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AFFAIRS



# JIPA

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# Peace, Prosperity, Planet, People

## A New Chapter in US–India Relations

AMBASSADOR ERIC GARCETTI

Good afternoon. It's great to be here with you today. I'd like to thank IIT Director Professor Rangan Bannerjee and Dean of International Relations Professor James Gomes for hosting us here today at an institution which so embodies our hopes for future generations.

I'd also like to express my appreciation to the Asia Society Policy Institute, and the esteemed Dr. C Raja Mohan, for co-organizing this event.

I just returned to India yesterday from the United States, where I had the honor to participate in the official state visit of Prime Minister Modi to the United States and was privileged to witness something truly remarkable.

I'd like to tell you what I saw.

I saw an incredible celebration of the bond between the world's two great democracies. As President Biden so clearly heralded, I saw a celebration of the "defining partnership of this century."

I saw an unequivocal recognition, as Prime Minister Modi so eloquently said, that "the scope of our cooperation is endless, and the chemistry of our relations is effortless."

I saw the personal rapport between President Biden and Prime Minister Modi.

I saw the power of transformative friendship.

In sum, I saw history being made and our future framed.

There can be high expectations when US and Indian leaders come face to face. A visit can be full of good intentions and generate plenty of warm feelings, but will it yield concrete results that actually help our peoples and advance our relationship?

For this visit, the answer is a resounding "yes." Not only was there natural friendship and real partnership, I was also struck by the depth and breadth of the truly important initiatives announced, demonstrating once again how India and the United States are collaborating on nearly every human endeavor. The projects we're initiating will change the world.

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The text was delivered as a speech at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi), New Delhi, 28 June 2023.



The celebration was real. And from the White House to the Capitol, the American government, across party lines, congressional houses, and the different branches of government all brought a fantastic celebration.

From the welcome-filled with pomp and American tradition, to the Indian--inspired menus that incorporated millet touches—

From the thoughtful gifts to PM Modi's stirring speech before Congress—

From the groundswell of pride among Indian-Americans who saw that their place in the US-India story was so appreciated, to the graciousness of the Prime Minister and the Indian delegation—

It was all so very memorable.

One of my favorite images was seeing Anchal Sharma, one of IIT Delhi's own students and currently a Fulbright scholar at MIT—share the stage with the Prime Minister and First Lady Jill Biden. Anchal is drawing on her superb Indian and US educational opportunities to advance her work in assistive technology, which in turn will benefit so many. Anchal is an inspiration, and a testament to what's possible when the US and India come together: A future of boundless possibility. In Prime Minister Modi's words, a future where “the potential of our synergies is limitless.”

After such an amazing, auspicious, hope filled week, and as I return now to India to help lead our work together, I'm propelled by a fundamental realization. It's the recognition that translating our incredible *potential* together into an incredible *reality* comes down to how much confidence our countries have in each other, and in our shared vision.

That's why I'd like to underscore my remarks today with a simple Hindi phrase: *Sapne sakar karna*.

*Sapne sakar karna*. Making dreams into reality.

I'm a big fan of that idea. As many here may know, I'm from California. And California is a place where people dream big and big dreams come to life.

From the Hollywood director who transformed a story of cross-cultural discovery set across the stars into *Avatar*, the highest-grossing movie of all time; to Astrolab, the California startup company that reimagined all-terrain travel to help astronauts move across the surface of the moon; to the city of Los Angeles—my hometown—which will soon realize its dream of uniting the world through sports when the city hosts for a third time the Olympic Games, and for the first time the Paralympic Games, in 2028.

Globally, just like Los Angeles, the United States has shown time and again that through imagination, great spirit and hard work, dreams can come true.

But I don't need to convince anyone here of this. India is also a place where dreams become reality every day.

After all, in India a young boy selling tea grew up to lead his country on the global stage.

In India, a Santali teacher rose to become President of her country.

Today, India is improving lives and pulling people out of poverty through its transformative technology.

Our countries have so much in common because the Indian dream and the American dream are two sides of the same coin— we share the same vision. Our people want to achieve success for our communities and our families. We embrace possibility, new opportunities, new knowledge, and the chance to make a difference. We want to leave the world better-off and more secure than we found it—not just for ourselves and our own countries, but for everyone.

Our connection is very personal, based on affinity and friendship. We're linked by a diaspora community more than four-million strong. Through educational and business connections, and an appreciation for each other's cultures, our friendship grows along with our shared experience and shared ambitions.

We can see the results of this friendship in every aspect of our relationship. I'd like to share a few statistics that reflect just how close we are:

- Last year, one out of every five US student visas issued worldwide went to an Indian student, and over 200,000 Indians are studying in the United States.
- The United States is India's largest trading partner, with more than \$191 billion dollars in two-way trade.
- India conducts more military exercises with the United States than it does with any other country.
- More than 450 Indian nationals work at the US National Institutes of Health intramural laboratories—the highest number of biomedical scientists from any Asian country currently at NIH.
- In the United States, more than 20 elected and appointed government officials proudly claim Indian heritage. Of course, this includes our Vice President, Kamala Harris.
- Indian-origin CEOs head many of the United States' largest and most iconic companies, such as Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, Starbucks, and Adobe. In fact, more than 10 percent of Fortune 500 company CEOs are of Indian ancestry.
- Within the past six months, five members of the US Cabinet—President Biden's closest government advisors—visited India to meet with their counterparts, and more visits are planned.

The Prime Minister's official state visit crystallized that our partnership is accelerating at breathtaking speed and is having undeniable impact.

This raises an interesting challenge. In so many areas, we're cooperating more closely than some ever imagined we could. So, what do we do when our partnership's achievement outstrips our earlier expectations?

Of course, this is a good challenge to have. And, luckily, there's a simple answer.

We reframe our vision. We reset the moment. We dream an even more ambitious reality. And then we make it real.

In Hollywood—the land of the sequel—the most crucial question is always “what happens next?”

So today, distinguished guests and colleagues, that's my question to you: When it comes to the US and India, what happens next?

How do we frame a new vision, one that recognizes past achievements and builds on our longstanding values to create a better future?

How do we prioritize new starts, and invest in new opportunities?

How will we accommodate difference, even as our friendship becomes closer?

For us to prosper further, how do we transform old patterns and systems, even cynicism, to new awareness, and swap out worn stereotypes for more enlightened understanding and more accelerated action?

After all, the world isn't the same place it was—if these past three years have shown us anything, it's that our world can change overnight. And while we've made it through to the other side of the pandemic, we are painfully aware of our global vulnerability.

Today, global supply chains feel more brittle; our security and national borders can't be taken for granted, our planet cries out for relief, and fundamental values—democracy, freedom, and rule of law—feel under attack.

So how can the United States and India translate our dreams into a more peaceful, secure, and prosperous future for all our peoples?

I have a few ideas, based on one fundamental fact: the United States and India are better off, and we produce better results, when we work together.

... for Peace.

... for Prosperity

... for the Planet.

And ultimately, for People: the People of India, the People of the United States ... and for the peoples of the whole world.

### ***Let's talk about ensuring the peace.***

When Prime Minister Modi said that “today's era is not an era of war,” it caught the ears of the entire world.



What a powerful idea. What a *necessary* idea. And President Biden has spoken about this moment being “an inflection point.”

Of course, lasting peace isn’t something that just happens; it has to be carefully built and nurtured.

Luckily, the United States and India have the power to set an example and build a more peaceful world, in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

A key component of peace is protection. As we’ve unfortunately seen over the past three years, we live in a world in which countries ignore sovereign borders, advancing their claims through violence and destruction.

This is not the world we want. This is not the world we need.

Together, India and the United States of America can build a bulwark against this “might makes right” mentality. Working together, the world’s two largest democracies can bolster the security, stability, and prosperity of the entire world.

Our countries already do so much together to ensure the peace.

Our troops conduct joint training and operations from the mountains of Alaska to the Red Sea.

Our forces are friends, thanks to our strong tradition of exchanges at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Our countries’ defense industries are increasingly connected. In fact, components made here in India already keep US Apache helicopters and C-130 transport aircraft in the sky.

And soon, we’ll see advanced jet engines made here in India as well.

So, what happens next?

During their discussions last week in Washington D.C., our leaders pledged to accelerate our momentum through building together and working together.

Let’s start with building together. This is important. When the US and India work together to coproduce military equipment, we create a state-of-the-art system at a sustainable cost and with resilient supply chains for India, the United States, and our partners.

The announcements made during Prime Minister Modi’s official state visit set a marker and highlighted incredible potential.

Through the co-production work that is already happening in airframes and engineering, and the planned work in aeroengines, artillery, and ground vehicles, to name just a few, we are poised to further deepen co-production and tackle new opportunities—some that we can’t even imagine today.

Now let’s talk about working together.

Our partnership is anchored in the common values we cherish—freedom; respect for sovereignty and for all humankind. In turn, our partnership can anchor the region and deliver benefits on a massive scale.

I hope soon we'll see the United States and India working together across the Pacific and into the Atlantic, from Central Asia to Southern Africa.

We can stand together against those who would upend the common good for their own benefit.

We can stand together for choice, resisting coercion.

We can stand together as a force for stability to avert regional and global crises.

We can deploy our ships together in the Pacific and Indian oceans, and even beyond, to ensure maritime security.

We can employ our air forces across the Indo-Pacific region to ensure freedom of the skies and the seas, and to jointly respond to humanitarian crises from the Sahara to the Pacific Islands.

We can coordinate our land-force exercises across regions to bolster the sovereign defense of all countries who want to work with us. These are opportunities fully within our control as Major Defense Partners.

We have so much momentum to build from. Last week we saw a bipartisan effort to introduce legislation in both chambers of US Congress to fast-track our engagement and expand our security cooperation.

Like any other skill, it takes practice and trust. We need to institutionalize trust by increasing our human interaction, communication, and interoperability between our forces. And as we master interoperability on the land, sea, and air, we can advance our partnership in new frontiers, including outer space and cyberspace.

Our bold vision for building together and working together is already being realized.

Not just peace, the absence of war, but the active promotion of freedom “no sweeter word . . . no nobler goal . . . no higher aspiration,” than freedom. May we remind ourselves that we come together for more than preserving peace, but to work towards freedom.

If peace is the predicate, then prosperity is the purpose of our work. What lifts up our people is not just our efforts to keep them free from war, but also to keep them free from want, as we work better together, to build prosperity for all, including the most vulnerable.

Our countries have a long history of working miracles through economic empowerment. Now the time has come to engage on critical emerging technology to set the stage for the miracles of tomorrow.

Last year in Tokyo, President Biden and Prime Minister Modi framed an ambitious vision called the initiative for Critical and Emerging Technology—iCET for short.

They envisioned a US–India technology partnership that would connect us; that would protect us; and that would detect unseen threats that could do us harm—from the tiniest bacteria to massive cyberspace intrusions.

They imagined working together as democracies to build an open, accessible, and secure technology ecosystem for collaboration and innovation on tomorrow's leading technology: space, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and advanced wireless communications.

Last week, our leaders took this nascent vision and turbo-charged it.

As they announced, we're working towards human spaceflight cooperation, as partners under the Artemis Accords.

In the coming months and years, we'll see NASA and ISRO astronauts and scientists working, training, and exploring side-by side, honing our understanding of space and of the planet we call home.

We're deepening private sector cooperation on space and harmonizing our regulatory and licensing standards.

Our long partnership in public health continues to break new ground. We're using artificial intelligence to detect and treat cancer and deploying technologies to expand medical care access for more people.

Thanks to the great work of Dr. Pooja Mukul—who is with us here today—our countries' private sector engineers are partnering to provide mobility to individuals across the world who are most in need through prosthetic knee replacements that cost less than one hundred US dollars.

Dr. Mukul's work also stands as a clear example of the invaluable contributions that women working in STEM professions make to the prosperity of both our peoples. As we expand workforce participation and empower women across all sectors, we'll unleash the boundless potential of our economies.

And there's so much more to come.

As with all technology, true power comes from interoperability. Luckily, our shared experiences give the United States and India a tremendous base of interoperability to work from. As democracies, we believe that the design and use of technology should be informed by democratic values and respect for human rights.

Unfortunately, not everyone shares that vision. There are those who would prefer to use technology as an authoritarian weapon, to intimidate their neighbors and control their own citizens.

That's why we're diversifying and deepening our supply chains with trusted partners and reducing dependencies that put our peoples at risk.

In March, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal launched a partnership to make our semiconductor supply chains more resilient.

We saw the first fruits of these efforts last week, when Micron, Applied Materials, and LAM Research announced agreements to collaborate with India on semiconductors.

And just a few weeks ago, our leaders convened the inaugural meeting of the India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue, which focused on ways to facilitate access and trade in critical technologies, while maintaining necessary controls to prevent their misuse.

The Strategic Trade Dialogue is a crucial part of our technology vision, laying a secure foundation for us to collaborate and innovate on space, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and more.

On the US side, there's a revolutionary transition underway, to ease India's access to these critical technologies.

And, as founding members of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity—or IPEF—we can also work as partners to increase the prosperity and interoperability of the entire region.

IPEF connects the United States and India with twelve other partners across East and Southeast Asia to promote resiliency and economic opportunity.

Working together with our IPEF partners, the United States and India can increase the prosperity of our own people and create opportunities for the entire world.

And, together with Australia and Japan, our countries act together as a Quad to address the most pressing challenges across the Indo-Pacific region, from healthcare to maritime awareness to cybersecurity.

Last week, we put down our trade swords and forged them into plowshares, reducing tariffs on US agricultural products like almonds and apples while providing fewer barriers to Indian steel products.

As we begin to put old trade fights into the rear-view mirror, it is time for us to raise our ambitions in the coming months to tear down bureaucratic, administrative, and legislative hurdles and imagine future agreements that make the US-India economic relationship one of the most frictionless in the world.

But as we raise the standard of living in the US and so dramatically here in India, we face a threat to that prosperity, not only in our countries, but across the globe. This threat demands an equally bold agenda, so that:

***Together, we can do better for the planet.***

It's difficult to overstate the urgency of the challenge presented by climate change.

From floods to fires to typhoons and monsoons, extreme weather events cause incalculable damage to critical infrastructure that billions of people across the world use daily to access power, food, water, healthcare, and human connection.

Climate change undermines our security and causes serious economic disruptions—costing the global economy more than USD 2.2 trillion dollars in the last two years alone.

And climate change also takes lives, including the dozens of people who die during increasingly common and severe heat waves.

Without urgent action, climate change could push another 100 million people into poverty by 2030.

That's not the future we want.

As a global community, we need to cut our emissions of harmful gases. For the long-term health of the planet, this is an essential step.

Cities, as well as nations, can lead. As Mayor of Los Angeles—one of the founding cities of the Urban20—or U20—movement I joined with mayors from other G20 cities to set a global urban agenda, a movement I launched on-stage in Glasgow, speaking just after Prime Minister Modi.

Now, as Ambassador, I am so excited that India is hosting the sixth U20 cycle this year as part of its G20 presidency.

The G20 theme of “One Earth, One Family, One Future” recognizes how local action, partnered with global leadership, can drive lasting, positive change.

It's our city, town, and village residents, after all, who experience our economies at the ground level, as they start new businesses; search for new jobs; spend time stuck in traffic; and strive for clean air, water, and housing for their families.

Our citizens need the health and infrastructure investments they deserve. Those of you in Delhi, and India's other major cities, well appreciate this urgency. So how do we put this intention into action?

We must strive for integration—linking economic growth and environmental sustainability, urban density and green space, and diversity and social harmony.

Now is the time to harness technology to make our environmental agenda a reality. We must work better together to save our planet.

I'm happy to say our countries collaborate closely in this space, through our efforts in the India-led Solar Alliance, for example, and through US government support for groundbreaking companies like First Solar, in Tamil Nadu.

Last week, our leaders emphasized our shared vision to rapidly deploy clean energy at scale and highlighted our plans to accelerate cooperation in green hydrogen, offshore and onshore wind, and other emerging technologies. They underscored exploration to increase our minerals security cooperation to ensure we have the means and resources to advance our clean energy goals.

Our private industries are also working closely together.

As we speak, Boeing is working with the Indian Institute of Petroleum to develop sustainable aviation fuels from Indian feedstock.

As the climate crisis intensifies, we'll also need to engage the global community collectively.

India has led the way by forming the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. This year, the United States is joining India as co-chair.

Together, we're strengthening early warning systems for climate hazards, including access to real-time data; helping to take early action; and strengthening the capacity of institutions, communities, and governments to proactively address risk to reduce exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards.

Next, we need to come together to help leaders at the subnational level, in Indian states and local communities, who can lead and learn together with US and other global regions and cities how to best implement greener buildings, transportation networks, and electricity grids.

Together, we can and must adapt and build our resilience to safeguard our people, livelihoods, and infrastructure.

A safer, more prosperous, healthier planet are all the foundation of our work so our peoples can realize their fullest potential and dignity.

The US-India partnership is ultimately about personal relationships and building those very personal bridges that connect our societies.

When I came to India for the first time as a teenager—when I saw firsthand how connected we are to each other, despite differences in language, wealth, social status, and geography, it changed my life forever.

I've come back to this country every decade since then. I studied Hindi and learned the history and the cultures of the region.

I may not be Indian, but India is a big part of me and has helped shape who I am today.

I wonder: how many people in this room have had a similar connection to the United States through education, family, food, or American culture?

I'd guess quite a few.

Now multiply those feelings by four million—one for each member of the Indian American diaspora currently living in the United States.

*That's* the power of our people-to-people connection. It drives everything else we do.

My goal as Ambassador is to make these personal ties even stronger; to give as many people as possible, in both countries, the opportunity to have the same life-changing experience that I did. I see so many students in this room today. I am inspired by your dedication, and I want you to have every opportunity to realize your full potential.

Because the Indian diaspora in the United States is so strong and vibrant, Indians generally know the United States better than Americans know India.



And I think Americans are missing out. I'd also love to bring more Americans to India, to work, study, and visit.

When our countries' leaders announced the expansion of scholarships to encourage American students to come study in India, including under our joint Fulbright-Nehru Education Exchange Foundation, it laid a clear marker.

The US Department of State is also working with Indian academic institutions to develop compelling study-abroad programs with US colleges and universities.

We've established a new Joint Task Force linking the Association of American Universities and leading Indian institutions to expand research and university partnerships. We're working with the Government of India to help make it easier for US universities to expand their presence here in India, to create joint degree programs and foster joint research programs in STEM fields as well as upskilling opportunities through community colleges.

We are also thrilled that so many Indians want to experience the United States directly, to study, conduct business, see family and friends, and enjoy the many wonders of the United States. We would also like to see the numbers of Indians visiting the US grow.

It takes a lot of work and coordination to respond to the extraordinary interest in the US from India and we are striving to make the process of traveling to the US as efficient as possible.

Which brings us to visas—a popular topic, I know.

We want to eliminate the barriers that prevent qualified travelers from experiencing the United States. One way we get there is by expanding our operations.

We're already doing this. We're currently processing more visas, faster, than the US Mission in India ever has before. We set a goal for ourselves to process at least a million visas in 2023, and we're already more than halfway towards reaching that goal.

Our investments have brought real results, and we've seen wait times for first-time tourist visa interviews fall by more than 50 percent.

In the coming months, we'll continue to invest in expanding our visa operations and broadening our team. We'll find innovative solutions to streamline the visa process, such as reducing the need for in-person interviews, which allows consular teams around the world to assist in processing visas for the growing number of Indian travelers.

We are committed to ensuring that a whole new generation of Indian adventurers, entrepreneurs, and scholars can experience America.

And as was announced last week, in the coming years we'll see two new US consulates—in Bengaluru and Ahmedabad—added to the four already in India to further foster understanding and connection.

Of course, investing in people also means standing up for the rights of everyone, especially the marginalized and most vulnerable. The United States will continue to engage with Indians across the country, from all walks of life. India is a country of tremendous diversity, with different faiths, heritages, and experiences, and we celebrate this deeply syncretic culture that makes India so unique.

We will continue to engage on human rights issues, as we have always done, and as we do in all countries around the world.

This is an area that I approach with great humility—the United States continues to learn through hard experience how important it is to be honest about our challenges and confront them head on. As Mahatma Gandhi phrased it so well, “our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and test of our civilization.”

As Vice President Harris said last week, reflecting on the lessons her grandfather, who helped fight for India’s independence taught her, we must not only have democracy, but work to defend democracy. In America, we’re still not perfect, and the American experiment continues alongside the American dream.

I think the Indian dream is equally potent and challenging. But in the face of our domestic and international challenges, the idea of India and the United States dreaming and succeeding together are an unbeatable combination.

As we work together to invest in peace, invest in prosperity, and invest in our planet, to the benefit of our peoples, we’ll unlock the full potential of the US–India relationship.

Together, our countries can bring transformative solutions to some of our greatest challenges. Together, we can be a partnership for true good in the world. That’s my dream.

Today, and in the weeks and months ahead, I want to hear about your dreams for the US–India partnership, and how we can realize those dreams together.

*Sapne sakar karna.* 🌟

#### **Ambassador Eric Garcetti**

Eric Garcetti was designated as the US ambassador to India 15 March 2023. He previously served as the mayor of Los Angeles from 2013 to 2022. Garcetti, a former member of the Los Angeles City Council, was President of the Council from 2006 to 2012. He earned his BA and MA from Columbia University. He attended Oxford and the London School of Economics as a Rhodes Scholar and taught at Occidental College and the University of Southern California. He was a reserve officer in the US Navy for 12 years.

# US and European Energy Security amid Great-Power Competition

COL SHAWN M. WILLIS, USAF  
LT COL ANTHONY P. RIZZUTO, USSF  
DR. SVETLA BEN-ITZHAK

## Abstract

In response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Europe and the United States levied a series of economic sanctions, which prompted Moscow to retaliate by cutting Russia's natural gas supplies to Europe by 80 percent. This crisis not only affected Europe's energy security but also presented a threat to the US due to its close ties with its European allies. As a result, both Europe and the United States are expanding renewable energy sources to fully decouple from Russian energy supplies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, as they increase renewable energy production, they are at risk of becoming dependent on Chinese renewable energy equipment and materials supply chains. This article argues that to prevent energy from being weaponized by Russia or China, the United States and Europe must develop an independent renewable energy market. To achieve this goal, the article proposes specific strategies and measures that the United States and Europe could adopt to create an independent renewable energy market and avoid relying on external sources for their energy needs.

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Energy security is a crucial consideration for all nations, as it has a direct impact on a state's military might, its economic growth, and the well-being of its citizens.<sup>1</sup> The International Energy Agency defines energy security as "the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price."<sup>2</sup> Militaries, economies, and individual citizens depend on access to energy, and a state does not have freedom of action when other states control energy access and supply chains.

Europe relied heavily on Russia for meeting its energy demands before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In response to economic sanctions imposed by the European Union, United States, and United Kingdom in the aftermath of the invasion,<sup>3</sup> Russia weaponized its energy exports by cutting off natural gas supply

<sup>1</sup> Li-Chen Sim, "Russia's Impact on US National Interests: Ensuring Energy Security," *Russia Matters*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.russiamatters.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Energy Security," International Energy Agency, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Chad P. Bown, "Russia's war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline," Peterson Institute for *Realtime Economics* (blog), 14 March 2022, <https://www.piie.com/>.

to Europe by 80 percent, thereby posing a threat to European energy security.<sup>4</sup> Although European countries found alternative energy suppliers, the prices were significantly higher.<sup>5</sup> In March 2022, shortly after the invasion, the United States also banned all imports of Russian oil, liquified natural gas (LNG), and coal.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, Europe and the United States are increasing their capacity for renewable energy production to eliminate their dependence on Russian energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, the transition to renewable energy has created a new energy dependence since China controls most renewable energy equipment production and material supply chains.

The 2022 US *National Security Strategy* (NSS) emphasizes that “Europe has been, and will continue to be, our foundational partner in addressing the full range of global challenges.”<sup>7</sup> The close ties between the United States and Europe imply that security issues for European states also pose security challenges for the United States. As a result, ensuring long-term energy independence for both the United States and Europe is crucial. To achieve this goal, the United States and Europe should expedite the expansion of renewable energy-generation capacity and establish autonomous supply chains for vital renewable energy materials and equipment to avoid falling into a new energy dependence trap.

This article examines Europe’s historical dependence on Russian energy and current obstacles Europe faces in decoupling from Russian energy supplies. Additionally, the article presents an overview of current energy policies and long-term goals of both the United States and Europe to accelerate renewable energy growth. The article argues that while the United States and Europe aim to achieve energy security by expanding renewable energy sources, they may inadvertently become dependent on China, which currently controls most renewable energy materials and supply chains. To avoid such dependence, the article recommends specific policy solutions to ensure long-term energy independence for the United States and Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> Sam Meredith, “Russia has cut off gas supplies to Europe indefinitely. Here’s what you need to know,” *CNBC*, 6 September 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Reed, “Why Europe’s Electricity Prices Are Soaring,” *New York Times*, 25 August, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> “United States Bans Imports of Russian Oil, Liquefied Natural Gas, and Coal” (fact sheet: White House, Washington, DC, 8 March 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

<sup>7</sup> *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, October 2022), 38.

## **How Europe Became Addicted to Russian Oil and Subsequent Fallout**

Russia held a considerable economic influence over Europe prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as it accounted for approximately 33 percent of Europe's natural gas imports.<sup>8</sup> Certain European countries were particularly reliant on Russian gas. Poland, Finland, Slovakia, and Germany, which boasts the largest economy in Europe and significant fossil fuel consumption, imported a substantial portion of their gas exclusively from Russia.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Germany and Russia were on the verge of completing a second direct natural gas pipeline in 2022, which would have increased German gas imports from Russia to about 60 percent.<sup>10</sup> These Russian pipelines were strategically designed to export Russian oil to multiple European countries, granting Russia the capability to manipulate the flow of oil.<sup>11</sup> Given this setup, Moscow would have had the ability to curtail its supply of natural gas, leading to severe gas shortages, rationing, and industrial shutdowns, consequently inflicting significant economic damage.<sup>12</sup>

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, prompting many European countries to impose sanctions against Russia. In December 2022, the European Union and United Kingdom implemented a ban on Russian crude oil imports by sea, resulting in the elimination of approximately 90 percent of Russian oil imports.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, in February 2023, the European Union further prohibited the importation of all refined products derived from Russian oil, including jet fuel, gasoline, and diesel.<sup>14</sup>

To compensate for a reduction in Russian oil imports and to reduce their energy dependence, European countries swiftly sought alternative energy sources.<sup>15</sup> However, each country possessed a distinct power infrastructure mix, leading to varying

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<sup>8</sup> Reed, "Why Europe's Electricity Prices Are Soaring."

<sup>9</sup> Somesh Jha, "Which European nations are handling the energy crisis best?," *Al-Jazeera*, 20 December 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>; and Christiane Lemke and Helga A. Welsh, *Germany Today: Politics and Policies in a Changing World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 149.

<sup>10</sup> James Kirchick, *The End of Europe: Distactors, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Kirchick, *The End of Europe*, 88.

<sup>12</sup> "Energy crisis poses threat to Europe's industrial sector," United Nations, 2 December 2022, <https://www.un.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Horowitz, "The West just scrambled the oil market. What happens next is up to Russia," *CNN Business*, 5 December 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ayesha Rascoe and Jackie Northam, "The EU is cutting off imports of Russian oil products," *NPR*, 5 February 2023, <https://www.npr.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> Laurenz Gehrke, "Germany to Upgrade Two Ports 'Quickly' to Receive Shipped Gas," *Politico*, 27 February 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/>.

capabilities to respond and mitigate the loss of Russian energy.<sup>16</sup> For instance, France heavily relies on nuclear power, but due to maintenance-related shutdowns of several nuclear power plants, it was unable to meet the energy demand.<sup>17</sup> Germany—despite being the world’s third-leading country in renewable energy investment—lacked a robust renewable energy infrastructure that could adequately respond to surges in demand. While wind power constitutes a significant portion of Germany’s renewable energy sources, it is subject to natural forces and cannot be easily or automatically increased. In fact, European wind farms experienced lower wind levels in 2022 than anticipated, exacerbating the energy shortfall even before the onset of the energy crisis.<sup>18</sup> As a result, Germany’s primary non-green-energy alternative, coal, could be utilized to meet the increased demand, but factors like low river water levels hindered the prompt startup and resupply of coal plants.<sup>19</sup>

In the absence of sufficient energy alternatives within Europe, European countries resorted to foreign LNG suppliers as a substitute for the Russian natural gas they previously relied upon. However, their efforts were uncoordinated, leading to several challenges. The lack of a centralized energy market,<sup>20</sup> the increased costs associated with processing and transporting LNG compared to piped natural gas,<sup>21</sup> and varying energy pricing policies across EU countries contributed to a significant rise in overall energy expenses for consumers.<sup>22</sup>

While the decoupling of European countries from Russian gas triggered the 2022 energy crisis, several factors exacerbated the problem. These factors included the inability of renewable energy sources to scale up and meet the surge in demand, the absence of an interconnected LNG infrastructure across Europe,<sup>23</sup> challenges related to LNG shipping,<sup>24</sup> pressure on Europe to secure LNG for winter stockpiling,<sup>25</sup> the lack of a centralized energy market within the European

<sup>16</sup> Todd Gillespie, “Plunge in Wind Power Is Next Big Test for European Power Market,” *Bloomberg News*, 8 December 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Jeromin Zettelmeyer, Simone Tagliapietra, Geor Zachman, and Conall Heussaff, “Beating the European Energy Crisis,” International Monetary Fund Finance and Development, December 2022, <https://www.imf.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> Gillespie, “Plunge in Wind Power Is Next Big Test.” »

<sup>19</sup> Reed, “Why Europe’s Electricity Prices Are Soaring.”

<sup>20</sup> Lemke and Welsh, *Germany Today*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> “Why Nord Stream 2 is the world’s most controversial energy project; The Economist explains,” *The Economist*, 15 July 2021, <https://www.economist.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> Yana Popkostova, “Europe’s Energy Crisis Conundrum,” European Union Institute for Security Studies, 28 January 2022, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/>.

<sup>23</sup> Jha, “Which European nations are handling the energy crisis best?”

<sup>24</sup> Popkostova, “Europe’s Energy Crisis Conundrum.”

<sup>25</sup> Reed, “Why Europe’s Electricity Prices Are Soaring.”



Union, pricing policies linking electricity costs to fossil fuels prices,<sup>26</sup> and heightened global demand in the summer of 2022 following the relaxation of COVID-related restrictions.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the cost of natural gas in Europe reached an unprecedented peak in 2022, with prices ten times higher than the previous year.<sup>28</sup> Gas prices remain elevated in 2023, and if this trend persists, the International Monetary Fund estimates that European governments will need to allocate nearly 6 percent of their annual gross domestic product to mitigate energy costs.<sup>29</sup>

The energy crisis that unfolded in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Europe's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian gas imports underscores the complex balance between three key objectives in the European energy sector: (1) eradicating reliance on strategic competitors, such as Russia, who can exploit energy exports as a weapon, (2) ensuring affordable domestic energy supply, and (3) transitioning toward green energy to combat climate change.<sup>30</sup> The shift toward renewable energy sources not only reduces dependence on Russian energy but also contributes to greenhouse gas emission reduction. Moreover, renewable energy has the potential to lower consumer energy costs. According to the International Energy Agency, increased investments toward achieving net-zero emissions would result in lower average household energy costs in advanced economies by 2030 and 2050 compared to current levels.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that further development is required, as the renewable energy infrastructure in 2022 was inadequate to fully replace the energy previously supplied by Russian gas. The subsequent section explores the progress made by Europe and the United States in this regard, while also highlighting the remaining challenges that must be addressed.

### **Current EU and US Energy Policies**

Following the cessation of Russian gas imports by several countries in 2022, the European Union undertook various measures to mitigate energy costs. These included improving the interconnectivity of continental electrical grids to facilitate power sharing, pursuing multilateral LNG procurement contracts, revising EU energy market regulations to mitigate the impact of surge pricing, and exploring

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<sup>26</sup> Reed, "Why Europe's Electricity Prices Are Soaring."

<sup>27</sup> Popkostova, "Europe's Energy Crisis Conundrum."

<sup>28</sup> Reed, "Why Europe's Electricity Prices Are Soaring."

<sup>29</sup> Zettelmeyer, at al., "Beating the European Energy Crisis."

<sup>30</sup> Zettelmeyer, at al., "Beating the European Energy Crisis."

<sup>31</sup> "Prices and affordability," International Energy Association, 2021, <https://www.iea.org/>.

the possibility of establishing a unified energy market across the European Union.<sup>32</sup> In September 2022, EU member states reached an agreement to initiate energy consumption reduction efforts, impose revenue limits on electricity providers benefiting from high energy prices, collect financial contributions from fossil fuel providers, and provide direct monetary support to small- and medium-sized businesses to alleviate energy expenses.<sup>33</sup> In December 2022, the EU members also implemented policies to coordinate gas purchases, facilitate gas exchanges across international borders, and establish a common set of rules to regulate energy prices.<sup>34</sup>

Concurrently, the United States and European Union established a joint Task Force on Energy Security aimed at ensuring a stable supply of LNG from the United States to Europe and expediting the transition toward clean, renewable energy sources.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the US increased LNG exports to Europe by 141 percent in 2022 compared to the previous year.<sup>36</sup> However, apart from bolstering LNG supply to Europe, the US has yet to implement specific policies to support the EU's energy initiatives adopted in September and December 2022 (as discussed above). Currently, there exists an opportunity for the US to actively assist the EU in its energy initiatives, thereby enhancing EU energy independence, further reducing reliance on Russia, and strengthening US-European ties in line with the 2022 US *National Security Strategy* (NSS).

### **Renewables: Key to Energy Independence or to New Dependence on China?**

Increased collaborative investments in renewable energy between the United States and Europe hold the potential to completely eliminate long-term energy dependence on Russia. The growth of clean and renewable wind and solar

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<sup>32</sup> Conall Heussaf, et al., "An assessment of Europe's Options to Reduce Energy Prices," *Policy Contribution* 17/22, September 2022, 13 <https://www.bruegel.org/>; and Popkostova, "Europe's Energy Crisis Conundrum."

<sup>33</sup> Zettelmeyer, et al., "Beating the European Energy Crisis."

<sup>34</sup> "EU Energy Platform: Work advances on joint gas purchasing after legal proposal is agreed by Energy Ministers" (press release, European Commission, Brussels, 20 December 2022), <https://ec.europa.eu/>.

<sup>35</sup> "Joint Statement between the United States and the European Commission on European Energy Security" (press release, White House, Washington, DC, 25 March 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

<sup>36</sup> Victoria Zaretskaya, "Europe was the main destination for U.S. LNG exports in 2022," *Today in Energy*, 22 March 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/>.

energy has surpassed initial capacity projections and is expected to continue its upward trajectory.<sup>37</sup>

For instance, initial estimates in 2006 predicted that global solar photovoltaic energy would generate around 85 gigawatts in 2030. However, thanks to significant cost reductions and technological advancements, it is now anticipated that solar power will generate over 2,500 gigawatts of energy in 2030, surpassing the initial projections by 30 times. To put this into perspective, one gigawatt can power approximately 750,000 homes.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, wind capacity has also exceeded expectations. In 2006, it was projected that wind power would generate 400 gigawatts by 2030. However, the current estimates have increased fourfold, with the expected wind capacity reaching 1,600 gigawatts in 2030.<sup>39</sup> If these trends persist, nearly 60 percent of the world's electricity will come from renewable sources by 2035.<sup>40</sup> Embracing renewable energy aligns with the climate objectives of the United States and Europe to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>41</sup>

In 2022, President Joe Biden signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act, marking the most significant action taken by the US Congress to date in advancing clean energy development and combating climate change. This legislation allocated USD 370 billion for investments to “lower energy costs for families and small businesses, accelerate private investment in clean energy solutions in every sector of the economy and every corner of the country, strengthen supply chains for everything from critical minerals to efficient electric appliances, and create good-paying jobs and new economic opportunities for workers.”<sup>42</sup>

To ensure energy security for the United States and Europe, it is crucial for the Washington to engage in collaborative efforts with European countries as part of their renewable energy initiatives. However, the establishment and maintenance of renewable energy infrastructure often entail reliance on other nations for the pro-

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<sup>37</sup> McKinsey & Company, “Global Energy Perspective, 2022,” 26 April 2022. <https://www.mckinsey.com/>.

<sup>38</sup> AJ Dellinger, “Gigawatt: The solar energy term you should know about,” *CNET*, 16 November 2021, <https://www.cnet.com/>.

<sup>39</sup> Florian Heineke et al., “Renewable-energy development in a net-zero world,” McKinsey & Company, 28 October 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/>.

<sup>40</sup> “Global Energy Perspective 2022,” McKinsey & Company, 26 April 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/>.

<sup>41</sup> *The Long-Term Strategy of the United States: Pathways to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050* (Washington, DC: US Department of State and the US Executive Office of the President, November 2021), 5–6, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>; and “2030 Climate Target Plan,” European Commission, 2023, <https://climate.ec.europa.eu/>.

<sup>42</sup> *Inflation Reduction Act Guidebook* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022).

curement of necessary components and technologies.<sup>43</sup> In this context, China's dominance in critical renewable energy technologies, such as solar panel production and high-strength magnets for wind turbines, as well as control over critical material supply chains, grants Beijing significant influence over the growth of the renewable energy market. This presents the risk that as Europe endeavors to reduce its energy dependence on Russia by transitioning to renewable energy sources, it may inadvertently become reliant on China. Similarly, the United States faces the same challenge as it seeks to expand its renewable energy production.

### **Policy Recommendations on How to Achieve Energy Security**

To achieve energy independence, this article proposes several recommendations for the United States and its European allies to regain control over critical supply chains for renewable energy materials and production. These recommendations include:

1. **Reinvigorating domestic solar panel production:** The United States and Europe should prioritize the revitalization of domestic manufacturing capabilities for solar panels. By boosting domestic production, they can reduce reliance on foreign suppliers and ensure a stable and secure supply of solar panels.
2. **Establishing domestic supply chains for critical renewable energy materials:** Efforts should be made to establish domestic supply chains for critical materials used in renewable energy technologies. This would involve developing domestic sources or diversifying supply from reliable partners to reduce dependency on a single country, such as China.
3. **Expanding slower-growth renewable sources:** While wind and solar energy are growing rapidly, other slower-growth renewable sources should also be considered. This diversification can help mitigate risks and ensure a more balanced energy mix. Technologies like geothermal, biomass, and hydropower should be further explored and expanded.
4. **Increasing research investments to improve renewable energy technologies:** It is essential to invest in research and development to enhance the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and scalability of renewable energy technologies. By fostering innovation, the United States and Europe can accelerate the transition to cleaner energy sources and strengthen their competitive edge in the global renewable energy market.

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<sup>43</sup> Li-Chen Sim, "Russia's Impact on US National Interests: Ensuring Energy Security," *Russia Matters*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.russiamatters.org/>.

By implementing these recommendations, the United States and Europe can regain control over critical supply chains, reduce dependence on external sources, and achieve greater energy independence in the realm of renewable energy.

### ***The United States and Europe Must Reinvigorate Domestic Solar Panel Production***

By the end of 2021, China had established a dominant position in the global solar panel industry. More than 80 percent of solar cells and assembled solar panels were manufactured in China, and they produced nearly all the photovoltaic wafers used in solar panels.<sup>44</sup> The International Energy Agency highlights China's control over nearly every aspect of the raw materials and supply chain.<sup>45</sup> China holds more than 75 percent of polysilicon production, a critical material in current solar panel technology. This is in contrast to the past when polysilicon production was more evenly distributed among the United States, Europe, South Korea, Japan, and China in 2010.<sup>46</sup> However, by 2021, North America's share in the solar panel supply chain had diminished to just 2.8 percent, indicating a significant shift in global dynamics.<sup>47</sup>

While the US solar energy industry experienced substantial growth in 2021, its ability to sustain this expansion is uncertain due to its heavy reliance on equipment from foreign sources. To address this issue, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act allocated USD 425 million for clean energy initiatives, offering the potential to revitalize a domestic solar supply chain.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the clean energy initiative faces resistance from sectors tied to traditional industries such as US oil and gas production, as demonstrated by the introduction of a bill in Wyoming to phase out the sale of electric vehicles by 2035.<sup>49</sup> Such protectionist arguments have serious implications for US energy security.

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<sup>44</sup> "Special Report on Solar PV Global Supply Chains," International Energy Agency, July 2022, 7, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/>.

<sup>45</sup> "Solar PV Global Supply Chains Executive Summary," International Energy Agency, July 2022, <https://www.iea.org/>.

<sup>46</sup> Matt Blois, "The US solar industry has a supply problem," *Chemical and Engineering News* 100, no. 33 (18 September 2022), <https://cen.acs.org/>.

<sup>47</sup> Michelle Davis et al., "Solar Market Insight Report 2021 Q4," Solar Energy Industries Association, 14 December, 2021, <https://www.seia.org/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$425 Million to Expand State Clean Energy Programs," US Department of Energy, 26 August 2022, <https://www.energy.gov/>.

<sup>49</sup> "SJ0004 - Phasing out new electric vehicle sales by 2035," State of Wyoming Legislature, 2023, <https://wyoleg.gov/>.

Despite being a net energy exporter since 2019,<sup>50</sup> the United States cannot indefinitely rely on fossil fuels as global reserves of oil, natural gas, and coal are projected to be exhausted the next few decades.<sup>51</sup> To ensure energy security, the United States must expand domestic renewable energy sources before fossil fuel supplies are exhausted. China has positioned itself as a leader in the renewable energy sector, and now it is crucial for the United States and Europe to develop their own capabilities and reduce dependence on China for building their renewable energy infrastructure.

### ***The United States and Europe Must Establish Domestic Supply Chains for Critical Renewable Energy Materials***

China currently holds a dominant position in the global supply of key materials such as rare earth elements (REE), polysilicon, and lithium, which are vital for wind, solar, and battery technologies. Researchers indicated that China controls approximately 60 percent of global REE production<sup>52</sup> and 85 percent of global refined REE supply.<sup>53</sup> Such a large share of REE production and supply gives significant pricing power and influence of the global supply to Beijing's central planners, potentially impacting up to USD 1 trillion of trade.<sup>54</sup> An illustrative example of China's influence occurred in 2010 when it imposed an export ban on REE to Japan following a maritime incident near the Senkaku Islands, leading to a global surge in REE prices. The price of dysprosium oxide, a crucial material used in turbine magnets, experienced a staggering 1,500 percent increase.<sup>55</sup>

By leveraging its control of REE and other key material supply chains, China has positioned itself as the market leader in essential components for renewable energy technologies that rely on these materials. For example, China controls 90 percent of the rare earth magnet supply. This dominance extends to the specific

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<sup>50</sup> "U.S. energy facts explained," US Energy Information Administration, 10 June 2022, <https://www.eia.gov/>.

<sup>51</sup> Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser, and Pablo Rosado, "Years of fossil fuel reserves left," *Our World in Data*, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

<sup>52</sup> Michelle Michot Foss and Jacob Koelsch, "Of Chinese Behemoths: What China's Rare Earths Dominance Means for the US," Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, 19 December 2022, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ross Embleton and David Merriman, "Rare earth elements: frequently asked questions," Wood Mackenzie, 1 October 2022, <https://www.woodmac.com/>.

<sup>54</sup> Foss and Koelsch, "Of Chinese Behemoths."

<sup>55</sup> "China's Maritime Disputes," Council on Foreign Relations, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/>; Jan Dodd, "Rethinking the use of rare-earth elements," *Windpower Monthly*, 30 November 2018, <https://www.windpowermonthly.com/>; and Foss and Koelsch, "Of Chinese Behemoths."



magnets required for manufacturing electric vehicle motors and wind turbines.<sup>56</sup> The significance of REE extends beyond energy production and affects multiple US and European security technologies. For example, each F-35 stealth fighter contains 920 pounds of REE.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, China's control over REE not only poses a threat to the expansion of wind energy and electric vehicles in the United States but also raises concerns regarding the security of US defense production.

Similarly, China currently controls approximately 60 percent of the global lithium chemical supply<sup>58</sup> and produces about 75 percent of all lithium batteries.<sup>59</sup> These batteries are extensively used in the electric vehicle industry and play a crucial role in the transition to renewable energy for the United States and Europe. To mitigate China's dominance in REE and other critical materials, it is imperative for the United States to reestablish a domestic supply and processing chain for REE and to collaborate with European allies to develop domestic capabilities for other critical materials like lithium.

The United States has taken the first steps toward rebuilding US material supply chains. In March 2021, the US Department of Energy announced a USD 30 million plan aimed at securing domestic supply chains for REE, lithium, cobalt, and other materials.<sup>60</sup> Sustained and deliberate focus is vital to ensure each link in the supply chain is not reliant on China. An example highlighting the need for caution is MP Materials' Mountain Pass mine in California, which is the sole US REE mining and processing facility. It is worth noting that this facility is nearly 10-percent owned by the Chinese company Shenghe Resources,<sup>61</sup> and more than 94 percent of MP Materials' total revenue for the first three quarters of 2022 came from sales to Shenghe.<sup>62</sup> Without complete control over the supply chain between the United States and its European partners, Beijing will retain coercive power over the United States and Europe.

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Onstad, "China frictions steer electric automakers away from rare earth magnets," *Reuters*, 19 July 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

<sup>57</sup> Science History Institute, "The Case of Rare Earth Elements," *Science Matters*, 2020, <https://www.sciencehistory.org/>.

<sup>58</sup> "World Energy Outlook 2022," International Energy Agency, November 2022, 113, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/>.

<sup>59</sup> "Global Supply Chains of EV Batteries," International Energy Agency, July 2022, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/>.

<sup>60</sup> Samantha Subin, "The new U.S. plan to rival China and end cornering of market in rare earth metals," *CNBC*, 17 April 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/>.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Hui, "The West is rebuilding its rare earths supply chain—but China still looms large," *Quartz*, 25 November 2022, <https://qz.com/>.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Hui, "A US rare earths miner is staging a comeback to take on China," *Quartz*, 16 November 2020, <https://qz.com/>.

## ***The United States and Europe Must Expand Slower-Growth Renewable Energy Sources***

Other renewable energy sources—including hydroelectric, biofuels, and geothermal—play significant roles in the shift toward renewable energy, although their growth rates may be slower compared to solar and wind. In 2021, hydroelectric power accounted for more than 60 percent of the world's renewable energy supply.<sup>63</sup> However, projections indicate a 23-percent decrease in net capacity additions between 2021 and 2030, primarily due to fewer hydroelectric projects in China, Latin America, and Europe.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the US Department of Energy's Wind and Water Power Technologies Office conducted an analysis suggesting that US hydropower could increase by nearly 50 gigawatts of combined electricity generation and storage capacity by 2050.<sup>65</sup>

Biofuels offer an alternative approach to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. In 2021, the United States produced approximately 15 billion gallons of ethanol and 2.5 billion gallons of biodiesel/renewable diesel.<sup>66</sup> While biofuels offer many advantages, further studies are necessary to determine the environmental impact of factors such as water resource strain resulting from biomass growth, deforestation, and potential food shortages caused by displacing food crops for biomass crops.<sup>67</sup>

Geothermal energy, which harnesses heated steam from the Earth to generate electricity, represents another renewable energy source with significant potential for enhancing energy independence and security in the United States and Europe. In 2019, geothermal power capacity reached around 3.7 gigawatts. However, the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory's 2021 geothermal market report concluded that geothermal power capacity could potentially reach 60 gigawatts by 2050.<sup>68</sup>

The optimal path to renewable energy production for the United States and Europe involves a diverse mix of all renewable energy sources. This approach ensures a resilient infrastructure that is not solely reliant on a single energy source. While solar and wind energy have experienced substantial growth in recent years, other

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<sup>63</sup> Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser, and Pablo Rosado, "Renewable Energy," *Our World in Data*, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

<sup>64</sup> "Hydropower," International Energy Agency, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/>.

<sup>65</sup> Water Power Technologies Office, "A New Vision for United States Hydropower," US Department of Energy, n.d., <https://www.energy.gov/>.

<sup>66</sup> "U.S. Bioenergy Statistics," US Department of Agriculture, 19 January 2023, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/>.

<sup>67</sup> "16 Important Pros and Cons of Biofuels to Know," *Our Endangered World*, 5 February, 2023, <https://www.ourendangeredworld.com/>.

<sup>68</sup> "NREL 2021 U.S. Geothermal Market Report Released," US Department of Energy, 13 July 2021, <https://www.energy.gov/>.

sources have the potential to increase the overall energy-generation capacity beyond that of solar and wind alone. Therefore, increased investment in proven hydroelectric, biofuel, and geothermal energy generation can prove reliable and economically viable.

### ***The United States and Europe Must Increase Renewable Energy Technology Research***

Progress in renewable energy research is continuously advancing, leading to improvements in efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and reliability. However, simply regaining market share in existing renewable energy technologies is insufficient. The United States and Europe must also spearhead the development of the next generation of renewable energy production.

Exciting advancements in solar cell technology offer promising prospects for reducing the cost and energy requirements of traditional solar cells.<sup>69</sup> Ongoing research is exploring alternative materials to REE<sup>70</sup> and other critical materials such as lithium,<sup>71</sup> which could potentially reshape the renewable energy supply chain.

Moreover, there are wind energy technologies available that do not rely on materials and magnets controlled by China. For example, induction generator wind turbines do not use permanent magnets and, therefore, do not require REE. However, transitioning away from REE-based permanent magnets does have certain trade-offs. Permanent magnet generators offer higher efficiency and energy-generating capacity compared to induction generator turbines, and they require less maintenance.<sup>72</sup> As alternative solutions are developed, it is crucial for the United States and Europe to establish domestic production capabilities and supply chains to maintain control over their energy security.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the energy crisis caused by Russia's natural gas export cuts in 2022 highlighted Europe's heavy dependence on Russian fossil fuels. To address this

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<sup>69</sup> David L. Chandler, "Explained: Why perovskites could take solar cells to new heights," *MIT News*, 15 July, 2022, <https://news.mit.edu/>.

<sup>70</sup> Tanner Stening, "Researchers may have just solved the rare earths crisis," Northeastern University, 17 October 2022, <https://news.northeastern.edu/>.

<sup>71</sup> "Sodium-based Material Yields Stable Alternative to Lithium-ion Batteries," *UT News*, 6 December, 2021, <https://news.utexas.edu/>.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Dvorak, "The big generator debate: Permanent magnet designs versus double-fed induction versions," *Windpower Engineering & Development*, 15 June 2014, <https://www.windpowerengineering.com/>.

vulnerability, European countries, with assistance from the United States, initiated efforts to reduce their reliance on Russian energy sources. However, these measures have been costly and have not provided long-term solutions. Europe and the United States are now focused on expanding their renewable energy capacities to achieve sustainable energy independence. Nevertheless, they face challenges due to China's dominant position in renewable energy equipment production and critical material supply chains.

This article emphasized the importance of energy security for Europe and the US in light of the European energy crisis following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, the article explored renewable energy sources as a key component of achieving energy security for both regions. Furthermore, the article highlighted the risks associated with China's continued influence over the renewable energy market. To mitigate the potential dependence on China and ensure long-term energy independence, the article recommends reinvigorating domestic solar panel production, establishing domestic supply chains for critical renewable energy materials, expanding slower-growth renewable sources, and increasing research investments to enhance renewable energy technologies. By pursuing these strategies, Europe and the United States can strengthen their energy security and reduce reliance on external sources. 🌟

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# Strategic Competition and Self-Reliance

## Analyzing Munitions Industrial Bases in India and Pakistan amid Great-Power Rivalry

CW4 MICHAEL LIMA, DBA, US ARMY

### Abstract

The intensifying great-power competition between the United States and China, exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the unification tensions surrounding Taiwan, has compelled nations to align themselves and bolster their defenses. This study explores the munitions industrial bases of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, focusing on their pursuit of self-reliance to wield national power and strategically navigate the competition below armed conflict. The study aims to understand how a vital munitions industrial base allows developing countries to refrain from contributing support to Western nations in a conflict between the United States and its most consequential strategic competitor, China. The article delves into the diplomatic, arms sales, and technology transfer strategies employed by both nations to strengthen their munitions industrial bases and gain advantages in interregional conflicts. By shedding light on the capabilities and challenges faced by India and Pakistan, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge relevant to the Indo-Pacific region. The insights into the development of defense industrial bases, including the importance of national self-reliance and strategies for countering perceived threats, hold particular relevance for the Department of Defense, US Army, US Air Force, and other services operating in the Indo-Pacific.

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*A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction. Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peace time, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea. Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United State corporations. This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.*

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Farewell Address (1961)

In his farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower, the former commanding general of the victorious forces in Europe during World War II, issued a cautionary warning about the military-industrial complex. Recognizing the imperative of maintaining a robust military capability to safeguard a nation's way of life, Eisenhower acknowledged the inherent complexities associated with this symbiotic relationship. The military-industrial complex encompasses the intricate interplay between a country's armed forces and the defense industry responsible for supplying armaments and munitions. This dynamic manifests in diverse ways, extending beyond the United States and finding resonance in the pursuit of national interests by other nations worldwide. From aspirations of territorial expansion to self-imposed isolationism, including regional conflicts with neighboring states, countries navigate this intricate landscape as they strive to achieve their strategic objectives.

This article examines the munitions industrial bases of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan following the partition of India. With a focus on fostering self-reliance as a means of bolstering national power, each nation endeavors to develop its own organic industrial base.

The theoretical framework of this article provides an in-depth understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the relationship between the armed forces and the defense industry in India and Pakistan. The objective is to validate that a robust munitions industrial base allows developing countries to retain the option of not relying on support from Western nations and their allies during armed conflicts. However, a significant challenge arises as former British colonies are less likely to support Western nations that are no longer required and have already turned to other nations, such as Russia and China.

The research question revolves around identifying the factors that contribute to self-reliance in a munitions industrial base. The subquestions are as follows: How does each nation's organic industrial base compare to that of the world powers? What policies support the defense sector in achieving self-reliance?

The literature review will include an examination of the military-industrial complex, focusing on its two primary forms observed in the United States and China. As major world powers, these nations represent opposite ends of the spectrum in shaping the military-industrial complex. A comprehensive analysis will be conducted to compare India's and Pakistan's munitions industrial bases with that of the United States, considering the diplomatic strategies, arms sales, and technology transfer employed by each nation to strengthen their industrial bases.

In this context, the term *organic industrial base* (OIB) is employed to denote a comprehensive network of government-owned industrial facilities. Within the scope of this article, OIB encompasses entities such as public sector undertakings



(PSU) and defense public sector undertakings (DPSU), Defence Production Establishments (DPE), which are government-owned corporations. Moreover, the term *munitions industrial base* refers to a specific subset of the OIB, encompassing depots and ammunition production facilities. Throughout the analysis, national terminology is juxtaposed with that of the United States to ensure readability and comprehension.

## **Partition of India**

Every story requires a starting point, and in the context of this article, it begins with the partition delineated in the Indian Independence Act of 1947. The Indian subcontinent encompasses a diverse array of nations, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Geographically, this landmass spans from the Himalayas to the northern reaches of the Indian Ocean. However, the research primarily focuses on India and Pakistan, two adversaries deeply rooted in the history in the Indian subcontinent.

The Indian Independence Act marked a significant milestone in 1947 as it established two independent dominions: India and Pakistan. The dominion of Pakistan was further divided into West Pakistan and East Pakistan, the latter of which is present-day Bangladesh. The partition of India involved the bifurcation of the Bengal and Punjab provinces along religious lines, resulting in separate territories for Muslims (in Pakistan) and Hindus and Sikhs (in India), resulting in one of the largest forced migrations in history.<sup>1</sup> The repercussions of this forced migration were nothing short of disastrous, characterized by untold atrocities and immense suffering in the newly formed nations. Muslim populations migrated from India to Pakistan in the west, while Hindu and Sikh communities moved to the east. The scale of the exodus was staggering, with an estimated 20 million people displaced, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. While precise documentation is limited, the death toll reached hundreds of thousands, and as many as two million lives may have been lost. Although most present-day Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis were born well after the partition, the echoes of this historic event remain ingrained in the national consciousness. Similar to how the hardships of the past have shaped nations like the United States, even though most Americans were born long after World War II, the experiences of India and Pakistan continue to influence those nations' trajectories. Notably, the two countries have engaged

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<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament, "1947 Indian Independence Act," 18 July 1947, <https://www.parliament.uk/>.

in three wars and numerous conflicts, often revolving around Jammu & Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority territory.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout history, the inevitability of war has often loomed over nations, particularly those situated along contentious borders. In ancient times, preparations for battle entailed amassing swords, spears, and bows. However, the discovery of gunpowder ushered in a new era, necessitating the storage of shells and other materials, as well as the development and adaptation of tactics that transformed the nature of warfare. One constant factor, regardless of the era, is the imperative to ensure the preparedness of state and tribal forces.

### Indo-Pakistani Wars

Following the partition, the Indo-Pakistani War erupted in 1947 over the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 granted legal and technical independence to the princely states; however, in practice, they were compelled to choose between India and Pakistan. Jammu & Kashmir had a Muslim-majority population of around 77 percent, with an additional 20 percent Hindu population, as per the 1941 census. The region was ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu ruler. The war commenced when Muslim tribesmen, supported by regular forces from Pakistan, launched an open revolt and occupied Kashmir in an attempt to overthrow the Maharaja. The Singh fled and eventually acceded to India in October 1947. India provided military assistance to the region, leading to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947–1948. As a result, India gained control over approximately two-thirds of Jammu & Kashmir, while Pakistan occupied the remainder.<sup>3</sup> This conflict set the stage for future hostilities and highlighted the importance of national armies and airlifted troops, as well as the involvement of artillery.

The second major conflict between the two countries regarding the status of the Jammu & Kashmir occurred in 1965. While the war did not resolve the territorial claims, it drew the involvement of the superpowers, the United States and the

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<sup>2</sup> Vivek Shankar, "India's Partition: A History in Photos," *New York Times*, 14 August 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/>. Kashmir's current status in the Indian federal system is that of a Union Territory, meaning that it is directly administered by the central government and has less autonomy than a state. This status was imposed on 5 August 2019, when the Indian government revoked Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which gave the former state of Jammu & Kashmir special rights, including its own constitution. The region was also divided into two union territories: Jammu–Kashmir and Ladakh. The move was controversial and sparked protests and unrest in Kashmir, which were met with a security lockdown and a communications blackout by the Indian authorities.

<sup>3</sup> Raju G.C. Thomas, ed., *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia* (1992; repr., New York: Routledge, 2019), 25, <https://books.google.com/>.

Soviet Union, in the region. The conflict reignited when the Pakistani Army attempted to forcefully seize Kashmir. Although unsuccessful, the war reached a stalemate due to the international politics of the Cold War. Following the Pakistani invasion, India requested the intervention of the United Nations, leading to the passage of Resolution 211 by the Security Council, which called for a ceasefire and negotiations to resolve the Kashmir conflict. The United States and the United Kingdom supported the acceptance of the ceasefire by India and Pakistan, which was partly due to the cessation of arms supplies. While both nations were affected, Pakistan, with its weaker military compared to India, felt the impact more profoundly. The resolution, which generally favored India, demonstrated the vulnerability of nations in defending their borders and the potential consequences of sanctions and arms embargoes.

The Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, which emerged from the two geographically separated territories of West Pakistan (Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now the People's Republic of Bangladesh). Civil war erupted in Pakistan as the West Pakistan army clashed with East Pakistanis demanding autonomy. India intervened in East Pakistan to support its people after millions of civilians sought refuge in India. Following the surrender of the Pakistani Army, East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh at the end of the war. The 1971 conflict was not directly related to the struggle for Jammu & Kashmir, but rather focused on the independence of Bangladesh. It underscored the transformative impact of internal conflicts and the need for a nation's preparedness and support. The United States supported Pakistan during this war, prompting China to increase arms sales, while the Soviet Union backed the Indian Army. However, it was not until a subsequent major engagement that US relations with India would change.

The Indo-Pakistani War of 1999, known as the Kargil War, represented a broader conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. In a notable departure, the United States publicly aligned with India for the first time, as it determined that Pakistan had intentionally violated the Line of Control near Kargil. The US administration was resolute in its commitment to rebuilding bilateral relations with India, recognizing its status as a major democratic power with considerable future significance. However, the global order was disrupted by the nuclear tests conducted by both India and Pakistan in May 1998.<sup>4</sup> The international community actively advocated for the cessation of hostilities in the Kargil War, which led to Pakistan losing a significant amount of its global goodwill due to its involvement.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Riedel, "How the 1999 Kargil Conflict Redefined US-India Ties," *Order from Chaos* (blog), 24 July, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

Since the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the two regional powers have maintained a militaristic relationship.

### **India–Pakistan Relations**

The relations between India and Pakistan, two nuclear powers, have been marked by contention, especially concerning conflicts over the shared border and the territory of Jammu & Kashmir since the partition. To address these issues and promote peace, peace treaties were signed between India and Pakistan, including the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. These agreements reflect the nations' commitment to resolving their differences through peaceful means.

Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Simla Agreement was signed, aiming to put an end to the conflict and establish a framework for normalization. The agreement emphasized the peaceful resolution of disputes through bilateral negotiations or other mutually agreed means: "That the two countries are resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them."<sup>5</sup> The Simla Agreement provided a pathway toward resolving severe issues between India and Pakistan.

Similarly, the Lahore Declaration was a significant bilateral agreement that outlined the shared vision of peace and stability between the two nations. It also included measures to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup> The declaration underscored the commitment to maintaining peace and resolving conflicts peacefully.

Thus, throughout their history, India and Pakistan have had a contentious relationship, and both nations have acquired nuclear weapons capabilities, establishing themselves as nuclear weapon states. As part of their deterrence strategies, they continue to expand their nuclear arsenals. The possession of nuclear weapons by both countries adds an additional layer of complexity to their bilateral dynamics and reinforces the need for stable relations and dialogue.

### **India's Missile Arsenal**

New Delhi's nuclear policy accounts for the regional threats facing India, particularly from Pakistan and China. Based on available information, experts estimate that India has produced 160 nuclear warheads and continues to develop

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<sup>5</sup> Agreement on Bilateral Relations between the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan (Simla Agreement), Simla, 2 July 1972.

<sup>6</sup> The Lahore Declaration, Signed at Lahore on the 21st day of February 1999.

additional warheads for its new missiles.<sup>7</sup> India possesses a complete nuclear triad capability, similar to the United States, allowing it to deliver nuclear strikes through air-, sea-, and land-based platforms.

Researchers estimate that India has assigned three or four squadrons of Mirage 2000H and Jaguar IS/IB aircraft stationed at three bases for nuclear strike missions against Pakistan and China. In terms of land-based delivery systems, India has a diverse range of ballistic missiles with varying ranges, including Prithvi-II and Agni-I (short-range), Agni-II (medium-range), and Agni-III (intermediate-range). India is also nearing completion of two longer-range Agni missiles: Agni-IV and Agni-V. Additionally, India operates the Dhanush, a ship-launched missile, and is developing the K-4, a submarine-launched ballistic missile, for deployment on a small fleet of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines.<sup>8</sup>

Developing and manufacturing missile systems requires a complex blend of expertise and infrastructure. India has successfully established an OIB for missile defense through institutions like the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The DRDO, formed in 1958 through the merger of various defense-related organizations, conducts research and development for defense technologies under the Ministry of Defence. It operates over 50 laboratories and establishments focused on aeronautics, armaments, missiles, advanced computing and simulation, special materials, and naval systems.<sup>9</sup> Alongside the DRDO, India's defense industry includes PSUs, government-owned corporations that play a significant role in defense manufacturing.

One such PSU is Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), which manufactures guided missile systems for the Indian Armed Forces. Established in 1970, BDL collaborates with the DRDO and foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEM) to supply various missiles and allied equipment. BDL operates four state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities, located in Telangana State (Hyderabad, Bhanur, and Ibrahimpatnam) and Andhra Pradesh (Visakhapatnam), enabling the production of guided missiles, underwater weapons, airborne products, and other defense equipment.<sup>10</sup> India's military platforms and weapons serve as a crucial deterrent and form the cornerstone of its national security strategy against adversaries like Pakistan, which also possesses a formidable arsenal.

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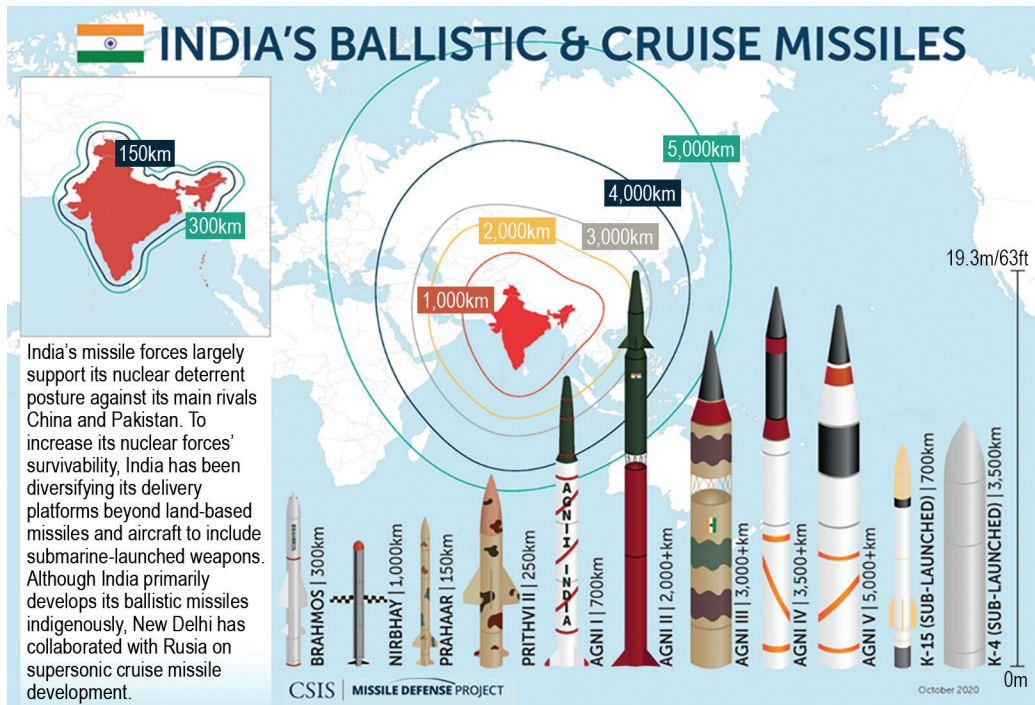
<sup>7</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Nuclear Notebook: How Many Nuclear Weapons Does India Have in 2022?," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 11 July, 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda "Indian Nuclear Forces, 2020," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 76, no. 4 (2020), 217–25, <https://www.tandfonline.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Defence, Government of India, "About DRDO," 5 May, 2020, <https://www.drdo.gov.in/>.

<sup>10</sup> Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), "Company Profile," 12 May 2023, <https://bdl-india.in/>.





**Figure 1. India's ballistic and cruise missiles.** (CSIS Missile Defense Project. <https://misilethreat.csis.org/>.)

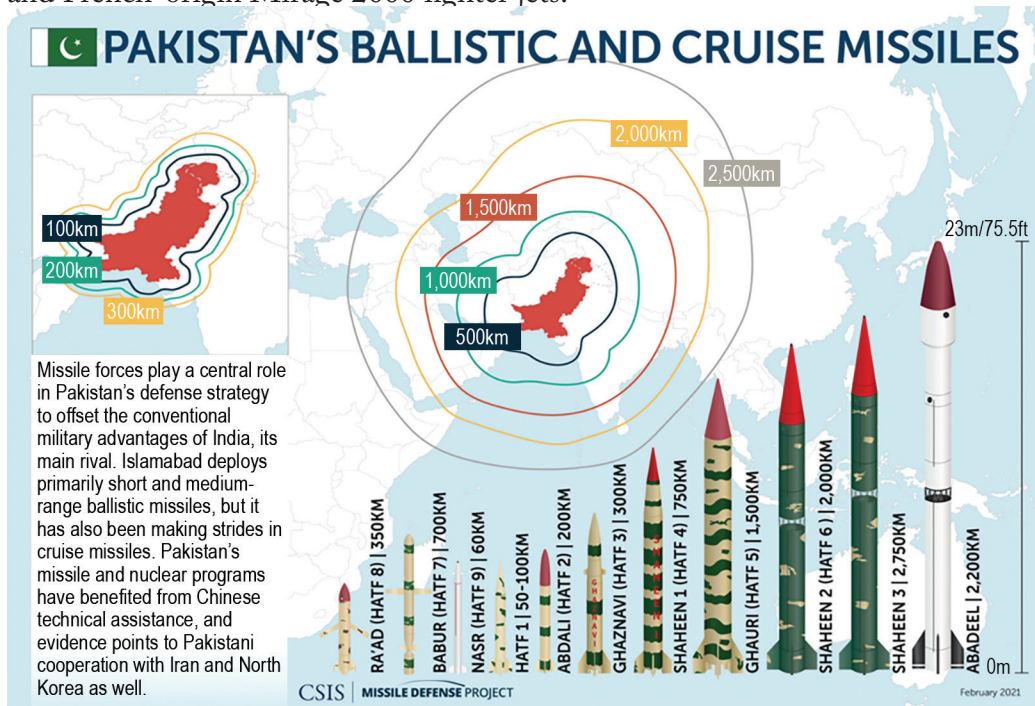
## Pakistan's Missile Arsenal

Pakistan's nuclear program, much like India's, is driven by the regional threats it faces, primarily from India. As of 2023, Pakistan possesses an arsenal of approximately 170 nuclear warheads, which continues to grow.<sup>11</sup> The country is actively expanding its nuclear arsenal and developing new delivery systems, including sea-based platforms and the ongoing development of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Its current inventory of delivery systems comprises a range of short-range ballistic missiles (such as Hatf, Abdali, Ghaznavi, Shaheen, and Nasr), medium-range ballistic missiles (including Shaheen, Ghauri, and Ababeel), and the development of the Taimur missile as an ICBM. Cruise missile variants such as Babur and Ra'ad are also part of Pakistan's capabilities. Additionally, Pakistan

<sup>11</sup> Hans Kristensen et al., "Status of World Nuclear Forces," Federation of American Scientists, 31 March 2023, <https://fas.org/>.



can deliver nuclear weapons through strategic bombers like the US-origin F-16A/B and French-origin Mirage 2000 fighter jets.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 2. Pakistan's ballistic and cruise missiles.** (CSIS Missile Defense Project. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/>.)

While India maintains a combination of government and government-owned corporations as its OIB and missile manufacturer/research organization, Pakistan operates through a commission under its National Command Authority, which assumes responsibility for most national missile defense functions. The Pakistani National Engineering and Scientific Commission (NESCOM) established in 2000, actively administers several defense development programs, including the National Defense Complex and the Air Weapons Complex. With approximately 16,000 employees, NESCOM conducts research and development in various disciplines of science and technology, encompassing microelectronics to advanced materials and plays a crucial role in developing indigenous technologies.<sup>13</sup> Developing indigenous technology is an essential aspect of establishing a robust munitions industrial base. However, before a nation can internally create complex defense

<sup>12</sup> Arms Control Association, "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Pakistan," March 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> NESCOM, "CESAT – About Us," 28 December 2008, <https://web.archive.org/>.

systems, it may need to acquire technology and support from more tech-nologically advanced nations. In addition to government agencies and government-owned enterprises, nations can explore avenues such as foreign military sales, direct commercial sales, or even joint ventures (JV) to enhance their capabilities.

### International Arms Transfers

The global arms trade and the defense industry play a significant role in munitions supply worldwide and often serve as instruments of international diplomacy. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 167 states were identified as importers of major arms during the period of 2018 to 2022, with the top five arms importers being India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia, and China, collectively accounting for 36 percent of total global arms imports. India holds the top position on the list, with an 11-percent share of total global arms imports, while Pakistan ranks eighth. India has maintained its position as the world's biggest arms importer since 1993. However, it has experienced an overall decrease of 11 percent due to efforts to diversify its arms suppliers, replace imports with domestically designed and produced major arms, and improve its arms procurement process.<sup>14</sup> The choice of suppliers can have significant international repercussions. For instance, India's purchase of S-400 missile defense systems from Russia may lead to potential US sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.<sup>15</sup> Imposing perceived wrongful sanctions would only push India toward further agreements with its current leading supplier, Russia, such as the Indo-Russian multinational BrahMos Aerospace joint venture.<sup>16</sup> This joint venture, established through an inter-governmental agreement, benefits both countries through shared ownership, returns, risks, governance, and resources.

In the case of Pakistan, arms imports have increased by 14 percent during the reporting period, accounting for 3.7 percent of the global total. China remains the primary supplier, supplying more than three-quarters of Pakistan's arms imports.<sup>17</sup> While Pakistan received significant transfers of US arms during the Afghan jihad in the 1980s and the subsequent Global War on Terror, the volume has not reached the level of Chinese arms transfers, which have increased since 2009. Pakistan's support is reciprocated with technology transfer and access to power projection. Pakistan facilitated China's missile program by transferring unexploded Tomahawk

<sup>14</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon, and Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022" SIPRI, March 2023, <https://www.sipri.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> "U.S. Arms Sales to India," *Forum on the Arms Trade*, n.d., <https://www.forumarmstrade.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> BrahMos Aerospace, "Joint Venture," 2022, <https://www.brahmos.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Wezeman, Gadon, and Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022."

missiles that landed in Afghanistan and provided samples of the crashed Black Hawk helicopter during the 2011 Abbottabad mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden, thereby sharing US stealth technology with China. China's military relationship with Pakistan and its operation of the Gwadar port, located in Balochistan Province and a key city of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are assessed to give China leverage in the region, particularly near the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.<sup>18</sup> Diplomacy plays a crucial role in maintaining relationships between nations, and international arms transfers are one of the avenues used to influence other nations. The establishment of a munitions industrial base is a strategic objective for many industrialized nations, enabling them to support their military services in contingencies, escalating conflicts, or full-scale conventional wars.

		<u>Share of global arms imports (%)</u>		<u>Percent change from 2013–17 to 2018–22</u>	<u>Main suppliers and their share of importer's total imports (%), 2018–22</u>					
Rank	Importer	2018–22	2013–17	2018–22	1st	2nd	3rd			
1	India	11	12	–11	Russia 45	France 29	USA 11			
8	Pakistan	3.7	3.0	14	China 77	Sweden 5.1	Russia 3.6			

**Figure 3. India and Pakistan ranking in the 40 largest importers of major arms and their main suppliers.** (SIPRI Arms Transfer Database. <https://www.sipri.org/>.)

### The Indian Ordnance Factories

At the heart of a munitions industrial base lies the production of munitions internally, encompassing design and manufacturing. The Indian Ordnance Factories are instrumental in providing self-reliance and defending India's borders. The history and development of the Indian Ordnance Factories can be traced back to the British reign in India. In 1775, the establishment of the Board of Ordnance in Fort William, Kolkata, marked the official beginning of the Army Ordnance in India. Subsequently, a gunpowder factory was established at Ishapore in 1787, commencing production in 1791. In 1801, the Gun Carriage Agency was set up

<sup>18</sup> Sameer P. Lalwani, "A Threshold Alliance: The China-Pakistan Military Relationship," United States Institute of Peace, 22 March 2023, <https://www.usip.org/>.

at Cossipore, Kolkata, with production commencing in 1802, and operations have continued to this day.<sup>19</sup>

In 2021, the Government of India made the decision to dissolve the Ordnance Factory Board and transfer the management, control, operations, and main-tenance of 41 production units to seven government companies known as DPSUs.<sup>20</sup> These DPSUs include Munitions India Limited (MILHQ), Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (AVNLHQ), Advanced Weapons and Equipment India Limited (AWEILHQ), Troop Comforts Limited (TCLHQ), Yantra India Limited (YILHQ), India Optel Limited (IOLHQ), and Gliders India Limited (GILHQ). The SIPRI Arms Industry Database, which provides information on arms-producing companies, has consistently included Indian Ordnance Factories among the top 100 arms-producing and military services companies since 2002, excluding 2021.<sup>21</sup> India's long-standing history dating back to British India has contributed to its emergence as a global munitions manufacturer, earning it a well-defined ranking that can be closely monitored. This advantage has not been fully utilized by Pakistan.

There are various economic, political, and strategic factors that drive India's choices and have led to a reduction in arms imports, with one significant factor being the Make in India initiative launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. This initiative was part of the nation-building efforts aimed at transforming India into a global design and manufacturing hub. By promoting self-reliance, India aims to generate employment and expertise in critical areas of manufacturing across multiple sectors, thereby fostering economic growth and democracy. The defense sector has been specifically identified as a focal point for the Aatmanirbhar Bharat (or Self-Reliant India) initiative, emphasizing the establishment of indigenous manufacturing infrastructure supported by robust research and development.<sup>22</sup>

To attract foreign investment, the Indian government has implemented an attractive foreign direct investment (FDI) policy, allowing up to 74-percent FDI through an automatic route (previously 49 percent) for enterprises seeking new industrial licenses. The FDI limit can go up to 100 percent with prior approval from the government.<sup>23</sup> However, if the generous FDI policy does not provide

<sup>19</sup> Directorate of Ordnance (Coordination & Services), "History," 18 April 2023, <https://ddpdoo.gov.in/>.

<sup>20</sup> Directorate of Ordnance (Coordination & Services), "Our Units," 18 April 2023, <https://ddpdoo.gov.in/>.

<sup>21</sup> SIPRI, "SIPRI Arms Industry Database" December 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, "Defence Manufacturing," *Make in India*, n.d., <https://www.makeinindia.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> National Investment Promotion & Facility Agency, "Defence Manufacturing," 2023, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/>.

sufficient incentives, the Indian government has taken stringent measures in the defense sector to ensure indigenous production. The Department of Military Affairs and Ministry of Defence have compiled four indigenization lists containing a total of 411 items that should be manufactured domestically rather than sourced through imports. These items include short-range surface-to-air missiles (land variant), shipborne cruise missiles, multipurpose grenades, and assault rifles.<sup>24</sup> The Strategic Partnership Policy serves as a driving force for the Indian military-industrial complex to either manufacture defense systems domestically or establish strategic partnerships. This policy aims to foster long-term collaborations between the Indian private sector and global OEMs seeking technology transfers, thereby enabling the development of domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains. This approach is one of the factors contributing to reduced imports and an increase in defense exports. In the fiscal year 2022–23, Indian defense exports have grown more than tenfold since 2016–17, reaching more than 85 countries.<sup>25</sup> This achievement not only aligns with the Make in India initiative but also advances the Self-Reliant India objective in the defense sector.

By leveraging the defense sector across multiple nations, New Delhi ensures that India is not solely reliant on the authority of any single country, in line with its new “multi-alignment” approach. The strategic partnership between the United States and India is founded on shared values such as democracy, as well as mutual interests in global security, economic trade, and investment as evident through FDI. However, it should not be assumed that India would automatically assist the United States in military operations against China. The support of the central government in New Delhi would only be guaranteed if India itself becomes the target of Chinese aggression during a land invasion scenario. India’s traditionally nonaligned foreign and security policy suggests that in any other China contingency, India would exercise caution and potentially provide covert assistance, if any at all, to the US military.<sup>26</sup> It is crucial to note that providing support during times of war and conflict differs significantly from peacetime relations.

It is noteworthy that Russia, India’s largest importer of munitions, is considered the most acute threat to the United States, while China represents its most significant strategic competitor. Furthermore, China serves as the largest munitions trading

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<sup>24</sup> National Investment Promotion & Facility Agency, “Defence Manufacturing.”

<sup>25</sup> “Aatmanirbharta on the rise: Defence exports reach an all-time high of approx. Rs 16,000 crore in Financial Year 2022-23” (press release, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 1 April 2023), <https://pib.gov.in/>.

<sup>26</sup> Michael J. Mazarr et al., *U.S. Major Combat Operations in the Indo-Pacific: Partner and Ally Views* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), <https://www.rand.org/>.



partner with Pakistan, creating a challenging situation in the region for the United States and its allies.

### **The Pakistan Ordnance Factories**

Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) actively operates as one of Pakistan's extensive organic industrial bases, engaging in the production of arms, ammunition, and explosives. Following the partition, the 16 ordnance factories of British India came under the possession of India, as none were located in Pakistan. In 1951, the POF was established to facilitate the indigenous development of munitions, catering to the requirements of the defense forces and law enforcement agencies. The experiences of the wars in 1965 and 1971 further reinforced Pakistan's determination to achieve self-reliance in defense production capabilities and diversify sources of military procurements.

Currently, the POF encompasses 14 factories and 12 subsidiaries, engaged in the production of rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, mortars and ammunition, and tank/artillery munitions.<sup>27</sup> The precision and reliability of the POF's arms and ammunition have generated a growing demand in the international market, with clients in 40 countries.<sup>28</sup> Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, Pakistan established the Defence Production Division with the aim of formulating policies, coordinating production and procurement, and promoting development activities to achieve self-reliance through indigenization.<sup>29</sup> In 2004, the division was designated as the Ministry of Defence Production, and in 2016, it incorporated Public-Private Partnerships as a key element of its private and foreign investment strategy.<sup>30</sup> Presently, Pakistan is focused on developing indigenous technology and resources through collaboration between public and private enterprises to meet the requirements of the Pakistan Defence Forces.

To promote defense exports, the government has placed significant emphasis on the Defence Export Promotion Organization. This agency plays a vital role in facilitating customer inquiries and coordinating the export of high-quality defense products. Ensuring the quality of these products is a demanding aspect that is crucial for establishing reliability in foreign markets.<sup>31</sup> Ensuring quality is a

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<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Defence Production, "Year Book 2018-21," n.d., <https://modp.gov.pk/>.

<sup>28</sup> Defence Export Promotion Organization, "Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Catalogue," n.d., <https://depo.gov.pk/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Defence Production, "History."

<sup>30</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan, "The Public-Private Partnership Act, 2016, Pakistan," 5 September 2016, <https://na.gov.pk/>.

<sup>31</sup> Defence Export Promotion Organization (DEPO), "About DEPO."



demanding aspect crucial for establishing reliability in foreign markets. Amid the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, where Ukraine is receiving support from numerous nations, Pakistan has emerged as a prominent supplier of ammunition to Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> To gain insight into the level of support that would be extended to Western nations in a conflict involving Pakistan's close partner, we can examine a recent conversation between the Speaker of the National Assembly, Asad Qaiser, and the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Yao Jing. During this discussion, Speaker Asad Qaiser stated, "Relations between Pakistan and China are based on shared geopolitical, economic, historical and strategic interests and both the countries had always stood with each other at difficult times."<sup>33</sup> This statement not only highlights Pakistan's growing capabilities in its munitions industrial base but also underscores its commitment to providing support in the event of a significant armed conflict at the national level.

### **Military-Industrial Complex**

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the *military-industrial complex* as the "aggregate of a nation's armed forces and the industries that supply their equipment, materials, and armaments." In the United States, the Department of Defense primarily procures supplies through a bidding process on open contracts from the military services. Enterprises that meet the specified requirements can win the bid, typically based on the lowest cost, as long as the goods and services align with the agency's current needs.

Since the 1990s, the defense sector in the United States has undergone significant consolidation, resulting in the transition from 51 to 5 major aerospace and defense prime contractors: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamic.<sup>34</sup> This consolidation has reduced the number of contractors responsible for providing military-specific armaments. As many items may not be financially viable for private businesses, nations invest in an OIB that encompasses government-owned, government-operated as well as government-owned, contractor-operated facilities.

For instance, the Department of Defense (DOD) oversees a network of facilities known as the OIB, including 21 Army depots and arsenals, Navy shipyards and fleet readiness centers, Air Force air logistics complexes, and

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<sup>32</sup> Abhinandan Mishra, "Pak emerges as major supplier of ammunition to Ukraine in war with Russia," *Sunday Guardian*, 15 April 2023, <https://sundayguardianlive.com/>.

<sup>33</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan, "National Assembly Observer," January–June 2020, <https://na.gov.pk/>.

<sup>34</sup> Aerospace Commission, "Final Report of the Commission on the Future of the United States Aerospace Industry," November 2002, 134, <https://history.nasa.gov/>.

Marine Corps production plants. These facilities are “covered depots,” subject to reporting and minimum capital investment requirements. These facilities engage in the production, storage, and disposal of various conventional munitions, as well as the maintenance, overhaul, and repair of weapon systems and defense equipment.<sup>35</sup> These capabilities are crucial for maintaining military readiness and are located in depots, production plants, shipyards, readiness centers, and logistics complexes operated by each military department.

The prime contractors in the military-industrial complex play a vital role by providing a wide range of military requirements through contracting. This system has proven effective for the United States, a nation that values fairness and a democratic process. However, it may not be suitable for all nations.

On the contrary, the People’s Republic of China boasts a robust system of state-owned enterprises that are considered valuable state-owned assets with specific missions to fulfill. The state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC), which operates directly under the State Council, states that “The mission of state-owned central enterprises, with a high sense of political responsibility and historical mission, will go all out to develop strategic emerging industries, effectively improve the core competitiveness of enterprises, enhance core functions, actively serve the country’s major strategies, and build a modern industrial system.”<sup>36</sup>

Among these enterprises, the Norinco Group stands as a prominent Chinese state-owned defense corporation engaged in the production of commercial and military munitions. As the Chinese state-owned enterprise responsible for ordnance production (listed as Ordnance Industry Group), Norinco prioritizes national interests and provides equipment support, weapons, technical support services, and equipment to various branches of the Chinese military, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, Strategic Support Force, and Armed Police. With control over 60 subgroups and direct management of units in 29 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, the Chinese state-owned enterprise exerts significant influence.<sup>37</sup>

These examples represent the far ends of the spectrum when it comes to military-industrial complexes, with the respective subcomponent of munitions industrial

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<sup>35</sup> US Government Accountability Office, “Military Depots: DOD Strategy for Addressing Deteriorating Facilities and Equipment Is Incomplete,” 9 May 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/>.

<sup>36</sup> State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, “The State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission held a deployment meeting for central enterprises to accelerate the development of strategic emerging industries,” 25 May 2023, <http://www.sasac.gov.cn/>.

<sup>37</sup> China Ordnance Industry Group Co., Ltd., “Group Profile,” n.d., <http://en.norincogroup.com.cn/>.

bases. Situated between these extremes lie India and Pakistan, each with its own unique factors shaping their military-industrial complexes and munitions industrial bases, as depicted in table 1. Both nations have been striving for indigenous manufacturing in the defense sector and reducing their reliance on imports to fulfill their military requirements. Although their approaches have similarities, India, as a residue of the British Empire, has historically followed the United States' example with the Royal Ordnance Factories and now employs DPSUs. In contrast, Pakistan actively utilizes commercial subsidiaries/semi-government enterprises for exports and relies on DPE/executive departments to oversee government-owned commercial enterprises.

Simultaneously, both countries engage in JVs with foreign investors. This enables India and Pakistan to establish a munitions industrial base that can be compared to those of the United States and China. Consequently, the two nations are reducing their dependence on the United States and the West. India, in particular, openly advocates for a multi-alignment approach, and both countries' membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation indicates their reluctance to align themselves entirely with the West, especially during times of conflict.

**Table 1. National organic industrial base comparison of the United States, China, India, and Pakistan**

	United States	China	India	Pakistan
<b>Law/Role</b>	Title 10, Section 2464 of the U.S. Code (U.S.C.) states that “it is essential for the national defense that the Department of Defense maintain a core logistics capability that is Government-owned and Government-operated,” specifying further that this “shall include those capabilities that are necessary to maintain and repair” weapon systems and other military equipment.	The mission of state-owned central enterprises, with a high sense of political responsibility and historical mission, will go all out to develop strategic emerging industries, effectively improve the core competitiveness of enterprises, enhance core functions, actively serve the country’s major strategies, and build a modern industrial system.	Objective of developing a comprehensive production infrastructure to produce the weapons, systems, platforms, equipment required for defence.	Pakistan defence production sector has a significant role in strengthening of conventional defence and national economy. Ministry of Defence Production is striving hard for a self-reliant/ self-sustained defence production industry with a view to increase job opportunities, generate revenue, decrease dependence on imports and increasing the exports to earn valuable foreign exchange.
<b>Government Agency</b>	Department of Defense	State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council	Department of Defence Production	Ministry of Defence Production
<b>Established</b>	1947	2003	1962	1972
<b>Defense Budget</b>	USD 772 billion	USD 225 billion	USD 72 billion	USD11 Billion

	United States	China	India	Pakistan
<b>Enterprises/ Facilities/ Administrative Control</b>	Defense contractors	State-owned enterprises	Defence public sector undertakings	Commercial subsidiaries/ semi-government enterprises
	21 Army depots and arsenals, Navy shipyards and fleet readiness centers (FRCs), Air Force air logistics complexes (ALCs), and the Marine Corps' production plants. Facilities as "covered depots," subject to reporting and minimum capital investment requirements.	96 central state-owned enterprises	20 production divisions, 23 manufacturing units, 10 r&d centres, 4 shipbuilding yards, 41 factories, and one facility management division	34 factories and 13 subsidiaries
	Government-owned, government-operated (GOGO) and government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO)	State-owned assets	16 central public sector undertakings	6x defence production establishments, 4x executive departments
<b>Munitions</b>	Joint Munitions Command	China North Industries Group	Indian Ordnance Factories	Pakistan Ordnance Factories
<b>Production</b>	9 production facility locations	60 subgroups and directly managed units	20 Factories	14 factories and 12 subsidiaries

## Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked heightened strategic competition between the United States and China, intensifying global dynamics. In response, the United States is leveraging its strength to engage with China, actively seeking allies and partners who share common interests and values. India and Pakistan have made significant financial commitments to Russia and China, respectively, through major weapons purchases. Both countries are driven by the aspiration to establish self-reliant munitions industrial bases, ensuring their autonomy from foreign powers.

While there have been warnings about the potential risks associated with the military-industrial complex, the imperative need for development and security remains undeniable. As tensions persist and escalate, there is a looming possibility that major powers could be drawn into an all-out conflict. In such a scenario, India

and Pakistan may find themselves confronted with the challenging task of choosing sides, a decision that could have far-reaching consequences.

The evolving landscape of international relations, driven by military capabilities and alliances, underscores the critical importance of maintaining a balanced and strategic approach. It is essential for nations to carefully navigate this complex geopolitical terrain, while also fostering dialogue, cooperation, and diplomacy to mitigate the risks of an escalating confrontation and promote peace and stability in the world. 🌐

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# The Iran Challenge

## Unraveling India's Foreign Policy Dilemma

SANKALP GURJAR

### Abstract

The article delves into the complex dynamics of India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran and examines the challenges it poses. The study introduces two key concepts namely Iran's role as a *geopolitical pivot* and India's *extended neighborhood*, to provide a framework for comprehending New Delhi's imperatives in relation to Iran, within the context of an evolving regional and global security landscape. By discussing five key strategic interests, namely the geopolitics of Afghanistan, overland access to Central Asia and Russia, security and stability of the Persian Gulf, energy security, and engagement with West Asia, the article highlights India's multidimensional considerations in its ties with Iran. However, the intricate interplay of Iran's regional behavior, responses from Gulf powers and the United States toward Iranian actions, as well as the deepening strategic relations between Iran and China, pose significant complications to Indo-Iranian engagement. Consequently, Iran emerges as a strategic conundrum that influences the formulation of New Delhi's foreign policy. This article contributes to a nuanced understanding of the Iran challenge and its implications for India's foreign policy decisions in the Indo-Pacific region.

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the Iran challenge for India's foreign policy in the context of changing regional and global security land-scape. Iran is an important player in India's extended neighborhood and impinges on India's foreign and strategic policy interests across the wider Eurasian and Persian Gulf regions. The intricate dynamics between India and Iran present a complex dilemma and strategic conundrum, as they navigate their multifaceted relationship. On one hand, Iran serves as an indispensable player in India's geostrategic calculations in the South-West-Central Asian region, including Afghanistan, by facilitating overland access to Central Asia and ensuring energy security. Conversely, Iran's regional behavior, particularly its rivalries with the United States and Washington's allies in West Asia, adds layers of complexity to India's foreign policy challenges. Moreover, the evolving geopolitics of Afghanistan accentuate the significance of addressing the Iranian challenge in India's foreign policy considerations. Thus, this article sheds light on the intricacies of the Iran challenge and its implications for New Delhi's foreign policy decision-making process.

During the crucial endgame in Afghanistan, as the Taliban's rise and the US-backed Afghan government's fall unfolded, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), S Jaishankar, undertook two significant visits to Iran within the span of a month. Notably, on 6 July 2021, Jaishankar became the first foreign leader to meet with Iranian president-elect Ebrahim Raisi, signaling India's proactive approach.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, in early August, he returned to Tehran again to attend Raisi's swearing-in ceremony.<sup>2</sup> Following this, Iranian foreign minister Dr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian visited India in June 2022, with Afghanistan prominently featuring in the discussions. A press statement from India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) highlighted that both countries emphasized the immediate provision of humanitarian aid to the Afghan people while engaging in talks on international and regional matters, including the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

The discernible resurgence of diplomatic engagement between Tehran and New Delhi, following a period of relative stagnation in the Indo-Iranian relationship since 2018, signifies significant strategic realignments precipitated by the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban. India's proactive overtures toward Iran serve as a clear indication of the latter's pivotal role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US withdrawal. Furthermore, Iran's recent inclusion as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) offers new avenues for collaboration between India and Iran, particularly in the realms of security and connectivity. This development holds the potential to deepen and diversify the partnership between the two nations in these critical domains.

The February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a profound impact on the geopolitical dynamics of the Eurasian region. Relations between Russia and the West have deteriorated significantly, elevating the strategic importance of pivot states like Turkey and Iran for both sides. As stringent Western sanctions take effect, Russia is actively seeking alternative trade routes, currency arrangements, political support, and connectivity options. In this context, Iran emerges as a crucial link for Russia to establish connections with India and Asian markets, leveraging its overland routes and ports like Chabahar and Bandar Abbas. Additionally, Iran holds significant influence in global oil and gas markets. Iran and Russia both hold

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<sup>1</sup> "Jaishankar meets Iranian President-elect," *The Hindu*, 8 July 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Suhasini Haidar, "Jaishankar's Tehran visit significant for timing on Afghanistan," *The Hindu*, 5 August 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Visit of H. E. Dr. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran to India" (press release, Ministry of External Affairs, 8 June 2022), <https://mea.gov.in/>.

pivotal roles in the Syrian context, which explains Russian president Vladimir Putin's July 2022 visit to Tehran to engage with Iranian and Turkish leadership.

The article adopts a comprehensive structure comprising of eight sections. Firstly, it elucidates the pivotal role of Iran as a significant geopolitical pivot and highlights Tehran's strategic importance as a major player in West, Central, and South Asian geopolitics. Subsequently, it situates Iran within India's extended neighborhood, offering a framework to comprehend New Delhi's foreign policy objectives and the expanding horizons of its strategic vision. The discussion then delves into India's five primary strategic interests concerning its ties with Iran, namely the geopolitics of Afghanistan, overland access to Central Asia and Russia, security and stability of the Persian Gulf, energy security, and engagement with West Asia. These five key interests are examined against the backdrop of evolving global and regional geopolitics. Given the ongoing war in Ukraine, the article refrains from making definitive assessments regarding its impact or predicting future directions, acknowledging the fluidity of the situation..

### **Iran as a Geopolitical Pivot**

Iran's pivotal geopolitical location stands as one of its greatest assets, as highlighted by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his influential work *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (1997). Brzezinski, a former US National Security Advisor, categorizes Iran as a *pivot state*, defined as a nation "whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location" and "from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behavior of geostrategic players." As geopolitical pivots owe their significance to their geographical positioning, they play a distinct role in either facilitating access to crucial regions or impeding resource access for influential actors.<sup>4</sup> Alongside Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, and Turkey, Iran emerges as one of the pivotal states with significant importance in world politics, particularly in Eurasian geopolitics. Brzezinski emphasizes Iran's stabilizing support for political diversity in Central Asia and its dominant position along the eastern shoreline of the Persian Gulf. Despite the hostility toward the United States, Iran acts as a barrier against long-term Russian threats to US interests in the Persian Gulf region. Brzezinski further suggests that both Iran and Turkey are engaged in establishing

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<sup>4</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 41.

influence in the Caspian Sea–Central Asia region, yet their capacity for major regional shifts in power distribution is limited due to domestic challenges.<sup>5</sup>

Positioned at the crossroads of the energy-rich Caspian Sea region and Persian Gulf region, Iran's influence extends along the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf and connects the Caspian Sea–Central Asian region to the Indian Ocean through overland transit routes and ports like Chabahar. Additionally, Tehran's significant support and political-military-ideological links with various groups, including the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Assad regime in Syria, enable its influence in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, and Mediterranean regions.<sup>6</sup>

Highlighting Iran's pivotal geostrategic location, Robert Kaplan argues that “just as the Middle East is the quadrilateral for Afro-Eurasia, that is, for the World--Island, Iran is the Middle East's very own universal joint.”<sup>7</sup> Kaplan provocatively suggests that the pivot proposed by Halford Mackinder, traditionally located in the Central Asian steppes, should be moved southward to the Iranian plateau. Iran's possession of key Middle Eastern geography, encompassing location, population, and energy resources, makes it fundamentally significant in global geopolitics.<sup>8</sup>

Both Kaplan and Brzezinski underscore the role of geography as a crucial variable in explaining Iran's enduring strategic power and importance. The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) further expands on the concept of pivot states, identifying military, economic, and ideational factors as critical determinants. Iran—alongside India, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—exhibits attributes in all three categories.<sup>9</sup> As per HCSS, Pivot states find themselves caught amid the overlapping spheres of influence of great powers, with associations comprising military and economic agreements, cultural affinities, arms and commodities trade, and discourse. A change in the association of a pivot state has profound implications for regional and global security. According to the HCSS study, 22 states worldwide can be classified as pivot states, with Iran actively shaping its immediate security environment, thereby underscoring the broader ramifications of its ideological orientation and future associations.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2013), 266–68.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 269.

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 269.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Sweijs et al., *Why are Pivot States so Pivotal?: The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security* (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2014), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Sweijs et al., *Why are Pivot States so Pivotal?*, 31–35.

Iran's unique position places it at the convergence of three regions: the Middle East, South Asia, and the post-Soviet space. For New Delhi, all three regions, along with the northern Indian Ocean maritime space, hold significant importance for India's strategic and economic interests. Consequently, any power exerting influence across the extensive geostrategic expanse from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea and from the Caspian Sea to the Gulf of Aden becomes crucial for India, necessitating engagement with such states.

### **India's Extended Neighborhood and Iran**

India's policy makers perceive "security as lying in a neighborhood of widening concentric circles."<sup>11</sup> India's foreign policy envisions a geostrategic landscape structured around three concentric and expanding circles of engagement. The first circle comprises South Asia, stretching from Afghanistan in the West to Myanmar in the East. Given its demographic and geographic advantages, India holds a dominant position in South Asia, actively seeking primacy and exerting influence to counter external involvement.<sup>12</sup>

The second circle encompasses the extended neighborhood, comprising regions adjacent to South Asia, including West Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and Indian Ocean region. Within this sphere, India aims to "balance the influence of other powers and prevent them from undercutting its interests."<sup>13</sup> Analysts, including David Scott, argue that India's "vision of an extended neighborhood involves power projection by India; be it hard power military and economic projection or be it soft power cultural and ideational strands."<sup>14</sup> This extended neighborhood concept has become a comprehensive framework guiding India's engagement in all directions, characterized by a 360-degree vision of the opportunities beyond South Asia.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, the third circle encompasses the entire world, reflecting India's aspirations as a global power.<sup>16</sup> It signifies India's recognition that its strategic interests and responsibilities extend far beyond its immediate neighborhood. In this circle, India aims to play an active role in shaping global affairs, contributing to

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<sup>11</sup> "Speech by Foreign Secretary Shri Shivshankar Menon on 'India and International Security' at the International Institute of Strategic Studies" (transcript, Ministry of External Affairs, 3 May 2007), <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.

<sup>12</sup> C Raja Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2006), 17–32.

<sup>13</sup> Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," 18.

<sup>14</sup> David Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power," *India Review* 8, no. 2 (2009), 107.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept," 107.

<sup>16</sup> Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," 18.

issues of global significance, and participating in international decision-making processes. India believes that it is not only a regional power but also seeks to be a key player on the global stage, advocating for its national interests, promoting peace and stability, and forging partnerships with countries around the world. This broader global perspective highlights India's ambition to be a responsible and influential actor in addressing the complex challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

India's strategic planners believe that "the logic of geography is unrelenting" and that "geography gives India a unique position in the geo-politics of the Asian continent, with our footprint reaching well beyond South Asia and our interests straddling across different sub-categories of Asia—be it West Asia, East Asia, South-east Asia or Central Asia."<sup>17</sup> For India "Central Asia verges on our northern frontiers" and that "our exclusive economic zone spans the waters from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca."<sup>18</sup>

After the end of the Cold War, India's political, economic and defense engagements with the extended neighborhood have intensified. The deepened engagement with the extended neighborhood is the "beginning of the reassertion of India's historically benign and stabilizing role in these regions premised on the commerce of ideas and goods."<sup>19</sup> In this context, West Asia is a key region in terms of India's extended neighborhood concept. India launched the Look West policy in 2005 as "the Gulf region, like South-East and South Asia, is part of our natural economic hinterland. We must pursue closer economic relations with all our neighbors in our wider Asian neighborhood."<sup>20</sup>

Among these, Iran emerges as India's closest geographic neighbor in the Gulf region, possessing invaluable resources, political capabilities, and a strategic location that renders it indispensable for safeguarding India's interests in West Asia. Iran's role in India's Afghanistan–Pakistan policy is of immense value, reflected in the structure of India's MEA, which groups Iran with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Moreover, Iran's position as a connector for Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the South Caucasus region with the Indian Ocean adds another vital dimension to India's strategic engagement. Significant incidents, such as the 2016 abduction

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<sup>17</sup> "Speech by Foreign Secretary Shri Shivshankar Menon."

<sup>18</sup> "Speech by Foreign Secretary Shri Shivshankar Menon."

<sup>19</sup> "Indian Foreign Policy: A Road Map for the Decade Ahead" - Speech by External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the 46th National Defence College Course" (transcript, Ministry of External Affairs, 15 November 2006, <https://mea.gov.in/>).

<sup>20</sup> "PM launches 'Look West' Policy to boost cooperation with Gulf" (press release, Prime Minister's Office, 27 July 2005, <https://archivepmo.nic.in/>).



of an Indian intelligence officer at the port of Chabahar, have underscored the intricate and interrelated geopolitics at play in West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia. The following sections of this article delve into the complexities of India's Iran challenge.<sup>21</sup>

## **Geopolitics of Afghanistan**

The close geographic proximity and the presence of Shia communities, primarily among the Hazara ethnic group, grant Iran a natural role in Afghan politics. Apart from Pakistan, Iran stands as one of the most significant neighbors to Afghanistan. The Iranian regime perceives itself as the guardian of Shia interests throughout the region, and the sizable Shia population, comprising around 10–12 percent of the Afghan population, compels Tehran to take a keen interest in Afghan affairs. Historically, the city of Herat in western Afghanistan has been under the influence of Iran.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as a major regional power in its own right, Iran possesses the capability to play a critical role in balancing Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan to some extent.

In the late 1990s, Iran—along with India and Russia—supported the anti-Taliban forces represented by the Northern Alliance.<sup>23</sup> The ousting of the Taliban from power following the 11 September 2001 terror attacks brought relief in India and Iran. However, in subsequent years, Iran's deteriorating relationship with the United States and the resurgence of the Taliban as a formidable force prompted Tehran to adjust its strategies. Iran began reaching out to the Taliban to safeguard its interests and established a working relationship with the group.<sup>24</sup> In July 2021, Iran even hosted talks between Afghan and Taliban leadership.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, when Kabul fell on 15 August 2021, the Iranian embassy remained open, and the staff was not evacuated, reflecting Tehran's nuanced approach toward the changing dynamics in Afghanistan.

Together with China, Pakistan, and Russia, Iran is regarded as one of the major beneficiaries of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that the Taliban and Iran are not natural allies; they simply agreed that the departure of US forces was mutually beneficial. Inherent tensions exist in their

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<sup>21</sup> Indo-Asian News Service, "Kulbhushan Jadhav was abducted from Iran by Pak, claims Baloch activist," *Business Standard*, 18 January 2018, <https://www.business-standard.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> Deepika Saraswat, "The Iranian Approach to the Taliban: Understanding Changes and Continuities," *Indian Council of World Affairs*, 25 August 2021, <https://icwa.in/>.

<sup>23</sup> C Raja Mohan, "Ebrahim Raisi and India's Bet on Iran," *Foreign Policy*, 4 August 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> Vinay Kaura, "Iran's influence in Afghanistan," *Middle East Institute*, 23 July 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Afghan gov't delegation meets Taliban in Iran," *Al Jazeera*, 8 July 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>.

relationship, as evidenced by clashes between the Taliban and Iran's border security forces in June and July 2022.<sup>26</sup>

For India, Iran's role in Afghanistan presents a dilemma. India views Iran as a valuable partner in Afghan affairs. However, there has been a divergence between Indian and Iranian perceptions regarding the US presence in Afghanistan. Tehran saw the United States as part of the problem, whereas New Delhi clearly benefited from the US presence in Afghanistan, which facilitated the expansion of India's presence in Afghanistan both militarily and politically. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has had an adverse impact on India's prospects in the country. Despite engaging with the Taliban and reopening its embassy in Kabul, India remains cautious about a Taliban-led Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, India's overtures toward Iran are part of a strategic readjustment. New Delhi aims to maintain a well-established relationship with Tehran, particularly given the rapidly evolving situation in Afghanistan. Over the years, Iran has cultivated a Shia Afghan militia force, known as Fatemiyoun, which grants Tehran significant leverage in Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> At present, Tehran does not appear openly supportive of anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan. However, if Sunni extremist elements of the Taliban gain prominence and pursue policies targeting non-Sunni Muslims, the situation could rapidly change. Similar to India, limiting Pakistan's role in a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan aligns with Iran's long-term interests, and the Indo-Iranian partnership will play a role in this pursuit.

### Overland Access to Central Asia and Russia

Iran holds a central position in India's strategy to establish connections with Central Asia and Russia, which hinges on developing the port of Chabahar, located just outside the Persian Gulf.<sup>28</sup> The routes from Chabahar to Central Asia transit through Afghanistan. Therefore, the supporting infrastructure, mainly the road in Afghanistan between Zaranj and Delaram was needed to be constructed. A modern railway line in Iran from the port to the Afghan border was also envisaged. The project was expected to boost the trade between India and Central Asia, including with Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> Iran, being the transit country, would receive the benefits of a modern infrastructure and a flourishing trade network.

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<sup>26</sup> "Afghan-Iran border clash: Taliban says one killed," *BBC News*, 31 July 2022 <https://www.bbc.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Saraswat, "The Iranian Approach to the Taliban."

<sup>28</sup> Yoel Guzansky and Gil Hurvitz, "A Port Rush: Competition for Control of Trade Routes," *Institute for National Security Studies*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.inss.org.il/>.

<sup>29</sup> Khesraw Omid Farooq, "Chabahar Port: A Step Toward Connectivity for India and Afghanistan," *The Diplomat*, 3 July, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

Additionally, India proposed Chabahar as a vital node in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which seeks to connect Russia and Eastern Europe with India through road, rail, and maritime routes passing through the Caspian Sea region and Iran.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the plans to connect with Central Asia and Russia would be complementary to the INSTC, and the role of Chabahar cannot be overstated in this effort. In the wake of Russian invasion of Ukraine, the INSTC is emerging as an important node for accessing South Asian and Southeast Asian markets. In June 2022, two Russian containers were shipped from Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea to Mumbai, India, via Iran. This was seen as a test for the new trade routes under the INSTC banner. The strained relationship between Washington and Tehran over the Iranian nuclear program was a key factor that delayed the development of Chabahar from 2003 to 2015. In 2015, Iran signed a nuclear deal with the six world powers. As per the deal, Iran accepted limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of stringent sanctions. It opened the doors for greater economic engagement with Iran. In 2016, India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral agreement for the development of Chabahar.<sup>31</sup>

Phase one of the Chabahar port was inaugurated in December 2017, enabling India to send wheat to Afghanistan and provide much-needed humanitarian assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.<sup>32</sup> However, following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the future of Chabahar and its associated connectivity projects has become uncertain. The Taliban's openness to Chinese investments in Afghanistan raises questions about their willingness to support a trade corridor between India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia through Chabahar. Given Pakistan's influence over the Taliban, it is likely that they will discourage the growth of overland trade through Chabahar, as it would diminish Pakistan's control over Afghanistan.

Notably, the port of Chabahar is in close proximity to the China-developed port of Gwadar in Pakistan, which is a significant project for China and Pakistan with strategic and economic implications for the wider Indian Ocean region. China's plans to connect Xinjiang in western China to the Indian Ocean via Gwadar and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) further under-score the importance

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<sup>30</sup> "Address by External Affairs Minister on 'Chabahar Day' at the Maritime India Summit 2021" (transcript, Ministry of External Affairs, 4 March 2021), <https://mea.gov.in/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ankit Panda, "India, Iran, Afghanistan Finalize Chabahar Port Agreement," *The Diplomat*, 18 April 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> Harsh V Pant, "India-Iran Cooperation at Chabahar Port: Choppy Waters," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2 April 2018, <https://www.csis.org/>; and "India to use Chabahar port to send assistance to Afghanistan," *The Hindu*, 9 June 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

of Gwadar to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Consequently, undermining the potential of Chabahar aligns with Pakistan's interest.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, in 2018-19, as the US under the Donald Trump administration hardened its stance towards Iran and re-imposed sanctions, India decided to limit its Iran relationship, which included halting oil imports, despite knowing the strategically important role of Iran in the geopolitics of Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf. As a result, Iran turned to China in a major way. In 2021, it was announced that Iran and China have signed a 25-year agreement for deepening their strategic partnership. As per the agreement, China will invest USD 400 billion in Iran and in return will receive Iranian energy exports.<sup>34</sup> Plans are afoot to develop connectivity and transport infrastructure within Iran and with its neighbors such as Turkey and Pakistan. Chinese companies are expected to play a major role in it. The agreement serves the interests of both parties and opens up new avenues of cooperation. For India, the burgeoning relationship between Iran and China presents considerable challenges. The consequence of the strengthening China-Iran strategic relationship in Eurasia will be to undermine India's interests and operating space in the region. Afghanistan presents another opportunity for China and Iran to work together.

### **Security and Stability of the Persian Gulf**

In India's maritime security considerations, the Persian Gulf and the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz serve as a key theater. The Indian Navy regards this region as one of its primary "areas of maritime interest."<sup>35</sup> Given the presence of approximately 7 million expatriates in Gulf countries and the crucial role of energy supplies from the region in India's energy security, New Delhi recognizes the need to actively contribute to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf.

Iran, situated along the northern coastline of the Gulf, holds immense significance in the strategic dynamics of the region. It possesses the capacity to influence the geopolitical trajectory in the Persian Gulf. However, due to Tehran's contentious relationship with the United States and Gulf powers like Saudi Arabia, the stability in the Gulf has faced persistent challenges. Iran has periodically threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint, which

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<sup>33</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, "Pakistan's Gwadar Port: A New Naval Base in China's String of Pearls in the Indo-Pacific," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2 April, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/>.

<sup>34</sup> Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers, "China, With \$400 Billion Iran Deal, Could Deepen Influence in Mideast," *New York Times*, 27 March, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

<sup>35</sup> Indian Navy, *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 2015, 65-68, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/>.

would have far-reaching implications for global energy security.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, there have been incidents of attacks on oil tankers and ships in the Gulf of Oman, with Iran often implicated.<sup>37</sup>

For India, maintaining stability in the Gulf is essential for its domestic energy security. However, New Delhi finds itself in a complex position: it has substantial interests in ensuring Gulf stability while simultaneously deepening partnerships with the Gulf powers and the United States. The strained relationship between Iran and the United States, along with the latter's allies in West Asia, affects India's engagement with the Gulf region.

In 2020–2021, trade between India and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states reached USD 121 billion, with approximately 60 percent of India's oil imports originating from the Gulf.<sup>38</sup> Recognizing the significant economic and energy interests at stake, the Indian Navy initiated Operation Sankalp in 2019, through which Indian warships were deployed to “establish presence, provide a sense of reassurance to the Indian merchantmen . . . [and] monitor the ongoing situation [between the United States and Iran] and respond to any emergent crises.”<sup>39</sup> Over the course of two years, 23 Indian warships have deployed in support of the operation.<sup>40</sup> This consistent naval presence underscores India's enduring interest in the region. The behavior of Iran in the Gulf, as well as the responses from regional actors, necessitates India's sustained engagement in the Gulf.

## Energy Security

India ranks as the world's third-largest energy consumer, following China and the United States. The country heavily relies on energy imports, with West Asia supplying approximately 60 percent of India's oil needs. Major oil suppliers from the region include Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait.<sup>41</sup> Previously, Iran also played a significant role as a major oil supplier, accounting for

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36. Elisa Catalano Ewers and Ariane Tabatabai, “How Iran's Oil Infrastructure Gambit Could Imperil the Strait of Hormuz,” *War on the Rocks*, 16 June 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

37. Ariel Cohen, “Iran's Suspected Energy Terrorism: Persian Gulf Tanker Hijacking,” *Forbes*, 3 August 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/>.

38. Kirtika Suneja, “India considers reviving FTA talks with Gulf Cooperation Council,” *Economic Times*, 10 April 2021.

39. “Press Brief on Operation Sankalp” (press release, Press Information Bureau, 8 January 2020, <https://pib.gov.in/>).

40. Manjeet Negi, “Two years of Operation Sankalp: Warships deployed in Gulf region for safe passage of merchant ships,” *India Today*, 14 July 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

41. US Energy Information Administration, “India,” 30 September 2020, <https://www.eia.gov/>.

about 10 percent of India's oil imports. In 2018–2019, India was the second-largest consumer of Iranian oil after China, importing around 480,000 barrels per day. However, due to pressure from the United States, India ceased Iranian oil imports in 2019.<sup>42</sup> This loss of a major customer like India was a setback for Iran. In response, India compensated for the shortage of Iranian oil by increasing imports from other Gulf powers and the United States. However, this shift resulted in India losing leverage in its relationship with Iran. Conversely, China resisted US pressure and continued importing oil from Iran, deepening Beijing's strategic partnership with Tehran.

In 2021, as global oil prices began to rise, India considered resuming Iranian oil imports. Iran's geographical proximity and its oil production capabilities position it as a crucial player in India's energy security dynamics. Additionally, certain Indian refineries located on the western coast are geared to process Iranian crude oil. For these refineries, importing Iranian oil and refining it for the domestic and global markets makes practical sense. Against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the significance of oil exporters like Iran has dramatically increased. Bringing Iranian energy exports back into the market would not only alleviate the pressures of rising energy prices but also directly impact Russia. The Russian regime heavily relies on energy exports, and higher prices have served to bankroll the war in Ukraine. For a developing country like India, high energy prices directly impact domestic stability. Therefore, resuming Iranian energy imports becomes imperative to mitigate discontent among the population.

### **Engagement with West Asia**

The intensification of strategic rivalries between Iran and the United States—and Washington's West Asian allies like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel—has become a prominent fault line in West Asian geopolitics. These rivalries often have religious dimension, with Sunni powers in the Gulf pitted against Shia Iran. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pursued aggressive policies aimed at isolating Iran and diminishing its influence in the region. However, their objectives have not been fully achieved. The war in Yemen continues, and Iran's ally, the Assad regime, remains in power in Syria. The region has experienced significant instability over the past decade. To address this, backchannel talks between Saudi and Iranian diplomats were initiated to reduce the tensions between the two regional rivals. Recently, as part of a China-

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42. Nidhi Verma and Julia Payne, "Indian, European refiners get ready to buy Iranian oil," *Reuters*, 19 May 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>.



brokered agreement, both countries decided to reopen embassies and limit their strategic rivalries.

In this complex strategic environment, India has substantial interests in strengthening ties with all major players in West Asia. However, Iran's behavior also affects India's engagement in the region. New Delhi has endeavored to build stable relationships with all major regional players, without taking sides in the ongoing rivalries. In fact, India has invested political capital in deepening its strategic relationships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in recent years. New Delhi is also part of a quadrilateral initiative known as I2-U2, which includes Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. While some analysts perceive this group as anti-Iran, both India and the United Arab Emirates reject such a framing. They recognize the value and importance of Iran in the strategic landscape of South-West Asian geopolitics.

Due to the US policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran during the Trump administration, India was compelled to limit its relationship with Tehran. However, as the geostrategic environment in South-West Asia evolves, New Delhi is reassessing its strategic priorities. Recent visits and diplomatic overtures by India in Iran underscore the enduring strategic significance of Iran in the geopolitics of West Asia and Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

Iran is one of the five geopolitical pivot states in the Eurasian region, with its geostrategic location being the nation's greatest asset. As India has sought to re-engage with the 'extended neighborhood', Iran figures prominently in India's calculations in Afghanistan, Central Asia, Caspian Sea region and the West Asian strategic theatre. In the changing regional and global geopolitics after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Iran's importance has gone up. The five key interests i.e., geopolitics of Afghanistan, overland access to Central Asia and Russia, security, and stability in the Persian Gulf, energy security and engagements with West Asia are enduring drivers of India's relationship with Iran.

Iran's regional behavior, along with the responses from Gulf powers and the United States, as well as Tehran's deepening strategic ties with Beijing, add further complexity to the Indo-Iranian relationship. As India navigates this strategic conundrum, changing dynamics in Afghanistan present intriguing opportunities for India and Iran to reengage and invigorate their strategic partnership.

Iran is an important player in the geostrategic space straddling South-West Asia and the Persian Gulf. However, Iran's hostile relations with the United States and its West Asian allies complicate India's engagement with Iran. India needs Iran for influencing the geopolitics of Afghanistan, for ensuring overland access to

Central Asia and Russia via Afghanistan, for ensuring a secure and stable Persian Gulf, and for India's energy security. Iran is a key factor to consider while charting India's engagements with West Asian powers as well. ★

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# Japan at a Historical Inflection Point

## Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance

MAJ YOUNG K. YOUN, US ARMY

### Abstract

This article examines the current security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing Japan's historical inflection point and the complex security threats it faces. The analysis highlights the evolution of the US–Japan security alliance since its establishment in 1951, demonstrating its resilience amidst changing geopolitical and domestic political dynamics. The alliance has persevered despite various obstacles, benefiting from Japan's strategic location in a region marked by security threats posed by China, North Korea, and Russia. Concurrently, the United States, serving as a security guarantor in both the Atlantic and Pacific regions, has encountered increased demands and uncertainties regarding its security commitments. By delving into historical context, key drivers, and challenges, this article offers a comprehensive overview of the US–Japan security alliance, exploring its implications for regional and global security. Understanding the alliance's complexities offers valuable insights for policy makers and scholars seeking to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

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The Indo-Pacific region is currently experiencing a historical inflection point in its security environment. The Government of Japan (GoJ) asserts that Japan is facing the most complex and challenging security threats since the end of World War II. Over the past seven decades, the US–Japan security alliance has evolved, influenced by a complex interplay of historical, domestic, and geopolitical factors. Since its establishment in 1951, this alliance has adapted to changing geopolitical and domestic political dynamics, enduring various unique challenges. Given Japan's strategic location, it finds itself at the center of a precarious situation, grappling with security threats and challenges from neighboring countries such as China, North Korea, and Russia. The United States, being a security guarantor to its European and Asian allies and partners, has found itself stretched thin, managing regional instability in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. Consequently, this has heightened the security dilemma and prompted doubts among allies regarding US security commitments. Through an examination of the historical context and an analysis of the key drivers and challenges that have influenced the alliance's development, this article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the US–Japan security alliance. Additionally, it explores the implications

of this alliance for regional and global security and underscores its significance in the contemporary security landscape.

## **The Three Pillars of Japanese Security Policy**

### ***1947 The Constitution of Japan.***

In February 1946, General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan, along with his occupation staff, drafted a new constitution for Japan. The GoJ made slight revisions to the final draft before its promulgation by the Diet.<sup>1</sup> Japan's postwar constitution of 1947, which replaced the 1889 Meiji Constitution, encapsulates three interrelated principles in Japanese constitutional culture: international pacifism, democracy, and popular sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> The constitution relegated the Japanese Emperor to a symbolic role, established a bill of rights that guarantees civil liberties, prohibited Japan from exercising its sovereign rights to wage war, and established checks and balances among the government branches of the Diet, Cabinet, and Judiciary.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, the new constitution received widespread acceptance, not only from politicians and the domestic public but also from the emperor himself. However, the interpretation and implementation of Article 9 of Japan's constitution remain a subject of controversy, with domestic and international political considerations and challenges complicating the issue.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that despite the controversy surrounding Article 9 and the constitution as a whole, no amendments have been made to date.

### ***UN Charter***

On 18 December 1956, Japan became a member of the United Nations (UN), marking a significant milestone. Since then, the UN Charter has played a crucial role in shaping Japan's foreign policies and guiding its international relations with other countries. This influence is evident in the 1960 Japan–US Security Treaty, where the UN Charter is recognized as the treaty's legal foundation. Throughout the treaty document, the UN Charter is referenced multiple times, demonstrating

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Perry, *Beneath the Eagle's Wings: Americans in Occupied Japan* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> "The Constitution of Japan," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 3 May 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Article 9 is a clause in Japan's Constitution that renounces war and prohibits Japan from maintaining a military force.

Japan's commitment to fostering peace and security, promoting human rights, and acknowledging the inherent right to individual or collective self-defense.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Japan's foreign policy framework is deeply rooted in the principles of the UN Charter, which serves as a foundation for its understanding and interpretation of various international issues.

### ***1951 US–Japan Security Treaty***

The US–Japan security alliance rests upon the principles and democratic values enshrined in the 1951 US–Japan Security Treaty. According to this treaty, the United States pledged to defend Japan in the event of an armed attack on Japanese territory. In support of the alliance, Japan granted the United States continued use of military bases, which served the dual purpose of maintaining international peace, regional security in the Far East, and defending Japan itself.<sup>6</sup>

The security treaty, also known as the “unequal treaty of 1951,” was imposed on Japan by the United States as a condition for ending the US occupation of Japan.<sup>7</sup> The signing of the treaty was widely regarded in Japan as a necessary sacrifice to regain sovereignty. However, it came at a domestic cost, as demonstrated by the Bloody May Day riots that erupted on 1 May 1952. Communist, socialist, and labor union groups that vehemently opposed the 1951 security treaty organized these riots.<sup>8</sup> Tragically, two people lost their lives, and approximately 1,500 protestors and 800 police officers sustained injuries during the unrest. This event sparked a surge in anti-American sentiment within Japan and fueled a broader movement advocating for demilitarization and left-wing political ideologies in the country.

### ***1960 US–Japan Security Treaty***

The current treaty, which underwent revisions in June 1960, stands as the cornerstone of Japan's security policy. It grants authorization for the presence of US military bases and troops on Japanese soil, primarily to defend Japan in the event of an attack.<sup>9</sup> The revised treaty also includes an obligation for the United

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<sup>5</sup> “Japan-U.S. Security Treaty,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 19 January 1960.

<sup>6</sup> “Security Treaty between the United States and Japan,” Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, 8 September 1951.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Kapur, “Japan's Streets of Rage: The 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty Uprising and the Origins of Contemporary Japan,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 18, iss. 11, no. 3 (25 May 2020), <https://apjif.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Kahan, “Riot: 6 Times Japan Got Mad,” *Tokyo Weekender*, 24 March 2023, <https://www.tokyo-weekender.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Mike M. Mochizuki, *Toward a True Alliance: Restructuring U.S.-Japan Security Relations* (Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 1997).

States to consult with Japan in advance if the US military bases were to be employed for combat operations beyond Japan's defense needs. Japanese government officials interpreted this provision as conferring the right to veto the United States from utilizing Japan as a launching pad for military operations in other parts of the region.

Although the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, also referred to as "Anpo" in Japan, now serves as the bedrock of US–Japan security relations, it was met with significant and prolonged popular protests, consisting of the largest demonstrations in Japan's postwar history. The sequence of following the treaty's conception includes the 19 May incident, in which Japanese Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke pushed the treaty through the National Diet after removing opposition lawmakers; the 10 June incident, where US envoys were mobbed by protestors while inside their vehicle; and the 15 June incident, a violent clash between the police and radical student activists on the National Diet compound. On 18 June, an estimated 330,000 demonstrators took to the streets near the Diet.<sup>10</sup> Despite the protest, the treaty was signed the following day.

It is worth noting that this treaty was signed during a period when Japan and the Soviet Union were working toward normalizing relations, even as tensions between Washington and Moscow were escalating. Concurrently, the Japanese people raised concerns about the risk of entanglement in foreign conflicts, the United States' commitment to Japan's defense, and Japan's veto power over US troop movements in Asia.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Japan's Security Policies in a Historical Context***

To understand the postwar Japanese constitution in its historical context, it is important to consider General MacArthur's role during the US occupation and the collective mind-set of the Japanese people at the time. As the SCAP, General MacArthur implemented sweeping political, economic, military, and social reforms aimed at democratizing and demilitarizing Japan.<sup>12</sup> The SCAP's government section was responsible for crafting the postwar constitution, which fundamentally reshaped the distribution of political power within Japan by curtailing the temporal authority of the Japanese Emperor and bolstering the power of the Diet. Consequently, many Japanese elites and politicians pragmatically aligned them-

<sup>10</sup> Mochizuki, *Toward a True Alliance*; and Kapur, "Japan's Streets of Rage."

<sup>11</sup> Justin Jesty, "Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief: Hamaya Hiroshi's Photos of the Anti-Security-Treaty Protests," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, iss. 9, no. 2 (2 March 2015), <https://apjif.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).



selves with the United States, recognizing that policies aligning with US interests yielded significant benefits. During the US occupation, Washington provided more than USD 2.2 billion in economic and military aid to Japan, surpassing Japan's national budget at the time.<sup>13</sup> This aid played a pivotal role in Japan's rapid postwar recovery. Furthermore, the Yoshida doctrine, named after the influential postwar prime minister, acknowledged the US security umbrella as a military, political, and economic advantage.<sup>14</sup>

Remarkably, the postwar Japanese constitution has remained unamended for more than 70 years, making it the world's oldest unamended constitution.<sup>15</sup> Aside from Article 9, which has increasingly become a subject of debate and contention in recent years due to escalating security tensions globally, the Japanese constitution mainly focuses on provisions related to self-governance. One way to explain the persistence of an unamended constitution for more than 70 years is the security interdependence between Japan and the United States. The Japanese archipelago holds significant strategic importance for the United States due to its geographic location, which grants proximity to trade routes and access to key maritime areas.<sup>16</sup> Japan's geostrategic position enables the United States to project military power in the region and impede China and Russia (and, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union) from gaining direct access to crucial maritime routes and terrain. For Japan, relying on the US security guarantee has allowed the country to prioritize its commercial interests without having to allocate extensive resources to defense spending. Consequently, defense minimalism has been the prevailing norm among Japanese policy makers. The imperative for Japan to amend its constitution has not been compelling enough to seriously consider revising or removing Article 9. However, as security threats in the region have intensified over the past decade, Japan has interpreted Article 9 in ways that strengthen its defense capabilities.

Another factor contributing to the unamended constitution is the collective psyche of the Japanese people. After the war, Japanese citizens widely acknowledged that their militarism and indoctrinated nationalism were major factors leading to

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<sup>13</sup> Nina Serafino, Curt Tarnoff, and Dick Nanto, *U.S. Occupation Assistance: Iraq, Germany, and Japan Compared* (Washington: CRS Report for Congress, 23 March 2006), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *Rethinking Japanese Security* (New York: Routledge, 2008). In principle, the Yoshida doctrine prioritized Japan's economic development over defense development by depending on the United States for its security.

<sup>15</sup> Sheila A. Smith et al., "Constitutional Change in Japan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas H. Etzold and John L. Gaddis, "Implementation: The Far East," in *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*. Columbia University Press, 1978.

the conflict.<sup>17</sup> Under US occupation, Japan underwent rapid transformation facilitated by the introduction of Western ideas and practices such as democracy, civil liberties, individualism, and access to US markets and technology. This collective memory of the war and its aftermath continues to shape the psyche of the Japanese people, resulting in a culture of antimilitarism. Japanese society can be broadly categorized into three schools of thought: pacifists, revisionists, and the mainstream.<sup>18</sup> Pacifists advocate for strict adherence to the antiwar and antimilitary provision of Article 9. Revisionists argue that Japan should become a “normal” nation and rely primarily on itself for defense. The mainstream, which prevailed during the Cold War, believed in rebuilding Japan’s economic power and depending on the United States for security. Ultimately, Japanese citizens approach constitutional changes with caution, recognizing that the constitution has safeguarded their postwar democracy.

### **Japan’s Collective Memory of Internal and External Security Issues**

The historical legacy of Japan’s prewar imperial colonization, the Pacific War, and the subsequent postwar reconstruction efforts have profoundly shaped its modern national identity as a peaceful island nation connected to the global community. Throughout the US occupation, the Japanese people internalized the significance of embracing new ideas and participating in international cooperation. However, similar to the immune system’s response to a foreign entity within the body, Japanese society has exhibited comparable responses toward the ongoing presence of the US military on the islands. This section aims to delve into the intricate dynamics among Japan’s domestic audience, its political establishment, and the US military concerning internal and external security events.

The first part will scrutinize the attempts by the Diet to revise the constitution, the connections between the Diet and the country’s elites, and the ensuing domestic reactions. The second part will delve into historical security events, analyze the respective responses from Japan and the United States, and evaluate their implications.

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<sup>17</sup> Etzold and Gaddis, “Implementation: The Far East.”

<sup>18</sup> Richard C. Bush, “The U.S. Policy of Extended Deterrence in East Asia: History, Current Views, and Implications,” Arms Control Series 5 (Washington: Brookings Institution, February 2011), <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

## ***Politics of Constitutional Revision***

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is Japan's conservative and largest party and has been advocating for constitutional reforms since its inception in 1955. Its longstanding influence on Japan's economic growth miracle and its diverse membership, encompassing both right-wing nationalists and relatively liberal, progressive politicians, have contributed to the LDP's sustained dominance in power for the majority of the past seven decades. The LDP has identified four key areas for revision: Article 9, upper house electoral districts, access to free education, and emergency powers for the Cabinet.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1990s, Japan began reevaluating its national security policy in response to escalating external threats, particularly North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.<sup>20</sup> In 1999, the Diet ratified the Regional Contingencies Law, which outlined Japanese logistical support for the United States in peacetime, armed attacks on Japan, and regional security contingencies. In 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's reinterpretation of Article 9, shifting from a strict interpretation to a more flexible approach, paved the way for security reforms through legislative measures that benefited the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and the US military. However, the move stirred significant controversy within Japan.<sup>21</sup>

On 16 July 2015, three key bills were passed. The first, the Law on Response to Contingencies, granted Japan the ability to employ force in assisting another state, even if Japan itself is not under direct attack. The second bill replaced the 1999 Regional Contingencies Law with new provisions that eliminated strict geographical limitations on security scenarios, facilitating global cooperation with the US military and other allies. The third bill empowered the JSDF to rescue Japanese nationals overseas and protect the armed forces of the United States and other countries. These laws broadened the permissions and authorities of the JSDF, introducing the concept of "collective self-defense" under three specific conditions.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sheila A. Smith et al., "The Politics of Revision," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> Asai Motofumi, "The Bush Strategy and Japan's War Contingency Laws," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 1, iss. 5 (23 May 2003), <https://apjff.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> Motofumi, "The Bush Strategy and Japan's War Contingency Laws"; and Sheila A. Smith et al., "Public Attitudes on Revision," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> The three new conditions are: (1) an attack on another state poses a "clear danger" to Japan's survival or to Japanese citizens' constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; (2) there is no alternative way of repelling the attack and protecting Japan and its citizens without the use of force; and (3) the use of force must be limited to the minimum necessary.

Despite the passage of these contentious bills through the Diet in 2015, the LDP has yet to achieve a successful amendment of Japan's postwar constitution.

### ***The Critics***

The legislations passed by the Japanese Diet have faced criticism from China and North Korea due to concerns about Japan deviating from its pacifist policies. South Korea has called for improved transparency and prior coordination regarding military movements related to the Korean peninsula. Within Japan, critics perceive the new laws as “war bills” that potentially grant authorization for the JSDF to participate in foreign conflicts under the guise of collective self-defense, thereby violating Japan's pacifist constitution.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, these security-related issues have become highly politicized and eroded Abe's political capital.

A significant portion of the Japanese public opposed the bills and felt that the government failed to adequately explain their implications, leading to protests near the parliament building in Tokyo in August 2015. Domestic critics argue that Abe's decision to force the bill through the Diet using his coalition's majority was undemocratic, as it disregarded the concerns of constituents and involved bending the rules.<sup>24</sup>

## **Identity Politics from Japan's Collective Memory**

The relationships between significant security incidents, the responses of the Japanese government and citizens, as well as the reactions of the United States, have been evaluated to assess their impact on the alliance. The analysis reveals that Japan's collective memory regarding security-related matters can be classified into three distinct areas: the domestic politics surrounding Okinawa, the cultural divide within the alliance, and the geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region.

### ***Domestic Politics in Okinawa***

To analyze the dynamics between the domestic audience, the GoJ, and the United States, five internal security-related incidents will be examined: the 1970 Koza riot/uprising, 1971 Okinawa Reversion Agreement, 1995 Okinawa rape incident, 2006 Camp Schwab Plan, and the 2012 protest of US Osprey deployment. These incidents have played a significant role in shaping the sentiments and responses of various stakeholders.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Abe on His Heels,” *Foreign Affairs*, n.d., <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> Japanese diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conversation with author, 29 March 2023.

The presence of US military bases has long been a source of resentment and frustration for the Okinawan people, fueled in part by repeated criminal activities involving US servicemembers. The 1970 Koza riot, for example, was triggered by a drunk-driving accident caused by a US serviceman that resulted in the injury of an Okinawan man.<sup>25</sup> The riot saw the participation of approximately 3,000 Okinawans, who engaged in acts of arson, targeting cars with US license plates, a school, and a guard house on a US Air Force base.<sup>26</sup> This incident, occurring while the community was still reeling from the acquittal of three US service members who killed an Okinawan pedestrian earlier that same year, not only highlighted the deep-seated frustration among Okinawans but also foreshadowed the challenges that the US military and the GoJ would face in their relationship with the local population.

The 1995 Okinawa rape incident further exposed the complex political, social, and legal challenges associated with the US military bases in Okinawa. This incident prompted widespread protests in Okinawa, with demands for a reduction in US forces and revisions to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The incident underscored the political divisions between the GoJ and the Okinawa prefecture, as well as the societal divisions between mainland Japanese and Okinawan locals. The Okinawan government viewed the SOFA as an unfair treaty that shielded US servicemembers from facing appropriate consequences for their criminal actions and vigorously called for its revision.<sup>27</sup> However, the Ministry of Defense, representing the GoJ, was cautious about making changes that could impact the US–Japan Security Treaty and the overall US military presence in Japan. This led to a divergence of opinions between the Okinawan government and the Japanese and US governments, which shared a similar stance on the role of the US military in the region. The United States also perceived any revisions to the SOFA as having broader implications for its forces throughout the Indo-Pacific, including South Korea and beyond, potentially limiting its military activities worldwide.

Okinawans have consistently felt that they bear a disproportionate burden regarding the distribution of US military bases, calling for a more equitable distribution throughout Japan. However, attempts to transfer US military bases from Okinawa to mainland Japan have faced strong opposition from the mainland. Consequently, Okinawans continue to perceive the burden-sharing arrangement

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<sup>25</sup> “The Koza Uprising,” *Okinawa Memories Initiative*, 2023, <https://okinawamemories.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Mitchell, “Military policeman’s ‘hobby’ documented 1970 Okinawa rioting,” *Japan Times*, 17 December 2011, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>.

<sup>27</sup> Masamichi S. Inoue, *The Rape Incident and the Predicaments of Okinawan Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

as unjust and unbalanced, contributing to anti-Tokyo sentiments. Grievances have persisted and grown since the 1971 Okinawa Reversion agreement, which involved relocating US military bases within the Ryukyu Islands. These sentiments have further complicated the dynamics of the alliance.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Anti-Tokyo Protests***

Protests erupted in Tokyo, reflecting widespread discontent and demands for the independence of the Ryukyu Islands from Japan. Critics of the Japanese government raised allegations of secret deals with the United States, which undermined Prime Minister Eisaku Sato's credibility and fueled suspicions about the government's true intentions and discriminatory treatment of the Okinawans.<sup>29</sup> These suspicions primarily revolved around perceived favoritism toward mainland Japanese and the United States, at the expense of the Okinawans.

The 2016 Camp Schwab Plan further eroded trust in the government among the Okinawans due to unilateral changes made by Tokyo and Washington regarding the relocation of US troops from Futenma Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) in the city center of Ginowan City, to Camp Schwab in Henoko, Nago City.<sup>30</sup> Concerns over the potential risks to civilians and the possibility of air-craft crashes in the densely populated Ginowan City led to tensions surrounding Futenma. Despite strong opposition from the public in Nago City, the GoJ uni-laterally decided to relocate the base to the less densely populated area of Henoko. This decision exacerbated mistrust among Okinawans toward the national government's decision-making process, policy positions, and ability to accurately represent the demands and desires of Okinawa's constituents.

The relocation process has faced numerous complications and delays due to budgetary and political obstacles, further straining the relationship between Okinawa, the GoJ, and the US military. Ultimately, both the Okinawa Reversion agreement and the Camp Schwab Plan have intensified negative sentiments among Okinawans toward the Japanese government. These grievances have amplified societal and political divisions between Okinawans and mainland Japanese, as well as between local and national governments regarding the overall presence of US military forces in Japan.

<sup>28</sup> In the 1971 Okinawa Reversion Agreement, the United States relinquished its administration of Ryukyu Islands and Daito Islands and returned them to Japanese sovereignty.

<sup>29</sup> Hong N. Kim, "The Sato Government and The Politics of Okinawa Reversion," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 11 (November 1973): 1021–35, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>30</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart, *The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa and the Futenma Base Controversy* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 20 January 2016), <https://sgp.fas.org/>.



## ***Safety and Environmental Concerns***

In addition to the ongoing issues, Okinawans have raised concerns regarding environmental and safety issues associated with US military aircraft, specifically the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. The deployment of Ospreys to Okinawa in 2012 triggered a public outcry, with 25,000 protestors taking to the streets.<sup>31</sup> These aircraft had a history of crashes during their development, resulting in 30 fatalities.<sup>32</sup> Alongside safety hazards, the military aircrafts also caused noise pollution, negatively impacting the daily lives of Okinawan residents. For many years, US forces conducted nighttime helicopter assault training exercises from Kadena Air Base, located in Okinawa City, the second-largest city in Okinawa prefecture. Despite the protests, the Japanese government accepted the delivery of Ospreys in July 2022 and plans to acquire more, sparking further demonstrations at the gates of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Tachikawa base. The Japanese government's decision to purchase Ospreys demonstrates its willingness to prioritize the security alliance with the United States, even if it entails potential political costs, although these costs may be marginal.

## ***Cultural Divide of the Alliance***

The Ehime Maru incident exposed a significant cultural divide between Americans and Japanese. On 9 February 2001, the USS *Greeneville*, a US Navy submarine, collided with a Japanese high-school fisheries training ship, the *Ehime Maru*, resulting in the tragic death of nine out of the 35 passengers on board.<sup>33</sup> However, the incident was reported differently by the Japanese and US media, reflecting a cultural bias. The Japanese press portrayed the *Ehime Maru* as a training vessel for high-school students and characterized the incident as a “careless human error” by the US commanding officer. On the other hand, the US media depicted the *Ehime Maru* as a fishing trawler and referred to the incident as an “unfortunate accident.” The divergent word choices and the way in which the incident was framed by the media created distinct images in the minds of their respective domestic audiences, shaping their perceptions of the tragic event.

These differing perceptions can also be attributed to contrasting cultural values and societal customs between the two countries. Immediately following the *Ehime*

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<sup>31</sup> Chiyomi Sumida and Travis J. Tritten, “Japan says 25,000 took part in Osprey protest on Okinawa,” *Stars and Stripes*, 14 September 2012, <https://www.stripes.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremiah Gertler, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft Program* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 19 April 2012), 7, <https://apps.dtic.mil/>.

<sup>33</sup> Tomoko Masumoto, “The Semantic Dimensions of an International Story: The ‘Ehime Maru’ Incident,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68, no. 2 (April 2011): 205–13, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

*Maru* incident, the Japanese expected Captain Scott Waddle, the submarine's commander, to offer a prompt personal apology. In Japan, it is customary for the person in charge to promptly apologize on behalf of their organization as a demonstration of social maturity, sincerity, and contrition. However, a US Navy representative advised Captain Waddle not to apologize, as it could be interpreted as an admission of guilt during potential court trials. While the US President, the US Ambassador to Japan, and top US military officers issued official apologies, these gestures were not fully accepted by the Japanese due to their perceived lack of promptness, which the Japanese interpreted as a lack of sincerity. Captain Waddle was later acquitted in court and received a military honorable discharge along with full pay and benefits. He eventually conveyed an apology in a letter to the bereaved family members, albeit belatedly and impersonally. These divergent social customs and cultural values between Americans and the Japanese contributed to contrasting impressions of each other, fostering mismanaged expectations that fueled suspicions and mistrust.

### ***Biased Media Reporting***

The local Okinawans primarily rely on two local media sources—the *Ryukyu Shimpo* and the *Okinawa Times*—for their news consumption. However, due to the reversion agreement, nonlocal newspapers are prohibited from being published within the Okinawa prefecture, eliminating any competition with mainstream Japanese newspapers. Both Okinawan newspapers have been criticized for their alleged bias in reporting the news. For example, in December 2014, when a US Marine saved an elderly Okinawan gentleman, the local newspapers and broadcast companies did not attend the press conference on the incident and misrepresented the nature of the US military.<sup>34</sup> This consistent negative media portrayal has contributed to the development of a parochial narrative within Okinawan communities, fostering the belief that the US military is inherently malevolent.

Even during the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the Okinawan news media provided limited coverage of the goodwill efforts conducted by the US military, in stark contrast to the coverage by mainland media. The way historical events have been conveyed through the media, or intentionally left unreported, has cast a long shadow over US–Japan relations.

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<sup>34</sup> Robert D. Eldridge, “Words to Worry About: The Danger of Media Bias in Okinawa,” *Nippon.com*, 16 July 2015, <https://www.nippon.com/>.

## ***Differing Norms and Structures***

Another instance of cultural misunderstandings between the United States and Japan can be seen during Operation Tomodachi. On 11 March 2011, a devastating 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck Honshu Island, resulting in the displacement of 500,000 citizens, 16,000 fatalities, 5,000 injuries, and the destruction of 129,000 houses.<sup>35</sup> The following day, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power complex experienced explosions, necessitating the evacuation of nearby residents. In response to the crisis, Operation Tomodachi was initiated, involving all branches of the US military. They played a supporting role alongside the JSDF, assisting Japan with logistics, search-and-rescue operations, radiological decontamination, and the provision of intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capabilities. By early April 2011, the United States had provided USD 95 million in humanitarian funding. Unsurprisingly, the intervention by the United States was received very positively by the Japanese population. Operation Tomodachi was widely regarded as successful and contributed to a favorable public opinion of the US–Japan security alliance.

However, despite the positive image projected, the joint disaster response effort revealed significant challenges in coordination, decision-making processes, command and control, information sharing, and resource allocation between the two countries. The US approach to disaster response differed considerably from that of their Japanese counterparts, resulting in gaps in situational knowledge and differing expectations. In contrast to the US government, the Japanese government demonstrated a higher degree of compartmentalization among its ministries and agencies, which limited the establishment of a robust command-and-control center and impeded a timely whole-of-government response. Operation Tomodachi, much like the *Ehime Maru* incident, highlighted the differences between the two countries rooted in their distinct cultural, societal, and institutional norms and structures.

## ***Geopolitics in Indo-Pacific Region***

Japan's perception of China and Russia as threats has increasingly become palpable and widespread both domestically and globally. A significant incident in 2010 involved a Chinese fishing boat colliding with two Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the Senkaku Islands, leading to the arrest of the Chinese crew members.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Moroney et al., *Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 85–108, <https://www.rand.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "Japan Seeks Chinese Compensation Over 2010 Boat Collision Incident," *The Diplomat*, 14 February 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

Beijing implemented an unofficial embargo on rare earth minerals, leveraging the economic interdependence between the two countries. This embargo had significant implications for Japan's automobile industry, particularly in hybrid vehicle production, where rare earth minerals are vital components. Beijing further heightened tensions by arresting four Japanese businessmen for trespassing on a Chinese military facility. Subsequently, thousands of Japanese protestors took to the streets of Tokyo, expressing their dissatisfaction with China's behavior and the Japanese government's handling of the territorial dispute, specifically the release of the Chinese ship captain.<sup>37</sup>

To address the escalating situation, the United States communicated to the Japanese government that the Senkaku Islands fall under the purview of the US–Japan security pact.<sup>38</sup> This implied that any military aggression by the People's Republic of China against the Senkakus would trigger the security pact. In a similar vein, in November 2013, Beijing unilaterally declared an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, creating overlaps with Japan's ADIZ. Once again, the United States reiterated its commitment to Japan's security and criticized Beijing's declaration as “unilateral, escalatory, and destabilizing.”<sup>39</sup> Despite objections from Japan and the United States, China persists in asserting its claims over the Senkaku Islands and the East China Sea, exacerbating the tension surrounding the territorial disputes.

### **US–Japan Security Cooperation: Evolution of the “Spear and Shield” Relationship**

The “spear and shield” metaphor is commonly used to describe the division of security roles between Japan and the United States. In this metaphor, Japan assumes a defensive-oriented posture as the “shield,” while the United States assumes responsibility for offensive operations, both conventional and nuclear, as the “spear.”<sup>40</sup> This approach aligns with the Yoshida doctrine, which allows Japan to prioritize economic development by adopting a minimalist approach to defense spending (capped at less than one percent of GDP). The alliance between Japan and the United States is highly valued by the Japanese government as it plays a crucial role in maintaining peace, security, and stability within Japan, the surrounding

<sup>37</sup> Yoree Koh, “Tokyo Protests Blast China's Response to Collision,” *Wall Street Journal*, 3 October, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/>.

<sup>38</sup> “Clinton: Senkakus subject to security pact,” *Japan Times*, 25 September 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Green et al., “Counter-coercion series: East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, 13 June 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery et al., *Japan–U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 6 January 2023), <https://sgp.fas.org/>.

region, and the global security environment.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the alliance serves as a deterrent against potential adversaries with hostile intentions.

In slight contrast, the United States primarily focuses on the military aspects of the alliance, particularly due to Japan's geostrategic location, which provides access to Eurasia, critical sea lines of communication, and the ability to project military power into the region.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Japan's military geography is essential for the defense of the United States, as a conquest of Japan or a Japanese realignment with China would have detrimental effects on US national interests. In today's geopolitical environment, the US–Japan alliance has evolved from a bilateral relationship parochially centered around containing communism in a bipolar world to a regionally focused relationship characterized by shared threat perceptions in a multipolar world. Accordingly, the alliance continues to serve as a cornerstone for ensuring security and advancing prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, thereby safeguarding the international liberal order. However, it is important to acknowledge that the security alliance also carries the potential risk of entrapment, meaning that either party could become involved in a conflict or war against their wishes.

### ***Japan's Tough Neighborhood***

Japan finds itself in an increasingly challenging neighborhood surrounded by hostile neighbors. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's unilateral changes in the East and South China Seas, and North Korea's frequent nuclear and missile activities all contribute to Japan's security concerns.<sup>43</sup> Most importantly, the tensions developing around the Taiwan Strait could draw Japan into the conflict given its proximity to the island nation. According to CIA director William Burns, President Xi Jinping has ordered his country's military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.<sup>44</sup> While enhancing readiness does not constitute a declaration of war, President Xi's ambition should be taken seriously. These developments place Japan on the frontline, with three revisionist states possessing nuclear capabilities in close proximity. Given the shifting geopolitical landscape, Japan has

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<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Defense, Japan, "Significance of the Japan–U.S. Security Arrangements," n.d., <https://www.mod.go.jp/>.

<sup>42</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> According to the *New York Times*, North Korea launched at least 95 ballistic and other missiles in 2022, which was 10 times more than the previous year. Several of the missiles flew over northern Japan.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Martina and David Brunnstrom "CIA Chief Warns Against Underestimating Xi's Ambitions toward Taiwan." *Reuters*, 2 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

three options: (1) to disengage, (2) to align with a rising power, or (3) to pursue a balancing strategy.

The first option entails Japan refraining from taking any action against China, which could result in the rewriting of regional norms and order by the “neighborhood bullies.” While aligning with China may offer some potential benefits, it is highly impractical due to ongoing territorial disputes and lingering resentments from the pre-1945 period. This leaves Japan with option 3, which involves balancing against the revisionist states by strengthening its relations with the United States. As external threats have increased and mutual threat perceptions have aligned more closely, the US–Japan security alliance has indeed grown stronger.

However, Japan still believes that its current security posture is insufficient, particularly in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Over the past year, the Japanese government has recognized the importance of expanding its role in internal balancing, such as rearmament, as well as external balancing through broader collaborations with like-minded countries.

### ***US–Japan Security Policy Responses***

In light of the evolving threat environment, the GoJ has announced its intention to increase the defense budget to a record high of two percent of its GDP in the 2022 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS).<sup>45</sup> This includes the acquisition of unprecedented “stand-off” missile capabilities, referring to long-range missiles with the ability to strike enemy territory. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a transformative impact on Japan, leading to a significant shift in Tokyo’s strategic calculations and military preparedness.

In 2022, Japan released its second-ever *National Security Strategy* (NSS, the first one was published in 2013), along with the new NDS and Defense Buildup Program, which outline guidelines for developing and maintaining critical defense capabilities to support the NDS.<sup>46</sup> These documents primarily focus on enhancing Japan’s deterrence capabilities and addressing provocations from regional adversaries. Japan observed that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was facilitated by Ukraine’s inadequate defense capability. As a small state, Japan saw parallels between itself and Ukraine and viewed Russia in a similar light as China, both being large, autocratic states. Consequently, Japan recognized the need to address its security deficit by enhancing its defense capabilities in a manner that Ukraine was unable

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Defense, Japan, “Significance of the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements.”

<sup>46</sup> Adam P. Liff and Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Japan’s new security policies: A long road to full implementation,” *Order from Chaos* (blog), 27 March 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.



to do. This shift prompted Japan's transition from a "proactive contribution to peace" policy outlined in its 2013 *NSS* to a retaliatory/deterrent approach utilizing counterstrike missile capabilities, such as cruise missiles.<sup>47</sup>

### ***US–Japan Threat Perception***

Aside from Iran, Japan's threat perception aligns with that of the United States regarding China, Russia, and North Korea.<sup>48</sup> The heightened threat perception has led to the deepening and strengthening of the US–Japan security alliance through various security cooperation initiatives, presenting challenges to China's grand strategy. With more than 50,000 US troops currently stationed in Japan, surpassing troop levels in any other country, the United States demonstrates its commitment and preparedness to assist Japan in maintaining its security.<sup>49</sup> However, despite this US security guarantee, the Japanese still harbor concerns about the potential for abandonment.

### ***Japan's Fear of Abandonment***

In a historical context, the security guarantee provided by the United States now carries much greater potential costs and risks than it did 70 years ago. This shift is attributed to the increased capabilities of strategic competitors such as China and North Korea, particularly their extended range missile capabilities that pose a threat to the United States. Moreover, the unpredictability of US politicians has raised doubts about their willingness to engage in conflicts over territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. These growing tensions have shaken Japan's trust in its sole ally.

The fear of abandonment has remained prominent in Japan since the "Nixon shock" of 1972, when President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger engaged in secret diplomacy with Chinese leaders and made a surprise visit to China without informing Tokyo.<sup>50</sup> In response to the initial shock caused by Nixon's trip, Japan hastily established relations with Beijing and aligned its policies with the United States, including severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The term *Nixon shock* also

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<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Defense, Japan, *National Defense Strategy* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 17 December 2013), <https://www.cas.go.jp/>.

<sup>48</sup> US Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington: Department of Defense, October 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Garamone, "U.S. and Japanese Leaders Chart Path to Strengthen 'Cornerstone' Alliance," *DOD News*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/>.

<sup>50</sup> James H. Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

encompasses Nixon's economic policy shift, which prioritized US economic growth and led to the termination of the Bretton Woods Agreement.<sup>51</sup> This had negative economic repercussions for Japan, resulting in an increased value of the Japanese yen and US export tariffs on Japanese imports. Ultimately, Nixon's policies were perceived by the international community, and particularly Tokyo, as a unilateral act in America's national interest.

Parallel themes stemming from the Nixon shock are notably similar to the administration of former President Donald Trump. Trump's presidency caught the international community off guard with his unconventional and unilateral actions, as he criticized US allies and questioned their contributions. Further straining the US–Japan alliance, his “America First” rhetoric, coupled with his unpredictable behavior on social media, created global uncertainty and unease, making it difficult to discern Washington's clear intentions in its foreign policies. Trump's economic policies were contentious and controversial with foreign countries, as he aimed to revise bilateral trade agreements and implement new approaches to multilateral trade and economic cooperation.<sup>52</sup> This led to Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which added to the uncertainty and raised questions about US reliability in the region.<sup>53</sup> This, coupled with his allied burden-sharing stance and ultimatums for increased financial contributions from Japan and South Korea for hosting US troops, further heightened the fear of abandonment among US allies and partners.

Trump's distancing from the region also initially weakened Prime Minister Abe's political standing, which was closely tied to America in terms of security and economic matters.<sup>54</sup> Japan's concerns over China's revanchist ambitions and North Korea's nuclear capabilities were key drivers for strengthening the alliance and establishing a robust deterrent against regional adversaries. On the economic front, Japan's Abenomics policy aimed to drive structural reforms through initiatives like the TPP.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, US Department of State, “Nixon and the End of the Bretton Woods System, 1971–1973,” *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, n.d., <https://history.state.gov/>.

<sup>52</sup> V. B. Supyan, “President Trump's Foreign Economic Reforms: Preliminary Results,” *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 90, no. 6 (2020): 653–60, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>.

<sup>53</sup> Mireya Solis, “Trump withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership,” *Unpacked* (blog), 24 March 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

<sup>54</sup> Tom Le, “Is America Abandoning Japan?,” *National Interest*, 1 February 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.

<sup>55</sup> According to Investopedia.com, *Abenomics* refers to the economic policies introduced in 2012 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to revitalize Japan's economy. These policies encompassed measures such as

Despite these political obstacles, Abe wielded significant influence in shaping the US–Japanese relationship through personal engagements with Trump. The warm rapport and direct line of communication between the two leaders prevented negative surprises akin to the Nixon shock and helped keep Japanese officials informed about major US policy changes.<sup>56</sup> After a North Korean missile launch, Trump told reporters, “The United States of America is behind Japan, our great ally, 100 percent.”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the Trump administration adopted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, initially proposed by Japan as a foreign policy approach to address the evolving geopolitical landscape in Asia. This strategy expanded the diplomatic and security perspectives to encompass interconnected continents (Asia and Africa) via two oceans (the Pacific and Indian Oceans).<sup>58</sup> The convergence of foreign policies between the United States and Japan reinvigorated the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) minilateral and redirected the security priorities of the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), which was previously known as the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) since its renaming in 2018. As a result, Japan is acknowledged as a driving force for transformation and a prominent regional leader, capable of exerting influence over its influential ally. Nevertheless, conflicting viewpoints emerge questioning the justification for preserving the current bilateral relationship, as some argue that prioritizing appeasement towards the United States may impede Japan’s pursuit of its long-term interests.

In shaping the alliance cohesion, the GoJ must strike a delicate balance between its dependence on and independence from the United States to mitigate the risks of abandonment and entrapment. Failing to take sufficient measures on its own security may lead to Japan being labeled as a free rider, inviting further criticism and potential abandonment. Conversely, if Japan becomes too autonomous, the United States may view it as self-reliant and reconsider the need to maintain the current levels of troops and resources in Japan. Japan faces complex challenges at the international and domestic political levels, requiring careful navigation of

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increasing the nation’s money supply, implementing government spending initiatives, and enacting reforms aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the Japanese economy.

<sup>56</sup> Hannah Fodale, “Abe’s Investment in His Relationship with President Trump has Advanced Japanese Interests,” *Debating Japan* 3, no. 1 (30 January 2020), <https://www.csis.org/>.

<sup>57</sup> “Trump says U.S. behind Japan ‘100 percent’ after North Korea Missile Launch,” *Reuters*, 11 February 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

<sup>58</sup> “Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development,” (speech transcript, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 27 August 2016, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/>).

conflicting policies and competing interests. Balancing internal and external considerations across various dimensions creates a multifaceted dilemma for Japan to address.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Japan's Policies Operationalized***

Taking inspiration from Abe, the current prime minister, Fumio Kishida, embarked on a comprehensive diplomatic tour aimed at deepening the security alliance with the United States and other like-minded countries.<sup>60</sup> Following the release of Japan's NSS in December 2022, Prime Minister Kishida visited several G7 countries the following month to seek assurances and forge closer security ties with Western partners. In addition to the Quad minilateral involving the United States, India, and Australia, Japan is also gaining traction with developing trilateral security groupings.

In March 2023, Japan achieved a historic milestone by joining a trilateral framework with the Philippines and the United States to enhance deterrence against China and prepare for potential crises related to Taiwan.<sup>61</sup> Around the same time, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, marking the first official visit by a South Korean president in 12 years.<sup>62</sup> This summit showcased a strengthened trilateral relationship among the United States, Japan, and South Korea, contributing to the regional security landscape.

Japan stands to benefit from forging closer relationships through these security arrangements in terms of resource sharing, military interoperability, and increased operational flexibility and range. However, these security arrangements also create a situation prone to miscalculation and escalation. The enhanced security posture of Japan, due to the uncertainty of intentions, may inadvertently convey the impression to China, North Korea, and Russia that their own security is diminishing in comparison.<sup>63</sup> This could lead to a reciprocal strengthening of security coalitions

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<sup>59</sup> In this article, *multidimensional factors* are defined as a range of national and international instruments of power, including diplomacy, information, military capabilities, economics, regional institutions, international institutions, media, and interest groups, among others.

<sup>60</sup> Maria Siow, "Was China the focus of Japan PM Kishida's whirlwind G7 'summit diplomacy' tour?," *South China Morning Post*, 13 January 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/>.

<sup>61</sup> "Japan, Philippines, U.S. to set up 3-way security framework," *Kyodo News*, 28 March 2023, <https://english.kyodonews.net/>.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Yeo, "South Korea-Japan rapprochement creates new opportunities in the Indo-Pacific," *Order from Chaos* (blog), 17 March 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

<sup>63</sup> For the original security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

and military capabilities in an attempt to restore the balance of power, potentially triggering an arms race, heightening regional tensions, and ultimately escalating toward conflict.

The Indo-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to the risk of conflict due to a higher likelihood of misinterpreting military capabilities as offensive rather than defensive. Given the geographical dynamics of the region, military capabilities are often perceived as intended for offensive purposes. For instance, the significance of sea lines of communication and maritime resources, such as fisheries, energy, and minerals, for most regional actors fosters a destabilizing competition to develop power-projection capabilities at sea and in the air.<sup>64</sup> These power-projection capabilities, including fighter jets and carrier strike groups, contribute to the perception that potential adversaries' capabilities are offensive, fostering increased mistrust, suspicion, and potential miscalculations among them.

Nevertheless, historical examples, such as the Soviet Union or China during Mao Zedong's era, demonstrate that effective deterrence measures can obstruct revisionist ambitions.<sup>65</sup> The United States, with its credible military posture and capabilities, played a crucial role in maintaining the relative peace of the Cold War, ensuring it remained "cold." Building upon this, the US Department of Defense has embraced the concept of integrated deterrence in the 2022 National Defense Strategy. This strategy emphasizes the importance of planning, coordinating, and operating with all government agencies, allies, and partners to establish a combat-credible force across all domains and across the full spectrum of conflict, with the goal of deterring aggression.<sup>66</sup> While deterrence merely freezes conflicts at a given moment, it remains an effective policy option to prevent revisionist states from exploiting security vulnerabilities to alter the existing international order. Therefore, a national strategy centered on deterrence, although not flawless, could be the most viable and effective option considering the current security challenges.

These layers of security alignments and frameworks contribute to the establishment of a robust regional security architecture that ensures a balance of power and strengthens the posture of allied nations. They also serve as incentives for other countries in the region to reconsider aligning with China. Furthermore, these evolving security groupings in the Indo-Pacific region are reshaping the

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 49–80, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>65</sup> According to Jervis, deterrence occurs when one individual dissuades another by persuading them that the potential benefits of a particular action are outweighed by the perceived costs of the associated penalties. See Robert Jervis, *Deterrence and Perception* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>66</sup> David Vergun, "Official Says Integrated Deterrence Key to National Defense Strategy," *DOD News*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/>.

previous bilateral model, which relied on the “hubs-and-spokes” alliance system, to a framework that better suits to the contemporary strategic environment in a multipolar world.

This shift signifies the region’s progression toward a more multilateral alliance system akin to NATO, offering the advantages of collective defense, burden sharing, and unified action among member countries.

## Conclusion

Over the past 70 years, the United States and Japan have held differing perspectives on domestic, international, and geopolitical issues due to variances in norms and structures. The media, domestic and international politics, as well as the security alliance, have influenced the collective memory of both nations, resulting in intricate identity politics and multiple lenses through which security challenges are viewed. These differences have at times caused misalignment in expectations, misunderstandings, and mistrust between the two countries, particularly regarding the presence of US military bases and political intentions.

However, as regional threats have grown, the US–Japan alliance has adapted to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, with Japan assuming a more equal partnership and regional leadership role. Despite this progress, Japan still faces domestic limitations, including slow decision-making processes, legal constraints, and a struggling defense industry.

Consequently, Japan will continue to depend on the United States and like-minded partners to address the widening military capabilities gap between China and other regional powers. In addition to the United States, Japan must further strengthen alliance systems with countries such as India, Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines to establish a robust security architecture that balances power in the region. Furthermore, Tokyo must foster strong relationships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries to mitigate Japan’s strategic vulnerability stemming from limited domestic sources of raw materials, energy, and insufficient food supply.<sup>67</sup>

Ultimately, the past serves as a precedent and plays a crucial role in shaping the present and future. By examining Japan’s historical events, the complex relations between the two countries can better be evaluated and explained. By untangling the nuances of this multifaceted security alliance, Japan and the United States can establish a stronger foundation for mutual understanding, gain fresh insights, and

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<sup>67</sup> Posen, *Restraint*.



develop an improved regional security architecture to effectively manage current threats and prevent future conflicts.

### **Policy Recommendations**

**Domestic Politics.** The actions of every US Sailor, Marine, Airman, Guardian, And Soldier can have strategic and long-lasting effects on the US–Japan alliance. Therefore, comprehensive policy reforms should be considered at all levels. Within the military, there should be the implementation of a “zero-tolerance” policy toward criminal activities, along with predeployment educational programs that provide basic cultural and language training. These measures aim to help service members bridge cultural gaps and assimilate better into the foreign country. At the government level, a thorough review of the SOFA should be conducted to ensure clear, fair, and acceptable terms for all parties involved. Additionally, research efforts in academia should focus on understanding the systemic issues connecting overseas troop deployments with criminal activity in the host nation. This research would provide valuable insights for addressing and mitigating these challenges.

**Geopolitics.** In addition to the Quad, which establishes its institutional structure and regional architecture across the Indo-Pacific region’s two oceans, it is worth considering two additional regional architectures—one focused on the East China Sea and the other on the South China Sea. While the Quad’s geostrategic scope extends across the Indian and Pacific Oceans, nonaligned countries like India may have limited interests in getting involved in a potential Taiwan contingency. Therefore, directing attention toward the two seas would engage more of those countries that are geographically closer to relevant maritime issues, such as safeguarding the freedom of navigation and ensuring open passages through the Malacca and Luzon Straits. Southeast Asian and East Asian countries understand that national security encompasses not only territorial defense but also economic security. This calls for a more responsive network of like-minded allies and partners to facilitate more efficient diplomatic, economic, and military engagements in the event of a maritime conflict or Taiwan contingency. The regional framework for the South China Sea could include Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. Meanwhile, the East China Sea regional framework could include Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea.

**Security Alliance.** The US–Japan relationship should evolve from being based on geopolitical fears and threats to becoming an alliance focused on regional security and prosperity. Shifting from a bilateral to regional and multilateral perspectives would enhance stability in the region and strengthen the alliance. Furthermore, the continued US military presence in Japan serves as a stabilizing and deterrent force at both conventional and nuclear levels, balancing the power in the region

against revisionist states. Therefore, as Japan establishes its joint forces command headquarters, establishing a combined forces fusion cell with the United States should be considered. This would allow for more efficient planning, coordination, and interoperability during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and contingency operations. Similar to the Cold War era, which was characterized by strategic competition and a constant race for superiority in a contest of “one-upmanship,” the United States and Japan, along with other allies and partners in the region, should anticipate and prepare for a similar long-term competition. However, this competition is more complex due to the changing characteristics of deterrence and warfare today, including multidimensional aspects such as weaponized economic interdependence, shifting international and regional frameworks, gray-zone operations, and advanced weapon systems. Thus, the United States and Japan should prioritize the development of their long-term grand strategy and resiliency across the full spectrum of conflict, particularly within the political and institutional structures at both the domestic and international levels. ★

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# Revised Maritime Spacepower Theory

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## Abstract

This article introduces a novel spacepower theory that draws inspiration from maritime concepts. Unlike previous theories that categorized space elements into brown space or blue space, this theory presents four distinct elements: brown space, green space, blue space, and terrestrial effects. Instead of focusing exclusively on one element, this article emphasizes the collective use of these elements to effectively harness spacepower for achieving national objectives. Drawing on historical maritime precedence, the article explores how maritime theories have been applied to spacepower concepts and introduces the revised maritime spacepower theory. The new facets of this theory are summarized and applied to the ongoing space weaponization debate, demonstrating how the theory reveals relevant nuances to facilitate consensus among divergent perspectives. The intended outcomes of this theory are to aid spacepower advocates in effectively communicating spacepower to broader audiences, support policy makers in regulating space development, and inspire space strategists to creatively apply spacepower to achieve national objectives.

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The United States has long leveraged spacepower to attain its national goals. The Department of Defense's *Defense Space Strategy* succinctly defines *spacepower* as "the sum of a nation's capabilities to leverage space . . . activities in peace or war in order to attain national objectives."<sup>1</sup> To effectively organize and employ spacepower, a foundational framework is provided by spacepower theory. In line with this objective, the United States demonstrated its commitment to preserve spacepower by reactivating the US Space Command (USSPACECOM) and establishing the US Space Force (USSF) in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Despite the advancements made by these organizations, the absence of a unified theory hinders the informed utilization of spacepower to realize national objectives.

Currently, spacepower theories usually fall into either the "brown water" or "blue water" models, terms borrowed from maritime applications. The debate between proponents of these theories has become polarized, with each side considering the

<sup>1</sup> *Defense Space Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, June 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> US Space Command Public Affairs, "US Space Command Recognizes Establishment," USSPACECOM.mil, 9 September 2019, <https://www.spacecom.mil/>; and Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Establishes U.S. Space Force," 20 December 2019, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/>.

other as part of the problem.<sup>3</sup> Brown water advocates express concerns that the implementation of blue water thinking will result in exorbitant costs and disregard the necessary support for space operations on Earth. On the other hand, blue water proponents perceive their brown water counterparts as lacking innovation and impeding the realization of spacepower's full potential.

The existing division between these two camps poses a significant obstacle to making meaningful progress in the field of spacepower. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, a Space Force divided cannot stand.<sup>4</sup> Compounding the issue, participants exacerbate this divide by employing different definitions, leading to miscommunication, which is further intensified when weapons come into play. Without a substantial effort to bridge this gap, both perspectives will encounter challenges in fostering innovation and advancing US spacepower. Ironically, this debate revolves around a false dichotomy, obscuring opportunities for collaboration and progress.

Space development must not be limited to the confines of brown water or blue water concerns alone. It is crucial to consider both perspectives when formulating policies and strategies. Moreover, there are four distinct perspectives that should be independently developed and collectively applied to ensure the effectiveness of space operations: "brown space," "blue space," "green space," and "terrestrial effects." These perspectives draw upon maritime experiences and are adapted to the space domain by considering factors such as operating location, purpose, and capability. By embracing these multifaceted perspectives, a comprehensive and robust approach to space development and operations can be achieved.

This article presents an enhanced maritime spacepower theory that provides clear definitions and practical guidance for effectively applying spacepower. The historical origins of this analogy in maritime practices will be explored, examining the usage of brown water, blue water, and green water ships. By gaining insights into how the US Navy developed and utilized brown, blue, and green water thinking, we can establish more precise applications to spacepower.

Next, the article critically examines previous maritime spacepower theories, emphasizing their limited focus on specific aspects of spacepower. Then, a comprehensive spacepower framework is developed, incorporating brown, green, and blue space thinking. This framework considers the spacecraft's operational environment, mission objectives, and design characteristics. Additionally, the influence of terrestrial effects on space operations is carefully analyzed and integrated.

<sup>3</sup> Brent Ziarnick, "The Battle for the Soul of the Space Force," *The Hill*, 23 August 2019, <https://thehill.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "A House Divided Speech," 16 June 1858, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Bassler, posted on National Park Service website, 10 April 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/>.

Subsequently, the article applies this framework to the contentious subject of space weaponization, illustrating how tailored policies can effectively safeguard the space environment while ensuring the protection of vital space assets. Finally, the article concludes with practical recommendations on leveraging this theory, demonstrating how each component aligns with national policy objectives, and outlining areas that warrant further research.

By presenting this revised maritime spacepower theory, this article aims to foster a deeper understanding of spacepower dynamics, promote coherence in military space operations, and guide strategic decision making in the space domain.

### **Origins of Maritime Analogy**

Before delving into the development of a maritime spacepower theory, it is crucial to gain a thorough understanding of the maritime origins of blue, brown, and green water within their original contexts. The US Navy classifies rivers and estuaries as *brown water*, the open ocean as *blue water*, and coastal waters as *green water*.<sup>5</sup> These designations are visually derived, reflecting the characteristics of each region.

Brown water primarily encompasses rivers, inlets, and bays that are situated close to the shore. To illustrate this concept, figure 1 portrays the Bristol Channel, which effectively exemplifies brown water in its central location.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, blue water regions correspond to the deeper expanses of the open sea, such as the Atlantic Ocean west of the United Kingdom. These areas are characterized by vast stretches of uninhibited water.<sup>7</sup>

Green water serves as a transitional zone between brown and blue water, predominantly found near coastlines.<sup>8</sup> An illustrative instance of this region is the English Channel, clearly depicted at the bottom of figure 1.

The terminology associated with these water regions extends to the types of vessels operating within each area. Blue water ships refer to ocean-going vessels, brown water craft navigate within brown water regions, and green water ships operate in the areas that bridge the two domains.

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<sup>5</sup> *Naval Operational Concept: Implementing Maritime Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2010), 8, <https://irp.fas.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Brown water." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed 14 March 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>; and Diptarka Ghosh, "Bristol Channel," *WorldAtlas*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.worldatlas.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc, 1993), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 947.





**Figure 1. Visual depiction for blue, brown, and green water<sup>9</sup>**

While a visual derivation may suggest a range-based definition for naval capabilities, it is crucial to recognize that the operating regions play a significant role in driving mission and structural distinctions among naval vessels operating within these areas. This section aims to shed light on the operational and design variances exhibited by brown, blue, and green water vessels.

The US Navy's development of brown and blue water vessels during the Barbary Wars and US Civil War serves as a historical reference point, highlighting the evolution of these capabilities. Subsequently, the article will shift its focus to green water craft, which emerged in the early 2000s as the US Navy addressed emerging threats and expanded its mission scope. Additionally, one must acknowledge the influential role played by land forces operating at ports and along the coastline, as they exert significant impact on naval operations. The article will also consider this region in its analysis.

Rather than exclusively relying on a single element, it is imperative to harness the collective potential of each element to effectively achieve national objectives.

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<sup>9</sup> Jamie Harris, "Nasa photo reveals UK as seen from the International Space Station," *Irish Independent*, 17 April 2019, <https://www.independent.ie/>.



By integrating and leveraging the strengths of brown, blue, and green water capabilities, a comprehensive approach can be adopted to address the diverse challenges and opportunities in the maritime domain.

### ***Early US History***

In early US history, naval vessels operating in different types of water demonstrated operational and design differences, playing crucial roles in achieving national objectives. Although the US initially sold off its navy, the nation embarked on a rebuilding effort from 1794 to 1798 to protect its merchant ships in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>10</sup> As former colonies, the US had relied on the British Royal Navy for protection, but with American Independence, this support ceased. To safeguard their commercial interests from European powers and Barbary pirates operating far away, the US constructed six super frigates. These impressive three-masted vessels, exceeding 150 feet in length, were specifically designed to challenge the largest naval ships of that era.<sup>11</sup> Serving as the early blue water fleet, these heavy frigates were capable of safely traversing the open seas and defending against other naval vessels.

Simultaneously, the US developed brown water vessels known as the Jefferson gunboats to combat the pirates. President Thomas Jefferson requested these cost-effective ships as a means of coastal defense. While some gunboats sank during their Atlantic crossings, their relatively small size and shallow draughts allowed them to navigate shallow waters and rivers, reaching the North African coastline to engage pirate forts.<sup>12</sup> The Jefferson gunboats exemplified early American brown water capabilities due to their operating environment, physical construction, and intended purpose. The United States required both blue and brown water capabilities to defeat the Barbary pirates and protect its interests overseas.

Decades later, the American Civil War demanded the deployment of uniquely designed naval vessels to secure victory. President Lincoln had two primary objectives for the US Navy: blockading Southern ports to disrupt resupply and supporting army campaigns along the Mississippi River.<sup>13</sup> Blue water naval ships implemented the Anaconda Plan to enforce the blockade, while brown water gunships were developed to patrol the Mississippi River. Blue water vessels had to withstand

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<sup>10</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, "The Establishment of the Department of the Navy," US Navy, 13 November 2017, <https://www.history.navy.mil/>.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Archibald, "Six Ships that Shook the World," *American Heritage of Invention & Technology* 13, no 2 (Fall 1997), 24, <https://www.inventionandtech.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Canney, *Sailing Warships of the US Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 196.

<sup>13</sup> American Battlefield Trust, "The Navies of the Civil War," 2023, <https://www.battlefields.org/>.

deep-sea conditions, operate for extended periods, and disrupt Confederate maritime activities. Frigates and Sloops of War were well-suited for this mission, possessing the ability to navigate the open seas and bring substantial firepower against the Confederacy.<sup>14</sup>

During the Civil War, the Union Navy utilized the blockade to disrupt Confederate sea lines of communication and “fracture Confederate distribution and sustainment.”<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, river steamers were converted into gunboats to support brown water operations along the Mississippi River.<sup>16</sup> These gunboats possessed the ability to navigate riverways and were armed to deliver effects inland. According to historical accounts, the brown water fleet “had as much effect in reducing the South to submission as the greater battles fought in the East.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the significance of their contributions, President Lincoln’s brown water navy faced challenges in competing for naval funding against the traditional blue water fleet. Blue water sailors and officers derisively referred to the gunboats as “stinkpots” and “turtles,” considering them unfit for true naval professionals. Furthermore, brown water commanders often received more support from the Army than the Navy.<sup>18</sup> In response, naval officers developed different tactics and perspectives to optimize the use of these distinct capabilities. Similar to the Barbary Wars, the United States needed to employ both capabilities—blue water and brown water—to achieve success in the Civil War.

### *Contemporary Era*

In the 1990s and 2000s, the US Navy faced nontraditional threats from smaller state and nonstate actors and needed “to develop greater flexibility and a broader range of missions and tasks than in the past.”<sup>19</sup> In addition to defensive operations, preventative noncombat activities and enduring relations with partner nations became increasingly important.<sup>20</sup> Green water operations actively focused on critical and congested coasts in the Mediterranean, Red, and Arabian Seas, as well

<sup>14</sup> Mike Barhorst, “A Brief Overview of the US Navy in the Civil War,” *Sidney Visitors Bureau*, 2020, <http://sidneycivilwar.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Schuck, “Economic Warfare: The Union Blockade in the Civil War,” *Naval History*, October 2021, <https://www.usni.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Joiner, *Mr. Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy: The Mississippi Squadron* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2007), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Joiner, *Mr. Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy*, 175.

<sup>18</sup> Joiner, *Mr. Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy*, 22–23, 29.

<sup>19</sup> W. L. Greer et al., “Green Water Navy Study,” Institute for Defense Analyses, September 2009, ES-1.

<sup>20</sup> Greer et al., “Green Water Navy Study,” ES-1.

as throughout the waters in Southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup> Research concluded that green water craft were most effectively designed to be large enough to safely traverse the high seas and reach operating areas, while also being small enough to operate in coordination with partner nation patrol craft to support naval operations in the area. However, the smaller size of green water craft does necessitate more frequent resupply. Vessels of this size fulfill unique roles along contested coastlines, actively securing operations in close proximity to shore and coastal defenses.

Green water vessels occupy a distinctive space between brown water and blue water ships due to their shared mission of sea control with blue water ships and their operational presence in similar waterways as brown water ships. The US Navy often combines the terms *brown water* and *green water* and refers to them collectively as *littoral regions* in joint doctrine. Littoral regions consist of two components: the seaward element, which encompasses the maritime boundary from the shore to the open ocean, and the landward element, which represents the physical land supported by maritime elements.<sup>22</sup> Brown water operations support the landward component, while green water operations support the seaward component. Although modern naval ships have the capability to undertake both landward and seaward missions, it is still important to recognize the independent strategies of brown water and green water vessels and tailor their operations accordingly.

Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique role of green water ships, even though blue water vessels historically fulfilled this role in the 1800s. Modern blue water vessels, such as aircraft carriers, tend to avoid confined or restrictive bodies of water along an adversary's littoral.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the emergence of asymmetric capabilities, including explosive-laden suicide boats, has pushed expensive blue water vessels away from contested littoral regions.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, smaller green water craft were purposefully designed to bridge the gap between brown water and blue water ships, enabling them to maintain sea control in contested littoral regions against naval and coastal threats.

Although land effects do not possess direct maritime capabilities, they still exert influence on maritime operations and are intertwined with coastal defenses and land-based supporting functions. Responding to sea power, states and nonstate

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<sup>21</sup> Greer et al., "Green Water Navy Study," 6.

<sup>22</sup> Joint Publication 2-01.3: *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 21 May 2014), GL-06, <https://irp.fas.org/>.

<sup>23</sup> Joint Publication 2-01.3, III-11.

<sup>24</sup> Neil Gadihoke, "Blue-Water Navies in Brown-Water Operations," *SP's Naval Forces*, May 2012, <https://www.spsnavalforces.com/>.

actors often prioritize the development of coastal defenses, making them the easiest and earliest effects to be established. The US Navy has historically dealt with coastal installations during the Barbary Wars and the Civil War, and continues to consider coastal installations in green water regions such as the South China Sea.<sup>25</sup> To effectively patrol nearby waters, naval vessels must take into account threats originating from land. While this may seem obvious, one of the challenges with the US Navy's Littoral Combat Ships is that they were not designed to withstand hits, and their inadequate design limits their effectiveness in the face of coastal threats.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to coastal threats, land effects also contribute to maritime operations in various ways. Lighthouses and long-range radars enhance maritime domain awareness, enabling the safety, security, economy, and environmental protection of a nation's maritime domain.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, shipyards are crucial for the construction of ships, and ports serve as vital hubs for vessel resupply, facilitating sustained operations abroad. The absence of these land-based functions in and around friendly coasts would severely hamper maritime operations. Therefore, maritime theories, including any resulting spacepower theories, must consider the terrestrial effects that influence domain operations.

Throughout US history, four distinct components—brown water, green water, blue water, and coastal effects—have shaped and informed maritime operations. Each component covers a specific region and serves a particular purpose, with systems specifically designed for their respective locations and missions. Moreover, the US consistently employs a combination of these components to achieve national objectives. As the maritime usage of brown, green, and blue water extends beyond a simple range from the shore, it is essential for these terms to carry nuanced meanings when applied to space operations theory.

### Past Maritime Spacepower Theories

Harold Winton, a military theorist, establishes the purpose of theories, stating that they define the field of study, categorize its elements, explain unique phenomena, connect the field to other fields, and anticipate future behavior within

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<sup>25</sup> Associated Press, "China has fully militarized three islands in South China Sea, US admiral says," *The Guardian*, 20 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

<sup>26</sup> Emma Salisbury, "Lessons from the Littoral Combat Ship," *War on the Rocks*, 15 November 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Joint Publication 3-32: *Joint Maritime Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 20 Sep 2021), GL-6, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

the field.<sup>28</sup> When applied to spacepower, Winton argues that a theory should define spacepower, categorize its elements, explain unique phenomena, connect spacepower to other fields, and anticipate future behavior. This section examines existing maritime spacepower theories and utilizes Winton's framework to demonstrate that only partial integration of maritime aspects into spacepower has been achieved.

James Oberg first applied elements of Mahan's seapower theory to spacepower in his book *Space Power*.<sup>29</sup> However, it was in Everett Dolman's controversial work, *Astropolitik*, that the first comprehensive treatment of Mahan was presented. Dolman highlighted Mahan's perspective on British seapower, which was based on controlling chokepoints along critical sea routes, and drew an analogy to the potential control and exploitation of space by dominating access to low Earth orbit.<sup>30</sup> Dolman argued that spacepower holds the key to national wealth and preeminence in the twenty-first century, much like seapower did in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> While *Astropolitik* established a connection between spacepower and seapower, it fell short in categorizing the elements of spacepower within the field, limiting its ability to project this theory forward. Nevertheless, Dolman's controversial work encourages further contemplation on spacepower. John Klein's *Space Warfare* builds upon Dolman's ideas and expands on the maritime spacepower analogy.

In Klein's *Space Warfare*, blue water perspectives are applied to spacepower as he describes the importance of maintaining freedom of action in space amid great-power competition, which he terms the *command of space*. Command of space entails the unrestricted utilization of space while denying adversaries the same ability.<sup>32</sup> Klein draws inspiration from the renowned naval strategist Julian Corbett when introducing the concept of controlling *celestial lines of communication*.<sup>33</sup> A state achieves command of space when it can utilize these lines of communication while simultaneously preventing opponents from doing the same. This concept bears similarity to blue water activities in naval operations. Blue water navies were essential in securing sea lines of communication for US merchant ships during the Barbary Wars. Similarly, blue water vessels were utilized in the

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<sup>28</sup> Harold Winton, "An Imperfect Jewel: Military Theory and the Military Profession," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 6 (December 2011), 854–56.

<sup>29</sup> Jim Oberg, *Space Power Theory* (Colorado Springs, CO: Government Printing Office, 1999), 137–38.

<sup>30</sup> Everett Dolman, *Astropolitik: Classical Geopolitics in the Space Age* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 37–39.

<sup>31</sup> Dolman, *Astropolitik*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> John Klein, *Space Warfare: Strategy, Principles, and Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 156.

<sup>33</sup> Klein, *Space Warfare*, 51.

Civil War to blockade Southern ports, denying sea lanes of communication to the Confederacy. While Klein's theory of space warfare aligns well with blue space activities, it does not adequately address the utilization of space systems once a state achieves command of space.

Bleddyn Bowen's *War in Space* is another spacepower theory that builds on a maritime analogy. Bowen presents a compelling theory on how space can support terrestrial operations, stating, "Spacepower exists within a geocentric mindset."<sup>34</sup> He argues that states utilize space to enhance their interests on Earth and employ all instruments of power to achieve their objectives. This aligns with brown water missions, where space systems support other domains, similar to how brown water ships support land operations. Command of space enables states to further pursue their interests on Earth and maintain power in space. Bowen also introduces the concept of geocentric orbits as a cosmic coastline with hostile shores that necessitate strategic maneuvers.<sup>35</sup> This reinforces the brown water analogy and highlights the fact that opponents can contest space from Earth's surface. Space organizations, such as the USSF, are responding to this threat by proliferating Earth orbits with smaller, more affordable satellites instead of relying solely on large flagships.<sup>36</sup> However, Bowen's theory falls short as it downplays the significance of space superiority and the potential for space capabilities beyond geocentric orbits. While decisive blue water battles may be rare, nations without blue water capabilities were unable to project power during the age of sail. Similarly, disregarding the importance of blue space capabilities could leave a state incapable of projecting power as others compete for space resources.<sup>37</sup>

Each of the previous maritime spacepower theorists contributes to spacepower thinking by focusing on specific aspects of spacepower. However, they fail to consider all elements of spacepower. Furthermore, discussions among spacepower advocates, policy makers, and strategists often revolve around the idea that only one aspect of spacepower is necessary. Defense hawks advocate for weaponizing space to achieve command of space, while arms controllers seek to prevent space weaponization and limit space activities to supporting terrestrial operations.<sup>38</sup> In

<sup>34</sup> Bleddyn Bowen, *War in Space: Strategy, Spacepower, Geopolitics* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2020), 49.

<sup>35</sup> Bowen, *War in Space*, 115.

<sup>36</sup> Chris Gordon, "Saltzman Unveils 'Theory of Success' as Space Force Debates Future," *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 22 February 2023, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/>.

<sup>37</sup> Namrata Goswami and Peter Garretson, *Scramble for the Skies: The Great Power Competition to Control the Resources of Outer Space* (London, UK: Lexington Books, 2020) 20.

<sup>38</sup> William Broad, "How Space Became the Next 'Great Power' Contest Between the U.S. and China," *New York Times*, 24 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.



contrast, policy makers and strategists utilize all elements of maritime power to achieve national objectives. Similarly, space development should not be restricted to solely addressing brown space or blue space concerns. All perspectives of spacepower must be considered when formulating policies and strategies. Since a spacepower theory has yet to incorporate all spacepower elements, a new maritime space theory is proposed in the next section that incorporates four distinct perspectives, each requiring consideration for effective space operations. These perspectives draw upon the rich history of maritime operations and are adapted to space by considering operating regions, purposes, and designs.

### **Revised Maritime Spacepower Theory**

This section revises a maritime framework for space operations by identifying four unique categories—brown space, green space, blue space, and terrestrial effects—with three distinct subsets: region, purpose, and design. Following Winton's framework, this theory aims to provide a definition of spacepower and categorize its elements. Spacepower refers to the ability of a state or non-state actor to accomplish tasks in space.<sup>39</sup> This spacepower theory applies to all space operations, past, present, and future, and classifies activities based on their region, purpose, and design. By differentiating activities along these lines, a better understanding of the necessity, utilization, and interaction of these assets with terrestrial and space operations can be gained. Finally, the proposed maritime theory anticipates the evolution of spacepower, enabling policy makers and strategists to effectively manage its development.

The first category is brown space, which draws analogies from brown water. Brown space systems are those that orbit a celestial body, serve a mission supporting operations on that celestial body, and are designed to utilize Kepler's laws to fulfill their mission. Brown water space, or simply brown space, refers to the orbital region surrounding a celestial body. Currently, this is defined as geocentric orbits since space operations predominantly serve Earth's population. In the geocentric sense, low Earth orbit (LEO), medium Earth orbit (MEO), highly elliptical orbit (HEO), and geosynchronous Earth orbit (GEO) are all prime locations for brown space operations due to their orbital relationship with Earth. While it is easier to conceptualize brown space in relation to Earth, future brown space applications could extend to other celestial bodies, such as the Moon or Mars, if they fulfill all three subsets. In addition to orbiting the celestial body, the spacecraft is designed

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<sup>39</sup> Brent Ziarnick, *Developing National Power in Space: A Theoretical Model* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015) 13.

to support operations on that celestial body. For Terran brown space, common missions include satellite communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, precision navigation and timing, environmental monitoring, and missile warning.<sup>40</sup> Brown space systems resemble brown water ships as both operate along their respective coastlines to deliver effects to other domains. While brown water navies' gunboats deliver effects inland, brown space systems deliver effects to the terrestrial domains of land, sea, air, and cyber. Moreover, brown space systems are purpose-built for Bowen's cosmic coastline as they adhere to Kepler's laws of planetary motion to operate and achieve the intended effects.<sup>41</sup>

Intelsat-901 serves as a commercial satellite communications spacecraft operating in the brown space category.<sup>42</sup> This geocentric satellite facilitates communication for users on Earth. It leverages Kepler's three laws of motion and the unique properties of geostationary earth orbit within GEOs to maintain a fixed ground track, making it easily accessible for terrestrial users.<sup>43</sup> To ensure its orbit remains precise, Intelsat-901 has a planned fuel budget. Once the fuel is depleted, the satellite is placed in a graveyard orbit to minimize the risk of collisions in GEO. Intelsat-901 qualifies as a brown space satellite because it orbits a celestial body (Earth), supports operations on Earth (SATCOM), and adheres to Kepler's laws to fulfill its mission. Notably, in early 2020, Intelsat-901 faced challenges in independently performing its mission due to the inability to maintain its designated orbit. However, Mission Extension Vehicle-1 (MEV-1), a green space satellite, prevented its decommissioning.<sup>44</sup>

The second category is green space, encompassing systems that operate around a celestial body and its moons to support space operations in the vicinity. Green space systems prefer Keplerian orbits but require more frequent maneuvering compared to their brown space counterparts. Their primary mission objectives often necessitate maneuvers to deliver desired effects. Like green water craft, green space systems operate in the vicinity of their respective coastlines and deliver effects within their domains. Green water vessels secure congested and contested coasts

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<sup>40</sup> Joint Publication 3-14: *Space Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), I-2, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

<sup>41</sup> Bowen, *War in Space*, 114–15.

<sup>42</sup> Gunter D. Krebs, "Intelsat-9 (901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907)," *Gunter's Space Page* (blog), 2023, <https://space.skyrocket.de/>.

<sup>43</sup> Jerry Sellers, et al., *Understanding Space: An Introduction to Astronautics*, 3 ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2005), 164.

<sup>44</sup> Meghan Bartels, "Ailing Intelsat satellite begins new life in orbit after historic servicing mission success," *Space.com*, 17 April 2020, <https://www.space.com/>.

to stabilize maritime operations, while green space vessels enhance space operations along the congested cosmic coastline.

An example of a green space asset is Northrup Grumman's Mission Extension Vehicle-1 (MEV-1), which operates in geosynchronous orbit, generates space effects, and incorporates additional thrust capability to service multiple spacecraft.<sup>45</sup> MEV-1 successfully docked with Intelsat-901 and relocated the satellite to a new operational position. Furthermore, MEV-1 will perform orbital maintenance maneuvers for the satellite duo, extending Intelsat-901's operational lifespan by another five years.<sup>46</sup> Despite sharing the same orbital regime as Intelsat-901, MEV-1's purpose and design differ significantly. Green space systems, including MEV-1, deliver effects within space, while brown space systems deliver effects to other domains. MEV-1 played a crucial role in preserving freedom of action for brown space systems, much like green water craft promote freedom of action along coasts. Thus, even though they operate in the same region, brown and green space systems possess distinct perspectives due to their distinct purposes, analogous to how brown and green water vessels serve different purposes in a littoral region.

The next category, known as blue space, aims to ensure freedom of action in cislunar space and beyond. Blue space systems operate beyond planetary orbits, support space operations, and ideally have flexibility beyond traditional Keplerian motion. Like their blue water counterparts, blue space systems are designed to operate remotely and conduct extended operations in new locations. These operating locations may include heliocentric orbits centered around the sun or potentially interstellar space in the future.<sup>47</sup> Navigating blue space requires different maneuvering designs. For instance, while Hohmann transfers efficiently adjust orbital altitudes in geocentric orbits, the propellant requirements for a blue space system to perform such maneuvers would exceed the spacecraft's orbital insertion capability. Current interplanetary spacecraft, like the Voyager spacecraft, utilize gravity-assist trajectories by leveraging the gravitational pull of nearby planets to increase velocity.<sup>48</sup>

Although the number of existing blue space systems is limited, advancements in propulsion technology can enhance the feasibility of blue space systems. Concepts such as nuclear fission rockets significantly improve thrust capabilities, reducing flight time between celestial bodies and increasing the likelihood of interplanetary

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<sup>45</sup> Vicki Cox, "Companies demonstrate groundbreaking satellite life-extension service," Northrup-Grumman, 26 February 2020, <https://news.northropgrumman.com/>.

<sup>46</sup> "Intelsat 901 at 332.5°E" (fact sheet, Intelsat, 2020), <https://www.intelsat.com/>.

<sup>47</sup> Sellers, *Understanding Space*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> Sellers, *Understanding Space*, 252.

travel.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of the propulsion designs that mature first, the purpose of blue space systems remains centered around exploration, expansion, exploitation, and exclusion.<sup>50</sup> Presently, blue space systems explore the solar system, while commercial entities develop capabilities for creating settlements, expanding into space, and utilizing space resources. As blue space capabilities continue to expand, the potential for conflict between state and nonstate actors increases, and efforts to exclude competitors can be expected. Independent thinking and proactive development of technologies and strategies are crucial for this perspective to effectively utilize blue space systems as capabilities mature.

The final category is terrestrial effects. Terrestrial effects originate from a celestial body and fulfill a mission to support space operations. Identifying terrestrial effects is straightforward as they originate on a celestial body and interact with spacecraft. These effects stem from various domains, including land, sea, air, and cyber, and are among the simplest systems to operationalize in terms of developing space capabilities. Rockets play a critical role in delivering spacecraft to orbit, serving as the initial step before satellites can operate in other regions. However, terrestrial effects encompass more than just rockets and launch infrastructure.

Ground-based space surveillance sensors, such as telescopes and radars, are utilized to track brown and green space systems orbiting the Earth.<sup>51</sup> Ground sites like spacecraft operations control centers and data reception sites also contribute to terrestrial effects by ensuring that satellite constellations meet their mission objectives.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, there exist Earth-based weapons. An early example is the nuclear tests conducted by the United States in 1962 to assess the impact of a nuclear explosion in space.<sup>53</sup> Although not intended as space weapons, the resulting radiation degraded several satellites.<sup>54</sup> The first deliberate destructive antisatellite test was carried out by the Soviet Union in 1968. Subsequently, the United States, China, India, and Russia have conducted a total of 16 antisatellite tests.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald Humble, Gary Henry, and Wiley Larson, *Space Propulsion Analysis and Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc, 1995) 446.

<sup>50</sup> Joshua Carlson, *Spacepower Ascendant: Space Development Theory and a New Space Strategy* (US: Independently Published, 2020) 175.

<sup>51</sup> Joint Publication 3-14, ix.

<sup>52</sup> Wiley Larson and James Wertz eds., *Space Mission Analysis and Design*, 3rd ed. (El Segundo, CA: Microcosm Press and Springer, 2006) 624.

<sup>53</sup> Defense Technical Information Center, *A "Quick Look" at the Technical Results of Starfish Prime, AD-A955 411* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 1962), 10, <https://apps.dtic.mil/>.

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert King, "Going Nuclear Over the Pacific," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 15 August 2012, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/>.

<sup>55</sup> Daryl G. Kimball, "U.S. Commits to ASAT Ban," *Arms Control Today*, May 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/>.

Additionally, denial and deception techniques, electromagnetic jammers, cyber-attacks, and directed energy lasers can deliver a range of effects to geocentric spacecraft.<sup>56</sup> Terrestrial effects encompass a broad array of capabilities that both enable and contest freedom of action for spacecraft.

**Table 1. Description of maritime space categories**

	Region	Purpose	Design
<b>Terrestrial Effects</b>	Land, Sea, Air, Cyber	Space Focused	N/A
<b>Brown Space</b>	Geocentric Orbits	Terrestrially Focused	Kepler Constrained
<b>Green Space</b>	Geocentric & Cislunar	Space Focused	Kepler Preferred
<b>Blue Space</b>	Cislunar & Heliocentric	Space Focused	Unconstrained

The four maritime space categories differentiate based on region, purpose, and design, as summarized in table 1. When determining the most suitable category for a space system, each subset is prioritized. The first consideration is the region, followed by the spacecraft's purpose. Observers should be able to classify spacecraft into the appropriate categories based on the operating region and observed behavior. However, observed behavior alone does not exclusively determine the spacecraft's purpose. Clues from the spacecraft's design provide further insights for differentiation. For instance, if a spacecraft exhibits characteristics of a brown space function but is excessively equipped with propulsion, power, and attitude control, it may indicate an additional purpose. Moreover, the design subset should be seen as a spectrum, where terrestrial effects or green space capabilities might be poorly applied to function as a blue space capability for interplanetary travel. While such systems may offer limited capabilities to less advanced space powers, they would not compare favorably to intentionally designed blue space systems. Despite this nuanced understanding, the categorization and subsets enable observers to quickly classify and prioritize spacecraft while gaining an understanding of how space systems operate. The next section explores how this differentiation could be applied to enhance space policy and strategy.

## Theory Applied to the Weapons Debate

This section focuses on how a revised maritime space theory brings clarity to space policy by addressing the controversial topic of space weapons. After examining relevant treaties, we will explore the major positions in the debate. Subsequently, we will apply the revised maritime spacepower theory to demonstrate

<sup>56</sup> National Air and Space Intelligence Center, *Competing in Space* (Dayton OH: Defense Intelligence Agency, December 2018), 14, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

how groups can collaborate to safeguard space assets and preserve the geocentric space environment.

The Outer Space Treaty and the proposed Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space fail to effectively prevent adversaries from posing threats or causing harm with space weapons. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 is notable for its ratification by 113 countries. Article IV of the treaty explicitly prohibits “nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction” in space or on celestial bodies in any form.<sup>57</sup> However, the treaty does not prohibit the use of other weapons in, to, or from space. Since 1967, antisatellite weapons have been tested and used to threaten space systems.<sup>58</sup> A new treaty—the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space Treaty—has been proposed to restrict the placement of weapons in outer space, but it possesses significant flaws. Specifically, the treaty fails to limit the production, testing, and deployment of weapons actively being developed by its main proponents, Russia and China.<sup>59</sup> As the current and proposed international treaties do not adequately address the escalating threat of weaponized space, policy makers and strategists are engaged in a debate on how to manage the space domain.

Political scientist Karl Mueller has skillfully framed the debate by emphasizing the challenges surrounding the definition of a space weapon and presenting a nuanced spectrum of viewpoints ranging from prosanctuary to proweaponization. First, there is no consensus on the definition of a space weapon. Mueller identifies key considerations for defining a space weapon, including its location, potential targets, attack mechanism, type of effect, and whether the effect extends to other systems.<sup>60</sup> Progress in the weaponization debate should address each of these aspects. Second, advocates of prosanctuary and proweaponization hold diverse beliefs influenced by their worldview, perspectives on international relations, and nationalistic tendencies.<sup>61</sup> Thus far, using partial maritime spacepower frameworks has failed to yield consensus, but the proposed maritime spacepower theory holds the potential to provide a resolution.

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<sup>57</sup> Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (Outer Space Treaty), United Nations, New York, 10 October 1967, 2, <https://www.nti.org/>.

<sup>58</sup> Joel Gehrke, “Russia Threatens Elon Musk’s Starlink Satellites,” *Washington Examiner*, 27 October 2022, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/>.

<sup>59</sup> “US Ambassador Robert Wood to Conference on Disarmament Plenary Meeting on Agenda Item Three, ‘Prevention of an arms race in outer space’” (press statement, US Mission Geneva, 14 August 2019), <https://geneva.usmission.gov/>.

<sup>60</sup> Karl Mueller, “Totem and Taboo: Depolarizing the Space Weaponization Debate,” *Astropolitics* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2003), 6–8.

<sup>61</sup> Mueller, “Totem and Taboo,” 9.



First, it is crucial to achieve a clear understanding of space weapons. The revised maritime spacepower theory can be utilized to elucidate the weapon's location and potential targets by applying the four categories. *Terrestrial effects* encompass Earth-based weapons that target space-based systems. *Brown space weapons* refer to space-based weapons that impact Earth. *Green space weapons* denote space-based weapons that affect brown and green space systems. Lastly, *blue space weapons* are designed to target blue space systems in interplanetary regions. These four categories naturally classify space weapons and facilitate more nuanced discussions. With this theory, policy makers and strategists can evaluate whether a decision should apply to all space weapons or a specific category.

Furthermore, the four maritime space categories have implications for the attack mechanism, the type of effect, and the level of discrimination expected from a particular space weapon. Theoretically, a space weapon is employed to harm or damage a space system through kinetic, nonkinetic, reversible, or irreversible means. The category of the space weapon is likely to dictate its practical deployment.

There are similarities between terrestrial effects and green space weapons in that they both target geocentric spacecraft. Terrestrial effects extend to geocentric orbits, a realm where friendly, neutral, and adversary spacecraft routinely traverse. Consequently, those who employ terrestrial effect weapons should minimize debris generation to prevent collateral damage and preserve the space environment for the freedom of action of friendly and neutral entities. The same principle applies to green space weapons as they impact the same geocentric region. Terrestrial and green space weapons that deviate from this category are prime candidates for prohibition through treaties or international norms, as they do not benefit any long-term space user.

Brown space weapons are distinct in that they are employed against terrestrial targets. These weapons could prove valuable in a joint operation, especially in situations where access to land, sea, and air domains is denied. However, it is important to note that brown space systems traverse a cosmic coastline, regularly crossing over friendly, neutral, and adversary countries. Consequently, brown space weapons are likely to face opposition from prosanctuary advocates and moderate proweaponization advocates who prioritize stability in international relations. This opposition may lead to a consensus to restrict or ban brown space weapons.

In contrast, blue space weapons are designed to cover vast distances and operate in a less crowded region of space. Prosanctuary advocates are unlikely to garner enough consensus to ban all blue space weapons, as there is no compelling reason to do so beyond philosophical or moral concerns. The deployment of a blue space weapon does not inherently destabilize international relations since most countries have yet to field blue space systems. The issue of arms control for blue space

weapons may gain more traction when states believe they have the capability and interest in deploying such systems.

Given the broad categorization of space weapon types, there is potential for prosanctuary and proweaponization advocates to find common ground in banning terrestrial and green space weapons that cause damage to the space environment. Other proweaponization advocates can develop policies to limit terrestrial and green space weapons to those that can selectively target potential objects in geocentric orbits without generating debris. Additionally, states could invest in debris removal systems that can clean up the space environment during peacetime operations and, if necessary, eliminate adversary systems in wartime scenarios. This approach allows states to develop the means to protect and defend their space capabilities while preserving the space environment. Such a capability promotes the responsible use of space, and could influence international norms of behavior.<sup>62</sup> Although some nations may still pursue the development and use of terrestrial and green space weapons that generate debris, they would face greater resistance from the international community if non-debris-generating weapons are developed and responsibly demonstrated.

By developing a nuanced capability, arms controllers and space controllers have something of value. Arms controllers would appreciate the ability to restrain weapon development and mitigate space debris, while space operators would benefit from the capability to protect spacecraft from both debris and other space-based threats. Finding a nuanced solution may be the only way to achieve consensus on space policy that endures across different administrations with varying perspectives on space weapon concepts.

Applying the revised maritime spacepower theory to the debate on space weaponization enables policy makers and strategists with opposing views to engage in a clearer discussion and explore unique solutions while upholding international commitments. This framework allows policy makers to regulate weapon development based on specific categories instead of pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach.

## Recommendation

This maritime spacepower theory establishes four categories—brown space, green space, blue space, and terrestrial effects—that apply to all space operations. Differentiating space activities based on operating region, purpose, and spacecraft

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<sup>62</sup> *Tenet Derived Responsible Behaviors in Space* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 2023), 4, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

design enhances our understanding of the need for distinct categories, the utilization of spacecraft types, and their interactions in both terrestrial and space operations. Spacepower advocates can employ this framework to communicate space capabilities to wider audiences and establish connections between abstract space concepts and maritime operations.

Further research should be conducted to examine how innovation can be applied to each element. The distinct categories of space operations offer opportunities for innovators to advance capabilities in unique ways that leverage the specific environments. Brown, green, and blue space thinking present different constraints for developers to harness. For example, brown space capabilities can support terrestrial operations related to the celestial body in orbit. In the case of Earth operations, space-based solar power could be a potential brown space capability to enhance terrestrial operations. This concept involves geocentric satellites collecting solar energy and transmitting it to terrestrial collectors.<sup>63</sup> Future green space systems could focus on debris mitigation or on-orbit refueling, utilizing geocentric satellites to achieve space-focused effects. Lastly, blue space research could concentrate on developing new propulsion systems to revolutionize blue space capabilities.

The proposed theory also carries strategic implications, necessitating further analysis to explore a variety of space strategies that incorporate all categories of spacepower. One approach could involve continuing brown space support to bolster national power while enhancing green space capabilities to preserve freedom of action, with dedicated research directed toward the development of new blue space technologies. While the mentioned approach may prove advantageous for advanced space powers, other space powers may benefit from different strategies. For instance, a country with a limited budget could prioritize the development of niche capabilities in specific elements of spacepower and establish partnerships with other nations. By forming collective partnerships, each member can secure their national objectives. The ideal combination of spacepower elements can differ significantly between countries and in various scenarios. Therefore, conducting further research to propose diverse combinations of space power elements, along with their corresponding advantages, would be invaluable for policy makers and strategists.

Furthermore, the suggested maritime theory anticipates the evolution of spacepower, offering policy makers and strategists a valuable tool to proficiently oversee its development. Like maritime power, spacepower achieves maximum effectiveness

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<sup>63</sup> Sarah Gerrity and Daniel Wood, "Space Based Solar Power," US Department of Energy, 2014, <https://www.energy.gov/>.

when all categories are taken into account and utilized to bolster grand strategy. Focusing solely on brown space or blue space is suboptimal. Instead, strategists and policy makers should embrace all four elements of maritime spacepower and devise approaches that blend them harmoniously to enhance the accomplishment of national objectives. By employing the framework provided by the four elements of maritime spacepower, debates can be clarified, and significant avenues for progress can be explored. ★

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# Sino-India Rivalry in South Asia

## The Politics of Strategic Hedging by the “Non-Nuclear Five”

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### Abstract

The “non-nuclear five” (NN5) countries consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have common geographical and/or regional borders with India and have historically been in their big neighbor’s historic and cultural sphere of influence. Yet, over the years, as China has made significant inroads into the South Asian region, NN5 are getting entangled in the India-China rivalry. In this paper, we posit how the NN5 exhibit a common pattern of strategic hedging given their bilateral relations with regional hegemon India, along with the rising influence of China. By analyzing comparative trends in the South Asian region, we contribute empirically to the research on “hedging” in international relations, since to date no study has examined all these five countries using this concept. The study is relevant because the US administration is increasingly focusing on “small countries” in its Indo-Pacific strategy, and the NN5 are such countries.

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Observers point out that initially China did not take the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) seriously. They quote Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s nonchalant attitude toward the security pact in March 2018: “the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they get some attention but will soon dissipate.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, just a few years later, in 2021, China’s perspective completely changed when the Quad held its first leader-level summit.<sup>2</sup> At this point, President Xi Jinping warned that China faces a “struggle over the future of the international order” with a United States determined to prevent China’s rise.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press” (press release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 9 March 2018), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad,” *War on the Rocks*, 7 April 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/> and Kevin Rudd, “Why the Quad Alarms China: Its Success Poses a Major Threat to Beijing’s Ambitions,” *Asia Society*, 6 August 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Rudd, “Why the Quad Alarms China: The success of an Australia-India-Japan-United States strategic dialogue poses a major threat to Beijing’s ambitions,” *Asia Society*, 9 December 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/>.

Observers argue that the Quad presents a challenge to China's strategy because it seeks to forge a multilateral coalition of resistance throughout the Indo-Pacific. "Quad-Plus," which could potentially include countries like Vietnam, New Zealand, and South Korea, has been proposed as a possible outcome of increased Chinese assertiveness in the region.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, these observers' analysis maintains a classical realist perspective, primarily concentrating on the actions of "bigger nation-states," while neglecting to fully account for the relationships between China and "smaller countries."

This perspective has led to a certain indifference, among other factors, allowing the situation to persist in the South Asian region, particularly in the "non-nuclear five" (NN5) countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. China has made noticeable inroads in these countries over the years. Anu Anwar describes these countries as the NN5 or "non-nuclear five."<sup>5</sup> Their proximity to India's historic and cultural sphere of influence, as well as their common cartographical and/or regional contiguity, should naturally align them with India. However, the NN5 countries demonstrate a common pattern of strategic hedging between India and China. *Strategic hedging* refers to a situation where a state seeks strategic alignment but retains the flexibility to shift their alignment vis-à-vis each major power, avoiding tight alignment with any of them.

This article aims to provide an analysis of the bilateral relations between these NN5 countries and India, considering the concept of hedging for the first time in this context. *Hedging* is a concept from the discipline of finance in which a hedger hopes to protect himself against loss resulting from price changes by transferring the risk to a speculator who relies upon his skill in forecasting price movements.<sup>6</sup> Hence, our analysis only deems issues of domestic politics, cultural/historical factors, and counterarguments to policy decisions relevant when assessing the overall gain/loss of foreign policy. However, this article does not delve into the intricacies of domestic politics and cultural considerations beyond its scope.

By examining the impact of these bilateral relationships on their interactions with China, the authors provide insights into how and why China has made progress in the region. Additionally, the authors argue that in the face of challenges and the need to make choices regarding rivalrous India and China, the NN5

<sup>4</sup> Jason Li. "South Korea's Formal Membership in the Quad Plus: A Bridge too far?" *Stimson Center*, 4 October 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/> and Wuthnow, "China's Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad."

<sup>5</sup> Anu Anwar, "China's Growing Engagement in South Asia: Challenges for the US," *Pacific Forum: Issues and Insights* 19, no. 6 (June 2019), <https://scholar.harvard.edu/>.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Yuzhu. "Hedging Strategy: Concept, Behavior, and Implications for China-ASEAN Relations." *East Asian Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2021): 1–36.



countries have tended to hedge their strategic and economic bets. This realization underscores the necessity for Western countries to reassess their South Asia policy to effectively counter China's ascent.

### **Background: The Quad and Inroads Made by China in South Asia**

The Quad is an initiative created by four democracies—the United States, India, Japan and Australia—back in 2004, was initially intended to provide humanitarian support for countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami.<sup>7</sup> However, in recent years, it has been revitalized to counter the growing Chinese sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>8</sup> All four countries now have compelling reasons to come together.

The United States, for instance, has USD 1.9 trillion worth of trade passing through the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>9</sup> India and Japan, on the other hand, have experienced intensified territorial disputes with China in recent years.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Australia has faced economic sanctions from China after suggesting a World Health Organization investigation into the origins of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of the Indian Ocean region is evident. As maritime strategist Alfred Mahan reportedly said, “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia as the destiny of the world will be decided there.”<sup>12</sup> China recognizes the significance of the Indian Ocean region for its growing economy. In 2016, trade between the Hormuz Strait and the Malacca Strait alone amounted to USD 18 trillion.<sup>13</sup> China's expanding economy requires substantial energy supplies for its industrial production, with 47 percent of its crude oil coming from the Middle East in 2020.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sheila Smith, “The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 27 May 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ed Griffith and Moises de Souza, “The Quad: US Efforts to Counter China's Influence in Asia Mark a New Era of Micro Alliances,” *The Conversation*, 1 June 2022, <https://theconversation.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, “The Quad in the Indo-Pacific.”

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Markey, “Preparing for Heightened Tensions between China and India,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 April 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, “The Quad in the Indo-Pacific.”

<sup>12</sup> Prasanta Sen Gupta, “The Indian Ocean in World Politics: Reflections On Its Future,” *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 43, no. 3/4 (1987), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, “Energy Security Options for India in the Context of Great Power Rivalry Emerging in the Indian Ocean,” in *Low Carbon Pathways for Growth in India*, ed. Rajat Kathuria, Saon Ray, and Kuntala Bandyopadhyay (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 179–86.

<sup>14</sup> “Chinese Reliance on Middle East Oil Increases: Report,” *Hindustan Times*, 31 December 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>.

The geopolitical significance of South Asia extends beyond its young and rapidly growing economies. Its proximity to the Indian Ocean region makes it a critical sea route for trade and a gateway to both the Middle East and East Asia. China has constructed ports in countries of South Asia, labeling them as “ports of friendship.”<sup>15</sup> These ports include Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, with plans to build additional ports in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Observers have raised concerns that these port developments surrounding India are aimed at exerting pressure on India, leading to claims that the intention is to choke India.<sup>16</sup>

As the Quad assumes a prominent role and China asserts its influence in the region, it is crucial to examine the responses of the “smaller” neighboring countries. The primary catalyst behind China’s extensive advancements is the presence of the regional hegemon, India, which is perceived as a “big brother” by the elites of the NN5 countries.

### Previous Literature and Theory: Strategic Hedging by the NN5 Countries

What explains the selective bandwagoning behavior of the NN5 countries in aligning with China? Traditionally, these countries have been within the “sphere of influence of India.”<sup>17</sup> While individually they are not small countries by any means—Nepal has a population of approximately 30 million, Sri Lanka 22 million, and Bangladesh 169 million—India dominates the region, encompassing around 75% of the landmass and contributing to 80% of South Asia’s gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>18</sup> Consequently, India holds a position of superiority in its bilateral relations with these countries. The elites in the NN5 countries perceive this as India’s big-brother attitude, feeling that they receive a lesser share in their bilateral relations.

In response, these elites adopt a strategy known as *balancing* in their foreign relations with both India and China. This approach of simultaneously balancing and bandwagoning may appear contradictory, but it is not. On one hand, the NN5

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<sup>15</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, “Pakistan’s Gwadar Port: A New Naval Base in China’s String of Pearls in the Indo-Pacific,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 2 April 2018, <https://www.csis.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Ayush Jha, “Security Threats to India: How Chinese Developments in Gwadar and Investments in Chabahar Port Can Jeopardize India’s Security in the Region?” *Medium*, 12 April 2021, <https://medium.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Chilamkuri Raja Mohan, “India and South Asia: The Elusive Sphere of Influence,” *National University of Singapore–Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)*, 2022, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Population Total- Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh,” *The World Bank*, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/>; and David Scott, *Handbook of India’s International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2011), 119.

countries seek to counterbalance the dominant influence of their bigger neighbor, India, by aligning with China. On the other hand, they cannot fully rely on China's highly risky debt book diplomacy.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, aligning with China is akin to joining the bandwagon driven by the actual source of threat. Over the years, the NN5 countries have seemingly grown closer to China as a result.

Realist international relations scholars agree that hegemonic powers respond to emerging challengers through balancing. However, there is no consensus on how auxiliary states or smaller powers react to emerging powers. Some scholars, like Stephen Walt, argue that "the weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon rather than balance."<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Waltz posits that balancing against strength occurs universally because "secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side."<sup>21</sup>

The literature has previously discussed the concept of concurrent balancing and bandwagoning, or the absence of either. Interestingly, this discussion has often revolved around China's rise. For instance, Ann Marie Murphy provides insights into the response of Thailand, a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally of the United States and a strategic partner of China.<sup>22</sup> She characterizes China's rise as a phenomenon that neither involves balancing nor bandwagoning, resulting in no significant changes in its alignment.

Similarly, in the context of China's rise in South Asia, previous works, though not explicitly stated, have hinted at a simultaneous balancing and bandwagoning behavior exhibited by weaker states. For example, Deep Pal mentions Bangladesh's ability to skillfully balance its relations with China and India.<sup>23</sup> This balancing act stems from various factors.<sup>24</sup> On one hand, Bangladesh is perceived by India as falling within its direct sphere of influence, while on the other hand, Beijing provides Dhaka with favorable terms for purchasing arms and extends soft loans. Furthermore, China has surpassed India in financing large-scale infrastructure projects with substantial fixed costs. Despite maintaining a seemingly amicable relationship on paper, Bangladesh's actions to balance between China and India

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<sup>19</sup> Sam Parker and Gabrielle Chefetz, "China's Debtbook Diplomacy: How China Is Turning Bad Loans into Strategic Investments," *The Diplomat*, 30 May 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 127.

<sup>22</sup> Ann Marie Murphy, "Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning: Thailand's Response to China's Rise," *Asian Security* 6, no. 1 (2010): 1–27.

<sup>23</sup> Deep Pal, "China's Influence in South Asia: Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021), 12 <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.

<sup>24</sup> Pal, "China's Influence in South Asia."

can be seen as a rational and measured response to China's growing influence. Despite being situated within India's direct sphere of influence, Bangladesh demonstrates an astute awareness of the regional and global realities. Its strategic hedging between India and China reflects a respectful acknowledgment of China's emerging hegemonic status.

This brings us to another strand of literature that talked about a related idea—hedging. *Hedging* in international relations is a strategic alignment in which states retains the flexibility to shift their alignment vis-à-vis each major power by avoiding tight alignment with any of them and signaling ambiguity about the scope of shared security interests, while constantly attempting to reduce the source of the risk.<sup>25</sup> According to a number of studies, hedging is a hybrid strategy in which a government engages with a large or emerging power diplomatically and economically while also taking insurance measures such as fallback security measures.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, those who study alignment politics contend that states should hedge in a situation when they pursue a restricted or ambiguous alignment with one or more large powers.<sup>27</sup>

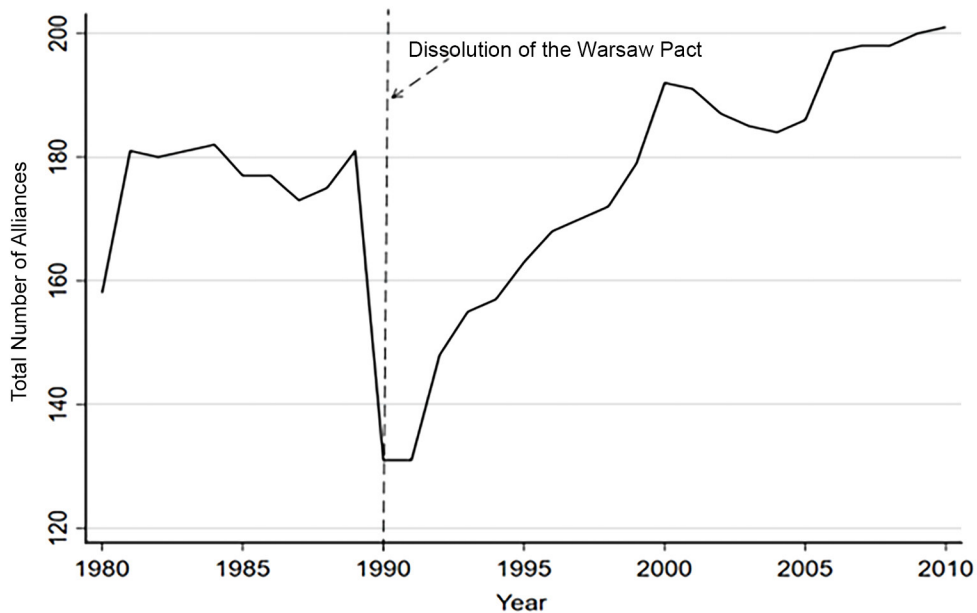
Hedging, in this context, typically refers to a national security or alignment strategy employed by one state toward another. It involves a combination of cooperative and confrontational elements. The concept of hedging emerged in contrast to *balancing* or *bandwagoning*, terms developed during the Cold War to depict alternative strategies of resisting or accommodating a dominant or threatening great power. The prominence of hedging as both a practice and a conceptual framework increased in the post-Cold War era, coinciding with a significant decline in the number of formal defense pacts (fig. 1).<sup>28</sup> As the inter-national system transitioned from bipolar to unipolar and arguably multipolar, alignment behaviors underwent significant changes. Hedging is considered a component of these behaviors that cannot be fully explained by either balancing or bandwagoning.

<sup>25</sup> Darren J. Lim and Zack Cooper, "Reassessing Hedging: The Logic of Alignment in East Asia," *Security Studies* 24, no. 4 (2015): 696–727.

<sup>26</sup> Evan S. Medeiros, "Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia Pacific Stability," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (December 2005): 145–67; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (August 2008): 159–85; and Øystein Tunsjø, *Security and Profit in China's Energy Policy: Hedging against Risk* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> John D Ciorciari, *The Limits of Alignment: Southeast Asia and the Great Powers since 1975* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010); Lim and Cooper, "Reassessing Hedging"; and Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2 March 2016): 500–14.

<sup>28</sup> John D Ciorciari and Jürgen Haacke, "Hedging in International Relations: An Introduction," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 3 (1 September 2019): 367–74.



**Figure 1. The collapse of the USSR and total number of alliances in the system<sup>29</sup>**

Citing a wide range of scholars, John D. Ciorciari and Jürgen Haacke outline several reasons for hedging in international relations.<sup>30</sup> Some scholars perceive hedging as a security tactic employed by minor states or middle powers, particularly when navigating triangular relations between China and the United States.<sup>31</sup> Early studies on hedging focused extensively on the Asia-Pacific region, examining Sino-US relations and Southeast Asian interactions with China's rise. Since then, analysts have applied the concept to explain behavior in various regions, including the Persian Gulf, East and South Asia, Europe, and Eurasia.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Douglas M. Gibler, *The Correlates of War Project Formal Alliance dataset. International Military Alliances, 1648–2008* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Ciorciari and Haacke, "Hedging in International Relations."

<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Meeting the China Challenge: The U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies," in *Policy Studies* 16, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2005); Denny Roy, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27, no. 2 (August 2005): 305–22; and Brock F. Tessman, "System Structure and State Strategy: Adding Hedging to the Menu," *Security Studies* 21, no. 2 (April 2012): 192–231.

<sup>32</sup> Asle Toje, "The EU Security Strategy Revised: Europe Hedging Its Bets," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 15, no. Issue 2 (1 May, 2010): 171–90; Tessman "System structure and state strategy"; Hoo Tiang Boon, "The Hedging Prong in India's Evolving China Strategy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 101 (12 April, 2016): 792–804; and Kei Koga, "The Concept of 'Hedging' Revisited: The Case of Japan's Foreign

Certain scholars highlight the significance of domestic factors in shaping hedging strategies, an aspect often overlooked.<sup>33</sup> This perspective encompasses how states address specific strategic and economic vulnerabilities, such as the potential risks associated with energy supply disruptions.<sup>34</sup> Hedging can also be utilized to safeguard or reinforce domestic regimes and political legitimacy.<sup>35</sup>

Building upon the existing scholarship on hedging, we argue that despite being within India's direct sphere of influence, sharing cartographical and/or regional contiguity, as well as a common history and culture, the NN5 countries exhibit a consistent pattern of strategic hedging between India and China. On one hand, these countries cannot overly rely on India due to perceived issues stemming from India's big-brother attitude. On the other hand, they have witnessed China's debt book diplomacy in action, which deters them from fully aligning with China. While there is no formal grouping of these five non-nuclear countries, they consistently display similar behavior, indicative of an overarching pattern of strategic hedging.

The empirical sections of this article provide case studies on each of the NN5 states, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. These case studies illustrate how these countries, despite not belonging to any regional economic or political grouping, exhibit a consistent pattern of hedging with common elements. The subsequent section explores the challenges and limited options faced by the NN5 states in navigating the Sino-Indian rivalry within the regional politico-economic landscape, which ultimately drive their hedging behaviors.

## Case Studies

In the paragraphs that follow, we undertake a pioneering effort to systematically analyze the bilateral relations between the NN5 countries and the regional hegemon, India. This analysis aims to shed light on the micro foundations of the observed hedging dynamic. Through this examination, it becomes apparent that the NN5 countries are indeed adopting a strategic hedging behavior in their engagement with India.

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Policy Strategy in East Asia's Power Shift," *International Studies Review* 20, no. 4 (29 December, 2017): 633–60.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Marie Murphy, "Great Power Rivalries, Domestic Politics and Southeast Asian Foreign Policy: Exploring the Linkages," *Asian Security* 13, no. 3 (4 August 2017): 165–82.

<sup>34</sup> Brock Tessman and Wojtek Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," *International Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (June 2011): 214–40; and Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and China's Economic Policy in the Middle East," *China Report* 51, no. 2 (23 April 2015): 102–20.

<sup>35</sup> Kuik, "The essence of hedging."



## **Bhutan**

Let us begin by examining the relations between Bhutan and India. While existing literature discusses strategic and economic vulnerabilities as drivers of hedging behavior, we contend that Bhutan's economic dependency, particularly in the hydroelectric sector, provides the basis for its hedging posture.<sup>36</sup>

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan shares a close friendship with India, dating back to the signing of a treaty of friendship in 1949 following India's establishment as a modern nation-state in 1947 under Jawaharlal Nehru's premiership.<sup>37</sup> A significant area of cooperation between India and Bhutan lies in the hydropower sector. Bhutan, being a water-rich country, has the capacity to generate approximately 30,000 MW of hydroelectricity annually, with India being its largest importer.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that Bhutan supplies around 5,000–5,500 million units of electricity to India each year.<sup>39</sup> Despite this cooperation, India's involvement in Bhutan's hydropower sector raises concerns for Thimphu. Bhutan, with a GDP of USD 2.5 billion (2020), has incurred a debt of USD 150 million (2016–2017) due to hydropower-related accumulation.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, despite the 2017 Doklam standoff occurring in disputed territory between Bhutan and China, there are factions in Bhutan that prioritize resolving the border dispute with China diplomatically and are more concerned about their hydropower deficits vis-à-vis India.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly, Bhutan refused to deploy its troops against China during the Doklam standoff. In an unexpected development to Indian observers in April 2023, Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering even stated that the Doklam issue needs to be resolved by all three countries, which some in New Delhi interpreted as legitimizing China's claims over the disputed region.<sup>42</sup> However, Bhutanese commentator Wangcha Sangey contends that Bhutan's efforts to reach a border settlement with China would be smoother if

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<sup>36</sup> Tessman and Wolfe, "Great powers and strategic hedging"; and Salman and Geeraerts, "Strategic hedging and China's economic policy."

<sup>37</sup> Dasho K. Letho and Dasho Karma. "Indo-Bhutan Relations." *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 7, no. 1 (1994): 53–58.

<sup>38</sup> Amit Ranjan, "During Visit to Bhutan, Jaishankar Must Address Hydropower Issues," *The Wire*, 8 June, 2019, <https://thewire.in/>.

<sup>39</sup> "Expanding Exports Point to Slow Growth in Home Power Demand," *Times of India*, 30 March 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>.

<sup>40</sup> Tenzing Lamsang, "More than the Doklam Issue, Bhutan Worried about Hydropower Deficits," *Indian Express*, 29 July 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/>.

<sup>41</sup> Lamsang, "More than the Doklam Issue."

<sup>42</sup> Jyoti Malhotra, "Bhutan desperate to settle dispute with China. It will change how India looks at its north," *The Print*, 31 March 2023, <https://theprint.in/>.

India did not advocate for Bhutan to maintain control over Doklam. Sangey further suggests that relinquishing control of Doklam would provide an alternative import route, thereby reducing Bhutan's dependence on India.<sup>43</sup>

Bhutan frequently underscores its role as a net provider of security in a region where tensions could otherwise escalate.<sup>44</sup> Tenzing Lamsang highlights the significant role of Bhutanese diplomacy in averting a larger Sino-Indian conflict, stating, "At the beginning of the standoff one assumption . . . was that of Bhutan being almost an Indian 'protectorate' and that it would do whatever India wanted. The assumption on the other side was that Bhutan would be intimidated by China. . . . By the end of the standoff both assumptions were turned on its head by Bhutan with its public statements, as well as behind the scenes diplomacy with both countries, helping them to not only achieve the disengagement, but also drawing red lines for both sides."<sup>45</sup> Bhutan has also committed to the "one China" policy and has refrained from taking any positions that could provoke China.<sup>46</sup> These actions by Bhutan illustrate the conscious diversification of its political and economic portfolio, i.e., engaging in hedging between China and India.

## Nepal

Let's now examine Nepal, another neighbor of India to the north. Nepal and India share cultural similarities, with both countries having Hindu majorities.<sup>47</sup> In 1950, the two countries signed a treaty of peace and friendship, allowing their nationals to live, work, and study in each other's countries.<sup>48</sup> However, the implications of this treaty, evident in subsequent decades, made Nepal heavily reliant on India for trade, particularly for the transit of imports and exports due to Nepal's landlocked status. This reliance became evident in 1989 when the Indian government imposed a "formal" blockade on Nepal, and a similar "informal" blockade occurred again in 2015.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Anbarasan Ethirajan, "Bhutan Wants a Border Deal with China: Will India Accept?," *BBC News*, 26 April 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

<sup>44</sup> Nitasha Kaul, "Bhutan's Foreign Policy Balancing Act," *East Asia Forum*, 26 November 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/>.

<sup>45</sup> Tenzing Lamsang, "Bhutan's Diplomatic Triumph in Doklam," *The Bhutanese*, 9 February 2017, <https://thebhutanese.bt/>.

<sup>46</sup> Rajesh S. Kharat and Chunku Bhutia, "Changing Dynamics of India-China Relations," in *India in South Asia: Challenges and Management*, ed. Amit Ranjan (Springer, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Rudabeh Shahid, "Nepal's #BackoffIndia Hashtag Was a Long Time Coming," *New Atlanticist* (blog), 28 May 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Treaty of Peace and Friendship," *Ministry of External Affairs*, 31 July, 1950, <https://mea.gov.in/>.

<sup>49</sup> Abhishek Mohanty, "The India-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty: Need for a Critical Reappraisal," *Synergy: The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies*, 7 January 2019, <https://utsynergyjournal.org/>.

In 2020, there was a surge of anti-India sentiment across social media platforms, with the hashtag #BackoffIndia trending. This outburst was triggered by India's claim to over 150 square miles (nearly 10,000 acres) of land that Nepal considered part of its territory.<sup>50</sup> These events unfolded while Nepal was still recovering from a devastating earthquake, and China stepped in to provide unparalleled infrastructure reconstruction support of USD 483 million.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, China's favorability has increased in Nepal, as it is seen as a viable option to meet the country's growing infrastructure needs, including the construction of a railway from Tibet into Nepal.<sup>52</sup> Since 2014, China has become the largest source of foreign investment in Nepal, and Indian influence has been overshadowed by Chinese financial support.<sup>53</sup> In February 2022, the growing Chinese influence manifested itself when the Nepalese parliament's ratification of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) USD 500-million grant sparked significant controversy. Factions allegedly aligned with China in Nepal raised concerns that this grant posed a threat to Nepal's sovereignty due to its connection to Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy and the potential deployment of US soldiers in Nepal.<sup>54</sup>

Although Nepal shares a history intertwined with India and both countries have Hindu majorities, the past decade has witnessed Kathmandu's hedging behavior. On one hand, Nepal seeks to push back against India's historical dominance, while on the other hand, it has been compelled to accept Chinese investments for infrastructure development. This complex dynamic reflects the interplay between political, economic, and cultural factors in Nepal's engagement with its neighbors.<sup>55</sup>

## **Maldives**

In recent years, Maldives, another southern neighbor of India, has expressed dissatisfaction with its powerful neighbor and has shown a leaning toward China. India has historically played a role in Maldives' domestic politics, with a notable instance in 1988 when it deployed paratroopers and naval ships to assist former

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<sup>50</sup> C.K. Lal, "Maelstrom of Collective Narcissism," *Kathmandu Post*, 12 May 2020, <https://kathmandupost.com/>.

<sup>51</sup> Xinhua, "China Donates 483 Mln USD to Nepal for Post-Quake Rehabilitation, Reconstruction," *Relief Web*, 26 June 2015, <https://reliefweb.int/>.

<sup>52</sup> Shahid, "Nepal's #BackoffIndia Hashtag."

<sup>53</sup> Ananth Krishnan, "China Is Largest FDI Source for Nepal, Overtakes India," *The Hindu*, 25 January, 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>54</sup> "Nepal police fire tear gas to disperse protest over US aid grant," *Al Jazeera*, 20 February 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>.

<sup>55</sup> Galen Murton and Austin Lord, "Trans-Himalayan Power Corridors: Infrastructural Politics and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Nepal," *Political Geography* 77 (March 2020): 102100.

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in repelling a coup attempt by a domestic businessman supported by Tamil mercenaries from Sri Lanka.<sup>56</sup> Until 2012, Beijing did not even have an embassy in Malé, indicating limited interest in the nation.

Yet during former President Abdulla Yameen's tenure from 2013 to 2018, things took a dramatic shift. In 2017, Maldives signed a free trade agreement with China, making it a major source of income from tourism.<sup>57</sup> Under Yameen's government, China funded major infrastructure projects, which many South Asia observers pointed out was pushing Maldives into a "debt trap."<sup>58</sup> However, under the new leadership of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih starting from 2019, there was a complete U-turn to an "India First" policy for strengthening economic and defense cooperation. Maldives also felt concerned about Chinese dominance, with at least 30% of its gross national income owed to China, and therefore tried to hedge its options by allying more closely with India.<sup>59</sup> In 2020, New Delhi pledged to extend USD 500 million to Maldives in soft loans and grants.<sup>60</sup>

However, this has led to complications in recent years as supporters of the "India Out" movement question the presence of the Indian military in the southern parts of the country, stating that it threatens the sovereignty of Maldives. The Indian military's presence is part of India's USD 50-million line of credit to Maldives for defense projects, earmarked for the development, support, and maintenance of the harbor at Uthuru Thila Falhu Naval Base.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the anti-India protests grew significantly, prompting the Solih government to ban them in April 2022 by decree, which further sparked demonstrations.<sup>62</sup> Despite concerns about falling into the trap of Chinese debt diplomacy, here too, India's big-brother attitude has fostered a climate of resistance against India.

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<sup>56</sup> "HT This Day: Nov 5, 1988 - Indian Troops Crush Male Coup," *Hindustan Times*, 4 November 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Kugelman, "The Maldives: An Island Battleground for India-China Competition," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 16 July 2021, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/>.

<sup>58</sup> Kugelman, "The Maldives"; and Balachander Palanisamy, "The Maldives' 'India Out' Campaign," *The Diplomat*, 26 July 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

<sup>59</sup> Asian News International, "Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives Stand Neck-Deep in Chinese Debt: Forbes," *Times of India*, 12 September 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>.

<sup>60</sup> Nectar Gan, "A Tale of Two Bridges: India and China Vying for Influence in the Maldives," *CNN*, 25 November 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

<sup>61</sup> Rezaul H. Laskar, "India, Maldives Sign Agreements for Developing Naval Harbour, Boosting Defence," *Hindustan Times*, 21 February, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>.

<sup>62</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "Decree Banning 'India Out' Campaign in Maldives Fuels Protests," *The Diplomat*, 11 May 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

## **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka appears to be the weakest hedger in the India-China balancing game. Indian involvement in this island's politics dates to the 1970s when it intervened in the Sri Lankan Civil War, which scholars on ethnic conflict such as Allison McCulloch and Jayadeva Uyangoda have classified as a full-blown ethnic war.<sup>63</sup> India intervened in the conflict due to pressure from its own Tamil political parties.<sup>64</sup> During the 1970s, India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), aided in training and arming the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) terrorist organization, which demanded a separate state for Tamils in northern Sri Lanka.<sup>65</sup> However, when the LTTE began forming alliances with separatist groups in Tamil Nadu, RAW withdrew its support as the Indian establishment feared the conflict would spill over into Indian territories.<sup>66</sup> The withdrawal of support angered the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, culminating in the LTTE assassinating India's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the presence of Indian troops to assist in implementing the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, which called for creating a federal structure in Sri Lanka, did not sit well with the majority Sinhalese population.<sup>68</sup> The majority Sinhalese feared that the federal state structure outlined in the accord would pave the way for the creation of an independent Tamil homeland. Some even harbored concerns of territorial annexation by India due to the large Tamil population residing across the Palk Strait in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

This mistrust of India, combined with China's rising global stature, led Sri Lankans to grow closer to China over the years. When the US ceased direct military aid in 2007 due to Sri Lanka's dismal human rights record, China became the island nation's largest donor.<sup>69</sup> This included providing tens of millions of

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<sup>63</sup> Allison McCulloch, *Power-Sharing and Political Stability in Deeply Divided Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2014); and Jayadeva Uyangoda, *Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Changing Dynamics* (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2007).

<sup>64</sup> P. A. Ghosh, *Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Role of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 1999), 62.

<sup>65</sup> Ghosh, *Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 156.

<sup>66</sup> Carlton G. Haelig, "The Sri Lankan Civil War: Turning COIN on Its Head and Learning to Adapt," *Small Wars Journal*, 9 September 2017, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/>.

<sup>67</sup> "AG Perarivalan: India Top Court Frees Killer of Ex-PM Rajiv Gandhi," *BBC News*, 18 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

<sup>68</sup> A. R. M. Imtiyaz, "Sinhalaized Nation-Building Project: A Symbol of Illiberalism?," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 21, no. 1/2 (2008).

<sup>69</sup> Somini Sengupta, "Take Aid from China and Take a Pass on Human Rights," *New York Times*, 9 March, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

dollars in sophisticated weapons and six F7 fighter jets.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, China's veto power as a UN Security Council member prevented a UN investigation into alleged atrocities committed against the Tamils.<sup>71</sup>

In August 2022, a tussle between India and China unfolded in Sri Lanka regarding the docking of a research ship named Yuan Wang 5.<sup>72</sup> India voiced security concerns, claiming that the vessel could possess military capabilities and potentially monitor several ports in southern India. Following the controversy, the vessel departed, but not without creating a diplomatic storm including statement by the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong who said that China and Sri Lanka had together “resisted the rude and unreasonable interference of third parties”<sup>73</sup>—thereby reflecting China's growing involvement in the island nation, which was previously under the influence of India.

Additionally, the Sri Lanka-China bonhomie has resulted in a precarious situation. The construction of the Hambantota Port in southern Sri Lanka was financed by China. However, Sri Lanka struggled to repay the loans, leading to what some observers describe as a debt trap. When Sri Lanka defaulted on the loans, the port and 15,000 acres of surrounding land were leased to a venture led by China Merchants Port Holdings Company for 99 years in exchange for USD 1.1 billion in 2017.<sup>74</sup> The Sri Lankan case demonstrates how Indian political strategies during the Sri Lankan Civil War at least partially pushed Sri Lanka into the risky debt-trap game with China.

## Bangladesh

Finally, let's turn our attention to Bangladesh's relationship with India. This is perhaps the most intriguing relationship between two countries in the South Asia region. During Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan in 1971, India provided refuge to 10 million refugees from the territory of what was formerly

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<sup>70</sup> “China a Major Player in Sri Lanka War,” *Hindustan Times*, 2 May 2009, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>.

<sup>71</sup> Brad Adams, “We Cannot Ignore Sri Lanka,” *The Guardian*, 27 April 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

<sup>72</sup> Yvette Tan, “Chinese ‘spy ship’ Yuan Wang 5 docks in Sri Lanka despite Indian concern,” *BBC News*, 16 August 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62558767>.

<sup>73</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, “India and China engage in war of words over Sri Lanka,” *The Diplomat*, 1 September 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

<sup>74</sup> Kai Schultz, “Sri Lanka, Struggling with Debt, Hands a Major Port to China,” *New York Times*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.



East Pakistan, as they fled a crackdown by the Pakistan military.<sup>75</sup> India also clandestinely supported the guerrilla fighters of East Pakistan for nine months as they battled against the Pakistan army. Eventually, in December 1971, the Indian Army entered East Pakistan, leading to the surrender of the Pakistan Army and the birth of Bangladesh as a new nation.<sup>76</sup>

However, in the present day, this relationship is not as flourishing. With the rise of the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, Indian politicians have frequently raised the contentious issue of undocumented migration of Bangladeshi Muslims to India. This has led to concerns among intellectuals and civil society circles in Bangladesh, as they fear it may trigger a future refugee crisis.<sup>77</sup> While this rhetoric is relatively recent, there have been other long-standing issues.<sup>78</sup> Firstly, there is the unresolved matter of water sharing from the River Teesta, a tributary of the River Brahmaputra, which flows from northern India into Bangladesh. The second issue pertains to over 1,200 Bangladeshi citizens killed by India's Border Security Force between 2001 and 2021. Indian authorities claim these actions are aimed at preventing cattle smuggling and undocumented migration. Lastly, another unresolved issue between India and Bangladesh relates to trade imbalances. Bangladeshi traders complain of facing numerous non-tariff barriers when exporting to India, while Indian traders do not face the same obstacles when exporting to Bangladesh.

On the other hand, China's relationship with Bangladesh started off on a negative note.<sup>79</sup> Mao Zedong's China opposed Bangladesh's independence in 1971 and aligned with the Pakistani establishment at the time. In 1972, China exercised its veto powers as a permanent member of the UN to block Bangladesh's membership. In fact, China withheld diplomatic recognition from the new country until 1975. However, China has now become the largest source of foreign direct investment and the leading trading partner for Bangladesh.<sup>80</sup> In April 2023, Bangladesh's *Indo-Pacific Outlook* document was published, which affirmed its commitment to

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<sup>75</sup> Subir Bhaumik, "Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-Option & Change." *East-West Center*, 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>77</sup> C. R. Abrar, "NRC, CAA and Bangladesh," *Daily Star*, 3 January 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/>.

<sup>78</sup> Champa Patel and Rudabeh Shahid, "Bangladesh's Regional Majoritarian Challenge," *East Asia Forum*, 13 November, 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/>.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis : Asia's New Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> "China now largest FDI source of BD," *Financial Express*, 18 December 2022, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/>.

nonalignment and safeguarded its interests with Beijing.<sup>81</sup> Observers have highlighted that the US visa policy, introduced the following month, with the aim of “supporting a free and fair election in Bangladesh” and allowing visa denials for those who obstruct the electoral process, cannot be separated from China’s increasing influence in Bangladesh.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, while India’s treatment of its Muslim population has fueled anti-India sentiments within certain sections of Bangladeshi civil society, there appears to be no public discourse surrounding China’s treatment of Uyghur Muslims.<sup>83</sup> This highlights the cultural basis of Bangladesh’s hedging between India and China.

## Conclusion

Through their hedging behavior, it is evident that the NN5 countries have developed intricate political connections with India and China, and they generally do not align with specific camps. In the 1980s, there was significant enthusiasm among the NN5 countries when the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established, as its membership was expected to foster greater regional engagement and reduce dependence on India.<sup>84</sup> However, SAARC became entangled in the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan and failed to achieve the desired level of economic integration as envisioned by the NN5 countries. As a result, other subregional groupings were conceived. One such grouping is the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative, which aims to connect the eastern part of South Asia.<sup>85</sup> Another more ambitious grouping is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a larger alliance of countries situated along the Bay of Bengal with a focus on maritime cooperation.<sup>86</sup> Another subregional grouping, the 2015 India–Sri Lanka–Maldives Trilateral Maritime Security Cooperation, actively addresses concerns such as maritime piracy, terrorism, nontraditional

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<sup>81</sup> *Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 April 2023), <https://mofa.gov.bd/>.

<sup>82</sup> Md. Salman Rahman, “The US steps up pressure on Bangladesh ahead of elections,” *The Interpreter*, 9 June, 2023 <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>; and Ali Riaz, “What the new US visa policy for Bangladesh means,” *South Asia Source* (blog), 6 June, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.

<sup>83</sup> Rudabeh Shahid and Arafat Kabir, “At 50, Bangladesh Perfects an India-China ‘Balancing Act,’” *9DASHLINE*, 2 June 2021, <https://www.9dashline.com/>.

<sup>84</sup> Ma Jiali. “SAARC: Achievements and Challenges.” *Policy Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (2012), 161–65.

<sup>85</sup> Sohini Nayak, “A Resurrection of the BBIN MVA,” *Observer Research Foundation*, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/>.

<sup>86</sup> “Home—Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation,” *BIMSTEC*, 2016, <https://bimstec.org/>.

threats, and energy security in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these subregional groupings has been constrained. Despite multiple rounds of multilateral talks, none of these groupings have achieved full functionality to date.<sup>88</sup>

A series of Asia strategy simulations hosted by the German Marshall Fund over the course of a decade sought to find answers on how the United States and its allies can succeed in the Indo-Pacific and better prepare for long-term competition in the region.<sup>89</sup> These simulations revealed that the United States benefits whenever it focuses on “swinging” states. A report summarizing the findings of these simulations emphasized that the United States has made significant progress in bringing together nations that are eager to resist China.<sup>90</sup> However, it suggested that more attention should be given to the region’s “swinging” states, those countries that have yet to firmly decide their alignment. While achieving quick victories with these countries is unlikely, sustained engagement can lay the groundwork for future realignment. The report states: “Countries that are still making their alignment decisions deserve more attention than they have received. Engaging countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and various Pacific Islands is a challenging task. Many are cautious of US pressure and perceive their interests and values as somewhat different from those of the United States. Nonetheless, successful diplomacy can yield tangible results. Each country desires US investment, which is crucial for their continued development. However, they all hope to avoid having to choose between the United States and China. This presents an opportunity for greater US engagement, albeit one that must be approached delicately.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, given the circumstances conducive to China exerting influence in the region, it is strategic for the United States and its Western allies to reevaluate their South Asia policy and prioritize genuine bilateral or multilateral engagement with the NN5 countries by understanding their concerns, interests, and perspectives. ★

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<sup>87</sup> Krupa Vasani, “India, Maldives and Sri Lanka: Trilateral Cooperation on Maritime Security,” CESCUBE, 2 October 2021, <https://cescube.com/>.

<sup>88</sup> Reena Marwah and Swaran Singh, *Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: Conceptual and Operational Challenges* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2022).

<sup>89</sup> Zack Cooper and Aaron L. Friedberg, “Six Lessons from a Decade of Asia Strategy Simulations | Strengthening Transatlantic Cooperation,” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/>.

<sup>90</sup> Cooper and Friedberg, “Six Lessons.”

<sup>91</sup> Cooper and Friedberg, “Six Lessons.”

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# Between Myth and Reality

## Examining the Practicalities of North Korean State Collapse

CAPT SHAQUILLE H. JAMES, USAF

### Abstract

This article critically examines the likelihood of a collapse in the North Korean regime by drawing insights from three comprehensive inputs. Through a diverse range of perspectives, it provides a thorough analysis of the vulnerabilities and resilience of the North Korean party-state. By exploring intricate dynamics within North Korea, including internal power shifts, factional infighting, and historical precedents, this article sheds light on the complexities of the regime's political landscape. While acknowledging inherent uncertainties, it assesses the regime's structural integrity and proven resiliency, challenging common assumptions of an imminent collapse. The article underscores the regime's ability to withstand internal and external pressures and initiates a discussion on the role of external actors and their potential impact. By presenting contrasting viewpoints and addressing key factors, this article offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the likelihood of a state collapse in North Korea.

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The potential collapse of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea or DPRK) is a complex and poorly understood topic, yet it holds significant implications for North Korea policy. Despite the gravity of a collapse and its consequences, there is a dearth of research focusing on the specific details of a North Korean state collapse. While policy papers discuss the potential aftermath and offer brief descriptions of collapse scenarios, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the conditions, extent, and feasibility of a collapse. Furthermore, limited research exists on the vulnerability of the DPRK to trends and circumstances that historically lead to state collapse. This knowledge gap calls for an exploration into the enigmatic concept of North Korean state collapse, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of its intricacies and the factors contributing to its likelihood.

Given the alarming potential consequences of a state collapse in North Korea and its continued consideration in policy making, there is a pressing need for a focused examination of the characteristics and feasibility of such an event. This article begins by reviewing the historical context of collapse within North Korea policy and assessing the current ramifications of a North Korean collapse. It then explores the intricate structure of the North Korean party-state, comparing and contrasting common themes and contributing factors of state collapse with the

inherent characteristics and mitigating factors specific to North Korea. The analysis pursues three main objectives: identifying common trends of state collapse applicable to North Korea, evaluating the overall vulnerability of the North Korean party-state to collapse, and delineating the realistic circumstances under which a collapse could occur, considering North Korea's unique circumstances and insights from the collapse of other states. The findings demonstrate that while the risks associated with a collapse in North Korea are significant, the research and examples from recent decades, coupled with the resilience of the North Korean party-state, suggest that a collapse is highly unlikely, albeit not entirely impossible. Among various scenarios, an attempted forcible change in leadership leading to unprecedented division and civil war emerges as the most plausible, albeit highly impractical. Therefore, while contingency planning for a potential catastrophic collapse should continue, future North Korea policy should not hinge on the notion that such a collapse is imminent, inevitable, or even probable, as it is far from certain.

### **State Collapse and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

The COVID-19 era has brought immense hardship and adversity to the DPRK. Since being the first country to completely seal its borders in January 2020, North Korea has witnessed a further deterioration of its already fragile domestic situation. Even Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un acknowledged these difficulties in speeches delivered in 2020 and 2021, a departure from the norm.<sup>1</sup> Observers from the Washington-based think tank 38 North, among others, have noted the particularly challenging circumstances faced by North Korea during the pandemic, with food security reaching its worst level since the Arduous March of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The visible signs of increased economic hardship and severe food insecurity have once again raised concerns about the potential collapse of the North Korean state.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the first time that the concept of state collapse in North Korea has emerged. During the Arduous March of the 1990s, a period marked by severe economic and humanitarian crises resulting in widespread starvation, the fear of a

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<sup>1</sup> "North Korea: COVID-19 Used As Pretext To Seal Border," *Human Rights Watch*, 17 November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/>; and Sang-hun Choe, "North Korea's Leader Had Big Economic Plans. He Admits They've Failed," *New York Times*, 19 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Lucas Rengifo-Keller, "Food Insecurity in North Korea Is At It's Worst Since The 1990s Famine," 38 North, 19 January 2023, <https://www.38north.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> So Yong Jong, "Yanggang Province Family Found Dead After Prolonged Bout Of Starvation," *DailyNK*, 12 December 2022, <https://www.dailynk.com/>.



collapse was palpable.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the United States, while engaging in denuclearization negotiations, operated on the assumption that a collapse was imminent. Despite these concerns, a collapse did not materialize, but the belief in its likelihood influenced US policy toward North Korea.

In 2011, with the death of Kim Jong-il and the succession of his young and untested son, Kim Jong-un, as the leader, concerns about instability and collapse resurfaced. Kim Jong-un had only three years to prepare for his ascension, unlike his father who had a much longer transition period. At that time, some experts considered a North Korean collapse a “reasonable probability.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, during military exercises in the spring of 2013, US and ROK forces conducted scenarios to prepare for such an event, primarily focused on the security of North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction, including its nuclear arsenal.<sup>6</sup> The concern for North Korea’s domestic stability seemed secondary in these plans.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the nuclear aspect, there are substantial reasons to be deeply concerned about the possibility of state collapse in North Korea. Despite the end of the Arduous March, the country continues to grapple with severe scarcity. With a GDP of around USD 27 billion in 2021—approximately 60 times smaller than that of South Korea—North Korea faces economic stagnation and mismanagement, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Kim regime’s stringent anti-COVID measures.<sup>8</sup> According to UN data, North Korea has consistently failed to produce enough food domestically to feed its population since 1995, relying heavily on external assistance.<sup>9</sup> The result is a population that is, overall, quite food insecure, with research by the World Food Programme finding high rates of malnutrition among the population.<sup>10</sup> This has resulted in widespread food insecurity and high rates of malnutrition, with the average height of North Koreans significantly lower than their South Korean counterparts.

Considering North Korea’s dire human rights situation, extensive system of political prison camps, and the additional strain caused by anti-COVID-19 measures, a collapse in the country could trigger a colossal humanitarian crisis

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing for the Possibility of a North Korean Collapse* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *North Korean Collapse*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ingersoll, “US Army Planning.”

<sup>7</sup> Jena McGregor, “North Korea’s Leadership Transition From Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Eun,” *Washington Post*, 20 December 2011, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Gross Domestic Product Estimates for North Korea in 2021,” *The Bank of Korea*, 27 July 2022, <https://www.bok.or.kr/>; and “GDP (Current US\$) – Korea, Rep.,” *World Bank*, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Rengifo-Keller, “Food Insecurity in North Korea.”

<sup>10</sup> “WFP DPR Korea Country Brief,” *World Food Programme*, December, 2021.

among the already vulnerable population, potentially leading to mass refugee flows and widespread starvation.

Moreover, North Korea boasts the world's fourth-largest military, with approximately 1.3 million personnel.<sup>11</sup> Despite its size, the Korean People's Army (KPA) faces similar humanitarian and food security issues as the rest of the population, with reports suggesting that some conscripts must resort to stealing food from civilians to survive.<sup>12</sup> In a state collapse scenario, the breakdown of command, control, and discipline within the KPA could pose significant security and humanitarian challenges for any force attempting to stabilize North Korea.

Even in the absence of a complete collapse of military discipline, the loss of effective and verifiable command and control (C2) in North Korea, especially concerning their nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, could pose a significant WMD threat to the entire region.

Therefore, there is substantial cause for concern regarding the possibility of a collapse in North Korea. However, the question of how a North Korean collapse might manifest remains unanswered.

### **Challenges Posed by Unknown Variables and Information Scarcity**

North Korea, one of the most secretive states on the planet, has historically maintained its secretive nature. Consequently, analyzing North Korea presents challenges due to limited information availability and unpredictable variables. For instance, the country's susceptibility to state failure can vary based on its humanitarian, social, and political dispositions, among other factors. Ascertaining North Korea's internal stability at any given time proves notoriously difficult, lacking a reliable degree of certainty. Despite assuming a period of relative calm and reduced tensions with the US-ROK alliance for the purpose of this examination, North Korea's actual disposition can deviate from this assumption at any moment. In fact, one could plausibly argue that, due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korea's current vulnerability to state failure exceeds normal levels, though the extent of this vulnerability remains undetermined.

Moreover, North Korea's control of information hinders a thorough understanding of its ability to withstand collapse. While it is common knowledge that North Korea possesses an extensive state security apparatus and that Kim Jong-un

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<sup>11</sup> *North Korea Military Power. A Growing Regional And Global Threat* (Washington: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2021), 36.

<sup>12</sup> *North Korea Military Power*, 36; Hyun-min An, *et al*, *Prisoners in Military Uniform* (Seoul: The Database Center For North Korean Human Rights, 2022), 102.

is surrounded by personal bodyguards, specific details such as the total number of personnel dedicated to state security, the exact number of bodyguards protecting Kim Jong-un, or the presence of discontent among these personnel—all of which could be pivotal in a state collapse scenario—remain undisclosed. This lack of information also impacts other analytical aspects, including the attitudes of regime elites, the loyalty of the military leadership, and internal contingency plans in the event of attempted forcible power changes. Ultimately, despite focusing on a relatively “normal” version of North Korea, the existence of unknowable variables and information gaps necessitates acknowledging the presence of uncertainty in the findings of this analysis.

### **How and Why Nations Fail and Collapse**

Discussions about the consequences and potential responses to North Korean collapse scenarios often overshadow an important topic: the level of vulnerability of North Korea to collapse and the circumstances under which it may or may not occur. While North Korea has not yet experienced collapse, there is substantial research available on the broader subject of state collapse.

The concepts of *state failure* and *state collapse* are complex and encompass various definitions and research examples. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they represent distinct, albeit interconnected, phenomena. According to research by Miguel de Corral and Rolf Schwarz, states can be categorized into five groups, with weak/fragile states and failed states representing the second weakest and weakest categories, respectively.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Rotberg defines a failed state as “a polity that is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental tasks of a nation-state in the modern world,” despite maintaining international recognition.<sup>14</sup> Failed states are typically characterized by internal conflicts, loss of territorial control, regimes that exploit their own citizens, flawed institutions, deteriorated infrastructure, and rampant corruption.<sup>15</sup> While civil war and intense violence often accompany failed states, the presence of violence is not a prerequisite for state failure. Additionally, a state can fail in certain aspects while continuing to function in others. Examples of failed states

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<sup>13</sup> Miguel de Corral and Rolf Schwarz, “States Do Not Just Fail and Collapse,” *Democracy and Security* 7, no. 3 (July–September 2011), 213.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Rotberg, *State Failure And State Weakness In A Time Of Terror* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 6; and Corral and Schwarz, “States Do Not Just Fail,” 224.

<sup>15</sup> Rotberg, “Failed States,” 6–8.

include Sudan, Zaire under Mobutu Sese Seko, Afghanistan under the Taliban, Sierra Leone under Siaka Stevens, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to failed states, collapsed states exhibit a breakdown of structure, legitimate authority (legitimate power), law, and political order, requiring their reconstitution in some form, be it old or new. According to William Zartman, state collapse is “a situation where structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new.”<sup>17</sup> Zartman further emphasizes that state collapse involves the dis-integration of both governmental superstructure and social infrastructure, with civil society being unable to rebound, fill positions, restore faith, support the government, or rally around a successor.<sup>18</sup> In the context of a failed state, Rotberg defines a collapsed state as “a rare and extreme version of a failed state” where there exists a vacuum of state authority, rather than simply weak state authority.<sup>19</sup> Hence, state collapse and failure are not mutually exclusive but rather exist along a continuum. States do not collapse abruptly; instead, they first experience faltering and failure before reaching an extreme level of failure known as *collapse*. Therefore, it is possible to find examples of states that have both failed and collapsed and transitioned between these categories.<sup>20</sup> Using this definition, examples of collapsed states include Somalia, Bosnia, Lebanon, and Afghanistan in the 1980s, as well as Nigeria and Sierra Leone in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup>

While not all failed states collapse, failed and failing states are more susceptible to collapse due to the underlying characteristics that contribute to their failure. It is crucial to note that states do not simply collapse unexpectedly; collapse is the result of a long series of extreme circumstances. These circumstances give rise to trends that, while not universally applicable, are commonly observed in states that fail and collapse. Therefore, when evaluating the likelihood of a country’s failure and, ultimately, collapse, it is important to identify indicators of state failure, assess the extent of their manifestation, and consider the potential for the situation to further deteriorate into complete collapse.

<sup>16</sup> Rotberg, “Failed States,” 6–10.

<sup>17</sup> William I. Zartman, *Collapsed States. The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 1, 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> Zartman, *Collapsed States*, 1, 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> Rotberg, “Failed States,” 10.

<sup>20</sup> Rotberg, “Failed States,” 10.

<sup>21</sup> Rotberg, “Failed States,” 9.

## **The North Korean Party-State**

The North Korean party-state is a complex governmental structure that intricately integrates the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) into all aspects of state governance. While some elements of the DPRK governmental structure exist on paper in other countries, certain interpretations of common themes, such as a state constitution, a ruling party, and a representative assembly, manifest differently in North Korea. One notable example is the role of the KWP in the functioning of the North Korean state. Unlike Western liberal democracies, where the party and the state are separate entities, no such distinction exists in North Korea. According to Article 11 of the DPRK constitution, all activities in the DPRK are conducted under the leadership of the KWP.<sup>22</sup> A broad interpretation of this clause suggests that, regardless of the formal structure of the DPRK government, the KWP serves as the supreme governing body within the country. The structure of the state and its organs are dependent on the will of the party. In contrast to other forms of government where parties operate within the framework of the state, the opposite is true in North Korea: the state operates within the confines of the party. This is even evident in the DPRK constitution itself, which, unlike in other nations where the constitution is the supreme law of the land, reflects the KWP's will and derives its legitimacy from its association with the party. The design of the North Korean government revolves around the direct leadership of the KWP and relies solely on the party's presence for its functioning. Essentially, in North Korea, the party is the state, and the state belongs to the party.

The KWP employs various mechanisms to maintain firm party control over state organs. For instance, a crucial requirement for becoming a government official in North Korea is to become a member of the KWP. In principle, KWP membership entails demonstrating sufficient loyalty and allegiance to the North Korean party-state. This criterion extends beyond an individual's own actions and may also encompass the actions and history of their family members. In North Korea, the *songbun* system categorizes individuals into several groups primarily based on loyalty. The three main categories are the core class, the wavering class, and the hostile class.<sup>23</sup> The core class comprises individuals considered sufficiently loyal to the Kim regime, either through their own conduct or the conduct of their family members. The wavering class consists of individuals whose loyalty is in question, while the hostile class comprises those seen as politically irredeemable.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> DPRK Constitution, Chap. 1, Art. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun. North Korea's Social Classification System* (Washington: The Committee For Human Rights in North Korea, 2012), 4–7.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, *Marked for Life*, 4–7.

Members of the hostile class face significant challenges in securing meaningful employment or becoming party members due to their *songbun* classification. On the other hand, members of the core class and some individuals in the wavering class have greater opportunities to join the party and subsequently pursue government positions, with those possessing the highest *songbun* enjoying the chance to attain high-ranking positions. Through this relatively straightforward loyalty assessment, the North Korean party-state ensures that government officials possess a certain degree of loyalty to the party before assuming their roles within the state.

In addition to ensuring party loyalty among party-state officials, the KWP also employs various mechanisms to maintain control over the population. These mechanisms include a vast state security apparatus, strict control over information, resources, and weapons, human rights violations, and indoctrination. An essential component of indoctrination is the utilization of Mass Organizations. In North Korea, party-sponsored Mass Organizations exist at nearly every level of society, serving as a means to engage the general populace in political activities, foster “class consciousness,” and instill socialist ideology into the mission and responsibilities of the working people.<sup>25</sup> However, mass organizations also serve additional purposes geared toward state control. While the populace becomes politically involved through these organizations, they also provide a means for the party to observe and surveil average North Koreans at the individual level. This arrangement allows the party to integrate itself into the everyday lives of North Koreans and assess party and state loyalty among the population using an embedded state mechanism.

Ultimately, the organization of the North Korean party-state results in a totalitarian apparatus that is extensive, tightly woven, highly robust, far-reaching, and unchallenged. The levers of power extend into the highest levels of leadership and the military, with political officers stationed at every level, and even into individual households, where *inminban* (people’s units) monitor and, if necessary, control the actions of households. While the North Korean government may encounter practical challenges, it is by no means politically weak.<sup>26</sup> Most state functions are geared toward the preservation of the party-state, even at the expense of other essential state functions. The outcome is a North Korean state that exhibits weaknesses in certain areas, remarkable strength in others, and an undeniable extensive reach.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Jong-il, *Giving Priority to Ideological Work Is Essential for Accomplishing Socialism* (1995), 36.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, *Pyongyang Republic*, 128–29



## **Applying the Concept of Collapse to North Korea**

When comparing the North Korean party-state to the definitions, examples, perceptions, and common trends of state failure and collapse, interesting observations can emerge. Some descriptions of a failed state would categorize North Korea as either a failed or failing state, a viewpoint shared by certain observers.<sup>27</sup> However, other definitions portray North Korea as a weak state rather than a failed or failing one.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of North Korea, it is crucial to consider the specific context when applying the general descriptors of failing, failed, and collapsed states. For instance, failed states are often characterized by high levels of corruption, deteriorating infrastructure, and flawed state institutions, among other indicators. While some of these traits can be observed in North Korea, not all of them apply easily. For instance, failed states are typically associated with limited or no control over their borders and parts of their recognized territory. In the case of North Korea, the government maintains effective and uncontested control over its entire recognized territory, including a clearly demarcated and monitored border with China and Russia.<sup>29</sup> While defections and smuggling occur across this border, it would be inaccurate to suggest that North Korea lacks border control in the same way as truly failed and collapsed states. The strict border controls implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrate the central government's ability to exercise control in this aspect, indicating a strengthening of their border management.

By examining these nuances, it becomes evident that while North Korea may exhibit weaknesses as a state, it does not align entirely with the characteristics of a failed or collapsed state. The specific circumstances surrounding the North Korean party-state warrant a careful analysis that goes beyond general definitions and takes into account the country's unique dynamics and control mechanisms.

A significant trend observed in failed and collapsed states is the presence of a viable alternative to the nominal leadership. Whether it manifests as a rival political faction, a tribal or religious minority, a military junta, or a rebel group, a viable alternative typically emerges when the state loses control over territory or people. In some cases, this alternative may even possess enough strength to forcefully challenge the nominal leadership, as seen in military coups. However, for such

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<sup>27</sup> Bennett, *North Korean Collapse*, 13; and John Lee, "North Korea Is A Failed State," *NK News*, 21 April 2016, <https://www.nknews.org/>.

<sup>28</sup> Corral and Schwarz, "States Do Not Just Fail," 213.

<sup>29</sup> This definition of *recognized territory* ignores the de-facto territorial dispute with South Korea and utilizes the *Northern Half of Korea* verbiage found in the DPRK Socialist Constitution.

a scenario to unfold, a viable alternative must first exist. Currently, in North Korea, there are no evident viable alternatives. There are no rebel groups, genuine rival political parties or factions, or tribal divisions within the country. Almost all forms of power—political, cultural, societal, economic, and military—are consolidated within the KWP. Therefore, there is no clear mechanism by which power could be wrested away from the KWP, and it remains uncertain whether an alternative could emerge in the event of a sudden power vacuum.

However, this does not imply that the appearance of a viable alternative is impossible. Similar to other failed and collapsed states, the North Korean military theoretically presents a potential source of a viable alternative. Nonetheless, the KPA also has a defined role within the framework of the KWP. The KPA is an integral part of the party and, despite its significance as a powerful organ, it ultimately operates under the party's authority.<sup>30</sup> This dynamic persisted even during the era of *songun* politics under Kim Jong-il, where the KPA and national defense held prominence in North Korean state policy.<sup>31</sup> Despite the perceived political influence the KPA might have gained during this era, in reality, it possesses limited political capital within the party-state. This is particularly evident in the post-*songun* era, given Kim Jong-un's subsequent purges of military ranks.<sup>32</sup> While the KPA remains a potential option as a viable alternative in North Korea, its status as a party-aligned entity with limited political capital diminishes the likelihood of its successful transition to a capable alternative, although it cannot be ruled out entirely.

When considering the possibility of North Korean state failure, it is important to consider external pressures. For decades, North Korea has faced international sanctions and the smuggling of USBs containing foreign media, among other pressures, which clearly aim to undermine the party's control over the state. Despite the government's efforts to isolate the country due to COVID-19, North Korea continues to experience international sanctions, information smuggling campaigns, and other external pressures. Theoretically, if applied effectively, these external pressures could weaken and ultimately cause strong aspects of the party-state to fail. However, while there is evidence suggesting that some pressures have influenced North Korean behavior, there is no clear evidence regarding the impact of external pressures on the stability of the regime or its key organs. Furthermore, even if there were some effects on the regime, they did not lead to state collapse. It is evident that the North Korean party-state, by design, is highly resistant to external pressures.

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<sup>30</sup> Jongseok Woo, "Songun Politics and the Political Weakness of the Military In North Korea; An Institutional Account," *Problems of Post Communist* 63, no. 4 (2016), 255.

<sup>31</sup> Woo, "Songun Politics," 255.

<sup>32</sup> Woo, "Songun Politics," 254.

It is plausible that external sources of pressure, such as China, the US-ROK alliance, or the United Nations, could exert more pressure than the state can withstand. For instance, China could decide to cut off oil and electricity supplies to North Korea, severely compromising a fundamental function of the state. However, such heavy-handed tactics are unlikely and fall beyond the scope of this examination. These tactics have the potential to cripple any country, not exclusively North Korea. Furthermore, considering North Korea's historical resilience to external pressures and the narrative of victimhood propagated by the state, employing more forceful measures may weaken the state initially but ultimately result in a "rally around the flag" effect, reinforcing the state's victim narrative and enhancing social cohesion, thereby reducing the likelihood of state failure. In conclusion, while a sufficient amount of external pressure could push the North Korean party-state towards failure, it would not reflect the state's inherent vulnerability to collapse, but rather the extreme measures that could destabilize any state. Given the low probability of such measures being implemented and the current ineffectiveness of existing external pressures in generating internal instability, it can be inferred that, within reasonable bounds, external pressures are currently unlikely to result in the collapse of the North Korean state.

### **The North Korean Version of "Collapse"**

North Korea can be characterized as a weak state with a strong central government that maintains a monopoly on political power and the use of force within the country. In some instances throughout its history, it has shown signs of transitioning into and out of the failed state category, such as during the retreat to the Yalu River in the Korean War, the Arduous March, and possibly during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown. However, even in these circumstances, the North Korean party-state did not fail in critical categories that are essential for retaining state power. These categories ensured that the North Korean state, despite shortcomings in certain areas, maintained legitimacy, control over loyalty, power, violence, and C2 of the armed forces and WMDs. The party-state's resilience and strength have arguably prevented North Korea from descending into a full-fledged failed or collapsed state, even during challenging times.

When assessing the possibility of a collapse of the North Korean state, it becomes crucial to consider the factors that could impose significant stress and disruption on the party-state, compromising its demonstrated resilience. Given the robust nature of the party-state, any stressors capable of inducing a collapse would need to exert tremendous and targeted strain on the structure of the party-state itself.

At the outset, certain options can be ruled out. The stability of the party-state was not compromised despite the severe strain endured during the Arduous March,

which involved famine, mass deaths, and mass defections. Therefore, this event can be dismissed as a catalyst for collapse.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the likelihood of a people's revolt is extremely low. The party-state's effective means of crushing any uprising, coupled with political indoctrination, a vast security apparatus, and information control, make initiating and succeeding in a revolt highly challenging, if not impossible.<sup>34</sup> Economic hardship, despite being a persistent issue in North Korea for decades, has not posed a significant threat to the party-state's power, thus ruling out its potential to cause a collapse.

However, there remains one distinct possibility that sets itself apart from the rest. Many scenarios depicting a collapse of North Korea commonly feature one central trend: a sudden and unexpected change in the supreme leadership of the DPRK. Given that the DPRK government revolves around a unitary and totalitarian leadership structure, the abrupt removal of this leadership unit could lead to the emergence of various factions competing for power. This internal conflict could pose a substantial threat to the structural integrity of the party-state.

However, for this scenario to unfold, the infighting among the core leadership must reach an exceptionally intense and violent level, surpassing the ideological disagreements witnessed in the years following Kim Jong-un's ascension to power. During that period, numerous high-ranking party-state officials were purged, banished, or executed, yet the party-state continued to function relatively normally. If conflict among the top leadership is to jeopardize the party-state, it would have to be on an unprecedented scale, encompassing a broad scope and exhibiting extreme violence unlike anything seen in North Korean history.

Two main possibilities exist for a sudden change in North Korea's supreme leadership: the sudden death of the supreme leader or the ousting of the supreme leader. While either scenario could potentially lead to factional infighting, the ousting of the supreme leader presents a greater likelihood of instigating the instability required to compromise the party-state. Although Kim Jong-un currently lacks a clearly designated successor, there is some evidence to suggest that his sister, Kim Yo-jong, has been groomed to assume his position in the event of his incapacitation.<sup>35</sup> While such a swift transfer of power is unprecedented in North Korean history, Kim Yo-jong, having been present during her brother's rise to

<sup>33</sup> Jeongmin Kim, "Starvation in North Korea Not Severe Enough to Pose Threat to Kim Jong Un: NIS," *NK News*, 8 March 2023, <https://www.nknews.org/>.

<sup>34</sup> Francis Grice, "The Improbability of Popular Rebellion in Kim Jong-un's North Korea and Policy Alternatives for the USA," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4, no. 3 (December 2017): 276–80.

<sup>35</sup> Chris Steinitz, Ken Gause, and Elizabeth Yang, "Does Kim Jong Un Have a Succession Plan?," *38 North*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.38north.org/>.

power, is likely familiar with the potentially brutal methods required to maintain her leadership. In a sudden death scenario, where a viable alternative may not have had sufficient time to emerge, any opposition to Kim Yo-jong would likely be scattered, if it exists at all. Although not impossible, factional infighting following a sudden death is unlikely to generate the level of stress necessary to compromise the party-state.

An ousting scenario presents a distinct set of circumstances. In the event of an ousting, whether through the arrest or assassination of the supreme leader, a viable alternative will have emerged. The size and scope of this alternative are challenging to predict, but it must possess sufficient strength to evade or gain support from the state security apparatus, overcome or receive assistance from the Supreme Guard Command (Kim Jong-un's personal guards), and gain unauthorized and hostile access to the supreme leader. Any faction accomplishing these feats becomes a de facto viable alternative to the nominal state leadership, although the situation grows increasingly complex from that point forward.

Nevertheless, a successful ousting of the supreme leadership does not automatically result in the collapse of the party-state. In fact, a robust, cunning, supported, and powerful viable alternative that successfully removes the North Korean supreme leader is likely capable of maintaining nominal control over the rest of the party-state in their absence. They can utilize the same levers of power, whether institutional or improvised, that the previous regime employed. While the successful ousting of the supreme leader is a recurring theme in North Korean collapse scenarios, it does not guarantee the collapse of the state.

However, there is a caveat to this theory. It is important to consider scenarios in which attempts to oust the supreme leader are unsuccessful. As mentioned earlier, internal violence and civil war are common trends in failing and collapsing nations. A successful attempt by a robust and capable viable alternative could lead to a relatively smooth transition of power away from the Kim family, resembling some military coups in the developing world. On the other hand, a failed attempt by the same viable alternative could result in the suppression of the alternative faction, or it could ignite a significant conflict between the faction and those loyal to the still-powerful and living supreme leader. This situation could serve as a catalyst for a civil war, extending beyond the highest echelons of North Korean state power and descending into a widespread and violent conflict. In an extreme scenario, such a civil war could compromise the very foundation of the party-state and, if the key competencies of the party-state collectively fail, lead to the collapse of the state.

This scenario, however, remains highly improbable and lacks substantial historical precedent in North Korea. Nonetheless, if the North Korean party-state

were to collapse, it would require an unprecedented and highly unlikely sequence of events. A sudden and significant shift in power at the highest levels of leadership, accompanied by internal conflict and division that escalates to the point of civil war, would exert immense pressure on the functioning capacity of the party-state. This strain would surpass any challenges the government has encountered thus far in its history and could potentially lead to its collapse, albeit with extremely low probability.

## Conclusion

State collapse is theoretically possible in North Korea, as it is in any other nation. However, North Korea's susceptibility to collapse may be higher compared to other countries, given its relatively low score on de Corral and Schwarz's *Degree of Statehood* scale, which categorizes it as a fragile/weak state.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the design, structure, and proven resilience of the North Korean party-state make state collapse highly unlikely. Over the decades, North Korea has demonstrated its ability to withstand various forms of strain and pressure, both internal and external, that could have crippled a less resilient state. Despite economic hardships, humanitarian disasters, international isolation, and factional infighting, the North Korean party-state has remained intact. Its key strengths, despite its many weaknesses, have allowed it to endure in the face of such challenges. Therefore, any scenario leading to a North Korean state collapse would have to involve unprecedented events that pose a direct threat to the structural integrity of the party-state, surpassing anything witnessed in North Korean history thus far.

If a North Korean state collapse were to occur, it would not likely be triggered by a humanitarian disaster or economic underperformance. Public dissatisfaction with the regime or international pressure, isolation, and sanctions would also not be the direct causes. The party-state is expected to be strong enough to withstand these pressures and overcome them.

A collapse of the North Korean state would be the culmination of a highly unlikely and increasingly extreme series of events. It would likely stem from a sudden and unforeseen power shift or attempted power shift at the highest levels of leadership. However, the unique characteristics of the North Korean party-state add complexity to the situation. A viable alternative that possesses the power and support necessary to successfully challenge and remove the supreme leader would also be capable of maintaining control over the party-state. In other words, the more successful the coup, the less likely a collapse becomes.

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<sup>36</sup> Corral and Schwarz, "States Do Not Just Fail," 213.



To trigger a collapse, the leadership shift would need to result in extreme divisions, violence, and factional infighting among the North Korean elites, reaching the level of a large-scale civil war that engulfs the party-state. Among the possibilities, a launched but unsuccessful attempt to force a leadership change in North Korea, with multiple powerful and armed factions vying for supremacy, appears to be the most plausible scenario for creating the conditions that lead to the failure and collapse of the North Korean party-state.

However, even this most likely collapse scenario remains highly improbable due to the inherent strengths of the North Korean party-state. While North Korea certainly has weaknesses and shares certain characteristics with failed and collapsed states, considering it doomed or highly likely to collapse would be a misunderstanding and a significant underestimation of the strengths and structural integrity of the North Korean party-state. Although planning for such a scenario should continue, North Korean policy should not hinge on the expectation of an imminent collapse unless there are verifiable indications that question the structural integrity of the party-state and its various apparatuses. In the unique case of North Korea, if a collapse were to occur, it would likely be the result of a civil war rather than the cause of it. States do not simply collapse, and North Korea is no exception. ☸

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# India Takes a Step Away from the Russian Defense Industry

MATTHEW STEIN

## Abstract

India and Russia have had a long-standing security cooperation partnership, with India relying heavily on Russian weapons and equipment for its armed forces. However, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the *Make in India* initiative in 2014 to develop the country's defense industry and reduce dependence on imports. The war in Ukraine has caused India to accelerate this process and end negotiations or cancel agreements with Russia on several weapon system acquisitions. Indian officials cited Russia's logistical problems in delivering new systems as the reason for the cancellations. This article examines how the conflict in Ukraine has impacted one of Russia's key security cooperation partnerships and how India's defense industry is developing to produce replacements for these systems. The study provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for India to achieve its goal of self-reliance in defense production.

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India's current security cooperation with Russia has roots in the solid relations between the Soviet Union and India. Diplomatic ties between India and the Soviet Union were established in 1947, but the relationship deepened in the 1950s and 1960s when India faced border disputes and conflicts with Pakistan and China, leading to increased economic and security cooperation. During these conflicts, US support for Pakistan instead of India also prompted New Delhi to strengthen ties with Moscow. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union altered the dynamics of the relationship, India and Russia have continued to maintain close ties. Despite not being each other's top trading partners, the two countries have an estimated annual trade turnover of several billion USD, including significant defense expenditures by India.<sup>1</sup>

The inventories of India's Army, Navy, and Air Force feature several Russian weapon systems. The Indian Army possesses an estimated 2,400 T-72 and 100 T-90 main battle tanks, 2,400 BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, 150 BM-21 and 42 BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket-launch systems, and several dozen mobile and static air defense systems of Russian origin. The Indian Navy has seven *Sindhughosh*-

<sup>1</sup> "India: Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," Observatory of Economic Complexity, <https://oec.world/> and "Russia: Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," <https://oec.world/>.

class (previously Soviet *Kilo*-class) attack submarines, one *Vikrant*-class (previously Soviet *Kiev*-class) aircraft carrier, three *Rajput*-class (previously Soviet *Kashin*-class) guided-missile destroyers, six *Talwar*-class frigates (previously Soviet *Krivak*-class) frigates, one *Abhay*-class (previously Soviet *Pauk*-class) corvette, three *Kumbhir*-class (previously Soviet–Polish *Polnocny*-class) amphibious warfare vessels, and one *Jyoti*-class (previously Soviet *Komandarm Fedko*-class) replenishment tanker. In addition, the Indian Navy utilizes more than 40 MiG-29 multirole fighters, three Il-38 aircraft, and a dozen Ka-28 helicopters in anti-submarine and maritime patrol roles. The Indian Air Force has more than 60 MiG-29s, 50 MiG-21s, and 260 Su-30s in various combat roles, six Il-78 aerial tankers, 17 Il-76 heavy transports, more than 100 An-32 medium transports, over a dozen Mi-24 attack helicopter variants, more than 200 Mi-17 transport helicopters, and a dozen Mi-21 and Mi-29 trainer aircraft.<sup>2</sup>

To provide a balanced perspective, it should be noted that alongside Russian weapons, each of the three branches also possesses weapons systems of non-Russian origins. For instance, the Indian Army has an estimated 122 domestically produced Arjun main battle tanks and 36 Pinaka multiple rocket-launch systems. Similarly, the Indian Navy and Air Force operate a mix of Russian and non-Russian systems in the same functions. The navy has an equal number of domestically produced ships of various types, while the air force also has dozens of non-Russian combat aircraft, transports, and attack and utility helicopters. However, the large number of Russian systems in India's inventory attests to the long-standing security cooperation between India and Russia prior to the war in Ukraine.

The depth of India's security cooperation with Russia is demonstrated not only by the large number of Russian-origin weapon systems in India's inventory, but also by the several joint ventures to produce systems in India. These ventures include the BrahMos cruise missile, the Su-30MKI multirole fighter, various ships for India's navy, and other projects such as the production of the AK-203 assault rifle.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, India purchased five Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems in October 2018, with the first deliveries taking place in late 2021.<sup>4</sup> The sale of the S-400s, which Russia has sold to only a handful of other governments, highlights

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<sup>2</sup> "Asia: The Military Balance," in *The Military Balance* 123, no. 1 (2023): 208–301, DOI: 10.1080/04597222.2023.2162718

<sup>3</sup> Kartik Bommakanti, "India-Russia military-technical cooperation: Beyond commercial relations," *Observer Research Foundation*, 22 June 2017. <https://www.orfonline.org/>; and Dinakar Peri, "AK-203 assault rifles production to begin by year-end: Russian official," *The Hindu*, 18 October 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Dinakar Peri, "Deliveries of S-400 air defence system have begun, says Russian official," *The Hindu*, 14 November 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

the strength of Indian–Russian ties. While the purchase did not include a technology transfer to manufacture the systems in India, it nevertheless underscores the close partnership between the two countries. This relationship was further highlighted in July 2019 when Russia declined to sell 50,000 Kalashnikovs to Pakistan after pressure from the Indian government, despite having lifted an arms embargo against Pakistan in 2014 and engaging in closer security cooperation up to that point.<sup>5</sup>

The Russian defense industry annually exports around USD 15 billion worth of equipment to various countries, with India being among the top four recipients.<sup>6</sup> While defense exports generate significantly less revenue for Russia's economy than energy exports, the export of weapons serves as a tool for Moscow to establish or maintain influence with various governments worldwide. Russian officials, including Vladimir Putin, have stated that defense exports support the country's foreign policy by providing weapons and equipment to nations that do not have good relations with the West.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Make in India Initiative**

Before discussing India's cancelled agreements with Russia, it is important to note how the Indian government has been emphasizing the need to build up the country's defense industry and reduced reliance on imports for its armed forces. The *Make in India* initiative, which covers several sectors of country's economy, has three main objectives: increasing manufacturing growth, creating more manufacturing jobs, and raising the percentage of manufacturing as part of the country's gross domestic production (GDP).

Indian officials have taken various steps to boost growth in the defense sector, including implementing a requirement that new acquisitions are produced domestically whenever feasible, as well as creating import ban lists that require the armed forces to purchase certain systems or equipment from a domestic supplier.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Armed Forces are permitted to acquire weapon systems outside of these requirements if there is an urgent operational need. For example, the Indian Army

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<sup>5</sup> Snehash Alex Philip, "Russia rejects Pakistan request for 50,000 AK rifles, assures India of no deals in future," *The Print*, 17 July 2019, <https://theprint.in/>.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Trevelyan, "Ignoring Ukraine setbacks, Putin touts 'superior' Russian weapons exports," *Reuters*, 16 August 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Connolly and Cecilie Sendstad, "Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter," *Chatham House*, Research Paper, 20 March 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Snehash Alex Philip, "AK 203 and Kamov delayed, India and Russia aim for missile deal ahead of Modi visit," *The Print*, 10 February 2020, <https://theprint.in/>; and Abhishek Bhalla and Manjeet Negi, "Mini UAVs, mine-protected vehicles among new list of 108 defence items banned for import," *India Today*, 31 May 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

has acquired light machine guns and different types of artillery and small arms ammunition through these types of acquisitions.<sup>9</sup>

The *Make in India* initiative has coincided with several years of increasing defense expenditures in India. By 2019, India's defense budget had become the world's third-largest, a position it maintained into 2022.<sup>10</sup> India continues to prepare for a potential two-front war against Pakistan and China.<sup>11</sup> As the Indian government allocates a significant portion of its budget to defense and seeks to develop its domestic defense industry, each acquisition takes on added significance. Because India's defense industry cannot yet meet all the requirements for the armed forces, the country will continue to import various weapon systems. Despite the impact of the war in Ukraine on their partnership, India is likely to continue working with Russia to build up its defense industry.

### **The War in Ukraine**

New Delhi has maintained a neutral stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, urging both sides to end the war and find a diplomatic solution.<sup>12</sup> India has indirectly supported Russia at the UN by abstaining from various votes against Russia at the UN General Assembly and as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council.<sup>13</sup> India's abstentions at the UN Security Council included a vote on the draft resolution condemning Russia's annexation of four regions of Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> While India condemned the killing of civilians in Bucha, Ukraine, early in the war, its representative at the UN called for an independent investigation into the incident without attributing blame to Russia for the deaths.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Press Trust of India, "Post Pulwama, Centre grants more financial powers to 3 services to buy weapons," *Times of India*, 16 April 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>; and "India to Procure 16,479 Light Machine Guns From Israel," *Force*, 20 March 2020. <http://forceindia.net/>.

<sup>10</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "World military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time," 25 April 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> "India must be prepared for 2-front war: Rawat," *Daily Excelsior*, 7 September 2017, <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Parliament proceedings | India called upon Russian, Ukrainian sides to return to path of diplomacy, dialogue: Govt.," *The Hindu*, 21 July 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> "As UN Votes to Remove Russia from UNHRC, India Abstains," *The Wire*, 7 April 2022. <https://thewire.in/>; and "U.N. demands Russia reverse Ukraine annexations, India abstains from vote," *The Hindu*, 13 October 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> Sriram Lakshman, "India abstains on UNSC resolution condemning Russia's 'referenda'," *The Hindu*, 1 October 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> "At UNSC, India Supports Call for Independent Probe Into Bucha Civilian Killings in Ukraine," *The Wire*, 5 April 2022, <https://thewire.in/>.

New Delhi has not implemented any sanctions against Russia, but it has expressed concerns about violating them. In July 2022, the US government granted India a waiver in connection with the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), allowing India to purchase Russian systems, including the S-400s which have already been acquired.<sup>16</sup> India has been importing Russian oil since the war in Ukraine began and remains one of Russia's top buyers. Moreover, New Delhi did not commit to end purchases of Russian oil when the G7 governments introduced a price cap on Russian oil in early December 2022.<sup>17</sup>

On 16 September 2022, at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a rare public statement indirectly criticizing the war in Ukraine, telling Russian President Vladimir Putin that the "era of war is over."<sup>18</sup> This could be related to some of India's business interests in Ukraine, including significant delays in train wheels for India's Vande Bharat—a new semi-high-speed, intercity rail system—and spare parts for gas turbine engines for the Indian Navy. Both are manufactured in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian firms involved have been forced to delay production to support the war effort.<sup>19</sup> It is unclear whether Modi's statement was a direct criticism of Russia's actions or a more general call for peace, but it could also be a response to the impact that the war has had on the rising cost of food, as India imports wheat and sunflower oil from Russia and Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> Overall, India has generally avoided openly criticizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

### **India's Cancelled Agreements and the Russian Defense Industry's Logistics Issues**

The Indian government cancelled or suspended several agreements with Russia to acquire new or upgraded weapon systems a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. The first cancelled agreement came on 16 April 2022, when the Indian Air Force cancelled plans to purchase 48 Mi-17 V5 helicopters from Russia.

<sup>16</sup> "Important step for India's purchase of Russian weaponry, says ex-diplomat on US sanction waiver," *India Today*, 16 July 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

<sup>17</sup> Press Trust of India, "Russia becomes India's top oil supplier in October," *The Hindu*, 6 November 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Suhasini Haidar, "PM Modi tells Vladimir Putin 'now is not an era of war'," *The Hindu*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Wheels of Vande Bharat trains are on their way from war-torn Ukraine," *India Today*, 24 April 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>; Anirban Bhaumik, "Russia-Ukraine war: India assesses impact on defence supply from both nations," *Deccan Herald*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> Samrat Sharma, "How the Russia-Ukraine war may affect India's platter," *India Today*, 29 March 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.



Indian officials claimed the decision to cancel the deal happened before the war to provide a boost to the *Make in India* initiative, but it marked the first in a series of decisions by the Indian government.<sup>21</sup> On 18 April, the Indian Ministry of Defence opened a four-day conference with sessions dedicated to examining the impact of the war on deliveries of weapons and equipment to India.<sup>22</sup> On 29 April, Indian Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh made a statement that the war in Ukraine highlights the need for India to become more self-sufficient in its defense industry.<sup>23</sup> His statement followed announcements from other Indian officials who noted how the war in Ukraine has caused delays in the delivery of weapons, equipment, and spare parts for the Indian Army and Navy.<sup>24</sup>

Several significant cancellations took place in the wake of these announcements. On 8 May, Indian Air Force officials announced the cancellation of plans to upgrade its inventory of 85 Russian Su-30MKI fighters due to logistical problems arising from the war in Ukraine. Officials stated this decision would bolster India's defense industry.<sup>25</sup> On 10 May, Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army Manjiv Pande acknowledged logistics issues with certain types of ammunition and spare parts from Ukraine and Russia that were critical to the Indian Army's readiness but noted that there were sufficient reserves for the immediate future. General Pande also indicated that India was exploring alternative sources for ammunition and supplies.<sup>26</sup> On 17 May, the government announced that it was suspending negotiations to acquire 10 Russian Ka-31 airborne early warning and control helicopters for its Navy. The Indian Navy already has 14 Ka-31s and had sought to add more, but New Delhi was unable to find a way to pay for the new helicopters in the face of ongoing sanctions on Russia and doubted Russia's ability to deliver them.<sup>27</sup> The agreements to upgrade the Su-30MKI fighters and purchase the 10 Ka-31 helicopters were estimated to be worth several hundred million USD.

India's concerns over Russia's ability to deliver new systems persisted as the war in Ukraine continued into July 2022. The Indian Army and Air Force had been

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<sup>21</sup> Manjeet Negi, "To boost Make in India, IAF cancels plans to buy 48 Mi-17 choppers from Russia," *India Today*, 16 April 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

<sup>22</sup> Bhaumik, "Russia-Ukraine war."

<sup>23</sup> Manjeet Negi, "Russia-Ukraine war highlights need for a self-reliant military: Rajnath Singh," *India Today*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

<sup>24</sup> A.K. Sachdev, "The Great Indian Dilemma," *Force India*, April 2022, <https://forceindia.net/>.

<sup>25</sup> "India shelves ₹35,000 cr plan to upgrade Su-30 fighter fleet amid Russia-Ukraine war," *Live Mint*, 8 May 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/>.

<sup>26</sup> Press Trust of India, "Supply chain of certain ammunition, spares impacted because of Ukraine war: Army chief," *New Indian Express*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Anirban Bhaumik, "Amid Ukraine war, India halts KA-31 helicopter deal with Russia," *Deccan Herald*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/>.

seeking to replace their inventories of light combat and light utility helicopters that can operate in high-altitude environments for several years prior to the start of the war in Ukraine. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) had already introduced some indigenous light utility helicopters into operational units, but India planned to purchase 200 Russian Ka-226T helicopters to complement the HAL light utility helicopters. However, officials abandoned negotiations in early July due to logistical challenges related to the war in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

An incident in late July 2022 prompted another decision to not pursue an agreement with Russia for a new system. On 28 July, an Indian Air Force MiG-21 crashed during a training flight, killing two pilots. This marked the sixth Indian MiG-21 crash in 18 months. Shortly after the incident, officials announced that the Indian Air Force would retire all its current inventory of MiG-21s by 2025. India had been negotiating with Russia to acquire MiG-29s and SU-30s before the July crash, but an agreement could not be reached because of the ongoing war in Ukraine.<sup>29</sup>

Representatives in the Russian defense industry have acknowledged that ongoing contracts have been impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in addition to India cancelling contracts. On 17 August, the United Shipbuilding Corporation of Russia announced a six-month delay on two frigates currently being constructed for the Indian Navy. The delay was due to difficulties procuring components for the ships due to sanctions, and the ships had already been delayed by nine months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>30</sup> A few days later, in an interview with the Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, Dmitry Shugaev, Russia's Director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, stated that Russia would take a tailored approach to fulfilling orders for Russian military equipment for each customer, accounting for logistical problems due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. He also mentioned that the Russian industry would provide alternative payment options to work around sanctions.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, on 15 August 2022, Russia's Rubin Design Bureau, a submarine designer and builder, withdrew from a request for proposal to construct six submarines for the Indian Navy, stating that the proposal was unrealistic. According to the deputy director of the bureau, the cost and requirement to build in India, the transfer of

<sup>28</sup> Dinakar Peri, "Army Aviation augments combat power while ageing Cheetah, Chetaks await replacement," *The Hindu*, 10 July 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>29</sup> Pradip Sagar, "Bye Bye MiG-21 Bison," *India Today*, 31 July 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/>.

<sup>30</sup> Dinakar Peri, "Six-month delay in delivery of two stealth frigates by Russia due to war in Ukraine," *The Hindu*, 17 August 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

<sup>31</sup> Dinakar Peri, "Customised defence deals offered to offset sanctions impact, says senior Russian military official," *The Hindu*, 19 August 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

technology, and penalties for not meeting deadlines were too high. Although the war in Ukraine was not explicitly cited as a factor in withdrawing from the proposal, it marked another instance of Russia and India failing to reach an agreement since the war began.<sup>32</sup>

## Outlook

Based on the history of Indian–Russian relations and New Delhi’s commitment to developing its domestic defense industry, Indian officials canceled agreements or ended negotiations for several weapon systems because they did not believe Russia could deliver them. Unlike the punitive measures that Western governments have carried out, these cancellations do not appear to be aimed at punishing Russia for the war in Ukraine. However, the cancellations have left India without clear replacements from its defense industry, and it is uncertain when a replacement will be available or if another security cooperation partner will step in to fulfill the country’s armed forces’ requirements.

India has been clear for several years that it intends to import fewer weapon systems and develop its domestic defense industry, so Russia losing some defense agreements was expected. Still, the war in Ukraine has accelerated India’s plans. While it is unlikely that the Indian government will completely abandon its acquisitions of Russian weapon systems, Russia is likely to continue to face logistical difficulties in delivering weapon systems as the war in Ukraine continues. As Russia depends on defense exports to sustain its economy and shape foreign policy, this could weaken its international influence further. This, in turn, could ultimately offer other security cooperation partners an opportunity to fill in the gaps that Russia is leaving in its pursuit of the war in Ukraine. ★

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<sup>32</sup> Dinakar Peri, “Terms of Indian Navy’s mega submarine deal unrealistic: Russian official,” *The Hindu*, 15 August 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.

# From Global Britain to Atlantic–Pacific

## The United Kingdom's Indo-Pacific Policy under the Integrated Review Refresh 2023

DR. SHINGO NAGATA

### Abstract

This article examines the United Kingdom's Indo-Pacific policy as outlined in the *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World (IR23)*. Released in March 2023, this foreign policy and national security paper builds upon the *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR21)*, which codified the post-Brexit foreign policy initiative *Global Britain* in March 2021, with the Indo-Pacific Tilt policy as a central component. However, in *IR23*, the Indo-Pacific policy was positioned within the Atlantic–Pacific partnership, as opposed to *Global Britain*. This article argues that through the utilization of the Anglo-French defense and security cooperation, the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) defense security cooperation framework, and the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), London demonstrates a clear long-term commitment to promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region by fostering the Atlantic–Pacific partnership.

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On 16 March 2021, the United Kingdom unveiled *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR21)*, a comprehensive policy paper codifying its foreign and security objectives for the next decade. At the core of this post-Brexit foreign policy initiative was the Indo-Pacific Tilt, emphasizing the United Kingdom's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

In line with this commitment, London deployed the Carrier Strike Group (CSG21), led by the new aircraft carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, to the Indo-Pacific from May to December 2021. This significant endeavor was accompanied by the United Kingdom's recognition as the eleventh full dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in August 2021. Additionally, in September that same year, the United Kingdom, along with Australia and the United States, launched the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) defense security cooperation framework, which included plans for supporting Australia's procurement of nuclear attack submarines (SSN).

However, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, adjustments to the *IR21* became necessary. As a result, on 13 March 2023, the

United Kingdom released the *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World* (IR23), a revised policy paper addressing the evolving global landscape.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Indo-Pacific Policy within the Atlantic-Pacific Partnership**

With IR23, London shifted its focus towards addressing China as a pacing threat, prioritizing it over Russia during Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The paper stated, "Tensions in the Indo-Pacific are increasing and conflict there could have greater global consequences than the conflict in Ukraine."<sup>2</sup> While IR21 categorized Russia as an "acute threat," IR23 continued to view Russia as "the most acute threat,"<sup>3</sup> with no substantial change in its positioning as an immediate concern despite the Ukraine invasion. Conversely, the description of China became even more alarming. In IR21, China was labeled a "systemic competitor" alongside Russia, whereas in IR23, it was described as an "epoch-defining challenge" to the United Kingdom and the international order, reflecting heightened caution.<sup>4</sup>

In light of this context, IR23 not only included a column entitled "The UK's Policy towards China"<sup>5</sup> but also addressed the situation in Taiwan for the first time. Moreover, IR23 elevated the Indo-Pacific region's priority from a mere "tilt" to becoming "a permanent pillar of the UK's international policy" emphasizing a long-term strategic approach.<sup>6</sup> Notably, IR23 clarified London's stance on developing an Indo-Pacific policy aligned with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision led by Japan and the United States. While FOIP was not discussed in IR21, IR23 stated that "a core tenet of the UK's approach to the Indo-Pacific will be to support the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific shared by many regional partners."<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to IR21, IR23 omitted the explicit mention of *Global Britain* in its content. Instead, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) deepened its relationships with like-minded Indo-Pacific countries in recent years, the United Kingdom transcended the confines of the aforementioned term. It positioned its defense and security cooperation with Indo-Pacific nations within a newly

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<sup>1</sup> HM Government, *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*, CP811 (London: Stationery office, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 3, 6, 12, 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 30–31.

<sup>6</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 22.

formed multilateral partnership network known as the *Atlantic–Pacific*. This network serves as a bridge connecting the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions, serving as a defining characteristic of *IR23*.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, with the release of *IR23*, British leaders emphasized the United Kingdom's long-term commitment to security cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries clear by aligning it with the Atlantic–Pacific partnership.

### Anglo-French Defense and Security Cooperation

During the Anglo-French summit in Paris on 10 March 2023, which preceded the release of *IR23*, defense and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region were discussed, and the agreements reached were promptly incorporated into *IR23*.<sup>9</sup>

France, being the first country in Europe to formalize an Indo-Pacific strategy due to its overseas territories and a significant portion of its exclusive economic zone located in this region, holds a unique position. On the other hand, the United Kingdom has actively engaged in Southeast Asia security through Commonwealth defense cooperation frameworks such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and the British Forces Brunei (BFB). Consequently, it can be argued that the two countries, sharing common interests in the Indo-Pacific, enjoy a mutually complementary relationship in regional defense and security cooperation.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to anticipate that as NATO aims to collaborate with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific to address China's growing military influence, the United Kingdom and France, equipped with strategic assets capable of projecting their presence effectively, notably aircraft carrier strike groups, will assume leading roles in these endeavors.

Against this backdrop, the Anglo-French summit revealed a commitment to cooperate on the rotational deployment of carrier strike groups, demonstrating Europe's persistent presence in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>10</sup> In a show of support for future cooperation, the United Kingdom participated in the French-led multilateral joint naval exercise La Perouse 23 alongside Japan, the United States, India, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand in the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean on 13–14 March 2023.

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<sup>8</sup>. *Integrated Review Refresh 2023*, 1, 9.

<sup>9</sup>. Richard Whitman, "The Anglo-French Summit: A Modest Advance in Foreign, Security and Defence Policy?" *UK in a Changing Europe*, 14 March 2023, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/>.

<sup>10</sup>. "UK and France Commit to Greater Defence Cooperation at Paris Summit" (press release, Government of the United Kingdom, 10 March 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/>.



France operates a single aircraft carrier, the FS *Charles de Gaulle*, while the United Kingdom operates two *Queen Elizabeth*-class carriers. Notably, the latter deploys F-35 Joint Strike Fighters operated by allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, fostering interoperability and cooperation between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. Given these circumstances, the United Kingdom is expected to play a prominent role in the deployment of the Anglo-French Carrier Strike Group to the Indo-Pacific.

## AUKUS

AUKUS, a defense and security cooperation framework announced abruptly in September 2021, was established with China's military advancements in mind. Concurrent with the release of *IR23* on 13 March 2023, the leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia declared in San Diego, California, their agreement to support Australia's acquisition of SSNs, which is the primary objective of AUKUS. The "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS" outlined the following details:

- Beginning in 2023, Australian military and civilian personnel will embed with the U.S. Navy, the Royal Navy, and in the United States and United Kingdom submarine industrial bases to accelerate the training of Australian personnel. The United States plans to increase SSN port visits to Australia beginning in 2023, with Australian sailors joining U.S. crews for training and development; the United Kingdom will increase visits to Australia beginning in 2026.
- As early as 2027, the United States and United Kingdom plan to begin forward rotations of SSNs to Australia to accelerate the development of the Australian naval personnel, workforce, infrastructure and regulatory system necessary to establish a sovereign SSN capability.
- Starting in the early 2030s, pending Congressional approval, the United States intends to sell Australia three Virginia class submarines, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed. This step will systematically grow Australia's sovereign SSN capability and support capacity.
- In the late 2030s, the United Kingdom will deliver its first SSN-AUKUS to the Royal Navy. Australia will deliver the first SSN-AUKUS built in Australia to the Royal Australian Navy in the early 2040s.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS" (press release, Government of the United Kingdom, 13 March 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/>.

On 13 March 2023, just before *IR23* was released, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a £5 billion increase in defense spending over the next two years, aiming to achieve a long-term defense spending-to-GDP ratio of 2.5 percent.<sup>12</sup> Examining the allocation of the £5 billion increase, it is worth noting that £3 billion has been designated to support nuclear-related ventures, including the cost associated with supporting SSN procurement under AUKUS.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, *IR23* can be viewed as a diplomatic and security directive intended to solidify AUKUS's comprehensive trajectory. Notably, the simultaneous release of *IR23* with the announcement of the AUKUS support plan by the leaders of the bloc highlights the United Kingdom's enduring commitment to Indo-Pacific security, with AUKUS serving as a vital component of the Atlantic-Pacific partnership, which takes into account China's military advancements.

### Global Combat Air Programme

In addition to AUKUS, *IR23* also highlighted the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) as a crucial element of the Atlantic-Pacific linkage. In December 2022, the leaders of Japan, the United Kingdom, and Italy announced the joint program aimed at developing a next-generation fighter aircraft, set to be operational by 2035 and intended to replace Japan's F-2 fighter and the Royal Air Force's Eurofighter. The significance of GCAP extends beyond the fighter development aspect, as emphasized in the "Joint Leaders' Statement." The program's "global" designation signifies the intention to foster future "inter-operability with the United States, with NATO and with our partners across Europe, the Indo-Pacific and globally."<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after the release of *IR23*, the first meeting of the Japanese, UK, and Italian defense ministers was held in Tokyo on 16 March 2023 to discuss cooperation on the GCAP. This meeting took place on the sidelines of DSEI Japan 2023, an international defense equipment exhibition sponsored by a British company and held near Tokyo 15–17 March 2023. The GCAP, which showcased a model of the next-generation fighter jet, was the central focus of discussions at DSEI.<sup>15</sup> At the ministerial meeting, British Minister of Defence Ben Wallace

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<sup>12</sup> "PM Announces Major Defence Investment in Launch of Integrated Review Refresh" (press release, Government of the United Kingdom, 13 March 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/>.

<sup>13</sup> "PM Announces Major Defence Investment."

<sup>14</sup> "Joint Leaders' Statement: UK-Italy-Japan: 9 December 2022" (policy paper, Government of the United Kingdom, 9 December 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/>.

<sup>15</sup> "Global Combat Air Programme Takes Centre Stage at DSEI Japan" (press release, Government of the United Kingdom, 16 March 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/>.

and Italian Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto also recognized the significance of GCAP for the United Kingdom and Italy in terms of the Atlantic-Pacific linkage, stating that “the security of Europe and Asia is inseparable, and affirmed that the Indo-Pacific region is also critical for the UK and Italy.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, they highlighted the importance of cooperation with Japan as a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>17</sup>

During his keynote speech on March 15, the opening day of DSEI, Defense Minister Wallace conveyed the following statement:

GCAP is not going to be a short love affair. It’s going to be a marriage. AUKUS was another project we announced this week—the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, developing the next generation of nuclear attack submarines. That’s a 20, 30, 40 year programme. And GCAP will be of a similar length. So when we as the nations committed to this programme, there’s no going back.<sup>18</sup>

These remarks clearly indicate that the purpose of GCAP and AUKUS is to establish a framework for long-term defense security cooperation between the United Kingdom and Indo-Pacific countries.

## **Conclusion**

With the publication of *IR23*, London has unequivocally emphasized the Indo-Pacific region as “a permanent pillar of the UK’s international policy” from a long-term strategic perspective, despite the ongoing crisis of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, *IR23* has affirmed the United Kingdom’s proactive role in fostering defense and security cooperation between Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific countries by aligning its Indo-Pacific policy within the framework of the Atlantic-Pacific partnership.

Simultaneously with the release of *IR23*, London has actively advanced the Atlantic-Pacific partnership through initiatives such as the Anglo-French summit, the announcement of the AUKUS plan, and the Japan–United Kingdom–Italy defense ministers’ meeting to discuss the GCAP. These endeavors substantiate London’s enduring commitment to promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region over the long term. 🌟

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<sup>16</sup> “Trilateral Defense Ministerial Meeting” (press release, Ministry of Defense, Government of Japan, 16 March 2023), <https://www.mod.go.jp/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Trilateral Defense Ministerial Meeting.”

<sup>18</sup> Ben Wallace, “UK Defence Secretary - Keynote Speech DSEI Japan 2023” (speech transcript, Government of the United Kingdom, 15 March 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/>.

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# “Out, In, and Down”

## Classical Geopolitics and the Balance-of-Power in a New Old World

VIKTOR M. STOLL

### Abstract

This article provides a concise analysis of historical perspectives and geopolitical theories, with a focus on Lord Hastings “Pug” Ismay’s tripartite strategy and its implications for contemporary security policies. By examining Ismay’s strategy and its context, the article explores its effectiveness and prescience in addressing collective security challenges. Additionally, the article investigates diverse geopolitical theories that have influenced collective security approaches throughout history, considering their strengths and weaknesses. It offers a comprehensive overview of Ismay’s tripartite strategy, highlighting its components and examining its practical application through historical examples and case studies. This research deepens our understanding of collective security strategies and their relevance to modern security policies. By critically examining historical perspectives and drawing on geopolitical theories, the article contributes to the ongoing discourse on global security dynamics. The analysis aims to enhance our knowledge of the complexities surrounding collective security and provide a foundation for further exploration and debate within the field.

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In 1952, Lord Hastings “Pug” Ismay (1887–1965), the first Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), succinctly outlined the alliance’s strategic objectives with his famous tripartite formula: “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”<sup>1</sup> Pursued via an equitable balance of these three ends, the Alliance’s geopolitical end state sought “an insurance against the unspeakable horror of a [nuclear world] war that would destroy our civilization.”<sup>2</sup> From his position as NATO Secretary-General, Ismay was arguably the most influential individual in “the arena of global politics”—

<sup>1</sup> Ismay purposely avoided using the term *Soviet Union* for designating NATO’s primary external threat. Instead, Ismay opted for the term *Russians* as a broader, geopolitical characterization of the perennial Eurasian threat to Western Europe. Victor Davis Hanson, “Lord Ismay, NATO, and the Old-New World Order,” *National Review*, 5 July 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Hastings Ismay, “Secretary General’s Speech to the North Atlantic Council,” Bonn, Germany, May 1957.

a chief executive of the West's principle intergovernmental organization and the political leader of the world's most powerful military alliance.<sup>3</sup>

For Ismay, a British general with extensive military experience on the Northwest Frontier, in World War I, and as Winston Churchill's chief military advisor during World War II (1940–1945), the implications of the tripartite security strategy of “Out-In-Down” were clear. While the threat of a cataclysmic nuclear war between the democratic West and communist East was plainly of immediate concern to NATO policy makers throughout the organization's formative years, the alliance also presumed to manage international conflict more broadly. As such, Ismay's tripartite prescription for the prevention of global conflict is particularly prescient.<sup>4</sup>

The West, through an interconnected postwar system of collective security predicated on Ismay's three strategic ends, formed the bulwark of broader international peace and security. This strategy aimed to balance the global polarity and maintain the tenuous yet relatively stable bipolar system between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American alliance that emerged in the immediate postwar geopolitical environment. It involved containing the Russians east of the Elbe, ensuring American commitment to prevent the isolation of the British Empire, and suppressing German militarism to prevent the resurgence of a highly unstable multipolar system that had dominated Europe for centuries. If the “Russians came in,” the “Americans left,” or the “Germans stood back up,” this strategy would collapse, paving the way toward a return to prewar multipolarity, a new world war and global nuclear annihilation.

Ismay believed that the West should act as a united ideological bloc, with the geopolitical power of the United States serving as a check against anti-Western ideologies, particularly international communism. However, equally important in Ismay's collective security paradigm was the need to keep potential “revisionist” powers within the West in check. This required their integration into and dependence on a collective Western security strategy, encompassing economic, political, and military aspects.

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<sup>3</sup> The position of NATO Secretary-General was defined as “a unique figure in international politics... [one] that combines elements of transitional alliance politics, international administration, and multinational diplomacy in a manner not seen elsewhere in the arena of global politics.” Robert S. Jordan and Parley W. Newman, Jr., “The Secretary-General of NATO and Multinational Political Leadership,” *International Journal* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1975), 732–57.

<sup>4</sup> For a view of the West German government during the Bonn Conference: “Dass ein moderner atomarer Krieg ein apokalyptisches Verhängnis sein würde, nicht nur für die Bevölkerung der Bundesrepublik und des Westens, sondern für die gesamte Menschheit, einschließlich der Völker des Sowjetblocks, das wissen wir alle.” Chancellor Conrad Adenauer, “Deutschland bekennt sich zur Nato” (speech, NATO Foreign Ministers' Conference, Bonn, 1957).



While Ismay specifically mentioned Germany as the most likely revisionist power in Europe within the context of North Atlantic relations, he also viewed Japan as the primary revisionist power in the Indo-Pacific. Ismay's awareness of the threat posed by a revanchist Japan stemmed from his time at the Quetta Staff College in 1922, shortly after World War I. At the college, which served as the primary command and staff institution for senior officers in the British Indian Army, Ismay took part in a significant war game scenario. The scenario involved a theoretical Japanese invasion of Siam, Malaya, and Singapore, despite the ongoing Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923), which would expire the following year. In his role as the Japanese General Staff, Ismay extensively studied Japanese political, economic, and military intentions and capabilities.

In late 1925, Ismay assumed the role of Assistant Secretary for the Committee on Imperial Defence (1904–1947), the primary organ responsible for coordinating and advising on defense policy and strategy within the British Empire.<sup>5</sup> According to Ismay's biographer Ronald Wingate, his task was to determine "how we should have to defend ourselves in our vast Empire if we should go to war." In this capacity, Ismay played a significant role over the next four years as one of the key architects of the "War Book," which outlined the global campaign plan for the defense of the British Empire in the event of war.<sup>6</sup>

After serving as aide-de-camp to Lord Willingdon, Viceroy of India and Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army, with a growing focus on the Japanese threat, Ismay returned to Whitehall in May 1933. He assumed leadership of the Eastern Intelligence Division at the War Office, which held a wide-ranging portfolio covering the Far East, Japan, Russia, and the United States. In this role, Ismay increasingly concentrated on Japan's geopolitical ambitions, especially following its withdrawal from the League of Nations in March 1933 after the occupation of Manchuria.<sup>7</sup>

In 1936, Ismay resumed his position at the Committee on Imperial Defence as Deputy Chief and eventually assumed leadership of the committee in 1938. With the outbreak of war in Europe, the committee was absorbed by the War Department, and Ismay took on the role of chief staff officer and principal military

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<sup>5</sup> The Committee on Imperial Defense (CID) incorporated representatives from the Dominions and served as a form of National Security Council staff for the prime minister and cabinet. The CID was the principal defense strategy organ for the empire until it was rebranded the Defense Committee (1947). For more on the structure and history of the CID, see: Chad T. Manske, *The Machinery of Government Needs a Tune-Up: Lessons for the US National Security Council from the British Committee of Imperial Defence*, Walker Paper 15 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2009), 9–34, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

<sup>6</sup> Wingate, *Lord Ismay*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Ismay, *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay*, 176–77.

advisor to Churchill. As Churchill held the positions of Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Britain, Ismay also served as secretary of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which served as the primary platform for imperial interservice defense policy. In this capacity, Ismay coordinated defense policy in anticipation of an increasingly likely war with Japan. He focused on the “Singapore Strategy,” aiming to address the geopolitical concerns of Australia, New Zealand, India, and other British Empire territories east of Suez.

However, Ismay’s position, which he had developed during the Quetta staff exercise in 1922, was reversed when the Japanese invaded Malaya in December 1941. Despite advocating for the abandonment of outlying territories like Hong Kong and the substantial reinforcement of Singapore prior to the war, Ismay’s recommendations were ignored in Whitehall.<sup>8</sup> Within a mere six weeks, the Japanese 25th Army, led by General Tomoyuki Yamashita, captured Singapore and ended Britain’s two-century-long dominance in the Indo-Pacific. Ironically, Yamashita’s operational plan for attacking Singapore from the north via Malaya closely mirrored the proposal Ismay had made when playing the role of the Japanese General Staff during the Quetta exercise two decades earlier.

Ismay undoubtedly grasped the volatility of geopolitical alignments and the paramount importance of national interest in international relations. As a former cavalryman on the Northwest Frontier, he personally witnessed Japan’s transformation from a key ally to a grave threat to British influence in the Indo-Pacific. Through the Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902–1923), Britain had empowered Japan to safeguard British interests and security in the region, countering imperial rivals like Russia and Germany. From 1914 to 1918, the Imperial Japanese Navy played a vital role in securing allied communication lines and British territories spanning from the Suez Canal to the Straits of Magellan. However, within the alliance’s initial successes lay the seeds of its eventual dissolution.

With its eastern flank protected by its Japanese partners, Britain could shift the majority of its military strength from the Indo-Pacific to the home islands, better addressing the rising threat posed by a belligerent Germany and its naval expansion (1898–1914). By 1906, shortly after Japan’s decisive victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905),<sup>9</sup> approximately one-third of all British

<sup>8</sup> Ismay, *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay*, 238.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the Russo-Japanese War, see: S. C. M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 49–76; and Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longman, 1985).

ships in the region were redeployed to the home islands.<sup>10</sup> This reallocation had been the British policy makers' intention from the outset.<sup>11</sup> Japan would assume the bulk of British defense obligations in the Indo-Pacific as British national security interests shifted toward the European continent.<sup>12</sup> During World War One, as British priorities increasingly focused on achieving victory in Europe, their long-standing alliance with Japan took a backseat to foster a closer relationship with the United States, whose support for the Entente war effort was of utmost importance.<sup>13</sup>

However, the diverging national interests between the United States and Japan regarding their respective dominance in the Pacific exacerbated the realignment of British geopolitical priorities toward the United States. In the aftermath of racially charged attempts by the United States to contain Japanese economic, political, Naval Conference (1921-22), Anglo-Japanese national interests were irreparably severed by 1923.<sup>14</sup> Japan, already significantly empowered by two decades of British deference, suddenly emerged as the dominant geopolitical force in the Western Pacific. With Britain officially ending its alliance with Japan in March 1923 and pivoting toward the United States, Japan was left as the principal power in the Indo-Pacific, outside the Anglo-umbrella of political and economic security. This resulted in a complete shift in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, transforming the Anglo-Japanese-American "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" entente

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<sup>10</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 246; and Henry P. Frei, "Japan in World Politics and Pacific Expansion, 1870s-1919," *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific Dominions 1871-1919*, (ed.) John Moses, and Christopher Pugsley (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1999), 182.

<sup>11</sup> For the preeminent treatment of the formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, see: Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894-1907* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> For more on the British defense re-alignment towards Europe to deter the German threat, see: Richard Dunley, "Sir John Fisher and the Policy of Strategic Deterrence, 1904-1908," *War in History* 22, no. 2 (April 2015): 155-73; Jon Tetsuro Sumida, "Geography, Technology, and British Naval Strategy in the Dreadnought Era," *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 89-102; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the divergence of national interests within the Anglo-Japanese alliance, see: Ian Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1908-23* (London: Athlone Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> For excellent treatments of Japan's progressive racialized exclusion from the Allies after World War I, see: Yoichi Hiramata, "The First World War and Japan: from the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to the Washington Treaty," in *The Sea in History—The Modern World*, ed. N.A.M. Rodger (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2017), 412-25; Hiroshi Nakanishi, "Japan at the Paris Peace Conference: The Proposal to Abolish Racial Discrimination," *Japan Review* 3, No. 3-4 (Winter/Spring 2020): 4-11; and Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

into a nationalist and anti-Western Japanese power that fundamentally opposed the Anglo-American order it was now rejected by.<sup>15</sup>

Ismay personally witnessed this rapid divergence of national interests between Britain and Japan from his positions in intelligence, policy, and planning in India and Whitehall. He observed the increasing instability in the Indo-Pacific as Anglo-Japanese interests rapidly diverged and a multipolar regional balance took shape. In less than two decades, he saw Britain's staunch Indo-Pacific ally realign into a partner that posed an existential threat in Europe, forming a transcontinental Axis committed to toppling the Anglo-world order.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Ismay experienced the culmination of this deviation from the vantage point of British imperial defense policy throughout six years of total war. It was from these experiences that Ismay formulated his tripartite security strategy for the postwar period.

For Ismay, preventing global catastrophe required a united West, led by the United States, and based on an anti-Western bogeyman that provided an impetus for alignment of the block's national security interests. Ismay understood that a united Western bloc was only possible if a broad consensus of national security interests were maintained—a task that required the utmost care and attention. In his embrace of the centrality of national interest to multipolarity, Ismay harnessed the words of British Foreign Minister Lord Palmerstone (1784–1865), who famously stated in 1848: “it is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”<sup>17</sup>

Ismay rightly deduced that any divergence of national security interests would split Western powers into traditional nation-state rivalries dominated by conflicts over land and resources. Predicated on the inescapable “primacy of geography” in human relations, these rivalries would ensure the return of an unstable multipolar world order.<sup>18</sup> In his assessment, Ismay echoed the idea that “primacy of geography”

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<sup>15</sup> For a global perspective of this paradigm shift, see: Frederick R. Dickinson, “Toward a Global Perspective of the Great War: Japan and the Foundations of a Twentieth-Century World,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 4 (October 2014): 1154–83. For more on the American-Japanese interwar rivalry, see: Michael J. Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 111–50.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy A. Yellen, “Into the Tiger’s Den: Japan and the Tripartite Pact, 1940,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 3 (July 2016): 555–76.

<sup>17</sup> Viscount Palmerston, Speech to the House of Commons regarding the Treaty of Adrianople, London, 1 March 1848, HC Deb 01, March 1848, Vol. 97, cc 66–123.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the “primacy of geography,” see: Colin S. Gray, “The Continued Primacy of Geography,” *Orbis* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 247–59.

plays a fundamental role in shaping international dynamics and conflicts.<sup>19</sup> According to Ismay, conflicts over land and resources are intensified by physical proximity, leading to greater incentives for expansion and more destructive conflicts over time.<sup>20</sup> This perspective aligns with his belief that centuries of unbridled intra-Western conflict, culminating in the two World Wars, were ultimately rooted in the "primacy of geography."

Ismay's "Out-In-Down" tripartite prescription for a Western collective security strategy reflected the salient features of the Anglo-American geopolitical theories dominating international relations during the period. Thus, Ismay firmly rooted his approach in the concept of the "primacy of geography" and, as a result, it aligned with the broad Anglo-American security consensus of the postwar period. This consensus was epitomized by George Kennan's famous "containment" policy. The nearly seven decades of limited conflict that followed provide evidence of the validity of Ismay's "Out-In-Down" approach in managing interstate competition.

However, with the collapse of the Communist threat in 1991, Western national interests began to decouple at an increasing rate. Despite attempts to identify a uni-fying boogeyman such as rogue regimes, transnational terrorism, and international criminal syndicates, the individual national interests of Western nations continued to diverge without the anchoring presence of a pan-Eurasian geopolitical threat. Even the response to emerging threats posed by revisionist powers like China and Russia is leading to divisions within the West, as different interest groups align regionally.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the breakdown of Western unity and Ismay's collective security strategy has been exacerbated by domestic trends toward isolationism in the United States. The threat of American withdrawal empowers the growing geopolitical assertiveness and autonomy of Germany and Japan, the revisionist Western powers highlighted by Ismay. As a result, all three of Ismay's strategic objectives are

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the influence of geographic proximity on inter-state conflict, see: Alan K. Henrikson, "Distance and Foreign Policy: A Political Geography Approach," *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 4 (October 2002): 437–66.

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent treatment of this phenomena in Europe, particularly before the Treaty of Vienna (1815), see: Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1988), 86–100.

<sup>21</sup> Philippe Le Corre, "On China's Expanding Influence in Europe and Eurasia," *Testimony before the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee*, Washington DC, 9 May 2019; Noah Barkin, "The U.S. is Losing Europe in Its Battle With China," *The Atlantic*, 4 June 2019; and Theodore Pelagidis, "China's backdoor to Europe," Brookings Institute, 15 April 2019.



crumbling, leading the world back toward an unstable multipolar order, which is the opposite of Ismay's intended end state for Western security.<sup>22</sup>

While current security discourse focuses on the emerging Eurasian "poles" such as Russia, China, and even India, the importance of Ismay's third admonishment, which emphasizes keeping revisionist powers "down," is severely neglected in US policy. Ismay recognized that Germany and Japan have the inherent capacity to assume regional polarity. The management of this "latent polarity," as I term it, remains a widely misunderstood aspect of America's international security architecture. While Washington slowly shifts its national security focus from transnational terrorism to geopolitical competition with Russia and China, it fails to address the management of Japan and Germany's latent polarity. In fact, recent American efforts to persuade and coerce Japan and Germany to increase defense spending and burden sharing to levels that domestic audiences perceive as extortion will only hasten the re-emergence of autonomous, and potentially independent, Japanese and German-led geopolitical poles on opposite ends of Eurasia.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, current US security policy is recreating the geopolitical conditions that led to the divergence of the Anglo-Japanese alliance a century ago.

This article delves into the intricacies of Japan's latent polarity from the perspective of classical geopolitics and asserts that current political, military, and economic trends are paving the way for the emergence of an independent Japanese geopolitical pole in the Indo-Pacific. The article suggests that this development will undoubtedly undermine US primacy in the region, much like it did for Britain during the interbellum period. This analysis gains particular significance considering the recently concluded US–Japan bilateral negotiations for a new Special Measures Agreement (SMA) of 2022–2026 which, under the Trump administration, had originally demanded a 300-percent increase in Japanese burden sharing.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Although some experts argue that postwar international organizations will provide a stable forum for interstate cooperation, coordination and conflict resolution, the broad consensus is that multipolarity is inherently less stable than bipolarity. Mark Y. Rosenberg, "Experts Get Multipolarity All Wrong," *Foreign Policy*, 24 June 2019. See, also: Trine Flockhart, "The Coming Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 1 (2016): 3–30; and Susan Turner, "Russia, China and a Multipolar World Order: The Danger in the Undefined," *Asian Perspective* 33, no.1 (2009): 159–84.

<sup>23</sup> Lara Seligman and Robbie Gramer, "Trump Asks Tokyo to Quadruple Payments for U.S. Troops in Japan," *Foreign Policy*, 15 November 2019; and Michael Mandelbaum, "Pay Up, Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 5 (September/October 2017): 108–14.

<sup>24</sup> Then–National Security Advisor John Bolton delivered the demand to Japan in July 2019, in addition to a separate demand to South Korea for a 400-percent increase to their burden-sharing agreement. Seligman and Gramer, "Trump asks Tokyo." See, also: "Trump touts U.S.-Japan alliance as treaty turns 60, but urges Tokyo to do more," *Japan Times*, 19 January 2020.



While these demands were ultimately reduced under the Biden administration, the possibility of a US disengagement from East Asia is now very real for Government of Japan. This, combined with geopolitical uncertainties following Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, is rapidly fueling Japanese up-armament and defense self-sufficiency.<sup>25</sup>

### **Ismay's Collective Security Strategy—MacKinder, Spykman, and the Primacy of Geography**

The first pillar of Ismay's collective security strategy, "to keep the Russians out," aimed to prevent the dominance of an anti-Western hegemonic power in the Eurasian continent. Ismay viewed the "Russians" as the principal center of international communism and a significant threat. However, this point essentially echoed Halford J. Mackinder's thesis in *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904) and encapsulated decades of Anglo-American geopolitical thinking.<sup>26</sup> Mackinder's concept of Eurasia as the "World-Island" combined historical developments with railway and telegraph innovations, presenting inner-Eurasia, spanning from the Volga to the Yangtze, as a geopolitical "pivot" or continental "heartland" with the potential for global dominance.<sup>27</sup> For Mackinder, the control of Europe west of the Volga by a heartland power was the ultimate stepping stone for world domination, while an East Asian power penetrating deep into Siberia and Central Asia represented a "yellow peril to the world's freedom."<sup>28</sup>

Ismay's second pillar, "to keep the Americans in," highlighted the American inclination toward isolationism as an equally perilous threat to international peace. Paul Kennedy observes that among the Great Powers before 1914, only America enjoyed "relative invulnerability and a freedom from the ambivalence which plagued" Europe and East Asia due to its geographic distance from the World-Island.<sup>29</sup> However, after 1945, if the United States relinquished its security responsibilities on

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<sup>25</sup> Japanese defense outlays jumped by 26 percent between Japanese Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023, with plans to reach 2 percent of GDP in 2027—the first time in more than three decades. This comes after nine straight years of increases outpacing inflation. Emphasis is being given to precision munition stockpiles, unmanned aerial systems, and force projection capabilities. Takahashi Kosuke, "Japan Approves 26.3% Increase in Defense Spending for Fiscal Year 2023," *The Diplomat*, 24 December 2022.

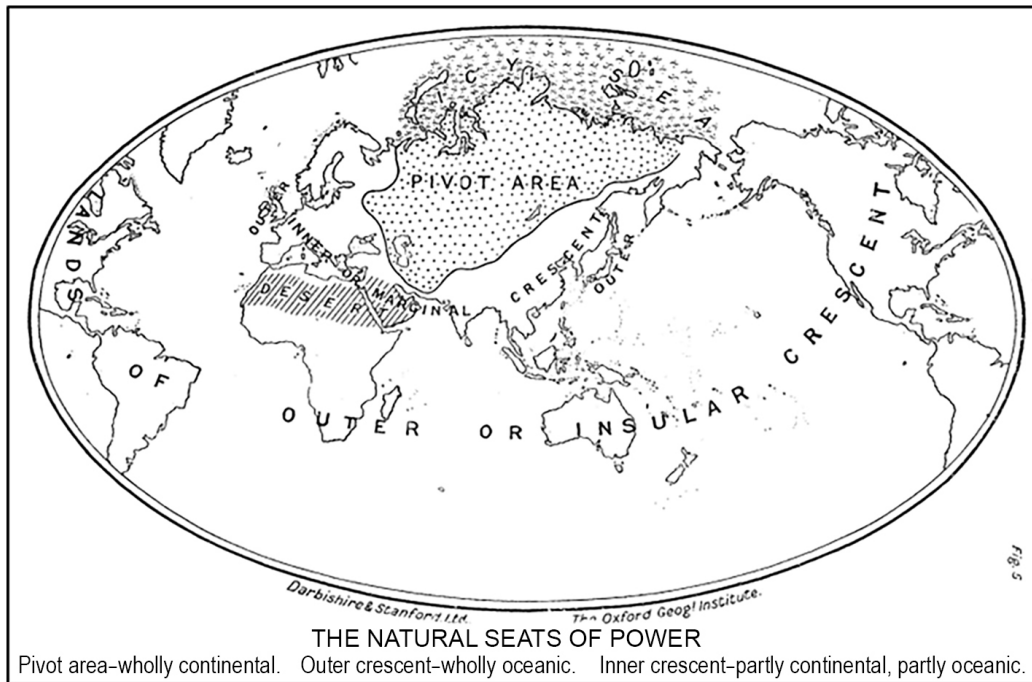
<sup>26</sup> For more on Mackinder's theories in British geopolitical thinking, particularly in contrast to the influence of Alfred Thayer Mahan, see: Paul M. Kennedy, "Mahan versus Mackinder: Two Interpretations of British Sea Power," *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift* 10, no. 2 (1976): 39–66.

<sup>27</sup> H. J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421–44.

<sup>28</sup> Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History."

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, 93.

both ends of the World-Island, referred to by Mackinder as the “Islands of the Inner or Marginal Crescent,” it would cede the initiative to an anti-Western heartland hegemon, particularly the Soviet Union and its allies. If America retreated into Mackinder’s “Islands of the Outer or Insular Crescent,” encompassing the Western Hemisphere, the “Marginal Crescent” would be unable to resist the heartland’s dominance, thereby allowing it to control the “Insular Crescent.”



**Figure 1. Mackinder’s “Natural Seats of Power”: The “Pivot” or Heartland”, the Inner or Marginal Crescent, and the Outer or Insular Crescent.**<sup>30</sup>

One of Mackinder’s chief critics, Nicholas J. Spykman, emphasized the crucial importance of unwavering US commitment to the “Marginal Crescent.”<sup>31</sup> In his work “The Geography of the Peace” (1944), Spykman, who renamed the “Marginal Crescent” as the “Rimland,” presented a significantly different proposition from Mackinder. According to Spykman, the Rimland was not of marginal significance but rather the true geographic pivot of history—the battleground between the land

<sup>30</sup> Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History.”

<sup>31</sup> For more on the debates surrounding the development of geopolitical theory during the early twentieth century, see: Stephen V. Mladineo, “Introduction,” in Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), xvii–xxii.

powers of Eurasia and the maritime powers of the "Insular Crescent." In opposition to Mackinder, Spykman asserted in his work *"The Geography of the Peace"* (1944), Spykman, who renamed the "Marginal Crescent" as the "Rimland," presented a significantly different proposition from Mackinder. According to Spykman, the Rimland was not of marginal significance but rather the true geographic pivot of history—the battleground between the land powers of Eurasia and the maritime powers of the "Insular Crescent." In opposition to Mackinder, Spykman asserted, "who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world."<sup>32</sup> He believed it was both natural and necessary for the United States to form strong alliances with the other two major powers of the "Insular Crescent"—Britain and Japan.<sup>33</sup> With a united "Insular Crescent," power could be projected into the Rimland, encompassing Western Europe and East Asia, effectively countering the Heartland's hegemony on the World-Island.

Ismay incorporated Spykman's thesis into the second pillar of his collective security strategy. As the world's leading maritime state and dominant power in the "Insular Crescent," the commitment of the United States to the Rimland was central to containing the inherent hegemony of the Heartland. Therefore, Spykman's and Mackinder's theories played a pivotal role in the American policy of containment, which linked the Rimland to the Insular Crescent. Throughout the 1950s, under the guidance of George Kennan and John Foster Dulles, "the rim of Eurasia from Scandinavia to the Philippines, was thus enmeshed with a system of military and political alliances."<sup>34</sup> By the time Ismay presented his admonishment, the objective of "keeping the Americans in" was becoming the official policy of the United States.

Traditionally, the debate on management approaches to America's system of alliances and her geopolitical national security ends here. The analysis of the value of America's "Rimland" system of alliances, from NATO to Japan, is framed as a simple dichotomy: is there a threat to regional American interests from Eurasia, and is the threat significant enough to justify continued American commitment efforts? Following the Cold War and coinciding with the resurgence of Russia and China, this dichotomy continues to dominate America's approach to alliance management, especially concerning Ismay's latent poles. Consequently, there is an

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<sup>32</sup> Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1944), 43. For the place of America's postwar containment policy as an amalgamation between Mackinder's and Spykman's theories, see: Michael P. Gerace, "Between Mackinder and Spykman: Geopolitics, Containment and After," *Comparative Strategy* 10, no. 4 (1991): 347–64.

<sup>33</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "Asia's Coming Era of Unpredictability," *Foreign Policy*, 1 September 2019.

<sup>34</sup> George Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 137.

increasing breakdown of America's "hub-and-spokes" alliance system of bilateral relationships, and a shifting realignment of American regional allies toward latent Japanese and German poles in the Rimland.<sup>35</sup>

In Europe, the idea of a "geopolitical Europe" led by a Franco-German partnership is gaining traction within European policy circles.<sup>36</sup> *The Economist* put it more straightforwardly in June 2020, stating, "Germany is doomed to lead Europe."<sup>37</sup> Fortunately, NATO and the European Union, supported by countries like Britain, France, Italy, and Poland, which are more cautious of German dominance, can to some extent restrain German hegemony in Europe.<sup>38</sup>

However, the situation in the Indo-Pacific seems different, as there are few regional intergovernmental organizations and even fewer Western-aligned powers that can counterbalance the emergence of a Japanese pole in the region. In fact, states that once sought Anglo-American support for protection against Imperial Japan are now turning to Japan for leadership in forming a collective response to a rising China and a receding United States. This has led to what a recent study by the Rand Corporation referred to as a "thickening Web of Asian Security Cooperation" among American bilateral allies. This trend "has the potential to create, realign, or simply reflect changes in regional actors' interests, identities, and commitments in important ways that could reinforce or reduce U.S. influence."<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the emerging threat posed by China against Taiwan do not, in themselves, present systemic challenges to the global balance of power. However, the second- and third-order consequences of these threats, such as the remilitarization of significant regional powers in response, give rise to serious long-term challenges to the postwar order. In the coming decade, American policy makers will need to skillfully balance the ascent of these powers while preventing the fragmentation of the West into a multipolar constellation. ⬠

<sup>35</sup> Paul Midford, "New Directions in Japan's Security: non-US centric evolution," *Pacific Review* 31, no. 4 (2018): 407–23.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrike Franke and Jana Puglierin, "The Big Engine that Might: How France and Germany can Build a Geopolitical Europe," *European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief*, 14 July 2020, <https://ecfr.eu/>.

<sup>37</sup> Charlemagne, "Germany is Doomed to Lead Europe," *The Economist*, 27 July 2020.

<sup>38</sup> According to a recent Pew survey, Europeans broadly agree that Germany has too much influence in the EU, at a rate of 49 percent to 36 percent. Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike, and Dorothy Manevich, "Post-Brexit, Europeans More Favorable Toward EU," Pew Research Center, 15 June 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.

<sup>39</sup> Scott W. Harold et al., *The Thinking Web of Asian Security Cooperation: Deepening Defense Ties Among U.S. Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2019), iii.

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# Innovating Strategic Ambiguity

## Empowering Taiwan's Defense amid a Persistent Threat from China

LTC ANDREW WAGNER, NEVADA NATIONAL GUARD

### Abstract

This article explores the imperative for Taiwan to proactively adapt its island defense strategy to effectively counter the aggressive actions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and maintain a strong deterrent capability. Urgent implementation of asymmetric approaches is advocated, positioning Taiwan as a resilient “porcupine” in the face of mounting threats. Delaying such measures only escalates the risk of decisive CCP intervention. The study highlights the integral role of Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept (ODC) in advancing whole-of-society strategies, while emphasizing the need for policy adjustments and a heightened focus on strategic ambiguity in coordination with the United States, to optimize the deterrence value of the ODC. By fostering third-party training innovations, prioritizing defense capabilities to deter People’s Liberation Army (PLA) actions, and bolstering Taiwan’s confidence in protracted engagements, both Taiwan and the United States can effectively address the gaps in Taiwan’s defense posture. Successful implementation of the ODC and the whole-of-society approach will contribute to upholding the existing status quo and safeguarding US security interests.

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The United States employs a policy of strategic ambiguity when addressing the Taiwan issue, which is rooted in the Shanghai Communiqué and the “US concession not to support either a ‘one China, one Taiwan’ or ‘two Chinas’ framework.”<sup>1</sup> This approach was further refined with the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The TRA codified US military support and any potential military response into US law, requiring the president “inform the Congress promptly of threats to the security or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan,” and the “President and the Congress shall determine the appropriate action in response,” leaving any potential US response unknown.<sup>2</sup> The United States supports the status quo between China and Taiwan through strategic ambiguity, while attempting to deter the increasingly aggressive and invasion-capable People’s

<sup>1</sup> Adam P. Liff and Dalton Lin, “The ‘One China’ Framework at 50 (1972–2022): The Myth of ‘Consensus’ and its Evolving Policy Significance,” *China Quarterly* 252 (2022), 984, <https://www.cambridge.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> House, “H.R., 2479–Taiwan Relations Act. 24 1979.” 96<sup>th</sup> Congress, Congress.gov, 10 April 1979, <https://www.congress.gov/>.



Liberation Army (PLA). Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen stated in 2016, "We will not succumb to pressure from China. . . . Taiwan is a sovereign, independent country."<sup>3</sup> Her statement highlights the complex dynamics in cross-strait relations, where Taiwan perceives itself as distinct from mainland China while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) views its existence as a threat. As the PLA's military capabilities continue to grow, there is a pressing need to reassess Taiwan's defensive strategy to effectively deter China. A key recommendation is to invest in asymmetrical warfare capabilities, training, and a comprehensive whole-of-society approach as outlined in Taiwan's 2017 Overall Defense Concept (ODC) to disrupt PLA calculations.<sup>4</sup> However, the current Taiwanese policy and US strategic ambiguity pose challenges to maximizing the deterrence value of the ODC, thus impacting US security interests. This article will delve into the background of the ODC, explore the cultural dimensions related to its implementation, assess the implications for US security interests, and propose lines of effort to preserve the status quo within the Taiwan Straits.

## **Background**

Taiwan's ODC outlines strategies to counter the military advantages of the CCP through innovation and asymmetry, although it leaves certain aspects, such as guerilla-type territorial defense forces and urban warfare, undetermined. In his treatment of the invasion threat to Taiwan, Ian Easton divides the operationalization of the ODC into three distinct phases. The first phase, "Mobilization and Force Preservation," involves Taiwan reacting to a surprise PLA attack by activating reserves, declaring martial law, and emplacing defenses. Simultaneously, military forces dig in and disperse to survive an initial assault. The second phase, "Joint Interdiction," sees the military reemerge to decisively defeat PLA forces in the littoral zones and at the landing beaches, employing sea mines and missiles.<sup>5</sup> The final phase, "Homeland Defense," envisions a protracted urban war of attrition, where Taiwanese forces and citizen soldiers engage in demolishing "bridges, tunnels, supply depots, fuel stores, airport tarmac and anything else that might be of aid"<sup>6</sup> and impeding the PLA. Estimates suggest that Taiwanese forces could hold

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Charles Hutzler, "China Can't Make Taiwan 'Bow to Pressure,' Island's Leader Says," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Drew Thompson, "Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose," in *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*, ed. Joel Wuthnow et al. (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2022), 337.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, "Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose," 327

<sup>6</sup> Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat* (Manchester: Eastbridge Books, 2019), 180–209.

out unassisted for at least 30 days,<sup>7</sup> while the uncertain US response to Chinese aggression looms. While these three phases propose a robust strategy to deter a Chinese invasion, the implementation of the ODC fails to fully harness the will to fight within Taiwan.

One of the challenges in implementing an asymmetric strategy lies in Taiwan's focus on high-end conventional forces, which potentially indicates an underestimation of the national will to fight on the island. In August 2022, President Tsai announced a 14-percent increase in Taiwan's defense budget to more than USD 19 billion.<sup>8</sup> However, Taiwan's emphasis on acquiring conventional systems and upholding previous contracts for US equipment aligns more closely with a traditional defense in depth approach, even if such systems are less survivable than dispersed asymmetric capabilities.<sup>9</sup> As Jimmy Quinn observes, "Taiwan's defense establishment is in the throes of a debate about how to balance the imperative of buying legacy weapons systems—jets, warships, and tanks—with that of turning the island into a 'porcupine,' bristling with missiles and militias, to prevent the People's Liberation Army from seizing the country and to wage an asymmetric guerrilla campaign against it if it does."<sup>10</sup> The ongoing debate over the asymmetric approach and the challenges in implementing it highlight the potential bias toward an overly optimistic strategy of defeating the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the strait, while potentially underestimating the value that a motivated populace brings during the "Homeland Defense" phase.

Taiwan's decision to transition to an all-volunteer military force and end mass conscription further undermines the deterrence value of the ODC. Until 2009–2011, under the Ma Ying-jeou administration, Taiwan maintained a credible strategic reservist force that required mandatory two-year terms of conscripted military service.<sup>11</sup> However, since 2013, draftees are only required to do four months of military training, while the military shifted toward a fully volunteer force. The implementation of an all-volunteer force has proved to be myopic, given the escalating tensions across the strait, and has diminished the ability to credibly execute the "Homeland Defense" phase. In 2022, Taiwan extended mandatory military service to one year to support an asymmetric defense of the island. President Tsai emphasized, "As long as Taiwan is strong enough, it will be the home of democracy

<sup>7</sup> Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat*, 210.

<sup>8</sup> Jimmy Quinn, "Taiwan Needs Quills," *National Review* 74, no. 20 (2022), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, "Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose," 332

<sup>10</sup> Quinn, "Taiwan Needs Quills," 2.

<sup>11</sup> Thompson, "Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose," 335

and freedom all over the world, and it will not become a battlefield,”<sup>12</sup> highlighting the increased role of asymmetry in deterring the CCP. Nevertheless, Taiwan must overcome institutional inertia toward legacy weapon systems and effectively integrate the Taiwanese people into the ODC.

An invasion that progresses into the “Homeland Defense” phase would require significant resolve and hope for long-term success, which hinges on the culture and social dimensions of the Taiwanese people. As Clausewitz aptly describes, a nation under siege is “like a drowning man who will clutch instinctively at a straw, it is the natural law of the moral world that a nation that finds itself on the brink of an abyss will try to save itself by any means.”<sup>13</sup> This understanding compels policy makers to grapple with the difficult choices surrounding a potential invasion of Taiwan.

One of the recommended means in the ODC is the formation of a territorial force consisting of reservists who are “trained for localized operations with decentralized command, as the nature of warfare will be urban and guerrilla.” US government officials directly reiterated this suggestion to President Tsai in 2020.<sup>14</sup>

Support for the territorial force proposal is evident in a survey conducted by the Taiwan International Strategic Study Society (TISSS) in March 2022. The survey revealed a 30-percent increase, with 70.2 percent of Taiwanese respondents expressing willingness to defend Taiwan if China took military action following the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, the same survey indicated an increased willingness among respondents to extend mandatory military service and undergo a two-week reservist training program to enhance military readiness.<sup>15</sup>

Similar sentiments were reflected in the Taiwan National Security Studies Survey (TNSS), which was conducted in December 2022 among adults over 20 years old. The TNSS survey found that 65.8 percent of respondents believed that a majority of Taiwanese people would likely or definitely join the war effort in the event of a Chinese invasion.<sup>16</sup> These findings from the TISSS and TNSS

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<sup>12</sup> Yimou Lee and Ann Wang, “Taiwan to extend conscription to one year, citing rising China threat,” *Reuters*, 27 December 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Micheal Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 64.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, “Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose,” 335

<sup>15</sup> Keoni Everington, “30% more Taiwanese willing to fight for country after Russian invasion of Ukraine,” *Taiwan News*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/>.

<sup>16</sup> Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, “Taiwan National Security Survey,” Taiwan National Security Studies, Duke University, trans. Google Translate. 2022, 24, <https://sites.duke.edu/>.

surveys suggest that there is substantial support among Taiwanese citizens for defending their homeland.

The Taiwanese people increasingly view themselves as independent and separate from mainland China, which poses challenges of peaceful reunification. According to a 2020 survey by the Pew Research Center, “In Taiwan, most people have negative views about mainland China. Just 35% of adults give positive marks to mainland China, while about six-in-ten hold unfavorable views.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, only 27.5 percent of Taiwanese respondents identify as Chinese and Taiwanese, 67 percent identify solely as Taiwanese, and less than 6 percent of the population seeks unification with mainland China.<sup>18</sup> These statistics illustrate Taiwan’s distinct identity and the potential for its citizens to resist by any means to preserve their nation.

A 2022 study titled “National Identity, Willingness to Fight and Collective Action” examined how individuals’ identification as solely as Taiwanese or having a dual identity (Chinese and Taiwanese) influences their resolve and willingness to fight in a China–Taiwan war, based on their perception of others’ willingness to fight through collective action. The data revealed that individuals with an exclusive Taiwanese identity were twice as likely to engage in a China–Taiwan war, and the willingness of “fence-sitters” increased when they believed that “the majority of Taiwanese people will resist.”<sup>19</sup> This study demonstrates that Taiwan’s identity is distinct from mainland China and suggests an increased potential for citizens to resist and protect their nation.

While recent data indicates that the Taiwanese people may be willing to fight against an invasion, there are doubts about the willingness of the United States to intervene on their behalf, which weakens Taiwanese resolve. Strategic ambiguity leaves the Taiwanese people hostage to CCP coercion and uncertain of US support. At the same time, “effective hostage-taking requires guarantees that the hostage survives if the demands are met.”<sup>20</sup> As Thomas Christensen argues, “successful deterrence requires both threat and assurance.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the Taiwanese people, as the hostage in this context, require assurances of their survival to effectively deter

<sup>17</sup> Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “In Taiwan, Views of Mainland China Mostly Negative,” *Pew Research Center*, 12 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Yu-Jie, “‘One China’ Contention in China–Taiwan Relations: Law, Politics and Identity,” *China Quarterly* 252 (2022): 1025–44, doi:10.1017/S0305741022001333.

<sup>19</sup> Austin Horng-En Wang and Nadia Eldemerdash, “National identity, willingness to fight, and collective action,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 7 December 2022, <https://doi.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict,” *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2002), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Christensen, “The Contemporary Security Dilemma,” 7.

China. In 2020 55.1 percent of Taiwanese people believed that the United States would intervene on Taiwan's behalf, but that number dropped to 42.7 percent in 2022. Furthermore, almost half, 47.3 percent, considered that the United States would not participate at all when viewed through the lens of the Ukraine situation. Most significantly, only 34.7 percent in the TISSS survey and 26.9 percent in the TNSS survey believe Taiwan can stand against China without US support.<sup>22</sup> Recognizing that approximately a third of Taiwanese people believe they could defend Taiwan without US aid highlights a fundamental flaw in strategic ambiguity. In the absence of stronger assurance and hope from the United States, the Taiwanese people could find themselves confronted with a difficult choice. On one hand, they may face the prospect of a devastating war of attrition with limited chances of success. On the other hand, they might consider a less painful but also less free reunification with the mainland. Maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait aligns with the interests of the United States. However, the strategy of strategic ambiguity, while urging Taiwan to prioritize deterrence, also undermines the certainty of US assistance in the event of a conflict.

## **Implications**

Outlined below are three essential areas for potential U.S. strategic endeavors within the Taiwan Strait, which offer both security implications and opportunities.

### ***Equipping***

The Taiwanese military and political leaders understand the role of asymmetric strategies. However, they face resistance to change that the United States must help overcome by equipping credible defensive deterrents throughout all three phases of Taiwan's defense. Within the military dimension, Taiwan must fully embrace, equip for, and train for a comprehensive whole-of-society approach as outlined in the ODC. To facilitate this, the United States must invigorate the necessary processes and industrial support to meet these goals. Taiwan should prioritize acquiring asymmetric defense capabilities rather than focusing solely on procuring traditional legacy systems, "turning the island into a 'porcupine,' bristling with missiles and militias."<sup>23</sup> Through the TRA, the "United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense ca-

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<sup>22</sup> Everington, "30% more Taiwanese willing to fight"; and Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, "Taiwan National Security Survey," 19.

<sup>23</sup> Quinn, "Taiwan Needs Quills," 2.

pabilities.”<sup>24</sup> By leveraging the TRA and collaborating with partner nations, the United States should prioritize the shift toward asymmetric warfare, emphasizing more survivable and dispersed systems. It is essential for the United States to develop lines of effort that align industrial capacity, partner capabilities, and budget constraints within Taiwan while swaying US public opinion to recognize the value of investing in deterrence rather than risking conflict in the Taiwan Straits.

### ***Whole-of-Society Approach***

The establishment of a territorial force of reservists is an increasingly important priority in Taiwan, and it requires a revitalization of a more martial culture supported by US policy. The willingness of the Taiwanese people to fight, as evidenced by surveys and the growing requirements for mandatory military service, indicates a positive cultural shift that supports the development of a territorial defense force. To ensure the effectiveness of this force as a credible deterrent, Taiwan must enhance its training capacity and resource allocation. The United States, leveraging its network of allies and partners, is well-positioned to facilitate training opportunities and provide training spaces in partner nations, thereby enhancing Taiwan’s asymmetric capabilities while minimizing tensions with the CCP. To achieve its security objectives, the United States could encourage various regional partners like Singapore, South Korea, or Japan to train Taiwanese reservists in high-payoff defensive and disaster relief tasks, addressing gaps in Taiwan’s defensive capabilities. If implemented effectively, off-island training would enhance efficiency, rapidly bolster deterrent capacity, and strengthen positive regional relationships, thereby complicating the calculations of the PLA.

### ***Strategic Assurance***

To ensure credible deterrence, the United States must balance between China’s interests and the need to provide legitimate assurances of Taiwan’s ability to withstand a Chinese invasion. The United States should evaluate its strategic ambiguity policy and utilize the TRA to equip and train Taiwan in a manner consistent with US interests, fostering the determination and capability of the Taiwanese people to resist. The fact that only a third of Taiwan’s population believes they could defeat China without US assistance suggests that there may be a threshold of violence or threat level at which the Taiwanese population might consider submitting to the CCP.

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<sup>24</sup> H.R. 2479, Taiwan Relations Act.



Given the constraints of strategic ambiguity, the most realistic option for the United States to reassure Taiwan and maintain its resolve to fight is to provide sufficient capacity for Taiwan to defend itself and win—or at the very least, avoid defeat. A strong and confident Taiwan aligns with US interests in effectively deterring Chinese actions. US policy should prioritize comprehensive armament, training, and support of the whole-of-society approach until the military and cultural changes outlined by the ODC become deeply ingrained within the Taiwanese people.

## **Conclusion**

Taiwan stands at a critical juncture, confronted by the aggressive power of an assertive CCP. It is imperative for Taiwan to undertake a strategic redesign of its island defense to effectively respond to this challenge. Delaying the implementation of asymmetric approaches and failing to transform into a metaphorical porcupine only heightens the risk of decisive action by the CCP.

The asymmetrical strategies outlined in the ODC provide a foundation for the whole-of-society concept, but they necessitate policy changes within Taiwan and updates to US strategic ambiguity to fully leverage the deterrence value of the ODC. By embracing these strategies and making necessary adjustments, Taiwan and the United States can bridge the gaps in Taiwan's defense capabilities, prioritize equipping to mitigate Chinese military superiority, and instill greater confidence in Taiwan's ability to defend itself.

A key aspect of this effort lies in innovating third-party training programs, wherein regional partners can play a crucial role in enhancing Taiwan's defensive readiness through high-value defensive and disaster relief tasks. By successfully implementing these initiatives with robust US support, the ODC and the whole-of-society approach can contribute to maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and safeguarding US security interests.

It is essential for Taiwan and the United States to work together closely, continually reassessing and adapting their defense strategies to effectively deter Chinese aggression. By doing so, they can uphold stability in the region, ensure the security of Taiwan, and protect shared democratic values. The challenges ahead are formidable, but with strategic vision and collaborative efforts, Taiwan can confidently navigate this complex landscape and safeguard its future. ★

### **LTC Andrew Wagner, Nevada National Guard**

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*Wagner*

advanced airframes. Senior officer responsible for all aspects of mission execution and developed short- and long-term strategic plans to achieve state and overseas Aviation mission requirements. He is Lean Six Sigma Green/Black belt certified and performed duties as standardization pilot and maintenance test pilot in UH-60A/L Blackhawk airframe.

# The Cross-Strait Conundrum

## Assessing the Viability of a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan

SHAHEER AHMAD

### Abstract

This article analyzes the geopolitical landscape in East Asia, focusing on the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. It explores China's strategic objectives, military preparations, and the challenges it would face in executing such an operation. Despite China's growing military capabilities, Taiwan's geographic advantages, robust defense systems, and significance in global supply chains make an invasion a formidable and risky undertaking. The article also considers the potential involvement of allies and the broader implications for international relations. It concludes that maintaining the status quo is in the best interest of all parties involved.

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The twenty-first century has witnessed a profound shift in the geopolitical landscape, as described by Williamson Murray as “uncontrollable, unpredictable, and above all unforeseeable.”<sup>1</sup> Recent events, such as the unprecedented invasion of Ukraine, serve as stark reminders that the element of surprise remains a significant factor in international relations.<sup>2</sup> In East Asia, Chinese preparations for a potential invasion of Taiwan are sending shockwaves through the region's geopolitical dynamics. China's remarkable rise as a formidable challenger to the United States has made the “Taiwan question” increasingly unavoidable. The once-turbulent waters of the strait have now become a theater filled with roaring fighter jets, military exercises, and strategic bluffs.

Under the leadership of Chinese paramount leader Xi Jinping, whose posture grows increasingly vigorous and nationalist, questions arise regarding the potential risk of a military confrontation with the United States if China proceeds with an invasion of Taiwan. As the regional military balance gradually shifts in China's favor, Chinese defense papers outline several possible scenarios for retaking the renegade province. China's doctrinal approach of “winning local wars under high technology conditions” is aimed at preventing Taiwan's independence and fa-

<sup>1</sup> Williamson Murray, “Thinking about Revolution in Military Affairs,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Summer 1997), 71, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/>.

<sup>2</sup> Shaheer Ahmad, “Enigma Unveiled: Understanding Russian Strategic Mindset and its Implications for the Indo-Pacific,” *Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers*, 30 April 2023, <https://indopacificresearchers.org/>.

cilitating the long-held goal of national rejuvenation. Following Nancy Pelosi's notable visit to Taiwan, Chinese leaders seized the initiative and attempted to normalize their encroachment across the median line. The People's Liberation Army (PLA), currently undergoing a defense overhaul, has emphasized the concept of *xixinhua*, or "informatized" wars. With increasing military capabilities, the PLA possesses a tactical and operational edge over Taiwan's military, bolstering its confidence in undertaking the primary mission of retaking Taiwan.

However, the situation is far from straightforward, primarily due to Taiwan's own military capabilities. While China boasts the world's largest and most formidable air defense systems, considerable firepower, network-centric warfare capabilities, and substantial manpower, the act of invading Taiwan would disrupt international relations overnight, resulting in severe disruptions to global supply chains. Additionally, China faces limitations in both horizontal and vertical escalations, coupled with deficiencies in its operational art. Furthermore, the logistical challenges, unique topography, Taiwan's military capabilities, and the PLA's limitations in critical domains pose significant obstacles to China's course of action regarding Taiwan. The complexities involved in this potential conflict cannot be underestimated.

### **Taiwan: A Dangerous Contingency**

Taiwan, often likened to a cork in a bottle, remains a crucial factor in limiting Chinese expansion in the Western Pacific, as Michael Beckley describes it as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" enabling China's military projection in the region.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, for the United States, Taiwan holds significant prestige and serves as the sole Chinese democracy on the planet. The conquest of Taiwan would release a substantial portion of China's budget, military personnel, frigates, destroyers, and aircraft carriers, while also consolidating Chinese grand strategy domestically.<sup>4</sup> With China's military rise and distractions faced by the United States, the current climate appears to be a "ripe moment" for Beijing to retake the renegade province and achieve its goal of national rejuvenation.

However, the invasion of Taiwan carries inherent risks due to its global significance within supply chains. Such an act would trigger an international response, resulting in economic and diplomatic sanctions against China. The United States

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Paul V. Kane, "To Save our Economy, Ditch Taiwan," *New York Times*, 10 November 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

and its allies are thus working to ensure that the aftermath of an invasion inflicts more harm on China than the existing status quo.<sup>5</sup>

Xi's assertive posture, distinct from his predecessors, has led many commentators to believe that the era of China's peaceful rise and Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum of "hide your strength and bide your time" is over. As the regional military balance progressively shifts in favor of China, concerns grow among analysts who fear that unchecked Chinese military prowess will ultimately challenge US dominance in the skies and seas of East Asia. However, a careful examination reveals that invading a developed island remains a mission impossible in modern times, given Taiwan's geography, military power, resolute capacity, durability, and its vital role within global supply chains. These factors make invasion an unlikely option for China.

The strategic significance and challenges surrounding a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan underscore the complexities and potential consequences of such a high-stakes geopolitical maneuver.

### **East Asian Conundrum: China's Aggressive Interplay**

China's grand strategy revolves around reclaiming lost territories and maintaining a favorable balance of power in its neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> On 1 February 2023, the PLA dispatched approximately 20 aircraft to breach the median line separating Taiwan from the mainland.<sup>7</sup> In response, Taiwan scrambled jets and activated its air defense systems. The repeated violation of Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) has become a routine for the PLA, which no longer respects the sanctity of the median line. Last year alone, the number of ADIZ breaches doubled, reaching a recorded 1,727 instances.<sup>8</sup> These actions align with China's objectives of weakening Taiwan's military readiness and ensuring the PLA's preparedness for a potential operation to retake what Beijing regards as a renegade province.

China's assertive military maneuvers have raised concerns in Washington, and it is now widely assumed that the invasion of Taiwan is a matter of "when" rather than "if." The US Department of Defense, along with its allies, is working to

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<sup>5</sup> Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, "Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan," *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (November 2021), 29, doi: 10.55540/0031-1723.3089.

<sup>6</sup> Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 145.

<sup>7</sup> "Taiwan activates defenses in response to China incursions," *AP News*, 1 February 2023, <https://apnews.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Agence France-Presse, "China's warplane incursions into Taiwan air defence zone doubled in 2022," *The Guardian*, 2 January 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

convey to Beijing that the peace resulting from an invasion would be more detrimental than the current status quo. To this end, a deal has been signed with the Philippines to expand US military bases in the region. Similarly, a marine corps contingent is expected to be deployed in Okinawa to ensure swift mobilization in the event of a Taiwan emergency.<sup>9</sup>

PLA strategic documents envision a war initiated through aerial and missile strikes targeting Taiwan's air bases, missile batteries, and air defense systems, employing volleys launched by ground and air-launched missile batteries. The objective of this campaign is to render Taiwanese defenses powerless before they have a chance to strike back. China's hope of establishing aerial and naval superiority in the conflict hinges on neutralizing Taiwan's air defenses and stand-off weaponry. The success of the joint firepower strike campaign will pave the way for a successful amphibious invasion (island landing), strategic bombing, and the enforcement of a naval blockade. However, despite possessing aerial, naval, and firepower capabilities, the Chinese course of action is constrained by numerous tangible and intangible factors.

Navigating the complex landscape surrounding a potential invasion of Taiwan poses significant challenges for China's grand strategy, requiring careful consideration of both military capabilities and broader geopolitical dynamics.

### Constraining Chinese Invasion

The PLA has several means and options at its disposal to invade Taiwan and achieve a fait accompli, including joint firepower strike campaigns, island landing, and naval blockade. PLA texts describe joint firepower strike campaigns as offensive operations conducted by all three services against long-range targets. The objective is to coerce the enemy's leadership, break their will to fight, and force them to abandon their strategic designs.<sup>10</sup> PLA strategy documents reveal that China plans to initiate the war by launching a blitz on Taiwan's air and naval bases, missile batteries, and command-and-control systems.<sup>11</sup>

The success of the firepower campaign is crucial to neutralize Taiwan's defenses before they have a chance to retaliate. Aerial superiority is thus a prerequisite for a successful amphibious invasion, as failing to achieve it would undermine the prospects of a victorious island landing. Undertaking an amphibious invasion is a

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<sup>9</sup> "U.S Marines to set up unit in Okinawa for remote Japan Island defense," *Kyodo News*, 10 January 2023, <https://english.kyodonews.net/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dang Chongmin and Zhang Yu, *Science of Joint Operations* (Beijing: PLA Press, 2009), 173–74.

<sup>11</sup> Guangqian Peng and Youzhi Yao, *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005), 327.



notoriously challenging and technical mission, regardless of a military's size or capability. Despite China possessing the largest navy, a significant ballistic missile inventory, enhanced firepower, and the second-largest military budget after the United States, crossing the 160-kilometer-wide strait is far from an easy task for the PLA.<sup>12</sup> Invading Taiwan requires an amphibious landing, which is hindered by sea mines and antiship batteries on rocky terrain, making a D-Day-style landing highly improbable.

Historical evidence suggests that Taiwan's air defenses are likely to survive the initial assault by the PLA. In the Gulf War, despite the coalition forces pounding Iraq with 88,500 pounds of ordnance and destroying Iraqi airfields with cluster bombs, the Iraqi air force and its mobile launchers remained operational. Confirming the destruction of any mobile launcher during the campaign proved impossible.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Falklands War demonstrated the failure of an amphibious invasion, with Argentina, despite the British military's prowess, sinking a considerable portion of the British fleet. China's naval losses would undoubtedly be greater, given their vulnerability to Taiwan's long-range artillery.

China is also aware of its lack of operational experience and capabilities in both air and sea warfare. In the case of Taiwan, the PLA would need to outnumber the defending forces and establish a beachhead on Taiwan's shores to reinforce the landing troops. However, Taiwan's geography, characterized by steep cliffs, marshes, torrential rains, and unpredictable tides, poses significant challenges to a successful island landing. Moreover, Taiwan's antiship missile batteries and artillery have the potential to weaken the PLA fleet and inflict damage on landing sites.

The PLA has previously demonstrated deficiencies in critical missions such as strategic airlift, logistics, and antisubmarine warfare, which further limit the prospects of success in a cross-strait conflict. According to PLA literature, the PLA commanders lack the ability to judge situations, understand top-level intentions, make operational decisions, and deal with unexpected conditions, revealing their limitations. Therefore, while PLA commanders may exaggerate their war preparedness, doing so entails enormous potential risks.

On the other hand, Taiwan possesses notorious early airborne warning systems, fixed early warning radars, and E-2 Hawkeye aircraft that can anticipate PLA

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<sup>12</sup> Harlan Ullman, "Reality Check #10: China will not invade Taiwan," *Atlantic Council*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> Herman L. Gilster, "Desert Storm: War, Time and Substitution Revisited," *Airpower Journal* (Spring 1996): 82–93, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

actions and inform command-and-control systems prior to an invasion. If Taiwan were to detect an incoming PLA invasion early, it would have sufficient time to deploy its navy and scramble F-16 fighter jets to intercept the intruding forces. Additionally, Taiwan is considering purchasing 400 antiship land-launched Harpoon missiles to bolster its capabilities against a potential Chinese amphibious assault.<sup>14</sup> Taiwan's air defense includes long-range surface-to-air missile launchers, mostly road-mobile, as well as short-range ballistic missile launchers in under-ground silos, missile batteries, and howitzers aimed at mainland China, capable of launching offensive operations on Chinese bases.

Lastly, the factor of allies' involvement demands attention. The possible participation of key US allies, Australia and Japan, poses a worrisome challenge to China's ambitions. According to Elbridge A. Colby, if China cannot project its military prowess across the straits, it raises doubts about their prospects beyond the first island chain.<sup>15</sup> Beijing would certainly strive to avoid entangling itself on multiple fronts in the region. Therefore, a cost-benefit analysis indicates that employing brute force or coercion becomes a double-edged sword for China.

### **Conclusion: Reimagining International Relations**

Military action against Taiwan would severely undermine China's strategic posture and potentially force Xi's defense overhaul, aimed at transforming the PLA into a capable force for informatized warfare, into a "reverse gear." Despite Xi's objectives for defense modernization, the PLA has yet to fully benefit from its modernization efforts. Deficiencies in critical domains, along with a lack of realistic combat training conditions, restrict the PLA's prospects of achieving success in a Taiwan contingency. Merely increasing capabilities cannot compensate for the absence of combat proficiency, especially for a force that has not engaged in a major war since the Vietnam War in 1979.

Taiwan's advanced air defenses, antiship missile batteries, F-16 fighter falcons, and formidable E2 Hawkeyes would present a daunting challenge to the invading PLA. Additionally, countries like Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines are likely to pursue military modernization efforts that could undermine China's goal of maintaining a favorable balance of power in the region. Considering these factors, a Taiwan contingency represents a dangerous geopolitical gamble for China.

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Capaccio, "Taiwan to buy 400 US anti-ship missiles intended to repel a Chinese invasion," *Bloomberg*, 18 April 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 173.

Therefore, maintaining the status quo on the island is in the best interest of all stakeholders involved. ♣

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# Revisiting Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy Balance under the Shadow of the Space Dragon

A. JATHINDRA

## Abstract

Sri Lanka's foreign policy challenges come to the fore as it grapples with the complex dynamics of maintaining neutrality while engaging in economic cooperation with powerful nations, particularly China. Recent events, including the presence of Chinese submarines, the long-term lease of Hambantota Port, and plans for a Chinese radar base on the island, raise concerns about the country's foreign policy rhetoric. This article examines the risks of leveraging debt for strategic gain, the implications for regional stability, and the delicate balance between economic cooperation and safeguarding national interests. Sri Lanka serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the need for a sustainable and balanced approach that aligns with stated objectives. As the country charts its path forward, careful reassessment of foreign policy rhetoric and actions that protect sovereignty are crucial in navigating evolving global dynamics.

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India and the United States' disengagement policy concerning the Rajapaksa-led war inadvertently opened doors for the expansionist strategy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Sri Lanka, a nation historically within India's sphere of influence. Although the CCP has maintained diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka since 1957, a significant shift in strategic relations occurred following the failure of the Western-backed peace process in 2005. Regrettably, India's approach has undermined its influence on Sri Lanka, thereby diminishing its display of regional power as the primary force in South Asia during the final stages of the Sri Lankan war.

Some authors propose the hypothesis that the display of "leadership" represents just one among several qualities that a regional power can exhibit.<sup>1</sup> However, India found itself ensnared by domestic preferences. Historical factors, stemming from past failures in conflict management regarding Sri Lanka, significantly deterred India from potential intervention. Conversely, domestic factors, particularly the vested interest of Tamil Nadu in the conflict, consistently exerted pressure on New

<sup>1</sup> Sandra Destradi, "India and Sri Lanka's Civil War: The Failure of Regional Conflict Management in South Asia," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 3 (May/June 2012), 595–616, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

Delhi to become involved. Additionally, it is worth noting that in 2007, the United Progressive Alliance Government in New Delhi relied on the support of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a regional party centered in Tamil Nadu.<sup>2</sup>

The situation underwent a slight shift when New Delhi intensified pressure on Colombo concerning the treatment of civilians during the escalating violence in Sri Lanka, spurred by growing concerns in Tamil Nadu. An illustrative example is the statement made by the External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on 6 October 2008, affirming India's commitment to "do all in its power" to ameliorate the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka and issuing an unambiguous warning.<sup>3</sup> However, despite this politically charged rhetoric, India refrained from exercising its regional prerogative to intervene.

Seizing the opportunity presented by this situation, China stealthily capitalized on the defense vacuum. Coinciding with the year 2007, the United States suspended direct aid to Sri Lanka amid allegations of human rights violations. It was during this period that Beijing devised its strategy to envelop Colombo, offering crucial aid, armaments, and diplomatic support to the Sri Lankan government, free from concerns about Western criticism.

Significantly, one of the notable outcomes resulting from China's active engagement in the war was its successful acquisition of the strategically vital Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka. This acquisition holds immense importance, as the port is strategically positioned to assume a crucial role in Beijing's far-reaching Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, a comprehensive infrastructure development program, seeks to enhance connectivity, promote trade, and foster economic cooperation across diverse regions. China's control over the Hambantota Port—gained through debt-trap lending—becomes a focal point in Beijing's broader geopolitical ambitions, underscoring the port's strategic value in facilitating maritime trade routes and solidifying China's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In March 2007, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government entered into an agreement with China, securing 85-percent funding for the construction of the Hambantota Port. Subsequently, in April, a secret deal was signed between the Colombo and Beijing, involving ammunition and ordnance supplies worth USD 37.6 million, potentially intended for use against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. China emerged as the primary supplier of weapons to Sri Lanka in 2008, accounting for more than 80 percent of the total supplies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nitin Anant Gokhale, "How India secretly helped Lanka destroy the LTTE," *Rediff News*, 21 August 2009, <http://news.rediff.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Destradi, "India and Sri Lanka's Civil War."

<sup>4</sup> Destradi, "India and Sri Lanka's Civil War."

Fast forward to May 2023, China declared its commitment to jointly create an extraordinary chapter and promote the advancement of the Hambantota Port, envisioning it as a new beacon of progress and a driving force in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean.<sup>5</sup>

The Hambantota Port now stands as a prominent exemplar of China's utilization of loans and aid to gain global influence. Struggling to repay the loan, the Sirisena–Wickremesinghe government, in 2017, transferred the port to China through a 99-year lease. During the handing-over ceremony, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, previously known for his pro-Western stance, remarked that Hambantota would be transformed into a major port in the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup>

However, following China's assumption of control over the port, concerns were raised regarding its potential military utilization. Former Indian foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon expressed apprehension, suggesting that the investment in Hambantota could only be justified from a national security perspective, implying the possible involvement of the People's Liberation Army.<sup>7</sup> Echoing New Delhi's concerns, in 2018, US Vice President Mike Pence stated, "Beijing pressured Sri Lanka to deliver the new port directly into Chinese hands. It may soon become a forward military base for China's growing blue-water navy."<sup>8</sup> As anticipated, the Sri Lankan government promptly rejected such concerns, maintaining a contrasting position. Addressing an audience at Oxford University, Wickremesinghe emphasized, "There are no foreign naval bases in Sri Lanka; some people are seeing imaginary Chinese Naval bases."<sup>9</sup> His comments came days after Pence's warning regarding China's strategic use of debt.

In November 2021, the US Department of Defense released a comprehensive report titled *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, which indicated that Beijing is actively considering and planning for additional military bases and logistics facilities to support its naval, air, and ground forces projection worldwide, including in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>5</sup> "China Merchants Group to build Hambantota Port into major logistics & industrial base," *News First*, 3 May 2023, <https://www.newsfirst.lk/>.

<sup>6</sup> Kiran Stacey, "China signs 99-year lease on Sri Lanka's Hambantota port," *Financial Times*, 11 December 2017, <https://www.ft.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *New York Times*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Mike Pence, "Vice President Mike Pence's Remarks on the Administration's Policy Towards China" (speech transcript, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018), <https://www.hudson.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Press Trust of India, "Sri Lanka rejects US claims, says no Chinese military base at port," *Economic Times*, 11 October 2011, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.



Reports have emerged confirming China's intention to establish a new jungle radar base in Sri Lanka, as reported by the United Kingdom-based *Daily Express*.<sup>10</sup> This move is seen as an extension of China's ulterior use of loans and aid to expand its global influence. The radar base, set to be built near Dondra Bay in the dense jungles of Ruhuna at Sri Lanka's southernmost tip, aims to enhance China's naval projection into the Indian Ocean. The Aerospace Information Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences is involved in this project.

The location of the radar base raises concerns about China's increased espionage activities against Western naval vessels in the Indian Ocean, as well as the potential for spying on Indian naval bases and US and British military installations in Diego Garcia. Notably, important Indian military facilities such as the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota (SDSC SHAR), located in the Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh, and the missile test range in Odisha could also fall under Chinese surveillance, posing significant security implications.

China's intensified orbital launch activities over the years, with a significant rise in launch rates and the establishment of ground station support infrastructure, further emphasize its growing role as a space actor. The Chinese Academy of Sciences' Aerospace Information Research has been actively involved in satellite operation, telemetry, tracking, command capabilities, and space situational awareness, which plays a crucial role in modern warfare's information-rich battlespaces.<sup>11</sup>

The confirmed establishment of a radar base in Sri Lanka validates earlier prophecies regarding China's military expansion. The docking of a Chinese submarine at the Colombo port in 2014 and the subsequent presence of a Chinese spy ship at Hambantota Port in 2022 further demonstrate China's strategic intentions.<sup>12</sup> These developments raise serious questions about Sri Lanka's foreign policy rhetoric, which has emphasized neutrality, nonalignment, and an India-first approach.

In March 2023, Sri Lanka successfully secured a USD 3-billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), opening the door for additional support from multilateral institutions like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. Notably, China declined to agree on debt restructuring with Sri Lanka and instead proposed a two-year moratorium on its debts while continuing negotiations.

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<sup>10</sup> Marco Giannangeli, "UK military bases face security risk over China's sprawling new jungle radar base," *Daily Express*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.express.co.uk/>.

<sup>11</sup> "How Is China Advancing Its Space Launch Capabilities?," *China Power Project*, 5 November 2019, <https://www.csis.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirlal, "Chinese submarine docks in Sri Lanka despite Indian concerns," *Reuters*, 2 November 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/>; and Yvette Tan, "Chinese 'spy ship' Yuan Wang 5 docks in Sri Lanka despite Indian concern," *BBC News*, 16 August 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

According to Professor Alessio Patalano of Kings College London, “support Sri Lanka’s debt restructuring proposal may well include the construction of this base as part of the price.” He pointed out that China’s leveraging of debt for strategic gain is not unique to Sri Lanka, citing the Chinese-built Espacio Lejano ground station in Neuquén, Argentina, as another controversial example since 2012. The station, operated by China Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC), a sub-entity of the People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force, has raised suspicions of Chinese military utilization.<sup>13</sup>

According to Professor Patalano, “China employs various tactics to conceal the military nature of bases like these. However, at its core, this is a form of information warfare, as all shipping generates signals that can be intercepted to provide Beijing with critical intelligence.” He further expressed concern, stating, “What is particularly worrisome is not only China’s ability to exploit debt accumulated through projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, but also the lengths to which national authorities will go to extricate themselves from the challenging realities of economic cooperation with China.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the years, Sri Lankan governments have often expressed their foreign policy positions through rhetoric emphasizing concepts like *nonalignment*, *neutrality*, and *India First*. They have also iterated their intention to avoid interference in the power dynamics of superpowers. Following Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s assumption of power, he emphasized Sri Lanka’s commitment to maintaining friendly relations with all nations while adhering to a neutral stance in order to steer clear of international conflicts.<sup>15</sup> During a November 2019 interview, he reiterated the country’s aversion to aligning with any particular nation or engaging in a delicate balancing act.<sup>16</sup>

He reiterated his stance once again. Speaking at the United National General Assembly in September 2020, he emphasized, “Sri Lanka is committed to following a neutral foreign policy with no affiliations to any particular country or power bloc.”<sup>17</sup> However, it appears that he strategically employed the notion of neutrality primarily in response to US demands for Sri Lanka to reduce its dependence on China.

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<sup>13</sup> Giannangeli, “UK military bases face security risk.”

<sup>14</sup> Giannangeli, “UK military bases face security risk.”

<sup>15</sup> President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, interview with Nitin A. Gokhale, Colombo, 28 November 2019, <https://www.news.lk/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Would remain neutral in matters among global powers: Sri Lanka President,” *Business Standard*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.business-standard.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Pascal Lottaz and Asanka Prabodani Jayathilake, “Sri Lanka Discovers Neutrality: Strategy or Excuse?,” *The Diplomat*, 19 March 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

In his initial interview after assuming office, he expressed his intention to renegotiate the 99-year lease agreement for the Hambantota Port, deeming it a “mistake.”<sup>18</sup> However, his actions told a different story. Gotabaya Rajapaksa backed out of the deal with India and Japan to develop the Colombo Port Eastern Container Terminal (ECT). Back in May 2019, during President Maithripala Sirisena’s tenure, a memorandum of cooperation was signed, outlining the joint development of this deep-sea container terminal by India and Japan. At the time, there was no opposition to the project. The ECT is situated adjacent to the Colombo International Container Terminal, which is 85-percent owned by China. In 2014, unannounced visits by Chinese submarines to this Chinese-owned terminal raised suspicions that Chinese agencies were providing financial support for protests against the ECT deal.<sup>19</sup>

Now, President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who assumed office following a popular uprising that led to the Rajapaksa’s resignation, strongly emphasized that Sri Lanka, as an island nation, has the potential to attain a higher standing in the international arena by adopting a nonaligned foreign policy. This approach aims to avoid reliance on or alignment with any powerful country or group of countries. However, the recent revelation of China’s plans to establish a radar base has raised significant concerns regarding the consistency of Sri Lanka’s foreign policy rhetoric.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the evolving dynamics between China and Sri Lanka have raised important questions about Sri Lanka’s foreign policy objectives and its ability to maintain a neutral and nonaligned stance. Despite Sri Lanka’s rhetoric of nonalignment and independence from powerful countries, the presence of Chinese submarines, the long-term lease of the Hambantota Port, and the proposed establishment of a radar base highlight Beijing’s growing influence in the region.

The case of Sri Lanka serves as a reminder that national authorities, faced with the complexities of economic cooperation and debt restructuring, may find themselves compromising their principles to secure financial assistance. China’s strategic leveraging of debt and its efforts to disguise the military nature of its projects highlight the broader issue of information warfare and the vital intelligence gained through intercepting signals.

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<sup>18</sup> “President Rajapaksa says leasing H’tota Port was a ‘mistake’, calls for renegotiation with China,” *Financial Times*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.ft.lk/>.

<sup>19</sup> “Chinese hand behind scuttling of ECT port deal?,” *South Asia Monitor*, 2 February 2021, <https://www.southasiamonitor.org/>.

As Sri Lanka moves forward, it will be crucial for the government to reassess its foreign policy rhetoric and ensure that its actions align with its stated objectives. Maintaining a balanced approach and safeguarding national sovereignty should be at the forefront of decision making. Additionally, Sri Lanka must carefully navigate its relationships with powerful nations while safeguarding its own interests and ensuring long-term stability in the region.

Ultimately, the developments in Sri Lanka serve as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by nations in balancing economic cooperation, strategic partnerships, and maintaining their autonomy on the global stage. The choices made by Sri Lanka will shape its future trajectory and have implications not only for the country itself but also for the wider geopolitical landscape in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific writ large. 🌟

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# Extreme Cold Weather CBRN Training at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center

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## Abstract

The threat of near-peer adversaries possessing weapons of mass destruction necessitates a focus on comprehensive readiness for the US Army. This article highlights the significance of regaining Arctic dominance and conducting large-scale combat operations (LSCO) training in extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments to effectively counter near-peer competitors. It discusses the need for increased CBRN training, equipment, and confidence in combat operations, emphasizing the unique challenges posed by extreme cold weather. The Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center in the Indo-Pacific theater emerges as a groundbreaking training facility that allows for in-theater training, cost savings, and increased training value for soldiers. The article acknowledges the ongoing threat of adversaries' CBRN weapons of mass destruction, underlining the importance of maintaining readiness through dynamic and rigorous training. It concludes by emphasizing the significance of applied readiness, regional engagement, and a paradigm shift in prioritizing CBRN training and evaluation. Overall, this article advocates for a comprehensive approach to address the complexities of LSCO in extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments to emerge triumphant in future conflicts.

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The threat of near-peer adversaries in possession of weapons of mass destruction permeates today's complex national security landscape. Future conflict in the Indo-Pacific theater will undoubtedly involve the employment of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons.<sup>1</sup> Near-peer competitors like Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) continue to invest significant resources in the development of CBRN military advancements, particularly for employment by their Arctic-capable land forces. However, while US adversaries are substantially increasing their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) development and posture, the US Army's readiness to conduct operations in both extreme cold weather conditions and in CBRN-

<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Bitzinger, "The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific: The Context for Arming," *Defense & Security Analysis* 38, no. 3 (2022): 247–57, <https://doi.org/>.

contaminated environments has diminished.<sup>2</sup> By regaining Arctic dominance and conducting large-scale combat operations (LSCO) training in extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments, the US Army will be better postured to fight and emerge victorious in the nation's wars.

The US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) holds responsibility for the world's largest and most significant theater of operations, encompassing near-peer threats posed by the PRC, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and Russia. Each of these adversaries is well known to possess ever-growing arsenals of CBRN agents and WMDs.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, of these nations retain territories with extreme cold weather climates. The combination of extreme cold weather environments and CBRN warfare agents increases the complexity and lethality of LSCO in such setting exponentially.<sup>4</sup> However, under the innovative leadership of GEN Charles A. Flynn, the US Army Pacific Command (USARPAC) has devoted substantial resources to the expansion and development of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC). The JPMRC stands as the US Army's first regional combat training center (CTC) located within the Indo-Pacific theater of operations and assumes significant responsibility in preparing brigade combat teams (BCT) for LSCO in CBRN-contaminated and extreme cold weather environments.

The JPMRC represents a groundbreaking CTC that enables the retention of trained forces within the Indo-Pacific theater, ensuring their continuous availability for deployment under the combatant commander's purview. Instead of transporting a BCT and its associated equipment and personnel halfway across the world to a CTC in Louisiana or California, the JPMRC empowers commanders to conduct in-theater training, similar to the approach adopted by US European Command-stationed units. This not only yields significant cost savings of tens of millions of dollars annually in transportation expenses for the US Army but also enhances the training value for Soldiers.

One of the key strengths of the JPMRC lies in its ability to facilitate joint and combined operations with partners and allies at various locations throughout the USINDOPACOM theater. The center executes three training rotations annually, encompassing the challenging terrains of the Hawaiian archipelago's jungles, Alaska's extreme cold weather tundra, and an allied or partner nation in the

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<sup>2</sup> Manpreet Sethi, "Nuclear Overtones in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Arms Control Today* 52, no. 5 (June 2022), 12–15, <https://www.armscontrol.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Bitzinger, "The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>4</sup> John W. Castellani et al., *Sustaining Health & Performance in Cold Weather Operations* (Natick, MA: US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, October 2001), <https://apps.dtic.mil/>.



region, such as Australia. This remarkable diversity of locales and operational versatility presents unparalleled opportunities for US military forces to train in terrain types that closely resemble those where they may be called upon to fight.



**Figure 1. 11th Airborne Division Soldiers battle during JPMRC-AK 23-02.** US Army infantrymen with Blackfoot Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 11th Airborne Division, hold security with their M240B machine gun while clearing opposition forces during Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center-Alaska 23-02 at Yukon Training Area, Fort Wainwright, Alaska, 1 April 2023. JPMRC-AK 23-02 is a display of the 11th Airborne Division's ability to survive and thrive in the Arctic, and its soldiers' ability to fight and win our nation's wars anywhere. (US Air Force photo by Alejandro Peña.) VIRIN: 230401-F-HY271-0333

Each exercise at the JPMRC is built upon a multifaceted doctrinal simulation. This simulation incorporates real-time feedback, employing virtual and constructive effects across multiple echelons, effectively immersing participants in a comprehensive training environment. Another notable innovation integrated into every JPMRC rotation is the inclusion of enhanced CBRN training scenarios and rigorous assessments conducted by CBRN subject matter experts. These additions significantly enhance the training and evaluation value of the CTC.

It is noteworthy that the US Army has not dedicated the necessary time and resources to adequately prepare ground forces for combat operations in complex

CBRN environments since the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the unique and demanding training provided at JPMRC equips army units with improved readiness to undertake LSCO in extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments. The incorporation of extreme cold weather CBRN training within the JPMRC is essential to ensure the joint force is well-prepared to confront the myriad challenges presented by near-peer adversaries.

However, further efforts are required to ensure that the joint force possesses the necessary training, equipment, and confidence to successfully execute combat operations in extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments.<sup>6</sup> The ongoing situation in Ukraine serves as a persistent reminder of the threat posed by adversaries' CBRN weapons of mass destruction.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, it is imperative for commanders at all echelons to understand and prioritize the importance of such training, enabling the joint force to maintain readiness and achieve victory. The inclusion of extreme cold weather CBRN training at JPMRC–Alaska is crucial to the US Army's preparedness for future conflicts, ensuring its ability to effectively fight and emerge triumphant.

The US Army must continuously generate force readiness through dynamic training conditions, as it is a transient state. Over time, readiness diminishes due to personnel turnover and deficiencies in maintaining institutional and organizational memory. In the context of conducting LSCOs in CBRN-contaminated and extreme cold weather environments, the Army's readiness is significantly inadequate. The application of readiness serves as the best means to verify the training and preparedness of Army units at various echelons for their specific mission sets in these demanding environments.<sup>8</sup> Implementing more dynamic and rigorous CBRN training, combined with agile combat employment in the theater, can enhance the force posture of the US Army against near-peer adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region. This approach can be referred to as *applied readiness*, reflecting the paradigm shift.

To achieve this, extreme cold weather CBRN training focused forward in the Indo-Pacific theater necessitates expeditionary advanced basing operations and facilitates the execution of maneuver operations in the forward environment. Forces that maintain recurrent forward presence in the theater continuously

<sup>5</sup> Bitzinger, "The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Kick et al., "Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Foundation Gaps Place Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Operations at Risk—Part 2," *Countering WMD Journal* iss. 24 (Spring/Summer 2022), 33, <https://digitalcommons.usmilitary.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> Sethi, "Nuclear Overtones in the Russia-Ukraine War."

<sup>8</sup> Joint Publication 3-40: *Joint Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

generate and renew force readiness, which is assessed and validated for the combatant commander.

The JPMRC–Alaska conducted the 23-02 training exercise from 27 March to 5 April 2023, with the objective of validating the capability of US Arctic warriors to rapidly deploy and operate in subzero temperatures. The US Army forces in Alaska serve the purpose of maintaining a capable formation that can be used in the coldest regions of the Indo-Pacific. The United States recognizes the Arctic as an increasingly competitive area with Russia and the PRC, a competition that will be further intensified by the effects of climate change and improved sea lane traversability. Operating effectively in the Arctic enables the USARPAC commander to maintain readiness and project forces, enhancing the capacity to respond to competition, crisis, and conflict. Through joint training and engagement with Arctic allies and partners such as Canada, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, and Norway, the US Army can safeguard national interests and uphold regional stability. Continuous regional engagement in the Arctic is vital to ensure strategic competitiveness in the Arctic region remains a priority for the United States.<sup>9</sup>

In January 2021, Army leaders released a new Arctic strategy, which outlines how the service will support the Department of Defense's Arctic strategy published in 2019. This strategy addresses the need to shift the training focus of Soldiers and units, enabling them to reacquire cold weather capabilities after years of counterinsurgency operations in the US Central Command area of responsibility. The primary objective outlined in the strategy is to restore the Army's Arctic dominance by prioritizing the training of combat brigades to operate effectively in cold weather regions and extended operations in the Arctic.<sup>10</sup>

The JPMRC was specifically designed to provide comprehensive multi-echelon training across all war-fighting functions. The introduction of the first JPMRC–Alaska exercise in 2022 marked a new paradigm tailored for the extreme cold weather mission set in the region. In May 2022, the US Army Alaska was redesignated as the 11th Airborne Division, signifying its unique role in responding to threats across USINDOPACOM and the Arctic.

The US Army must assume that great-power competitors not only possess but are willing to employ CBRN weapons in an extreme cold weather environment to achieve tactical and strategic goals. It is crucial for US forces to receive comprehensive training and appropriate equipment to effectively operate in such

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<sup>9</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Regaining Arctic Dominance—The U.S. Army in the Arctic" (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), <https://www.army.mil/>.

<sup>10</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Regaining Arctic Dominance."

a complex environment.<sup>11</sup> Extreme cold weather introduces additional complexity and challenges to most normal military operations, and its effects on the employment of CBRN agents and weapons of mass destruction are deeply concerning.

The freezing points of most chemical agents, including nerve agents like sarin and VX, and choking agents like phosgene, are extremely low, ranging between -60°F and -198°F. Even blister agents like nitrogen mustard maintain their liquid phase at temperatures of -76°F, making them viable for use in extreme cold weather environments. These chemical agents exhibit significantly higher persistency in extreme cold compared to warmer environments. For instance, nonpersistent chemical agents like sarin can persist in extreme cold environments, posing a severe and lasting hazard to Soldiers for weeks or even months after initial deployment. Moreover, liquid droplets of chemical agents mixed in snow can transfer to clothing and equipment and vaporize once brought into a heated tent or vehicle.<sup>12</sup>

The destructive effects of nuclear weapons employed in an Arctic environment are also amplified. Snow- and ice-covered terrain increase certain blast effects, such as the radius of the nuclear blast and minimum safe distances, by as much as 50 percent. Soldiers operating on frozen terrain would face challenges in rapidly digging in to seek shelter from approaching blast waves, rendering them particularly vulnerable to lethal effects. Additionally, the cold and windy weather patterns in the Arctic complicate the prediction of fallout patterns, and heavy snowfall can concentrate radioactive fallout. During cycles of warming and thawing, melting snow and ice may cause the migration of radioactive fallout, further concentrate radioactivity in low lying areas.<sup>13</sup>

The functionality of various CBRN protective clothing and detection equipment is severely compromised at temperatures below 0°F, adding to the lethality of CBRN agents in extreme cold weather environments. For instance, the M50 protective mask becomes stiff and brittle, leading to tears and cracking, impairing its ability to form an effective seal. Fogging of the eyepiece becomes a common issue, and the associated drinking tube for the M50 is nonfunctional in subzero environments.<sup>14</sup> The batteries powering CBRN-detection equipment like the AN/VDR-2 Radiation Monitor, Joint Chemical Agent Detector (JCAD), and Improved Chemical Agent Monitor (ICAM) also fail to operate without proper insulation from subzero temperatures. Furthermore, auto-injectors containing antidotes for nerve agents

<sup>11</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Regaining Arctic Dominance."

<sup>12</sup> Castellani et al., "Sustaining Health & Performance in Cold Weather Operations."

<sup>13</sup> Castellani et al., "Sustaining Health & Performance in Cold Weather Operations."

<sup>14</sup> A.J. Young et al., "Physiological Problems Associated with Wearing NBC Protective Clothing during Cold Weather," *Aviation, Space and Environmental Medicine* 71, no. 2 (February 2000): 184-89.

and anticonvulsant liquids are susceptible to freezing below 29°F. Even if kept warm, administering these auto-injectors to service members wearing multiple layers of cold weather clothing and protective gear becomes more challenging. Additionally, the symptoms of nerve agent exposure can resemble those of cold weather injuries like hypothermia, further complicating medical responses.<sup>15</sup>

The reprioritization of CBRN training and evaluation at CTCs like JPMRC represents a necessary course correction for the Army as a whole. However, further actions are imperative to ensure that our forces can fight and win during LSCOs in a CBRN-contaminated environment.<sup>16</sup> The ongoing situation in Ukraine underscores the persistent threat posed by adversaries' CBRN weapons of mass destruction.<sup>17</sup> Arctic Soldiers in the US Army must receive thorough training, suitable equipment, and be prepared to confront the unique CBRN challenges presented by extreme cold weather environments. Achieving future strategic and tactical successes hinges on commanders understanding and appreciating the significance of operating within extreme cold weather and CBRN-contaminated environments, generating applied readiness for combatant commanders to leverage. The enhanced CBRN training at JPMRC marks a crucial initial stride on the extensive path toward achieving the US Army's proficiency in conducting LSCOs in a subzero and CBRN-contaminated environments. ★

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Captain Piasecki is a US Army chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) officer and was the maneuver support observer, coach, trainers (OC/T) team chief at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center during Rotation 23-02. He is now a resident student at the Combined Arms Center Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds Bachelor of Science degrees in both physiology and psychology from Michigan State University and is pursuing a Master of Science in emergency disaster management from American Military University. Piasecki, has served in multiple CBRN and staff assignments throughout the US Army Pacific Command area of responsibility over the past decade.

<sup>15</sup> Castellani et al., "Sustaining Health & Performance in Cold Weather Operations."

<sup>16</sup> Kick et al., "Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Foundation Gaps

<sup>17</sup> Sethi, "Nuclear Overtones in the Russia-Ukraine War."



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