Strategies for the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions of the U.S. and Like-Minded Countries

EDITED BY DR. SATORU NAGAO, VISITING FELLOW
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The rise of China and its attitude towards the world forces the United States to address the challenges posed by China's ambitions. As a result, the United States has clearly identified China as a competitor; the latest National Security Strategy, released in December 2017, states that “China and Russia challenge American power.” That same year, Vice President Mike Pence spoke at the Hudson Institute and said “Beijing is employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States.” Now, U.S.-China competition is escalating, especially so since January 2018, when the U.S.-China “trade war” began. The United States needs to win the competition to protect the U.S.-led rules-based order.

Given the United States’ need to win the competition, cooperation with allies and like-minded countries is key because historically, the number of political partners has been a decisive factor in geopolitical struggles. For example, in World War I, the winning side comprised of 32 countries, but the losing side was composed of just 4 countries. In World War II, the winning side had 54 countries, but the losing alliance consisted of only 8 countries. During the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, the winning side had 54 countries, but the defeated comprised 26 countries. These facts indicate that the number of supporters correlates to the likelihood of winning the competition.

In the case of the current U.S.-China competition, the U.S. has many formal allies including NATO, Central and South American countries, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan (52 in total), but China’s only formal ally is North Korea. Beyond formal allies, the U.S.’s circle of like-minded relations expands to include countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and others.

In June 2019, the U.S. Defense Department published its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report. In this document, the U.S. expresses its perception of which countries are allies and like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region and explicitly names those countries. Though Pakistan and Myanmar are cooperating with China, the three are not formal allies. And currently, Myanmar is rethinking its relationship with China. Presently, China has started many infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, which have saddled countries accepting Chinese aid and investment with enormous debt. China then leverages this debt and makes those countries support pro-China policies. As a result, when Sri Lanka turned away from its pro-China policy, China demanded payment of the debt and has taken control of Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port for 99 years.

Therefore, maintaining and improving collaboration with its allies and like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific will be key for the U.S. However, when many countries try to cooperate, challenges arise due to varying perceptions about capabilities, strategies, and interests. It is of increasing importance to identify and understand the perceptions of those cooperating in this region because the current security arrangement may not be sufficient to address the challenges ahead. This report includes the views of scholars studying the United States, Vietnam,
Singapore, ASEAN, Australia, India, Sri Lanka, U.K., France, EU, Canada and Japan. Even if what I can do is very limited, I am hopeful that this report will promote understanding and contribute to the victory of the United States, its allies, and other like-minded countries.

Finally, I would also like express my thanks for all the advice and support I received from the experts and staff at the Hudson Institute and the Japan Foundation, especially all contributors; President of the Hudson Institute, Dr. Ken Weinstein; Senior Vice President, Lewis Libby; Director of Studies, Joel Scanlon; Director of Operations, Nick Mackey; Publications Director, Carolyn Stewart; Manager of Grants and Projects, Victoria Miller; and Hudson Institute intern, Riho Aizawa. Without their efforts, it would have been impossible for me to publish this report.

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I. U.S.

America’s Indo-Pacific Strategy
by Patrick M. Cronin

Some 18 months after sharing the U.S. vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, the Trump administration finally released a lengthy report on the subject. While the 55-page report emanates from the Department of Defense (DoD), rather than the White House, it looks at broad U.S. objectives, extant and emergent challenges in the region (especially China), and a typology of three lines-of-effort and a variety of specific activities.

If the Obama administration can be praised for giving serious attention to the interagency process and deliberations, the Trump administration deserves credit for producing some consequential strategy papers. A high standard was set early by the December 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), written and coordinated under the watchful eyes of National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster and Deputy National Security Advisor Nadia Schadlow.

Critics may fixate on the isolationist-sounding “America first” focus of the NSS, but that strategy signals the first time since the end of the Cold War that the United States returned to a focus on major-power competition. The 2017 strategy report also shifts attention away from global terrorism, which has dominated security strategy since 2001.

Photo caption: Vietnamese military officers purchase souvenirs during a tour onboard the USS Carl Vinson at Tien Sa Port on March 5, 2018 in Danang, Vietnam. The USS Carl Vinson made a historic visit to Danang, marking the biggest U.S. military presence in Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. (Getty Images)
Although the strategy was seen as overdue in the United States, leading voices in the region fear the tilt toward confronting China could create conflict. As Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong remarked in his opening address at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue, “There is a growing bipartisan consensus in the U.S.: that China has taken advantage of the U.S. for far too long; that China has overtaken, or will soon overtake the U.S. in areas of advanced technology...through underhanded means; that instead of opening up and becoming more like the U.S., China has regressed in terms of political openness, and hence represents a challenge to American values and leadership.”

In other words, one of America’s key partners in Southeast Asia is admonishing the United States not to force regional actors to choose between neighbors and friends, between major economic and security partners, and, really, between China and the United States. However, the United States is telling the region that it either needs to step up to the challenge of competition with China, preferably with the United States, or risk losing independence and even sovereignty. This message has been clear since the first year of the Trump administration, which continues to work on implementing policies in response to this shift back to great-power competition.

On the heels of a substantial strategic pivot from post-9/11 terrorism to resurgent major-power rivalry, the January 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) under then-Secretary James Mattis translated the strategy into a Department of Defense (DoD) plan of action. The defense strategy remains mostly classified, but the unclassified explanation makes clear that China’s bid is now the pacing threat against which to work on deterrence and defense: “China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to its advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.”

More recently, in June 2019, under the supervision of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver, the Pentagon produced the first-ever Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR). This report, released during the annual assembly of regional defense secretaries at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, is an outstanding statement of U.S. strategic objectives, organized around three pillars of preparedness, partnerships, and networked security architecture. Before distilling key points from that strategy, however, some background on earlier precedents is warranted.

Evolution of the U.S.’s Asian Strategy Reports

While the new IPSR is preceded by four earlier Department of Defense reports on Asia-Pacific security, more than 20 years have elapsed since the last report. The George H.W. Bush administration published two East Asia Strategy Initiative (EASI) reports for Congress at the end of the Cold War, which forced planners to think ahead to the twenty-first century. The first EASI report was published in April 1990 (A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress: Looking Toward the 21st Century) and the second, an updated version of the inaugural report, in April 1992 (A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress).

During the Clinton administration, another pair of regional reports were published by the Pentagon. The first East Asia Strategy Report (EASR) was published in 1995 (United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region) and the sequel was published in 1998 (The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region).

Any attempt to follow up these reports by the George W. Bush administration was overtaken by the events of September 11, 2001, and the strategic exigency of dealing with terrorism. But
Asian dynamism never ceased, and by the end of President George W. Bush’s second term, there was renewed bipartisan support for thinking about America’s role in the Asia-Pacific.

When I was director of the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, I provided institutional support to a multi-think tank study, under the general leadership of former Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt M. Campbell. The idea was to draft a bipartisan statement that might be adopted by the next administration, regardless of the winner of 2008 election, and become the basis for a fifth report. The result was published by the Center for a New American Security in February 2009 under the title, The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration. Indeed, an official version of a similar report started to be drafted during the administration of President Barack Obama, but for myriad bureaucratic and policy reasons, it never made it into print.

In 2015, the DoD published a more narrow variant, the Asian-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy report, which explained enduring U.S. goals amidst a more assertive Chinese challenge in maritime Asia, and it set out four basic lines-of-effort that more or less continue to this day: enhancing military capabilities; building ally and partner capacities to reduce risk; and building regional architecture and supporting the rule of law.

Well into the third year of the administration of Donald Trump, a fifth regional report has been issued — one that follows the broader geographical region of the Indo-Pacific set out by the White House in 2017.

The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report

The strength of the 2019 IPSR is that it integrates and amplifies themes of preparedness, partnerships, and promoting a networked security. However, the report is hampered to some extent by two crucial gaps: 1) a widening disparity in threat perception between the United States and parts of the region; and 2) a large chasm between the strong defense-oriented engagement of the United States and the lagging economic strategy and engagement, especially relative to Beijing’s signature Belt and Road Initiative.

The report opens with a short message from then-Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan, who highlighted previous themes of the administration: America’s “enduring commitment to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific in which all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules, norms, and principles of fair competition.”

Secretary Shanahan then implicated China as the main challenge, stating, “The People’s Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations.” The United States, he asserts, “will not accept policies or actions that threaten or undermine the rules-based international order” — a statement that is likely to concern as much as reassure smaller regional actors. A subsequent section of the report highlights China as a “revisionist power,” a phrase singled out by Singapore’s Prime Minister as illustrative of America’s hardening view of China. Moreover, the Chinese are undoubtedly riled by the report’s reference to Taiwan as “a country;” the terms stopped short of calling Taiwan “a nation” but may still be seen in Beijing to erode America’s longstanding one-China policy.

National security experts throughout the region, however, probably accept the report’s identification of China as “engaged in a campaign of low-level coercion to assert control of disputed spaces in the region, particularly in the maritime domain,” but greater skepticism may abound as to what the United States is prepared to do about it.

The report’s introduction underscores the Indo-Pacific region’s economic centrality for the world and the United States: “The Indo-Pacific contributes two-thirds of global growth in gross
domestic product (GDP) and accounts for 60% of global GDP.” Moreover, “nine of the world’s 10 busiest seaports are in the region, and 60 percent of global maritime trade transits through Asia, with roughly one-third of global shipping passing through the South China Sea alone.”

With five Pacific states and Pacific territories on both sides of the International Date Line, “America’s annual two-way trade with the region is $2.3 trillion, with U.S. foreign direct investment of $1.3 trillion in the region — more than China’s, Japan’s, and South Korea’s combined.”

Both economic weight and classical geostrategic rationales emerge in this opening section: “Our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific recognizes the linkages between economics, governance, and security that are part of the competitive landscape throughout the region, and that economic security is national security… It is a vision which recognizes that no one nation can or should dominate the Indo-Pacific.”

In recognition that “economic security is national security,” administration initiatives are given early prominence. These include new investments in Indo-Pacific infrastructure, energy markets, and digital economy; new development finance partnerships with Japan, Australia, Canada, and the European Union; the BUILD (Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development) Act; and the recent announcement of $10 billion in U.S.-Japan energy investment, a U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership, and a five-nation effort to provide Papua New Guinea with electricity. An Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative will help shine a spotlight on some of China’s opaque and coercive investments. Moreover, the authorized — but not appropriated — ARIA (Asia Reassurance Initiative Act) awaits funding and implementation to broaden existing programs such as the Maritime Security Initiative.

The bulk of the report describes how the United States is enhancing its preparedness (including its readiness to deal with any “fait accompli scenario”), strengthening its partnerships, and promoting a networked region through minilateral coalitions and multilateral institutions centered on ASEAN.

The preparedness section makes clear that despite China’s geographical advantage in maritime Asia, the United States retains an impressive force posture in the region and continues to modernize its forces, too. “In the region, USINDOPACOM currently has more than 2,000 aircraft; 200 ships and submarines; and more than 370,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, DoD civilians, and contractors assigned within its area of responsibility.” However, uncertainty remains regarding trends in Chinese military modernization, as well as future U.S. defense spending which must make tough tradeoffs between modernizing legacy platforms and investing in potential game-changing innovation.

The second major line of effort — focused on allies and partners — highlights great continuity in U.S. policy, although some of that continuity has been called into question by the occasionally tougher tone taken toward uneven burden-sharing among allies and trade frictions spilling over into security. “The U.S.-Japan Alliance is the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific,” and “U.S. forces in Japan are an essential component of our posture in the region.” Indeed, the “U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security” is “a key enabler for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region.” Likewise, “The U.S.-ROK Alliance is the linchpin of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia, as well as the Korean Peninsula,” and “The U.S.-ROK combined force — unique among bilateral U.S. military relationships — is a robust deterrent to aggression on the Korean Peninsula.” Australia-U.S. cooperation is longstanding: “For more than a century, we have conducted joint and coalition operations, training and exercises, intelligence cooperation, and capability development.” Among effective activities, the Marine Rotational Forces-Darwin is slated to grow to 2,500 U.S. Marines this year. Evidence that these three allies are critical to the United States defense posture and strategy can be found in the two trilateral discussions the United
States organized at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue: a strong U.S.-Japan-Australia statement in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and a salubrious U.S.-Japan-ROK discussion to help attenuate recent tensions between America’s two Northeast Asian allies. The 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty survived the departure of U.S. forces in the early 1990s, and after a 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), the two allies currently conduct some 280 bilateral defense activities, including “the most bilateral exercises in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility.” Slow but nonetheless increasing activity began last year to make use of five EDCA agreed locations. Omitted are the current challenges posed by President Rodrigo Duterte. In contrast, Thailand’s 2014 military coup created significant challenges for a major non-NATO ally and a bilateral relationship that dates back to an 1833 Treaty of Amity and Commerce. Of course, the more recent 1954 multilateral defense pact (SEATO) was never built on common interests or even geographical proximity. Even so, the IPSR stresses Thailand’s “key geostrategic role in the Indo-Pacific region,” including the “access provided to Utapao Royal Thai Naval Air Station and the associated deep-water port at Sattahip.”

The report then praises four Indo-Pacific democracies — Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Mongolia — as “natural partners.” This is an unusual grouping, even leaving aside the blurring of Taiwan’s unique status. The 1990 MOU, 2005 Strategic Framework, and 2015 Enhanced Defense Cooperation with Singapore demonstrate a deep and serious security partnership. In September 2019, the strategic partners renewed for another 15 years the 1990 MOU giving the United States the right to use defense facilities in Singapore. While the commitment to a secure and confident Taiwan remains a focal point, it is also increasingly at the center of the U.S.-China competition, even as Taiwan faces a bellwether election in January. New Zealand relations continue to improve. Although New Zealand left the trilateral ANZUS alliance in the 1980s over concerns about nuclear-power ship visits, now it is helping Australia and the United States, as well as France and Japan, protect the sovereignty and well-being of Pacific Island nations. Finally, Mongolia is given unprecedented attention, and it regards the United States as “its most important ‘third neighbor’ and primary security partner.”

Democratic India deserves an even higher billing, rather than being situated as merely the lead point of discussion in a South Asia section that also touts relations with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh. Perhaps this muted praise for such a substantial partner as India is a bureaucratic artefact of the ongoing transition of the U.S. government from thinking about not just an Asia-Pacific region, but an Indo-Pacific one.

Likewise, the report skips back to East Asia by discussing “expanding partnerships” with three essential maritime Southeast Asian countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The report declares that “the United States is prioritizing new relationships with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia — key players in ASEAN that remain central in our efforts to ensure peace and underwrite prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.” But one cannot help but wonder whether the United States should be doing more to draw attention to the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Indonesia and whether it will do enough in 2020 to mark 25 years of diplomatic relations with Vietnam. Brunei, Laos, and Cambodia are each accorded a short a paragraph suggesting sustained engagement. However the report preceded news accounts that China signed a secret agreement to use a Cambodian naval facility at Ream.

Both the Pacific Islands and some NATO partners (the U.K., France, and Canada) are rightfully given attention as expanding partnerships in the region. Regarding Europe, this year’s Shangri-La Dialogue offered a European voice that seemed more engaged with the region than perhaps any time in recent decades, not least because both the U.K. and France have elevated their narrative and engagement, while the European
Union remains active in largely complementary diplomacy and development.

When the report turns to promoting a networked region, it places trilateral relations ahead of ASEAN — something that is sure to rankle some diplomats in Southeast Asia. But the United States is also deeply engaged in bilateral diplomacy and cooperative activities in a manner consistent with its report language, as affirmed by various official U.S. statements and ministerial-level meetings during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 31–June 2, 2019. But networked security revolves around both minilateralism and working through ASEAN-centered institutions. One of the most effective demonstrations of U.S.-ASEAN defense cooperation hinting at a new level of networked security was the complex maritime exercise conducted in September 2019 and co-led by the U.S. Navy and the Royal Thai Navy.47

As intimated above, the defense ministers of the United States, Japan, and Australia announced a “strategic action agenda” in support of “democracy, human rights, free trade, and the rules-based international order.”48 The trio advocated engagement with like-minded partners “to foster regional prosperity, resilience and transparency in a time of geostrategic change.”49 The three countries expressed their commitment not only to a free and open Indo-Pacific, but to a “free, open, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.”50

The action plan calls for stepped-up trilateral cooperation in maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, amphibious activities, and in the domains of space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum. Specific lines of trilateral effort will include: closer coordination on building partner capacity through information sharing and complementary programs; better information sharing among the three countries and with the region; more sophisticated trilateral exercises to enhance interoperability; and promoting “transparency, regional cooperation, and the rule of law through port visits and other defense-related activities that demonstrate every nation’s right to freedom of navigation and overflight….”51

The U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral relationship remains vital but strained by recent tensions between Seoul and Tokyo, including the announcement by President Moon Jae-in not to renew a vital intelligence-sharing agreement between South Korea and Japan.52 Although this trilateral relationship received less attention at Shangri-La, the meeting of the three defense chiefs was still helpful in managing the enduring threats and opportunities posed by North Korea.

In the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, an earlier focus on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia was reduced to a paragraph extolling the utility of talking among the four maritime democracies.53 This reduced profile, however, ought to have been a pleasant development for most ASEAN members, who view the Quad as another mechanism for enabling outside power management of internal Southeast Asian issues. Conversely, the new U.S. strategy underscores ASEAN centrality and U.S. support for ASEAN mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers’-Plus, and the East Asia Summit.

Combined with other configurations of cooperation — including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, as well as frequent exercises and dialogues among some or all members of the Quad plus others, such as France, the United Kingdom, or the Philippines — Washington is invested in plurilateralism as another means of building the networked security architecture in the strategy document.

The conclusion of the IPSR reiterates the U.S. commitment to preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific. But, importantly, it also declares Washington’s higher expectations of allies and partners:
“The United States will uphold our commitments and will act to defend our interests and those of our allies and partners. At the same time, we maintain our expectation that our allies and partners will contribute their fair share to security by

- Resourcing and investing sufficiently for their own defense to ensure deterrence and mitigate vulnerabilities;
- Cooperating in building partner capacity for third-party partners in the region;
- Upholding a rules-based international order (i.e., flying, sailing, and operating to uphold international laws and norms);
- Providing access needed for contingency response and resiliency;
- Strengthening interoperability, including information sharing, with the United States and other like-minded countries in the region; and,
- Promoting and actively participating in region-led initiatives to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific™ (emphasis added).

All of these contributions are needed and expected by the United States, even if it might strike some as odd to end one’s national strategy document with a list of what others ought to be doing. Perhaps a United States competing with emerging Asia has little choice but to lean more heavily on its allies and partners. Even so, reciprocity cuts both ways, and America’s allies are looking for greater consistency and reliability from the United States. The tension between emphasizing the critical role of allies and simultaneously engaging in hard-nosed bargaining with them detracts somewhat from what the report rightly calls its “asymmetrical advantage” vis-à-vis other major powers: viz., staunch allies.

U.S.-China Competition and the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue
The dueling narratives of the U.S. Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan and China’s Defense Minister Wei Fenghe took centerstage at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue. The major-power-competition focus resulted from two developments: for the first time in almost a decade, Beijing dispatched its defense minister, thereby putting it on par with other countries; additionally, the hardening views between the two powers and the concern that heightened security and economic competition is creating in the region. The lines were drawn in the opening keynote speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

While Prime Minister Lee put down guardrails of behavior for both the United States and China, I interpret this year’s speech as a call for a course correction in Washington. He began by asserting, “Globalization is under siege. Tensions between the U.S. and China are growing. Like everyone else, we in Singapore are anxious.”55 He elaborated: “The U.S.-China bilateral relationship is the most important in the world today.” How the two work out their tensions and frictions will define the international environment for decades to come” (emphasis added).56 Prime Minister Lee declared that “China can no longer expect to be treated the same way as in the past when it was much smaller and weaker” (emphasis added).57 In an indirect reference to U.S. disruptive policies, “The bottom line is that the U.S. and China need to work together, and with other countries too, to bring the global system up to date, and to not upend the system” (emphasis added).58 Prime Minister Lee declared that “the possibility of falling into the so-called Thucydides Trap, asserting somewhat sensationaly and without specifics, “Americans now talk openly of containing China…” (emphasis added).59

Beyond this latest iteration of a shifting balance of power and the need for major powers to find a modus vivendi which allows for cooperation rather than zero-sum competition, Prime Minister Lee notably signaled that China’s economic investment in regional infrastructure and connectivity represented the right path moving forward. The China-Singapore (Chongqing) Connectivity Initiative was explicitly cited as a promising example. Conversely, America’s free and open Indo-Pacific vision lacks economic weight and remains too nebulous. “I believe China appreciates...
the need for the Belt and Road Initiative to be inclusive,” he said, because “Chinese leaders stated clearly that the BRI would be ‘open, green, and clean’” (emphasis added).60

Prime Minister Lee thereby set the terms of reference for the two major speeches that would follow on Saturday and Sunday, which came from the U.S. and Chinese defense secretaries. While there were no direct confrontations, there were notable moments.

The next morning, Acting Secretary Shanahan addressed the first plenary session, and he succeeded in picking up where Secretary James Mattis had left off: “The Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision is an effective guide for regional contributions, because it is based on enduring principles of international cooperation: respect for sovereignty and independence of all nations, large and small; peaceful resolution of disputes; free, fair, and reciprocal trade and investment, which includes protection of intellectual property; and adherence to international rules and norms, including freedom of navigation and overflight.”61

Shanahan emphasized that the United States cooperates with China “where we have an alignment of interests, from military-to-military dialogue to develop risk-reduction measures, to tackling transactional threats such as counterpiracy, to enforcing United Nations sanctions on North Korea. And we compete with China where we must; but competition does not mean conflict.”62 He added that “China can and should have a cooperative relationship with the rest of the region, too, but behavior that erodes other nations’ sovereignty and sows distrust of China’s intentions must end” (emphasis added).63

On the third and last day of the dialogue, China offered its own narrative. Invoking Abraham Lincoln’s vital role in preserving the unity of the United States, State Councilor and Defense Minister General Wei warned, “If anyone dares to split Taiwan from China, the Chinese military has no choice but to fight at all costs for national unity.”64 He added that “any underestimation of the PLA’s resolve and will is extremely dangerous” and that “we make no promise to renounce the use of force.”65 In a reference to the more distant past, General Wei, “The PLA has fought many battles and is not afraid of sacrifice.”66

Limitations, Constraints, and Questions
Almost three years into the Trump administration, a free and open Indo-Pacific vision is moving forward and unlikely to revert back to a smaller geographical framework. But while there is much to praise in both the U.S. strategy and regional diplomacy, there are also some fundamental constraints that will continue to complicate implementation and the desired strategic impact sought by Washington decision-makers. Here are four gaps policymakers will need to be mindful of:

- The gap in threat perceptions (the U.S. and perhaps Japan and Australia are more closely aligned about the comprehensive challenge posed by China than others, especially in Southeast Asia);
- The gap between rhetoric and reality (U.S. words, in print and when delivered orally, are better than the effect on the intended audiences — as at least one recent survey and Prime Minister Lee’s 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue keynote address suggest);67
- The gap between defense activities and economic activities (the United States should not try to replicate the ambitions of China’s BRI, but it needs to better harness its many economic, trade, investment, finance, and development instruments of policy, including pulling them together into a few visible showcase projects, in tandem with the private sector and with allies and partners); and
- The gap between narrative and action (while some actions are given too much attention — freedom of navigation operations or FONOPs, e.g. — economic activities and the building of
human capacity are overshadowed by China's propaganda and use of economic and other instruments of policy).

For all these deficiencies, however, the Indo-Pacific vision is here to stay, and is likely to become part of a future bipartisan framework for engaging the world's most consequential region in the 21st century.

**American Sea Power in the Indo-Pacific**

*by Bryan McGrath*

This essay is adapted from panel remarks made at the Indo-Asia Pacific Panel held at the Hudson Institute on November 16, 2018.

The United States is a Pacific power, and as such, relies heavily on Seapower to protect and sustain its interests in the region. American Seapower — for the purposes of this essay — consisting of the Navy and Marine Corps operating as an integrated whole, is essential to assuring regional friends and allies of continuing American commitment to the region. Additionally, forward deployed naval power acts as a deterrent to would-be disturbers of the peace. In the foreseeable future, China is the focus of this deterrence.

While American Seapower is critical to the U.S. approach to the region, it is only one part of a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes trade and diplomacy at least as much as military alliances. A recent essay entitled “Assessing America’s Indo-Pacific Budget Shortfall” by Eric Sayers provides an excellent summary of the degree to which this important region is under-resourced at both the State Department and the Pentagon, in addition to the multiplicity of programs that exist outside the bounds of hard power.68

Geography is not destiny, but it is important, and when considering China’s place in the Western Pacific, it is useful to think of the way Japan, Australia, and India create natural perimeter. One can also think of this arrangement as a baseball diamond, with Australia as “home plate”, Japan as “first base” and India as “third base”. Growing references to “the Quad” nations — the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan — recognize the natural utility of this geographic arrangement of like-minded maritime powers.69

Deterring and if necessary, winning a conflict in the Western Pacific demands a strong U.S. naval presence in the region and active and powerful navies from the Quad nations. There should be no mistaking what “winning” means in a potential conflict with China, as it is a powerful, nuclear nation of the first order. In the event of conflict, a return to status quo ante should be considered winning.

To generate the kind of naval presence necessary the United States has two options to choose from or to blend. First, it can build a larger Navy and deploy a larger share of that Navy to the South China Sea. This is the preferred option, because the United States needs a larger Navy to service its global responsibilities. Currently, naval presence is a shell game in which a two-hub Navy is continuously attempting to service three operational hubs — Europe, the Middle East, and the Western Pacific. With a return to great power competition underpinning our National Defense Strategy, this means that the Middle East/CENTCOM Area of Responsibility presence will be harvested to service Europe and the Western Pacific. The 2018 National Defense Strategy explicitly de-emphasizes the role of U.S. military force in the Middle East,70 but as recent events in which a U.S. aircraft carrier was sortied from the Eastern Mediterranean to the North Arabian Sea in response to intelligence of Iranian terror threats demonstrate,71 the Middle East continues to demand U.S. attention. America’s enduring interests in and around Europe, the Middle East, and the Western Pacific require a three-hub approach to forward naval presence, and the Navy must make the case more effectively for the force structure necessary to service these responsibilities.

In addition to a larger fleet, the Navy could forward base a larger percentage of the fleet in the Western Pacific. Whether the Navy
grows or not, this option should be pursued. This would require access to forward bases, and it is not immediately apparent how likely this access is to be granted. Clearly this would take some long-term diplomacy, but it is the most efficient method of generating forward based operational availability, as rotational transits to and from the continental United States require additional ships. The United States should also consider forward basing more forces in Guam and other areas under U.S. jurisdiction.

Irrespective of how large the Navy is or what portion of it is devoted to operations in the Indo-Pacific, the ships that do operate there must be more lethal, and they must be better supported by continuous intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting (ISR&T). The Navy is making strides in meeting the lethality goal, fielding longer range and more energetic weapons, but the ISR gap — the difference in our ability to find, fix, track, target, and engage — between us and the Chinese is real, and it must be addressed.

And while more— and more lethal— forward deployed naval power is central to any coherent approach to security and stability in the region, the degree to which the U.S. network of friends and allies in the region is the most effective deterrent to Chinese adventurism and aggression cannot be overstated. The United States must do more to lead and catalyze activities that present operational problems for the Chinese while demonstrating the durability of its friendships and alliances. Additionally, the current administration’s approach to regional free-trade agreements in the Western Pacific sends mixed messages to the region as to commitment on levels other than military.

In order to more effectively contribute to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, the following recommendations are offered. First, the United States must understand that the new era of great power competition is being waged in a new era of media ubiquity. And while recent Department of Defense initiatives to restrict the public statements of its leaders are in the main — misguided — the dialogue over operations in the South China Sea is entirely too loose. Freedom of navigation operations in the region should be conducted routinely and should be considered routine. Excessive claims by any nation in the region should be challenged, but these challenges need only be accompanied by diplomatic communications that register the challenge. The Defense Department’s propensity to issue press releases every time a U.S. ship challenges an excessive or disputed Chinese maritime claim should be discontinued. And when such an operation does raise Chinese interest, reports stressing the dangers of “close aboard” operations among ships does little to carry a message to the Chinese that the U.S. is not going to be intimidated by such aggression.

Second, the Navy needs to create a far more effective ISR&T complex in the region than it currently fields. A network of space-based, aerial layer, surface and subsurface based sensors that provides the U.S. Navy with target quality information on every Chinese Warship operating in the region continuously should be the goal. The range of the Navy’s anti-ship weapons exceeds its ability to properly target them, and this gap must be closed. China’s naval forces should understand that if they are targeted wherever they are.

Third, the United States must make clear and unambiguous statements about what the consequences of aggression will be. There is in the national security community, a great debate as to whether the U.S. would attack the Chinese mainland in the event of conflict. This debate should end. There should be no doubt in China’s leader’s minds that mainland targets are on the list, and that furthermore, the islands and features that they have militarized were never part of this debate in the first place.

Fourth — the U.S. should move the Third Fleet — currently based in San Diego, forward. The Seventh Fleet based in Japan is simply too far out of the fight — and more importantly — too busy with fights of its own — to provide operational level direction in the broader Indo-Asia Pacific. A base in Northern Australia
or Guam would be preferred, but where exactly it could land remains to be seen. The “Third Fleet Forward” initiative of a few years ago was an interesting idea, but it appeared somewhat insufficient and gimmicky.\textsuperscript{72}

There is a commonly held — but flawed — assumption that Chinese surveillance in the Indo-Pacific is ubiquitous, and that U.S. ships operating there are constantly targeted. The truth is quite different. For instance, although the famed “DF-21” “Carrier-Killer” missile has a reported range of about 1000 miles, China’s ability to find, fix, track, and target U.S. ships at this distance is subject to numerous environmental and operational considerations. Those who paint China as “ten feet tall” tend to draw surveillance arcs emanating from the mainland that pre-suppose exquisite knowledge of the battlespace from seafloor to stratosphere, when if fact, wide gaps exist within the battlespace where the probability of detection is minimized. With sufficient knowledge of the battlespace and its atmospheric conditions, those gaps can are both knowable and exploitable.

Even if China possessed these overwrought estimates of ISR/T fidelity, it would still make sense for the U.S. not only to operate in the region, but to create a similarly lethal level of ISR/T coverage of the Chinese fleet in the area. Being there — in the region — with combat ready forces of upgraded lethality whose locations may be well-known, serves the broad objective of conventional deterrence. For example, the system of bases across Europe in the Cold War, and tens of thousands of troops in Korea for the past seven decades — served useful roles in conventional deterrence even though there was little or no doubt where these military forces located. The growing sense that for a naval force to be effective, it must be invisible, is simply incorrect. And while stealth and deception play a significant role in the CONDUCT of war, we should not underestimate the role that preponderant, visible force plays in the avoidance of war.

It is crucial for the U.S. Navy to be where the nation’s interests lie, and that means being in the Indo-Pacific in numbers with considerable capability. Assurance of friends and allies and deterrence of would-be aggressors both require visible, capable forces that can deter Chinese objectives by denying the fruit of aggression, rather than attempting to deny the aggression through the threat of future punishment.
II. REGIONAL COUNTRIES

Vietnam and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Vision
by Do Thanh Hai & Le Thu Ha

Introduction
The U.S.’s introduction of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” is one of the most difficult puzzles for the whole East Asian region. The concept of Indo-Pacific is not a new one. It was coined by the Japanese Prime Minister, Abe Shinzo, a decade ago. However, the U.S. administration’s adoption has given it greater geopolitical significance, as did its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. President Donald Trump’s statement on the sideline of the November 2017 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Danang, Vietnam has indeed made it a centrepiece of the U.S. attempt to preserve its primacy in the face of an assertive China. Still, the Indo-Pacific has been an evolving concept whose components have not been fixed from the very beginning. After almost two years of extensive consultation with the regional allies and partners, the U.S. Department of Defense finally came up with a full paper titled “Indo Pacific Strategy Report” (IPSR) in June 2019. It is quite remarkable that for the first time, the U.S. put forward a largely hollow concept and calls upon its allies and partners to give it shape.

The Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) is important, as it is the U.S.’s response to a long-standing question of its commitment to the region. With a preponderance of power, the U.S. has long been considered the leader and mainstay for Pacific stability. Yet, there

Photo caption: Built on land reclaimed from the Indian Ocean and funded with $1.4 billion in Chinese investment, the Colombo Port City project is seen jutting out into the ocean that will eventually be 65 million cubic meters of sand. November 8, 2018 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. (Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)
has been enduring anxiety across the region that Washington may scale down its presence and engagements, leaving a strategic vacuum for other powers to fill. So, the central question is how far the IPS reflects U.S. commitment to the rule-based order of the region. The volatile nature of U.S. domestic politics has made the IPS more a brainteaser than a definite riposte to regional concern. Vietnam is not an exception. Recognizing the U.S. as a mainstay of Asia-Pacific stability, Hanoi is trying many ways to foster U.S. reassurance and constructive engagements in order to maintain a viable balance of influence in the region, not to incite confrontation. How Hanoi has responded to the IPS is a good topic to explore, as it is indicative of regional concerns and Vietnam’s own strategic calculations.

Vietnam-U.S. Relations
The end of the Cold War opened up a new chapter for Vietnam, where it opted for an internationalist foreign policy aimed at establishing peaceful and stable neighborhood so as to focus on its own national development. Hanoi has moved beyond the ideological division and past animosity to develop partnerships with all major powers. Vietnam’s ties with U.S. were forged in 1995 and quickly expanded since June 2005, when then-Prime Minister Phan Van Khai made the first ever visit of a senior Vietnamese leader to Washington, D.C. Importantly, Vietnam has openly recognized the U.S. as a Pacific power that plays a very important role maintaining regional security and stability. The two countries entered a comprehensive partnership in December 2013, which prescribed high-level dialogue and cooperation in almost all fields.

Many analysts mistakenly view the Hanoi-Washington partnership as primarily a means to balance to Beijing. China certainty represents a significant security challenge for Vietnam, as the two countries have a host of intractable sovereignty and maritime disputes in its eastern maritime domain — called the East Sea in Vietnam and the South China Sea internationally. However, Vietnam’s relations with China are complex and comprehensive to the extent that any change would directly affect Hanoi with regard to the Mekong River, cross-border trade flow, and maritime waters in the South China Sea. Though China’s behavior in the South China Sea and the Mekong River are worrisome, overall Vietnam-China relations are in the best shape ever in history. As a result, Hanoi tries to handle China in a way to carefully constrain its aggressive intents, rather than rock the entire bilateral relationship.

To this end, Vietnam’s aim is to establish a viable multi-dimensional balance of influence (not just balance of power), centered on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to restrain abuse of power and foster peaceful settlements of existing disputes. In this vein, Hanoi eagerly forged partnerships with the U.S., and other powers, to offset the weight of a rising China. That explains why Hanoi was largely responsive to the Obama administration’s Pivot, later changed to “rebalancing the Asia-Pacific,” which gives priority to engaging the region widely, voicing opposition to revisionism in multilateral forums, and assisting Southeast Asian countries to build capacities. The U.S. is of particular importance in the eyes of Vietnam because it is the key force underpinning regional peace and stability. Vietnamese and U.S. interests converge on the maintenance of the status quo across the region. However, that does not mean Hanoi would go to great lengths forging a military alliance with Washington to counter China in peacetime. Many strategists in Hanoi are also puzzled as to whether the U.S. would really risk a war with China to protect its allies’ and friends’ legitimate interests.

Hanoi’s Indo-Pacific Cautiousness
In November 2017, the central city of Vietnam, Da Nang, became the center of gravity as all Asia-Pacific leaders gathered for the APEC summit. It came as a surprise that President Trump also chose this forum to announce his administration’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” vision. The vision lays emphasis on the maintenance of the existing international order based on four principles: 1) respect for sovereignty and independence for all nations; 2) peaceful resolution of the disputes; 3) free, fair, and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent
agreements and connectivity; and 4) adherence to international rules and norms, including those of freedom of navigation and overflight. A month later, the administration published the *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy*, which overtly labeled China as a strategic competitor.

Such an articulation was a long overdue as Asia-Pacific countries were concerned about U.S. commitment to the region. While other capitals remained reluctant and skeptical, Hanoi tried to engage with the Trump administration to establish a cordial and cooperative relationship. Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was the first Southeast Asian leader to have a telephone conversation and a meeting with President Trump in person. Yet, the articulation of the Indo-Pacific vision is far from reassuring. Instead, it is more a source of skepticism. While appreciating greater willingness on the part of the U.S. administration to consult regional partners, Vietnam joined other ASEAN countries in their hesitancy to lend public political support to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative.

Caution stems from several of perennial concerns. First, it is unclear how the Indo-Pacific strategy was linked to Obama’s rebalancing, which is centered upon the idea of comprehensive engagement. U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership was seen as a backstep in the U.S. commitment to shape regional economic order. Second, the U.S.-initiated trade conflict with China is stirring up concerns about the prospect of protectionism and the collapse of the current liberal trading system. The secretive nature of the U.S.-China trade negotiations poses many risks to other regional economies whose development prospects are built upon an open trading system. Third, the adoption of Shinzo’s concept and the revival of the Quadrilateral gives an impression that the U.S. puts an emphasis on bilateralism and minilateralism with allies and rising India, rather than relying on ASEAN as a means of multilateral engagement. Lastly, the amount of resources the U.S. will put into the Indo-Pacific, which is the clearest measure of its commitment, is still in doubt.

In many ways, the Indo-Pacific vision is viewed as a geopolitical design to contain China and thwart its grand Belt and Road Initiative. That is not in Hanoi’s wish. There remain concerns in Hanoi that the adoption of Indo-Pacific as a broad geographical unit would dilute attention away from the South China Sea, which is the main ground for Chinese expansionism. Despite uneasy relations with China, Vietnam does not desire to drum up confrontation in the region, which would easily polarize the region into Cold War-styled conflicting camps. Like other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam wants to drive a change in China’s behavior toward greater restraint, reliability, and responsibility, rather than be an antagonist at its doorstep. Standing on the eastern edge of the Eurasian landmass, the last thing Hanoi wishes is for a fault line to emerge along its coastline and extend both ways or to become entangled in a fight between the titans. Consequently, in March 2018, during his official visit to New Delhi, India, Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang introduced the concept of Indo-Asia-Pacific, which boasts the idea of inclusivity and seamless connectivity. It was clearly an effort to bridge the gap in the Indo-Pacific vision.

The IPS as an Evolving Project

It is important to recognize that the U.S. administration has identified extensive consultation and deliberation as the key pathway for developing its strategy. Over the last few years, U.S. officials and experts observably made frequent tours to the region, talking with officials and think-tanks in many countries to seek ideas and advice to substantiate the empty shell of Indo-Pacific vision. Through intense exchanges, the U.S. side is now aware of the sensitivities over side-taking and has provided reassurance that the Indo-Pacific strategy does not amount to containing China or forcing the Southeast Asian countries to make a choice. A positive move in Asian eyes is that the U.S. fully understands the comprehensive nature of the challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and adopted a whole-of-government approach.

A number of initiatives have been put in place to foster a U.S. economic presence in the region. In response to widespread
China's BRI. The intense competition between the U.S. and China put all Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, in a precarious situation, which is characterized by greater pressure from many directions to articulate one's standing on the two great powers' grand initiatives. Tragic modern history, fraught with wars and armed conflicts, has shaped Vietnam's strategic thinking; it is skeptical of geopolitics and disinclined to take sides in a power struggle. As a result, it is not difficult to understand why Hanoi has been indisposed to give blanket support to any geostrategic design to forge coalitions. In the Vietnamese perspective, connectivity is good when it promotes integration, but is bad when it drives division and exclusivity. So, Vietnam's position, vis-à-vis both IPS and BRI, remains ambivalent so long as they have not been fully and clearly sketched out.

While recognizing the importance of power in the near-term, Vietnam puts a premium on rules, principles, and ASEAN's role in regional structures as the key elements in regulating interstate relations. Instead of taking sides with any great power, Hanoi has sided with a set of rules and principles that it views as the best for maintaining peace, stability, and just order. To be exact, in the maritime domain, Hanoi repeatedly calls for the strict application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides zoning and regulation of the maritime domain and activities at sea. In the trade realm, it seeks compliance with existing rules in the WTO framework. In security and political areas, Vietnam repeatedly asserts its commitment to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the ASEAN Charter, most importantly respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in another's internal affairs, no threat or use of force, and peaceful settlement of disputes. In other words, Vietnam is interested in maintaining existing international order and utilizing ASEAN and its derivatives as the main platforms for shaping new rules or revising the existing ones as necessary.

Under ASEAN's Aegis

Perhaps, debate within Vietnam over the Indo-Pacific strategy is as intense as it is over other connectivity schemes, particularly...
Direct challenge to rules-based order, while downplaying or overlooking the longstanding American contributions to the region. The Chinese were visibly exhilarated at Lee’s speech. At the question and answer session, a People’s Liberation Army official took the first comment to heap praise at Lee’s speech. That is not all. The Chinese state media also rose to the same chorus. It is as if this year’s SLD had been a diplomatic coup for Beijing.

Contrasting Chinese Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe’s firm, if fiery speech was the rather lacklustre speech the day before by then Acting Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan, which some would describe as “underwhelming,” especially after much anticipation had built up for an expected “new Indo-Pacific strategy.” Singapore, the host of SLD, did not find the aftermath to pass quickly. Commentators, especially scholars in the West, not least of all American, not only expressed disappointment at Shanahan’s speech, but also criticized Singapore for shifting gears in favor of China, to the point of suggesting that the rising Asian power ought to be allowed the room to help make rules for the world. The criticisms were well-meaning but largely unfounded.

Reading Beyond the Speech
The context is important in order to understand Lee’s speech and its intent. There is an ongoing, intensifying trade war between China and the U.S., which carries inevitable economic spill-over to Southeast Asia, a region that thrives socio-economically on American investments and security presence, as well as access to Chinese infrastructure funding and vast market. Lee’s speech pertained mainly to the idea of accommodating a rising China with an enlarged global economic stake. His comment about the Sino-U.S. technological rivalry, specifically pointing to the whole saga over Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, very much reflects the angst experienced by not just Singapore but many Southeast Asian countries seeking to develop their digital telecommunications infrastructure cost-effectively. Notwithstanding latent security concerns, Huawei presents an economical solution for Southeast

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Singapore and the Indo-Pacific: The Relentless Quest for Balance
by Swee Lean Collin Koh

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) raised some eyebrows, especially within the U.S. Government, when he mentioned the need for the United States to accommodate a rising China. There were concerns that there is a shift in Singapore’s position that appears to favor Beijing, despite its direct challenge to rules-based order, while downplaying or overlooking the longstanding American contributions to the region. The Chinese were visibly exhilarated at Lee’s speech. At the question and answer session, a People’s Liberation Army official took the first comment to heap praise at Lee’s speech. That is not all. The Chinese state media also rose to the same chorus. It is as if this year’s SLD had been a diplomatic coup for Beijing.

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Asian countries to keep in pace with an evolving global economic landscape, especially the Industrial Revolution 4.0. concept, for which 5G telecommunications plays an important role.

However, it would be presumptuous to say that there is a general shift in Singapore’s position. While the island city-state wants China to play a larger global economic and technological role, holding onto the conviction that doing so would benefit everyone, the same could not be said about the Asian power’s defense and security role. Without a doubt, the growing diplomatic, economic, and military clout of China, namely its expanding interests and influence across the region and worldwide, bring more strategic uncertainties because of its growing assertiveness and proclivity to flout international rules and norms, and resort to coercion — as seen in the East and South China Sea disputes. At the same time, geopolitical rivalries are evidently intensifying, especially over competing visions of the “Indo-Pacific” — a concept that has been embraced by key regional powers such as Australia, Japan and the U.S., but largely opposed by China, which has its own alternative vision in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Facing this ongoing competition between the giants, smaller and weaker countries in the region, especially those in Southeast Asia, generally feel a sense of trepidation. Singapore is not alone. Lee’s speech very much reflects the general sentiment of Singapore’s peers within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). To dwell upon a single speech in one evening would completely miss the point of how Singapore, among various ASEAN member states, has been trying assiduously to balance competing geopolitical trends and national interests. If the whole discussion about ongoing geopolitical rivalries and competing Indo-Pacific visions, Singapore appears to be an odd man in the room of these giants. The country has no Indo-Pacific vision or strategy to tout along the same lines as the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” concept put forth by Japan and the U.S. For example, ASEAN recently rolled out its collective

version that was spearheaded by Indonesia — the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). That move was a politically expedient one, insofar it was designed more for ASEAN to assert its continued centrality and strategic relevance in the regional security architecture. AOIP is merely a declaration of common principles that the ten-member bloc agrees on, but it is nothing akin to a common foreign policy directive that each government has to compulsorily follow.

An Indo-Pacific Strategic Consciousness, Sans Strategy

Instead of an Indo-Pacific strategy, Singapore possesses a “strategic consciousness” of this concept. In fact, this strategic consciousness has been in-built since the beginning. One only needs to consider Singapore’s geostrategic location in between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This geographical fact alone already ties Singapore to a maritime connectivity-based Indo-Pacific premise. Continued safe and secure access to the sea lines of communications joining these two oceans forms the bedrock of the country’s national survival and prosperity. Even when seen from a strategic-political perspective, if one argues that “Indo-Pacific” is not about the maritime connectivity between the two oceans, but rather India’s rising role, the fact is that since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Singapore has consistently brought India into the regional fold. In no small part because of Singapore’s help, India has become a dialogue partner with ASEAN. This enthusiasm was mainly because Singapore believed that India could play a constructive countervailing role, especially in the post-Cold War context of concerns about receding American strategic presence and the potential for China to fill this vacuum.

As such, the Indo-Pacific strategic consciousness has always existed in Singapore’s outlook for the region. However, Singapore has never elucidated its own Indo-Pacific strategy, which therefore creates avenues for much speculation about whether it may change gears, especially under Chinese influence or duress. For example, Joshua Kurlantzick wrote
“overall, it remains unclear whether China’s soft and sharp power approaches to the city-state are actually producing a Singaporean populace with more favorable views of China, an environment in Singapore that would make the city-state more willing to go along with Chinese foreign policy aims, or really any shift in the receiving state (Singapore)’s long-term views because of China’s actions.”

Most commentators often raise the 2016 debacle of Singapore Armed Forces’ Terrex armoured fighting vehicles detained in Hong Kong in the context of bilateral tensions over Singapore’s open support for the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling on the South China Sea, among other disagreements. Prime Minister Lee was also not on the guest list for China’s inaugural Belt and Road Forum, a move seen as Beijing’s snub to Singapore for failing to “toe the line.”

To be sure, Singapore has learned valuable lessons from these incidents. The key lesson learned is to avoid “megaphone diplomacy” — which could be somewhat grating upon Beijing’s pride and prestige where it concerns “face” in the international arena. But fundamentally, Singapore’s position has never changed. It continues to champion a rules-based order, and even if it has been not so vocal about its views and quietly copes with Indo-Pacific dynamics, the country has allowed its policy actions speak louder than words. The ultimate objective has always been to maintain that strategic balance between those competing major powers and to manage their rivalries and find possible avenues for them to work together within an inclusive regional architecture, all while maintaining strategic autonomy as a sovereign nation-state — and one not forced to take the side of any major power.

More Continuity Instead of Change
In this strategic equation, one could observe more continuity than change in Singapore’s approach to the growing Indo-Pacific discourses. On the one hand, while acknowledging the U.S. contributions to the region, both in terms of investments, technological transfers and military presence, Singapore encourages Washington to continue its regional engagements. On the other hand, Singapore continues to emphasize strategic cooperation with China via the economic and trade pathway, chiefly focused on BRI. It is clear that Singapore continues to prioritize the U.S. as a primary security partner while seeing China as an economic partner. This bifurcated approach has been subject to much criticism about those contradictions at hand — the U.S. has been playing an immense economic and trade role in the region, not just a military one. Meanwhile China’s growing clout could mean Beijing is no longer satisfied to be viewed merely as an economic partner and would seek to promote a stronger military role commensurate with its growing clout.

In order to take these into consideration, Singapore has moved on various concurrent, parallel fronts. With China, the overall emphasis remains fixated on economic cooperation via BRI. Singapore took pains to point out that BRI will be beneficial to parties who sign up for this initiative and tangibly strike new agreements under it, for example the Chongqing Demonstration Initiative on Strategic Connectivity. In fact, Singapore claims to be “an early and strong supporter” of BRI. This should, at least plausibly in the minds of Singaporean policy elites, placate Beijing and help to alleviate its suspicion that Singapore is colluding with other major powers to contain China. Considering Chinese complaints about sluggish progress made on the security front, when General Wei visited Singapore to attend the SLD, the two countries reached a deal to enhance defense cooperation. Moreover, Singapore, in its capacity as ASEAN chair, helped facilitate the inaugural ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise in August 2018. It is worth noting that bilateral military relations have begun from a low baseline, and the scope of cooperation has been tightly limited to certain areas such as counter-terrorism, military medicine, and low-intensity naval exchanges. One practical reason behind this slow development in military ties is because the two militaries are diametrically different where it comes to doctrine, training, and equipment — the Singapore Armed Forces is indoctrinated, trained, and equipped along Western lines,
which makes it challenging to promote close interoperability with the PLA.

What is more interesting is that, around the same time it incrementally enhanced defense relations with China, Singapore made prior and concurrent equivalent arrangements with other regional powers. In late 2017, Singapore and India agreed to enhance defense cooperation, including more port calls by Indian Navy ships and also provisions for mutual logistics support, and — perhaps of some concern to China — the proposal for a naval exercise involving India and ASEAN countries in the Strait of Malacca and Andaman Sea area. Also around that same time, Singapore and the U.S. agreed to renew the 1990 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the United States’ Use of Facilities in Singapore in 2020, which will incorporate partnership elements of the U.S. National Defense Strategy. And in an apparent snub to China’s suggestion to exclude or limit foreign military exercises in the Single Draft Negotiating Text of the proposed Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, ASEAN is planning its inaugural maritime exercise with the U.S. in September 2019 — and Singapore had a role to play in it as the ASEAN chair during the time of its announcement.

Evidently, Singapore seeks to ensure that U.S. security engagements in the region continue at a pace ahead of China’s in order to preserve the predominant American stabilizing role. This is in no small measure attributed to Singapore’s continued concerns about the strategic uncertainties brought about by first, China’s rise and growing assertiveness, and second, trepidation over the Trump administration’s policies towards the region. While doing so, Singapore assiduously tries to convince China that it is not joining any attempt at containing it, as seen in its open support for the BRI — a flagship project under President Xi Jinping. And it also acceded to Beijing’s requests by incrementally enhancing bilateral defense ties. All in all, it reflects Singapore’s longstanding and relentless quest to maintain a balance between the competing major powers, preserve its strategic autonomy, and to seek ways to maximize its own national interests.

A Quest for Strategic Centrality: The Sino-American Rivalry and ASEAN in the Age of the Indo-Pacific

by Richard Javad Heydarian

Reflecting on the future of Asia’s rapidly evolving security architecture, the late Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew cautioned, “The size of China’s displacement of the world balance is such that the world must find a new balance. It is not possible to pretend that this is just another big player. This is the biggest player in the history of the world.” In short, China’s reemergence as the primary indigenous security actor in Asia does not only require a tactical “balance-of-power” readjustment, especially among immediate neighbors and rivals, but instead portends an overhaul of the entire regional security architecture. With growing power, however, often comes more aggressive ambitions, especially among revanchist former empires, such as China, tinged with an expansionist impulse. Ever the wide-eyed realist, Lee maintained that there is a widely “held consensus that the U.S. presence in the region should be sustained” — crucially, not due to some irrational clamor for militaristic containment of China, but instead because “military presence does not need to be used to be useful,” and that American “presence [alone] makes a difference and makes for peace and stability in the region.”

The Singaporean leader saw this formula — namely, the need for the U.S. to act as an “onshore balancer” — most relevant in the case of the South China Sea disputes, since “China will not let an international court arbitrate territorial disputes in the South China Sea,” a claim that proved prescient, when China categorically rejected the Arbitral Tribunal award at The Hague years later as a piece of “trash paper.” In fact, China unabashedly adopted the “three nos” policy of non-
In many ways, this is also how one should understand the ASEAN’s dilemma and approach vis-à-vis the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) doctrine. On one hand, the FOIP signals growing American resolve, along with key allies and strategic partners such as Japan, Australia and India, to check China’s revisionism. In the same breath, there is growing worry, if not outright suspicion, among smaller Southeast Asian states that the brewing Cold War, and the broader ‘Indo-Pacific’ discourse, is a direct threat to the “ASEAN centrality” (AC), namely Southeast Asian nations’ collective effort to shape and preserve an inclusive regional security architecture beyond the grip of any major power. After all, the very notion of AC, and its staunch advocacy by small and middle powers across the Asia-Pacific, was precisely about avoiding a return to bipolar and multipolar rivalries following the end of Cold War in Asia. No wonder then, ASEAN is scrambling to reassert its centrality and shape the concept and operationalization of the Indo-Pacific paradigm in its own image.

From Miracle to Stasis

Before his tragic death at the hands of German Nazism, the early-20th century philosopher Walter Benjamin famously warned, “Behind every fascism, there is a failed revolution.” In many ways, the ASEAN’s current predicament, namely China’s revanchism and its progressive peripherality in shaping the regional security architecture, is a reflection of its collective failure to rise to the occasion. The whole region is suffering due to what can be termed as a “Kantian deficit,” the absence of a “perpetual peace” under the auspices of a robust and effective league of likeminded, pacifist nations. ASEAN is confronting what I termed as the “middle institutionalization trap,” namely the institutional structure and decision-making processes, which allowed the regional body to establish a robust security community in the twentieth century, is now painfully insufficient to address the new challenges of the twenty-first century.

Interestingly, the first U.S.-ASEAN joint maritime drills came just a year after a similar exercise between ASEAN and China. Thus, the AUMX was less about the U.S. rallying smaller countries against China, but more of a reflection of the ASEAN’s sophisticated policy of omni-balancing — namely, preserving maximum strategic autonomy through sustained, non-committal engagement with (competing) major powers. This way, ASEAN aims to constrain a rising power’s (China) aggression through flexible cooperation with the status quo power (America). In short, Southeast Asian nations prefer to outsource “hard balancing” to external powers in order to strengthen their bargaining chip when dealing with China. This is an essential element of ASEAN’s struggle for autonomy within a competitive security environment.

For the Singaporean leader, the best antidote to Chinese revanchist instincts, and defiance of international law, is “the continued presence of U.S. firepower in the Asia-Pacific” so that the “[United Nations] Law of the Sea [will] prevail.” In short, he saw international law, and by extension the observation of regional norms and principles, effective if, and only if, it’s anchored by American naval prowess. And it’s precisely within this context, namely Southeast Asian country’s desire for an American counterbalance to Chinese hegemonic ambitions that one should understand the relevance of recent initiatives such as, the inaugural ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise (AUMX) in early-September. The five-day exercise covered a vast expanse of waters stretching from the Sattahip naval base in Chonburi province in Gulf of Tonkin to Cape Cà Mau on the Cà Mau Peninsula in Vietnam. There were also non-drill activities in archipelagic Southeast Asian nations of Brunei and Singapore, which permanently hosts American Littoral Combat Ships. The geographical pivot of the exercises was the South China Sea, with both the U.S. and ASEAN signaling their shared interest in keeping Chinese maritime ambitions at bay.

Even prominent Southeast Asian expert Amitav Acharya has wondered if “ASEAN centrality is as much a product of external participation, non-recognition, and non-compliance vis-à-vis a final and binding international ruling.” For the Singaporean leader, the best antidote to Chinese revanchist instincts, and defiance of international law, is “the continued presence of U.S. firepower in the Asia-Pacific” so that the “[United Nations] Law of the Sea [will] prevail.” In short, he saw international law, and by extension the observation of regional norms and principles, effective if, and only if, it’s anchored by American naval prowess. And it’s precisely within this context, namely Southeast Asian country’s desire for an American counterbalance to Chinese hegemonic ambitions that one should understand the relevance of recent initiatives such as, the inaugural ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise (AUMX) in early-September. The five-day exercise covered a vast expanse of waters stretching from the Sattahip naval base in Chonburi province in Gulf of Tonkin to Cape Cà Mau on the Cà Mau Peninsula in Vietnam. There were also non-drill activities in archipelagic Southeast Asian nations of Brunei and Singapore, which permanently hosts American Littoral Combat Ships. The geographical pivot of the exercises was the South China Sea, with both the U.S. and ASEAN signaling their shared interest in keeping Chinese maritime ambitions at bay.

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Malaysia and Singapore were at loggerheads, locked in a perilous Konfrontasi logic. Meanwhile, the Philippines and Malaysia teetered on the verge of war amid festering disputes over the oil-rich Sabah. At the same time, both the Western-aligned (Thailand and the Philippines) and ‘non-aligned’ nations (Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia) of Southeast Asia confronted a menacing communist expansionism in the Indo-China, as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam fell behind the Asian iron curtain and various communist insurgencies gained ground in archipelagic Southeast Asia. ASEAN’s creation, thus, was a largely defensive and visionary move to coalesce core Southeast Asian nations of Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore around shared threat perceptions, while making sure they didn’t sleep-walk into war among themselves. And the strategic result defied all expectations. Within a single generation, ASEAN went from a wild shot at peace into arguably the most successful regional integration experience in the post-colonial world, as even communist and post-communist Southeast Asian countries later joined the regional grouping. Astonishingly, ASEAN achieved this with a skeletal bureaucracy and barely any Copenhagen Criteria-type of incentive system for aspiring members. To put things into perspective, while the EU enjoyed a 30,000-strong civil service staff, which focused on crafting and implementation of integration policies, with a multi-billion-dollar budget (equal to 1% of EU budget), the ASEAN secretariat has had just over 200 staff operating on, until recent years, a meager $10 million budget. Even more impressively, ASEAN established a peace regime, or a de facto “security community,” where even the threat of use of force, never mind actual military mobilization, became unthinkable as an instrument of inter-state relations. This is most evident in the decision of Southeast Asian countries to either place their territorial disputes on the back burner (Philippines and Malaysia) or take them to international arbitration, as in the case of Indonesia-Malaysia maritime disputes (Pulau Ligitan and Pulau Sipadan) and Thailand-Cambodia border disputes, particularly over the Temple of

players in Southeast Asia as it is of the ASEAN members themselves,” since “one suspects that its emergence had more to do with the dynamics of Great Power relationships than with any projection of ASEAN’s internal unity or identity.”

To be fair, there is the undeniable element of tyranny of geography. It’s in Southeast Asia, the ancient backyard for Beijing’s imperial machinations, where the rise of China is most pungent and disruptive. Equally, however, ASEAN also shares the blame for not embracing necessary institutional innovation and strategic dynamism to confront the challenge head on. The implication is clear, either the regional body will have to reform its operating principles or, alternatively, risk a fast fade into irrelevance within an increasingly unstable regional environment. Institutional decay, if left unchecked, disempowers Southeast Asian countries, leaving them with limited agency and means for protecting their core interests.

The reality is that ASEAN, in its current form, is ripe for strategic hijack by external powers, especially China. The veteran Singaporean diplomat Barry Desker rightly points out this troubling dynamic when highlighting the “ability of external parties to shape the positions of ASEAN members on regional issues,” most especially when “China exerts its influence on ASEAN members to prevent any decisions which could affect its preference for bilateral negotiations” over multilateral engagement with the ASEAN collective. In recent years, China has rapidly transformed from a strategic partner to a de facto veto-player within the ASEAN. How did it achieve this? The answer partly lies in the regional body’s own institutional design, particularly its (mis)conception of the notion of “consensus.”

Since its inception, ASEAN relied on two key principles to cajole the most fractious and diverse nations — along ethnic, religious, political, and developmental faultlines — into a security community: The twin pillars of the ASEAN experiment were the principles of consultation (Mushawara) and consensus (Muafakat). At the dawn of the Cold War, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore were at loggerheads, locked in a perilous Konfrontasi logic. Meanwhile, the Philippines and Malaysia teetered on the verge of war amid festering disputes over the oil-rich Sabah. At the same time, both the Western-aligned (Thailand and the Philippines) and ‘non-aligned’ nations (Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia) of Southeast Asia confronted a menacing communist expansionism in the Indo-China, as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam fell behind the Asian iron curtain and various communist insurgencies gained ground in archipelagic Southeast Asia. ASEAN’s creation, thus, was a largely defensive and visionary move to coalesce core Southeast Asian nations of Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore around shared threat perceptions, while making sure they didn’t sleep-walk into war among themselves. And the strategic result defied all expectations. Within a single generation, ASEAN went from a wild shot at peace into arguably the most successful regional integration experience in the post-colonial world, as even communist and post-communist Southeast Asian countries later joined the regional grouping. Astonishingly, ASEAN achieved this with a skeletal bureaucracy and barely any Copenhagen Criteria-type of incentive system for aspiring members. To put things into perspective, while the EU enjoyed a 30,000-strong civil service staff, which focused on crafting and implementation of integration policies, with a multi-billion-dollar budget (equal to 1% of EU budget), the ASEAN secretariat has had just over 200 staff operating on, until recent years, a meager $10 million budget. Even more impressively, ASEAN established a peace regime, or a de facto “security community,” where even the threat of use of force, never mind actual military mobilization, became unthinkable as an instrument of inter-state relations. This is most evident in the decision of Southeast Asian countries to either place their territorial disputes on the back burner (Philippines and Malaysia) or take them to international arbitration, as in the case of Indonesia-Malaysia maritime disputes (Pulau Ligitan and Pulau Sipadan) and Thailand-Cambodia border disputes, particularly over the Temple of
ASEAN chairmanship, and, four years later, complained, with genuine frustration, amid the South China Sea arbitration at The Hague: “It is very unjust for Cambodia, using Cambodia to counter China. They use us and curse us…this is not about laws, it is totally about politics.”

The situation has further deteriorated under the Rodrigo Duterte presidency, as the Philippines pivoted away from the U.S. in an unabashed embrace of China, especially within the ASEAN. During his chairmanship of the regional body, the anti-Western Filipino leader effectively toed China’s line in blunt language, telling external powers such as the U.S., Australia, and Japan, that the South China Sea disputes are “better left untouched.”

Even more, he has effectively ignored the Philippines’ own arbitration award victory against China, insisting that it’s Manila’s sovereign right not to assert its sovereign rights against Beijing. Under Duterte, ASEAN is turned into a Chinese shield against multilateral efforts to hold Beijing to account for its militarization of high seas and maritime disputes in Asia’s maritime heartland. The upshot is ASEAN peripherality on one of the most important strategic questions of the century. This is a strategic travesty of titanic proportions. As Singaporean diplomat Bilahari Kausikan memorably remarked, the South China Sea dispute is “where the parameters of U.S.-China competition and their interests are most clearly defined.” For Harvard University’s Graham Allison, the disputes represent a potential “Thucydides trap,” where the next global conflict could erupt.

ASEAN’s basic illusion, namely the wishful thought that unanimity-based decision-making, is a sufficient institutional arrangement for 21st century geopolitics has now been fully exposed. As the playwright Arthur Miller memorably observed, “An era can be considered over when its basic illusions have been exhausted.” Naturally, the way forward is for the regional body to reconfigure its institutional arrangements or adopt new decision-making modalities altogether. For instance, the effective and time-tested “ASEAN Minus X” formula, whereby unanimity isn’t a prerequisite for collective action, can be applied.
in politico-security matter.\textsuperscript{120} The appropriately majoritarian formula was immensely effective during trade negotiations within the ASEAN. No wonder then, as early as 1992, Southeast Asian nations signed the ASEAN Free-Trade Area Agreement (AFTA), with the stated goal of reducing tariff barriers between member states. And the region was successfully able to bring tariffs down to 0-5% within a relatively short period.\textsuperscript{121} By 2003, ASEAN leaders, under the Bali Concord II, decided to push the envelope and contemplate an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Having achieved its AFTA target ahead of time, the region presented a more ambitious plan in 2007, when members agreed to create an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The AEC is likely to take the form of an “Free trade agreement-plus” arrangement, which allows for greater intra-regional factor mobility (capital and labor), a more comprehensive zero-tariff policy on intra-regional trade, and further coordination on economic policies with regard to infrastructure, investments, services, financial markets.

Alternatively, the ASEAN could go a step further and adopt the European Union’s often-used weighted qualified majority voting modality, where geopolitical heft and population density of member-states are properly taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{122} As an interim measure, the ASEAN can move towards “minilateralism,” whereby likeminded core ASEAN members can cooperate on specific issues on a flexible basis in parallel to multilateral decision-making within the ASEAN. For instance, active Southeast Asian claimant states such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam can adopt their own Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea based on ASEAN norms of peaceful dispute-settlement and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This way, the ASEAN can transcend the COC negotiations with China, which have been bogged down by Beijing’s notorious delaying tactics, unreasonable demands, and outright belligerence.\textsuperscript{123} Moreover, the minilateral can bleed into the multilateral overtime; we have already observed what I call the “osmotic integration” process, whereby a minilateral Counter-Terrorism Convention was later adopted on a collective, multilateral level.\textsuperscript{124} Maybe ASEAN claimant states can apply the same logic on a South China Sea COC by elevating it to negotiations with China.

The ultimate goal is to avoid the hijacking of the ASEAN by external powers and weak links due to a suboptimal unanimity-based decision-making process on the collective level. ASEAN can also discuss other minilateral arrangements such as Indonesia President Joko Widodo’s call for joint patrols\textsuperscript{125} in disputed waters, or Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad’s call for demilitarization, multilateral, rather than bilateral, negotiations,\textsuperscript{126} and clarification of China’s precise claims in the disputed area.\textsuperscript{127} Down the road, ASEAN should also consider greater integration with proximate, likeminded powers, including associate membership arrangements with Australia and New Zealand in coming decades. Desperate times call for dizzyingly creative solutions.\textsuperscript{128}

**Competing Visions for the Indo-Pacific**

Despite signs of institutional decay, the ASEAN retains a major strength: its “convening power.”\textsuperscript{129} ASEAN meetings and mechanisms, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), remain as few multilateral platforms where all major Indo-Pacific powers and actors, including North Korea, can directly engage each other. ASEAN is the closest we’ve come to an omni-multilateral avenue for negotiating the future of the region. And despite all the “talk-shop” criticisms, the regional body provides an important alternative to direct conflict. As Winston Churchill reportedly said, “to jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war” (though apparently, he less quotably said “to jaw jaw is better than war”).\textsuperscript{120}

Moreover, ASEAN members, such as Singapore, have also become a global platform and hub in their own right. This is most palpable in the case of the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), among the most prestigious defense fora in the world, which annually brings together leading experts and defense officials from across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The 2018 edition of
the SLD, however, stood out for one key reason: It effectively declared the official beginning of the Indo-Pacific era. In his keynote speech, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi confidently marked the emergence of the South Asian nation as a global power — and pillar of peace and prosperity at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Presenting his country as a global “swing state,” Modi underscored New Delhi’s commitment to use its burgeoning naval and commercial power to preserve a “free and open” Indo-Pacific anchored by a Rules-Based Order (RBO). In a (rare) expression of fidelity to the Nehruvian tradition, the Indian leader touted his country’s deftly-managed and sophisticated strategic non-alignment, as evident in the “maturity and wisdom” of Sino-Indian relations, in the “extraordinary breadth” of U.S.-Indian relations, and the “special and privileged” strategic partnership with Russia.

At the heart of Modi’s message was the principle of “congagement” towards a rising China, whereby India, along with other likeminded powers Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN, should engage China where they should, but also draw the line when necessary. In his paradigm, the middle powers will usher in a post-American era, which is not dominated by Beijing, but instead anchored by shared values of freedom, peace, and prosperity. He envisioned a rules-based Indo-Pacific order, with the middle powers as its ultimate guarantors, without excluding either the U.S. or China from the equation.

Equally important, however, was the speech of then-U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, who forwarded a more muscular vision of a FOIP, where China’s revanchist ambitions must be checked lest we compromise peace and freedom in Asia. While China forges ahead with dominating continental Eurasia, thanks to its ambitious and neo-imperial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across semi-democratic and authoritarian regimes from Central Asia to Eastern Europe, Washington seems intent on checking Beijing’s march in the Eurasian rimlands and the high seas. According to this vision of the Indo-Pacific, China is a clear and present danger to freedom and prosperity. In both its National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) papers, the Trump administration made it clear that confronting a revisionist China is going to be a defining feature of 21st century geopolitics, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Mattis portrayed China as a direct menace, thanks to its “militarization of artificial features in the South China Sea” through the “deployment of anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, electronic jammers and, more recently, the landing of bomber aircraft at Woody Island [in the Paracels].” The former defense secretary underscored the indispensability of American power to regional stability, touting the importance of the U.S. Navy’s “freedom of navigation for all nations” across the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Months later, U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence made a historic speech at The Hudson Institute, which left no room for speculation as to the Trump administration’s commitment to a “constrainment” strategy against China. As the late political scientist Gerald Segal explained, a constrainment strategy “is intended to tell [China] that the outside world has interests that will be defended by means of incentives for good behavior, deterrence of bad behavior, and punishment when deterrence fails.” In his Washington Post Op-Ed before the end of the year, Pence warned revisionist powers such as China that the U.S. and its allies “will stand up to anyone who threatens our interests and our values.” Beginning with former Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Harry Harris, who is now the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, the Pentagon has stepped up its call on likeminded countries, especially the Quadrilateral (QUAD) grouping of Australia, India, U.S. and Japan, to jointly contribute to a FOIP, whether through economic measures, naval drills and freedom of navigation operations, or diplomatic coordination.

To this end, Washington also launched the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative to monitor, expose, and counter threats to basic freedoms in international waters and China’s “debt trap”
diplomacy, which threatens the sovereignty of smaller nations, from Sri Lanka and Maldives to Malaysia and Pakistan. In this sense, the Trump administration’s vision for the Indo-Pacific leaves less space for passive strategic engagement while emphasizing the need for proactive dissuasion and deterrence against Chinese revisionism. Predictably, China has dismissed the whole Indo-Pacific discourse as a hostile rhetoric and poor cover for new containment designs. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi derisively characterized it as an “attention-grabbing idea,” which will “dissipate like ocean foam.” The question now is: What about ASEAN?

Both the Modi and Trump administrations’ visions of the Indo-Pacific, however, have not been fully welcomed by ASEAN and its core members. There is a lingering sense among Southeast Asian countries that the whole Indo-Pacific discourse is a thinly-veiled cover for a containment strategy by the QUAD against China and, even more crucially, at the expense of ASEAN centrality. In short, the implicit message is: “Step aside [little] guys, let the big boys take care of the [China] problem!”

At the most fundamental level, there is simply confusion and perplexity vis-à-vis the whole Indo-Pacific concept, as Hoang Thi Ha of the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies explains, “there is no common understanding or authoritative definition of the term even among its proponents.” Indonesia, ASEAN’s undeclared leader and the cradle of the global Non-Aligned Movement, has scrambled to respond. In recent years, it has pushed for an alternative ASEAN-centered conception of the Indo-Pacific. The Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, for instance, unveiled a more inclusive version of the Indo-Pacific, which promotes an “open, transparent, and inclusive” order based on “the habit of dialogue, promoting cooperation and friendship, and upholding international law.” Her ideas build on earlier efforts by former Indonesia diplomatic chief Marty Natalegawa, who tirelessly advocated for AC in shaping the pan-regional security architecture. From the Indonesian, and more broadly ASEAN, standpoint, China is a critical element in the regional security architecture; thus, it has to be engaged largely through ASEAN mechanisms, rather than seen primarily through the prism of Cold War rivalry and strategic threat. ASEAN wants to focus more on money (trade deals with China) than missiles (in the South China Sea). The upshot of Indonesia’s effort was the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in June 2019, where the regional members adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

At its core, the AOIP is a reiteration of AC, where ASEAN will “continue to maintain its central role in the evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions” and remain an “an honest broker within the strategic environment of competing interests,” promoting an “open,” “transparent,” “inclusive,” “rules-based” order built on “respect for international law.” It calls on ASEAN, or rather other countries which are doubtful of the regional body’s relevance, to “lead the shaping of their economic and security architecture and ensure that such dynamics will continue to bring about peace, security, stability and prosperity for the peoples in the Southeast Asia as well as in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific.” It reiterates the need for “avoiding the deepening of mistrust, miscalculation, and patterns of behavior based on a zero-sum game.”

At times, the AOIP looks both defensive and, in less charitable terms, a vacuous attempt at demanding centrality rather than demonstrating it. Moving forward, ASEAN should simultaneously contemplate institutional innovations and reforms, which will allow it to effectively draw the line vis-à-vis Chinese expansionism; it also should welcome closer strategic cooperation with middle powers of Japan, Australia and India, which aid capacity-building in ASEAN and have maintained robust communication channels with Beijing. This is the best way for smaller nations to preserve their strategic autonomy in the age of Chinese revisionism. Preserving freedom and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific will ultimately have to be a collective effort, with ASEAN as a proactive contributor.
Australia’s View of the Free & Open Indo-Pacific
by John Lee

In a series of speeches from March 2017 onward, leading up to the release of the Foreign Policy White Paper (FPWP) in November 2017, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop articulated key aspects of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which was subsequently endorsed by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in his 2017 Shangri La Dialogue address three months later, and by counterparts in the U.S. and Japan. Bishop stated in her March 2017 Fullerton Lecture in Singapore:

It is a fact of life that we compete or we fall behind. It is how nations choose to compete that really matters….There has been a concerted international effort to ensure that more powerful nations do not bully their neighbours. History tells us then when “Might Makes Right” prevails, it sets humanity on a dark path towards conflict in our international relations.

When the strong impose their will on the weaker state, it invariably leads to the latter’s resentment of unfair agreements imposed on them. The better alternative is the existing rules-based order which has served the region remarkably well… The evidence is overwhelming that countries buying into the system of rules have fared much better than those which have not.

Nevertheless, the regional order is under strain as nations occasionally use their military or economic weight to push the envelope, while accusing the rules-based order of being a relic from a different era.

In making the case for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Bishop further argues:

One reason why the rules-based order underwrites stability in power and wealth is that such an order does not privilege previous winners nor constrain opportunity for newcomers. Its basic principle is the rule of law where governments, firms, and individuals enjoy rights and fulfill obligations regardless of wealth or power. In a world of [increasing competition], it becomes more important that countries abide by the rules rather than break them.

The classic reiteration of the liberal international worldview is not new ground for the Tony Abbott and Turnbull governments. Even so, there are several noteworthy and novel aspects to the contemporary Free and Open Indo-Pacific being championed and pursued under the Trump/Abe/Turnbull governments.

From “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific”

Japan has transitioned from “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific” terminology since the early years of Abe’s second term in office in 2012, onward. In Australia’s 2016 Defence White Paper, the Indo-Pacific terminology was used to describe the country’s primary areas of responsibility and interest from a defense acquisition, planning, and force posture point of view — terminology reaffirmed in the FPWP.

There are several reasons why Australia decided to focus on the Indo-Pacific. The most obvious is to bring India into the strategic equation. The Australian support for the revival of the Quad meetings between officials from the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India should be understood in this light.

Moreover, China has moved toward a “Two-Ocean” strategy, consisting of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Indian Ocean contains what China calls its “far-seas operations,” a concept that
Balance of Power and the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”

The U.S.-centric hub-and-spokes system, which has its roots in the early days of the Cold War, remains the backbone of the security architecture in the region. In the absence of a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation-style collective security architecture, the U.S. has been far more successful in forging robust alliances with Northeast Asian powers (Japan and South Korea) than with Southeast Asian states, which remain significantly smaller military players than Japan or South Korea.

The U.S. is committed to Japan and South Korea, and the alliances’ strategic planning and military interactions are extensive, formalised and entrenched. However, the U.S.’s strategic and military interactions with Southeast Asian allies (the Philippines and Thailand) and security partners (Singapore and Malaysia) are less formalized or extensive.

In recent times, U.S. alliances with Japan and Australia have become more important from the perspective of regional stability in the period since the end of the Cold War and in the contemporary era of China’s rise (with the U.S.-South Korea alliance having major relevance for affairs in the Korean Peninsula rather than the broader region). This stems from the fact that the Japanese and Australian militaries (especially their navies) are among the most formidable in the region, have a high degree of inter-operability with the American Seventh Fleet, with the inter-operability of the Japanese and Australian fleets improving rapidly, and the high degree of trust the Americans place in the Japanese and Australians when it comes to sharing strategic intelligence and information.

Although Washington did not necessarily foresee the more proactive strategic posture of the Shinzo Abe era, a greater strategic role for Japan is welcomed and greatly encouraged. While there is constant public debate within Australia with respect to whether it should adopt a more independent foreign policy, governments of both Coalition and Labor Parties...
continue to view the alliance with the U.S. as the bedrock of Australian and regional security and stability — a policy position clearly articulated in the 2000, 2009, 2013, and 2016 Defence White Papers.

Over the past decade, the U.S. has urged and welcomed the development of closer strategic, defense, and intelligence cooperation between Japan and Australia. It is now commonplace for Australia to characterise Japan as our closest and most mature partner from the region. In terms of formal compacts, key agreements include the 2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which provides for cooperation on issues such as maritime and aviation security and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the Acquisition and Cross Services Agreement on defence logistics cooperation, which entered into force in 2013, and an Information Security Agreement on sharing intelligence and other classified information, which entered into force in 2017.

Both countries are working to conclude a “Reciprocal Access Agreement” which would specify terms for allowing the military forces of these countries to conduct joint operations and exercises. The agreement is expected to be completed over the next year or so and Australia would join the U.S. as the only other country with whom Japan has signed such an agreement in the post-war period.

The closer strategic, military, and intelligence cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and Australia is explicitly framed in the context of advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The deepening cooperation between these three countries and its connection to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept can be placed in the following contexts.

In the post-war period, General MacArthur’s call to “preserve in peace what we won in war” was achieved through a combination of military alliances and security relationships, economic support for post-war economies, and increasing economic integration with regional countries, soft multilateral institutions to support the American role and presence in the region, and U.S. support for economic and political liberalisation.

During the decades after the Second World War, “winning the peace” largely meant checking the spread of communism in East Asia. The U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) makes clear that while there is no longer a communist threat, the U.S. is in another era of competition:

The United States will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world. China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.

Furthermore, and with respect specifically to the Indo-Pacific, the NSS argues:

A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific... Although the United States seeks to continue to cooperate with China, China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda...

This is recognition that the challenge China poses is vastly different from that posed by the Soviet Union. While the NSS acknowledges “The U.S. interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific extends back to the earliest days of our republic,” the U.S. is facing a Chinese authoritarian competitor from within the liberal order. It is a competitor that has “exploited the international institutions we helped build” and is selectively circumventing, ignoring, or else challenging the rules-based order and many of its core principles, even as it has benefitted as a participant and free-rider within it.
There is little doubt Japan and Australia agree with this assessment even if Tokyo and Canberra have not expressed such concerns about China and the latter's challenge to the rules-based order in the same stark terms. In official documents and pronouncements, Australia comes closest.

In her Fullerton Lecture in March 2017, Australian Foreign Minister Bishop made the following comments:

"The domestic political system and values of the United States reflect the liberal rules-based order that we seek to preserve and defend."

While non-democracies can thrive when participating in the present system, an essential pillar of our preferred order is democratic community. Democratic habits of negotiating and compromise are essential to countries resolving their disagreements according to international law and rules.

In the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper (FPWP), which was launched eight months later, the following passage justifiably generated much interest:

"To support a balance in the Indo-Pacific favourable to our interests and promote an open, inclusive and rules-based region, Australia will also work more closely with the region's democracies, bilaterally and in small groupings. In addition to the United States, our relations with Japan, Indonesia, India and the republic of Korea are central to this agenda."

This brings us to a major rationale for Australia's joining the U.S. and Japan in promoting a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" — it is a response to the tendency of powerful authoritarian states to challenge, circumvent, or ignore aspects of the current order when it is convenient for them to do so. In the Indo-Pacific region, China and to a lesser extent Russia are the two authoritarian powers that have been named by the U.S. and are unnamed by Japan and Australia.

There are three aspects to creating a balance of power favorable to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific that are worth noting — and which critics of the concept often ignore or misunderstand.

First, a favorable balance of power is conceptually and operationally different to containment, as was the case in the first few decades after the end of the Second World War.

Containment seeks to restrict the growth in the absolute power and influence of the adversary or competitor. In contradistinction, a favorable balance of power supporting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific seeks to combine the weight of those adhering to the liberal, rules-based order to ensure that there are stable and enduring incentives for all nations to play by the rules and disincentives for nations to break them. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, the three democratic countries are not seeking to contain Chinese power. They are seeking to ensure sufficient collective power and will to ensure that growing Chinese power is not used to challenge, circumvent, or ignore, the rules-based order. This is reaffirmed in the NSS. Ultimately, the objective is to encourage China and other powers to champion the same rules and principles.

Second, the focus on working with other powerful liberal democracies is significant. It represents a stronger collective reaffirmation of the importance of the liberal characteristics of the current regional rules-based order and a refocusing on "democratic community."

This was spelled out by Foreign Minister Bishop:

"History shows democracy and democratic institutions are essential for nations if they are to reach their economic potential."
The only countries in the world who have escaped the middle-income trap to become high-income and advanced economies are democracies — with the exception of a small number of oil-rich Middle Eastern states.

Liberal-democratic institutions such as rule-of-law, rather than rule by executive privilege, independent and competent courts, protection of property and intellectual property rights from state appropriation or theft, and limitations on the role of the state in commercial and social affairs remain the prerequisites for stable and prosperous societies, as they do for the creation of a vibrant and innovative private sector.

Note that these sentiments do not entail a new era of aggressive democracy promotion by the U.S. and its two allies. It is more a reassertion of the importance of strengthening liberal institutions, emphasising the separation of powers, limits on executive privilege and the rule of law. The three governments are more interested in institutions and practices of governments that encourage habits of compromise, negotiation and transparency than they are in the number of parties contesting domestic elections.

“Democratic community” should not be viewed with the level of discomfort that is often the case in the region. It is worth noting that the ASEAN Charter itself includes aspirations to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This leads to a further point about the economic aspects of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

The concept accepts the reality of economic competition and competition between nations carried out in the economic realm. However, economic and other forms of competition should be regulated.

The regulation of such competition takes several forms. One aspect is to promote greater separation between economic and political agency and objectives. As Bishop argues in an address in October 2016, the power and force-projection capabilities of the American Pacific Fleet throughout the Indo-Pacific is not leveraged to coerce or have any bearing on the operation of economic activity and competition in the region. If Exxon Mobile loses out to a foreign petroleum company in a legitimate economic transaction, the liberal rules-based order means the United States cannot use its military or economic power to intervene. Powerful countries can legitimately use their political or military power to protect their citizens abroad. However, they cannot threaten or force foreign governments and other entities to achieve some desired economic result.

Operationalizing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept delivers a moral and strategic reason and rationale for greater cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and Australia. As with any framework involving multiple countries, misalignment and inconsistency of policies make operationalizing that framework a challenge.

While there seems to be little alignment of economic and trade policies, the operationalizing of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific is more promising in other areas.

Trilateral defense cooperation between the three countries is based on ever closer inter-operability of air, maritime and cyber capabilities, improvements in strategic intelligence and information sharing, and establishing the future foundations for joint exercises between Japanese and Australian forces, which would easily evolve into trilateral exercises with the addition of the U.S.
One particularly important area for cooperation is submarine and anti-submarine warfare, given collective concern these three countries have about Chinese underwater activities in the Western and South Pacific Ocean. Indeed, the three countries have plans for the joint development of amphibious capabilities. Another is the acquisition of F-35s by Japan and Australia, which is a significant step in an integrated, networked air capability for the three countries. More broadly, greater cooperation in the maritime, air, underwater and cyber domains between the three countries is seen by all three countries as essential to counter almost every aspect of the potential military threat posed by the rapid modernization of the People’s Liberation Army.

Despite the mixed messages and misalignment on economic and trade policy, there seems to be agreement on countering China’s use of economic incentives and largesse to reshape the rules of interstate commerce in the region.

The reluctance of the U.S., Japan, and Australia to sign on to the BRI is a case in point. There is strong suspicion within the three countries that the BRI is largely motivated by China’s desire to bind BRI economies to terms that are beneficial to Beijing and less so for other countries — at the expense of the economic interest and regional influence of the U.S. and its allies.

Canberra has consistently expressed concerns about countries falling into debt traps and subsequently having their national interests compromised and sovereignty undermined by creditor countries (i.e., China) — a situation that has played out in Sri Lanka, Laos, and Cambodia and potentially in other countries.

Unlike the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has a set of governance principles broadly consistent with those of multilateral institutions like the World Bank, the BRI is a set of bilateral arrangements between China and individual countries. While China has just over one quarter of the votes in the AIIB, terms of each BRI agreement is negotiated between China and another country, with Beijing generally enjoying overwhelming leverage during these negotiations.

The point is that the BRI is seen to undercut the Free and Open Indo-Pacific in a number of ways: it weakens the capacity of indebted countries to exist as sovereign nations when these overbearing debts are called in; it lowers common standards for economic governance and transparency through the conclusion of opaque agreements; it promotes investment for political rather than commercial purposes, thereby conflating commercial and political agency in the region; and it promotes a closed economic and supply chain system that prioritizes the long-term interests of China over other countries.

India-U.S. Relations in the Shadow of the Indo-Pacific

by Aparna Pande

Since the end of the Second World War, American grand strategy for Asia and the Pacific has centered on creating an Asian diplomatic and security architecture that ensures stability and security in the region. American preeminence has ensured a rules-based order, which opposes notions of ideological dominance (such as the rise of communism) or arbitrary assertions of territorial claims and disputes (such as those relating to the status of Taiwan). The post-World War II Asian security structure has rested on American economic and military might, combined with a network of partners and allies across the region.

The economic and military rise of China over the last two decades poses a challenge to American pre-eminence. China is gradually creating a new Asian order with Chinese primacy at its heart. U.S. strategy needs to be one of renewed engagement with its partners and allies across the region — India, Japan and South East Asia — to construct a configuration that will be
The end of the Cold War, along with economic liberalization within India and a changing global situation, has allowed New Delhi to start rebuilding relations with countries in Asia, especially in the Indo-Pacific. In recent years India’s, economic growth and military modernization have led to rising ambitions in international politics as well as a new set of more prominent security concerns for New Delhi, namely China’s expansion into India’s backyard.

India’s antagonistic relationship with China — its northern neighbor and rival for leadership in Asia — dates back decades. However, it is the not-so-peaceful rise of China that lies at the core of today’s situation. After building its economic and military potential over many decades, China has begun encroaching on a region that India has always considered its own sphere of influence: South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

New Delhi has long sought to compartmentalize its disputes with all its neighbors, hoping that economic ties and people-to-people relations would over time build trust that would help resolve potential border disputes. Since the 1990s, India and China have sought to build relationships and economic partnerships in order to keep the border issue on the backburner. Today, China is one of India’s top economic partners, and the two countries collaborate globally on issues such as climate change and in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

While it has worked with some of its immediate, smaller South Asian neighbors, this policy will not necessarily continue to work with China. China used the last four decades of peace with India to create its economic miracle and modernize its military. However, India’s economy has not grown consistently at double digits (which is critical), and its military modernization is decades behind what it should be.

India and the Chinese Challenge
Since 1989, China’s annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate has averaged almost 10 percent. Over the same period,
India’s growth rate averaged just half that (5.5 percent during the 1990s and early 2000s and around 7 percent over the last decade). China is an $11 trillion economy while India is an $2.3 trillion economy. In 2018, China’s military budget of $175 billion is significantly larger than India’s military budget of $45 billion.\textsuperscript{187}

India’s immediate neighborhood of South Asia has always been India’s first line of defense, but for decades, India’s policy was simply to presume that this was its sphere of influence and that India’s neighbors would accept that ‘Delhi knows best.’ The growing Chinese presence, however, has made Indian leaders aware that managing a sphere of influence is not only a function of telling others what to do but being able to expend resources that deny space to competitors.

China is aware that New Delhi’s smaller South Asian neighbors bear a latent resentment against Indian predominance in the region — a function of the circumstances from which several countries emerged from a unified India after colonial rule. Thus, Beijing has always used the India-card in its relations with these countries. India, on the other hand, has been impeded by its inability to allocate resources comparable to those of China in India’s immediate neighborhood.

While the majority of India’s developmental assistance (over 85 percent) is provided to its immediate neighbors in South Asia, India has never expended enough to compete with China’s assistance programs.\textsuperscript{188} Further, India’s ability to deliver projects on time has been hurt by complacency, bureaucratic negligence, and political indifference.

China’s deep strategic and economic relationship with Pakistan is exemplified in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (or CPEC). China’s assistance to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal are all China’s attempts to create friction between India and Bhutan. Finally, Chinese actions in the Maldives are seen by India as impinging on India’s sovereignty and security.

Indian leaders have resented the presence of any external power in the region unless that power accepted Indian predominance. Beijing’s refusal to do so has repeatedly irked New Delhi.

China’s rise has forced New Delhi to take a more active stance in containing its rival. Indian analysts have long viewed China’s policy as one of strategic encirclement, which is often called the string-of-pearls theory. It is designed to give the Peoples Liberation Army an advantage in a potential conflict and more leverage in negotiations over disputes.

New Delhi is wary of Chinese bases and ports especially in the Indian Ocean from Hambantota in Sri Lanka, to Gwadar and Jiwani in Pakistan on the Persian Gulf, as well as potential bases in the Maldives and in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. New Delhi views the One Belt, One Road or the Belt and Road Initiative as a continuation of China’s planned encirclement of India.

In Pakistan alone, China has financed over $62 billion of development projects.\textsuperscript{189} Through a combination of readily available low-interest loans, gifts to those in power, as well as generous clearance of unpaid debts, Beijing has created a strategic network across large parts of Asia, and even Africa and Latin America. In some cases, the huge quantity of lending seems designed to lure nations into a debt trap, leaving them beholden to China for years to come.

Over the last two decades, China has also strengthened its activities in the Indian Ocean by building military bases, securing access to ports and islands, and even sending its submarines into a region that India sees as Indian domain. Since 2012, Chinese submarines have been sighted, on an average, four times every three months in the Indian Ocean region, and in 2016 a Chinese submarine called at the Pakistani port of Karachi, just off India’s coast.\textsuperscript{190}

India may have been slow initially to respond to Chinese presence, but it is finally deploying its capabilities and resources.
In early May 2018, for the first time since the Second World War, India has decided to station fighter planes in the Andaman-Nicobar Islands with the aim of strengthening India's hold over the crucial Malaccia, Sunda, and Lumbok Straits, the Straits of Ombai Weter, and the eastern Indian Ocean region.

For some years, New Delhi had contemplated leveraging these strategically located island chains as its line of defense against China. India has also identified locations in Car Nicobar and Campbell Bay as bases for fighter planes. The Indian Navy has positioned warships in the region and also built two floating docks to repair and refurbish warships. New Delhi also plans to bestow tri-service command on the commander-in-chief of Andaman and Nicobar Command (CINCAN) so that he can exercise direct control over all assets and men, including those of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Army.

India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Indo-Pacific

On the eve of India's Republic Day in January 2018 — when India hosted the leaders of all ten ASEAN states for the first time — Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in an opinion-editorial that, "Indians have always looked East to see the nurturing sunrise and the light of opportunities. Now, as before, the East, or the Indo-Pacific region, will be indispensable to India's future and our common destiny."191

India’s historical and civilizational ties with South East Asia date back centuries reflected in long-standing trade ties, the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent, and an ancient Indian empire that extended its presence to South East Asia (the Chola Empire). However, it is only from the 1990s that India adopted its ‘Look East’ policy, aimed at building closer economic ties with the region, and only in the last decade has India added a security dimension to this relationship.

Reflective of this ‘Act East’ policy, India’s trade with the region stands at $ 76 billion, with India being a member of the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free-trade agreement.192 India has also deepened partnerships with South East Asian countries aimed at bolstering their defense capabilities and making them strategically useful partners.

In 2015, India and Singapore signed defense cooperation and strategic partnership agreements. The Indian armed forces helped build the capacity of their Vietnamese counterparts, and in February 2017, the two sides held discussions on the sale of Surface-to-Air Akash and supersonic Brahmos missiles. New Delhi has provided over $500 million in credit to Vietnam to modernize their armed forces, and since 2016, India has trained Vietnamese navy submariners at its naval training school.193

The Malacca straits are critical for India, as they are for China, with almost 40 percent of India’s trade passing through these straits. In mid-May 2018, Indonesia and India signed an agreement whereby Indonesia gives India access to the strategically located island of Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra and less than 300 miles from the Malacca Straits.194 India will invest in the dual-use port and economic zone of Sabang, as well as build a hospital. Indian naval ships will also visit the port, which is deep enough for submarines to travel through.

New Delhi has also boosted relations with the Pacific islands, again a region with which India shares civilizational ties and a large Indian diaspora. Since 2014, the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation has convened annually, either in India or in the region itself, and New Delhi has offered assistance, including annual grant-in-aid to each of the 14 Pacific countries, in amounts ranging from $125,000 to $200,000. India has also set up a fund for adapting to climate change, building the capacity of coastal surveillance systems, and technical training and educational fellowships.195

Across the Indian Ocean, India has deepened relations with island nations like Seychelles, Maldives, and Mauritius, as well as with strategically located countries like Oman and the United
East Asia, primarily with countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. India will help with the development of ports, Japan with building industrial parks, and the U.S. will focus on building power plants.¹⁹⁸

India is also deepening its relationship with the United States. For decades the United States was the predominant maritime power in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions. The U.S. established a network of alliances with countries in the region, built the economies and defense establishments of a number of these countries, and ensured it had partners and bases to secure freedom-of-navigation and protect national security interests.

The United States and India

The rise of China means that Washington needs regional powers to buttress its own strength more than it did in the past. As a populous, democratic, market economy, India’s size and values make it a natural partner for the United States.

India’s rapid economic growth, around seven percent per year for the last few years, makes it a contender for the world’s fastest expanding economy.²⁰⁰ The average income in India has nearly doubled in the past ten years, and economic modernization promises to bring more jobs and advanced industry.

From being “estranged” democracies during the Cold War, India and the U.S. today are, in the words of former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the “two bookends of stability — on either side of the globe — standing for greater security and prosperity for our citizens and people around the world.”²⁰¹
This was, however, not always the case. Despite American support for Indian independence, and a common appreciation for democracy between the two nations, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, opted for nonalignment. While the United States provided economic and developmental aid to India, New Delhi perceived American support to Pakistan as detrimental to Indian interests.

India’s close relations with the Soviet Union was another factor that kept New Delhi and Washington estranged. Right from independence, India's, leaders sought to build domestic capabilities, whether economic, military or even educational. During the Cold War, India welcomed aid from both blocs. The United States’ developmental aid in the form of PL-480 loans and assistance in establishing India's higher-education institutions, was deeply appreciated.

However, American companies were not keen on manufacturing in India, in either the economic or military arena. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was more willing to help set up coal and steel mills and provide assistance to India’s infant domestic military-manufacturing-complex.

Further, New Delhi perceived Moscow as an ally in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), especially when it came to issues relating to Pakistan and Kashmir. The United States, on the contrary, was viewed as being more sympathetic to Pakistan.

The U.S. has gone from being an offshore balancer in South Asia during the Cold War and enabling Pakistan’s desire for parity with India, to championing a serious strategic partnership with India in the last two decades. Washington has also acknowledged India as the dominant regional power, and as an emerging global power.

From having almost no military relations during the Cold War to India becoming a “Major Defense Partner” of the United States, the two countries have come a long way. The designation of “Major Defense Partner” allows India to purchase advanced and sensitive technologies on par with many of America’s closest allies and partners. At $20 billion in bilateral trade in 2000, the figure now stands at $115 billion in 2018.222

When the United States looks to Asia, it no longer sees the peaceful rise of China; instead it sees an economic and military rival that seeks to undermine the international liberal order that the United States helped establish after the World War II. Washington now seeks like-minded, democratic, free-market societies as allies and partners in upholding this rules-based order.

The U.S. views India as a counterweight to a rising China. As the world’s largest democracy with a multicultural society and expanding military heft, New Delhi has the potential to balance China’s expansion westward. As China’s navy moves into the Indian Ocean and builds a blue-water fleet, the United States sees India as a valuable partner in balancing China at sea.

Going Forward

India and the United States agree on the need for an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and upholding a rule-based liberal international order. The January 2015 “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” spoke of how the two countries seek “a closer partnership” to promote “peace, prosperity and stability” by boosting regional economic integration, connectivity, and economic development.223

India’s growing economic and security relationships and interest in the Indo-Pacific region are aligned with its deepening partnership with the United States. Two years after signing the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision of 2015, India joined the Quad (a strategic grouping of the United States, India, Japan and Australia), and there is hope of making the grouping something more than an annual talk-shop. In February 2018, during French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to India,
New Delhi and Paris signed an agreement whereby the two countries would open their bases to warships from each other’s navies.

Despite being “estranged” democracies during the Cold War, today India and the U.S. share, in the words of former Secretary of State Tillerson, a “growing strategic convergence.” Though the two had almost no military relations during the Cold War, India is now a Major Defense Partner of the United States. The United States also increasingly views India as a potential regional security provider and seeks to build India’s security capacity through commercial and defense cooperation.

Even though the India-U.S. relationship is much deeper and multi-dimensional today than it has ever been, there is still a gap in expectations on both sides, and the two countries are still in the process of adjusting and adapting.

Despite closer relations with the United States, India is still reluctant to join any formal alliance structure. India is practically America’s ally but is still reluctant to formalize that alliance. India is hesitant to cede power to a collective security mechanism, and so is reticent to join anything resembling a formal military alliance.

India has consistently sought freedom from external pressures. While every country seeks this kind of autonomy, for India it has been a matter of principle. The colonial experience left an indelible mark on India’s collective identity. More than seven decades after Independence, seeking freedom from outside influence is as much at the core of India’s external relations as it was when India was a colony. During the Cold War, the policy was referred to as nonalignment, and now it is called strategic autonomy.

Reflecting its pursuit of autonomy and maximum options in foreign relation, India is a member of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa economic association (BRICS), the trilateral Russia, India, and China grouping (RIC), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in which China is the main investor. At the same time, India is against the Belt and Road Initiative, supports Japan’s Quality Infrastructure Initiative, is a member of the Quad, and views the United States as a natural ally.

India is pursuing more global engagement while also retaining strategic autonomy. India seeks to be a part of multilateral organizations but prefers bilateral relationships. So, it would prefer bilateral relationships with the U.S. and other allies and is not in favor of arrangements like the Quad becoming formal military alliances.

Indians believe in the promise of India as an Asian power and future great power. They seek strong economic growth not only to become China’s rival but also for socio-economic development at home. India’s long drawn-out military modernization is not only directed towards China, but also to ensure the territorial integrity of India from both domestic and external threats.

India wants recognition of its preeminence in the Indian Ocean region and in South Asia but is reticent to openly confront China. New Delhi understands the threat China poses to India’s land and sea borders, but there is also a recognition of the limitations of its economic and military capabilities. Further, India has a Hobbesian outlook, believing it must be able to counter China on its own and distrusting promises that any country would come to its assistance.

At the end of the day India’s concerns about threats in its immediate neighborhood remain paramount to the perceptions of India’s leaders and strategists. For India, South Asia is more important than the South China Sea; thus, differences between Washington and New Delhi may arise from concerns about American support with respect to Pakistan and Afghanistan.
Policy Recommendations

India is different from traditional American allies, whether in Europe, Latin America or Asia for whom the United States is the key security provider. India would never want that kind of a relationship. Instead, India seeks a relationship in which Washington does for India what the United States did for China decades ago, namely help build China’s economic, technological, and military might with the hope that China would become a more responsible global player and maybe even a free-market democracy.

If the U.S. wants India to play a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi seeks more economic investment, technological expertise, and the sale and manufacture of state-of-the-art defense equipment.

U.S. policy toward India must include the following considerations:

1. The U.S. must recognize that India's size and history makes it different from other, smaller American allies in Asia.

2. Instead of subjecting the India-U.S. relationship to a one-size-fits-all policy towards allies, the United States should consider a special partnership with India, which exempts India from export control regulations governing military sales.

3. U.S. trade policies should also be adjusted to enable the rise of India as a strategic competitor to China.

4. Attempts to balance ties between India and other South Asian states, notably Pakistan, should be abandoned to enhance India’s capacity to confront China.

Any short-term loss in dollars and cents or other, less significant nominal alliances, would be offset by the immense benefit to the United States of having a major, one-billion-strong nation standing by its side to ensure that China and its closed system do not emerge dominant in the Asia-Pacific for years to come.

China’s Growing Influence in the Indian Ocean: Implications for Sri Lanka and its Regional Allies

by Asanga Abeyagoonasekera

The Indian Ocean has become a friction point for tension between the United States, China, and India. Such tension intensifies as each state takes measures to counter the others and project dominance within the region. Because of its central location, Sri Lanka often experiences the ripple effect of these regional power dynamics. Currently, Sri Lanka feels the impact of China’s growth, particularly as a result of its Belt and Road Initiative. The effects are so significant that one cannot examine Sri Lanka’s strained relationship with India without considering it in the context of China’s rise.

Geostrategic Significance of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s location is a major reason for its geopolitical significance. Over the years, many Sri Lankan governments have promoted Sri Lanka as a maritime hub, an identity that extends back to ancient times. Even in the earliest maps, cartographers like Ptolemy and Henricus Martelleus drew Sri Lanka in oversized proportion. Such representation of the island points toward its rich civilization and strong trade relationships with the rest of the world. Sri Lanka’s foreign diplomatic relations date back many centuries, and recorded history speaks of emissaries between Sri Lanka and Rome in the 1st century. According to historian Pliny, there were four members from Sri Lanka who visited the Court of Emperor Claudius Caesar circa 50 AD.

An ancient map by Sir Halford Mackinder depicts two islands located in the outer rim of the mainland: the United Kingdom in the Atlantic and Japan in the Pacific, since each performs a pivotal role in its respective region. Sri Lanka has a similar position as an island on the outer rim of Indian subcontinent and facing the Indian Ocean. Hence, Sri Lanka could one day play a role in the India Ocean similar to that of the United Kingdom and Japan.
Currently, scholars and leaders around the world are discussing Sri Lanka’s geopolitical significance. In his book Monsoon, Robert Kaplan recognizes that Sri Lanka is “part of the new maritime geography, and that makes it very important.” Furthermore, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, under the leadership of John Kerry, released a report in 2009 that highlighted the strategic importance of Sri Lanka and urged the U.S. government to prevent it from drifting into the Chinese sphere of influence. Admiral Harry Harris, during his tenure commanding U.S. Pacific Command from 2015-2018, remarked that “the Indian Ocean matters to the U.S., Sri Lanka matters to the U.S., and the U.S. matters to Sri Lanka.” According to Harsh V. Pant, China is rapidly catching up, and its ties with Sri Lanka are aimed at expanding its profile in this crucial part of the world. He observes that Indian policy-makers should realize, that if they are more proactive, they might lose the game for good. Historically, there have been rich cultural and socio-political ties between Sri Lanka and India. In particular, southern India has tremendous influence in the northern regions of Sri Lanka, and this is known as “Cauvery Delta Influence.” However, as Sri Lanka’s erudite, former foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar rightly observed, India-Sri Lanka relations are getting lost in the mist of time. Despite once having such strong ties, the relationship between Sri Lanka and India has been strained over the past thirty years.

China’s Sphere of Influence and Sino-Lankan Relationships

Recently, Sri Lanka has been caught in three overlapping spheres of influence, namely that of India, its closest neighbor; China, its largest trading partner; and the United States of America. Thus, Sri Lanka has very much felt the effects of the increasing tensions in this region. In this context, it is necessary to understand the strategic position of Sri Lanka in order to assess the long-term consequences of such regional tension. Foresight analysis is essential with this regard.

China’s Belt and Road Initiative, which is often compared to the “Marshall Plan,” has identified six economic corridors across the globe. These economic corridors share a stark similarity with Mackinder’s map and is a modern-day depiction of China’s projection of power. This Belt and Road Initiative promises to boost the economies of the countries involved, and Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to support it. Under this initiative the Chinese government is assisting countries through loans, and through this support, Sri Lanka was able to build many infrastructure projects. Chinese aid to Sri Lankan infrastructure projects is particularly evident Colombo, the country’s commercial hub. Hambantota Port, Mattala International Airport, Colombo Port City, and the Lotus Tower are a few of such projects initiated by China. Many analysts have warned Sri Lanka that these loans are predatory, and that China has created a debt trap for the island. Subhashini Abeysinghe, the research director of Verite Research, countered this notion, stating that Sri Lanka has more loans with other institutions, including IMF sovereign bonds, that exceed Chinese loans. Comparatively, nations like Pakistan have borrowed five times more than Sri Lanka. Thus, claims that China has Sri Lanka in a debt trap are overstated. Sri Lanka will continue to borrow from China, and the bilateral relationship will continue to grow stronger in the near future. However, this does not mean Sri Lanka should not negotiate better terms for all commercial loans; nor should Sri Lanka rush into certain projects without public consultation and debate. In fact, the 99-year lease of Hambantota Port was hurriedly signed on a Sunday, despite President Sirisena’s advice to discuss the plan further in Parliament. The President’s coalition ignored him, and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe rushed to sign the agreement without much debate.

Indo-Lanka Relationship vs. the Chinese Sphere of Influence

Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen observed that spaciousness, freedom-of-movement, and internal cohesion are three main attributes of a “great power.” In the recent past, China has essentially acquired the attributes mentioned above, which has significantly affected the Indo-Lanka relationship.
With respect to Sri Lanka, China’s growing power has become somewhat problematic for India. For an instance, China has expanded its international trade and has become the largest trading partner of Sri Lanka, overtaking India in the last year. Further, the position of Mattala International Airport, which received financial assistance from the Chinese government, is particularly important. India has since come forward to take over the airport’s operation. Some strategists opine that India was politically motivated to counter the growing Chinese influence in the island. Similar controversy has arisen regarding the antenna installed at the top of Lotus Tower, which is suspected have the purpose of intercepting Indian communications. Further, Hambantota Port has been on center-stage because it is situated at the southern tip of Sri Lanka; its position is just a few nautical miles from the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Some experts view this as a Chinese strategy to establish a military presence in the Indian Ocean; both China and Sri Lanka deny this, stating that the port project is purely for economic and trade purposes. However, none of these assertions have been substantiated by evidence.

Despite China’s efforts to supplant India’s influence in Sri Lanka, India’s foreign policy decisions have been impactful. According to Ambassador Shivshankar Menon’s latest book, Choices: Inside the Making of India’s Foreign Policy, India made “minimax” foreign policy decisions at the last stage of Sri Lanka’s protracted civil war in 2009.\(^{21}\) The author defines minimax decisions as those aimed at minimizing the harm and maximizing the gain. Though the success of those decisions was not immediately apparent, Ambassador Menon asserts that no matter what one might think of its internal politics, Sri Lanka is a better place today without the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (a separatist group known as LTTE) and the civil war. And India contributed to making that outcome possible.

However, Ambassador Menon also explains the limitations of India’s foreign policy decisions in the Sri Lankan context. They are the same limitations voiced at a New Delhi conference organized by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) a few years ago, which coincided with India’s vote against Sri Lanka at the Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 22, 2012. Speaking at the ICWA conference, Salman Khurshid (India’s minister of external affairs, an eminent lawyer, and a member of the Indian National Congress) explained to participants how a regional government can dictate terms to the central government, further adding that he is like Muhammad Ali the boxer, allowing his opponent to punch him but waiting for the right moment to strike him down. This is a clear example of how strong the Tamil Nadu factor is in Indo-Sri Lanka relationship.

The competition between China and India to influence Sri Lankan politics substantiates Sri Lanka’s significance. This is on display in the words of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa. In a statement to the South China Morning Post, he asserted that Indian intelligence was behind his defeat in the 2015 presidential election. Further, he alleges that U.S. and India used their embassies in Sri Lanka to bring him down. Of note, all the Chinese infrastructure projects mentioned above were initiated during the Rajapaksa administration. This suggests that Sri Lanka’s regional importance is affecting both the foreign policy and internal dynamics of the country. It also serves as an indication that India would do well to recalibrate and strengthen its relationship with Sri Lanka.

China and India are two players at a chessboard with different strengths and weaknesses. China has economic strength, but India’s strengths are the historical and socio-cultural ties it has with Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka share a common colonial experience, post-colonial institutions, and political culture, all of which have ensured the mutual confidence of two strong democratic governments. Moreover, Sri Lanka is one of India’s closest neighbors, a fact that also helps pave the way for the two countries to share a particularly unique bond. Hence, Indo-Lanka relations should be better at all levels including political, economic, social, and cultural, even while Sri Lanka continues to engage in extra-regional relations with China and the U.S.
The Way Forward

Given Sri Lanka’s geopolitical situation, the following recommendations aim to maintain ties with the great powers within and beyond the Indian Ocean region. Sri Lanka certainly has the potential of playing a pivotal role both regionally and globally, given its position. Sri Lanka records the highest human development index in South Asia, with a literacy rate of 98%. Moreover, according to the World Economic Forum, Sri Lanka has moved from a factor-driven economy to efficiency-driven economy. U.S. has observed that Sri Lanka is a contributor to the rules-based-order and is a good example of a like-minded partner in the Indian Ocean.

Further Sri Lanka should cultivate its role as a regional stabilizer in the Indian Ocean. Balancing New Delhi, Washington, and Beijing will be a priority for President Sirisena, who is rightfully promoting a “balanced, Asia-centric” foreign policy. Clearly an equitable foreign policy is what Sri Lanka should have with global powers. However, if Sri Lanka is to play the role of a regional stabilizer, it will require the assistance of countries such as India and Japan. The active participation of India is extremely important in this venture. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the Indian government’s role in regional stabilization has appeared indolent, particularly given the failure of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); thus, it is essential for India to consider playing a more active role. India’s lack of involvement can probably be attributed to the Monroe-doctrine-mentality, or rejection of foreign intervention, perpetrated by President Nehru in the fight against colonialism. Such hostility towards foreign relationships was evident in 1977, when India was perturbed by Sri Lanka’s open economic policy that President Jayawardene’s government adopted.

In 1971, seven European members of the UN General Assembly formed an ad hoc committee and wrote the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. This declaration, which Sri Lankan Prime Minister Madam Sirimavo Bandaranaike helped shape, called for the great powers to curb further military escalation and expansion in the Indian Ocean. The document also stated the need for a system of universal collective security. This declaration is especially relevant today, due to the tension among the great powers operating in the Indian Ocean — tensions that have made the region unstable. Therefore, ensuring a rules-based order in the Indian Ocean is of the utmost importance, as is balancing the relationships among India, China, U.S. and Sri Lanka, who may well be the lynch-pin of this endeavor.
III. EUROPE AND CANADA

Britain and the Indo-Pacific
by John Hemmings

The current “received wisdom” that one hears in international conferences is that the United States and the United Kingdom are showing increasingly isolationist tendencies in their foreign policy. The U.S. — by pursuing a Trumpian “America First” policy — and the U.K. by withdrawing from the European Union — the “dreaded” Brexit. While it is true that both leading Western liberal democracies are undergoing major domestic re-ordering and shifts from neoliberal policies that have been considered mainstream since the end of the Cold War, it would be foolish to conclude that either of these powers is in any way withdrawing from the world or its events. For the U.S., “America First” has been about bringing back industrial and manufacturing might to the heartland, following the realization that it remains crucial to deciding a nation’s overall power capabilities. For the U.K., Brexit has certainly been about recapturing identity and power from the political structures in Brussels.

However, rather than moving towards a “Little Britain” (one of three possible post-Brexit postures I’ve written about in the past), Britain’s foreign policy elites have sought to project the

Photo caption: Commanding Officer of the HMS Albion Captain Tim Neild greets children during the welcoming ceremony at Terminal 2 Port of Tanjung Priok, Jakarta on April 22, 2018, as part of an exercise strengthening cooperation between the British and Indonesian military. (Aditya Irawan/NurPhoto via Getty Images)
coalsitions can develop sharply delineated responses to the changes in the international system and vie for control over a state’s foreign policy direction.

Looking back to 2013 and 2014, one can see the outlines of Britain’s two strategies taking shape during this period. In 2013, Xi Jinping announced the One Belt One Road (OBOR) policy, in which the PRC promised a global infrastructure and investment strategy, involving $4-8 trillion in 62 countries across four continents. That same year, Prime Minister David Cameron visited China in what some called a groveling attempt to remove Britain from the “freeze” caused by his meeting with the Dali Lama in 2012. In a leader for the *Guardian* newspaper, the British Prime Minister promised that an upcoming visit to China, accompanied by more than one hundred business leaders, “would build a lasting friendship…a partnership for growth and reform that can help deliver the Chinese Dream — and long-term prosperity for Britain too.”

It should be noted that 2013 also saw a huge push for infrastructure in the U.K., with a widely-cited report noting that a shortfall in investment since 2003 contributed to losses of $85 billion a year between 2003 and 2010. John Ross, a British Marxist based at the Renmin University in China, crowed in the same newspaper that Cameron’s visit to the PRC was a “humiliating climb-down”, noting that Britain needed the Chinese market for its exports and investment in its infrastructure and could ill-afford such “exaggerated pretensions.” By 2014, the PRC had already replaced Japan (2011) as the world’s second largest economy and had become by 2013, the world’s largest trading nation. George Osborne, the Chancellor, was already attempting to make London the primary trading hub for the renminbi in a bid to satisfy Beijing’s strategic need to internationalize its currency.

At the same time, a different story began to emerge in-region: in June 2014, the *Philippine Star* reported that reclamation activities were being carried out by the PRC in five areas of the Spratley Islands. It quickly became apparent that these activities were immense and might pose a downstream threat...
to freedom of navigation in the region. The most important document to emerge from that time that noted this was the 2014 U.K. National Strategy for Maritime Security (NSMS), which was cosigned by four ministries: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department of Transport. In the document, Britain’s national interests in the maritime space are reaffirmed, noting that 95% of British trade is shipborne, with more than $600 billion of goods going into or out of British ports per annum. It lists “disruption to vital trade maritime routes” as a security threat second only to terrorism. It advocated support for the international rules-based system and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and capacity-building for “partner nations.” Shortly after this, Prime Minister Cameron noted Britain’s need for “the sea-lanes to stay open and the arteries of global commerce to remain free flowing,” while also stating an ambition for China to become Britain’s “second largest export destination” in the following decade. It must be noted that 2015 was the year that Xi Jinping was given a State visit to the U.K. and treated to a horse-drawn carriage ride down the Mall to meet the Queen at Buckingham Palace, a year that both nations hailed as a “Golden Era” of relations. The gap between the U.K.’s two Asia strategies would only grow from this stage onwards.

Over the next four years, nearly every Foreign Secretary or Defence Secretary spoke in favor of defending the rules-based order while nearly every Chancellor of the Exchequer of Minister for Trade spoke of welcoming investment from the PRC. In 2015, Sir Michael Fallon, the then-Secretary of State for Defence said that while Britain takes no position on underlying sovereignty claims, it was “disturbed by the scale and speed of current land reclamation activities and the risk that these actions might pose to maritime freedom of navigation and to the stability of the South China Sea.” The UK also began a foreign and defence ministerial meetings with Japan, which produced a Joint Statement outlining both countries desire to “work together to defend and protect the global commons, on the high seas...to support an international system based on the rule of law and international norms.” In the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue, Sir Michael Fallon reiterated the U.K.’s commitment to “the rules-based international system, international law, and the maintenance of freedom of navigation and overflight — both of which we consider non-negotiable.” In 2017, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, emphasized the U.K.’s “belief in the rules-based international system and in the freedom of navigation through those waterways which are absolutely vital to world trade,” promising that its new aircraft carriers would be deployed to the region, including the South China Sea. This was followed by a memorandum of understanding with Oman, which allowed for the establishment of a U.K. Joint Logistics Support Base at Duqm. According to the Foreign Office, the base at Duqm would allow Britain’s aircraft carriers to “project influence across an important region.”

HMS Sutherland, HMS Argyll, and HMS Albion all made
deployments to the region, with the HMS Albion carrying out a freedom of navigation maneuver in the South China Sea in the summer of 2018. As James Rogers and I wrote for the Henry Jackson Society in January 2019, the deployment, along with the maneuver, has shown Britain’s commitment to the region as the Royal Navy is – thus far – the only non-US naval force to carry out such a maneuver. Given the need for PRC-linked investment, how can the U.K.’s uptick in naval operations be explained? Primarily, it has been a gradual realization of the strategic importance of the South China Sea (12% of U.K. trade transits the waterway according to China Power), but it is clear that Britain’s other Asia strategy, the China Strategy will continue to play a strong role in Whitehall. This was most recently evident in February 2019, in the furor that arose after Defence Minister Williamson gave a speech at the Royal United Services Institute, a defense think tank in London. In his speech, the Defence Minister spoke of the rise of great power competition, and Britain’s willingness to compete for its interests and values far from home by deploying a “littoral strike group East of Suez in the Indo-Pacific.” George Osborne, the former Chancellor and creator of the U.K.-PRC “Golden Era,” called the speech “gunboat diplomacy of a quite old-fashioned kind” in the Financial Times. This framing of the Defence Minister’s remarks, and the PRC’s cancellation of trade talks shortly thereafter, created a storm of controversy across Whitehall and hinted at the increasing power that Beijing had inside Britain’s strategic circles. Williamson’s eventual fall from power — accused of leaking a vote in the National Security Council on Huawei’s role in Britain’s infrastructure — shows clearly that the debate between Britain’s Indo-Pacific-leaning elites and its China-leaning elites is not yet over.

In adopting a split approach toward Asia, the U.K. is hardly alone. Many states — the United States among them — have in the past adopted a two-handed approach toward the PRC. Evan Medeiros, President Obama’s China advisor, once referred to this as “hedging,” noting it involved the pursuit of “policies that, on one hand, stress engagement and integration mechanisms and, on the other, emphasize realist-style balancing in the form of external security cooperation with Asian states and national military modernization programs.” With the small exception of a few states, many European and Asian states could be said to have hedging strategies toward the PRC. The problem with Britain adopting the current approach, however, is that it is becoming increasingly out-of-kilter with the U.S. strategic shift toward the PRC, as outlined in the 2017 National Security Strategy. The U.S. remains Britain’s most important ally, largest national export market, and the lead nation for European security. As the US position evolves, the UK – as America’s closest ally – will likely consider its own position in relation to its two approaches, economic and strategic, placing emphasis on the former. As with all matters relating to trade and security, finding the balance is the trick. However, it could find this balance if it began to really think through the inconsistencies in its current approach. As it stands, it is not apparent that Britain is deliberately choosing to hedge. Rather it is being pulled between two different policy baskets, held by different policy coalitions within London.

And it will continue to do so, see-sawing back and forth, until one side or another is able to dominate the other. Policy changes may even occur at the personnel level as different ministers prioritize security and trade differently. This is hardly a recipe for showing commitment and reliability to Britain’s potential partners in the region — including the Quad member states, India, Japan, Australia, and the U.S., who look to Britain to help them stabilize the region. At present, Boris Johnson, Britain’s current Prime Minister, is on record as having once promised to deploy Britain’s aircraft carriers to Indo-Pacific region and there are now indications that this will occur sometime in 2021. More recently, he has expressed interest in the PRC’s strategic infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, eschewing a trade alliance with President Trump against Beijing. As we approach a General Election in late 2019, it is clear that see-sawing is not yet over.
France, a Power in the Indian Ocean
by Jonas Parello-Plesner

U.S. security interests in the Indian Ocean have grown in recent years. The Trump administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy reflects this trend. From a defense perspective, this strategy has led to the establishment of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which combines East Asia and India, including the Indian Ocean, into one strategic unit. Meanwhile, India and China are both rising military powers, and this includes their maritime capabilities. For India, the ocean which bears its name is home turf. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi has talked about the Indian Ocean as being key to India’s future. For China, the Indian Ocean is a component of its blue-water ambitions, and a basing option in Djibouti enhances its expanding naval reach. The Indian Ocean is also part of the Maritime Silk Road, which is the sea component of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese investment in Sri Lanka and its port of Hambantota are examples of this.

France’s long-standing naval presence is also woven into this strategic tapestry. As the Indo-Pacific strategy is fleshed out in Washington, New Delhi, and Tokyo, France’s participation is pertinent as the only European power with a permanent naval presence in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

President Macron has also emphasized France’s role in the Indo-Pacific. He has talked about a “new, strong Indo-Pacific Axis” when he visited Australia last year. Beyond Australia, France has increased cooperation with the U.S., India, and Japan, whom official French government papers also underline as allies.242

Macron has spoken honestly about the increased Chinese presence as a “game changer” in the region. Further, he expressed the need to defend and uphold freedom of navigation and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In this regard, France maintains an active naval presence throughout the South China Sea to protect freedom of navigation.243 As Florence Parly, France’s minister of the armed forces, explained to the audience at last year’s Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, “France is not part of the territorial disputes in the area; nor will it be. But we insist on two tenets of the rule-based international order: disputes should be resolved by legal means and negotiation, not by fait accompli, and freedom of navigation must be upheld.”244 But other priorities such as terrorism, piracy, illegal fishing, environmental damage and climate change are also part of the French strategic vocabulary for the region.

“This region, for us too, is home,” as Defense Minister Parly put it. More specifically, France is part of the Indian Ocean, with the Mayotte and La Réunion islands situated in the southwest Indian Ocean close to the African continent. Over one million French citizens live on those islands; they are the outer reaches of the European Union and use euros as their currency. These French territories compose part of an extensive exclusive-economic-zone in the Indian Ocean.

France has a broad-based military presence in the Indian Ocean as well. In the north, it has a presence in the United Arab Emirates and in Djibouti. In the south, the French armed forces cover both La Réunion and Mayotte islands with naval capabilities such as surveillance frigates, patrol vessels, and helicopters. As an engaged maritime power, France is involved in various regional cooperation fora such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Furthermore, France is a founding member of the Indian Ocean Commission and a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

With India, France has been developing a strategic partnership since 1998. This goes far beyond the naval domain, and France is active both with civil nuclear cooperation and trade and investments. France has held military exercises with India including army, air force and navy components. The naval exercises have included the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, which demonstrates that the exercises have grown in scope and capability. French arm sales, such as submarines and fighter planes, are aiding India’s military modernization.
France sees India as a strategic and democratic partner in the region, and President Macron’s March 2018 visit to India reinforced this partnership. Macron mentioned in an interview with India Today that he would like to see France become India’s preferred European partner in this century, replacing the U.K. and its historic role with India, and for India to see France as the new gateway to the EU after U.K.’s expected departure. Still, France continues to trail Germany and the U.K. as a trading partner for India.

During Macron’s the visit of to India, the leaders agreed to a strategic vision document which outlines shared emerging challenges, including “maritime traffic security in the face of the threats of terrorism and piracy, especially in the Horn of Africa; respect of international law by all States, in particular freedom of navigation and overflight; fight against organized crime, trafficking, including in weapons of mass destruction, smuggling and illegal fishing (IUUs); combating climate change and its consequences on security, particularly in terms of natural disasters; protection of the environment and natural resources, including tackling oil spills; and aid to victims of disasters.”

France has also sought to connect the EU and India on EU projects for the Indian Ocean. France worked to secure EU funding for maritime information centers in Madagascar and the Seychelles as part of the program to Promote Regional Maritime Security. France also directly participates in the EU’s Operation Atalanta, which aims to curb piracy in the Western part of the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, France could elevate the strategic debate within the EU about the Indian Ocean to help define what the new multipolar security environment means for the EU and how the EU can strengthen multilateralism and respect for international law. Additionally, as the EU rolls out its EU-Asia Connectivity strategy, launched at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit in Brussels in October 2018, the EU could become an alternative to China’s Maritime Silk Road for smaller nations such as Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, France is the most relevant European ally for the U.S. as it fleshes out its strategy for the Indian Ocean, both because France has a unique and historical presence and because France is best able to garner EU support for a more active role in the Indian Ocean.

India and other Asian democratic partners, such as Japan and Australia, should actively integrate France into their regional strategies as a maritime security partner and to ensure freedom of navigation. While an ally of the U.S., France does retain a certain dose of strategic autonomy. In contrast to its business-oriented predecessors, the Macron government has been very clear-eyed about the challenges China represents, stating that China’s Maritime Silk Road threatens the equilibrium in the Indian Ocean, as the new Silk Road should be a two-way street, not a one-way road to Beijing. This stands in contrast to prior, more business-oriented French governments that mostly perceived China’s rise as a business opportunity and were keen to lift the EU arms embargo on China.

Getting the Balance Right: Managing EU Relations with the U.S. and China
by Liselotte Odgaard

Paradoxically, the European Union has become more active in the Indo-Pacific than ever, at a time when it is facing serious internal and external challenges. Brexit, growing authoritarianism, and migration are all issues that have caused great turmoil between the EU member states as they try to address how to secure the future of the union as a coherent international actor based on a commitment to liberal democracy, market economy, and the rule of law. From across the Atlantic, Washington has opened trade disputes with the EU, ignored European interests in the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and complains about free-riding European military forces. Beijing is proceeding with implementation of its Belt and Road Initiative in Eastern and Southern Europe despite the EU’s reservations concerning
China’s global development strategy. How do these challenges influence EU policies in the Indo-Pacific and the EU’s relations with the U.S. and China?

The internal challenges facing the European Union have, by many, been pronounced symptoms that the grand project of a united Europe is failing. For example, Walter Russell Mead comments that, “If Paris and Berlin could devise a program to reignite European growth, secure its frontiers, and satisfy the nationalist emotions now roiling the bloc, Europe could arrest its decline. So far at least, such an outcome seems unlikely.” Despite doomsday prophecies, support for the European Union appears to be stronger than ever. Not even the illiberal Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban and his Fidesz Party have leaving the EU on the agenda, although the European Parliament’s center-right grouping decided in March 2019 to suspend Fidesz from the group on the grounds that it has violated EU principles on the rule of law. If anything, the consecutive internal crises have encouraged the EU to take initiatives to strengthen Europe's footprint in the Indo-Pacific, recognizing the need to focus not only on the United States and China, but on creating solid links with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific, which is necessary for Europe's continued economic, social and political well-being.

The EU supports the continued preeminence of the U.S. alliance system in the Indo-Pacific. However, the growing regional role of China and Washington’s enhanced focus on U.S. national interests rather than alliance interests have encouraged the EU to maintain and strengthen a broad array of connections with Asian countries and multilateral institutions. This effort was reflected in President of the European Council of Ministers Donald Tusk’s remark in May 2018 that the EU had to be prepared to act alone, without the United States. The EU has adopted an equally independent approach to China lately. The European Commission’s Report, EU-China — A Strategic Outlook, seeks reciprocal conditions governing its economic relations with China. This involves addressing the distortive effects of foreign state-ownership and state financing on Europe’s internal markets, which fills existing gaps in EU law. In addition, a common EU approach to the security of 5G networks will be worked out to safeguard against potential serious security threats to critical digital infrastructure, and the EU is placing screening mechanisms to detect and raise awareness of security risks posed by foreign investment in critical assets, technologies, and infrastructure.

The strategy is in line with the Trump administration’s call for reciprocity in economic relations with China. However, the EU’s intention to cooperate with Beijing on climate change, on implementing the EU’s Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, and on continuing joint efforts to implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran defines a platform for Europe-China relations that is distinct from U.S. policy. The independent policy line was reflected in the EU-China summit statement of April 2019. The EU and China firmly support the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core, fight against unilateralism and protectionism, and commit to complying with WTO rules. The two sides reaffirmed their joint commitment to cooperate on WTO reform, including strengthening the rules on industrial subsidies. This testifies to the EU’s determination to hold China to behaving in accordance with the international regimes it has signed on to, which aligns with the U.S. stance on Chinese economic practices. However, the EU also subscribes to working with China on WTO reform and emphasizes that Europe considers multilateral institutions fundamental to upholding a liberal market-economic order; additionally, adjusting the institutions to encompass China, without violating key liberal values, is a key priority for the EU. This position parts company with Washington’s preference for bilateral agreements with China outside of existing global institutional frameworks.

A more self-reliant attitude toward relations with Washington has encouraged Europe to seek closer ties with Asian
states that are considered compatible with European liberal economic and political values. The EU and Japan agreed on an economic partnership agreement in December 2017, sending a powerful signal against protectionism at a time when Washington is renegotiating trade agreements with both Brussels and Tokyo, and China, thereby threatening to undermine European market-economic principles. Europe sees free-trade agreements as an instrument to uphold a rules-based liberal order at a time when the United States has opted out of multilateral trade agreements, pulling the plug on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement in January 2017.

Japan kept TPP alive, creating a trade pact among 11 Pacific Rim nations called the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP-11) that went into force on December 30, 2018. On February 1, 2019, the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership provisionally entered into force between the two entities, who already has strong economic relations. The partnership agreement is the first-ever bilateral framework agreement between the EU and Japan. It provides a framework for enhanced political cooperation and joint action on issues of common interest — on bilateral as well as regional and global challenges. The agreement demonstrates that the EU considers Japan a key component of ensuring the long-term preservation of a global political framework based on liberal economic, democratic, and human rights principles.

The EU and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are negotiating free trade agreements, hoping to profit from the EU's position as the second largest trade partner of ASEAN after China. ASEAN is the EU's third largest trade partner. In October 2018, the EU and Singapore signed a landmark free-trade agreement, which Europe sees as a pathfinder to a wider free-trade agreement with ASEAN. The EU's priority of addressing ASEAN is another manifestation of Europe's preference for multilateral institutions as the basis for international cooperation.

The EU has had a long-standing strategic partnership with India since 2004. From 2019, Brussels and New Delhi have begun discussing common security interests in the Indian Ocean. Maritime security is a priority for the EU, as the world's largest trading bloc and as a global security provider. In November 2018, the EU published a strategy on India, confirming their mutual commitment to a liberal, democratic, human rights, and rules-based order centered on multilateralism. Cooperation was given a significant defense component on this occasion, with maritime security as a focus area. It includes Indian escorts for humanitarian aid deliveries from the EU, cooperation on fighting piracy, and strengthening the links between the EU's naval forces and India's navy.

The expansion of European cooperation with India is in line with the U.S. rapprochement towards India, but the emphasis on multilateralism, humanitarian aid, and piracy as means of strengthening relations is different.

The EU began negotiating a free-trade agreement with Australia on June 18, 2018. The EU is Australia's second largest trade partner, and the EU was Australia's largest source of foreign direct investment in 2017. Moreover, they too share a commitment to a rules-based order, the rule of law, global normative frameworks, and free and open markets.

Europe's embrace of the Asian members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the informal strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, and its enhanced cooperation with ASEAN, complements U.S. efforts to expand its relations with Indo-Pacific democratic and market-economic states. However, Europe's strengthening of its Asian links occurs because of an independent position that prioritizes multilateral institutional cooperation and comprehensive free trade agreements. This deviates from U.S. priorities as of late — of bilateral negotiations and ad hoc institutional frameworks. This is not necessarily a drawback, but could be utilized as a division of labor, focusing on the complementarity of efforts that are carried out with the same common fundamental objective.
wants to preserve its beneficial trading relationship with China, and it is concerned that China could retaliate by complicating Indian-Pakistani relations.\textsuperscript{263}

ASEAN shares India’s concerns about any Indo-Pacific framework position that would be seen by China as exclusive and thus negatively affect their economic ties.\textsuperscript{264} Where they differ is that ASEAN’s Outlook for the Indo-Pacific aims to inculcate ASEAN centrality into the Indo-Pacific framework.\textsuperscript{265}

Japan and the United States, despite their long-standing alliance, also have diverging views as on what should be prioritized in any formulation of the Indo-Pacific. Tokyo pledges “nation-building support in the area of development, as well as politics and governance,” and to “promote quality infrastructure development, trade and investment, and enhance business environment and human development, strengthening connectivity in ASEAN region.”\textsuperscript{266} In contrast to this development-focused Indo-Pacific vision, the United States strategy, as outlined in the 2019 Department of Defense \textit{Indo-Pacific Strategy Report} (IPSR) “affirms the enduring U.S. commitment to stability and prosperity in the region through the pursuit of preparedness, partnerships, and the promotion of a networked region.”

Stressing “peace through strength and employing effective deterrence requires a Joint Force that is prepared to win any conflict from its onset,” and “allies and partners are a force multiplier to achieve peace, deterrence, and interoperable warfighting capability. The Department is reinforcing its commitment to established alliances and partnerships, while also expanding and deepening relationships with new partners who share our respect for sovereignty, fair and reciprocal trade, and the rule of law,” the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy has a strong security and deterrence focus.

Emerging Canadian Role in the Indo-Pacific?
Where do close partners and allies, such as Canada, fall within this continuum of converging and diverging interests in the

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\textbf{Coming in from the Cold? Canada’s Indo-Pacific Possibilities & Conundrum}

\textit{by Stephen R. Nagy}

\textbf{Converging and Diverging Interests in the Indo-Pacific}\textsuperscript{257}

The Indo-Pacific region has garnered considerable interest in many nations, including Canada. Japan’s conceptualization is through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision,\textsuperscript{258} whereas the United States’ Defense Department has formulated the Indo-Pacific Strategy,\textsuperscript{259} which was released June 1, 2019. Australia, a state that is situated in the two oceans that give the Indo-Pacific its name, has been a forerunner in utilizing the term of Indo-Pacific, as seen in its 2017 \textit{Foreign Policy White Paper}.\textsuperscript{260} Even ASEAN has released the \textit{ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific}.\textsuperscript{261}

Each vision, outlook, or strategy (hereafter framework) has converging and diverging components. Examining convergences, all four of the frameworks highlight the importance of creating a rules-based region with a focus on the maritime domain. There is also more or less convergence on the idea of the Indo-Pacific being “open” and “inclusive.” These convergences are related to guarding sea lines of communication (SLOCs) from disruption by one of more powers.

With at least $3.37 trillion in trade transiting key arteries in the Indo-Pacific, such as in the South China Sea, securing SLOCs in the Indo-Pacific through a shared rules-based maritime understanding is the major pillar of commonality formulated in the various Indo-Pacific frameworks.\textsuperscript{262}

The degree of inclusivity within the Indo-Pacific frameworks is where we see diverging views. ASEAN and India are both hesitant to articulate an Indo-Pacific framework that is not inclusive. India
Indo-Pacific, and does Canada have its own perspective of the Indo-Pacific?

As a self-defined middle power, Canada’s long-standing track record in buttressing international law parallels the broader convergence of Indo-Pacific stakeholders’ interest in a rules-based Indo-Pacific, as does the broader objective of ensuring the region does not bifurcate into a Chinese sphere of influence and a U.S. sphere of influence.

The questions we are left with considering is what is Canada’s position on the Indo-Pacific? What are Canada’s interests in the region? What kind of role does Canada wish to play in the region? What are its comparative advantages that can be deployed to the region to add value to any kind of multilateral cooperation in the region, either between other middle powers such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India, or with the U.S. or China?

As of August 2019, Canada’s stance on the Indo-Pacific has been under-researched and ill-defined. To illustrate, on April 28th, 2019, on the occasion of PM Shinzo Abe’s visit to Canada, PM Justin Trudeau alongside PM Abe discussed “their shared vision for maintaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region based on the rule of law — something Canada and Japan will continue to advance through a range of initiatives.” At the same time, PM Trudeau’s homepage sends an Asia-Pacific message that “Canada and Japan are partners in the CPTPP, a free trade agreement between Canada and ten other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.” This bipolar approach echoes Patrick’s view that Canada has still not formulated a vision about the region and its place in it.

More critical views of Canada’s earlier contributions to the region suggest that opportunities have been squandered and lacked a vision of what Canada’s place was in the region.

The legacy of our earlier engagement with the region was largely squandered through a decade or more of neglect in the late 1990s and the first decade of this century. In the past, Canada played a vital role in Asia, including participation in the Colombo Plan in the 1950s, establishing a dialogue partnership with ASEAN in the late 1970’s, being a founder of APEC’s predecessor (the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, or PECC) in 1980, and becoming one of the economies to establish APEC in 1989.

Canada’s long-standing and comprehensive relationship with the U.S., its limited capacity owing to the size of Canada, and a lack of necessity to invest its diplomatic and financial resources into the region partially explains the above criticisms. An inability to rationalize and then articulate to citizens as to why Canada should be investing in the region is the other explanation.

Canadian Middle-Power Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific

Canada’s limited capacities to effectively engage in the Indo-Pacific demand that it leverages the normative, functional, and hierarchical aspects of middle power diplomacy to use its comparative advantages for maximizing its influence in shaping the Indo-Pacific region.

Here, Canada and other countries need to be clear that their interests in the region will not solely be economic and security in nature. Non-traditional security challenges associated with food security, climate change, and increasing levels of extremism are likely to be defining features of a region. These challenges will be highly destabilizing and will necessitate cooperation and coordination with stakeholders in the region.

Canada’s ability to negotiate any of these problems in the Indo-Pacific era is limited due to geography, limited capacity, and comparative advantages. Canada will be negatively affected if it does not carve out a role within the region and establish a platform and a role to shape the region’s evolution that suits Canada’s national interests.

Realistic about Canada’s capabilities, Canada needs to align itself with other middle powers in the region and globally to
contribute to the evolution of the Indo-Pacific region. This is a hierarchical approach to middle power diplomacy in that it recognizes that there is a power hierarchy in the international system, and in order to realize Canadian natural interests in the Indo-Pacific, it must align itself with other middle powers.

This alignment will necessarily be based on a common relationship with the United States but not necessary solely with the United States. At times, a middle power alignment could and should be utilized to curb or shape Washington’s behavior so that unilateral actions do not go against Canadian and other middle power interests. This would reflect a normative form of middle power diplomacy in that an alignment of middle powers would actively try to shape the behavior of states in a region (including China and the United States) such that they reflect desired international behavior.

Concurrently, middle power alignment should also be used as a tool to insulate each other from other states as well. With this objective in mind, Canada and its middle power partners need to identify their converging and diverging interests in the Indo-Pacific region and develop intelligent forms of cooperation. This represents the functional side of middle power diplomacy, the selection of areas of cooperation that reflect the collective comparative advantages of aligned middle powers.

While not an exhaustive list, the following section highlights the functional middle power cooperation that Canada can and should engage in the Indo-Pacific region. What is clear from the examples below is that the middle power cooperation that Canadian can engage in in the Indo-Pacific is normative in nature in some areas, such a humanitarian disaster relief (HDR) or buttressing rules-based behavior in the maritime domain, while others are preventative in nature.

**Middle-Power Coordination in Trade and Economy**

Middle powers such as Canada have an interest in enmeshing themselves into multilateral trade agreements. This enables them to receive the benefits of free trade but also ensure that their respective trade portfolios are diverse enough to protect themselves against economic coercion by larger states.

To illustrate, growing economic entanglement with China has led to many cases of economic coercion to change the behavior of states. The most recent cases of economic coercion by China include, but are not exclusive to, the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands in 2012, the THAAD installment in South Korea in 2017, and the arrest of Huawei executive Ms. Meng Wanzhou. Economic diversification through active involvement in multilateral trade agreements helps middle powers to diversify their trade portfolio such that they are better situated to resist economically coercive behaviour.

The Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a case in point. This 21st century trade agreement would be an excellent platform for Canada to work with other middle powers to advocate for other states to join the agreement but also make a collective effort to lobby the U.S. to re-join the agreement.

In the region there are many candidates including South Korea, Thailand, and the U.K. An intelligent case that Canada and other middle powers should and could advocate for is Taiwan becoming an associate member of CPTPP based China’s own Belt Road Initiative’s (BRI) practice of having sub-state actors join the BRI without their national government joining. The case of the state of Victoria in Australia serves as a useful example of how Taiwan could be part of the CPTPP based on its advocacy through a pre-existing Chinese practice of incorporating sub-state actors into Chinese-led international agreements.

By enlarging the CPTPP to include complimentary economies like Taiwan, Canada can strengthen its economic foothold in the region while not challenging the One China Policy that China uses as a basis for bilateral relations. This is not a panacea for resisting coercive economic tactics. Notwithstanding, an
shorten supply chains as businesses would look for suppliers within each respective digital system resulting in the breakdown of global supply chains. Increased costs would be passed on to the consumer, likely lowering consumption levels and economic growth globally.

A second aspect of bifurcating digital economies is related to the role of the state in the digital economy and what that means for privacy, data localization requirements and the intellectual property rights protection. Currently, there are concerns and suspicions related to the role of the Chinese government in the digital economy.

More specifically, suspicions stem from China’s National Security Law and Cyber Security Law, which came into effect in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Article 11 in the National Security Law states, “All citizens of the People’s Republic of China, state authorities, armed forces, political parties, people’s groups, enterprises, public institutions, and other social organizations shall have the responsibility and obligation to maintain national security,”274 while Article 28 in Cyber Security Law stated, “Network operators shall provide technical support and assistance to public security organs and national security organs that are safeguarding national security and investigating criminal activities in accordance with the law.”275

In the digital economic arena of the Indo-Pacific region, Canada will need to work alongside its middle power partners and in concert with the United States and China to develop a shared regulatory mechanism similar to the Japanese G-20 proposal or some kind of evocation of that initiative. Without doing so, the region’s economic potential will be negatively affected and likely to slow, making it increasingly difficult for the plethora of emerging states in the region to get to or escape the middle-income trap.

Not doing so would result in a cascade of developmental issues such as extremism, poverty, corruption, and poor governance.
that would be destabilizing to the region at the economic, security and human security levels.

Middle-Power Security Coordination

While economic and digital coordination among middle powers is important in the Indo-Pacific, security coordination among middle powers can create a critical mass of capacity and capability that can serve each respective middle power’s individual security interests as well.

Areas of alignment in the Indo-Pacific include stemming weapons proliferation in Northeast Asia and South Asia, bolstering rules-based behavior in the maritime domain, strengthening ASEAN intra-regional integration, among others. This is representative of the functional, hierarchical, and normative aspects of middle power diplomacy, in that middle power alignment is necessary and useful to enforce rules. The focus on creating a critical mass of capabilities to enforce rules is a realism about the limits of acting alone, reflecting both the hierarchical and functional nature of middle powers’ capabilities, where each middle power has a comparative advantage that can be leveraged when aligned.

Canada has been engaged in monitoring and surveillance activities since 2018, using aircraft based at Kadena Air Base, and subject to a UN Status of Force Agreement, to counter illicit maritime activities, including the ship-to-ship transfers of North Korean-flagged vessels that are prohibited by United Nations Security Council Resolutions.276. Here, Canada is not alone; other middle powers, such as Australia, New Zealand, France, and the U.K., are also contributing to the monitoring and surveillance process. Formalizing and expanding the number of middle power states involved in these activities can and will stem weapons proliferation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Aside from monitoring and surveillance, middle power partners have a role in securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs), which remain regulated by international law and not any state’s military forces. The Taiwan Straits, East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS) are illustrative cases, with China building and then militarizing islands in the SCS, the rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s July 2016 decision against China’s claims in the SCS, and aggressive fly-bys by Chinese fighters when ships pass through the Taiwan Straits. We also have so-called grey zone tactics in the form of merchant vessels violating Japan’s exclusive economic zone around the Senkaku Islands as a longer-term strategy to erode legal basis for sovereignty in the ECS.

Acting independently, Canada has little capacity to enforce rules-based maritime behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region. However, collectively with aligned middle powers, Canada can contribute in a more meaningful to the shared interest in ensuring SLOCs remain internationalized. With a long-term track record of cooperation within NATO and participating in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises, Canada already has a platform to expand the quality and nature of middle-power cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to further focus on enforcing rules-based maritime behavior.

Working with Japan, Australia, and the U.S., Canada should advocate for the formation of a new Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad 2.0) that includes the states with a pre-existing track record of security cooperation and similar capabilities. The obvious candidates include the U.K., France, New Zealand, Germany, and possibly South Korea and Singapore. The group would function as an alignment of states with a convergence of interest in maintaining rules-based behavior in the maritime domain.

The manifestation of this middle power cooperation could vary. Regularized humanitarian disaster relief (HDR) activities in the SCS, ECS, Taiwan straits and Indian Ocean would serve to increase interoperability and a joint presence in the region. Focusing on HDR rather than security cooperation or
Middle-Power Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Cooperation

NTS cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is another area where Canada should be proactive about middle-power alignment — both to mitigate NTS issues and deal with situations as they arise. Specific areas of concern include piracy, human trafficking, food security, and human security associated with climate change and the tangential and non-tangential challenges associated with overpopulation and demographics. The examples given are illustrative of the functional middle-power opportunities to cooperate in the Indo-Pacific.

In the case of climate change for example, areas such as the Mekong Delta, South Asia (Bangladesh in particular) are going to be zones of massive disruption as sea levels rise. In the case of the Mekong Delta, food security will become a chronic problem as watersheds are salinized by rising sea levels, effecting the region's ability to act at the rice basket for Southeast Asia.278 There are also concerns about the effects on fisheries and other resources that feed hundreds of millions of ASEAN citizens.279 This is not merely a food security issue; a collapse of the Mekong Delta eco-systems would also be devastating to the region's economy and its ability to export internationally.

Similarly, Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia would face a crisis of enormous proportion as sea levels rise. South Asia’s food basket would face many of the challenges of the Mekong Delta countries as well as pressures from forced migration as millions migrate in land to areas less effected by climate change. How the most densely populated cities in the world such as Dakar will manage this flood of domestic climate-refugees is an open question, but what is clear is that climate change will be a food security challenge that destabilizes economies and social structures.

As a human-security champion and destination for refugees, NTS issues such as food security in the Indo-Pacific will...
challenge Canada’s commitment to its fundamental values. Staying wedded to these values will require working with a critical mass of middle powers alongside and in partnership with China and the U.S. It will be the collective resources of aligned states that will be able to lessen the effect of climate in the region and at a global level.

Working with other middle powers, Canada should strengthen good governance within the region, promote development through infrastructure and connectivity, and continue to cultivate human capital in the region, such that leaders can act with local knowledge to lessen the impact of climate change.

In concert, middle powers need to lobby and find opportunities to be a bridge for the U.S. and China to work together in the region. Cooperation should not be a zero-sum equation, and middle powers can use their critical mass to influence these two great powers.

Anti-piracy, anti-human trafficking operations, and humanitarian disaster relief are other areas in which middle powers can work together, or in cooperation with China and the U.S. In the case of anti-piracy operations, Canada can work with its partners with naval vessels or using its intelligence operations as a force-multiplier to provide first-rate intelligence as to how, where and what pirates are doing in the Indo-Pacific region. This kind of role of role leverages Canada’s track record of intelligence cooperation within the five-eyes network to provide a public good for the region through cooperation with other middle powers. This is important in terms of securing SLOCs in the region, and it is the kind of role that would not receive push back from stakeholders in the region as it benefits all.

Intelligence operations can also be used to deal with human trafficking in the region. By some estimates, approximately 40 million individuals are trafficked every year. Aside from the human rights aspect of human trafficking, there are the associated criminal networks and facilitators that are destabilizing forces in states where human trafficking is prevalent.

Notwithstanding that these cases are located a large geographical distance from Canada, a NIMBY approach would not serve Canadian or middle-power interests in the region. Their destabilizing nature has a negative cascade of downstream effects on Canada’s interests in a stable region that is economically dynamic and sustainable, free of corruption and developing.

It would not be difficult to conceive that if instability becomes the defining feature of the region that we could see an Indo-Pacific version of the mass exodus of refugees and migrants that left Syria and the associated instability and extremism that came in the wake of the Syrian conflict.

In the case of the Indo-Pacific, a middle power alignment would be both proactive and reactive in nature. In terms of reactivity, responding to HDR associated with natural disasters such as the 2004 Aceh Tsunami or March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake is unpredictable. Nonetheless, preparation through inter-operability exercises in the region, joint preparation of emergency resources, and a track record of pre-existing institutional coordination would diminish to possibility that a large-scale disasters cascades into a large-scale humanitarian disaster.

Coming in From the Cold? Canada’s Indo-Pacific Possibilities & Conundrum

Canada’s converging interests with its long-standing partner the U.S. and other middle powers stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region are clear. So is Canada’s existing track record of activities in the region, despite not being formally labelled Indo-Pacific activities or falling under the rubric of an Indo-Pacific framework like its allies and partners. The possibility and necessity to expand Canadian contributions in the emerging region needs to be based on a realistic assessment of its existing capabilities.
Overcoming this conundrum requires an assessment of Canadian comparative advantages and how they can work synergistically with other middle powers and the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific such that they can contribute to the Indo-Pacific’s evolution towards an open and rules-based region. From this perspective, rather than formulating a Canadian Indo-Pacific vision or strategy, Canada needs to identify where it can contribute and which partners it can work with to contribute to the region’s institutionalization.
IV. JAPAN

Implications of U.S.-China Tensions in The Indo-Pacific: Japan’s View
by Yoji Koda

Preface
In 2012, President of People’s Republic of China, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, Xi Jinping, set forth “the great revival of the Chinese nation” — a clear national goal of China. The national goal is to build a Great Modern Socialist Country by communist China’s centennial year of 2049, with socialistic core values.

As a paramount leader of rising China, it is not unusual, but rather a natural and appropriate action for President Xi to proclaim such a national objective to over 1.3 billion Chinese people.

At the same time, however, from the eyes of most international community members, China, under the new national objective of its Great Revival, seems to have started serious challenges against today’s long-familiarized and firmly-established

STRATEGIES FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC: PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. AND LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES

In this paper, I would like to examine some key elements that would affect the current and future rivalry of China and the U.S.

China’s Military Strategy Against the U.S.: Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD)

It is well known that “A2AD” is a term used by Western security thinkers to describe and explain China’s military strategy against the U.S. One thing to note at this point is the fact that the concept of denial is not just specific to China. In other words, denial is, in general, a strategic concept used by an inferior power towards a superior power. A typical example of this concept was the “Sea Denial” strategy of Admiral Sergey G. Gorshkov of the Cold-War era’s Soviet Navy, which was clearly inferior to the U.S. Navy (USN), to deter and suppress USN and other allied European navies in the Atlantic theater, well as Japan’s Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) in the Pacific Ocean areas.

The key objectives of China’s A2AD strategy are to keep U.S. military forces (USF) out of the Indo-Pacific region during peace-time and crisis periods (i.e., “A2”); as well as to deny USF from conducting free and unimpeded military operations against China (i.e., “AD”) in war time.

However, for China and its military, i.e. People’s Liberation Army (PLA), it is extremely difficult — practically impossible — to establish these goals by winning an all-out and head-on war against superior USF. So, a key tenet of A2AD is to build sufficient capabilities to attack and neutralize some of USF’s key weak points, or Achilles’ Heels, that would entrap robust a USF into the most difficult situations, where USF war-fighting capabilities would be substantially reduced. Thus, in theory, PLA will gain victory over constrained USF by conducting strike operations against “sitting-duck”-type targets. That is, in such a scenario, it would be clear that the hunter is the PLA and the sitting ducks are disabled the USF.

So, for PLA, building up its force to fully meet the requirements of this strategy has been a matter of highest priority, and China and the PLA have been developing many military capabilities for A2AD operations. These include anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM), hypersonic anti-ship/land attack missiles, submarine forces, and offensive seabed mine capabilities, as conventional high-end equipment and systems.

Along with this, there are unconventional and asymmetric A2AD operations; China and the PLA have been building anti-satellite capabilities (including satellite-killer missiles), cyber–attack capabilities, destruction of the seabed network of fiber-optical cables for internet connections, electromagnetic pulse capabilities, and others that will aim to neutralize USF command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. These specialized PLA capabilities, so to speak, are the ones that would disable the nerve networks which connect the “brain” (headquarters) and the "muscles" (front-line fighting forces), as well as all of the sensors, which function for USF like the eyes and ears of the body.

China’s ultimate objective of A2AD is to convince the U.S. to abandon its long-maintained policies of engagement in Indo-Pacific matters by successfully demonstrating these capabilities to U.S. leadership and the American people, in hopes that it will weaken the will of U.S.

As indicated above, a key element of A2AD is that China could achieve its military objective of always “keeping the USF out” of key operational areas without ever fighting the U.S. When crises occur, China would demonstrate the aforementioned unique military capabilities of PLA to the American public to deter U.S. involvement. In other words, China is expected to use A2AD to deprive the U.S. of its determination to keep a military presence

international norms and customs — especially the overwhelming global dominance of the United States (U.S.).
in Indo-Pacific and to signal that a fight against the PLA would entail an extremely high cost.

Main Elements of A2AD: The Characteristics of the PLA

From the viewpoint of its capacity to support China’s foreign policies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is necessary to examine each component of the PLA, which has been rapidly growing due to two decades of special budget allocations.

The 1.5 million-strong the PLA Army still lacks U.S.-style expeditionary capabilities that would fully support China’s overseas foreign policy. The PLA Army is second-to-none homeland defense force that can deliver a crushing blow to any invader, including USF. The Army, together with the Marines, also has the capability to attack and occupy Taiwan, in the absence of U.S. intervention. Additionally, the Army and Marines are capable of invading and seizing Japan’s Southwest (Ryukyu) Islands. But, taken as a whole, the PLA Army is too weak to support China’s other, larger, foreign policy objectives.

In recent years, PLA Navy (PLA-N) has become a top service, with the highest national priority. PLA-N has been pursuing an aggressive force build-up program for almost two decades. Depending on the source of estimates, the size of PLA-N, with its three fleets, is ranked as the second or third largest navy in the world today. The inventory of major PLA-N equipment includes aircraft carriers (CV), large surface combatants, both diesel-electric and nuclear-powered submarines, and various types of amphibious ships and watercraft, as well as a fair number of fixed-wing and rotary-wing naval aircraft.

However, despite its growing size and the improving qualities of the above-mentioned naval assets, PLA-N's capabilities to support China's overseas policies are limited, and will continue to be so into the near future. The reasons behind this include the following: first, the PLA-N has poor underway logistic-support capabilities in waters distant from the mainland; second, it has a serious lack of full-sized overseas naval bases to support PLA-N distant-water operations; and third is China’s maritime geography, i.e., it is surrounded by the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS) and circumferential Pacific island chains stretching in an ark from Japan to Taiwan, from the archipelagos of the Philippines and Indonesia/Malaysia to the Malay peninsula, and finally to Vietnam.

The PLA-N is also not capable of effectively protecting China's vast and globally-spread Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) for national survival. However, the PLA-N is in fact capable of strongly supporting PLA Army and Marines' amphibious operations in the ECS and SCS, and also against Taiwan or Japan’s Southwest Islands.

The PLA Air Force is, in general, a subordinate force to the PLA Army; so, like the Army, PLA Air Force has poor out-of-area operations capabilities. This is especially due to the same constraints that PLA-N has, and it will be extremely difficult to improve its expeditionary capabilities in the near term. In this regard, the PLA Air Force’s ability to support China’s foreign policy in air spaces distant from the mainland is, and will continue to be, extremely limited.

Note: Because of the objective of this article, an examination of the capabilities of PLA Rocket Force is not included.

The Effect of A2AD on Japan’s Maritime Strategy

Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Strategy to Counter A2AD

A current key focus of JMSDF strategy is to maintain sufficient capability to meet the various challenges of the PLA-N. This will surely contribute to protecting Japan's vital SLOCs and allow Japan to conduct support operations for USN forces, as well as contribute to Japanese Self-Defense Force’s (JSDF) Island Defense Joint Operations.
At the same time, however, there should be additional considerations to cope with the PLA-N’s new maneuvers under the A2AD strategy. For example, there are several key elements, which are listed below, in PLA’s A2AD strategy. JMSDF should develop its countermeasures to match future maritime security challenges.

- **ASBMs**
- New naval base on Hainan Island and Artificial Islands in SCS
- Naval Build-up Program, including aircraft carrier (CV) and Naval Strategic Arms (Ballistic missile-carrying submarine (SSBN))
- Asymmetric warfare

**Joint Efforts of JMSDF and USN to Match China’s Challenges**

In order for JMSDF to fully respond to the China’s new strategies, the most important thing is to develop and maintain sufficient operational capabilities against PLA-N. In this process, JMSDF should closely cooperate with USN because the main objective of China’s strategy is directed against USN forces in the region. China strongly intends to create situations favorable to itself, which will erode Washington D.C.’s determination to intervene in Asian issues or deploy USN forces. So, there is a lot for JMSDF and USN to do in order to deter PRC’s strategic attempts.

**A Key Initiative: JMSDF-USN Fleet Ballistic Missile Defense Capability**

Among them, one key initiative for Japan and JMSDF is to jointly develop functioning ASBM defense systems with the U.S. to neutralize China’s so-called “carrier-killer” missiles, such as the DF-21 and DF-26, which will target ocean areas distant from the mainland. If any of the USN’s capital ships operating in the Western Pacific Ocean, such as nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (CVN) or large amphibious ships, would be heavily damaged (with enormous casualties) by Chinese ASBM strikes, it is possible that both U.S. leadership and the American public would lose their determination to keep USF in that area to fight against the PLA to restore the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

As it was mentioned before, weakening, or getting the U.S. to abandon its intent to stay forward-deployed in the Indo-Pacific region, especially without actually fighting USF, is a primary objective of China’s A2AD strategy, and will continue to be so in the future. As it currently stands, if a crisis comes to fruition at some point in the future, China will establish its strategic objectives with relative ease, and this would be the least advantageous situation for Japan and the U.S. In this regard, Japan and the U.S. should prevent that scenario from emerging at any cost.

China’s development of increasingly potent A2AD weapons is the primary reason for Japan and the U.S. to jointly develop new ASBM defense capabilities. One favorable condition for our two nations is that fact that Japan and U.S. are already fully and jointly involved in development and deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems for national defense. If Japan and U.S. will wisely use the momentum of current BMD efforts, it would be much easier to develop and complete additional countermeasures to ASBMs, especially in their terminal-homing-phase.

For the purposes of this article, this concept of countering China’s A2AD weapons, such as ASBMs, is designated Fleet Ballistic Missile Defense (F-BMD).

**China’s Achilles Heel and the “God-Given Treasure” for Deterrence and Victory: Island Choke Points**

All PLA-N forces are contained in two semi-enclosed ocean areas, i.e. the ECS and SCS. So, for the PLA-N forces to operate outside of China’s immediate littoral waters, their units have to pass through straits and channels — choke points — in order to enter and depart the outer, open-ocean waters.
This complicates the PLA’s strategy. It is very difficult for the PLA-N to operate freely in the blue-water ocean. In particular, deployments of the PLA-N’s units in contingency and wartime scenarios could become extremely difficult and troublesome.

Thus, the existence of several choke-points in the First Island Chain, which surrounds PLA-N’s areas of operations in the ECS and SCS, is surely a second-to-none deterrent to Chinese force projection and will also continue to be so in the future. For China, the choke points are real obstacles for its naval strategy to overcome. Posing additional challenges to PLA-N activity is the fact that all of these choke-points belong to other nations, and China has no control over them.

In this regard, the PLA-N cannot count on the luxury of free transit of its operational units in war time. Therefore, choke-point control operations by the U.S.’s allies could inflict substantial difficulties on China. For example, Japan can physically block chokepoints in its Southwest (Ryukyu) Islands Chain, thereby preventing PLA-N transit out to the open sea to fight USN forces.

Additionally, JSDF is capable of controlling the Bashi Strait, and Australian forces, if the nation agrees, may block and control high-sea areas around southern choke-points in the Philippines and Indonesian archipelagos. Similarly, India and its navy will be the other potential controllers of some choke-points to and from the SCS and the Indian Ocean.

So, for China and the PLA-N, the constrictive geographic nature of its home-waters could be the most difficult obstacle to becoming a real blue-water navy to support its A2AD strategy. Of course, China has many options to solve or reduce this problem, but China will have to pay large costs for any solution. For Japan and the U.S., and perhaps Australia and India as well, choke points around China have been, and will be, “God-given treasures” to deter China and the PLA-N. Of note, JSDF’s new Island Defense posture is a part of Japan’s strategy of future deterrence.

Implications of New Technologies

In order for Japan and JMSDF to deter the PLA-N from conducting aggressive operations against Japan and the U.S., new and innovative technologies for JMSDF’s anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations will be vital for future success. There are several existing programs in JMSDF to improve its ASW capabilities for SLOCs protection, such as bi- and multi-static sonar operations and new non-acoustic sensors. The below three areas are examples of new technologies and challenges.

1. Command, Control, Communications & Computers, and Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (C4ISR)

In all military operations, C4ISR capabilities are key factors for success. In any theater or domain, implications of new C4ISR technologies, such as surveillance from space, intelligence collection by extremely long-endurance unmanned aircraft, sea-bed acoustic devices, and deployable and expandable sensors, which are supported by artificial intelligence (AI), and advanced data processing systems, will be game-changers for JMSDF’s future maritime operations — especially ASW for SLOCs protection and choke-point operations.

2. Unmanned Vehicles

Long endurance, large and small in size, unmanned air (UAV), unmanned surface (USV), and unmanned underwater (UUV) vehicles have a huge potential to complement, but not to replace, conventional manned systems and platforms. The deployment of low-cost, medium- to high-performance unmanned vehicles in large numbers, will extensively make up for the inherent personnel risks involved in using existing manned systems. At the same time, the use of AI will substantially improve the latest unmanned vehicles’ autonomous capabilities, independent from controlling (mother) units at sea or on land.

3. Naval Mines

Since the end of the Cold War, one almost-forgotten combat system has been the naval mine. AI and new sensors, supported
by the latest sensor and data-processing technologies, have the potential to transform not only mine laying and sweeping, but also overall naval operations — especially those conducted at choke points, changing mines from seemingly obsolete warfare devices fully meeting future maritime high-end war requirements. These types of advanced mines will enable any navy to deploy a much smaller number of mines to establish its operational objectives, i.e., much more efficiently than in the past. These AI-mines will be most suitable for offensive mining at the mouth of enemy ports, and defensive mine-operations at strategic choke points. These mines will be able to attack the right target, at the right place, at the right time.

**Conclusion**

The PLA-N has the potential to become a real “blue-water” navy, and could thereby become a strong peer-competitor for the USN and JMSDF. In order for the JMSDF and USN to cope with China’s new challenges, our two nations, and two best maritime forces, have to start new initiatives now. In particular, the aforementioned joint development efforts focused on Fleet BMD (F-BMD) systems are a matter of urgency for both Japan and the U.S. as leading naval powers.

At the same time, however, it is true for China that there will be many problems involved with trying to build the PLA-N into a force that can operate powerfully on the open seas. Therefore, Japan and the U.S. will need to prepare to counter China’s strategy with precise coordination and focus on the PLA-N’s most difficult challenge, which is the semi-enclosing nature of the ECS and SCS.

A key question for Tokyo and Washington D.C. is how to assure wartime control of these strategic chokepoints. In order for JSDF and USF to maintain an advantageous position over the PLA, both will have to retain the capability to keep the big “wild birds” (i.e., PLA-N and PLA Air Force) in their naturally-formed “God-given” cages of the First Island Chain surrounding ECS and SCS. Both Japan and the U.S. need to develop an aligned strategy and mutual capability at the earliest opportunity to deter China’s adventurism.

*This article represents the personal opinions of the author and not any official position of the JMSDF or the Government of Japan.*

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**Does the Indian Ocean Matter for U.S.-Japan Relations?**

*by Satoru Nagao*

Historically, the Indian Ocean has been a low priority for Japan. In 2017, there were only 7,000 Japanese living in India — in a country of one billion. If it is hard to find Japanese nationals in India, it is even harder to find them in the area surrounding the Indian Ocean. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in its importance.

Notably, Japan has started to promote a vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” instead of a narrower focus on the “Asia-Pacific.” The largest warships of Japan, the helicopter carriers Izumo and Kaga, have called at ports in India and Sri Lanka since 2017. Japan donated two patrol ships to Sri Lanka and is also planning to donate used P-3C anti-submarine patrol planes.

These developments are likely due to the changing security situation near Japan, which has caused Japan to reevaluate the importance of the Indian Ocean region. This raises three questions: What are the security changes that have occurred around Japan? To adjust this new situation, what kind of security system is Japan seeking? And, what can cooperation among Japan, the United States, India, and Sri Lanka achieve in the Indian Ocean?

**What Changes Have Occurred Around Japan?**

Recently, China has started to expand its military activities around Japan. Figure 1 shows the air and naval routes China
China’s military activities have also been very aggressive in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, as well as at the Indo-China border (figure 4). History may explain China’s recent assertiveness, as China’s tendency toward maritime expansion has coincided with a shifting military balance in the region. When France withdrew from Vietnam in the
1950s, China occupied half of the Paracel Islands, and in 1974, immediately after the US withdrew from the region, it occupied the other half. In 1988, after the Soviet withdrawal from Vietnam, China attacked the Spratly Islands, which were controlled by Vietnam. Similarly, after the US withdrawal from the Philippines, China occupied Mischief Reef, claimed by both the Philippines and Vietnam. Therefore, historical precedent suggests that counter-balancing China’s military may halt China’s expansion.

However, in the current security environment, the military balance of power is tipping toward China and away from the U.S. For example, from 2000-2017, the U.S. commissioned 15 new submarines. During the same period, China commissioned at least 44 submarines. Vice Admiral Joseph Mulloy, then Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Capabilities and Resources of the U.S. Navy, reported that China had more diesel-powered and nuclear-powered submarines than the United States, as of February 2015. This has allowed China to expand its military activities. In response, U.S. allies and friendly countries need to fill the power vacuum to counter-balance China.

A new security framework is being developed — one that relies more on a network of U.S. allies and friendly countries (figure 5). This framework includes not only U.S.-led cooperation, but trilateral partnerships that do not include the U.S., such as Japan-India-Australia, India-Australia-Indonesia and India-Australia-France. Increasingly, U.S.-Japan-India-Sri Lanka cooperation in the Indian Ocean will be key.

In Response to China’s Rise, What Kind of Security System Is Japan Seeking?

For a long time, the “hub-and-spoke” system has maintained order in the Indo-Pacific region. Under this system, Japan and Australia are each U.S. allies but share no close bilateral security relations between themselves. Thus, this system is heavily dependent on U.S. military power.

What Can U.S.-Japan-India-Sri Lanka Cooperation Achieve in the Indian Ocean?

The U.S. became an influential country in the Indian Ocean after the 1970s. However, since the middle of the 2000s, China’s naval activities in the Indian Ocean have been expanding. Chinese submarines threaten vital sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean. Through its arms exports, port development, and expanding submarine activities, China will soon become the leading power in the Indian Ocean instead of the U.S. Japan cannot accept this situation.

In response, the U.S. and Japan must look to India. If India has the will and capability, the U.S. and Japan would be able to release themselves from the heavy burden of safeguarding security in the Indian Ocean and could deploy more military force in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. While Indian participation in the region has been a problem in the past, recently India has shown an active presence in the

Figure 3. Frequency of Japanese Fighter-jet Scrambles from 2008-2018

![Graph showing frequency of Japanese fighter-jet scrambles from 2008 to 2018 against China, Russia, and other countries.]

Indian Ocean. For the U.S. and Japan, India represents a new hope.

Defense cooperation among the U.S., Japan, India, and Sri Lanka would offer unique contributions to the security situation in the Indian Ocean. For example, the U.S. and Japan could contribute to India’s shipbuilding capabilities to build more warships. Providing anti-submarine know-how and equipment for India is another possibility. In India’s Andaman–Nicobar Islands, Japan and the U.S. are planning to support infrastructure projects that would enhance India’s naval capability to detect Chinese submarine activities. Not only do the Andaman-Nicobar Islands provide important strategic locations for submarine detection, but so would Sri Lanka (figure 6).

Furthermore, infrastructure development in countries neighboring India is useful for Japan-U.S.-India cooperation too. For example,
Bangladesh has already chosen Japan’s Martabali port project instead of China’s Sonadia port project. There is a possibility that Japan and India could follow a similar pattern in Sri Lanka. Thus, if the Trincomalee port project succeeds, then the importance of China’s Hambantota port for Sri Lanka will decline. It is also possible that the Chabahar port project in Iran could diminish the importance of China’s Gwadar port in Pakistan (figure 6). Additionally, regional partners can utilize the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor to impede China’s Growing influence in Africa.

Conclusion
China has recently started to expand its military activities around Japan due to the changing power balance between the U.S. and China. Those whose interests align with the U.S. and its allies should respond to this situation by developing a new security framework. Under such a framework, cooperation among the U.S., Japan, India, and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean will have ramifications in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Indeed, the Indian Ocean is of increasing importance to U.S.-Japanese relations, and the time has come to proactively further this cooperation to ensure prosperous stability across the Indo-Pacific.

Figure 5: Old “Hub-and-spoke” Alliance System Vs. New Alliance System of Networks

“Old Alliance”: US and its bilateral relations

“New Alliance”: Network of allies and friendly countries

Figure 6. Strategic Military Locations for Multilateral Cooperation

Source: Satoru Nagao
Figure 7. Opportunities to Provide Alternatives to Chinese Ports in the Indian Ocean
An Analysis of Japan’s Military Operations in the Indian Ocean

by Satoru Nagao

Recently, Japan has been increasing its focus on the Indian Ocean, and relatedly, Japan has ramped up its security cooperation with the U.S., India, Australia, and Sri Lanka in that region. Japan has started to use the phrase “Indo-Pacific,” which focuses on both the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, instead of “Asia-Pacific,” which focuses on the Pacific only. And since 2017, Japan’s largest warships, Izumo and Kaga, have called at ports in India and Sri Lanka. This indicates that Japan has the potential to be a major security actor in the Indian Ocean. If this is so, what kind of actor will Japan be? How can we analyze Japan’s future strategy?

In the past, Japan has engaged in military operations in the Indian Ocean region, with naval operations — rather than air or land operations — being the most important to Japan’s ability to project power. Thus, in examining Japan’s past naval operations in the Indian Ocean, the direction of Japan’s future strategy in the region may become apparent. The focus of this paper is to analyze these naval operations in order to understand and anticipate the nature of Japan’s continuing military activity in the India Ocean.

Nine Naval Operations

Japanese naval forces have implemented eight past military operations in the Indian Ocean. Due to threats over the last decade in the Strait of Hormuz, Japan’s ninth operation comprises plans to escort tankers in the Persian Gulf to defend against a potential blockade.

1. Safeguarding Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) in World War I

Japan implemented its first naval operation in the Indian Ocean during World War I. When German cruiser Emden attacked Chennai and the SLOCs in the Indian Ocean in 1914, Great Britain offered Japan, at that time a British ally, the opportunity to join the mission to safeguard SLOCs in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. Japan dispatched one battle cruiser and three cruisers to assist Australia with an escort convoy. In 1916, German naval activities in the Indian Ocean (which included the disguising of a cruiser) prompted Japan to add four cruisers and four destroyers to safeguard the SLOCs throughout the Indian Ocean.283

2. The Battle of Ceylon in World War II

Japan’s second operation in the Indian Ocean was its biggest. At war with U.S.- and British-allied forces, Japan dispatched five aircraft carriers with 315 carrier-based planes, four battleships, two cruisers, 11 destroyers and nine tankers. Further, against the British, it sent three aircraft carriers with 93 carrier-based planes, five battleships, seven cruisers, 14 destroyers, and about 70 land-based planes. The purpose of this operation was to support land operations in Burma (Myanmar). During the battle of Ceylon, Japan sank one aircraft carrier, two cruisers and other ships, and shot down 50 planes. The British shot down 13 airplanes. It was the first time in history that an aircraft carrier sank another aircraft carrier.284

3. Attacking Sea Lines of Communication in WWII

Japan had attacked SLOCs in the Indian Ocean during WWII. Table 1 shows the list of dispatched warships. The purpose of this operation was to attack the SLOCs and transport people and other goods between Germany and Japan, including the Indian nationalist Subhash Chandra Bose. Japan sent up to ten submarines with three small submarines, two decorated cruisers, or one submarine tender. The entire Indian Ocean was an arena for war. Japan’s operations also included attacking a port in Madagascar. Japan sank 102 ships, including one battleship, and destroyed 15. It lost three submarines in the Indian Ocean.285

4. Minesweeping After the Gulf War

After WWII, 45 years passed before Japan was willing to perform military activities in the Indian Ocean. However, when
Saddam Hussein invaded the Iraq, Japan needed to show the will to contribute to the world order and prove its commitment to its alliance with the U.S. Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force planed four missions: transporting multinational forces, sweeping mines, escorting ships, and dispatching warships to transport Japanese nationals. After the Gulf War, in April 1991, Japan decided to send one minesweeper tender, four minesweepers, and one supply ship to the Gulf region. These warships swept 34 mines by the end of the mission in September 1991. It was the first time that Japan independently decided to dispatch military forces after WWII.286

5. Refueling Missions After 9/11 (2001-2010)
In October 2001, just after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, Japan sent one replenishment ship and two destroyers to the Indian Ocean to support the U.S. operation in Afghanistan. By the end of the first phase of the mission, on February 24, 2007, Japan replenished warships belonging to 11 navies, 727 times. Japan refueled a total of 470 thousand liters of oil. After that, Japan began its second phase of refueling, which lasted until 2010. And in this mission, Japan sent a state-of-the-art naval destroyer equipped with AEGIS radar as one of the two destroyers escorting replenishment ships in 2002. In addition, Japan sent another destroyer and minesweeper tender to transport daily necessities to Afghanistan (through Pakistan).287

6. Disaster Relief for the 2004 Earthquake and Tsunami Near Sumatra, Indonesia
When a large earthquake and tsunami struck countries around the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004, Japan sent its two destroyers and one supply ship, which were returning to Japan after a refueling mission supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan.
The three ships and the ship-borne helicopter began searching for disaster victims and conducting rescue operations with other navies, including the U.S., India, and Australia. On January 12, 2005, Japan dispatched another destroyer, transport ship, and supply ship to provide maritime transport for Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Force that would be implementing relief operations.288

7. Disaster-relief Operations in Pakistan in 2007
When an earthquake devastated Pakistan in 2007, Japan sent one amphibious ship carrying five helicopters belonging to Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Force to provide disaster relief.289

To defend ships against pirates in the Red Sea, Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force started escorting ships in March 2009 using two destroyers with two helicopters and two anti-submarine patrol planes. Japan’s Ground and Air Self-Defense Forces support these operations with a small group of ground troops and transport airplanes. At first, these forces were located at the U.S. base in Djibouti.

Later, Japan set up a permanent base in Djibouti in 2011. This is Japan's first permanent base outside of Japan since WWII.290

In this mission, Japan joined the multinational Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), which, since 2013, has included the U.S., Australia, the U.K., France, Canada, Netherlands, and Pakistan. Japanese admirals took command of CTF-151 in 2015, 2017, and 2018.291 Japan also communicates with India, EU Naval Force Somalia, South Korea, and China. As of May 31, 2018, Japan has escorted 3,826 vessels, and its airplanes have flown 1,951 missions.292 These operations are still on-going.

9. Escort Tankers in the Persian Gulf (Future Plans)
As its ninth operation, Japan plans to dispatch two destroyers to escort tankers in the Persian Gulf, if Iran blocks the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has threatened both recently and in 2012. And after such a conflict, Japan would also sweep for mines. In June 2019, similar discussions occurred when tankers with ties to Japan were attacked in the Strait of Hormuz.293

Defining Features of the Nine Naval Operations
In these operations, there are three important features to note.

1. Motivations: The Security Situation in Northeast Asia and U.S. Policy
First, the security situation in Northeast Asia has prompted the dispatch of warships in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, relations with the U.S. strongly influence Japan’s decisions to send fleets to the Indian Ocean. In WWII, Japan’s war with the U.S. was the reason for both the battle of Ceylon and for attacking SLOCs in the Indian Ocean. After WWII, when Japan sent minesweepers or replenished ships, it was primarily due to Japan’s significant alliance with the United States.

The reason why the U.S. figures so importantly is related to U.S. influence on Japanese history. The industrial revolution in Japan started after four U.S. warships came to Uraga, near Tokyo, in 1853. After that, Japan faced two wars with China and Russia. In the Japan-Russia War, U.S. mediation contributed to Japan’s victory. But in WWII, Japan lost the war with U.S. In Japan’s two-thousand-year history, the U.S. has been the only foreign power to have successfully occupied the country. Then, during the Cold War, Japan could concentrate on building its economic power under the Japan-U.S. alliance. The U.S. worked with Japan to contain USSR submarine forces, and Japan has possessed first-class anti-submarine capabilities ever since. And now, to correct the military balance with China and tackle the threat from North Korea, Japan again collaborates with U.S. military power. Therefore, the U.S. has been the most important factor in Japan’s decision to do something security-related in the late-modern age.

Recently, Japanese activities have been expanding in the Indian Ocean region because the U.S. expects Japan to play an active role to counter China’s assertiveness. China has drastically increased its defense budget and expanded
military activities both in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. According to Admiral Sunil Lanba, chief of the naval staff of the Indian Navy, Beijing has deployed six to eight warships in the Indian Ocean. However, after the Cold War, the U.S. lost the need to maintain a large naval and air force. The number of warships that the U.S. possesses has decreased from about 600, during the Cold War, to less than three hundred in 2019. Hence, the U.S. needs the cooperation of its allies and other friendly countries. As a result, to safeguard Japan's SLOCs, Japan needs to contribute more as a U.S. ally. Because of this situation, Japan has promoted cooperation with the U.S., India, and Australia in the Indian Ocean, and Japan has also cooperated with many countries in the region, like Sri Lanka. Therefore, the combination of the security environment in Northeast Asia and U.S. security policy in this region shaped Japan's naval operations in the Indian Ocean.

2. Japan Collaborates Well With Other Countries
A second feature to consider when assessing Japan's military activity is the type of operation: whether it is a unilateral or cooperative operation. Indeed, except WWII, all Japan's military operations have been international, cooperative endeavors. In WWII, Japan escorted ships as part of a multinational effort. In its minesweeping role after the Gulf War, and refueling missions after 9/11, Japan was supporting the U.S. and Gulf countries. Japan's operations after the earthquake and tsunami in 2004, as well as the earthquake in Pakistan in 2007, were also part of international disaster-relief efforts. The on-going anti-piracy measures are an international effort too. In current discussions of whether to provide tanker escorts in the Gulf, Japan is weighing how to cooperate with the international community. Thus, all Japan's operations, with the exception of those in WWII, have been part of international efforts. Compared with China, who chooses unilateral naval deployments in the Indian Ocean, Japan's efforts are significantly multilateral in nature.

Why has Japan not chosen unilateral action in the Indian Ocean? Most likely, Japan does not have a strong reason to do so. Japan is not located in the Indian Ocean and does not have much motivation to deploy a fleet to the region because of its distance. But when the international community asks Japan to do so, Japan has responded with support. Recently, China has been increasing its military presence in the Indian Ocean, and Japan has been increasing its presence in response. However, Japan’s moves are in cooperation with the U.S., India, and Australia, as well as other regional countries. Thus, the purpose of Japan’s naval activities in the Indian Ocean is the promotion of cooperation with other countries.

3. The Size of Dispatched Fleets Were Small
The third feature of Japan’s military operations is size. The size of dispatched fleets has been small, except in one case: the battle of Ceylon. In the battle of Ceylon in the WWII, Japan sent five aircraft carriers to the Indian Ocean, which constitutes a large fleet. But in the rest of its operations, Japan sent only up to 12 warships to the Indian Ocean. Before WWII, Japan possessed 65 warships. Thus, the use of 12 warships dispatched did not account for a big share of Japan's naval forces. Likewise, in 1941, when Japan possessed 64 submarines, 3–10 submarines were not a large share either. Minesweepers and amphibious ships are not a major component of the Japanese naval force. Two destroyers with one replenishment ship, which Japan dispatched after 9/11, also composed a smaller force. And in 2009, Japan possessed one helicopter carrier, 52 destroyers, and 80 anti-submarine patrol aircraft. Thus, the two destroyers and two anti-submarine patrol aircraft, dispatched in 2009 for the anti-piracy mission, amounted to a small fleet for Japan. Because of the geographical distance, Japan cannot send a big fleet to the Indian Ocean easily.

Conclusion
Will Japan be a major actor in the Indian Ocean? If so, what kind of strategy will Japan choose? What can Japan do in the Indian Ocean? Analyzing Japan’s naval operations in the Indian Ocean leads to three conclusions. First, Japan could
be an important security actor in the Indian Ocean. As China continues to show a military presence in the region, Japan’s presence has also been expanding. However, secondly, Japan’s influence will be limited because the security situation in Northeast Asia as well as U.S. policy are the main sources of its motivation. Japan’s deployment of forces will be part of international efforts, which indicates that Japan does not have a strong inclination to be an independent actor in this region. Third, what Japan can do is limited because of the small size of its naval force. Ultimately, the kind of influence Japan can wield in this region will depend on cooperation with the U.S., India, Australia, and other U.S. allies and like-minded countries. Japan will participate in the Indian Ocean, and its influence will be cooperative.

Table 2. Defining Features of Japan’s Nine Indian Ocean Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPERATION</th>
<th>STRATEGIC REASON</th>
<th>ROLE OF FLEET</th>
<th>SIZE OF FLEET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safeguard SLOCs in WWI</td>
<td>Alliance with Britain</td>
<td>Defensive combat</td>
<td>Small (4-12+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The battle of Ceylon in WWII</td>
<td>War with the U.S. (Pacific theater)</td>
<td>Offensive combat</td>
<td>Big (31+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking SLOCs in WWII</td>
<td>War with the U.S. (Pacific theater)</td>
<td>Offensive combat</td>
<td>Small (6-9+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minesweeping after the Gulf War</td>
<td>Alliance with the U.S.</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Small (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refueling missions after 9/11 (2001-2007)</td>
<td>Alliance with the U.S.</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Small (2 or 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster relief for the 2004 earthquake and tsunami near Sumatra, Indonesia</td>
<td>Humanitarian mission</td>
<td>Disaster relief</td>
<td>Small (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster relief in Pakistan in 2007</td>
<td>Humanitarian mission</td>
<td>Disaster relief</td>
<td>Small (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-piracy measures since 2009</td>
<td>Protecting its own SLOCs</td>
<td>Defensive combat</td>
<td>Small (2+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort tankers in the Gulf (future plans)</td>
<td>Protecting its own SLOCs</td>
<td>Defensive combat</td>
<td>Small (2+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
As the authors of this report demonstrate, there is widespread awareness across the Indo-Pacific about the problems created by a rising China. However, there are different approaches about how to tackle the situation. The United States, India, Australia, and Japan have chosen a relatively strong stance toward China. And the U.K., France, the EU, and Canada, as U.S. allies, are trying to cooperate with U.S. efforts. On the other hand, Vietnam, Singapore, ASEAN, and Sri Lanka are worried about the side effects of U.S.-China competition. How can affected parties respond?


Regional countries like Vietnam, Singapore, ASEAN, and Sri Lanka are worried about one situation: even if they adopt a strong stance toward China, the U.S. and other like-minded countries might not support them in a crisis. These regional countries know what happened in WWII. When Germany bombed London in 1940, the U.S. president was planning to join the war to support the British, but he lacked legitimate reasons to persuade the U.S. citizenry to mobilize and reorganize their military for war. Before Germany’s ally, Japan, attacked Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, the U.S. could not justify direct intervention in the British-German war.

Because regional countries are worried that similar situations will happen again, the U.S. needs to maintain the strong image of a U.S.-led security system. The strength of this system rests on the assumption that the U.S. will intervene militarily if regional allies face emergencies. But the credibility of the U.S.-led security system is facing serious challenges in some cases. One unfortunate example of such a credibility gap occurred in the Obama administration’s Syria policy. Though President Obama declared the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons to be “a red line for us” in 2012, the U.S. did not attack when the regime used chemical weapons in 2013. The following year, Russia annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine and Syria after that. And China has also been building artificial islands in the South China Sea since 2015. All of these incidents took place after Russia and China perceived weakness in the U.S.-led security system.

Now, in the Indo-Pacific, the regional countries have started to worry that the U.S. will not adequately support them. This is especially true when China uses fisheries and paramilitary to obscure aggressive activity, instead of overt military operations. In those cases, can the U.S. find legitimate reasons to intervene militarily?

In order to maintain a strong image, the U.S. should use test-case scenarios to indicate what kind of intervention might occur in various situations. For example, if China were planning a small-scale limited attack on India in the Indo-China border area, what could the U.S. do? If the U.S. and Japan were to gather maritime and air forces around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, China would be unlikely to attack India in the Indo-China border area because China wants to avoid simultaneous conflicts on two fronts. Such a persuasive scenario would assure others of the strength of the U.S.’s security system. The U.S. should develop many examples of such scenarios and start joint training exercises based on these scenarios with its allies and like-minded countries.


A second concern of Vietnam, Singapore, ASEAN, and Sri Lanka is related to their economy. Currently, a U.S.-China “trade war” is ongoing. Because money is enabling China’s current assertiveness, this trade war is beneficial. When China has enough money, it can rapidly modernize its military. China’s wealth also allows it to invest a great deal of money in small countries; the small countries’ indebtedness allows China to expand its influence.
there. Countries with significant Chinese investment (and debt) are hesitant to criticize China, even if it does not follow international rules. Thus, if the current trade war reduces China’s income, it is the right way for the U.S. to deal with China. However, it is also true that the U.S. needs to assure its allies and like-minded countries that its strong position toward China will not impede the economic development of those siding with the U.S.

Indeed, the current economic system in the Indo-Pacific is dependent upon China. Many global companies built their factories and sell their products in China. Thus, the economic structure itself needs to change. The U.S., its allies, and like-minded countries should relocate their factories and find new markets elsewhere.

In the case of Japan, the number of Japanese staying in China has dropped from 150,399 in 2012 to 124,162 in 2017 because many factories have relocated from China to other countries like Vietnam and India. If similar moves occur in other countries, it will create a new economic structure that is not dependent on China.

Though the U.S. is no longer a member, what was originally known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership is a project that could create a new regional economic system that would not include China. The U.S.-Japan “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy is also creating a new image of the economic system in this region. In September 2019, Japan and the EU also agreed to start joint infrastructure projects. The Japan-India Asia-Africa Growth Corridor could contribute to creating that new economic image too. Using these projects, the U.S., its allies, and like-minded countries need to create a version of the Belt and Road Initiative that is better than the current China-dependent economic system.


The problem of China is caused in part by the image that China is a “rising power” and the U.S. is a “declining power.” However, if the U.S. can integrate both security and economic efforts, it will remain very powerful.

For example, when we talk about safeguarding energy supplies against Chinese submarine threats, we could try to build a stronger naval power. But under the current budget it is not feasible to prepare enough naval ships to safeguard extensive sea lines of communications (SLOCs). From 2000 to 2017, China acquired at least 44 new submarines, while the U.S. acquired 15. Even if U.S. submarines are far better than Chinese ones, the Chinese are catching up to the U.S. quickly. Thus, the U.S. side needs to establish a new security system, supported not only by the military, but also by an economic system. Case in point, India-UAE cooperation demonstrates this new idea. In 2018, India and the UAE signed an agreement allowing the UAE to set up strategic oil storage facilities in India. This agreement benefits both parties. India can use the stored oil in an emergency. For the UAE, even if tankers cannot go through the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE can sell oil from this storage. And because the UAE can sell oil from this facility regularly, the high cost of maintaining this facility is offset. This economic effort helps safeguard SLOCs.

The U.S. and its allies can apply a similar method to deal with China’s submarine threat to SLOCs. Countries siding with the U.S. could set up strategic oil reserve facilities in like-minded countries throughout the Indo-Pacific and share oil storage in peace and in emergencies. Because submarines cannot easily disrupt this network of oil facilities, it will be hard to threaten the supply lines of countries siding with the U.S. This defensive measure would assure the strong image of a U.S.-led security system.

The U.S. side will win the competition with China, but collaboration with its allies and like-minded countries—including Vietnam, Singapore, ASEAN, Australia, India, Sri Lanka, the U.K., France, the EU, Canada, and Japan—will be key. Therefore, we should understand each other and maintain
the strong image of a U.S.-led security system. Now is the time to "Make America a Great Leader Again."

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The author detected this sentiment from fellow participants, both Asian and Western, at the SLD right after the speech in the course of the discussions.

BRI, originally known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) when it was first unveiled in 2013, covers its geographical scope more than just the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Its outreach towards Europe and South America makes it more a global initiative.

In fact, at the SLD, several Southeast Asian policy elites who took the podium referred to Lee’s speech when they proffer their views on the regional geopolitical dynamics. It appears as if the speech has been welcomed by ASEAN policy elites, even if the speech was not crafted in consultation with them in the first place to reflect an intramural consensus.


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