department of Defense (DOD) and was Deputy Chief of Global Strategies with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans.

She has more than 25 years of Arctic experience working with academic, federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners across Canada and the United States focused on the resilience of systems, people, and communities. An internationally recognized expert in Arctic resilience, early warning systems, and special operations, she has led the development of the joint Canada–US Arctic resilience toolbox assessments: The Arctic Water Resources Vulnerability Index (AWRVI), the Arctic Adaptation Exchange Portal (AAEP), and the Permafrost Vulnerability Index (PVI). She has served on the Board of Directors for the Arctic Research Consortium of the US (ARCUS) and is a member of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics' Committee on Leveraging the Future Research and Development Landscape for the Intelligence Community. Doc Alessa is an author for the 5th *National Climate Assessment* and the US lead for the NATO Multinational Capabilities Development Campaign Climate Security Working Group.

CDR James Valentine, USCG, Ret.

Mr. Valentine is a retired United States Coast Guard (USCG) Commander (O-5/NATO OF-4) with two decades of intelligence experience. While on active military duty he served in intelligence billets ranging from field to national policy positions. In his final assignment from 2017-2019, he was a Senior Adviser to the United States Council on Transnational Organized Crime, serving six cabinet officers under Executive Order 13773. Over his career he received several personal awards, including the National Intelligence Superior Service Medal (NISSM) from the Director of National Intelligence, in 2016. He is now a research associate with University of Idaho's Center for Resilient Communities (CRC), while pursuing a master's degree in geoinformatics and geospatial intelligence at George Mason University. He has an MS in strategic intelligence from the National Intelligence University in Washington, DC (2005), and a BS in government from the United States Coast Guard Academy (1997).

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Mr. Moon is the Chief of Global Strategies in the US Department of Homeland Security Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans, Washington, DC. He is currently seconded to the Department of Defense in support of Arctic strategic issues. Between 2011 and 2016, he served the DHS as the Director, Transportation and Cargo Policy and chaired the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Sub-group for Maritime Security. A 1985 graduate of Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, he spent four years in the private sector before joining the US Coast Guard in 1989. Over the course of a 20-year career, he served as a Marine Safety officer, specializing in port operations and emergency management, community engagement, commercial and passenger vessel and facility safety and security programs. Mr. Moon has led strategic development and coordinated security issues across DHS, the interagency, and internationally since 2006.

Dr. Andrew Kliskey

Dr. Kliskey is President's Professor of Community & Landscape Resilience and the Director of the University of Idaho Center for Resilient Communities (CRC). Kliskey is also the Idaho EPSCoR Director (Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research). He is a social-ecological systems scientist and behavioral geographer with training, teaching, and research experience in landscape ecology, behavioral and perceptual geography, geographic information systems (GIS), planning, policy analysis, and surveying. Andy has spent the past 20 years working in Maori communities in New Zealand, rural communities in western Canada, Inupiat communities in northwestern Alaska, Denai'na communities in southcentral Alaska, and rural communities in Idaho, examining community and landscape resilience. His teaching and research are interdisciplinary in nature and directed at integrated methodologies in social-ecological systems that combines stakeholder-engagement, scenario analysis, and geospatial modeling. Kliskey is project lead on two National Science Foundation Innovations at the Nexus of Food, Energy, and Water Systems (INFEWS) awards.

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Thailand's Maritime Strategy

National Resilience and Regional Cooperation

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By most measures, Thailand is an important maritime nation. Its long coastlines look out toward both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Coastal tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, offshore oil and gas production, and commercial marine trading are essential drivers of its rapidly developing economy.¹ Furthermore, the Kingdom of Thailand maintains a naval force that is among the most powerful in Southeast Asia. This fleet includes seven frigates, 90 patrol and coastal combatants including seven corvettes, 17 mine warfare and mine countermeasure vessels, three large amphibious ships, a naval aviation section, and about 23,000 marines.² It has also ordered submarines from China. If counting hulls, this order of battle fleet includes a number of principal surface warships similar to that of Singapore and Indonesia. It also includes Southeast Asia's only aircraft carrier, though this ship has operated without fixed-wing aircraft for more than a decade.³ Yet, Thailand retains the strategic mindset of a predominantly continental state. The Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) and its three services, the Royal Thai Army (RTA), Royal Thai Navy (RTN), and Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF), are responsible for external security while also fulfilling a broad set of domestic tasks, including international security, providing support for development, and the completion of projects assigned by the king. Of these, the RTA receives the bulk of the funding and is the politically dominant force. The RTA has also been the service most directly related to Thailand's frequent coups.⁴

From an external security standpoint, Thailand has few state threats.⁵ Since the Cold War, Thailand was able to reach accommodation with its neighbors, and with exception of the 1987 and 2011 landside border clashes with Laos and Cambodia respectively, recent history has been free of interstate conflict. Lacking territorial and jurisdictional claims in the South China Sea, Thailand has also avoided direct confrontations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Therefore, the RTN's procurement decisions that include naval equipment best suited for blue-water operations and naval combat have drawn analytical attention. Many of these discussions see a navy either developing at the whim of parochial interests or vacillating ambition. This article contends that Thailand's maritime strategy is better understood by reviewing its consistent focus on supporting Thailand's national resilience and following ASEAN-oriented security approaches.

In this context, national resilience is a concept that originated in Indonesia. It connects economic and social development goals with internal and external security activity to create a condition where national power addresses all threats to the integrity of the nation-state.⁶ Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) context, the national resilience concept means that the member states' national governments are expected to "promote domestic stability on a comprehensive basis so that the resultant secure states can withstand internal and external stresses and thus contribute to the attainment of regional resilience in Southeast Asia."⁷ Thailand's maritime strategy has consistently supported both national and regional resilience. When it has developed higher-end naval warfare and blue-water capabilities, these have not been in response to a particular threat but were the result of opportunities to take advantage of economic conditions to play a leading role in addressing shared regional maritime priorities.

International analysts seeking to explain Thai maritime strategy have generally underplayed its consistent focus on national resilience and the importance it places on supporting regional cooperative norms. These studies often examine Thai strategic decisions through overly Western analytical points of view. More specifically, they seek to adapt terms and concepts that emerged in strategic cultures very different from Thailand's. By relying on overly Western strategic paradigms, these analyses inadequately reflect the uniquely Thai perspective on the role of its navy or the influence of ASEAN-oriented approaches to Thailand's strategic decision-making.⁸ Bearing this in mind, this article approaches the material by drawing on the thinking of Alles Delphine, who critiques the misapplication of Western concepts to the analysis of Southeast Asian strategic behavior.⁹

Although both the authors of this article served long careers in Western militaries and thereby carry some of these same biases, their experiences as students in regional universities and staff colleges, as well as their decades of regular contact with officers of the RTN and other regional militaries, place them at a better vantage point to understand Thai strategic thinking than some outside observers. This article harnesses those perspectives and seeks to reexamine Thailand's maritime security thinking with greater credence given to the perspectives of the RTN leadership. It does not seek to contradict these previous studies but to add an additional layer of analysis.

Some regional analyses have also fallen short when contextualizing individual Thai maritime security decisions in the broader scope of Thai history and strategic culture. For example, Mak and Hamzah saw Thailand's early 1990s naval modernization as a sign of possible intent to dominate its neighbors, but no other actions correlated to the aggression they suspected. Saperstein tells readers that "[t]he trauma of losing large naval procurements shifted blue-water navy

ambitions towards something much more comprehensive: maritime security cooperation, collective defense, and nontraditional security threat management.” However, Saperstein fails to note that the comprehensive approach he describes also predates the purchase of high-end hardware in the 1990s.¹⁰ Chong and Maisrikrod contend that Thai maritime strategy has evolved as a result of inter-cine competition rather than in response to threats, but their analysis measures strategy by the funding received vice the security end states desired. They do acknowledge that RTN operational intentions have remained relatively static.¹¹ In fact, while capability investments are important milestones to consider, these tend to correlate better with Thailand’s economic performance, budget availability, and the relative costs of modernization rather than fundamental shifts in Thailand’s maritime strategy.

Much of the existing literature also relies heavily on secondary sources or the small number of publicly available Thai strategic documents. In the absence of longitudinal exposure to Thai strategic thinkers and maritime security implementers, such analysis can suffer from important contextual gaps.¹² This article seeks to reduce this confusion by providing an overview of modern Thai maritime strategy. It emphasizes that developments must be understood in the context of Thailand’s unique history and strategic culture and shows that national resilience and regionally based cooperative norms are at the heart of its strategy.

Geographic Background

The Kingdom of Thailand occupies a central position in the Southeast Asian landmass. Its east and west coasts total 3,219 km. Its sea area is about 2,230 sq km (approximately 5 percent of the landmass) with an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 324,812 sq km. Thailand’s western coast faces the Andaman Sea, where Thailand shares agreed-upon maritime borders with Myanmar, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This body of water is strategically located at the northern mouth of the Strait of Malacca. Asia’s essential maritime chokepoint, the Strait of Malacca carries about one-quarter of the world’s international cargo trade and one-third of all seaborne oil.

Thailand’s eastern coast rings around the western and northern limits of the Gulf of Thailand, a semi-enclosed attachment to the South China Sea also bounded by Cambodia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Here Thailand’s 12 nm territorial seas meet those of Cambodia and Malaysia, and its claimed EEZ also reaches that of Vietnam. Competing claims to continental shelf rights and sovereignty disputes regarding islands, rocks, and other features have created a confusing situation where claimed EEZs overlap.¹³ Continental shelf provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arguably enriched Thai-

land while also creating new headaches for Thai strategic planners as they correlate to the bulk of Thailand's eastern EEZ.¹⁴ Only the boundaries with Malaysia and Vietnam are fully settled.¹⁵

The RTN is responsible for maritime constabulary duties in this vast and complex space. Some of the largest challenges in this domain include illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, illegal immigration, human trafficking, sea robbery, and drug smuggling. To efficiently organize against these threats, the RTN maintains three geographically oriented Naval Area Commands. Responding to national security threats on the nation's two main rivers, the Chao Phraya and the Mekong, is the task of the RTN's Riverine Patrol Regiment headquartered in Bangkok with operational units posted in provinces bordering Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. According to discussions with RTN officers, since the 2021 coup in Myanmar, the riverine units patrolling the Mekong have maintained a higher alert status ready to quickly react to potential border crossings by possible refugees.

This geographical environment is further complicated by the fact that maritime passage between Thailand's eastern and western coasts requires transit around the Malay Peninsula. As a result, Thai maritime strategy recognizes the reality that maintaining the operational flexibility need to sustain peak readiness requires the RTN to maintain an order of battle suitable to address the challenges associated with this geographic feature.

Historical Background

The RTN traces its history back to the Sukhothai period of the thirteenth century. Before the twentieth century, the Royal Forces were divided into land forces and naval forces, but there was only one commander, always drawn from the land component. Some officers from the naval forces took part in the uprising that led to constitutional changes in 1932. The RTN was created by the 30 November 1939 Royal Decree.¹⁶ Since its inception, the RTN has consistently been rated by international experts as the most professional and least political of Thailand's armed services. Its last battle against a regular navy took place during the 1941 Franco-Thai War, when Thailand sought to take advantage of the German occupation of Paris to regain vassal territories that had been ceded to France after the defeat in the Franco-Siamese War 1893. The 17 January 1941 Battle of Ko Chang was one of the final events of this conflict before Japanese conciliation brought about its conclusion.¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, Japan attacked Thailand. The RTN's resistance included the employment of four Japanese-built Thai *Matchanu*-class submarines, but Japan quickly prevailed. Shortly thereafter, Thailand formally aligned itself with the Axis powers.

After World War II, the United States provided Thailand with loans to support the transfer of surplus American war material. Under this arrangement, the RTN gained two corvettes, two antisubmarine ships, some coastal minesweepers, and other equipment. A much greater degree of modernization and capability enhancement was delivered via Cold War military assistance programs administered by the United States beginning in 1951. During the Cold War, the RTN maintained a close alliance with the United States and played a role as a firebreak blocking the spread of communism. In the 1970s, as the United States disengaged from Southeast Asia it reduced the scope of military assistance, prompting the RTN to purchase ships from the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Italy. From the late 1970s, Thailand also began constructing vessels domestically.¹⁸ As the Cold War progressed, the RTN kept a watchful eye on the expanding communist Vietnamese naval power, supported the fight against PRC-backed communist insurgents, kept a wary eye on the Russian Navy stationed in Vietnam, and responded to Russian demonstrations of force in the Gulf of Thailand.¹⁹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it also played a major role in the United Nations–endorsed efforts to render aid to refugees fleeing Indochina by sea and actively addressed the horrifying progression of pirate attacks targeting those peoples.²⁰

These Cold War experiences reinforced the value placed on mixing military capabilities to defend the nation against the forces of rival states, with the capacity to support economic development and provide security against nonstate threats. The resultant strategic culture is better understood through a regional lens rather than classic European-style thinking. Thailand's strategic approach embraced "National Resilience," a concept related to the Indonesian concept of *Ketahanan Nasional*, a doctrine refined in the late 1960s, referring to the nation's "tenacity and endurance in the face of all threats, be they domestic or external, that directly or indirectly endanger the survival of the state and the Indonesian nation."²¹ In Indonesia, the National Resilience doctrine views security as encompassing a wide spectrum of aspects to include economic, political, and social aspects. Building on Indonesian thinking, both national and regional resilience became central objectives of regional cooperation at the first ASEAN summit held in Bali in 1976. Regional leaders, facing internal security challenges, shared an understanding that regional resilience and national resilience were mutually reinforcing projects to be placed under the ASEAN umbrella.²² The Declaration of ASEAN Concord finalized at the 1976 Bali Summit formally enshrined the principle of resilience as a shared approach to domestic and regional security.²³

The National Resilience concept was formally adopted, adapted, and integrated into Thailand's Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1983–1986).²⁴ Thus, by the late 1980s, the RTN had incorporated decades of postcolonial

operations in the internalization of a strategic culture fully embedded within the national development model. When the notion of “nontraditional security” was formulated, primarily by Western thinkers, in the 1990s, this English-language label was adopted by Southeast Asian states, including Thailand, as an internationally understandable term that, in contrast to previous terminology, better described their already long-standing strategic doctrines.²⁵ Working in the maritime space, Geoffrey Till would associate this sort of strategy with a postmodern navy.²⁶ This, too, is an overtly Western conceptualization that as a label belies the prevalence of this approach in Cold War Southeast Asia.

In 1989, the RTN set up a trial force of one frigate, eight patrol craft, and four aircraft with coast guard–like duties. This reflected a recognition that divergent roles needed within its national resilience mission merited greater specialization. After the trial period, the Coast Guard Squadron was officially introduced on 29 September 1992. The Coast Guard Squadron operates directly under the RTN and its Naval Command Center.²⁷

As the Cold War came to an end, Europe was busy reducing its military stockpiles as the Warsaw Pact broke up and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe negotiations reduced the continent’s internal military threat. However, East and Southeast Asia moved in the opposite direction. Data from international institutes such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute show that those regions’ weapons acquisitions had grown to be, by 1994, over 25 percent of the market. Japan, the People’s Republic of China, and South Korea were leading with an average of 9 percent annual growth in their defense budgets. ASEAN member states followed with growth rates of 6–7 percent from 1992–94.²⁸

Asia’s economic boom provided international weapons dealers with the new markets they were seeking to maintain profits as European buyers showed less demand. Thus, modern weapon systems became more available and more affordable for increasingly wealthy Asian countries seeking to replace their old inventories, some of which had been produced in the World War II era. This was especially valid for Southeast Asia’s air force and naval systems. In 1994, regional acquisition of submarines, frigates, offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), and aircraft had increased up to 20 percent.²⁹ While domestic political factors should not be overlooked, the economic situation was central to this growth.

In 1996, the Thai government announced that the RTN would be expanded to become “capable of playing a significant regional role” with a two-ocean offshore capability.³⁰ In this context, Thailand expanded investment in blue-water naval capabilities, centering its fleet renewal around a new flagship, the Spanish-built aircraft carrier *Chakri Narubet*.³¹ Harrier jump-jet fighters to operate from the carrier, Amer-

ican *Knox*-class frigates, Sikorski SH60 Seahawk helicopters, Italian mine warfare vessels, and Harpoon surface-to-surface missiles were among the follow-on purchases.³² The RTN also procured six frigates constructed in China and fitted with European engines and electric generators between 1991 and 1995.³³ Contrary to some analysis, this did not reflect a national decision to prioritize the RTN over the other branches, but an across-the-board military expansion enabled by good economic conditions. In parallel to the RTN's hardware investments, the RTA grew its personnel strength from 166,000 to 190,000 between 1989 and 1999.³⁴

For some international analysts, the strategic rationale of the RTN's expanded capabilities seemed unclear. In 1994, Malaysian maritime specialists J. N. Mak and B. A. Hamzah questioned why Thailand's military, given the lack of an external national threat, was expanding with a "heavy maritime bias."³⁵ Although Vietnamese and Thai patrol boats exchanged fire in 1995, the relatively small and isolated incident would not seem to warrant such a buildup.³⁶ Indeed, Thailand was already well along the road to resolving maritime sovereignty disputes with Malaysia, Myanmar, and Vietnam.³⁷ Some pundits contended that the primary motivation of the funding was to establish the RTN as a domestic political counterbalance to the RTA.³⁸ Other experts even suggested that this effort, especially the RTN's stated desire to develop a submarine force, was more tied to desires to strengthen their international standing and prestige.³⁹ While all these viewpoints have some validity, it is inappropriate to understand the procurements as a step toward competing with the RTA for domestic leadership. Neither were the procurements simple vanity. Instead, the economic situation enabled a maritime modernization that was a necessary step for the RTN given the quality and age of its operational assets.

Thailand also desired to maintain a leadership position among the ASEAN states and recognized that many of the region's upcoming security challenges would be maritime in nature. While the carrier and submarines may not have been optimal purchases to counter these specific threats, they were important symbols of Thai leadership in a quickly developing region with a great stake in international maritime affairs. Indeed, this was a period when maritime cooperation was rapidly growing in Southeast Asia. Interstate competition was less of a concern than establishing cooperative maritime security capacities to roll back growing transnational threats.⁴⁰

The Twenty-First Century

The ASEAN member states transitioned into the twenty-first century via a series of colossal events. In 1997, currency devaluations and massive flights of capital from Thailand sparked the Asian financial crisis. This put immediate constraints on the RTN's options for procuring, maintaining, and operating the envisaged force structures. Expensive programs were paused or reoriented.⁴¹ Exemplifying this realign-

ment was the transition of *Chakri Narubet* to be solely a disaster relief vessel. Its Harrier jump-jets were eased out of action in 1999 and formally decommissioned in 2006.⁴² The financial crisis also set the stage for transformative events on the regional security scene to include the 1998 end of Suharto's military-centered regime in Indonesia, the 1999 independence of Timor-Leste, and a series of jihadist terror attacks that placed the region at the forefront of the "Global War on Terror" launched by the United States following the 11 September 2001 attacks.

After a short period of dithering, Thailand joined the US-led counterterrorism efforts and pitched in on a variety of other American projects to address the maritime security threats posed by terrorists and criminals. In 2003, Thailand joined the US-organized Container Security Initiative and was awarded designation as a US "Major Non-NATO Ally."⁴³ These decisions both shored up a security relationship with the United States and enabled intelligence sharing and other assistance that could be useful in response to the flaring separatist violence in Thailand's predominantly Muslim southern provinces. Thailand's economy also rebounded with strength. On 31 July 2003, one year earlier than agreed, Thailand completed repayment of the International Monetary Fund loans received in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis.⁴⁴

Evolution within ASEAN's approach to security would also have a major impact on Thailand's maritime security and nudge it into a deeper embrace of regional cooperation. On 7 October 2003, ASEAN's Bali Concord I established the ASEAN Community with the motto "One Vision. One Identity. One Community."⁴⁵ This was a leap forward from the 1976 Bali Concord and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), which were the first steps toward a regional security community yet preconditioned only marginal elements of security cooperation. The establishment of the ASEAN Community also united under one roof all treaties, agreements, and regularized meetings such as the TAC, the 1994 launch of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the 1997 Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (also known as the Bangkok Treaty), the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and the 2007 ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism.⁴⁶

The Bali Concord II encouraged further cooperation and requested stronger commitments from the member states by creating three pillars that the members must fill with cooperative content: the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The ASEAN Political-Security Blueprint (2009–2015) reinforced commitment to national and regional resilience: "ASEAN subscribes to the principle of comprehensive security, which goes beyond the requirements of traditional security but also takes into account nontraditional aspects vital to regional and national resilience, such as the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of development."⁴⁷

With these agreements, national resilience and regional resilience bonded as the normative approaches dominant in regional security thinking.⁴⁸ Thai thinking was no exception.

With maritime security embraced within the APSC pillar, Thailand's maritime strategy became increasingly supportive of regional maritime security cooperation. In 2004, Thailand was a founding member of the Japanese-initiated Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)⁴⁹ and in 2008 the kingdom became the fourth partner in the counterpiracy Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP). The RTAF joined the MSP-associated 'Eyes in the Sky' patrols the following year.⁵⁰ One Thai analyst explained: "Thailand has now embarked on a whole new security scheme—maritime security cooperation—that would allow the country to provide full surveillance and protection of its territorial waters as well as ensuring the safety of nearby international sea lanes for communications."⁵¹

The push toward regional security cooperation was also propelled by the 2004 tsunami. The international military force that assembled in the tsunami's wake delivered important relief operations on the western coast of Indonesia and Thailand. Significantly, the operation in Indonesia was delivered from a sea base, whereas those in Thailand primarily flowed through mainland air bases. In 2005, the annual US–Thai alliance exercise Cobra Gold reoriented away from conventional defense training "focused on countering regional aggression" to solidify lessons learned from the large-scale disaster response effort, placing greater emphasis on peacetime military operations and the incorporation of international coalition forces, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations.⁵² While the decision to transform Cobra Gold was bilateral, it very much suited the RTARF's standing desire to move away from exercising the kingdom's defense against a notional nation-state invader when Thai strategic leaders perceived no such threat. The value of this training was put on show during the relief operations associated with Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Since US forces were not welcomed into Myanmar, American supplies were delivered by Thai vehicles.

In the post-tsunami period, the RTARF led a leading role in the push for regional cooperation to concentrate on disaster relief as an activity that could be easily adapted, adopted, and improved within the ASEAN context. This approach also provided new opportunities for confidence-building measures (CBM) among the ASEAN member states. Thai Supreme Commander General Boonsrang Niumpradit specifically decided to push for disaster relief through ASEAN mechanisms because "Asia is the most disaster-prone region in the world and no country can face the impacts and consequences of a major disaster alone, The US does not provide direct military support to every country in the region—even in disaster relief."

During disaster response planning some ASEAN member states consider their force contributions to be sensitive data. However, the 2005 ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Response and follow-on Standard Operating Procedures for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations implementation required reporting of earmarked assets, and all member states reported their respective disaster relief assets (including helicopters).⁵³

A pair of 2008 policy documents, the *Defense of Thailand* white paper and *Total Defense Strategy*, both included a new emphasis on cooperation between the civil and military sectors and cooperative security.⁵⁴ *Defense of Thailand* outlined the policy priorities for strategic, budgetary, and operational decisions for all three RTARF services and noted two main roles for the RTARF:

Military Operations: including protecting the country from both internal and external threats and maintaining the internal security and order Military Operations Other Than War: including developing the country, safeguarding the Monarch, protecting and maintaining national interests, and other security-related operations.⁵⁵

For the RTN, the focus was clearly on nonstate threats and building international cooperation. In 2008, Rear Admiral Suriya Pornsuriya highlighted the threat of maritime terrorism to Thailand's port, fisheries, and offshore petroleum facilities. Among the vulnerabilities, he seemed most concerned with the potential harm to Thailand's frozen seafood exports.⁵⁶ While these concerns may seem misplaced to outsiders benefiting from the hindsight, this assessment came in the wake of renewed violence in southern Thailand and when the insurgents were already exploiting maritime routes for logistics purposes having been found with sophisticated maritime equipment such as submarines.⁵⁷ The interconnected nature of the violent organizations and a recent rash of maritime terror attacks in the Gulf of Aden, around Sri Lanka, and in the Sulu Sea had raised serious concerns about tactical proliferation.⁵⁸ In March 2009, Admiral Khamthorn Pumhiran, then-RTN commander-in-chief, explained:

These threats—maritime terrorism, transnational crimes, piracy, drug-trafficking, illegal immigration, human trafficking, illegal labor, and national and environmental disasters—adversely affect national security. . . . Thailand cannot deal with these issues alone, nor can any one country. The crucial factor in solving these problems lies in cooperation among every country in the region.⁵⁹

Thailand's push to strengthen international maritime cooperation also extended beyond Southeast Asia. In 2009, Thailand became a member state of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, and in 2010 it began supplying ships

to the antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁶⁰ In 2011, it ratified and entered into UNCLOS.⁶¹ In 2012, an RTN command element embarked on the Royal Navy supply ship *Fort Victoria* and led the multinational Combined Task Force 151 providing maritime security around the Gulf of Aden. Given Thailand's relatively limited stake in the Gulf of Aden shipping routes, the standing contributions of more powerful navies, and Thailand's slow (in comparison to neighbors Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) response to the developing threat near Somalia, an assessment shared by an RTN officer that Thailand's mission was primarily to gain diplomatic returns and strengthen norms of cooperation against nonstate threats seems entirely reasonable.⁶²

The diagram created by the RTN shown in figure 1 depicts the growth of this diplomatic role in relation to its constabulary and military roles. This depiction draws directly on Kenneth Booth's classic depiction of the functions of navies as visualizing three sides of a triangle representing diplomatic, policing, and military roles.⁶³ Like other navies (e.g., the Royal Australian Navy), the RTN replaced Booth's "policing" with "constabulary" to reflect their national division of responsibility. More significantly, by replacing the three sides of the triangle with a Venn diagram and placing those circles inside another circle, the Thai diagram emphasizes the holistic nature of the RTN national resilience mission. This contrasts with Booth's model that emphasizes the distinction between military, policing, and diplomatic roles even as it seeks to show their interconnections.

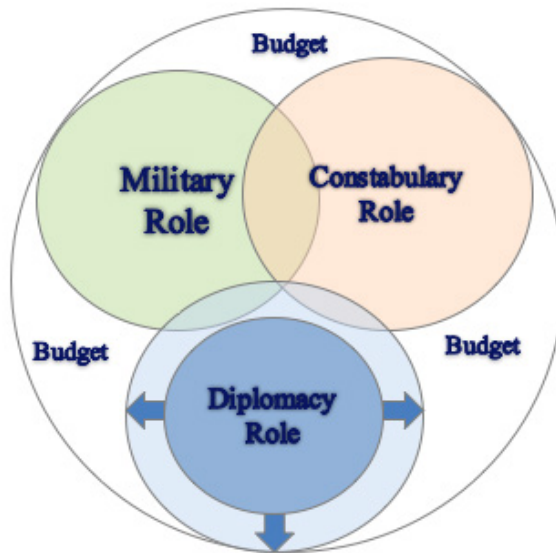


Figure 1: The RTN's Model for the Trinity of Naval Roles. (Source: Saperstein, "The Royal Thai Navy's" (2020), 37.)

In 2015, the Royal Thai Government published the *National Maritime Security Plan of 2015–2021*.⁶⁴ This document squarely nests under Thailand's National Security Strategy and National Development Plan. It focuses on the government's plans to enhance maritime governance over waters for which Thailand has responsibility and authority. In this context, it became clear that closer interagency cooperation was needed at home to increase operational efficiency. This had consequences for other maritime agencies such as the Ministry of Transport's Marine Department, the Royal Thai Police's Marine Division, the Fisheries Department, the Maritime and Coastal Environment Department, and the Customs Department, as they were put together with the RTN under one coordination umbrella.

This drive for efficiency was hastened by a 2015 European Union threat to ban Thai seafood by issuing a "yellow card" for Thailand's lack of progress in combating IUU fishing and human trafficking.⁶⁵ Data from 2017 shows that, at that time, Thailand was exporting around 1.5 million tons of seafood worth nearly \$7 billion and the overall fisheries sector equated to nearly 1 percent of the national GDP and over 9 percent of its agricultural GDP.⁶⁶ Due to the scope of the economic threat of sanctions, this became a top priority for the national government. New networks to monitor fishing activities were established, sea patrols were enlarged, an e-licensing system was introduced, and all fishing vessels were mandated to carry functional radios and GPS transmitters. Between 2016 and 2018, over 4,000 convictions were laid down for fisheries' management-related legal infractions.⁶⁷ The RTN assumed a central role in implementing and managing this activity.

In 2018 and 2019, the command-and-control structure of some of Thailand's maritime agencies was also restructured specifically to focus capacity on countering IUU fishing, illegal migration, and slavery at sea. The Thai Maritime Enforcement Coordination Center (Thai-MECC) had been established in 1997 to help with coordination activities between the RTN and other maritime agencies but held very limited power.⁶⁸ In 2019, Thai-MECC was transformed from a coordination center into a command center and put directly under the prime minister's office.⁶⁹ The strengthened Thai-MECC was tasked to enhance closer and efficient maritime security management, given tactical control of maritime assets, and Thai-MECC officers were empowered to search, arrest, investigate, and make a case for indictment.⁷⁰ The prime minister became the Thai-MECC chairperson and the RTN commander-in-chief became the deputy chairperson.⁷¹

Since the restructuring, there is a clear structural hierarchy that places Thai-MECC above all other agencies including the RTN. Subsequently, the new Thai-MECC became the key arbitrator of authority and jurisdiction.⁷² The Thai-MECC is mentioned alongside the Internal Security Operations Command as one of the "Regulatory Agencies under the Office of the Prime Minister." According to dis-

cussions with serving officers, the old interagency problems have been gradually disappearing, but the RTN remains the dominant maritime force providing the bulk of the operational forces. As shown in figure 2, the Thai-MECC's areas share the same geographic limits as the RTN Naval Area Commands.



Figure 2. THAI-MECC Areas and Naval Area Commands. (Source: Saperstein, “The Royal Thai Navy’s” (2020), 32.)

Since 2018, about \$700 million has been budgeted to support the manning and infrastructure to expand the Thai-MECC’s functionality. Included in these capabilities is the Maritime Information Sharing Center to integrate and fuse maritime domain awareness data and operational direction.⁷³ Subsequently, in 2019 the systems and human-to-human connections have been further developed in order to increasingly connect the Thai-MECC with international information hubs such as the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre, Singapore’s Informational Fusion Centre, and the US Office of Naval Intelligence as well as domestic private sector information. When conducting outreach with Track II discussions, participating in diplomatic functions, and engaging in capacity-building projects, RTN officers made it

clear that successfully strengthening the Thai-MECC capability to address IUU fishing and maritime slavery was at the very top of its institutional priorities.

In January 2019, the Thai-MECC/s efforts had successfully convinced the EU to retract its yellow card warning.⁷⁴ However, the large-scale effort did not come without costs. Fishing operators have expressed displeasure at marked losses in revenue, the bankruptcy of many fishing businesses, and severe labor shortages.⁷⁵ In December 2019, several thousand fishermen gathered in protest outside the agricultural ministry.⁷⁶ Such market disruptions in maritime industries regularly spill over into emerging criminal threats. At the same time, the RTN's solid focus on the IUU fishing problem has distracted its attention away from threats. As such, the RTN can be expected to move ahead and rebalance priorities within its national resilience mission while supporting the regional ASEAN Community aims regarding "Promoting ASEAN Maritime Cooperation."⁷⁷ The "Immediate Policy of the Minister of Defence for the 2021 Fiscal Year" explicitly states Thai intent to act as a primary regional power that will take the lead in various ASEAN frameworks.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Thailand's maritime strategy must be understood from the context of its unique history and sometimes-misunderstood strategic culture. In accordance with the National Resilience concept of the Thai government and the Regional Resilience concept of ASEAN, the RTN is clearly concentrated on fostering national development by protecting Thailand from the full range of security threats and supporting economic activities.

Only a year after the lifting of the EU's yellow card threat, the COVID-19 pandemic delivered massive budgetary, planning, and operational costs. These costs have led to the cancelation of training, kept ships in port, and caused the postponement of military hardware acquisition plans. One prominent example is the delay of payments for *Yuan*-class submarines from China, although the purchase is not yet canceled.⁷⁹ Other delays have been announced or can be expected in the larger procurement program that was set to include equipment better geared toward constabulary missions to include an amphibious ship configured for disaster response, OPVs, patrol vessels, search-and-rescue helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, and coastal radar kits.⁸⁰ For those in the RTN's senior ranks, the situation brings back memories of the 1997 financial crisis. The pandemic-enforced pause could offer the RTN an opportunity to reevaluate its priorities and establish a post-pandemic strategic outlook.⁸¹ However, there is little reason to expect a shift away from the long-standing policy of focusing on national resilience while strengthening support for regional cooperation within ASEAN. ❖

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Notes

1. The GDP of Thailand increased from \$120 billion in 2001 to \$502.89 billion in 2020. This reflects an average annual rate of over 8 percent per year, even after the shrinkage that results from the COVID-19 pandemic and US-PRC trade war in 2020. Similarly high rates have been consistently seen since 1960, the major exception being the 1997 financial crisis which will be addressed in this paper.

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The US–Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership and the Key Role of Air Force Relations

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Abstract

The government, military, and air force of Vietnam share US concerns about China's expansionism and intrusion in the South China Sea and want greater US assistance in building their defense capacity and developing their military capabilities. While the growing partnership with the United States will bring increasing security cooperation and diplomatic support, Vietnam will continue to confront China on its own, without a military alliance. Vietnam's acquisition of the US T-6 aircraft for pilot training sets the stage for a key partnership between its Air Defense–Air Force and the US Air Force and is helping Vietnam develop a more capable air force and move away from dependence on Russian weapons and China's influence in the 2020s.

Introduction

The government, military, and air force of Vietnam share US concerns about China's expansionism and intrusions in the South China Sea (SCS) (Vietnam's "East Sea"), and they want more US aid in building their defense capacity and developing their military capabilities. Skillful US security cooperation with and assistance for Vietnam will be a large part of building the comprehensive partnership and enhanced ability to engage in the ongoing dispute with China. Vietnam's acquisition of the US T-6 aircraft for training Air Defense–Air Force (ADAF) pilots,¹ and the ADAF–US Air Force (USAF) relationship will be a keystone of the partnership in the 2020s and a significant part of the US strategy of helping Vietnam move away from dependence on Russian weapons and China's influence. It will also contribute to the US strategy of building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.²

Vietnam is in the northwestern SCS, borders China, and has overlapping claims with China in the Paracel and Spratly Islands. David Shambaugh assesses Vietnam to be a "balanced hedger," because it must defend a land border from and maintain economic and political ties with China, as well as foster a growing partnership with the United States.³ The country has long featured a strong national-

ist movement, especially with armed resistance against France, the United States, and China from the 1940s to the 1970s. In addition, Vietnam has experience in waging low-level conflict with China over the Paracel Islands and SCS, with outbreaks in 1974, 1979, 1988, and 2014.⁴ China's unilateral seasonal fishing ban (from May to August) around the waters of the Paracels, as well as oil exploration in the SCS and militarization of outposts, continue to be sources of friction with Vietnam, which occupies 21 features in the SCS with two airstrips and mobile missiles.⁵ At the same time, the Vietnam's navy conducts joint patrols with the People's Liberation Army Navy in the Gulf of the Tonkin. Frequent meetings between leaders of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CVP) and the Chinese Communist Party are another sign of balanced hedging.

Approach

Out of the 11 Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam is most noteworthy, because it is a US partner, supports a rules-based order as well as a free and open Indo-Pacific, and has leadership with the willingness and air force with the capability to collaborate with the USAF. Vietnam has been involved in disputes with China over the SCS for decades and has recently become a comprehensive US partner. Drawing on methods from my field research and article on USAF–Indian Air Force relations,⁶ evidence from Southeast Asian and US sources, including semi-structured interviews,⁷ and my recently published article on collective action in confronting China in the SCS,⁸ I first analyze Vietnam's grand strategy and the ADAF and what they would like the United States and USAF to do to build capacity and develop capabilities. Second, I appraise what the United States and USAF would like Vietnam and the ADAF to do, especially to counter and deter China. Third, I assess how the United States and USAF might overcome barriers, advance mutual interests, and be creative in working with Vietnam and the ADAF.⁹ Finally, I weigh different scenarios about how US and USAF engagement with Vietnam and the ADAF may change and evolve to meet future security goals, including the provision of deterrence in the SCS.

Vietnam's Grand Strategy and Defense Policy

The CPV has developed a threat-based grand strategy for regime survival and to counter the rise of China while avoiding regional conflict. Vietnam's top national security priorities include protecting sovereignty by ensuring the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) has the capabilities necessary to enforce laws and protect interests in the maritime territory that it claims. This includes its 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf in the SCS, which it considers of

vital interest. The party first worries about the domestic threat from internal opposition forces and second about China in the SCS and on its northern border.¹⁰ The CPV learned the lessons from the collapse of the Soviet Union—to promote capitalism but use all means necessary to preserve power. Party leaders have set a national security goal of 6 percent annual GDP growth that they believe ensures internal stability. In the SCS, fishing and energy production constitute an important part of the economy and continuing economic growth. Finally, the country is countering China's influence by cultivating close relations with the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, as well as Laos, Singapore, Malaysia, and other South-east Asian nations.¹¹

Vietnam's 2019 defense white paper reemphasizes the long-standing policy of the “three No's”: no alliances, no foreign bases on Vietnamese territory, and no reliance on any country to combat others—as well as, in addition, no interoperability and no communications links with other militaries.¹² However, according to US officials, Vietnam's Ministry of National Defense (MND) sees relations with Russia as transactional and China as a looming challenge.¹³ Today, the United States is Vietnam's first choice for defense cooperation but must account for China. Therefore, while there are limits to Vietnam's efforts in building a partnership with the United States, there are also opportunities.¹⁴

While the white paper refers to the Vietnam–China “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership,” it also raises objections to China's destabilizing behavior in Vietnam's East Sea and warns that circumstances and conditions will determine the future of the partnership. Vietnam stands against the use of force or threats to use force and wants to avoid conflict but also wants to deter China. The white paper states that Vietnam is ready to engage in “security and defense mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific region.”¹⁵ This implies that Vietnam is interested in engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) arrangement,¹⁶ since the United States and Japan, India, and Australia are the main promoters of the Indo-Pacific concept. The white paper also expresses interest in greater involvement in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) security and defense mechanisms. Concerns about nontraditional security issues and the desire for more port visits, including by the US Navy and Coast Guard, create the basis for greater engagement with the United States.¹⁷

Vietnam is one of the best-armed Southeast Asian countries and has the potential to defeat a People's Liberation Army (PLA) ground invasion.¹⁸ Vietnam's army is its most powerful military service and has been in the front of the queue for procurement, receiving T-90 tanks from Russia to help defend the northern frontier with China. Since 2015, Vietnam has turned to investing in its coast guard, ADAF, and navy. First, Vietnam focused on its coast guard and maritime

security, given threats to its interests in the Paracel and Spratly Islands.¹⁹ In 2018, the ADAF took priority, and in 2022 the navy and navy infantry (marines) will have their turn. Vietnam has received two US Coast Guard cutters, and Vietnam's coast guard will use them mainly near their bases in the southern region, especially close to the Spratly Islands, to protect Vietnamese fisheries. While the coast guard patrols inside Vietnam's 200-mile EEZ, the country's navy also operates outside the zone in the Spratlys and with forays into the Paracels.²⁰

In making procurement decisions, Vietnam's Department of Defense Industry in the MND prioritizes profitability, and military factories share reluctance to spend money unless they are guaranteed profits. Even if Vietnam received free US equipment, the ministry and its department might be reluctant to spend on maintenance. While Vietnam is capable of manufacturing unmanned aerial vehicles and other equipment with basic technology, it is not close to producing aircraft such as the T-6.²¹

Although Russia has been Vietnam's traditional arms supplier of choice and more than 80 percent of the VPA's equipment is Russian, the MND has diversified purchases that, since 2016, have been coming mainly from the United States, as well as from India, Spain, and Japan. In response, Russian arms dealers have allegedly been paying Vietnamese officials under the table to continue to buy Russian, which is possible since officials make only an estimated \$400 per month and must survive in an expensive Hanoi.²²

Vietnam's Air Defense–Air Force

The ADAF handles all aspects of air defense for the country and plays the role of a consultative organ for the MND on matters concerning air defense of the ground forces and the air function of other services and branches. The ADAF must build consensus in the MND to advance its agenda. The ADAF supports the navy and coast guard in defending Vietnam's interests in its East Sea, works with other agencies and services in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, and contributes to economic development. The ADAF's defensive weaponry is a combination of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and fighter planes that can defend Vietnam's mainland from People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) attacks. While the ADAF's MiG-21 fighter planes normally are grounded and other aircraft are approaching obsolescence, its SAMs still supply a measure of air superiority over Vietnamese airspace. Michael Beckley estimates that ADAF SAMs, including the SPYDER from Israel and S-300 from Russia, can shoot down PLAAF fighter planes over Vietnam, exacting heavy losses.²³ In addition, the ADAF has 35 Su-30MK2V fighters with Kh-31 anti-ship cruise missiles and 18 air bases.

The ADAF has no rapid deployment role outside the mainland, which limits its ability to defend outposts in the SCS. It does provide routine air defense with SAMs for outposts in the Spratly Islands. While the ADAF provides “credible support” of land and naval forces, it still suffers serious limitations in areas of command and control (C2), domain awareness (ISR—intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), and airlift. ADAF pilots regularly fly over to PLA-controlled Woody Island in the Paracels (but in a straight line) and are unable to fly in severe weather or at night.²⁴ These problems demonstrate the air force’s limitations over its East Sea and need for the T-6 and intensive pilot training. In contrast, the PLAAF can launch more than 1,000 fighter planes, including some at night, from nine bases in southern China that could eventually overwhelm Vietnam.²⁵

While Vietnam is buying more Su-30MK2V and Su-27 fighter planes from Russia, the MND and ADAF are looking to diversify their relations without buying too diverse an aircraft fleet. In relations with the ADAF, Russia has been losing ground to India, Israel, and France and especially the United States. In 2018, Vietnam turned its attention to obtaining T-6 trainer planes for the ADAF from the United States. In addition, India is supplying an offset for Russian training, and the ADAF has sent trainees to India. The ADAF engages consistently with the air forces of the United States, India, Australia, and Japan—the Quad.²⁶

The US–Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership

Since China’s 2009 nine-dash line declaration and 2015 militarization of outposts in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, Vietnam has moved increasingly closer to the United States, and there has been a marked warming in relations.²⁷ While the population of Vietnam favors the United States over China, the ruling CPV is aware of the need to balance relations with the two powers. Vietnam will not become a US ally but has strategic relevance as a partner that stands up to China.²⁸

US Indo-Pacific strategy includes helping Vietnam to develop as a strong, prosperous, and independent nation. Vietnamese officials were pleased by the 2017 US National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy and their emphasis on competing with China, as well as the US pushback against China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Biden administration’s 2021 Interim National Security Guidance has maintained strategic competition with China as a top priority. On the downside, the CVP harbors concerns about the “two elephants trampling the grass,” with the United States taking a tougher stand toward China and increasing the risk of conflict.²⁹

Vietnam would like the United States to invest more in Southeast Asia, shore up domestic support for the CPV, and reduce dependency on China. US presidential visits have helped to move the relationship forward, and more would be

welcomed. Given China's expansionist activities in the Paracel and Spratly Islands and the importance of the SCS, Hanoi would like a greater US Navy presence, especially aircraft carriers, to balance against China. Vietnam likes US freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and overflight operations around the Spratlys and Paracels and would like more but cannot openly approve without provoking China. Vietnam would like US help in dealing with Cambodia, which is allied with China and causing fears of encirclement. Finally, Hanoi would like more help for the victims of Agent Orange.³⁰

The United States has been building trust by addressing the Vietnam War legacies of Agent Orange and unexploded ordnance, which have affected a large segment of the population. For example, the brother and sister of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc died of dioxin poisoning. In dealing with dioxin and unexploded ordnance, the United States is working with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and training the trainers to deal with the problem. In 2019, the United States gave \$300 million to clean former USAF bases at Danang and Bien Hoa. The United States also has been attending to the disabled around former bases.³¹

The United States is trying to compete in Vietnam with China's BRI and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank and is using the Build Act and International Development Finance Corporation funding to assist in the construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in Long Son in the southern region and Chan May in the central region, which would import US LNG.³² Also, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy of countering the BRI could include building electricity transmission lines from the Mekong River Project in Laos to Vietnam. Finally, the United States can help Vietnam by auditing BRI contracts to uncover China's corrupt practices in developing the Mekong River Project.³³

In 2017, the Trump administration's tough position on trade led to US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that Vietnam had done so much to join. US withdrawal from the TPP damaged relations, and Vietnam is still high on the US unfair trading practices list (a few places below number-one China). However, Vietnam has been trying to forestall a trade war by buying Boeing civilian planes and US LNG. US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) engagements and FONOPs in the SCS helped smooth the TPP withdrawal and helped keep relations positive and moving forward.³⁴

Human rights issues remain a sticking point between Washington and Hanoi.³⁵ More than 30 members of the US House of Representatives plus several members of the Senate are concerned about these issues with Vietnam. The Vietnamese community in the United States continues to oppose the regime and has been pressing for the repatriation of remains of South Vietnamese Army soldiers

to the United States for burial. The US ambassador to Vietnam has been involved in this issue and others and has regularly met with the Vietnamese community in the United States to smooth relations. The United States takes issue with Vietnam's cyber-related laws against Google and Facebook. Vietnam wants information technology companies' servers to be located in-country so that it can track and punish dissidents for actions, such as the dissemination of videos of dissidents protesting possible 99-year leases on Vietnamese land for Chinese companies to establish special economic zones.³⁶ A persistent issue is religious persecution by the state against the 10 percent of the population who is Roman Catholic and against underground churches. Church–state land-rights disputes and state land grabs continue to be a problem.³⁷

The US–Vietnam Comprehensive Defense Partnership

In 2011, Vietnam and the United States concluded their first military-to-military memorandum of understanding, and the partnership made significant strides in the succeeding decade. The two countries have regularly exchanged high-level defense and military-to-military visits. In less than a year after the restoration of military-to-military relations, a US aircraft carrier visited, and port calls have continued almost every year since; a US submarine has also visited. The United States has worked with Vietnam on peacekeeping operations training and HA/DR training and exercises. They have also discreetly worked on search and rescue (S&R) training, trying to avoid provoking China.³⁸

Vietnam pays keen attention to the partnership and is more committed to it compared to other US partners. Vietnam wants to be more assertive against China in the SCS and would like the United States to supply greater capability. Even so, defense relations will remain oblique, and Vietnam will continue to confront China in the Paracel and Spratly Islands on its own, with US diplomatic support but not direct military backing. In addition, the United States must account for Hanoi's absorptive capacity limits.³⁹

Since 2012, the United States has supplied the Vietnamese military with security assistance, especially education and training, through State Department Title 22 foreign military financing (FMF). US international military education and training support for Vietnam is now the third-highest in ASEAN, going from \$100,000 in 2012 to \$40 million in 2019. In 2015, the United States ended the lethal weapons ban, and in May 2016 the door opened to security cooperation and foreign military sales (FMS) managed by the Department of Defense under Title 10. FMS expenditures were \$10 million in 2017 and jumped to \$82 million in 2019. The United States has provided Vietnam with excess defense articles, start-

ing in 2016, with the sales of a US Coast Guard cutter to bolster Vietnam's coast guard and maritime security.⁴⁰

According to US security cooperation officials, there is a gap between security assistance (FMF) and security cooperation (FMS). FMF engagement has been piecemeal, while FMS expenditures are more seamless and effective at building the partnership than FMF, enabling military exercises and security sector development. In 2016, section 333 of the US National Defense Authorization Act (authority to build capacity of partner nations) required FMS to be approved year-to-year instead of on a multiyear basis, which has made it harder to build VPA capacity. Other FMS challenges include educating Vietnamese officials about US end-use monitoring rules.⁴¹

The US Navy and Coast Guard have had the best relations with the VPA, especially Vietnam's navy and coast guard. The US Navy has been given access to a Vietnam navy hospital ship, and HA/DR exercises enable the participation of US submarines. Vietnam accelerated the entry of US Coast Guard subject matter experts (SMEs) because the Spratly Islands are an urgent matter. The United States is leveraging partners. For example, Japan has supplied 18 patrol boats and provided undersea medical training for submarines, with US doctors included.⁴²

The United States would like Vietnam to continue to draw closer to the United States and cautiously away from China and Russia. The US Embassy Defense Office in Hanoi is the gatekeeper for US–Vietnam military interaction, and the office would like Vietnam and the United States to focus on increasing HA/DR and peacekeeping operations training. While the United States would like Vietnam to partake in the Maritime Security Initiative and S&R training, US officials recognize that Vietnam cannot afford to engage in activities that might provoke China. However, Vietnam has remained interested in maritime security and S&R training.⁴³

US officials in Hanoi advise that the US–Vietnam defense partnership needs to develop at a measured pace. US engagement takes place through a “narrow straw,” but high-level visits have still managed to increase dramatically. Japan, Australia, India, and other US partners all want to engage with Vietnam, which causes confusion. The US Embassy Defense Office coordinates with its counterparts from Japan and Australia to avoid duplication.⁴⁴

There are only six Vietnamese officials for all engagements with the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Cuba, and Anglophone Africa. Defense meetings often have 40 US officials negotiating with a handful of Vietnamese officials, which proves awkward. The United States holds meetings with “messengers” who have no authority within the MND hierarchy. The United States usually brings SMEs from eight to 12 agencies, but Vietnam cannot absorb so many interlocutors, and it is hard to locate Vietnamese SMEs.⁴⁵

US security cooperation with Vietnam includes exercises, especially the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) annual event in and around Hawaii, with practical training that has particularly helped develop Vietnam's naval infantry and its coast guard cutter bought from the United States. ADAF rotary-wing units conduct exercises with their US counterparts, focusing on HA/DR and personnel insertion. Exercises also focus on peacekeeping operations, including medical instructors and United Nations experts who certify the exercises. State Partnership Program experts from the Oregon National Guard participate in HA/DR and RIMPAC exercises, which provide the opportunity for the building of long-standing relations between American and Vietnamese military personnel. US defense officials assess that Vietnam is not ready to participate in multilateral Southeast Asian exercises, such as Cobra Gold or Balikatan, but that it could send observers. There is a debate concerning whether ADAF participation in US-sponsored Red Flag exercises is currently worth the cost.⁴⁶

The Counter US Adversaries Act sanctions against Russia would lead to sanctions against Vietnam if it purchases the Russian S-400 SAM system, which has the ability to shoot down a US F-35 combat aircraft. Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense system led to Ankara's expulsion from the F-35 program, and India's acquisition and US waivers pose the sorts of problems that could damage US–Vietnam defense relations. In addition, Vietnam's deployment of the older Russian S-300 SAM system is also viewed as problematic. If Vietnam goes ahead with the newer S-400 system, the United States must decide if it should impose sanctions or grant a waiver. Possible . Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act sanctions present a challenge for the United States and require skillful communications with Vietnam and deft application of sanctions and waivers.⁴⁷

The USAF–ADAF Partnership

The US and the USAF program of working with Vietnam's military and particularly the ADAF will be the cornerstone of the larger comprehensive partnership and is being managed carefully.⁴⁸ Already, the ADAF has more exercises with the United States than with Russia or any other country, and there have been annual airman-to-airman talks at the highest levels of the ADAF and USAF.⁴⁹ In September 2019, then–USAF Chief of Staff, Gen. David L. Goldfein, and then–Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) commander, General C. Q. Brown (USAF Chief of Staff since August 2020), visited Vietnam and interacted with senior officials, including ADAF leadership and the NMD's International Affairs Directorate.⁵⁰ The rising cooperation trajectory means that measured USAF and PACAF engagement will become

increasingly important. PACAF engagement with the ADAF has been scrutinized and endorsed by Vietnam's Central Military Commission.⁵¹

With the T-6 sale, the USAF has recently become the lead service engaging with the VPA given the accompanying training and maintenance package, maritime security potential, and future strategic prospects. In preparation for the sale, there have been T-6 site visits to Vietnam from US INDOPACOM and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Vietnamese officials have expressed appreciation for the T-6 package and the success of the US Coast Guard cutter program, in contrast with their unhappiness with Russian equipment and services. US Embassy officials in Hanoi believed that the T-6 sale represented a strategic shift from Russia to the United States "under the nose" of China and would be a major part of helping Vietnam move away from dependence on Russian weapons and corruption, as well as China's influence.⁵²

The initial \$25 million sale will bring the delivery of three T-6s before mid-2023 plus part of another for spare parts.⁵³ In preparation for the T-6 delivery, the United States and Vietnam have set up an aviation leadership program for ADAF personnel that lasts for three years and takes two to three students at a time. There is extra training in English to raise proficiency levels to international standards. Also, there is training in managing partnerships, aviation culture, and safety, as well as air competence, risk management, and maintenance. The United States educates and trains ADAF pilots with contractors and T-6 simulators. The Oregon Air National Guard has been engaging with a fighter subject matter expert to upgrade ADAF fighter pilot capabilities. However, a challenge for the T-6 and other programs is that there are not enough ADAF SMEs; there are also entry barriers to bringing in US or SMEs from other nations. The ADAF needs to train 20 students to produce 14 pilots to fly the initial three T-6s.⁵⁴

In the coming years, the USAF would like the ADAF to draw closer, with the sale of 12 T-6 trainers and a maintenance package, which would upgrade the capabilities of the ADAF. US officials would like ADAF pilots eventually to be able to fly in difficult weather and at night. The package for 12 T-6s would cost \$225 million over 10 years and includes sustainment and maintenance and would require 50 students to produce 30 pilots to fly 12 T-6s. Eventually, the USAF would like the ADAF to participate in Red Flag. This would help Vietnam to have more HA/DR and S&R engagement as well as C2 experience. The United States would like the T-6 program to be a stepping-stone to Vietnam's acquisition of USAF F-15E Strike Eagle fighters in the late 2020s. An alternative would be Israel selling F-16s to Vietnam in the 2030s as the T-6 program develops.⁵⁵

The ADAF would like more joint exercises with the United States to prepare to counter the growing China challenge. The ADAF would like more equipment,

training, and retraining and especially low-cost T-6 pilot training. Just as important is a maintenance package for US equipment such as the T-6. Vietnamese airman interviewees commented that high-level airman-to-airman talks between the USAF and ADAF leaders have been useful and that they should continue. Interviewees asserted that the United States should also provide air-traffic control and adverse-weather training with the T-6 package. Eventually, the ADAF would like lower-cost F-16 and F-15E fighter planes. ADAF officers appreciate US English-language training and would like more and would additionally like to see more officers invited to US professional military education schools.⁵⁶

Challenges for the USAF–ADAF Partnership and Recommendations

The ADAF faces several challenges. First, ADAF pilot flying capabilities need substantial improvement. Currently, pilots use virtual flight rules or radar vector in perfect weather only and have no experience with adverse weather conditions. They have limited flying hours, and dependence on simulators has contributed to pilot error in three crashes (CASA C-212, Su-22, and Yak-52) in recent years. Second, the ADAF will fly the T-6 with a different approach than the USAF and will be tied into Vietnam's integrated air defense system. Third, the ADAF has been devising its T-6 plan in a vacuum when it needs US technical expertise. Whereas the US Coast Guard cutter deal was less technical and needed less supervision, the T-6 deal requires oversight by the US Office of Defense Cooperation in Hanoi and USAF SMEs.⁵⁷

The United States and USAF also face challenges. Even after a T-6 site survey, there is risk on the US side, with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and section 333 one-year cycles that could disrupt the sale. Vietnam is not allowing USAF T-6 SMEs the type of access that the US Coast Guard SMEs enjoyed, even though the T-6 program is longer-term and more strategic and complex. The Ministry of Public Security has been slow to supply base access permission. The United States must also be careful with the T-6 deal. Vietnam cannot change its position if it decides that it should cancel. Finally, the US Embassy country team in Hanoi must be allowed to moderate US engagement with the ADAF.⁵⁸

The United States and USAF cannot rush stages of the T-6 program, must adjust to the Vietnamese pace, and must build consensus on one concept at a time, implementing one per year. The T-6 program should try to minimize US personnel. For example, the US Coast Guard brought too many uniformed personnel for the cutter program. Defense cooperation must be self-regulated by the US Em-

bassy in Hanoi, reporting to relevant officials in the Pentagon and INDOPA-COM and PACAF. The United States must queue for exercises. The USAF needs to fix its Pacific Angel exercise to become more focused on HA/DR and not so much on S&R so that the ADAF can more easily participate. The US Navy's annual Pacific Partnership exercise, focusing on HA/DR and with NGOs and regional organizations and states, is a more appropriate exercise model.⁵⁹ The United States must be willing to let Vietnam build its own hangers, train its own pilots, perform its own maintenance and self-sustainment, and move at a calibrated pace. Finally, Vietnam's plans may not fit with US plans, and Vietnam will decide the scope of the T-6 program and whether it should acquire three or eventually the entire package of 12.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Looking forward, Vietnamese and US officials believe that China will continue to expand and seek greater control of the SCS and its resources. The United States and USAF and Vietnam and the ADAF want a stronger partnership, but there are barriers to stronger relations and a more capable military and air force. Nevertheless, there are ways in which the United States and USAF can creatively engage. Both sides want a stronger partnership but for somewhat different reasons and at varying levels and rates of speed. The challenges are considerable, but with the right amount of will and creative effort, the United States and USAF and Vietnam and the ADAF can work together to overcome them and move the relationship forward. The United States has signaled that it is prepared to exert greater will to try to increasingly include Vietnam as part of a growing multilateral network supporting a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

Given the rising levels of Vietnamese and US interest and will, the prospects for the development of a strategic partnership and constructive USAF–ADAF relations are generally positive. The most likely scenario is that China continues to incrementally expand and the United States and Vietnam continue to slowly build from a comprehensive partnership toward a strategic one and toward stronger USAF–ADAF relations, with halting progress in the T-6 program. Other scenarios include aggression by China, Vietnam reaching out to the United States for a strategic partnership, stronger USAF–ADAF relations, and the T-6 program moving toward acquisition of the most advanced F-15E or F-16 fighter aircraft and some degree of interoperability. Also, problems could mount in US–Vietnam relations, and the T-6 program may not proceed as anticipated, which could lead to a plateau or decline in the partnership.

Most likely, the United States and Vietnam will continue to develop the comprehensive partnership and progress toward a strategic one. The relationship will

occasionally stagnate, depending on political conditions and the security cooperation situation. Although China continues to expand in the SCS region, there is little sign that it will escalate its activities toward open conflict. However, if conflict does ensue, the United States will have to choose either to take Vietnam's side and provide support or to refrain. While the United States, USAF, and IN-DOPACOM have shown that they want a stronger partnership and eventual interoperability with the VPA and ADAF, coming to Vietnam's rescue may be a bridge too far given the danger of escalation to war with China.

US and USAF engagement with Vietnam and the ADAF can eventually contribute to greater burden-sharing and deterrence in the SCS and Indo-Pacific region as a whole. Burden-sharing is necessary for the United States given greater security challenges from China in the Indo-Pacific. The continued rise of China and its grand strategy of eventually dominating Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific will require burden-sharing and stronger partnerships. Multilateral defense cooperation is the best way in which Indo-Pacific countries can develop regionally dominant air power and enhance deterrence in the region.

The development of deterrence against China in the region will require a multilateral partnership whereby countries commit themselves to acting in concert in case the PLA acts aggressively in one area of the Indo-Pacific. Regional deterrence will require a strong multilateral partnership, including the methodical buildup of air forces with US and USAF aid. The leaders of the United States and Vietnam and their air forces need to continue to discuss the strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific and their respective roles in providing deterrence. The USAF and ADAF can play a role in preventing China from achieving regional dominance by developing a shared outlook and respective strategies and capabilities to deter China from further encroaching in the SCS and on Vietnam's rights.

In overcoming obstacles, the United States and USAF can undertake initiatives to help the VPA and ADAF to become a regionally significant force. The United States and USAF can aid with training and equipment, including moving beyond the T-6 program and working toward Vietnam acquiring and developing US multirole combat aircraft, which would enable training and squadron development to proceed faster. US engagement could also provide the countries with a substantial capability boost, with bilateral mechanisms to develop ISR.

The United States should continue to build the partnership with Vietnam primarily through various forms of dialogue, simulations, and exercises as well as security assistance and exchanges. The USAF and PACAF can lead in partner development while avoiding a paternalistic and transactional relationship. Secondly, the United States and USAF should continue to promote US aircraft, weapons, and other equipment with the long-term aim of the USAF developing

increasingly complex exercises with the ADAF. The United States should work with Vietnam to build capacity and develop capabilities into making the ADAF a regionally significant force. ★

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Notes

1. Jon Grevatt, "Vietnam to Procure T-6 to Boost Pilot Training," *Janes*, 7 June 2021. The ADAF's air force component is also known as the Vietnam People's Air Force.

2. David Brumstrom, "Biden's Vietnam Ambassador Nominee Vows to Press Hanoi on Rights, Trade," *Reuters*, 13 July 2021. Ambassador nominee Marc Knapper promised that he would work to strengthen US security relations and raise the comprehensive partnership to a "strategic partnership."

3. David Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," *International Security* 42, no. 4 (Spring 2018): 85–127.

4. Toshi Yoshihara, "The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 41–65. The 1974 clash over Woody Island was between the forces of South Vietnam (defunct in 1975) and China.

5. Michael Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 78–119.

6. Stephen Burgess, "A Pathway toward Enhancing the US Air Force-Indian Air Force Partnership and Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific Region," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (Spring 2019): 1–36.

7. In June–July 2019, field research took place in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Future articles will analyze and assess USAF relations with the air forces of the Philippines and Thailand (long-standing US allies) as well as Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia (US partners).

8. Stephen Burgess, "Confronting China's Maritime Expansion in the South China Sea: A Collective Action Problem," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (Fall 2020): 112–34.

9. Stephen Burgess, "Rising Bipolarity in the South China Sea: The Impact of the US Rebalance to Asia on China's Expansion," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 1 (Apr. 2016): 111–43.

10. US Embassy officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019 helped to provide expert assessments of Vietnam, its grand strategy, and defense policy.

11. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.

12. Derek Grossman and Christopher Sharman, "How to Read Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper: A Message to Great Powers," *War on the Rocks*, 31 Dec. 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/>. Vietnam has not designated the US as a "strategic partner" yet, though the US considers Vietnam to be a strategic partner.

13. US Embassy Defense Attaché officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.

14. Eric Tegler, "The Practicalities of US Military Sales to Vietnam," *The Diplomat*, 5 Aug. 2015.

15. Grossman and Sharman, "Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper."

16. Stephen Burgess, "Multilateral Defense Cooperation in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region: Tentative Steps toward a Regional NATO?," *Contemporary Security Policy* (Dec. 2017): 1–22.

17. Grossman and Sharman, “Vietnam’s Latest Defense White Paper.” Nontraditional security threats include cyber, terrorism, climate change, piracy, and natural disasters.
18. Bich Tran, “Understanding Vietnam’s Military Modernization Efforts,” *The Diplomat*, 25 November 2020.
19. Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 100–01. Vietnam has been building up its coast guard with US and Japanese assistance.
20. Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 100–01. 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.
21. US Embassy Defense Attaché officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. Also, former US Air Attaché in Vietnam, interviewed at Air University, 4 Jan. 2019.
22. US Embassy Defense Attaché officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. Also, former US Air Attaché in Vietnam, interviewed at Air University, 4 Jan. 2019.
23. Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 100.
24. Michael Beckley, “The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia,” 101.
25. Lyle J. Morris, “China’s Air Force is Fixing its Shortcomings,” RAND, Oct. 2016. <https://www.rand.org/>.
26. US Embassy Defense Attaché officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
27. Stephen Burgess, “The Changing Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific Region and Optimum US Defense Strategy and USAF Strategic Posture,” report for the USAF Institute for National Security Studies and US Air War College, 2016. While Vietnam leans toward the US, Hanoi still hedges between Beijing and Washington.
28. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
29. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
30. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
31. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
32. “Status of LNG projects in Vietnam,” *MARINECURRENTS*, 14 January 2021.
33. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
34. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
35. David Brumstrom, “Biden’s Vietnam Ambassador Nominee.”
36. Giang Nguyen, “Vietnamese Protestors Clash with Police over New Economic Zones,” 11 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/>.
37. US Embassy Political Affairs officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
38. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. The US Embassy Defense Office is headed by a Senior Defense Official and includes Defense Attaché officers and Defense Cooperation officers.
39. US Embassy Defense Attaché officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
40. Eric Tegler, “The Practicalities of US Military Sales to Vietnam.”
41. US Embassy Defense Cooperation officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
42. US Embassy Defense Cooperation officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
43. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
44. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. US officials in Hanoi advised that the US–Vietnam partnership is like “dating” in which the two partners need to proceed at a deliberate pace.

45. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
46. US Embassy Defense Cooperation officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
47. US Embassy officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
48. Stephen F. Burgess, "The Rebalancing of the US Strategic Posture to Implement its Defense Strategy and Maintain Access to an Increasingly Bipolar Asia," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 1 (April 2016): 111–43.
49. US Embassy officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. Russia, India, China, Israel, and Japan follow the United States in the number of engagements.
50. Charles Pope, "Air Force Generals Goldfein, Brown Make Historic Visit to Vietnam," *Pacific Air Forces News*, 12 September 2019.
51. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
52. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
53. Jon Grevatt, "Vietnam to Procure T-6."
54. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. One official thought that some Oregon National Guard fighter pilots were overly assertive and needed to "throttle back" in dealing with their ADAF counterparts.
55. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
56. Interviews with an ADAF student at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL, 8 Jan. 2019 and with ADAF Air University alumni in Hanoi, June 2019. Also, former US Air Attaché in Vietnam, interviewed at Air University, 4 Jan. 2019. The interviewees recommended Air Command and Staff College, as well as Squadron Officer School and Air War College for ADAF officer education.
57. US Embassy Defense Cooperation officers, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. One official commented that the country team must be the "adults in the room" to moderate US engagement with the ADAF.
58. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. The access challenge was exemplified when the ADAF would not divulge essential force details to the US president's Secret Service team prior to a 2017 visit.
59. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019.
60. US Embassy Defense officials, interviewed in Hanoi, June 2019. Vietnam recently acquired two CASA C-295 transport aircraft to test them and will possibly buy more, which could be a template for acquiring T-6s.

Building Resiliency

A New US Approach to East Asia

MAJ JASON GIROUX, USAF

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.¹ 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.² America and its partners are concerned with how China is using its power to realign the existing order to support its own interests.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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

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.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸ The region tends to view these institutions with suspicion due to the widespread belief that they exist to advance US priorities.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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 inter-societal 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴ China's national identity is deeply entrenched in its victimhood status within Japan's imperial history.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² Additionally, fishing disputes exist between many of the subregion’s states.³³ 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.

East Asian Geopolitical Realities

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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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

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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.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.

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.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.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.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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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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Challenges and Lessons Learned from the Projection of French Airpower in Afghanistan

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A few weeks after the withdrawal of Western forces from Kabul, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on discussions held last September between Washington and Moscow about the possible utilization of Russian military bases by American forces if the latter were to carry out strikes against al-Qaeda or ISIS (Daesh) on Afghan soil.¹ More than a reversal of history that this situation could symbolize, it echoes the complexities of the projection of Western forces in 2001, particularly for the nations that do not benefit from the United States' diplomatic-military networks and negotiating power. Accustomed to operations within their own zones of influence, notably in West and Central Africa, French forces have retrospectively perceived their engagement in Afghanistan as a disruption, from the point of view of the area but also of the duration.

The 12 years of French participation in this war have several distinct components. Operation Heracles corresponds to the French contribution to the American Operation Enduring Freedom, which aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime and to combat its insurgent forces, while Operation Pamir designated the participation of French forces to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), whose objective was to secure the Afghan territory and train the Afghan Army. What was the impact of this war on the model of projecting French airpower? Political and military authorities were confronted with several difficulties to deploy air transport, observation, and combat detachments. Diplomatically, fly-over authorizations and most of all basing within neighboring countries all proved to be major obstacles. Compounding basing problems were flight paths that depended heavily on weather conditions and specificities of coalition warfare that had a great deal of influence on flight autonomy and therefore the responsiveness of air forces. Finally, the counterinsurgent nature of this conflict greatly influenced the geography of air operations and required the French Air Force to make a number of adaptations.

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Challenges of “Airbase Opening:”² Geography of an Airpower Deployment

The specificity of the Afghan theater for Western forces—and particularly for French troops—consists largely in the fact the territory is situated in Central Asia, traditionally a Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War.³ The coalition led by the United States faced a great deal of difficulty establishing bases in-theater on Afghan soil and in neighboring countries to intervene in this landlocked enclave. France held a unique place within this coalition. Without strategic interests in Afghanistan, political authorities wanted to provide diplomatic assistance to the United States by intervening on their behalf—all while maintaining a certain degree of autonomy.⁴ This position was shown by the desire to limit their footprint and situate French forces as far as possible from Afghan territory. Even if this diplomatic situation changed during the 12-year engagement, it had a considerable influence on the choice of initial capabilities deployed by French forces.

Thus, the first French missions in the context of the war against the Taliban regime utilized methods of listening, observing, and in-flight refueling. On 11 October 2001, a C-160 Gabriel and a DC-8 Sarigue bedded down at Al Dhafra Air Base, United Arab Emirates,⁵ followed on 21 October by two Mirage IVPs and two C-135 FRs.⁶ Utilization of this base, located 2,000 km from Kabul, illustrates the problem of basing for the war in Afghanistan. Additionally, the United Arab Emirates accepted the deployment of reconnaissance, refueling, and transport aircraft but was reluctant to accept fighter jets.⁷

Following a sequence of diplomatic negotiations with Central Asian states, Tajikistan became the first country in the region to accept the installation of a French detachment—though fighter jets were still not accepted. The deployment of an Operational Transport Group (GTO) to Dushanbe permitted the Air Force to open what would later be named the “northern door” to the theater and above all prepare for the capture of Mazar-i-Sharif, 250 km from the Tajik capital, to create a forward operating base. In the wake of the agreement with the Tajiks, the French Air Force launched its first attempt to deploy three Transall transport aircraft, which left Istres-Le Tubé Air Base, France, on 16 November 2001. Lacking an agreement with local authorities during a stopover in Turkey, the C-160s were forced to turn back. This shows diplomatic difficulties of air operations that required more than a simple authorization from the destination country. Thanks to the help of American resources—using a C-17 to Uzbekistan then CH-47 Chinook helicopters to northern Afghanistan—a small advance team of French forces led by Lt Col Bernard Hufschmidt managed to travel to Mazar-i-Sharif to prepare for the arrival of French aircraft.⁸ The first French aviator to set foot on Afghan soil in this war, Hufschmidt

was responsible for preparing the runway (practicable distance, repair of any damages, lighting, marking, signs, etc.) on behalf of the Special Operations Division, which had been created within military air transport in 1993.⁹

From 3 December, a small-scale airlift was established that included two components: intertheater, between Istres and Dushanbe (with, in the beginning, stops in Istanbul and Astrakhan, where the first planes remained grounded due to diplomatic problems¹⁰) and intratheater, between Dushanbe and Mazar-i-Sharif. An A-310 strategic transport plane from the Esterel Squadron was called on to transport some of the mechanics to Dushanbe—over the course of Operation Heracles, a number of chartered aircraft (Ilyushin 76s and Antonov 124s belonging to Ukrainian companies as well as American C-17s¹¹) were used to transport freight in support of French forces in Dushanbe. During the operation to open Mazar-i Sharif, a C-130 rotated between Istanbul and Dushanbe, while a second C-130 operated between Istanbul and Istres. The first landing of a C-160 at Mazar-i-Sharif occurred during the night of 6 December. After that, rotations began for the complete bed down of a combat company and a support company from the 21st Marine Infantry Regiment. As the coalition wanted to establish a presence at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, 50 km north of Kabul, a French Transall was the first to touch down at this airfield, which would become the hub for US forces.¹²

While based in Dushanbe, the four French transport aircraft of the GTO executed intratheater sorties to forward operating bases on Afghan soil. When Operation Pamir began in January 2002, 43 rotations of C-160 and C-130 aircraft enabled the deployment of French troops assigned to ISAF in Bagram.¹³ Located 450 km from Kabul and 250 km from Mazar-i-Sharif, the Dushanbe airfield became the gateway for French military forces into Afghanistan as well as the transloading location for materiel and freight. During the first six months of the deployment of French forces, the C-160s totaled 1,445 flight hours while the C-130s totaled 980,¹⁴ the vast majority on an intratheater scale. The use of short airstrips and of airfields lacking modern facilities generated a certain number of lessons in the domain of air transport. General Luc de Rancourt, the first commander of the GTO at Dushanbe, thus insisted on the importance of “having precise means of navigation that enable autonomous arrivals” so that aircraft can, without ground-based navigation, “penetrate independently regardless of weather conditions,” notably thanks to progress in the domain of digitization of the battlefield.¹⁵ According to de Rancourt, the communications sector is “the main factor” within an operation that is characterized by “command structures dispersed around the globe: Paris, Al Kharj in Saudi Arabia, Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Tampa.”¹⁶ The GTO’s airbase-opening capabilities were subsequently requested in November 2003, when a French special forces

detachment was deployed to Spin Buldak, in Kandahar Province in the south of the country.¹⁷ Relying on the engineers' work in preparing the airfield, a C-160 based in Dushanbe was the first to land there after a stop at Kandahar Airfield and a low-altitude flight. The French GTO thereby played both a relay role in transloading and that of a springboard for the installation of forward operating bases on Afghan soil. The Dushanbe base would also later host French combat aircraft, starting in October 2004—the runway would be rebuilt by French Air Force engineers.¹⁸ In the meantime, it was in Kyrgyzstan that French authorities found, at the end of December 2001, an initial operating location for the Mirage 2000 D. At the same time, the French government decided to deploy the naval aviation group constituted around the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, whose combat aircraft would fly an average of 12 missions a day until June 2002. This capacity, however, did not replace the long-term presence of aircraft deployed to airbases in the region.

It was the airfield of Manas, Kyrgyzstan, 20 km northwest of the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, which would be the first to receive French Air Force combat aircraft during the war in Afghanistan. Since the end of 2001, this airport had been used as a logistics hub by US forces:¹⁹ a detachment of C-130s retrieved materiel delivered there by civilian aircraft in order to distribute it at the coalition's forward operating bases.²⁰ In January 2002, when the possibility of an agreement with the Kyrgyz authorities was acquired, the French Air Force dispatched an advanced echelon of several officers, who landed at Manas in a Falcon jet to evaluate the work required for a bed down of Mirage 2000 Ds. The engineering troops were brought in on 14 February, and the field was ready to receive aircraft at the end of the month.²¹ Once again, the charter of Ilyushin 76 and Antonov 124 private aircraft was indispensable for the deployment of a detachment composed of six Mirage 2000 Ds and two C-135 FR tankers. It was, therefore, at the price of heavy diplomatic negotiations and considerable logistical and financial commitments²² that the French Air Force was able to deploy an air strike capability, in line with the requirements of political decision makers. In addition, the 1,500 km separating Manas from combat zones, coupled with overflight constraints (terrain, refusal of overflight by Uzbek authorities) limited the action of French aircraft.

The Problem of Air Routes Used by French Aircraft

More generally, the Afghan theater is distinguished from most other operations of the French Air Force by the multitude of air routes used over the course of 12 years of engagement, as well as by the strong geographic, political, and military constraints that affect the flight paths of aircraft. The different periods of

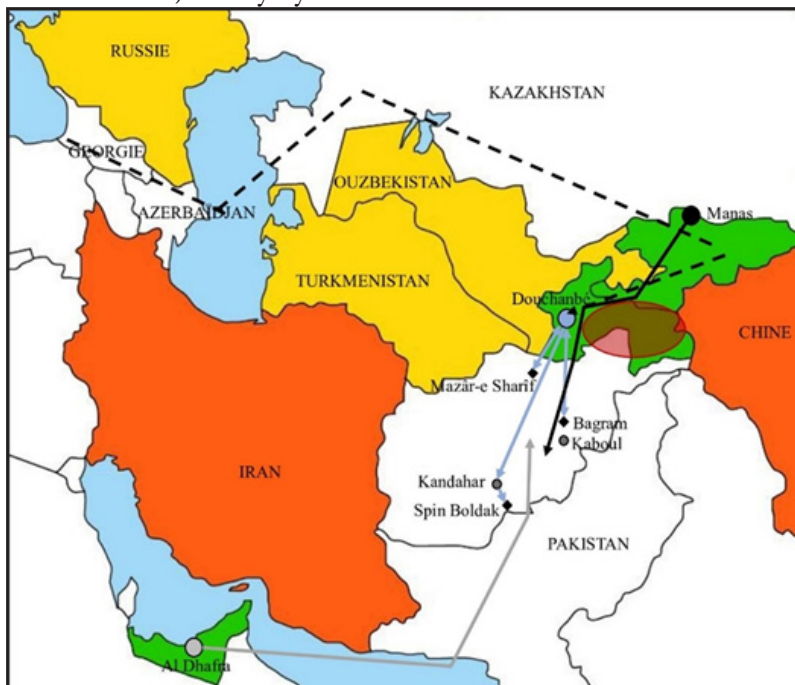
deployment of French airpower correspond to distinct basing and engagement conditions that influenced the construction of aircraft routes of flight.

When Mirage IV aircraft, based in the United Arab Emirates, executed their first intelligence-gathering mission on 23 October 2001, their route met the specific characteristics of strategic reconnaissance flights. The Mirage IV and the C-135 FR tanker initially formed a tight patrol and followed a civilian air corridor; their signal would therefore appear as that of an airliner in the eyes of air traffic controllers. They crossed the Arabian–Persian Gulf, skirted the Iranian coasts, then penetrated Pakistani airspace. Their entry into Afghan airspace was by way of the south, near the Kandahar region. At that moment, the Mirage IV accelerated at medium altitude for an hour and a half before rejoining the tanker at high altitude and starting the return trip to Al Dhafra. In a little more than 100 days and with an average of one mission a day, the Mirage IVs totaled 450 flight hours²³—in the four to five flight hours per mission, only 1.5 hours were devoted to surveying objectives, given the distances and the areas to be avoided.

This type of restriction usually takes on a more important dimension when it comes to combat missions. The location of the Mirage 2000 Ds at the Manas base, 1,000 km from Kabul, is an illustration of that. In addition to the distance, the terrain, and diplomatic constraints (the Uzbek authorities prohibit the overflight of any French fighter aircraft) complicated the determination of the air routes for the French fighter detachment. The aircraft had to avoid entering Uzbek airspace while flying around the highest peak of the Pamir mountain range, which straddles Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China. This condition is due to the difficulty for the French Air Force to ensure rescue missions in the event of a possible ejection in a zone where the summits reach almost 5,000 meters²⁴—the helicopters used for this type of mission having a ceiling of about 4,000 meters.²⁵ This route via the Vakhsh Valley represents a detour of several hundred kilometers, which had an impact on the cost of fuel but also on the fatigue of the pilots and, ultimately, on the time devoted to combat missions—the airmen call it “playtime.”²⁶ Despite this precaution, the French Air Force set up an unprecedented high mountain search capability in the event of an ejection during which the pilot would not be able to see a valley, for example during a flight with dense cloud cover. Called RESAL (airborne search and rescue), this system is based on an international agreement: it consists of a French C-130 based in Dushanbe, Spanish Puma helicopters, and Kyrgyz Mil Mi-8 helicopters. Set up in May 2002, it included, in addition to air commandos, elements of the high mountain gendarmerie platoon from Chamonix.

Furthermore, on an intertheater scale, the air routes for the deployment of French aircraft as well as for their logistical supply were subject to constraints of the same

order. On the diplomatic front, Uzbekistan and Russia refused the transit of arms and ammunition, while Turkmenistan initially accepted only humanitarian assistance flights.²⁷ French Air Force transport aircraft, as well as chartered private aircraft, must therefore bypass these areas, for example via Georgia and Azerbaijan. At the intratheater scale, the region's rugged terrain presented an additional constraint for French transport aircraft. From Dushanbe—a base located at an altitude of 700 meters but surrounded by mountains that reach 4,500 meters—the C-160s were at the limit of their capacities to cross the mountain barrier, and it was impossible for them to come back in case of breakdown after the beginning of their descent.²⁸ The Kabul airfield has the same characteristics of a “runway in the middle of a circus surrounded by towering mountains”²⁹ and reminded transport pilots of their missions during the Sarajevo Airlift in 1993. Two years after the opening of the Manas airfield, the installation of a detachment of combat aircraft in Dushanbe represented a substantial savings in time and fuel for the French Air Force. On 20 October 2004, three Mirage F1-CRs began a 20-day operation to carry out route reconnaissance, surveillance, and mapping missions, while on 6 August 2005, three Mirage 2000 Ds and three Mirage F1-CRs were deployed there, but this time for ground support missions. The deployment of the first three Mirage F1-CRs required the transport of 100 tons of materiel, mostly by AN-124s and IL-76s.³⁰



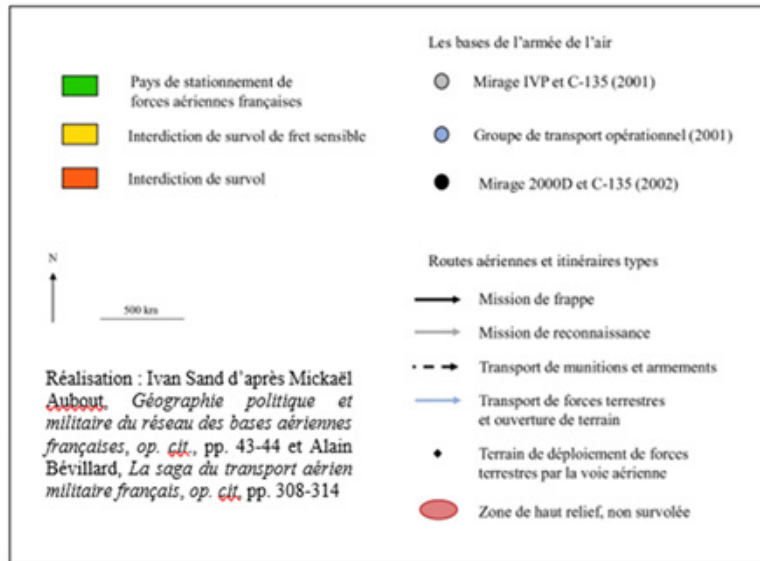


Figure 1. The initial picture of the Air Force in Afghanistan (2001–2002)

About a 10-minute flight from the Afghan border and one hour from the main combat zones, the base at Dushanbe offered a much more compelling position than Manas.³¹ However, with the Dushanbe infrastructure close to saturation, the C-135 tanker accompanying the first Mirage F1-CRs had to move to Manas. It would typically take off 50 minutes before the fighter planes to rendezvous with them in Tajik airspace.³² As of August 2005, the flight time of French combat aircraft was generally close to five hours—up to six hours when their mission took them into southern Afghanistan. They refueled three times and had about three hours of presence over the operation areas. While the performance was significantly better than when departing from the Manas base, it was much lower than that of the coalition aircraft based at the Afghan airfields of Bagram and Kandahar. Officially, the French authorities did not have access to these bases because they were already at maximum capacity³³ or because the security conditions were not met.³⁴ According to some testimonies, placing their aircraft outside the Afghan theater allowed the French political authorities to show their independence from their allies.³⁵

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 changed the deal and initiated a rapprochement with Washington. A few months after his election, the president announced his desire to return to the integrated command of NATO. With regards to this conflict, it resulted in the first installation of French combat aircraft on Afghan soil. On 26 September 2007, the detachment of three Mirage 2000 Ds was transferred from Dushanbe to Kandahar, followed three weeks later by three Mirage F1-CRs.³⁶ In addition to the political symbolism, this relocation placed

French planes 30 minutes from the main combat zones, which significantly increased their air support role within the coalition—during five-hour missions with two in-flight refuelings, the playtime was now approximately three and a half hours. Furthermore, this reorganization considerably improved the response time, which, thanks to an alert system on the ground, was three hours at night and 1.5 hours during the day. Until 2012, the date of the withdrawal decided by Pres. François Hollande just after his election, squadrons of Mirage F1-CR, Mirage 2000 D and Rafale rotated so that the French detachment had six fighters permanently in Kandahar. On the ground, as in the sky, the French Air Force was now fully integrated into the coalition. Its ability to support the various ground detachments—US forces were spread across some 100 bases on Afghan territory³⁷—was therefore greatly increased, especially with the Rafale, whose payload is greater than that of the Mirage 2000 D.³⁸ The presence of the most-modern fighter aircraft of the French Air Force, combined with the relocation of the fighter detachment from Dushanbe to Kandahar, brought renewed credibility and greater weight to the French involvement in the coalition.³⁹

Throughout the engagement in Afghanistan, the challenge of air routes was critical. On the diplomatic level, in addition to questions of overflight and basing in bordering nations, there is also the matter of France's role in the coalition, while on the geographic level, distance and terrain affected the performance of French aircraft. It was not until 2007 that the installation in Kandahar, "at the very heart of the fighting," made it possible to lift the "elongation constraint" on the one hand and was seen by the coalition as "additional proof of the French willingness to support coercive action . . . in a risk-sharing approach with the allies."⁴⁰ Diplomatic and geographic variables are also imposed on the conditions of engagement specific to a counterinsurgency war, in which the modalities depend both on the strategy followed by the coalition and on the political will of the French leaders.

Territorial Dynamics of Air Support in a Modern Counterinsurgency Conflict

The vast area of Afghan territory (650,000 km²), its 30 million inhabitants, its landlocked character, as well as the diversity of the natural terrain encountered—"vast desert expanses, great plains and high rocky mountains with deeply steeped valleys"⁴¹—played a primary role in the deployment of airpower in the face of an enemy using guerrilla warfare. While Western nations had not needed to wage counterinsurgency wars for a very long time, they had to adapt their strategy and military tools to an adversary who had a perfect knowledge of the terrain, avoided direct confrontation, and blended into the local population. The increase in troops,

from a few thousand at the end of 2001 to 140,000 in 2011,⁴² illustrated the coalition's difficulties in ensuring security throughout the territory.

Beyond the sheer size of the Afghan theater, it is the lack of delineation of a "constantly evolving battle space"⁴³ that posed many challenges to modern armed forces. Faced with this situation, the time factor becomes a fundamental element, especially from the viewpoint of air forces: in general, with the enemy only identifiable just before an attack, the response time "comes into direct conflict with a calm apprehension and a taking into account of all the parameters that will lead us to strike."⁴⁴ At various levels, the command-and-control structures implemented by the coalition sought to respond to this accelerated ops tempo, while some US processes inherited from the Cold War were sometimes considered too slow for a counterinsurgency conflict.⁴⁵ They resulted in a pronounced geographical dispersion at the strategic and operational levels, while at the tactical level, air support for troops on the ground was perfected through the establishment of dedicated resources and processes.

US Central Command, located in Tampa, Florida, is the agency responsible for joint operations. The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC), which directs the air plan, was initially located at the base at Al Kharj in Saudi Arabia, before moving to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar (land and maritime operations are also each managed from a regional base). The principal allied nations of the United States sent representatives and liaison elements to exert influence on the decisions when possible, or at least to gather as much information as possible and to ensure respect for the conditions of engagement of their nations' forces as defined by political authorities.

The rules of engagement, called ROEs, within the coalition presented a particularly delicate subject for the French Air Force. In September 2006, French aircraft were prohibited from "dropping bombs in urban areas, except when the air support controller on the ground [JTAC] is French and can ensure that no civilian is at risk of being the victim of an airstrike."⁴⁶ These rules or caveats were perceived as very restrictive, both within the French detachment and within the coalition. After a few situations where these conditions prevented French aircraft from striking on behalf of allied troops,⁴⁷ the national authorities decided to reverse these rules, so as not to discredit French participation in Operation Enduring Freedom—especially since technical factors regarding GPS-guided bombs, encrypted radios, and data links also limited French actions.⁴⁸

The French military decided, at the end of the 2000s, to reinforce the link between land and air environments in operations in Afghanistan with the creation of the Tactical Air Control (CTA). Following feedback from air commandos, deployed as part of the French special forces' participation in combat against the Taliban, a team of air controllers was embedded with ground troops at the level of

the joint tactical group (GTIA).⁴⁹ The diffused threat in Afghanistan influenced ground maneuvers: “the operational principal is to never take ‘one step without support,’”⁵⁰ notably air support in the form of combat aircraft, helicopters, or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. While the ground elements that guided air forces were on the order of four personnel per brigade during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the GTIA teams consisted of between six and 12 soldiers in the last years of French engagement in Afghanistan. These air control specialists, thus, illustrated the density and omnipresence of air support in this theater. During missions of the category “Preplanned Close Air Support,” in other words, air support planned in advance,⁵¹ French aircraft based in Kandahar were allocated a time slot, a zone of operation, and a JTAC to carry out missions as needed.⁵² In addition to eventual strikes called for by the JTAC, the crews would also have the mission to monitor a zone, for example, the area around a forward operating base, to conduct reconnaissance missions, or even to protect a convoy.⁵³ The war in Afghanistan, thereby, constituted a pivotal example of the increased usage of airpower in a counterinsurgency war. In particular, it reinforced the interaction between air operations and the situation on the ground, a role of aviation that would be confirmed several years later during the operations conducted against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Air mobility was a major asset for the coalition given the distances to travel, the impractical roads, and especially the threat that hung over convoys—between 2001 and 2010, 70 percent of coalition losses were caused by improvised explosive devices.⁵⁴ At the intratheater level, the number of passengers and tons of freight transported by heavy helicopters⁵⁵ and coalition aircraft grew noticeably as the conflict took the form of a counterinsurgency, which grew in intensity during the years 2000–2010.⁵⁶ Air drop was also used on an increasing basis by the entire coalition to resupply the numerous detachments on the ground.⁵⁷ In this domain, French forces developed an innovation: high-altitude low-opening air drop (LMTGH-OB).⁵⁸ Validated from 1 July 2008 forward,⁵⁹ this technique was a low-cost solution to effect airdrop in total safety—the aircraft flew higher than 6,000 meters to be above the Taliban air defense capabilities. In comparison with the US systems, its originality resided in basing the precision of the airdrops on meteorological data alone (notably the analysis of winds)⁶⁰ and not on GPS guidance. A team from Météo France was notably solicited to develop a model specific to Afghan geography that accounted for wind, temperature, and air pressure to determine the drop point—the precision was on the order of 250 meters. The aircrew worked with oxygen masks given the altitude of the flight, while the ground forces had to secure a circular area with a radius of 500 meters to recover the materiel.

Conclusion

At multiple levels, the war in Afghanistan represented a turning point for French airpower projection. The geographer Mickaël Aubout stated that this operation validated the “theater air base concept,” with transport crews notably distinguishing themselves in the domain of airbase opening.⁶¹ The air routes used by French aircraft—whether for intertheater deployment, intratheater transport, or combat missions—show the importance of diplomacy. Force projection can indeed be considerably constrained when lacking authorization for overflight, stop-over, or basing. Finally, the specifics of counterinsurgency warfare markedly influenced the use of airpower, with the risk that as coalition troops become bogged down, air interventions are carried out almost solely to support the ground scheme of maneuver, be it for the resupply of troops or in the domain of supporting fire.

Twelve years of engagement in Afghanistan have left a durable mark on the French Air Force. If they have highlighted certain limits to France’s power projection model, they have equally been marked by operational innovations and real progress in the processes of allied planning and targeting. Despite the negative outcome of the Taliban’s return to power, the shared work of different air forces engaged in Afghanistan represents an essential step in this era of grand air coalitions, which began with the Gulf War of 1991 and is unlikely to be ending soon. ✪

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Notes

1. Michael R. Gordon and Gordon Lubold, "U.S. Asked Russia About Offer of Bases to Monitor Afghan Terror Threat," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 September 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
2. Within the French Air Force, this term refers to the first use of an airfield.
3. French C-160s landed in Kabul on 25 September 1996, to carry out an operation to evacuate nationals when the capital was captured by Taliban troops. See Alain Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport* (Paris: L'Esprit du livre, 2007), 307.
4. Lieutenant-Colonel Jérôme de Lespinois, "The specificity of Air Force adaptation: the example of the Air Force in Afghanistan" *Note de recherche stratégique*, no. 22, IRSEM, July 2015, <https://www.irsem.fr/>.
5. Therefore, it is not a permanent French base, which opened in 2008. This deployment was therefore carried out within the framework of agreements specific to this conflict with the Emirati authorities.
6. Philippe Chapleau and Jean-Marc Marill (dir), *Dictionary of French Army External Operations. From 1963 to the present day* (Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2018), 144.
7. Frédéric Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan. French Aviators in Combat* (Levallois-Perret: Altipresse, 2009), 78.
8. See the testimony of Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Hufschmidt in Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport*, 314.
9. General Luc de Rancourt, "A small affair of fifteen days...with tacit renewal," *Le Trap*, no. 214, September 2013, 26–28.
10. Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport*, 310.
11. Colonel Luc de Rancourt, "Tactical Lessons from Operations HERACLES and AM-MONITE," in *The Air Force, the French Armies at the Dawn of the 21st Century, Volume II*, ed. Pierre Pascallon (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 229–37.
12. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 155.
13. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 156.
14. Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport*, 308.

15. de Rancourt, "Tactical Lessons from Operations HERACLES and AMMONITE."
16. de Rancourt, "Tactical Lessons from Operations HERACLES and AMMONITE."
17. Lieutenant Charline Rodin, *Afghanistan: Aviators' Perspectives* (Paris: SIRPA Air, 2011), 96.
18. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 157.
19. Colonel Jean-Marc Laurent, "Allied deployment in Kyrgyzstan: the international dimension of an airbase," *Les Cahiers de Mars*, no. 177, 2003/2, 106–13.
20. Laurent, "Allied deployment in Kyrgyzstan," 79.
21. Laurent, "Allied deployment in Kyrgyzstan," 80; and Lieutenant Mickaël Aubout, "Military geography of an airbase: the example of the base at Manas (2002 – 2004)," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, No. 19, February 2009, 28–38.
22. The Royal Air Force arrived at the same conclusion regarding the difficulties of deployment using bases that lack modern infrastructure. Air Chief Marshal John Day, "After Afghanistan - the role of air power," *The RUSI Journal* 147, no. 6 (2002), 38–43.
23. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 126.
24. Aubout, "Military geography of an air base."
25. Aubout, "Military geography of an air base."
26. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 163.
27. Aubout, *Political and military geography of the network of French air bases*, 402–03; and Aubout, "Military geography of an air base."
28. Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport*, 330.
29. Bévillard, *The Saga of French Military Air Transport*, 331–32. This configuration also raises fears of fire from RPG-7 rocket launchers during take-off and landing, Jean-Charles Jauffret, *The Unfinished War. Afghanistan, 2001-2013* (Paris: Autrement, 2013), 136.
30. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 157.
31. Marc Scheffler, *The War Seen from the Sky. The Battles of a Mirage 2000D Pilot* (Paris: Nimrod, 2013), 168.
32. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 160.
33. Scheffler, *The War Seen from the Sky*, 168.
34. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 192.
35. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 192.
36. Chapleau and Marill, ed., *Dictionary of French Army External Operations*, 145.
37. Jauffret, *The Unfinished War*, 128.
38. de Lespinois, "The Specificity of Air Force Adaptation."
39. Christian F. Anrig, "Neglected Contributors: The Continental European Air Powers," in *Air Power, Insurgency and the "War on Terror"*, ed. Joel Hayward (Cranwell: Royal Air Force Center for Air Power Studies, 2009), 125–40.
40. Lieutenant-Colonel Thierry Marzocchi, "Les ailes de la liberté: huit ans d'engagement aérien français dans le ciel afghan," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, no. 23, summer 2010, 12–17.
41. Général Gilles Desclaux, "Le rôle de l'arme aérienne dans une opération de stabilisation et de contre-insurrection," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, no. 23, summer 2010, 71–79.
42. de Lespinois, "The Specificity of Air Force Adaptation."
43. Lieutenant-Colonel Thierry Marzocchi, "The wings of freedom: eight years of French air engagement in the Afghan sky," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, no. 23, summer 2010, 12–17.
44. Marzocchi, "The wings of freedom," 12–17.

45. Colonel John C. Wilkinson and Andrew Hill, "Airpower against the Taliban. Systems of Denial," *Air & Space Power Journal*, fall 2017, pp. 44–49.
46. de Lespinois, "The Specificity of Air Force Adaptation."
47. For a precise description of one of these missions from the point of view of a French pilot, see the first chapter of Scheffler, *The War Seen from the Sky*, 15–31.
48. Adaptations were quickly found for each of these cases, notably the installation of the ROVER (Remotely Operated Video Enhanced Receiver) data link system between the ground and the air. See de Lespinois, "The Specificity of Air Force Adaptation."
49. Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard Granier, "French specificity in terms of 'Joint Terminal Attack Controller' (JTAC): tactical air control (CTA)," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, no. 23, summer 2010, pp. 102–07.
50. Granier, "French specificity in terms of 'Joint Terminal Attack Controller'," 102–07.
51. Two other types of support missions for land forces were carried out: X-CAS, where crews are on alert on the ground for the benefit of identified units; and E-CAS, emergency missions for the benefit of land forces which do not have no JTAC.
52. Lert, *Pilots in Afghanistan*, 198.
53. Jauffret, *The Unfinished War*. 128.
54. Desclaux, "The role of the Air Force in a stabilization and counter-insurgency operation."
55. Roger Anett, *Lifeline in Helmand. RAF battlefield mobility in Afghanistan* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2010), 99.
56. Anthony H. Cordesman, *US Airpower in Iraq and Afghanistan. 2004–2007* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13 December 2007).
57. Antony Loveless, *Blue Sky Warriors: The RAF in Afghanistan in their own words* (Sparkford: Haynes, 2010), 99.
58. The low opening means that the parachute opens at a low altitude to minimize the drift of the released material.
59. Rodin, *Afghanistan: Aviators' Perspectives*, 98.
60. Lieutenant-Colonel Laurent Solda, "Military air transport: dropping equipment at a very high height with low parachute opening," *Penser les Ailes Françaises*, no. 23, summer 2010, 108–15.
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Confluence of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

How Japan's Strengths Can Shore Up American Weakness in the Pacific

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In recent years, the Indo-Pacific region has become the primary venue of renewed great-power competition, bearing the weight of tense Sino-US relations. Indeed, pointing to the impending competition in the Pacific in the twenty-first century, in 2009 former prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew presciently declared in Washington, “if you do not hold your ground in the Pacific, you cannot be a world leader.”¹ China’s rise presents a myriad of challenges that are an ocean away from the continental United States. Yet notwithstanding America’s global leadership and vast military power, Washington is incapable of maintaining stability alone.

Against this backdrop, Japan, which within the past century once dominated the region by force, now stands apart as a peaceful democracy, the world’s third-largest economy, and Washington’s most important ally on Beijing’s periphery. Although now a middle-power, Tokyo is no idle bystander but has championed a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept that seeks to promote the region’s stability and prosperity through upholding a rules-based international order.² Moreover, Japan’s FOIP concept aligns well with US interests and warrants America’s full support. China’s economic centrality and influence pose a significant challenge to the realization of FOIP, but Japan is well-positioned to engage throughout the region. Moreover, Tokyo’s strengths in economic and diplomatic engagement fill critical gaps in Washington’s foreign policy.

Japan’s FOIP Concept

Though elements of Japan’s FOIP vision have percolated in Tokyo’s foreign policy since at least 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe officially unveiled FOIP at the August 2016 Tokyo International Conference on African Development.³ Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) provided the three pillars undergirding this vision: (1) promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade; (2) pursuit of economic prosperity; and (3) commitment for peace and stability.⁴ In pursuit of FOIP, Japan has undertaken multiple projects,

such as leading the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), investing in regional infrastructure and connectivity, and supporting maritime law enforcement in Southeast Asia.⁵

Japan's whole-of-government approach likewise entails Ministry of Defense (MOD) support in the form of extensive regional defense cooperation and counterpiracy operations to promote a favorable security environment and security of major sea lanes.⁶ Since 2009, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have continually supported counterpiracy efforts off the coast of Somalia with JSDF destroyers providing safe escort for more than 4,000 vessels and P-3C patrol aircraft contributing over 70 percent of the international community's warning-and-surveillance operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁷

Moreover, in 2019, the JSDF conducted its first Indo-Pacific Deployment (IPD) with the flagship JS Izumo and a contingent of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade.⁸ Over several months, this deployment included port calls to Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam, with a robust schedule of defense exchanges, community relations events, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief seminars.⁹ A myriad of bilateral and multilateral naval drills with the US, Australian, Indian, French, and Southeast Asian navies additionally strengthened regional security cooperation.¹⁰

Japan also recognizes the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in approaching the region. As the "convener of the region," ASEAN is a major player in shaping regional integration and the security landscape of Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific.¹¹ ASEAN hosts numerous venues, including the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit, thereby facilitating high-level diplomatic and security dialogues.¹² Thus, Japan's Ministry of Defense announced its "Vientiane Vision," which acknowledges ASEAN's centrality and enhances Japan's enduring defense cooperation with ASEAN.¹³ Fully recognizing partner-nation contributions to maintaining regional peace and stability, Tokyo likewise actively provides defense capacity building assistance throughout the region.¹⁴ Through such engagement, Tokyo highlights FOIP's common ground with ASEAN under the ideals of "openness, transparency, inclusivity, and a rules-based framework."¹⁵

Though understood as a competitive response to China's rise, in official publications, Japan emphasizes that FOIP is an inclusive concept, open to cooperation with all.¹⁶ Scholars describe the backdrop against which FOIP was birthed, noting that by 2010 China knocked Japan out of the world's number-two economy spot and was flexing its muscles in the East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS) over maritime territorial claims, including the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands.¹⁷ Kei Koga, in a survey of Japanese academics, notes the FOIP concept's ambiguity and seemingly contradictory inclusion of competitive and

cooperative elements vis-à-vis China.¹⁸ While Tokyo displays some hedging behavior, the primary intent of Japan's FOIP concept is to buttress the "existing rules-based international order."¹⁹

The United States and the Indo-Pacific

As highlighted by the US Department of State (DOS), with nearly \$2 trillion in two-way trade, the futures of America and the Indo-Pacific "are inextricably intertwined."²⁰ Indeed, the United States can ill-afford not to prioritize a region that is home to nearly 60 percent of the world's population and more than 40 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP).²¹ If Washington is not engaged in the region, the United States will not only have less access to key portions of the world economy but will also cede influence to China.²² Beijing has already inked the world's largest trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and will increasingly reshape international rules and norms to Chinese benefit.²³ China seeks to establish a Sino-centric hierarchy and hegemony in Asia, and as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt assert, the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific hinges upon US engagement.²⁴

Washington's current Indo-Pacific initiatives are largely a continuation of policies dating back to the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. It was in 2000 that Condoleezza Rice, who served as President Bush's National Security Advisor, laid out a clear-eyed description of Beijing as a threat to the Asia-Pacific and "a strategic competitor, not the "strategic partner" the Clinton administration once called it."²⁵ Although the fateful events of 11 September 2001 dramatically turned the focus of America's foreign policy to the Middle East, the Bush administration had at least identified the challenge posed by China and impending threat to the Asia-Pacific region's stability.²⁶

Continuing in this vein, in 2011 President Obama announced the "pivot" to the Pacific, signaling a degree of closure to years of large-scale military operations in the Middle East and the intent to shift focus to the Asia-Pacific and cope with China's rise.²⁷ The pivot included efforts to prioritize security cooperation with allies and partners, engagement with multilateral institutions, and economic policy in the region.²⁸ The Trump administration's FOIP narrative built upon many aspects of Obama's "strategic rebalancing," while also more explicitly responding to the challenges posed by China.²⁹ The US Department of Defense (DOD) promulgated its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in 2019, which directly confronted China, labeling it a revisionist power.³⁰ The subsequent DOS FOIP vision stated that the US vision does not exclude any nation, nor ask countries to pick sides, though it sternly warned against the repressive vision of revisionist powers and condemned Chinese oppression and provocative maritime claims.³¹

Challenges to FOIP

The greatest challenge to the realization of FOIP is China's sheer economic power and resultant influence. While Japan seeks some engagement with China and Tokyo's brand of FOIP is an inclusive concept, Beijing naturally seeks to reshape the international order on Chinese terms and to serve Chinese interests.³² Beijing portrays its rise as peaceful and mutually beneficial, promoting its concept of a Community of Common Destiny—where a community of states can prosper and harmoniously coexist.³³ Yet regardless of the friendly rhetoric on the surface, Beijing has an agenda and, like any country, maintains an unwavering commitment to its core national interests. In China's case, these interests include maritime rights and territorial claims that are sharply contested throughout the region and conflict with international norms.³⁴

Thus, China will naturally challenge some aspects of FOIP in pursuit of national interests and regional dominance.³⁵ Though not directly stated, under the umbrella of national sovereignty, Beijing practically elevates its extensive territorial claims and maritime interests in the ECS and SCS to the same category as a core interest.³⁶ Indeed, in 2018 Pres. Xi Jinping proclaimed that Beijing would not “compromise ‘even one inch’ of any of its territorial and sovereignty claims,” while other party officials have similarly cited unshakable determination to protect all territorial claims and maritime rights.³⁷ Given Beijing's expansive range of core interests that often clash with international law and the sovereignty of other states, China's influence in the Indo-Pacific will be a challenge to the establishment of many elements of FOIP.³⁸

Although many nations in the region may be wary of China's intentions, the economy is the dominant factor, and Beijing's regional economic clout is unrivaled.³⁹ As summarized by the RAND Corporation in figure 1, China wields greater economic influence across Indo-Pacific countries as compared to the United States on almost all metrics and with nearly all countries.⁴⁰ Surveys conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) likewise reveal that Chinese economic influence dominates in Southeast Asia, and respondents even gave China the edge over the United States in terms of political and strategic influence in the region.⁴¹ While the United States holds sway in terms of soft-power and military cooperation, Washington would do well to remember the mantra “it's the economy, stupid,” as partners largely place more value on economic concerns.⁴²

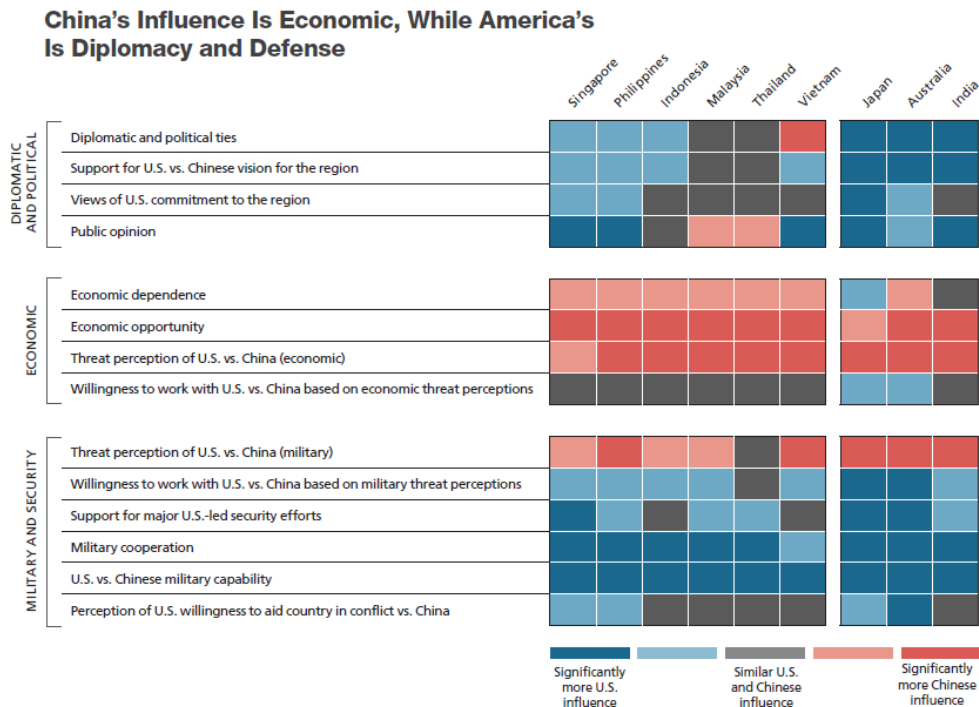


Figure 1. Comparison of US and Chinese Influence in the Indo-Pacific region. (Bonny Lin, et al., *U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion: Does the United States or China Have More Influence in the Indo-Pacific Region?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), 4, <https://www.rand.org/>).

China additionally bolstered its economic influence by concluding the RCEP trade deal in November 2020, which partly serves as a Chinese-led alternative to the CPTPP.⁴³ Contrary to the CPTPP, RCEP aims to establish international norms to Beijing's liking, with notable omissions on standards for intellectual property, labor, and state-owned enterprises (SOE).⁴⁴ As such, RCEP gives China significant sway over how to write the rules for trade in the region. Thus, Beijing unreservedly utilizes SOEs to achieve geopolitical ends and engages in intellectual-property theft, disregarding international norms in an unrestrained pursuit of national rejuvenation.⁴⁵

China's economic clout and corresponding influence likewise enable Beijing to exert considerable leverage and coercion when it suits Chinese interests. As a gauge of economic influence with ASEAN states, for example, China's current bilateral trade with ASEAN equates to \$591 billion compared to \$272 billion for US-ASEAN trade.⁴⁶ Similarly Chinese represent the largest proportion of tourists to ASEAN countries, with over 25 million tourists in 2017 compared to 4 million

from America.⁴⁷ Thus, tourism also allows Beijing to throw its weight around at will, as Hanoi painfully experienced when 2014 SCS tensions led to China sharply cutting off tourism to Vietnam and the associated economic inflow.⁴⁸

Moreover, economic power has enabled many of China's military gains in the region.⁴⁹ This is evidenced by China's economic coercion to fortify its territorial claims in the SCS, where Manila has not leveraged the 2016 United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea ruling against Beijing.⁵⁰ Acquiescing to Chinese influence, the Duterte administration ostensibly surrendered its SCS claims and largely sought to bandwagon with Beijing in pursuit of Chinese beneficence.⁵¹ With the graphical depiction in figure 2, Jonathan Stromseth of the Thornton China Center explains that China's "capacity to exercise influence and leverage through economic interdependencies" already far exceeds that of the United States.⁵² Indeed, as the Chinese Communist Party rejects international norms in pursuit of national interests; Beijing's vision of reclaiming its former glory as the Middle Kingdom and effectively relegating its neighbors to tributary status is a destabilizing challenge to a rules-based FOIP order.⁵³



Source: "Asia Power Index," The Lowy Institute, 2019, <https://power.loyyinstitute.org/>.

Figure 2. Current economic relationships

Finally, despite Beijing's overwhelming economic influence, several factors may hinder China's geopolitical aims, thereby leaving an opening for Japan, the United States, and like-minded states to achieve a semblance of FOIP. Beijing shows no signs of slowing down its pursuit of national rejuvenation and attainment of regional hegemony, yet there are some cracks under the surface and growing external pushback. For example, since 2007, China's debt has rocketed eightfold now, upward of 300 percent of GDP, and Beijing will soon begin to reap the byproducts of

its draconian one-child policy in the form of an aging population and shrinking workforce.⁵⁴ Moreover, negative views of China are reportedly at a three-decade high comparable to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre era.⁵⁵ The international community took notice of Beijing's aggressive expansionism in the region and systemic repression at home, as nearly a dozen countries have paused or canceled Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, 16 nations including eight of the world's ten biggest economies restricted or outright banned Huawei 5G products, and the European Union named China a "systemic rival."⁵⁶ This current state can be attributed both to Beijing forcefully overplaying its hand in the neighborhood on territorial disputes among other matters and the Trump administration's recognition of the "China Challenge" and forthright critique of Beijing's aggressive behavior.⁵⁷ Thus, notwithstanding Beijing's formidable array of national power and seemingly unstoppable momentum in the region, a Chinese-dominated tributary realm is not inevitable, and if Tokyo, Washington, and allies and partners join to play their cards well, an Indo-Pacific that looks more like FOIP is realistically attainable.

Where the United States Needs Japan's Strength in the Pacific

Countering the challenge of Beijing's economic influence will be difficult, but Tokyo carries several strengths in this arena that complement American weaknesses vis-à-vis China. Japan's economic and diplomatic engagement within the region is noteworthy and warrants full US backing. From regional trade and investment to Japan's reputation and pragmatic engagement with the region's non-democratic states, Tokyo is quietly leading the way on several FOIP initiatives that round out US and partner efforts.

Economic Engagement

In pursuit of FOIP Japan's role in regional trade is impressive. On trade issues Japan emerged as a regional leader under former Prime Minister Abe's leadership as Tokyo stepped up to fill the void left by Washington to complete the CPTPP.⁵⁸ Washington's abrupt withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership is widely considered a missed opportunity, and the Biden administration should consider following Japan's lead to join the CPTPP.⁵⁹ As Michael Goodman notes, an agreement like CPTPP not only demonstrates Washington's commitment to the region and provides a platform to promote a rules-based order, but it also carries the potential to shape China's behavior.⁶⁰ David Dollar similarly asserts that the primary reason for the United States to join CPTPP is to "preserve an open global trading system centered on the U.S."⁶¹ If the United States does not pursue free-trade agreements in Asia, the American economy will be the biggest loser as

the region becomes even more tightly integrated into Beijing's sphere of influence.⁶² For Washington, joining the CPTPP may require politicians to expend some political capital at home, but the alternative is to cede ground to China in the Indo-Pacific.⁶³ At a minimum the United States should work closely with Japan on trade issues and buttress Tokyo's role as a key leader within the CPTPP.

In addition to trade, regional infrastructure investment is another key component within the economic domain. Here Beijing's influence continues to grow with BRI, while the United States has not presented any substantial alternatives to compete. The Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) point out the critical need for trillions of dollars of infrastructure investment to support the growth of developing nations throughout Asia and the world—and Beijing is skillfully leveraging its SOEs to answer the call.⁶⁴ The United States is right to be suspicious about the BRI, in terms of Beijing's geopolitical intentions and BRI's opaqueness, questionable quality, and debt-trap concerns.⁶⁵ Yet for some developing countries, even if Beijing's terms and intentions are not entirely favorable, as exclaimed by a former Pakistani official, in some areas "China is the only game in town."⁶⁶

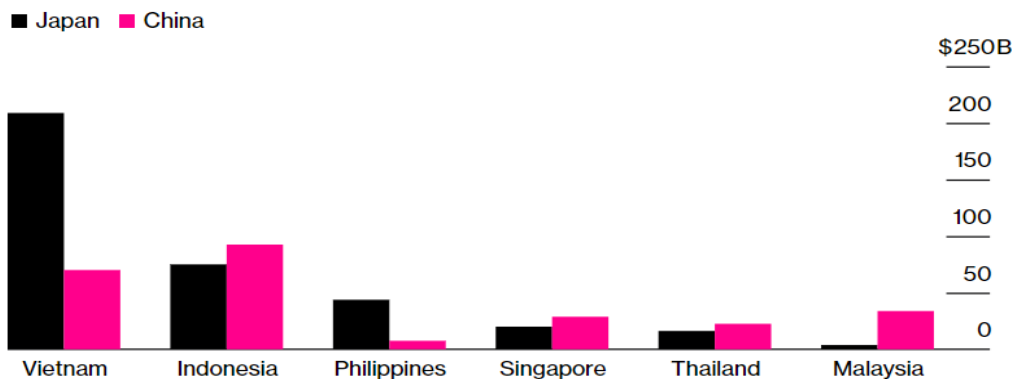
However, notwithstanding Beijing's expansive economic footprint, for decades Japan—not China—has been the leader in infrastructure investment in Southeast Asia, and Tokyo still maintains an edge over China in terms of dollars (\$367 vs. \$255 billion) and total projects (240 vs. 210).⁶⁷ Going forward, as Beijing's \$1 trillion BRI gains steam, Japan may not be able to match the dollar amounts put forth by China; however, Japan's regional investment and economic influence remain significant.⁶⁸ Indeed, in 2015 Tokyo launched the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, which provides more than \$100 billion in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).⁶⁹ Notable projects under this "Partnership" include funding for India's Delhi Metro and a large-scale bridge in Mongolia's capital.⁷⁰ Moreover, as seen in figure 3, Vietnam receives more than half of Japan's Southeast Asia investments—to the tune of \$209 billion—with nearly \$60 billion for the landmark high-speed rail project linking Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City.⁷¹

In championing "quality infrastructure," Tokyo offers transparency, long-term sustainability, and local job creation along with the transfer of skills and technology—a compelling package that implicitly critiques the standards often associated with BRI.⁷² Though Japan also strikes an inclusive tone, Tokyo emphasizes the need for both "quality" and "quantity" and has even cooperated with China on some third-country BRI projects since 2017.⁷³ China's rapidly increasing economic influence in the region is undeniable, as evidenced by Beijing becoming ASEAN's largest trading partner in 2009 and the nearly 900-percent growth of Sino-ASEAN trade since 2001.⁷⁴ Yet, on the whole, Tokyo continues to put forth

a substantial and attractive alternative to Chinese investment. Of note, such investment can help mitigate China's "economic cabbage strategy," whereby Beijing's investments might secure key regional infrastructure with geopolitical and security implications.⁷⁵ Tokyo also demonstrated its regional leadership abilities as former Prime Minister Abe chaired the 2019 Group of 20 and secured international endorsement for "Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment."⁷⁶ Thus, Japan's infrastructure development initiatives can at least modestly reduce the region's economic dependency on China while also challenging Beijing to raise its infrastructure investment standards.

Building Battles

Japan far outpaces China in value of infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia



Source: Fitch Solutions (data provided 18 June 2019)

Figure 3. The value of Chinese and Japanese infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia

In contrast to the robust scale of Tokyo's economic investments, US commitments to date are a drop in the bucket compared to the BRI. Initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Business Forum and the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD) Act are an encouraging step in the right direction but to date are of negligible scale.⁷⁷ The BUILD Act offers superior quality, transparency, and private-sector solutions to Southeast Asia and should be tailored to support US strategic interests, yet the \$60 billion commitment is easily overshadowed by the trillion-dollar BRI.⁷⁸ As detailed above, Japan's leading role in regional infrastructure development makes Tokyo an ideal ally to increase cooperation with on this front.

On a positive note, the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation recently concluded Memorandums of Understanding with counterparts in Japan and Australia, which led to a jointly financed \$1 billion energy project in Papua New Guinea.⁷⁹ This was a modest albeit important step for Washington. Indeed, the value of allies and partners is often touted from a defense and security perspective,

as former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, USMC, expressed that “allies and partners are our strategic center of gravity.”⁸⁰ Yet, it would be a grave mistake to not fully leverage allies and partners in the economic realm. If played correctly, increased economic engagement from the United States and like-minded states can help reinforce the footing of Indo-Pacific nations to better withstand Chinese economic coercion. While the Trump administration made progress on this front, the overall tone of transactional foreign policy and the wielding of tariffs and tough trade deals with longstanding friends partly undercut these efforts.⁸¹ Going forward, the United States should work in tandem with Japan to prioritize the expansion of additional cooperative initiatives in the economic domain to counter Chinese influence and buttress FOIP.

Diplomatic Engagement

Japan’s reputation within Southeast Asia is likewise a notable strength that complements US influence in the region. Renowned China scholar David Shambaugh describes Southeast Asia as the current epicenter of US-China competition, where the prevailing narrative, even if empirically questionable, is a dominant China and a declining America.⁸² Shambaugh’s depiction in figure 4 highlights the strength of Beijing’s influence, which is largely underwritten by its economic might and proximity in the region.⁸³

Yet, whereas Washington tends to frame competition with Beijing as a zero-sum game, countries in the region do not want to pick sides and certainly cannot openly challenge China without the risk of severe economic blowback.⁸⁴ Japan too must hedge against the reality of China’s rise in its backyard. Thus, Tokyo’s inclusive spin on FOIP carries greater regional appeal.

While America’s reliability seems to be in question, public opinion polls in South and Southeast Asia reveal that trust in Japan is at its highest levels ever.⁸⁵ As it stands, the Trump administration’s “America First” foreign policy naturally made traditional allies and partners question America’s dependability, inducing undue friction and creating an opportunity for Beijing to exploit the seams between the United States and like-minded partners.⁸⁶ The deterioration of Washington’s reputation within the international community is corroborated in Southeast Asia by ISEAS surveys, as well as globally in the Gallup Poll of International Respect for U.S. Leadership.⁸⁷ However, surveys of major Southeast Asian states—including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia—indicate that Tokyo is viewed most favorably across the board, while views of Washington and Beijing widely vary.⁸⁸ Hiroyuki Suzuki accurately assesses that Japan is well-positioned to play a critical role in the Indo-Pacific, given its multilayered rela-

tionships throughout the region, while Kei Koga suggests that Japan can “bridge the gap” between competing visions for the region.⁸⁹

Spectrum of ASEAN States’ Relations to USA & PRC

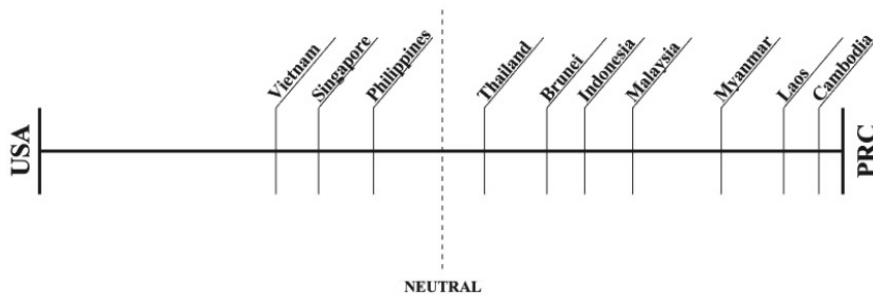


Figure 4. Spectrum of ASEAN states’ relations to United States and People’s Republic of China. (David Shambaugh, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia” (webinar, Stimson Center, facilitated by Yun Sun, 14 December 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/>).

Unlike the United States, Japan is also well-suited to engage even the non-democratic states in the region. This is especially important considering the consensus-based nature of ASEAN and that states such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are sometimes outliers. The strength of Chinese influence over Cambodia for example was manifested in 2012 when Phnom Penh took the unprecedented action of blocking ASEAN’s joint communique due to verbiage that challenged Beijing’s stance in the SCS.⁹⁰ Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi’s recent Southeast Asian trip that included a substantial visit to Phnom Penh highlights the role that Tokyo plays in this space.⁹¹ With Beijing’s growing influence in mind, Tokyo has maintained strong relations with Cambodia. While Cambodia is often viewed as a Chinese client state, Japan’s soft-power appeal is significant.⁹² Tokyo continues to support infrastructure development in the country and remains Phnom Penh’s largest traditional donor, having provided roughly \$3 billion in official development assistance over the past two decades.⁹³ In return, Phnom Penh has thus far voiced support for Japan’s FOIP concept.⁹⁴ Indeed, given Cambodian relations with the United States and the West generally remain

tenuous over human rights and democracy issues, Tokyo's relationship with Phnom Penh is all the more important.⁹⁵

Washington would do well to follow suit with prioritizing relations with allies and partners to include nondemocratic states in the Indo-Pacific. A growing chorus of academics and policy advisors agree on the importance of allies and partners to successful foreign and security policy and note the substantial relative advantage that Washington has over Beijing in this regard.⁹⁶ Yet, while the Biden administration made a stylistic pivot from Trump's "America First" in proclaiming "America is back," allies and partners have increasingly noticed Washington's foreign policy say-do gap. For example, America's abrupt 31 August withdrawal from Afghanistan caught NATO allies off guard.⁹⁷ Shortly thereafter the clumsy rollout of the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance surprised and enraged the French, leaving some to wonder at the similarity of Trump's and Biden's foreign policy underneath the rhetorical surface.⁹⁸ Such missteps suggest that the Biden administration is not living up to its *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (2021), which made constant mention of allies and partners, calling them "America's greatest strategic asset" and vowing to "revitalize America's unmatched network of alliances and partnerships."⁹⁹

There is also a danger that the Biden administration may go too far on an idealistic crusade for democracy when a more pragmatic approach is warranted considering the geopolitical realities and Beijing's influence. The new national security guidance claims that "democracy is essential to meeting all the challenges of our changing world" and that "we must join with like-minded allies and partners to revitalize democracy the world over."¹⁰⁰ Yet, such an approach risks marginalizing constructive relations with nondemocratic states that are vital partners in balancing against China—such as Vietnam.

While certainly America should maintain its moral compass and stand for human rights throughout the world, to broadly diagnose that spreading democracy throughout Asia is in the best interest of the United States may be an idealistic bridge too far. Speaking from an Asian perspective, Lee Kuan Yew cautions that America's brand of "supremacy of the individual and free, unfettered expression" is not universal, although Singapore is considered a democracy in some regards.¹⁰¹ Yet, even if the universality of liberty and freedom can be affirmed, Washington's recent experiences in the Middle East and Afghanistan serve as grave reminders that attempting to force democracy on a nation is often an ill-advised and calamitous undertaking. Neglecting to engage with the region's nondemocratic states would be a missed opportunity, not least of all for the simple fact that these states are more likely to fall into Beijing's camp in the absence of engagement from the United States and its allies.

As Shambaugh astutely points out, there is not a firm correlation between regime type and a state's relationship vis-à-vis the United States and China; Vietnam is the closest to China in terms of regime type, yet Hanoi is quite wary of Beijing, whereas the Philippines under Pres. Rodrigo Duterte displayed that even a democratic ally can swing toward Beijing's camp.¹⁰² Congressional barriers may inhibit US engagement with nondemocratic Southeast Asia states, but Washington should work to overcome these self-imposed restrictions where feasible, while simultaneously collaborating with Tokyo to leverage Japan's strengths in this area.¹⁰³

Therefore, it makes sense that Washington ought to throw its weight behind Tokyo and support Japan's FOIP efforts, as Tokyo adeptly engages the neighborhood's democracies and nondemocratic states alike. Here Japan takes a pragmatic approach: accepting the difficulty of compelling another state to change its domestic policies, Tokyo treads lightly on human rights issues and prioritizes maintaining influence and access with nondemocracies.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, recognizing that all its neighbors have a contribution to make, Tokyo seeks all the partners it can find to help curb Chinese regional influence.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

The Indo-Pacific region is vital to American prosperity and perhaps the most visible arena of great-power competition with China. US policy in the region should take a whole-of-government approach with robust economic and diplomatic engagement in conjunction with allies and partners. As Washington promotes its Indo-Pacific strategy, Tokyo is uniquely positioned to make a difference in the region, and Japan's role should not be undervalued. Japan's FOIP initiatives align well with US interests and warrant Washington's full support. Beijing's massive economic influence and plans for a China-centric order will certainly conflict with elements of FOIP, but Japan's longstanding economic investment in the Indo-Pacific—combined with Tokyo's soft-power edge—will enable Japan and like-minded nations to make measured headway toward the realization of FOIP.

As the US military reorients to the Indo-Pacific, it is critical to understand China's regional influence and coercive power and the proclivity of partners and even allies to hedge, seeking to avoid Beijing's ire. These dynamics can impact how far US allies and partners are willing to take military cooperation. As an example, one need look no further than Manila, as the Duterte administration has cozied up to China and threatened to nullify the Visiting Forces Agreement that underpins military cooperation with the United States.¹⁰⁶

For Washington, Japan is America's "most important ally in the Asia-Pacific region," and the US-Japan alliance is the "cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific."¹⁰⁷ America's power in the military domain and forward-

deployed presence in the Pacific is duly complemented by Japan's quiet strength in the economic and diplomatic realms. Tokyo's leadership in the region stems from its presence, reputation, and longstanding economic ties. Tokyo's inclusive approach and the breadth of Japanese investment in Southeast Asia also fill significant gaps in Washington's foreign policy, and Japan adeptly maintains influence with the entire neighborhood—including the region's nondemocratic states. Thus, Washington should play a supporting role to bolster Tokyo's efforts, deepening cooperation and staying in lockstep with Japan on regional initiatives. Indeed, as America mulls the renewed significance of the Indo-Pacific region, Washington would do well to remember that the surest road to a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" runs through Tokyo. 🌐

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The Coming of Quad and the Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific

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With the coming of the twenty-first century, power parity has started to shift from the Atlantic to the East, leading to conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is the confluence of two major oceans: the Indian and the Pacific. The geographical area covering the region is of great significance from geoeconomical and geostrategic perspectives. The region is home to some of the major rising powers, including China, India, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is also a region that is in the center of geopolitical rivalry, making it the hotspot for the emerging great-power competition.

The coining of term *Indo-Pacific* runs parallel with the rise of China, which, along with Beijing's growing assertive foreign policy, is taken to be the driving force fueling the great-power competition in the region.¹ Beijing, under its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), wants to exert China's influence in the wider Indo-Pacific region. This is seen as overturning the balance of power, having implications for the other major powers in the region. This led the United States to produce its Indo-Pacific strategy, which many view as a containment strategy to restrict the rise of China and aimed at bringing the other like-minded powers under a singular strategic framework as a balance against growing Chinese influence.

It is in this context that understanding the theoretical framework of balance of power becomes of paramount importance. The idea of the Indo-Pacific and the revival of the Quad is taken to be a balancing act to thwart the growing Chinese footprint in the region. Therefore, this article will first address the theoretical framework of balance of power, giving readers an overview about why nations balance. It will also look at how the overall idea of the Indo-Pacific and balance of power are working. The second part of the article will analyze the revival of the Quad in the geopolitical framework of twenty-first century from the perspective of balancing. It will also investigate the future of the Quad and whether it will lead to a deeper alliance of like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific.

Understanding the Concept of Balance of Power

The concept of balance of power is one of the most important theoretical frameworks in the field of international relations and diplomacy. It has helped

academics and diplomats better understand the structural framework of international politics and alliance systems. This concept has garnered the most scholarly attention in comparison to any other theoretical framework in international politics.² The fundamental concept of the balance of power theory is that nations will join an alliance system against a dominant or hegemonic power that poses a threat to the other nation's security.³ In an anarchic world where the security of an individual is guaranteed by itself, nations resort to external alignment to safeguard their own security.⁴ They also enhance their relative power to maintain their security, which is key in the structural framework of international politics.

Through balancing, nations try to uphold the status quo against a power that can have a potential impact on their security. The significance of this theory is one of the oldest in the field of international politics, stretching from Kautilya in ancient India to Thucydides in ancient Greece.⁵ However, the relevance and the significance of the balance of power has amplified with the rise of China and the coming of the great-power politics in the Indo-Pacific.

The Coming of Indo-Pacific and Balance of Power

The rise of China has had the most profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century. This has structured the coining of a new geographical sphere, the Indo-Pacific, which many have argued to be a balancing act to restrict the assertive rise of China into a new global hegemon. The concept of Indo-Pacific was first put forward by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, during his state visit to India under the banner of the “confluence of two seas.”⁶ However, the significance of this concept had garnered momentum following the adoption of the US Indo-Pacific strategy in 2017 under Pres. Donald Trump.⁷ The Indo-Pacific is considered to be a mental map carved out of imagination,⁸ with its primary role focused on containing the rise of China.⁹

It is in this context that the balance of power theory supports our understanding of the current security structure in the Indo-Pacific. China's rise and its competition with the other major powers like the United States, India, Japan, and Australia have pushed these other powers to view China as a threat to their security.¹⁰ Therefore, as stated under the framework of balance of power, nations will balance against a power that is deemed as a threat to their security. In the current situation, the United States perceives China to be a major strategic competitor, as highlighted in the Strategic Committee Act of 2021.¹¹ China's growing power projection capabilities have also had a great impact within Indian security and strategic circles, which view China's rise to have an impact on New Delhi's security.¹² The recent border clash has further exemplified this notion of rise of power competition with China. The current competition within the Sino-Australian

relations have also strained bilateral ties, with Canberra viewing China as a major competitor.¹³ The Sino-Japanese relations have also gone downhill due to the ongoing territorial dispute regarding the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.¹⁴ Therefore, the balance of power theory in the Indo-Pacific is centered around the rise of China and its security implications for the other major powers. The revival of the Quad under these circumstances supports the structural framework of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

The Current Paradigm of Balance of Power in Indo-Pacific

The re-emergence of great-power competition has made balancing a significant foreign policy initiative of all the major powers in the Indo-Pacific. According to Stephen Walt, there are two types of balancing that states conduct: (1) balancing with internal effort, and (2) balancing with external effort.¹⁵ The concept of internal balancing refers to increasing the relative power of a state by increasing its own military capabilities, enhancing economic growth, and focusing on policies that will increase its relative power. External balancing, on the other hand, increases the relative power by forging alliances against the targeted nation.¹⁶ With the anarchic nature of world politics, the security of a nation should be guaranteed by itself, given that today's ally might be tomorrow's competitor. Therefore, this leads nations to take a more dynamic approach in mixing internal and external balancing to safeguard their security.

With the coming of great-power politics in the Indo-Pacific, major powers of the region are enhancing their internal balancing. It has been a measure focusing mainly on China's growing power parity and assertive foreign policy in the region. China's relative annual increase in defense budget,¹⁷ which is the highest among its regional peers, has raised eyebrows in the other Asian capitals. Along with Beijing's foreign policy, which is predominated by power projection, this has led the other major powers to enhance their relative power capabilities in addition to structuring an alliance. This enhancement has been through increasing these nations' military capabilities, enhancing their economic power, and making strategic policy decisions that would provide them with some strategic edge. The current power competition in the Indo-Pacific has led Canberra to increase its defense spending significantly;¹⁸ it has also ramped up Australia's military upgradations and capabilities.¹⁹ This best illustrated by the launch of the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) alliance on 15 September 2021, which is a joint security pact between the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Due to this, “one of the first tasks of the new AUKUS partnership would be to help Australia acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines to be built in Adelaide in cooperation with the United Kingdom and the United States,” simultane-

ously cancelling the French-Australian submarine deal.²⁰ Such developments have only increased the pre-existing power competition within the Indo-Pacific.

Japan too has set a record increase in its defense budget, with its primary focus being given to stealth jets and long-range missiles.²¹ Apart from military balancing, some observers see the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, initiated by Tokyo and New Delhi, as a major alternative to China's BRI.²² This clearly portrays the various balancing approach initiated by the Indo-Pacific nations to enhance their respective power in military and economic terms.

The recent Sino-Indian border clash has been one of the most impactful events in their bilateral relations. Beijing still holds strategic advantage in the Himalayan border from the perspective of logistics and air bases vis-à-vis New Delhi. However, India's growing modernization drive is clearly reducing the gap between India and China in the high altitudes. For example, India recently completed its planned infrastructure projects around the border with China for the next five years in just one year.²³ This drive, with its structural shift from the continental to the maritime sphere, is also indicative of how New Delhi is pulling up its socks to manage China's growing push in the region. However, it is the Sino-US rivalry that is having the most significant impact on the overall security of the Indo-Pacific. The rise of China is the most significant challenge that the United States has faced since the end of Cold War, and America has devoted its attention to tackling this challenge. The pivot to Asia is basically America's push to contain the rise of China. As pointed out by then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, the United States will deploy 60 percent of its navy in the Pacific by 2020.²⁴ However, the United States never did deploy 60 percent of its naval assets into the Indo-Pacific, during the Obama administration. It was not until the Trump administration "adopted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy—the concept, originally an invention of Abe," as the nexus for bringing Quad 2.0 and Quad Plus in existence, that such advances occurred.²⁵ The results of which, showed that the United States has been expanding its security in the region to enhance its ability to maintain the balance of power in Washington's favor.

However, it has been the external balancing under the framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) that has been the most debated and analyzed issue in the Indo-Pacific. External balancing through alliance formation has always been key to understanding the notion of balance of power. This section of the article will look at the emergence of the Quad as a balancing factor and its implications for the regional security and the future of the initiative.

The Framework of Quad

Although, the Quad found its origins “in the so-called ‘Tsunami Core Group,’ an ad-hoc grouping that sprang up to respond to the devastating Boxing Day tsunami of 2004,” efforts to hold the grouping together in its first iteration met with failure as members left the group in 2007–2008.²⁶ The resurrection of the grouping during the 2017 ASEAN Summit in Manila, indicated the countries’ renewed desire to balance the rise of China.

In the group’s first iteration, now dubbed Quad 1.0, leaders established a multilateral framework for addressing cross-regional concerns. The nature of the Quad achieved its own political element in 2006, with a speech by Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso titled “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons.”²⁷ This aimed to promote networks that were “actively pushed by then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that appeared designed to isolate Beijing”²⁸ and would involve “the countries of Central Asia, India, South-east Asia, the Korean Peninsula and Mongolia virtually all the countries on China’s periphery, except for China itself.”²⁹ This is while also expanding “Japanese diplomatic efforts to promote freedom and the rule of law.”³⁰

The first full-fledged meeting of the Quad 1.0 took place in 2007 at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila. Observers viewed this as an “informal grouping,” which only addressed certain areas in which Quad nations had common interests such as humanitarian and disaster relief operations, from when the group had emerged.³¹ After the 2007 ARF, the Quad held its only joint military exercise in September of that year, an expansion of the pre-existing Malabar series between the United States and India. The second Malabar exercise, “featured the four navies, together with the Singaporean navy, exercising in the Bay of Bengal.”³² The drill had “expanded for the first time to also include Japan, Australia and Singapore.”³³ Ultimately, this military exercise was the last under the auspices of Quad 1.0, facing intense backlash from Beijing. Spooked by the potential damage China might render upon the Australian economy, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd withdrew his country from the grouping in 2007. This first iteration of the grouping seemed to represent a gradual organic, albeit stillborn, evolution rather than a rapid expansion into a full-blown alliance.

Factors Leading to the Rise of Quad 2.0

Subsequently, the origins of Quad 2.0 arrived in a similar fashion, to that of Quad 1.0. This showing that instead of emerging as a rapid expansion, it arrived rather as an underlying organic evolution. This aimed to build upon the original Quad, while remaining clear that in 2008, such an entity had not reached a certain

level of maturity. However, significant changes in the external political dynamics had made the idea of Quad much more reasonable. Prime Minister Abe had never really given up on the idea, as evidenced for example by Japan partaking in further Malabar exercises “in 2009 and 2014”³⁴ and then becoming a “permanent member of the formerly bilateral USA India naval exercise, Malabar, in 2015.”³⁵ Following the demise of the Rudd administration in Australia, there were signs of renewed interest from Canberra, including a request to participate in the trilateral Malabar naval exercise—a request denied by New Delhi, which was still weary of Australian intentions. However, with the continued shift in global geopolitics, the revival of the Quad looked increasingly likely.

All this remains especially relevant post-2015, with the emergence of a more assertive China in the Indo-Pacific. With the launch of the BRI, Beijing sought to expand China’s strategic outreach throughout the Indo-Pacific under its Maritime Silk Road Initiative.³⁶ The rise of China has been a key determining factor in the revival of the Quad initiative and the grouping’s new aggressive foreign policy approach, which stretches from the South China Sea to the Pacific and on to the Indian Ocean. With China’s president Xi Jinping coming to power in 2013, Beijing “has pursued an extremely assertive foreign policy in the region and elsewhere, riding on the back of unprecedented material prosperity as well as nationalist sentiment in the Chinese mainland.”³⁷ The other major powers of the region have viewed this resurgence as revisionist in nature, with perceived implications for their respective security. Under the structural framework of international politics, as mentioned earlier, nations tend to balance against a state that is perceived as a threat to their security. This therefore has heightened the sense of mutual interest and action in the tackling of such events among the Quad nations.

A rising China has presented multiple factors for Quad to face. The growing Chinese footprint via the BRI has been a central issue of concern among the Quad nations. Some observers have argued that the BRI, under its maritime initiative, has the potential to overturn the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.³⁸ The construction of some of the major ports stretching from Sri Lanka and Myanmar to Pakistan and the South Pacific appears to have extended Beijing’s strategic power in the region. The concept of China’s debt-trap diplomacy has also gained prominence following Beijing acquiring the Hambantota port in southern Sri Lanka, as Colombo was unable to repay its debts associated with this mega project.³⁹ This further solidified claims that Beijing was pursuing the so-called String of Pearls strategy, which could have a significant implication on the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, one could argue that upholding the current balance of power is the structural factor in the revival of the Quad 2.0.

The Future of the Quad

Along with the core four Quad nations, there is a potential for future expansion of the grouping—the Quad Plus—including other Indo-Pacific powers like France and the United Kingdom, both of which have territories and economic interests in the region. With China's broader international goals becoming more evident, the "many challenges faced by Europe today are not so different from those faced by the likes of Australia, India, and Japan."⁴⁰ The Quad Plus initiative has featured other Indo-Pacific nations that share similar concerns regarding China. This was evidenced by shared telecommunications between original the Quad members regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which included three additional Indo-Pacific powers: New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam and other tangential actors, such as Brazil and Israel.⁴¹ Moreover, the virtual meetings of the past few years have "shared their assessments of the current situation with respect to COVID-19 and discussed ways to synergize their efforts to counter its spread."⁴²

The recent face-to-face meeting held between the Quad leaders, on the 24 September 2021, in Washington, DC, one day before the UN General Assembly is of great significance.⁴³ This summit highlights that the Quad is picking up its pace and moving toward the four nations synchronizing their actions for the overall betterment of the Indo-Pacific. Many view the growing interaction as vital for the development of the region along with keeping it free, open, and inclusive.

In addition to the Quad, the recent announcement of the AUKUS has also raised a lot of speculations regarding the regional security architecture. Unlike Quad, many take the AUKUS to represent purely security and military implications. The AUKUS nations signed a deal that is about supplying Australia with eight nuclear attack submarines that will bring a dramatic change in the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁴ Beijing has condemned the pact as an act of containment that will undermine regional stability and enhance the arms race.⁴⁵ The creation of AUKUS reaffirmed the emphasis on the region and the growing relationship toward joint security pacts and procedures. However, there has been some speculation that the coming of AUKUS will sidelined the Quad initiative, but such speculation comes too soon for certainty.

Secondly, under French president Emmanuel Macron "there has been a marked increase in intensity in France's strategic Indo-Pacific focus, with a clear emphasis on 'French interests' within the region."⁴⁶ Yet, on an official level, the French Indo-Pacific strategy "is coordinated with the EU, but up till recently there was not an EU's Indo-Pacific policy, due in part to the EU's complex relationship with China."⁴⁷ Therefore, such overlap remains present when examining the future for

Quad 2.0. Yet, upon the cancellation of the French–Australia submarine deal and the announcement of AUKUS, France issued sharp criticism toward the parties involved. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian described the arrangements as “a stab in the back,” and France recalled its Australian and American ambassadors on 17 September 2021.⁴⁸ Seemingly, the results of this have witnessed an end to French and Australian attempts to deepen security partnerships between the two nations.

In addition, France has also sought to pursue stronger relations with India, as demonstrated by the “first trilateral dialogue between France, India and Australia was held through videoconference on 9th September 2020.”⁴⁹ This came on the heels of an earlier trilateral dialogue held in February 2021, and the inclusion of French naval vessels arriving in Kerala, in advance of joint naval exercises between the Quad member states. However, in the aftermath of the AUKUS announcement, France called off the next previously scheduled trilateral meeting.

Additionally, other EU nations besides France are currently forming their own Indo-Pacific strategy. This is because the “EU has a big stake in the Indo-Pacific region and should do its part to keep the regional order open and rules-based.”⁵⁰ This is especially relevant as Quad 2.0 nations view such actions as a threat to their own security and their strategic alliances. The Quad Plus expansion makes sense for several reasons: “One is the common security concern these countries share regarding China’s behaviors. Each have faced Chinese pressure plays in recent years, and harbor concerns regarding China’s military and political expansion into areas they consider their ‘neighborhood.’”⁵¹ Alongside this, all these Quad 2.0 nations are presently in no “position to effectively challenge China on a bilateral basis, making mini lateral cooperation with like-minded partners a better approach.”⁵²

Conclusion

The current geopolitical framework throughout the Indo-Pacific readers the balance of power the most relevant international relations theory to be applied to its study. The balance of power theory in the Indo-Pacific is centered on the rise of China, which many observers believe will not prove to be peaceful, with Beijing trying to overturn the power index in its favor. Beijing, under its BRI, has exponentially increased its foothold and power projection capabilities around throughout the Indo-Pacific. This has led other major powers to view Beijing’s growing capabilities—topped with assertive foreign policy and so-called wolf-warrior diplomacy—as a security challenge. One can point to this as the primary factor for the formulation of the Indo-Pacific construct and the revival of the Quad. One can also argue that the fundamental aspect of this Quad initiative is to maintain

the current balance of power in the region. However, the Quad is still far from being a formal military alliance and is labeled instead as a grouping of like-minded democracies. Still, it is a fact that military and security issues form a major portion of the grouping's foundation and goals. Moreover, observers can point to China's growing assertiveness as pushing more nations to be willing to be part of this initiative. While some have speculated that the Quad initiative will eventually evolve into a NATO-esque treaty organization, such speculation is premature. The end state of the grouping remains very much open to conjecture. ★

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Why China Cannot Challenge the US Military Primacy

MANGESH SAWANT

Since 1945, US global leadership has defended international law and protected the democratic order.¹ US primacy prevented the emergence of global and regional hegemons. The 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, which stated that Washington would prevent emerging threats and protect the global order, remains valid 30 years later. The Biden administration, in consonance with the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, is prioritizing its military strategy, weapons systems, and defense acquisition planning toward the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific Command's (INDOPACOM) area of responsibility is the focus of the US military in the twenty-first century.

US military power is based on the deterrence policy of punishment and denial. *Punishment*, according to John Mearsheimer, involves threatening to destroy an adversary's infrastructure, while *denial* convinces an opponent that military objectives will not be achieved.² Deterrence by punishment, thus works with an adversary's fear of massive retaliation, whereas, deterrence by denial focuses on showing how an adversary's endgame will not be achieved through strengthened integrated weapon systems, joint warfare, and precision offensive firepower. Deterrence transfers higher risk and imposes costs on China, while lowering risks to the United States. According to Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, the US engagement has brought stability in strategic theaters.³

The United States enjoys overwhelming advantages over China. The United States outweighs China in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), technology, and military spending. China's GDP is 15 percent of global GDP, compared to 24 percent of the United States.⁴ The United States retains a technological edge in key areas like command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) and air, surface, and undersea weapon systems. The United States has spent \$19 trillion on its military since the end of the Cold War. This spending is \$16 trillion more than China spent and nearly as much as the rest of the world's combined expenditure during the same period.⁵

The United States has been fighting conventional and unconventional wars on every continent. The United States has war-fighting experience in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Panama, Grenada, the First Gulf War, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The US military can be deployed at short notice anywhere

on Earth. The United States maintains strategic peace through military bases and defense alliances in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.⁶ In the post–Cold War world, the United States achieved dominance thorough AirLand Battle. Now the United States is shifting its military assets to the Indo-Pacific as it prepares for a SeaAir Battle.

The US Navy (USN) has established maritime supremacy. It operates 11 carrier groups. The United States is in a familiar terrain in the Indo-Pacific, having fought during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. INDOPACOM accounts for 60 percent of USN, 55 percent of the US Army, and 40 percent of US Marine Corps.⁷

Iraq's fourth-largest military in the world was decimated by the United States during the First Gulf War. Airpower played a major role, while there was diminutive fighting between the US and Iraqi armies. Then what? China studied the First Gulf War to understand modern warfare. In a full-scale war, China would be decimated by the nuclear and conventionally superior US military. China has not dealt with any external crisis, nor has fought full-scale wars in modern history. A technological gap exists between the United States and China. They definitely are not in the same league.

An Overwhelming US Military Superiority

Navy

The USN's merging of weapon systems and C4ISR systems with multi-domain network and integrated ship defenses is more lethal than the numbers of People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) submarines and warships. The PLAN consists of 63 warships over 3,000 tons with a total tonnage of 447,000 tons, while the USN has 120 warships with a total of 2 million tons.⁸ PLAN warships are armed with 1,900 missiles, whereas the USN has 9,500 missiles deployed on its warships.⁹

The course and outcome of modern wars is determined by C4ISR capabilities and not the quantity of weapon systems. The United States is far ahead in tracking and prioritizing PLAN targets. The USN is equipped with 426 C4ISR aircraft, while the PLAN has only 22 such aircraft. The PLAN has 441 fixed-wing aircraft and 118 helicopters, while the USN¹⁰ and the Marines¹¹ collectively have 2,448 fixed-wing aircraft and 1,249 helicopters. The PLAN's two aircraft carriers (ACs) can carry 70 aircraft, while the USN's 11 ACs collectively have more than 800 aircraft. The Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group (CSG) includes the USN's only forward deployed AC, the USS *Ronald Reagan*, which is operating along with the Nimitz CSG 11 and Theodore Roosevelt CSG for anti-China operations in the Pacific.¹²

The USN and PLAN have an equal number of submarines. However, the USN's technologically advanced fleet weighs 730,000 tons, which is three times that of the PLAN.¹³ The Block V, a *Virginia*-class ballistic missile submarine, has a contract that includes 11 submarines and will triple the class's Tomahawk cruise missile capacity to 40 missiles per submarine.¹⁴

The USN is inducting 10 high-tech DDG 51 Flight III destroyers, equipped with new technologies such as more power for laser weapons, newer engines, improved electronics and the advanced SPY-6 radar. A total of 20 DDG 51 class ships are under contract at US shipyards.¹⁵ The United States is constructing the new Flight IIA DDG 51s, which will be equipped with the next-generation radar technology, Aegis Baseline 9 Combat System, BMD, and antiship cruise missiles capabilities. The Flight IIA and III have 96 missile tubes equipped with SM-2, SM-6, and the Tomahawk cruise missile.

Logistics

The United States has a separate military air lift command and a host of agreements with private logistics transport firms. The US military has 516 installations in 41 countries and bases in more than 80 countries.¹⁶ The United States spends \$156 billion on 800 bases in foreign countries, while China's defense budget is US\$180 billion/year.¹⁷ The US military has bases in Italy, Diego Garcia, South Korea, Australia, Japan, Kuwait, and Qatar. Collectively they store a million pieces of weapon systems. US military personnel are stationed in 160 countries and has operational ground troops in more than 15 countries.¹⁸ The USN has 31 fast combat supply ships with a total tonnage of 1.29 million tons, while the PLAN has only 12 supply ships totaling 330,000 tons.¹⁹

Nuclear

The number of Chinese warheads is roughly 200 and is expected to double over the next decade.²⁰ By comparison, the United States has close to 4,000 superior nuclear warheads with 1,600 strategic weapons. The United States continues to modernize its nuclear arsenal, and it vastly exceeds the minimum requirement for nuclear retaliatory strikes on China.²¹

USAF

The USAF has deployed F-15, F-16, and F-22 fighter aircraft; B-1 and B-2 bombers; and air-refueling aircraft at Guam.²² The USAF Rapid Raptor program can globally deploy F-22s anywhere in the world within 24 hours.²³ The USAF has 44 missile interceptors in concrete silos in Alaska and California. The United

States is also constructing the next-generation stealth B-21 bomber, which will complete its maiden flight in 2022. The B-21 will be equipped with the next-generation long-range standoff stealth nuclear cruise missile and the JASSM-ER conventional cruise missile.

Global Partners

The network of US international partnerships has fostered security, promoted stability and prevented conflicts. In the Indo-Pacific region, the US forward military presence and cooperation with its regional partners is a deterrence for China.²⁴

The United States leads NATO and simultaneously provides a defense umbrella to Japan and South Korea. The United States has 29,500 troops deployed in South Korea and another 45,000 troops in Japan.²⁵ The Quad exercises bring together Indo-Pacific democracies committed to a rules-based order against the China threat. The United States also has bilateral military cooperation with Australia, Philippines, Thailand, India, Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The US Third Fleet commander told reporters that the United States has 10 nations participating in military exercise while the number of nations participating in China's exercises is probably less than two.²⁶ A Chinese attack on the United States will result in direct intervention of NATO under Article V as seen during the 2001 Afghanistan War.

Why China Cannot Challenge the United States

People's Liberation Army (PLA) Major General Zhang Shaozhong ranked Chinese military power in 2020 in the fifth place behind the United States, Russia, Britain, and France, while PLAN surface power was ranked in the eighth place behind Japan and India. The Peoples Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) was ranked seventh in the world, due to its lack of fourth-generation fighter planes and high-end drones. In General Shaozhong's view, China will become the second-largest military power in the world only in 2049, when it celebrates its centennial anniversary.²⁷

The US Military as an Economic Deterrent

The US military plays the central role of economic deterrence. The Communist Party of China (CCP) gains its legitimacy from economic development. It is possible that China could target Guam with its small fleet of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). However, the use of ICBMs will lead to massive retaliatory strikes by the United States leading to total annihilation of China's military and economic centers of gravity.²⁸ The USN Maritime Strike Tomahawk Cruise Mis-

sile Block V will destroy coastal cities like Shanghai, obliterating China's hi-tech industries in a matter of hours.

The CCP leadership is inexperienced in nuclear matters as it lacks exposure to a nuclear warfare strategy as practiced by the United States and Russia. China's nuclear policy is based on low-level deterrence, "minimum deterrence," and its nuclear arsenal remains small and vulnerable.²⁹ Threatening the United States with 200 nuclear weapons is not an option. Geographically, the United States and China are similar in size. However, China's economy will be decimated by a few US nuclear weapons, as its critical infrastructure is concentrated on the coastlines and not dispersed like the US infrastructure.

A war will lead to a loss of China's exports to the United States worth USD 310 billion. The war will result in a decline in industrial production, unemployment, and inflation, causing an economic crash and a people's revolution. As seen from World War II, the United States will experience reverse economic gains and benefit from the war, resulting in high employment and industrial growth.

It is expensive to be a superpower. Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War* two and a half millennia ago, "first count the cost."³⁰ China's defense budget cannot compete with the combined power of United States, India, Japan, and Australia. The United States alone spends more on national defense than China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil combined.³¹ Can China afford it? An arms race will lead to an increase in China's military spending, affecting its development goals.

The Absence of War-fighting Experience

The United States has an analytical learning process in place—China does not.³² Lessons learned have been well documented by the US military in the form of doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures. The US military has been documenting lessons learned since as early as the Boxer Revolution during the China campaign.³³ The US military has been led by outstanding military generals like George Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and David Petraeus, while China always lacked great generals. The world sends its military officers to US military institutions and not China's military colleges.

The PLA strategy is based on Mao's theory of the weak contender fighting a stronger adversary through deceit and deception. China's only option is an asymmetric strategy due to its incapability to fight symmetric wars. Chinese scholars have authored books like *Science of Military Campaigns*, *Science of Military Strategy*, and *Unrestricted Warfare*.³⁴ However, China is unable to convert the strategies and tactics mentioned in these books into an executable doctrine.

The Lack of Power Projection

Power projection capabilities set a superpower apart. From its Charm Offensive to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has been wielding its economic power to compel US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region to align with China, which has not been greatly successful.³⁵ China lacks global reach, as it does not have foreign defense treaties or logistical bases abroad equipped with military stockpiles.³⁶ During a war with the United States, soliciting Pakistan's military support looks difficult, as China's all-weather friend has been hesitant to cut its military ties with the United States.

China is constrained to operate beyond the unrefueled range of its aircraft, warships, and submarines. US nuclear-powered carriers can rule the seas for four years before being refueled. China's nonnuclear-powered AC can barely operate beyond its green waters. The Type 903 replenishment ship can only support two to three ships for approximately two weeks.³⁷ The USN's 68 nuclear-powered submarines have been prowling the world's oceans displaying naval power, while the PLAN's nuclear-powered submarines are unable to do so.

Fighter aircraft operating without a package of air-refueling tankers, Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft, or a network of expeditionary airfields cannot travel very far. The PLAAF's capability to target US bases in the Pacific is hindered by a lack of air-refueling capacity. A flight group of eight J-11B Flankers will have to be simultaneously refueled twice by two air-refueling tankers for a seven-hour flight.³⁸ The PLAAF will have to deploy 20 percent of its tanker fleet to refuel the Flankers. The PLAAF has 10 tankers for more than a thousand fighter aircraft, while the USAF has 625 tankers for 1,956 fighter aircraft.³⁹ The tankers will be the prime targets for the USN potentially putting the Flankers at risk.

China's only existing bomber, the H-6K, is reverse engineered from the 1950s Soviet-designed Tu-16 bomber. The bomber is incapable of attacking Hawaii—even when equipped with CJ-10 cruise missiles. The H-6K has a range of 3,800 miles, while Hawaii is 5,157 miles from the closest H-6K base. The H-6K cannot attack nearby US bases, as the bomber will be detected on open seas by the US C4ISR systems. PLAAF fighters are unable to escort the bombers, as they cannot match its range.⁴⁰

An Archaic Military

Less than 30 percent of China's surface forces, air force, and air defense forces and 55 percent of its submarine fleet were modern in 2011.⁴¹ Subsequently, nothing much has changed, as a substantial percentage of China's military remains obsolete.⁴²

China's military faces institutional shortcomings arising from obsolete command structures, low quality of personnel, and corruption.⁴³ The military has weaknesses centering on supporting capabilities such as logistics, inadequate air-lift, and deficient air defense and antisubmarine warfare.⁴⁴

The PLA's loyalty to the CCP has hampered its competence.⁴⁵ China's military training and operational capabilities and competences do not match US standards.⁴⁶ PLAAF pilots fall short on the requirement of executing sophisticated aerial maneuvers during unplanned operations.⁴⁷

China's military structure presents significant cultural challenges,⁴⁸ as it emphasizes control above command.⁴⁹ A culture of risk aversion and low levels of trust in subordinates impacts the PLA effectiveness.⁵⁰ A highly centralized structure does not allow the PLAN to operate autonomously during a war. Therefore, a political commissar is positioned on PLAN warships and submarines.⁵¹ The USN values autonomy from the individual to the institution, which reflects its emphasis on commanding at sea.⁵² Nation states cannot project power globally through a rigid command-and-control system.⁵³

PLAN submarines have the worst safety record in the world.⁵⁴ The PLAN's rudimentary nuclear missile submarine fleet carries a limited number of missiles.⁵⁵ The PLAN cannot threaten the US mainland, as its submarines will have to sail through chokepoints such as the Kuriles and the Ryukyus islands, Luzon Strait, Taiwan Strait, and the Philippine archipelago—all of which are controlled by the USN.⁵⁶ These chokepoints, forming a crescent-shaped chain, are also a defensive line for US containment policy; and the United States is involved in monitoring them. The PLAN submarine power is outdated, compared to the overwhelming USN undersea warfare capabilities. The US submarine arm brings strategic deterrence to the Indo-Pacific through a wide array of capabilities such as antisubmarine warfare, antisurface warfare, precision land strike; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and special warfare capabilities.

Soviet weapon systems were much sought after by the United States to learn their strengths and weaknesses. Numerous Soviet-made fighter aircraft defected during the Cold War. An Iraqi MiG 21 defected to Israel, while a Soviet MiG 25 landed in Japan. The aircraft were later handed over to the United States to decipher the technical details. However, US intelligence is not similarly orchestrating any defections of PLAAF fighter aircraft, as the United States is not interested in obsolete Chinese technology. Instead, China is stealing weapon data or reverse engineering US weapon systems.⁵⁷ The CCP-controlled military press described the Shenyang J-15 Flying Shark fighter aircraft as a "flopping fish" and criticized it for lacking the stealth capabilities of the F-35 Lightning.⁵⁸

The US F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter entered service in 1983 and saw combat during the First Gulf War, while the fifth-generation F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning fighter aircraft have been deployed in conflict zones. However, the PLAAF has not operationally inducted the J-31 fighter aircraft while the J-20 fighter aircraft has not yet proven its capabilities in any bilateral or multilateral military exercise. The much-hyped Chengdu J-20 is a heavy fighter aircraft comparable to the MiG 31, which is essentially an interceptor and not a multirole or an air superiority aircraft.

China's Vulnerable A2/AD Zones

A study of modern wars suggests that the United States will decimate China's military without entering the A2/AD zone. This is how the United States devastated Iraqi defenses in 1990. US strategic depth in Asia will allow military planners to concentrate the military at different locations.

The United States has a devastating array of lethal weapon systems, such as submarines, for countering China's A2/AD strategies. During the First Gulf War, the United States launched 297 Tomahawks, which destroyed the Iraqi military.⁵⁹ *Ohio*-class submarines can operate unhindered in the adversary's A2/AD zone closer to the shore; thus, striking targets far inland. Collectively, four *Ohio*-class submarines installed with 616 BGM-109 Tomahawk cruise missiles would obliterate China's military. The inexperienced PLAN AC group will be destroyed by long-range antiship missiles (LRASM), Tomahawks, and Mark 48-Mod 7 torpedoes launched from USS *Key West*, USS *Oklahoma City*, USS *Topeka*, and USS *Asheville* submarines based in Guam.

The USN and USAF have signed a USD 414 million contract for autonomously guided with onboard sensors, jam-resistant, and difficult to detect antiship LRASM.⁶⁰ The stealthy *Zumwalt*-class warship—equipped with emerging technologies—can sail undetected in littoral waters and contested territories to launch LRASM and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

China is constructing military bases on islands in the South China Sea; however, this military infrastructure is vulnerable to US weapon systems, as the islands lack natural defenses and camouflage.⁶¹ During a war, the bases will be annihilated by the USN as the PLA cannot hide behind hills and forests. Once destroyed, these facilities cannot be supported from the mainland, as the logistical supplies will be demolished by the USN. China's military modernization may enhance A2/AD zones, but it does not contribute to a blue-water, sea-control capability.⁶²

China's Hyped DF-21 Missile

The antiship DF-21 missile, carried by colossal transporter erector launchers, has a range of 1,400 miles. The missile regiments are based in the barren Gobi Desert, which makes it an easy target for the US military. The DF-21 has been tested on a stationary ship, but it has not yet been successfully tested against a moving target.⁶³ A system of systems is required to track the AC,⁶⁴ acquire the precise location, keep the missile locked on the target, penetrate the carrier's multilayered defenses, and provide mid-course updates as within one hour the ship will have moved 30 miles. China does not know about the DF-21 performance against the US CSG countermeasures.⁶⁵

The United States and Russia have not yet developed a missile equivalent to the DF-21. However, China lacks the C4ISR systems to strike targets at that range. China does not release the missile testing data, leading to many questions, including whether it can hit moving targets. Does it have precision targeting technologies?⁶⁶ Until proven otherwise, the functionality of the missile is based on nothing but circumstantial inference and speculation.

Opium War: Then and Now—Nothing Much Has Changed

One can draw some historical parallels. For example, similarities exist between the unprepared Qing military during the Opium Wars and the contemporary PLA, which underestimates the US military.⁶⁷ The Opium Wars were fought between the obsolete Qing military and an industrializing and a technologically advanced Britain, which possessed the world's most-powerful navy.⁶⁸ The British consisted of 20,000 troops and three dozen modern Royal Navy warships. While China maintained an 800,000 strong military force, only 35 percent of these forces were equipped with firearms.⁶⁹ China had several A2/AD advantages, including strategic depth, numerical advantage, familiarity with battle terrain, and excellent coastal defenses.⁷⁰ But, much like today's PLA, the Qing troops lacked combat experience. In contrast, the British troops were battle hardened and highly disciplined because of their involvement in various wars in the Middle East and Asia.⁷¹ The Qing's archaic military system made it difficult to deploy troops to counter the mobile British forces.⁷² China's generals, such as Yi Shan and Yang Fang, were incompetent in the pivotal Battle of Canton in 1841, resulting in a defeat for China.⁷³

The Opium Wars have military parallels for the PLA. The wars led to the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the decimation of China's military. The outcome of a contemporary war with the United States will be nearly identical to the political dimensions of the Opium Wars. The Tianjin Treaty of 1858, imposed by foreign powers, devastated China. Russia did not intervene but pressured China to cede a large part

of its northeastern territory, including Vladivostok.⁷⁴ The consequences of the Opium Wars led to the Boxer Rebellion in 1899. About 80 years later, the Japanese invasion of 1937 demonstrated how vulnerable and weak China was to external naval powers.

Conclusion

The US military dominates the strategic, tactical, and operational levels of warfare across the spectrum. The Pentagon is implementing sophisticated network warfare programs such as the Advanced Battle Management System, Project Convergence, and Joint All Domain Command and Control. China is concerned about the lethal and distributed US military, equipped with a potent combination of quantity and quality of weapon systems. The USN surpasses the PLAN in rapid deployment, maneuverability, and expeditionary warfare capabilities. The overwhelming display of US military power since 1945 is a credible deterrent for Beijing. Since the First Gulf War, the United States has demonstrated its capability of destroying the adversary through preemptive strikes consisting of long-range weapon systems such as cruise missiles in the first few days of the war, giving no time for the adversary to retaliate.⁷⁵

According to Taylor Fravel, China is not a military superpower.⁷⁶ There is not much evidence about China's plans for global military capabilities on par with the United States. China's military power is miniscule as compared to United States' former adversary the Soviet Union. China's military will be thinly stretched defending the third-largest country in the world. The top echelons of the CCP and PLA acknowledge US military advantages. Chinese scholars like Xu Ruike and Sun Degang admit that China is an economic heavyweight but is a military featherweight and will remain so for the coming decades.⁷⁷ US primacy in the post-Cold War world has prevented World War III. The two most likely contenders for expansion, North Korea and China, have restricted their militaries within their borders. The United States retains unrivaled military power, and China is not in a position to challenge it. ★

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Australia's Role in the Quad and Its Crumbling Ties with China

POORNIMA VIJAYA

Since 2016, a steady erosion of the US-led rules-based order has led to a mounting agreement between four states regarding the Indo-Pacific. The increasing and shared need to protect the international order brought four countries—the United States, Australia, Japan, and India—together under the framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). While the Quad dates to the early and mid-2000s, the grouping struggled until Japan introduced its *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (FOIP) strategy in 2016, which was then followed by the 2016 Australian *Defense White Paper*. Gradually, India issued similar statements, and by December 2017, the US *National Security Strategy* reflected the FOIP vision.

All four states have responded to an assertive China in varying degrees. China's assertive activities in the Indo-Pacific seas and the implications of the Belt and Road Initiative are considered geostrategic challenges to the existing world order. Following 10 years of inaction, the Quad has been revitalized as an initiative that seeks to support a "free, open, prosperous and an inclusive Indo-Pacific region."¹ Ensuring deeper cooperation between these states that share common interests, values, and threat perceptions will provide a better chance at maintaining the balance of power that helps preserve the status quo across the region.

The devastating COVID-19 pandemic further brought the Quad states together, shifting their agenda to more immediate goals of vaccine diplomacy, health crisis management, medical supply distribution, and collective plans to kickstart economic recovery.² Nonetheless, amid the pandemic, tensions with China have only deepened. Coercive behavior toward Taiwan resumed, as Chinese battleships sailed on the east coast of Taiwan. Furthermore, China deployed oil survey ships into South China Sea waters that are contested by Malaysia and Vietnam. The geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Indo-Pacific are extremely vulnerable to Chinese aggressiveness. The pandemic exposed several economic risks as well, thus accelerating Quad measures toward reducing members' dependence on China. China's reticent cooperation and lack of transparency on the origins of COVID-19, failure to limit the virus's spread beyond its borders, and lack of accountability have bolstered increased cooperation within the Quad. In this mindset and amid the increasing distrust between the Quad and China, Australia led the demand for an investigation into the origins of the virus.

Australia in the Quad

Among the Quad countries, increasing synergy has led to a vital impetus for the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Bilateral ties among Quad members have seen a positive growth trajectory and are largely considered as a vision of like-minded states.³ Australia's Pacific Step-up—a neighborhood policy of engagement—is one of its most important foreign policy priorities. The overlapping interests of the Pacific Step-up and the Quad drive Australia's foreign policy.

The Australian–US Ministerial Consultations held in July 2020 fostered deeper collaboration between the two countries as they pledged to enhance efforts to aid the Pacific Island states. The United States gave Australia \$118 million to assist in COVID-19 recovery. Washington and Canberra have also agreed to support and contribute to the Pacific Islands Forum.⁴ Through the Pacific Islands Forum, Australia has laid plans to invest \$500 million by 2025—as part of its Pacific Step-up initiative—to encourage renewable energy and cooperation under the United States' Asia Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy initiative.⁵ This US initiative is aimed to bolster sustainable and affordable energy markets across the Indo-Pacific and encourage the boost of the blue economy.

Furthermore, the two countries have laid plans to invest in high-quality infrastructure for Pacific Island states. To fulfill this agenda, the United States has established the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network and has partnered with the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, together pledging \$2 billion to promote strategic interests for both countries.

Australia is the largest development assistance partner in the Pacific and has spent \$1.44 billion for developmental causes and COVID-19 economic recovery in 2020–21. This makes Australia a logical partner for engagement and collaboration with Japan's Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiative, which further helps strengthen Japan's FOIP vision. Under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Japan hosted the second Quad ministerial meeting in October 2020 in Tokyo shortly after Suga assumed office, thus highlighting the continued significance of the Indo-Pacific strategy. This partnership grew further by the third meeting in February 2021, where various measures on engagement and the management of health crises became highlight topics.

Under the Japan–Australia Economic Partnership, Japanese foreign direct investments have increased exponentially and have taken measures to link the partnership to Australia's Pacific Step-up program. Thus, this strengthens collaboration between Australia, Japan, and the United States toward like-minded Pacific goals. For instance, the Palau cable has enjoyed US, Japanese, and Australian investments that have furthered their agenda vis-à-vis the Blue Dot Network.

Linking partnerships under the Pacific Step-up initiative provides Australia with opportunities to welcome third-party collaboration. Apart from United States–Japan–Australia collaboration, another instance of third-party collaboration can be seen with the formation of the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) by Australia, Japan, and India. The SCRI was formed to ensure sustained and balanced growth in the Indo-Pacific region and to reduce the dependence on China for the supply chain. The Platform for Japan–India Business Cooperation in the Asia–Africa region, also known as the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor, is slowly expanding toward the Pacific Islands, thus bolstering cooperation from Australia in connectivity projects.

India–Australia bilateral ties were often described as the weakest link compared to other bilateral and trilateral relations in the Quad.⁶ However, there was structured progress in these ties during 2020, which were strengthened when Australia integrated its Pacific Step-up with India’s Indo-Pacific initiatives. Project Sagar-mala, Project Mausam, and the Security and Growth for All in the Region initiative are all measures and projects under India’s action-oriented strategy—the Act East Policy—and Australia has shown immense support, as 17 percent of goods were imported using this coastal route. Canberra and New Delhi have become comprehensive strategic partners and have signed landmark agreements for reciprocal access to military bases. India is also among Australia’s top-tier trading partners, with trade amounting to \$22 billion between the two countries.

The newly established India–Australia–France Trilateral Dialogue is bringing other parties under the security blanket of the Indo-Pacific.⁷ France’s growing interests and focus on the Indo-Pacific are emphasized under the trio’s “Marine Global Commons” initiative.⁸ The still-nascent but formalized Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative is described as a global initiative that focuses on regional cooperation. This complements the Pacific visions of Japan, the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States, and the Australian Pacific Step-up, thus promoting maritime governance and like-mindedness.

The Australian Navy has also actively participated in joint military exercises to promote interoperability. Australian defense minister Linda Reynolds stated during the Malabar exercise that “High-end military exercises like Malabar are key to enhancing Australia’s maritime capabilities, building interoperability with our close partners, and demonstrating our collective resolve to support an open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.”⁹

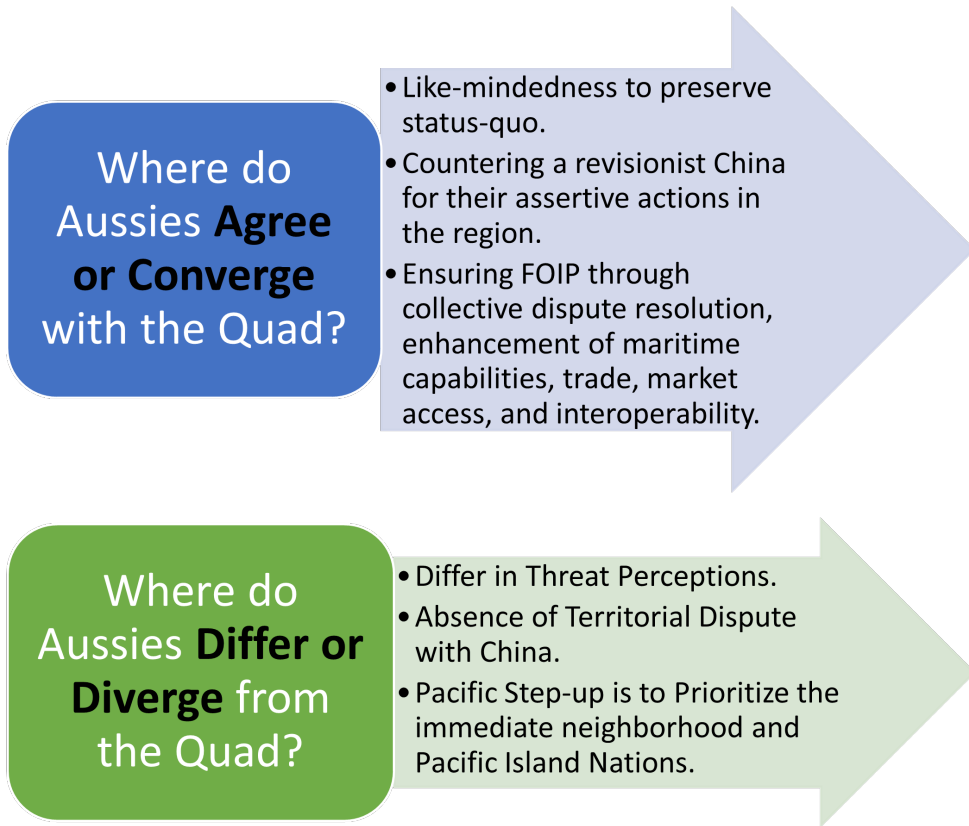


Figure 1. Convergences and divergences between Australian and Quad policies

The China Factor

In the immediate environment, Australia is more secure when compared to Japan or India, as it has no territorial disputes with China or its neighbors. Australia's alliance with the United States adds to its relative comfort. However, China's rise and aggressiveness are changing the dynamics and therefore the terrain for Australia. Australia has historically relied on the United States to be an external or offshore balancer in the region, a role that is under immense strain due to the continued growth of Chinese influence. Furthermore, as the *Australian Foreign Policy White Paper* and *Defense White Paper* in 2017 indicate, Australia regards China as a state that is altering the status quo by actively and aggressively undermining the US-led liberal international order of rules and norms. The US-led world order has encouraged middle and small powers to pursue an autonomous foreign policy that was unhindered by external coercion.

Since 2016, Australia has been actively challenging Chinese coercive behavior and actions that threaten the existing world order, leading to what many call a “freeze” in relations between the two states. Australia was originally the first to recognize the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision (which favored the Philippines over China in the South China Sea dispute) and asked China to abide by the ruling.¹⁰ Australia was the first among all others to ban Huawei from participating in rolling out 5G networks, expressing national security concerns. Australia alluded that Huawei was an instrument of the Chinese government rather than an independent commercial unit.¹¹

This was not the first decision against Huawei. In 2012, Australia was proactive in banning Huawei from tendering contracts during the construction of its National Broadband Network. This was based on apprehensions concerning the possibilities of cyberattacks from China. Beijing’s anger escalated when Australia enacted foreign interference laws in 2018—China perceived that these were particularly directed at it. Australia’s former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull commissioned this legislative enactment, which was a result of a report that revealed evidence of clandestine activities by China intended to influence educational institutions, public debates, and politicians of major parties.¹² Australia has been facing substantial pressure from China on all the earlier points, while the Morrison government has been continually critical of China to protect Australian values and national interests. Australian public opinion of China has drastically worsened because of this friction. In 2002, 52 percent of Australian citizens viewed China positively. That number plummeted to a mere 15 percent in 2021.

Australia has considered its immediate neighbors, the South Pacific Island states, to be powers that are relatively gentle and benign. Additionally, Australia has always portrayed itself as a leading power in this region. Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in his speech, called it part of “our responsibilities to our part of the world, our patch.”¹³ However, Australian insecurities and fears have risen considerably with recent reports of Chinese attempts and prospects to gain military footing in the region. Reports since 2018 have claimed that China has been persistent in its approach to build a permanent military base in Vanuatu. While these claims currently stand denied, Vanuatu is nevertheless heavily indebted to China. This has raised the prospect of debt-trap diplomacy in the Pacific region.¹⁴

Australia has been spectacularly speedy in its negotiation with Papua New Guinea, with an agreement to revamp the naval base at Lombrum—initially as a joint facility, with the United States joining subsequently. Any Chinese base in the South Pacific closer to Guam or Australia will upset US naval control in the Pacific.¹⁵

Australia has also been demonstrating ways to counter Chinese influence and oppose Huawei by gifting undersea telecommunications cable to the Solomon

Islands and Papua New Guinea.¹⁶ After acknowledging that the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative has an attractiveness that makes the Pacific Island nations vulnerable to debt sustainability and the potential to fall prey to debt-trap diplomacy, Canberra has expanded its efforts to portray Australia as a reliable partner and a friend to the Pacific Island nations and has stressed basing its relations on openness, respect, and equality.¹⁷ The Pacific Step-up strategy implemented by the Morrison government consists of many initiatives that build on its existing security and defense diplomacy, funding diplomatic presence, and the establishment of the Australian Infrastructural Financing Facility with an investment of AU\$2 billion for the Pacific Islands. Additionally, Australia is financing small and medium investments in the Pacific Islands with a budget of AU\$1 billion.¹⁸ Despite the expanded and speedy actions from the Australian end, the success of these strategies is yet to be seen.

Australia has become a target for Chinese aggression since Australia emphasized the need for and the importance of conducting an independent inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.¹⁹ China, which has been Australia's major trading partner, accounts for trade equivalent to 7 percent of the Australian gross domestic product (GDP) and 36 percent of total exports. Apart from this, Australia has the second-highest number of Chinese students enrolled in its education system in the world. Chinese tourists account for 27 percent of international tourist expenditure. Thus, Australia is economically vulnerable to Chinese aggression.

Beijing has been retaliating against those countries that oppose China on issues in the South China Sea (China imposed a ban on banana exports from the Philippines in 2012) and East China Sea (China banned the exports of Chinese rare earth elements to Japan and imposed unofficial sanctions on South Korea for the deployment of an antiballistic missiles system, THAAD, in 2017). Chinese economic aggressiveness against the United States is seen as they are engaged in a trade war—where in 2018 the United States imposed 25-percent tariffs on \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports. Australia is now facing Chinese economic aggressiveness. China has openly opposed the Australian government and imposed severe tariffs of 218 percent on Australian wine in 2020, which are likely to last for five years. Australia has taken this dispute to the World Trade Organization for resolution.²⁰ Australian wine exports to China have been valued at AU\$1.1 billion but have dropped drastically since the imposition of the tariffs. Apart from this, China is pressuring the Australian government to revoke their anti-China policies and have additionally scrutinized Australian exports of iron ore and gas. Chinese ambassador to Australia Cheng Jingye implied that Chinese economic aggressiveness will be largely witnessed in the export of tourism, wine, beef, and education following Australia's inquiry call into the origins of COVID-19. The

Chinese public has also retaliated, and Australian exports are likely to be subjected to a boycott as well. The Chinese state-run media *Global Times* has opined that the cutoff of wine and beef imports will “make Australia pay for its arrogant attitudes.”²¹

Australia’s susceptibility to economic reprisal may be exaggerated, however. Australian trade to the world markets consists of fungible products, for which Australia can find new markets elsewhere. Restriction and scrutinization of iron ore trade from Australia is an act of self-harm for China, as Australian iron ore is extremely reliable and is exported at a lower cost when compared to other competitors. The demand for iron ore continues to grow in China due to its unending infrastructural projects. Similarly, restricted gas exports might be more detrimental to China than to Australia. However, this does not impede any short-term acts of reprisal. For instance, in 2019, stays were imposed on Australian coal by China, for reasons that were not articulated. It was presumed to be in response to the enactment of foreign interference laws by Australia in 2018. Replacing Australian exports of tourism and education (representing less than one percent of Australian GDP) is likely to happen.²² However, the prospective side effect of the deteriorating relationship with China and the coronavirus crisis will be a concerted effort in promoting market diversification—especially of universities and businesses whose intense levels of dependency on China have been uncovered.

AUKUS: A Silver Lining?

A newly formed trilateral security arrangement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—officially known as AUKUS—was signed into being on 15 September 2021. The question arises, how does this affect Australia’s role in the Quad? AUKUS is predominantly a military and technological advancement pact, encompassing mechanisms for Australia to procure nuclear-powered submarines, that clearly intensifies Australia’s deterrence capability amid the rising perils of Chinese naval power. The new set of scheduled meetings accentuates a growing urgency for the United States and its allies, who seek to reconstitute the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, minilateral security measures such as AUKUS fortify the relevance of the Quad and subsequently other minilateral arrangements within the Quad.

AUKUS has been panned by many who suggest that this new minilateral arrangement will usurp the importance of the Quad. However, in actuality, AUKUS is both pertinent and vital for the shared prosperity of the Quad. Why? Firstly, during its announcement, AUKUS leaders underlined the significance of continuing partnerships with members of the Quad, ASEAN, and other allies from Europe, with an unswerving stake converging against Chinese revisionism, thus ensuring a stable balance of power in the region. Secondly, AUKUS is founded on

the same ideals as that of the Quad—safeguarding freedom, shared prosperity, and abiding by the rule of law. Thirdly, the growing figure of minilateral engagements, all in some ways or the other designed at complementing each other with a comparable sense of purpose, brings more countries (Quad and non-Quad) under a related umbrella—to balance and deter China.

AUKUS presents an opportunity for diplomatic, political, and military cooperation with joint exercises periodically led by member nations to reinforce combat interoperability and to develop mechanisms to combat possible contingencies that transpire within the region. AUKUS, through a strong military factor with feasible procurement of nuclear-powered submarines, aims at deterring China and protecting the status quo.

Conclusion

From an Australian perspective, in the post-COVID world, the need to reconstruct supply chains and preserve the rules-based international order is high; the ties between the Quad nations must continue to strengthen. The bolstering of the Quad, before catering to militarization or institutionalism, must focus on building greater synergy between its domestic Indo-Pacific vision and the Quad vision—and ultimately establish a broader vision that encompasses the national interests of all countries to create a coherent, action-oriented, futuristic multilateral institution. ★

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Seize the Data Initiative

LT COL RICK SCHUESSLER, USAF

Flexibility is the key to airpower.

—General Giulio Douhet

While General Douhet's observation remains a key tenant of airpower today, superiority in modern warfare requires increasingly complex, data-centric approaches to enhance the decision cycle and amplify the inherent flexibility of airpower. Furthermore, airpower is not alone in this challenge—as the flexibility of a vast number of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic applications are underpinned and enhanced by timely, accurate, and comprehensive data. Therefore, it is no longer adequate for organizations to only look internally when designing improved organization, analytic, distribution, and collaboration data tools or data strategies. Instead, to seize the data initiative and maintain the asymmetric advantages America has enjoyed in past, the United States must develop a holistic approach to data that improves the precision, timeliness, and convergence effects of US, ally, and partner instruments of national power. The technological advancements of the past decades have resulted in incredibly deep data lakes that hold opportunities to deter malicious actions through detection, attribution, and cost imposition. Connecting these data lakes to better cut through the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments of conflict will continue to ensure peace through decision superiority and, ultimately, strength. To that end, this article is intended to provide some historical context for the importance of connecting data, current progress within the Department of Defense, and a vision for future data imperatives.

Historical Context

Discrete, disparate, and fragile information systems have been at the root of too many catastrophic failures throughout history. One of these examples had the potential to change the course of World War II and stresses the importance of data integration and interoperability as key advantages with our allies and partners. On 10 May 1940, German forces swept through France in less than six weeks, culminating in the occupation of France. Despite reports and data indicating otherwise, French Army general Maurice Gamelin expected the German forces to attack through Belgium instead of through the wooded areas of the Ardennes and Sedan.¹ German historian Karl-Heinz Frieser later affirmed, “The air forces of the allies were presented with a unique opportunity on a silver platter

to smash a major portion of the German panzer force in the Ardennes but as if by a miracle, the German panzers were not bothered.”² If an interconnected data and intelligence system had existed at that time, the multisource data would have illuminated the actual German plan, and a game-changing opportunity could have been seized to alter the course of history.

Soon after the Battle of Sedan, the Japanese Naval Forces attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. This horrific attack left the United States stunned, having been dealt a significant blow to the US ability to wage war. However, much like the Sedan case, the buildup leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor presented multiple data and intelligence sources that—if compiled, analyzed, or fused—would have thwarted the Japanese attack. Instead, Pearl Harbor was dealt a significant blow, and tremendous fog and friction ensued at all command echelons, making command and control (C2) of the immediate attack nearly impossible. Decades later, similar shortcomings in intelligence sharing resulted in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. This led to clear recommendations from the 9/11 Commission that we must do better. Included in its report were five lines of effort that call for unification of counterterrorism agencies and efforts as well as the following critical observation, “The U.S. government has access to a vast amount of information. But it has a weak system for processing and using what it has. The system of ‘need to know’ should be replaced by a system of ‘need to share.’”³

Despite our past failures and the 9/11 Commission’s recommendations, our situation today has not drastically improved. We continue to face challenges regarding data sharing, and technological advancements have complicated the decision space through super-saturated, data environments. Contextually, estimates approximate the amount of data stored by 2020 at 40 trillion gigabytes (40 zettabytes), with Internet users generating 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day.⁴ The average Internet user spends 33 percent of their online time engaged in social media,⁵ and Twitter users average more than half a million tweets per minute.⁶ Described another way, at current download speeds, it would take a single person approximately 181 million years to download the entire Internet.⁷ The existence of such large data repositories provides both opportunities and vulnerabilities to any population. Our adversaries are designing government and civilian organizations and systems to weaponize this data for exploitation across all their elements of national power. The cybersecurity firm FireEye, along with Google’s Threat Analysis Group and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, for example, has been tracking hundreds of artificial social network accounts designed for pro-People’s Republic of China (PRC) influence.⁸ These accounts have attempted to discredit prodemocracy movements and are known to cover more than seven languages.⁹ Furthermore, the Department of Defense (DOD) assesses China is moving from an “informationized” warfare and to “intelligentized” warfare.¹⁰ Toward this

objective, China is developing advanced capabilities in “artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big-data analytics, quantum information and unmanned systems.”¹¹ The United States and its allies must build capabilities to detect, counter, and, if necessary, defeat these increasingly advanced systems to credibly deter coercion and aggression.

Current Progress within the Department of Defense

A strategist should think in terms of paralyzing, not of killing.

—Basil Liddell Hart

By sowing division, increasing the number antiaccess and area denial capabilities, and stealing intellectual property, we know the PRC is attempting to paralyze those who intend to maintain the rules-based international order and a free and open Indo-Pacific. To remain agile, the US Indo-Pacific Command is working on technological advancements that will create advantage by enabling operations inside an adversary’s decision loop. Success in this arena will be contingent on the ability to sense, make sense, decide, and act across multiple domains and in concert with allies and partners. Synchronizing these operations in a contested, degraded environment presents additional challenges. Recognizing those challenges, on 5 May 2021, the United States Deputy Secretary of Defense defined DOD data as a strategic asset and tasked all DOD leaders with ensuring data is “visible, accessible, understandable, linked, trustworthy, interoperable, and secure.”¹² Furthermore, the DOD defined five data decrees:

1. “Maximize data sharing and rights for data use: all DoD data is an enterprise resource.”¹³
2. “Publish data assets in the DoD federated data catalog along with common interface specifications.”¹⁴
3. “Use automated data interfaces that are externally accessible and machine-readable; ensure interfaces use industry-standard, non-proprietary, preferably open-source, technologies, protocols, and payloads.”¹⁵
4. “Store data in a manner that is platform and environment-agnostic, uncoupled from hardware or software dependencies.”¹⁶
5. “Implement industry best practices for secure authentication, access management, encryption, monitoring, and protection of data at rest, in transit, and in use.”¹⁷

These decrees are designed to move beyond segmented systems and toward a culture of data standardization and sharing. These are necessary steps to set the foundation, formalize, and frame the data architecture toward a Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) solution. Currently, the services have primarily focused on individual service-specific requirements as their contributions to the

overall JADC2 effort. These service programs include the Advanced Battle Management System (USAF), Project Overmatch (Navy), and Project Convergence (Army). Recognizing a greater need for collaboration, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown and Army Chief of Staff GEN James McConville recently signed a memorandum of understanding to work toward the JADC2 solution while acknowledging the final design must include allies and partners.¹⁸

The United States is overmatched in labor-intensive systems and is also at risk of losing the advantage in capital and technological superiority. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and quantum computing will be critical enablers for both JADC2 and maintaining a competitive advantage into the future. One example of a program that must continue to be replicated was the successful “confluence of warfighter, developer, and acquirer.”¹⁹ This type of collaboration between academia, industry, and the Air Force successfully integrated AI as a copilot on a U-2 aircraft.²⁰ Partnerships such as these must continue to grow to innovate at a speed and scale that matches the dynamic threat landscape. It is also critical to recognize that these advancements have data beginnings. Organizing, labeling, and sharing data now can reduce timelines for future innovation by getting that data in the hands of the war fighter to design, experiment, and integrate. Deterrence and competition will also necessitate more efficient and effective data protection. All technologies must be better protected in development, and that starts with ingesting reliable and secure data. The United States cannot continue to fund the enormous research-and-development costs of significant technological advancements only to have them stolen, rendered obsolete, or replicated for a fraction of the cost.²¹ Protecting this data and information in development is essential to our ability to defend ourselves, as well as our allies and partners. The United States must ensure all design efforts are adequately protected against data theft, corruption, and manipulation. The stovepiped or air-gapped solutions of the past are no longer adequate.

In addition to C2 advances, there are many new technologies on the horizon with the potential to increase our deterrence effectiveness by detection and, subsequently, by denial. These technologies will increase our ability to sense, plan, decide, and act across all domains. As an example, the Next-Generation Air Dominance program is reported to have implemented cutting-edge advanced manufacturing and digital design techniques to create a networked platform developed with reduced costs and increased interoperability.²² Moreover, in the integrated air-and-missile defense arena, the hypervelocity gun weapon system is demonstrating capability against a wide range of air threats at a significantly reduced cost per shot when compared to existing contemporary missile defense systems.²³ Integration into the Army’s Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System promises to enhance area air defense and protection of critical

assets. Furthermore, remotely piloted aircraft continue to advance their roles and prove resiliency with advancements in survivability, agility, data collection, on-board processing capability, AI integration, and air domain awareness. These are a few of the future tools and countermeasures that, if properly integrated, will promote deterrence through redundancy, multisource validation, self-healing network capabilities, and a layered defense.

Vision for Future Data Imperatives

Having a strategy suggests an ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential, to address causes rather than symptoms.

—Lawrence Freedman

Toward this outcome, JADC2 is a desired future state—but not the end state; the journey but not the destination. Due to the amount of data available and limits of human manpower and processing capability, we must build future technology as interconnected pieces of a larger network that ensures interoperability with not only joint and combined forces but also other whole-of-government and industry partners. This requires a common architecture, whole-of-government approach, and a coalition strategy toward information that includes assessment capabilities and a breakdown of the political, physical, and policy barriers to implementation. This concept is an expansion of the current JADC2 concept and goes beyond service components to create integrated deterrence through the entanglement of all instruments of national powers of nations interested in maintaining a rules-based international order.

From a military perspective, ingesting and disseminating nontraditional data sources will be critical in developing strategy and assessing performance and effectiveness in an increasingly expanding role of countering and deterring operations below the level of armed conflict. Autonomously disseminating evidence of sanction, international law, or border violations through industry, military, government, and coalition networks using AI and zero-trust networks to rapidly converge and coordinate effects is just one example of how this new network could aid maneuvers inside an adversary's decision loop. Coordinating humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities between partner nations and government agencies is another example of where rapid data analysis, augmented or automated decision cycles, and information dissemination could help achieve objectives and save lives. For consideration and design of such a system, the Bretton Woods conference provides a useful model from the past. Readjusted to today's global landscape and focused on peace and stability through conventional deterrence by the convergence of effects across combined national instruments of power.

Conclusion

Creating scalable, integrated networks with adaptive, resilient, and collaborative properties is the key to covering the gaps and seams of our decision loops and to deterring conflict by convincing our adversaries that achieving their objectives by force is not possible. This is the change that will enable the United States and its allies to remain a potent force for freedom across all phases of conflict for decades to come. Technology has accelerated the rate of change for the world, and the US military must keep pace to guarantee it remains relevant in a shifting landscape. Ensuring future investments are networked, adaptable, resilient, overlapping, and secure will create opportunities where discrete and rigid systems break down. Connecting large data lakes to underpin deterrence, to make C2 more resilient, and to bridge partner nations and government agencies will take a strategic approach to data collection and data sharing that will push boundaries. Empowering our people to design, build, implement, and adjust these new capabilities and discover innovative ways to accomplish the mission will be critical. AI, ML, and quantum computing must be employed to complement our strengths and reinforce our weaknesses, to cut through the fog and friction, and to enable our greatest assets—our people—to remain flexible, agile, and inside the enemy’s decision-making process. The race to that future is upon us; ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific will depend on our success. 🌟

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Direct Military Conflict with China May Not Happen—and Why There Are Worse Outcomes

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The “Thucydides’ Trap,” a phrase coined by Graham Allison, is the dangerous dynamic between a rising power that threatens to displace a hegemonic power. Thucydides originally wrote about the Peloponnesian War between the Athens, the rising power, and Sparta, the hegemonic power. As Athens continued expanding its empire, Sparta became afraid for its independence and position. The war became inevitable once fear was so deeply instilled in Sparta. With China being a rising power and the United States being a current hegemonic power, it seems that war could be a high possibility. If media outlets keep spreading misinformation or twisting facts, a fear may be deeply instilled in either country, leading to war involving direct military conflict.¹ However, in Ancient Greece warfare was done by direct military conflict. They did not conduct cyberattacks, have nuclear weapons, or other means short of war that may not be as personal as bombs leveling buildings or killing individuals but could potentially hurt a nation even more. These types of attacks—not involving direct military conflict—are what China is better suited to conduct war over.

Direct military conflict with China may not happen, but we must be ready and prepared for it and other types of warfare with China. In 2000, China increased its military budget by more than 1,000 percent; whereas, the US military budget only increased by 230 percent during the same period.² In 2012, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) acquired its first aircraft carrier. China now has two aircraft carriers with a third nearing completion.³ However, a few aircraft carriers are not enough to command complete power. In 2013, China began construction of an artificial island in the South China Sea, nicknamed “The Great Wall of Sand” by former United States Pacific Commander (USPACOM) ADM Harry Harris.⁴ Beijing’s intention was to create a military base with airfields, and in that it was successful. The expansions that China has achieved with its military, specifically the PLAN, represents a large part of the rising tensions between the United States and China.

These developments are tied with China’s national defense industry. In 2018, Beijing unveiled the Chinese-made DF-26, an intermediate-range ballistic missile that has a 1,553-mile range—capable of striking Guam. The press has

nicknamed this missile “The Carrier Killer.” The DF-26 also comes down vertically, making it difficult to counter the attack.⁵ China’s advanced missile technology is not meant to take down a Raptor or a Viper in air-to-air combat. Instead, these weapons would be used to target US and allied bases where aircraft and naval assets reside. Despite the significant developments to its weapons systems and the rapid growth of its national defense industry, China is unlikely to use these weapons against the West. China’s motivation for these weapons systems is antiaccess and area denial (A2AD), making it extremely difficult for Western powers to get anywhere close to China. Again, China’s motivation for these weapons systems is not to wage a war against Western powers but to deter such powers from interfering with China’s master plan to “reunite” China.

While China has one of the oldest cultures in the world, the country of China is relatively new. However, Chinese leaders view modern-day China as a continuation of the Middle Kingdom, which has a long history during which its borders changed multiple times. From this long history many different peoples were under Chinese rule and eventually emerged as their own countries—such as Vietnam and Taiwan. Today, the irredentist Chinese Communist Party looks to “reclaim” these lands, which it views as rightfully belonging to China. Naturally, this has led to many border disputes. Tensions have been rising along many of China’s borders, especially with India, whose border conflicts with China has resulted in numerous casualties.⁶ Beyond its land borders, off China’s coast, there are many territorial disputes. Nearby countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam are locked in the conflict whether they want to be or not. China’s motivation for most of these issues stems from historical territorial claims where China at some point claims to have had control.⁷ However, just because China had control at one point does not justify authoritarian rule now. In recent years, as China has tried bullying their neighbors into submission, the US Navy has been deploying aircraft carriers to patrol these waters.⁸ Simply put, China is growing and so is its reach, but the United States and other countries have taken notice of this quick and massive growth.

With China growing in power and influence, how long can its rapid growth go unchallenged by Western powers? How long can influence be sustained when integrity is left out of the equation? China has been targeting its neighbors and increasing conflict with these countries. This would serve as leverage against Beijing if China was to ever engage in direct military conflict with a Western power. For example, Japan and Australia have long been allies of the United States, and many other countries—Taiwan and India included—are furthering their relationships with the United States considering recent Chinese attempts at expansion.

The recent cooperation in the Indo-Pacific theater is illustrated by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) activities in the region. In addition, the United States

has recently signed multiple foundational agreements with India, including a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018, and the Industrial Security Agreement (ISA) summit that was recently held between 27 September to 1 October.⁹ The way China has used its growth may be its downfall. Simply put, if Beijing was to incite a war, there is a possibility that the countries it tried to bully into submission would team up against China.

This is not to say that China does not have allies, but, if history informs us, these relationships are unreliable. Take into consideration the relationship between China and Russia. In a meeting in Moscow, Chinese leader Xi Jinping called Russian president Vladimir Putin his “best friend.”¹⁰ Despite this claim, China continues growing its influence in former Soviet Republics, while Russia provides military arms to Vietnam and India.¹¹ Such relationships exist, but they are not rooted in loyalty or cooperation, since they deal arms to the other’s enemy. This is not the only example either. North Korea, a long-time Chinese ally, is too reckless and unreliable with its nuclear and ballistic missiles threats, which has forced China to sponsor UN sanctions on its ally in Pyongyang.¹²

Mentioning North Korea also brings up the topic of nuclear weapons, which are an even more lethal way countries could attack each other and carry global ramification. One could argue that the biggest reason a war should be avoided at all costs is that both sides have access to ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. To wreak devastation with nuclear weapons, a country does not need all its nuclear supply. Moreover, with ballistic missiles, China could shoot down satellites from space. Also, China has not participated in nuclear arms talks with the United States or Russia to reduce the number of nuclear weapons.¹³ It may be worth mentioning, the first country to utilize its nuclear weapons would essentially be putting a flag in the air that reads “we are willing to destroy everything in order to win this.” A conflict that involves nuclear weapons is a conflict no one in the world will stay out of and one with many implications.

If the whole world gets involved and direct military conflict between China and the United States is avoided does that mean we are free from consequences? Frequent news articles and headlines related to China are fomenting fear within our already divided country. Perhaps, there are some fates, such as a cold war, which are worse than direct military conflict. Bombs, missiles, and tanks would cause damage to infrastructure but nothing that could not be rebuilt. An ideological war plants seeds of fear and destroys friendships, security alliances, and economic relationships.

For instance, despite all the talks about China as a physical threat, the US–China trade war is still happening despite COVID and its shutdowns. China’s business and economic relationships have grown to be the second-largest and are

on pace to surpass those of the United States.¹⁴ The United States' and China's economies, when combined, make up for more than one-third of the world's gross domestic product in both nominal and purchasing power parity.¹⁵ We have already seen devastating effects on the global economy from the US–China trade war. Goods and services trading have declined between the two countries, and the global supply chain has been rocked.¹⁶ Both countries are already trying to become less dependent on each other and working to become more independent by growing industries where the two countries are not intertwined.¹⁷ When that does not work, outright bans of certain companies could take place.

China has been restrictive and has even banned numerous American companies, for example Facebook and Google, to retain control of what its citizens consume and learn. The United States is doing much of the same now, banning Chinese companies such as Huawei. Part of the government control over Huawei is the high likelihood of Huawei technology being used for spying.¹⁸ Between these actions and a trade war, the United States and China are in what seems to be a cold war. The extent of how long this cold war type conflict will manifest will continue is not certain, but the fear of the potential for a different conflict grows every day. With no true allies and many enemies, any invasion China might commit would trigger numerous countries to become involved. It is unlikely that China could handle these many adversaries at one time.

Between having too many enemies to fight and developing its military technology toward deterring enemies instead of engaging and destroying them, China is unlikely to engage in direct military action with the West. It is also unlikely the West would start a war with China unless it is forced into war by one of its alliance commitments in the Indo-Pacific region. While nuclear weapons will always be in the back of everyone's mind, most conflicts are secondary to economic issues such as power, controlling valuable resources, money, or other types of warfare such as cyberattacks that can shut down banks and hospitals. ☸

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