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U.S.-Japan Cooperation on Strategic Island Defense

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Summary of Recommendations	6
Strategic Level.....	6
Operational Level	6
Introduction.....	8
The Ryukyu Islands	10
China’s Strategic Ambitions and Japan’s Southwest Islands (First Island Chain Passage)	11
A Rising Maritime Military: The Threat from China	14
China’s Challenge to the Status Quo	16
U.S. Defensive Capabilities and Japan’s Southwest Islands	18
Japan’s Defense Limitations and Growing Focus on Defending the Southwest Islands.....	20
Joint U.S.-Japan Operations.....	23
Recommendations.....	24
Strategic Level.....	24
Initiate U.S.-Japan Engagement and Policy Planning	24
Make Room for Cooperation: De-stress China’s Sea Lines of Communication.....	25
Operational Level.....	26
Conduct Bilateral Planning and Exercises.....	26
Expand Joint Island-Defense Capabilities.....	26
Establish Japan’s Defensive Support Role for the U.S. in a Regional Contingency.....	27
Build Operational Command and Control for the Southwest Islands	28
Conclusion	29
Author Biographies.....	30

Executive Summary

Japan's southwest island chain, an archipelago of 1,100 kilometers (700 miles), is known as the Ryukyu Islands. Along with Taiwan and the Philippines, it comprises what the People's Republic of China (PRC) perceives as the first of three strategic island chains. To China, these island chains represent geostrategic impediments to Pacific Ocean expansion and power projection, which its adversaries—including the United States and Japan—might use to counter Chinese aggression in a conflict. In particular, the first island chain represents the first geostrategic hurdle for the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) as it seeks access to sea lanes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Two of China's three PLAN fleet bases are located on the East China Sea. To reach the South China Sea and the Pacific, ships or aircraft from these bases must transit through the choke points of the Taiwan or Miyako Straits, the latter passage through the Ryukyus. Japan's southwest islands pose a significant strategic and operational challenge for China, and thus their defense is equally strategically and operationally important for Japan.

China, to achieve its goal of global superpower status by the mid-twenty-first century, has sought to contest and change the status quo across the Indo-Pacific region by constructing and arming islands from the South China Sea to the East China Sea and beyond. As part of this effort, the PRC has expanded and modernized its armed forces. The immediate objective is to neutralize what Chinese rulers regard as the threat of the first island chain. This has included building a larger and more advanced surface fleet and air force, including the country's first aircraft carrier, as well as advanced destroyers and more advanced aircraft. It also involves developing and expanding China's amphibious assault capabilities by means of a larger and more capable PLAN Marine Corps, along with more amphibious warships, amphibious aircraft, and amphibious assault vehicles. In the PRC's crosshairs is not only Taiwan, the keystone of the first island chain and a vigorous democracy, but also the Senkaku Islands of Japan, whose sovereignty the PRC contests, and the Ryukyu Islands. Any Chinese invasion of Taiwan or military attempt to assert sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands runs the risk of drawing the United States and Japan into a conflict with the PRC.

The U.S.-Japan alliance obliges the United States to defend Japan and its sovereign islands. Both countries maintain a security presence in the Ryukyus, principally on the island of Okinawa, where the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) maintains a nineteen-thousand-strong force, alongside U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy units. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and Coast Guard also maintain ground, maritime, and aviation elements on Okinawa and conduct regular air and sea patrols throughout Japan's southwest islands. In keeping with constitutional restrictions that limit Japan's security forces to self-defense, Japan's Ministry of Defense has also recently sought to bolster the country's amphibious capabilities to counter potential Chinese aggression.

In the face of a rising PRC challenge, the United States and Japan have in recent years streamlined and strengthened their security cooperation. This has included participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises to improve interoperability at tactical and operational levels. In addition, the 2015 creation of an alliance coordination mechanism (ACM) provides guidelines for the U.S. and Japanese governments to coordinate defense cooperation, including the defense of Japan's outlying islands, at a policy level. However, the two countries still lack an integrated means—at the bilateral or multilateral level—to coordinate operations in response to regional contingencies.

Summary of Recommendations

To strengthen the defense of Japan's southwest islands, Japan and the United States should improve both strategic and operational-level engagement and coordination. This requires direct discussions between the two countries' policymakers to create a bilateral strategy for a conflict over Taiwan or the Japanese islands themselves. This should also involve joint tabletop exercises (TTX)—simulations that examine crises and review possible responses—and operational-level exercises, expansion of defensive capabilities for Japan's outlying islands, and upgrading of operational-level command and control for the southwest islands. The two countries should seek to forge closer ties and integrated defense capabilities in the region to deter PRC aggression and maintain a stable, viable status quo.

Strategic Level

Initiate U.S.-Japan Engagement and Policy Planning

The U.S. and Japan should build a multifaceted strategy to deter or counter Chinese actions against Taiwan, the Senkakus, or even the Ryukyus. Planning will have to take into account the constitutional constraints on the JSDF and establish strategic roles for both countries in advance of crises in and around Japan's southwest islands. This includes guarantees and support for free and open sea lines of communication (SLOCs) should an attack occur against Taiwan or Japan, and bilateral mobilization in the political arena to isolate China.

Operational Level

Conduct Bilateral Planning and Exercises

The U.S. and Japan should hold high-level dialogues to examine possible PLAN operations and explore how to counter Chinese actions at an operational level—from island defense and amphibious assault, to engaging and defending against Chinese cyber activities that support conventional operations.

Expand Joint Island-Defense Capabilities

To provide island defense, the U.S. and Japan should also establish closer operational-level coordination between the JSDF, including its Coast Guard, and the U.S. military. Measures should include improving intelligence, sharing real-time surveillance, and undertaking reconnaissance (ISR). In addition, the U.S. Marine Corps and Japan's new amphibious brigades should build joint amphibious rapid-reaction capabilities to defend or retake outlying islands.

Establish Japan's Defensive Support Role for the U.S. in a Regional Contingency

The United States could be drawn into a conflict with China as the result of a Chinese attempt to use force against Taiwan. There are ways that Japan could support U.S. activities without violating its constitutional restrictions. One would be to provide non-military assistance, such as search and rescue (SAR) for U.S. forces in theater. Another would be to direct Japan's Coast Guard and the JSDF to secure U.S. installations in Japanese territory, particularly Okinawa, from Chinese attacks.

The Japanese Ministry of Defense and the JSDF have developed or are developing unique and valuable defense technologies and equipment capable of supporting remote island defense and SAR operations. These amphibious platforms and technologies should be provided to the United States military—and the USMC especially—to bolster American operations in the region.

Build Operational Command and Control for the Southwest Islands

At an operational level, the U.S. and Japan should aim to build more integrated command-and-control structures for the Japanese southwest islands, beyond the slow-moving, policy-level coordination of the alliance coordination mechanism (ACM). To counter any weakness that the PRC could exploit against the islands, the U.S. and Japan should formalize ties between their forces in theater, through liaisons in their headquarters and on warships, and through planning cycles. This would enable them to exchange best practices and familiarize themselves with the other side's operations. The goal of these activities would be to establish regional command and control under a Combined Joint Command Center that could be fully activated immediately in a crisis and allow for swifter joint decision-making.

Introduction

Japan is a nation of nearly seven thousand islands, stretching from Hokkaido in the northeast to Yonaguni in the southwest. The country's southwest islands, collectively known as the Ryukyu Islands, make up an archipelago of 1,100 kilometers (700 miles). They have been part of Japan since the Kingdom of Ryukyu was annexed in 1879, during the Meiji period.¹ At their southernmost point, Yonaguni, the Ryukyus are roughly 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Taiwan. The largest and most populous island in the chain, Okinawa, is home to nearly 1.3 million Japanese citizens and, since the Second World War, has hosted a significant U.S. military presence. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) also have a sizeable presence on Okinawa.

The Ryukyu island chain comprises part of what the People's Republic of China (PRC) perceives as the "first island chain," an arc of islands that includes the Ryukyus, Taiwan, and the Philippine archipelago and encloses the East Asian mainland. For the PRC, the island chains represent vital strategic interests due to their positions: The first extends from Japan to Taiwan to Vietnam, the second from Japan to the U.S.-held Mariana Islands and Guam, and the third from the Aleutian Islands to Hawaii to Oceania. To China, these concentric arcs are geostrategic impediments through which Chinese maritime trade and military ships must pass to access the Pacific and Indian oceans and ultimately, global maritime trade routes.

Alternatively, if China could either neuter or preemptively control the island chains, they would not be hurdles to overcome, but perimeters from which to conduct defensive or offensive operations. China's recent military development has led to expansion and modernization of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and other Chinese military forces. Its likely strategic objective is to dominate the first island chain and project Chinese power regionally and eventually globally. Beijing regards Taiwan as a rogue province and a political irritant to the regime of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and it persists in its threat to take Taiwan by force. The island is, in fact, a robust democracy, an economic powerhouse, and the first island chain's strategic hinge.

Japan's southwest island chain, comprising a vast number of small islands and coral reefs scattered across more than 1,200 kilometers (750 miles), is also vulnerable to China. Nearly one-third of its 243 islands are uninhabited, and they are a potential threat to China's regional and long-term strategic goals. The Ryukyus and the U.S. military on Okinawa are strategically important to the United States and Japan, and they serve to deter China and help defend both Taiwan and Japan. For Beijing, Japan's southwest islands are part of the PRC's Achilles heel in the first island chain, hindering its ability to project military power regionally and more specifically, acting as a possible obstruction should China attempt to invade Taiwan. Thus, the PRC poses a challenge to both Taiwan and the Ryukyus and to regional stability more broadly.

Figure 1. Map of the Ryukyu-Southwest Islands of Japan

The Ryukyu Islands

Japanese and Southeast Asians settled the Ryukyu Islands during prehistoric times. From the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, the islands were subject to both Japanese and Chinese political and cultural influence and contested sovereignty. In 1872, however, the Japanese Meiji government made the last king a “vassal king” and took responsibility for the island’s foreign affairs. While the king attempted in 1877 to obtain political support from the Qing dynasty in China in exchange for reestablishing the kingdom as a Chinese tributary, this attempt was unsuccessful, and in 1879 the island kingdom formally became part of Japan. The Qing, however, never ratified an 1882 Sino-Japanese agreement recognizing Japanese authority over the islands, a fact noted by China today for nationalistic reasons, despite the island chain having been recognized territorially as part of Japan since.²

The Ryukyu Islands, and Okinawa especially, played an important role late in the Second World War. The United States, in preparation for imminent invasions of the Japanese home islands, invaded Okinawa in 1945, and the battle was one of the bloodiest in the Pacific theater. Nearly two hundred thousand died, including more than one hundred twenty thousand Okinawans and twenty thousand Americans. By securing the islands, the United States further isolated Japan and provided itself with a key vantage point from which to launch aerial attacks against the country.³ After the war, the islands remained under American jurisdiction until the 1952 San Francisco Treaty, in which the U.S. recognized the Ryukyus as a territorial part of Japan, under American administration.⁴ Japan regained control of the islands in 1972, although to this day the United States maintains a military presence, including bases that occupy approximately 15 percent of the main island’s total area.⁵

China's Strategic Ambitions and Japan's Southwest Islands (First Island Chain Passage)

China's grand strategy is to establish itself as a major global power. President Xi Jinping laid out this vision at the CCP's nineteenth Party Congress. The country aims to recreate itself as an advanced, modern, and prosperous society by 2035, then use the following years to build itself into a global superpower by the hundredth anniversary of the PRC's founding in 2049.⁶ The PRC aims to achieve the regional preeminence that China traditionally held while defending its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, safeguarding its interest abroad, and ensuring continued economic growth and development.⁷

China's regional and global ambitions hinge on its ability to ensure free access to the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea for its military and civilian shipping. This requires an "active defense" of Chinese interests: The ability to win short, localized wars within China's regional sphere and to advance its interests using coercive tactics that fall short of provoking broader war.⁸ The key to these goals regionally is China's "island chain strategy," the ability to access and control concentric arcs of islands that surround it and otherwise restrict its capacity to exercise influence at sea.⁹

The idea of the islands as chains comes from Western and Chinese views that they form a natural barrier "that China must penetrate to achieve freedom of maneuver in the maritime domain," and the reverse but parallel notion that the islands are also springboards for power projection. Early Cold War U.S. strategic thought saw the "island chains" as a convenient geographic means to contain the threat that communism might infect the Asian continent.¹⁰ Chinese maritime strategists subsequently adopted this view in the inverse, as the "containment" imposed on China by the United States and its allies was in fact an opportunity to expand China's maritime influence and access its sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The first island chain—the innermost "ring" of islands, the closest of these concentric enclosures—is thus a necessary and logical first geographic challenge for China's expanding power.¹¹

Critical to China's territorial integrity and dominance of the first island chain is the country's effort to regain political control in some form over the island of Taiwan. Taiwan is the cornerstone of the first island chain and historically has been referred to as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for the United States.¹² Taiwan has been the home of the Republic of China (ROC) government since the Communist regime took control of the Chinese mainland in 1949. At the nineteenth CCP Congress, President Xi pledged reunification with the island under a "one country, two systems" mechanism similar to the arrangement with Hong Kong, which he views as fundamental to China's "new era."¹³ However, although both sides agreed in 1992 that they are part of one China, the political route to reunification is vague at best, and increased PRC

coercive measures towards the island have weakened support for reunification in Taiwan.¹⁴ PRC rhetoric has consistently maintained that the island could, and may, be taken by force if necessary.¹⁵ A leaked 2008 blueprint for People's Liberation Army (PLA) operations to seize Taiwan emphasized that PLA units were already drilling for a rapid invasion of the island to seize control before the United States could act in response, as laid out in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act.¹⁶

Taiwan is not the sole strategic concern in the Chinese rulers' view of the first island chain. The Ryukyu archipelago, too, serves as a geographical buffer against China's access to the Pacific. This natural barrier forces Chinese military and civilian maritime vessels to navigate between these islands through the Miyako Strait, a passageway between the Japanese islands of Miyako and Okinawa that is 270 kilometers (145 nautical miles) wide. The Miyako Strait is additionally restrictive because 90 kilometers of the total strait (48 nautical miles) is Japanese territorial seas and airspace, and the entire strait is considered within Japan's exclusive economic zone.

Japan's air force, known as the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), also conducts scramble operations and anti-submarine operations in the strait. The Ryukyus, as one of the few international waterways and airways that provide access from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean, are a potential Achilles heel for the PRC. They represent a vulnerable choke point for the country's growing economic strength and a natural barrier to the PLAN's rising naval-force-projection capabilities. Militarily, the North Sea Fleet People's Liberation Army Naval Air Force (PLAN/AF) at Qingdao and East Sea Fleet PLAN/AF at Ningbo both rely on the Miyako Strait and Taiwan Strait for global access.¹⁷ These islands thus represent a hurdle for Chinese maritime ambitions in the western and central Pacific.

A Chinese military action against Taiwan could call for the PLAN to secure strategic islands within the Ryukyu archipelago simultaneously to slow or deter an American military response, as the U.S. military bases on Okinawa would likely be staging points for early U.S. military action against a PLA invasion. Beijing's decision to execute such a military option would require an improbable, but imaginable, plan to conquer Taiwan and some, if not all, of the Ryukyu Islands, to maintain the Miyako Strait and yet not escalate to a full-scale war. Such thinking would be a serious miscalculation, however, as neither the U.S. nor Japan could afford to stand by in the face of such bold aggression against Japan.

In the unlikely event the United States and other international actors chose not to intervene directly against a Chinese invasion of the Ryukyus, perhaps in an effort to exchange geographic gain for the time needed to achieve it, they could instead close the Miyako Strait to Chinese shipping and military transit in retaliation, thus greatly reducing the PLAN's mobility to support the invasion and its access to a significant SLOC.

Though the pros and cons of such a military action are worthy of a brief discussion, simply stated, Beijing realizes that a PRC move against the Ryukyu Islands would inevitably drag Japan and the United States into open conflict.

The Senkaku Islands, on the other hand, represent a far more vulnerable target. Referred to as the Diaoyu Islands by the PRC, this group of uninhabited islands falls under legal control of the Japanese government, which has maintained sovereignty over them since the nineteenth century. While the U.S.-Japan peace treaty after the Second World War affirmed Japanese sovereignty over the Senkakus, China (and Taiwan) continue to contest Japan's claims and assert that the islands historically belong to China.¹⁸ Beijing describes the islands as a "core interest," ranking them on the same level as Taiwan, Tibet, or Xinjiang despite their size. The islands—between China to the west, Taiwan to the southwest, and the Japanese Ryukyus to the east—sit near key SLOCs and are also rich in natural resources, including fishing, natural gas, oil, and mineral deposits.¹⁹ As they are uninhabited and do not have any permanent Japanese presence except regular Japanese Coast Guard patrols,²⁰ they are a potential flash point for regional conflict as China concentrates attention on the first island chain and strengthening its position in the East China Sea.

Broadly, the PRC's military strategy aims to secure the first island chain if necessary to gain the advantage in the event of a regional conflict and in peace time to project power beyond that natural impediment. The U.S. Department of Defense noted in 2017 that China continues to extend its capabilities beyond the first island chain.²¹ As retired U.S. Navy captain James Fanell testified in 2018 to Congress, "the most important aspect to any successful Chinese maritime campaign involves the act of physically occupying islands within the First and Second Island Chain. The key to holding these contested islands is the ability to successfully move forces ashore to seize and hold the ground."²² To attain this, the Chinese military has embarked on a project to reinvigorate and advance the PLA and its constituent branches.

A Rising Maritime Military: The Threat from China

Recent decades have seen the PRC rapidly modernize and expand its military capabilities. Through his China Dream initiative, President Xi aims to turn China into a global leader and superpower, in part through building a strong Chinese military capable of supporting and defending Chinese interests.²³ One major element of the PRC's military growth has been the construction of a blue water navy with capabilities to contest and eventually surpass U.S. naval power. While the PLAN has not reached full parity with U.S. naval capabilities, it has advanced significantly since 2010. In many regional scenarios, the PLAN could hypothetically hold its own against the U.S. military. This includes anti-surface warfare fought closer to the mainland—for example, in Taiwan—or further seaward—for example, in Chinese military fortifications in the South China Sea.²⁴

The PLAN has rapidly increased its fleet size by replacing aging ships with more modern and advanced surface combatants, including the first Chinese-built aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, as well as missile submarines and patrol craft. The net size of the Chinese navy, too, has grown, and is expected to surpass the U.S. Navy in total ship count by 2020.²⁵ The PLAN expects to add another carrier, the *Shandong*, in 2020, and three more, including two nuclear carriers, are currently under construction, along with many other advanced warships.²⁶

Beyond China's increasing fleet size and ongoing fleet modernization, the PLAN has also expanded its amphibious capabilities. Amphibious operations are critical to China's ability to project military force, particularly in the island chains in a regional conflict. The PLAN, as of 2017, was estimated to have as many as eighty-nine amphibious landing ships.²⁷ Its fleet currently has six amphibious transport docks (Type 071, or Yuzhao-class). These can carry two air-cushion medium landing craft, four helicopters,²⁸ armored vehicles, and PLAN marines, as well as Yuting II-class tank-landing ships capable of helicopter landings.²⁹ In addition, the PLAN last year began constructing the Type 075 landing helicopter dock, a much larger amphibious assault ship believed to be capable of carrying as many as thirty armed helicopters.³⁰ Furthermore, the AG600, an amphibious seaplane with a 5,000-kilometer (31,000-mile) range, is in development and will soon provide support for Chinese strategic objectives, including operations far beyond the first island chain.³¹ Finally, but not least, Chinese marines have an amphibious assault craft that is the envy of marines all over the globe. An armored assault vehicle that skims above the waves at 25-30 knots, the ZBD-05 can close the beach at triple the speeds of conventional U.S. craft. In summary, the anticipated addition of more Type 071s; the introduction of the much-larger helicopter-carrying Type 075s; the AG600s; and the increased surface fleet size can be expected to make China's amphibious power-projection world class, with capabilities well beyond the Indo-Pacific region and Chinese territorial waters.

The PLAN's amphibious capabilities have been further improved through rapid expansion of the People's Liberation Army Marine Corps (PLAMC). The Chinese military divides its amphibious warfare capabilities between two geographic lines of effort. The first, large-scale amphibious operations planned against Taiwan, falls to the PLA and its amphibious mechanized infantry divisions. The second, small island landings and operations focused on the South China Sea but increasingly, the Senkakus, falls under the purview of the PLAMC,³² which is expected to be expanded from its current size of twenty thousand to one hundred thousand marines, or six brigades.³³ This rapid increase, in part through transfer of brigades from other parts of the PLA, will boost the PLAMC's amphibious capabilities significantly, as it is expected to take on a larger role to advance China's interests globally.³⁴

Beyond China's development of conventional military capabilities, the country has proven adept at developing "gray zone" capabilities, which operate below the threshold for open conflict while subverting and altering the perceived status quo.³⁵ These include Chinese fishing boats dual-purposed as maritime militias that are under the operational control of Chinese government authorities and aim to exploit their ambiguous characterization. Their intended purpose is to force U.S., Taiwanese, Japanese, or any other nation's security forces to hesitate until it is too late to act effectively.

As China's leaked 2008 invasion blueprint for Taiwan indicated, the PRC has actively considered the operational use of civilian vessels, such as ferries and roll-on/roll-off ships, to covertly deliver military forces.³⁶ Other low-intensity actions could include deployment of Chinese special forces via the AG600 seaplane or by submarine to sparsely populated or unpopulated islands to "plant the flag" and assert Chinese sovereignty. With the PLA's improving capabilities, such an operation against the Senkakus, remote islands in the Ryukyu chain, or even Taiwan would be difficult to roll back without escalating into a wider conflict.

China's Challenge to the Status Quo

The PRC's rising military capabilities coincide with increasing Chinese aggression beyond the country's borders. China has unilaterally attempted—successfully to this point—to change the status quo in the South China Sea. It has constructed artificial islands on reefs to assert territorial and military claims and argued, contrary to international law and custom, that the entire sea falls under its exclusive economic zone.³⁷ The United States has conducted freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, and the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague has ruled against China's territorial claims.³⁸ Nevertheless, the PLA has nearly completed construction of military facilities on the artificial islands³⁹ and stationed People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) H-6K nuclear-capable bombers.⁴⁰ It has even quietly installed defensive anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and electromagnetic communications–jamming systems on the reefs.⁴¹

While no similar island-building or status quo–altering machinations have yet occurred in the East China Sea or the Strait of Taiwan, the PLAN and other Chinese military instruments have conducted saber-rattling exercises and low-intensity provocations against both Japan and Taiwan. Since Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-Wen's election in 2016, Beijing has ratcheted up pressure against Taiwan politically and militarily. The PRC has acted to peel away countries that support the island diplomatically and further increase its political isolation globally.⁴²

President Xi has refused to rule out force against Taiwan, and the PLA conducted numerous provocative military exercises in its vicinity as recently as May 2018, including flying H-9 bombers through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan and along the island's northeast coast.⁴³ At roughly the same time, China conducted large-scale exercises including destroyers and the PLAN's aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, near the Bashi Channel, along with live-fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait.⁴⁴ The PLA's long-standing objective has been to be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2020, and increased preparations and provocations indicate adherence to that timetable.⁴⁵

Japan, too, has increasingly been a PLA target near its southwest islands. Both China and Taiwan dispute Japan's sovereignty over the unpopulated islands, which are located in resource-rich seas.⁴⁶ However, the United States has reaffirmed under both the Obama and Trump administrations that the Senkakus fall under the U.S.-Japan security treaty, and thus the United States is obliged to come to Japan's aid in any conflict over the islands.⁴⁷ In 2013, the PRC declared an air-defense identification zone that included the Senkaku Islands, a provocative move criticized by both Japan and the United States. Since the beginning of 2018 alone, PLAN ships have approached or entered into Japanese territorial waters surrounding the Senkakus more than a dozen times. In January, a Type 054A Jiangkai-II-class frigate—belonging either to the PLAN or the Chinese Coast Guard—and an unidentified PLAN submarine entered Japanese territorial waters surrounding the islands.⁴⁸ The Chinese Coast Guard, which now falls under the

direct command of the Chinese security forces,⁴⁹ has continued deploying frigates and smaller patrol vessels to conduct sorties near the islands since the beginning of this year.⁵⁰

While the Senkakus have seen the highest level of provocations by the PLAN and Chinese Coast Guard, the Ryukyu Island chain has also been a target. A forty-aircraft-strong PLAAF exercise through the Miyako Strait in 2016 forced the JASDF to scramble interceptors.⁵¹ In May 2018, China for the first time flew its new Su-35 fighters, along with H-6K bombers and other patrol craft, through the Miyako Strait between Miyako Island and Okinawa.⁵² The PRC has increased its bomber patrols and PLAN naval transits through the strait, and in 2017 the Chinese Ministry of Defense warned Japan that it should “get used to” increased patrols passing through the island chain.⁵³

More provocative than China’s air and sea patrols through the Miyako Strait, however, have been its political claims over the Ryukyus. In 2013, as tensions grew over the Senkakus, several Chinese officials claimed that the Ryukyu kingdom had been a paying tributary to the Chinese empire more than five hundred years before the islands became Japanese territory, and that the Qing dynasty had been too weak to resist the nineteenth-century Japanese “invasion” of the islands. Thus, several Chinese officials claimed that sovereignty over the Ryukyu Islands did not belong to Japan, and they implied that it could be contested by China.⁵⁴

While this claim, which the PRC’s Foreign Ministry has neither endorsed nor rejected, was meant to pressure the Japanese government, the implication that the Chinese can claim the islands could help provide justification for a takeover in the future. The Japanese government believes that Chinese groups, likely with tacit support from Beijing, have provided funding to movements that support independence for the Ryukyus and groups that oppose U.S. military bases on Okinawa.⁵⁵

U.S. Defensive Capabilities and Japan's Southwest Islands

The United States and Japan maintain a strong alliance based on their 1952 security treaty and subsequent revisions, such as the 1960 mutual defense treaty.⁵⁶ In Article 6 of the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America, the United States assumed responsibility for defending Japan in the event of an external threat.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Japan serves as a strategic center for American military forces in the Asia-Pacific region. Permanent basing of American military forces there enables the U.S. to project military power while providing a security guarantee for Japan and other regional allies.

Article 6 of the 1960 treaty establishes that the United States can maintain a permanent military presence in Japan to uphold its treaty obligations.⁵⁸ Okinawa, in particular, is host to a significant U.S. military presence. Nearly fifty thousand U.S. military personnel are stationed on the island—approximately half of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ)—including nineteen thousand Marines.⁵⁹ The III Marine Expeditionary Force, including elements of the 3d Marine Division, is responsible for amphibious assault and related operations. It is based on Okinawa between Camp Hansen, home to the Twelfth Marine Regiment, and Camp Schwab, where the Fourth Marine Regiment, a combat assault battalion, and a force recon battalion are based.⁶⁰ The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit is also based on Okinawa. It is composed of a command element and a battalion landing team, which is essentially an infantry battalion reinforced by artillery, amphibious assault vehicles, combat engineers, and other vehicles. In addition, it has an aviation combat element with both rotary and fixed-wing support. This includes CH-53E Super Stallions, MV-22B Ospreys, UH-1Y Hueys, and AH-1Z Super Cobras, as well as fixed-wing jets such as AV-8B Harriers and eventually F-35B Lightning IIs. It also has a combat logistics element.⁶¹

The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit forms an amphibious ready group with the navy's Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 11. This squadron, based to the north in Sasebo, Japan, consists of four ships, including the amphibious assault ship *USS Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6).⁶² Kadena Air Base on the island also hosts the 18th Air Wing of the U.S. Air Force, which includes support aircraft and approximately fifty-four F-15C/D Eagle jet fighters, along with maintenance, intelligence, and special operations elements.⁶³ (In May 2018, the U.S. also temporarily deployed a number of F-22 Raptors, its most advanced fighter aircraft, to Kadena.)⁶⁴ The U.S. Army also has a garrison on Okinawa, primarily responsible for support functions for the service and the maintenance of Okinawa's military facilities, as well as hosting an Army special forces contingent.⁶⁵

U.S. military forces based on Okinawa, primarily from the Marine Corps and Air Force, are tasked with security and non-security-related operations. These range from air patrols and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations, amphibious assault operations, and high-intensity combat to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Moreover, U.S. Navy, Air

Force, and Marine Corps elements conduct routine patrols and training exercises in the East China Sea, on and around Okinawa, and throughout the Pacific Rim. The U.S. military presence on Okinawa and in Japan not only provides a security guarantee for Japan, but also for the first island chain and East Asia.

Japan's Defense Limitations and Growing Focus on Defending the Southwest Islands

Japan's ability to assist the United States in providing security for the first island chain, apart from its own territorial islands, is restricted. The fundamental limitation on Japan's military is Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, written in the years after World War II under American direction, in which Japan renounced war and accepted that it would not maintain an offensive military capability.⁶⁶

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces are, as their name implies, solely for self-defense.⁶⁷ After more than seven decades under the post-war constitution, the Japanese people have accepted the idea that their military capabilities should be only for immediate defense. Despite the sociopolitical and legal limitations on the JSDF, Japan is still one of the top military powers in the world. Measured in capabilities, the JSDF ranks eighth globally, just after the United Kingdom and South Korea, but ahead of Turkey and Germany.⁶⁸ While Japan is prevented from using its military as other large powers do, restrictions on its security forces have not prevented the Japanese government from bolstering the country's defensive capabilities to address the PRC's rising security threats to Japan's outlying islands.

Japan's domestic and regional security strategy reflects a growing recognition of the challenges Chinese incursions pose to Japan's southwest islands. Japan's 2017 Defense White Paper identifies China's rapid military buildup as a major security concern, along with its unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea. The document also finds that China not only conducts constant activities in the areas surrounding the Senkakus, but has also expanded areas of operations southwards and eastwards, to the Ryukyu Islands and areas surrounding Taiwan.⁶⁹ The Japanese government has expressed increased concern over Chinese threats to SLOCs, as the island nation is entirely dependent on the sea for its sustenance and economic health.⁷⁰ Japan's 2013 national security strategy document emphasizes the defense of its remote islands, primarily in response to Chinese threats:

Japan will proactively engage in the protection, management, and development of remote islands near national borders. Furthermore, from a national security viewpoint, Japan will study the situation of land ownership in areas such as remote islands near national borders and areas surrounding defense facilities.⁷¹

Overall, these and other strategy documents underscore the Japanese government's growing apprehension over Chinese challenges to Japan's outlying islands and the strategic planning it has undertaken to address the growing risk.

Defending Japan's security in the southwest islands necessitates a strong defensive presence. The JSDF and the Coast Guard maintain a sizeable presence not only on Okinawa, but also across the Ryukyus and in the territorial waters surrounding the Senkakus. The Japanese Coast Guard is responsible for surveillance of "official vessels, oceanographic research vessels, and vessels carrying foreign activists seeking to stake territorial claim"—all indirect references to mostly Chinese actors. The 11th Regional Coast Guard, headquartered at Naha on Okinawa, provides regular patrols in the Senkakus, in Japan's contiguous zones surrounding those islands, and in the entirety of the Ryukyu archipelago.⁷²

The JSDF also maintains a robust presence in the southwest islands. The 15th Brigade of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) is stationed on Okinawa, along with a surface-to-air missile unit. The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) also maintains a principal air base for fixed-wing units at Naha.⁷³ In July 2017, the JASDF established the Southwestern Air Defense Force and the Southwestern Aircraft Control and Warning Wing, based at Naha Air Base. This was part of a realignment to counter the threat of "aerial invasions" and carry out search and rescue (SAR) activities over the country's southwest islands. Among other assets, this command possesses at least four aircraft control-and-warning units (radar sites) at Yoza Dake on Okinawa and on the Okinoerabu, Kume, and Miyako islands.⁷⁴

The Japanese Ministry of Defense and the JSDF have increased development of maritime and amphibious capabilities. In 2016, the Japanese government's Defense White Paper announced that an amphibious rapid deployment brigade (ARDB) would be established within the GSDF, and in 2017 the first of these units became operational.⁷⁵ Created in the image of the U.S. Marine Corps, the units aim to provide rapidly deployable amphibious military forces in response to a contingency.

The Japanese government is currently considering deploying elements of the ARDB to Okinawa alongside their American counterparts. This would not only bring them closer to potential areas of conflict but also put them in a place where joint training with American forces could be conducted more easily.⁷⁶ Japan has also procured such platforms as the amphibious US-2 seaplane, which possesses SAR capabilities. The US-2 can be used effectively to deploy small units of U.S. Marines, Japanese ARDB soldiers, or even special forces to contested islands in the event of a Chinese plant-the-flag operation in the Senkakus or Ryukyus.

Japan has also begun to reinforce defensive installations on the Ryukyus. It has deployed Type-12 anti-ship missiles, whose range is 185 kilometers (100 nautical miles), to the islands of Miyako, Ishigaki, and Anami. Japan is also considering an additional deployment of Type-12s to Okinawa itself.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the Japanese government has opened a radar station on Japan's southwestern-most island, Yonaguni, which can monitor the seas between the island and Taiwan. Tokyo plans to build two advanced radar installations and remote-control surveillance cameras

under Coast Guard control on Okinawa and other areas south of the home islands.⁷⁸ The Japanese Coast Guard has upgraded its facilities and more than doubled the total number of personnel stationed on Miyako Island to better police the Miyako Strait and the island chain.⁷⁹

There has been progress in JSDF reorganizations, such as the ARDB and the ASDF's Southwestern Air Defense Zone and the construction of additional defensive and monitoring installations on Okinawa and other parts of the Ryukyu Islands. Nevertheless, Japanese defense efforts remain complicated by bureaucratic and organizational issues. MSDF-GSDF coordination at an operational level remains problematic. The ARDB would require MSDF transport ships to bring its fifty-two amphibious assault vehicles close enough to shore to be able to land.

However, these ships lack the capacity to transport both armored vehicles and the large hovercraft used to put troops, tanks, and non-amphibious armored vehicles ashore. The MSDF's seaborne transport capacity to support the GSDF is lacking.⁸⁰ At an organizational level, the JSDF does not have effective capabilities to coordinate joint operations. Historical rivalries, such as those between the Japanese army and navy during World War II; budgetary infighting; and a lack of strategic coordination restrict Japan's ability to improve needed joint operational capacities.⁸¹ Coordinating joint operations to defend the southwest islands will require improved interoperability between JSDF service branches.

Joint U.S.-Japan Operations

The United States military and JSDF have long operated side by side. The U.S. and Japan have conducted numerous bilateral and multilateral exercises, including Keen Sword, Multi-Sail, Malabar, RIMPAC, Pacific Partnership, and Cobra Gold.⁸² U.S.-Japan combined naval operations and exercises in the East China Sea have increasingly become the norm, and they strengthen the relationships between the two countries' naval forces, including amphibious naval support operations.⁸³ In the 2017 and 2018 Iron Fist exercises, held in California, the U.S. Marine Corps and Japan's GSDF conducted amphibious landings and trained in support of amphibious assaults. The USMC and Japan's new ARDB could benefit from these exercises in the future and build joint capabilities to hone amphibious assault options in defense of Japan's outlying islands.⁸⁴

At a policy level, interoperability between the U.S. and Japan has improved in recent years, and in 2015, the two revised their mutual-defense guidelines, which now “lay out a framework for bilateral, whole-of-government cooperation in defending Japan's outlying islands.”⁸⁵ The guidelines also established an alliance coordination mechanism (ACM) to coordinate responses between relevant bilateral agencies in the event of a regional contingency.⁸⁶

Despite these advances, there is still no effective joint command structure to operate in the event of a significant military conflict. The ACM does not provide for operational-level delegation, and the concept itself has not been fully perfected in practice. U.S.-Japan regional security cooperation continues to be coordinated in two ways: through multilateral high-level dialogues between the U.S., Japan, and third-party countries such as India, South Korea, and Australia; and through multilateral exercises, possibly involving NATO countries and the multilateral alliance itself. No integrated or standing body comprehensively addresses coordination of regional security problems.⁸⁷

China could exploit these flaws early in any operation to seize the Senkakus, Taiwan, or even the Ryukyus. Article 9 would preclude Japan's direct involvement in any U.S. efforts to counter a PLA operation against Taiwan. The lack of an effective means to coordinate operations in response to a takeover of Japan's southwest islands could leave the U.S. and Japan fighting against numerically superior forces—or compelled to accept the results as an alternative to dangerous escalation. While the two have developed joint capabilities, they remain limited in scope and need to be improved.

Recommendations

Strategic Level

Initiate U.S.-Japan Engagement and Policy Planning

To deter PLA operations against Taiwan, the Senkakus, Miyako, or even the Ryukyus, the United States and Japan should initiate strategic and operational-level bilateral discussions. Military and diplomatic officials from the two countries should hold frank and open policy discussions on addressing potential challenges in the southwest islands to ensure a united front against Chinese aggression. For the Japanese, this should involve regular assessments of U.S. administrations and their potential response to a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

Because this issue is politically sensitive for the Japanese government, it will need to take place under a broader discussion about strategic defense guarantees of SLOC security and territorial claims over outlying islands. Chinese operations against ROC-controlled islands, like the Pratas and Taiping islands in the South China Sea or the Penghus in the Taiwan Strait, would reflect a strategy of violating international law and territorial integrity in the South and East China seas to an unprecedented extent. Chinese aggression towards these contested islands could likely precede a Chinese military seizure of the Senkakus or territorial violations deeper into Japan's southwest islands, and it will require a multifaceted strategy to deter or counter.

The bilateral dialogue should assess the range of forms such an action could take—from an economic blockade against Taiwan or a limited operation to seize the smaller islands administered by the ROC, to a full-scale invasion of Taiwan and the simultaneous capture of critical Japanese islands. Discussions should emphasize Japan's inherently defensive role in any conflict not directly related to Japanese territory or disputed territory recognized as Japanese, such as the Senkakus.

The discussions should involve military and diplomatic leadership that builds consensus on what role Japan might play in diplomatic and political support for U.S. operations linked to Taiwan's defense. China claims that its relations with Taiwan and actions towards it are an internal issue. The United States and Japan should act prudently, now, to agree and strategize on how to counter this inevitable claim in international fora.

Moreover, any conflict between Taiwan and the PRC will inevitably have regional implications far beyond China. Taiwan's economy, despite the island's small size, is an important component of international trade. Its suspension by a blockade—or destruction by an invasion—would have large international consequences. The use of Chinese force against Taiwan would disrupt SLOCs that are vital to Japan, and the region's economies would be disrupted or damaged. Japan should

seek assurances regarding the U.S. commitment to defend the sea-lanes. The United States would likely need Japan's defensive and logistical assistance to maintain the SLOCs. Thoughtful planning will help both nations advance their security interests.

Strategic discussions between the U.S. and Japan should also examine how to jointly mobilize international opposition to Chinese aggression against Taiwan. This means identifying types of sanctions that can be used against the PRC and identifying regional and international allies whose assistance can be sought for economically and politically punitive action. Such action would include diplomatic measures that the European Union and other partner nations, like India, can take to isolate China in the event of a conflict. The United States and Japan will benefit from establishing general points of agreement to facilitate coordinated action with other states and at the UN and other international organizations.

Make Room for Cooperation: De-stress China's Sea Lines of Communication

Not all efforts should aim to cause the PRC strategic discomfort. There are steps that can alleviate some of the pressures the Chinese leadership identifies in the first island chain without accepting PRC dominance of the region. China sees the Miyako Strait as a strategic choke point for its maritime civilian and military ships. It also provides critical access to the Pacific Ocean and South China Sea for China's East Sea and North Sea fleets.

Chinese civilian vessels are free to transit Japanese waters under international law. Additionally, Chinese military passage through the Miyako Strait's waters and airspace is consistent with the U.S. understanding of freedom of navigation. China's recognition of international law could reduce tension over naval vessels in the Miyako Strait. The United States conducts similar operations through the Taiwan Strait between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland and through the South China Sea's international waters. Both the United States and Japan should reemphasize these points to Beijing. China may be unlikely to acknowledge the allowance in international law for free navigation on the high seas, given its actions in the international waters of the South China Sea. But such recognition could have a positive impact on regional stability. Japanese guarantees that the JSDF and Japanese Coast Guard would respect PLAN and PLAAF freedom of navigation operations could improve the chances for strategic deconfliction in other areas—leading, for example, to a reduction in confrontations in the Senkakus or agreements between the relevant countries on use of international waters, whether through the Taiwan or the Miyako Straits.

Operational Level

Conduct Bilateral Planning and Exercises

Bilateral coordination is integral to U.S. and Japanese security operations conducted in response to Chinese actions against Taiwan or the Japanese southwest islands. The U.S. and Japan should conduct a dialogue to better develop operational-level planning. This would include high-level conferences between parties from both countries with their counterparts: senior officials from the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, including Marine Corps and Navy leadership and theater-level U.S. military leaders would meet with officials from the GSDF, MSDF, and ASDF; and senior American and Japanese civilian policymakers would also participate.

These groups should conduct exercises to plan responses to crises—aimed at examining possible PLAN operations. Through these meetings, U.S. and Japanese officials could better establish contingency plans for Chinese aggression in the Senkakus or Ryukyus. The meetings could aid them in identifying inefficiencies—between JSDF branches, or between the U.S. and Japan—and enable them to better exploit the strengths of each military service. Operational contingencies should be built into U.S.-Japanese training exercises: on island defense; amphibious assault to quickly retake islands; and naval operations to reestablish sea and airspace control to support amphibious landings. Furthermore, such exercises should creatively anticipate Chinese use of the cyber domain in support of PLAN military operations, including cyber espionage and cyberattacks against military and civil infrastructure targets. Exercises should also review potential defensive, preemptive, and counteroffensive actions to mitigate the impact of malicious PRC cyber activity.

Expand Joint Island-Defense Capabilities

The Japanese Coast Guard and the JSDF have, as noted, increased their defensive capabilities surrounding the southwest islands. They now include anti-ship missiles, a new air defense command, expanded facilities, and additional surveillance stations and radars across the island chain. These efforts should continue and be expanded, and U.S. assets stationed at Okinawa should be integrated into the islands' defenses to build a more robust, comprehensive defense against Chinese aggression.

First, the United States and Japan should establish closer coordination on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance functions between the Japanese Coast Guard, the JSDF, and U.S. forces in the southwest islands. The two countries can jointly monitor early warning systems and conduct joint air and sea patrols around the Ryukyus. Improving real-time information sharing between Japan's services and U.S. forces will enable them to react faster to a Chinese operation against the Senkakus or Ryukyus. Rapid information sharing could enable joint allied forces to head off a covert attempt to infiltrate the islands. It could also help them to

deploy and defeat a small force on the Senkakus or the more isolated Ryukyus before reinforcements arrive.

Second, joint defensive capabilities can provide the opportunity to improve rapid-reaction forces themselves. The JSDF and Japanese Coast Guard should train with their U.S. military counterparts to hone the rapid deployment of U.S. and Japanese special and combat forces on isolated islands. The MSDF's US-2 amphibious plane could fulfill an important function under these conditions. As the plane is capable of landing at sea, it could be used to deliver special forces close to shore. It could also be employed to evacuate casualties of amphibious landings near the coasts of islands where the terrain cannot support helicopter landings. Both the U.S. Marine Corps and JSDF amphibious rapid deployment brigade forces would participate in such exercises to improve individual capabilities and their ability to operate jointly.

Establish Japan's Defensive Support Role for the U.S. in a Regional Contingency

Because of increasing Chinese pressure on Taiwan and the potential for an invasion or naval blockade, the United States may feel compelled—by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979—to intervene in defense of the island. As mentioned above, Japan will be central to any American operation, even though it cannot directly intervene under Article 9. If there is a conflict with China in the East China Sea over Taiwan, the United States will require non-military support. Here, Japan can play an important role.

A U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan will likely result in significant casualties at sea from aircraft that are shot down and ships that are damaged or sink. While Japan's constitution prevents it from joining a shooting war, it can provide search and rescue for thousands of stranded airmen, sailors, and marines. In particular, the Japanese Coast Guard, already present in the southwest islands, can provide search and rescue capabilities near Japanese waters. The Japanese Ministry of Defense and the JSDF have developed or are developing a number of unique and valuable defense technologies, as well as equipment capable of supporting remote island defense and search and rescue operations. Japan should take the initiative to make these amphibious platforms and technologies available to the United States military, the USMC especially, to bolster American operations of this nature.

In a conflict, the JSDF and Japanese Coast Guard will need to secure the Japanese southwest islands quickly. This includes Okinawa, where U.S. military forces are based and where Chinese cruise missiles and bombing operations would likely aim to destroy U.S. logistics, auxiliary support units, airfields, and command and control. Defense of Okinawa and other U.S. facilities in the southwest would depend extensively on the JSDF. Such purely defensive operations would fall within Japan's constitutional bounds and offer it a way to adhere to legal restrictions and support its chief ally. This would enable Japan to defend U.S. forces and preserve its regional

goodwill while lessening China's leverage to delegitimize Japan's peaceful posture internationally.

Build Operational Command and Control for the Southwest Islands

As noted above, the United States and Japan do not have an integrated command structure to contend with immediate security contingencies. Not only is the alliance coordination mechanism yet to be fully realized, but even when it is implemented, its coordination will move slowly, taking place between top officials, who may not be able to react swiftly to rapidly evolving circumstances. In short, this mechanism cannot currently serve as an effective means to coordinate joint operations between the United States and Japan to counter a Chinese offensive against the Senkakus or Ryukyu archipelago.

If a conflict breaks out, Chinese military leaders will likely anticipate the political and operational divisions between the United States and Japan and seek to exploit them. If no cohesive command and control exists between the two countries, China's measures may succeed. Both sides should invest resources to streamline a means for reacting jointly to a PLA offensive.

First, JSDF troops, especially on Okinawa, should formalize their ties to the III Marine Expeditionary Force on the island, as should the GSDF's ARDB. Liaison officers from both countries should be assigned to headquarters, and exchange officers, including pilots and others, could be assigned to units for a year. In addition, the countries should increase joint training activities to improve their ability to work together. The goal should be to bring Japanese senior officers into the U.S. planning cycles and their forces onto American ships, and vice versa, to exchange best practices and better understand how the other country operates.

These exchanges should also generate pressure for a unified regional command and control, a Combined Joint Command Center, to allow swifter decision making. Such a center does not need to be a standing organization but could be designed to be set up immediately in a crisis. Officers and leaders could be identified for assignment and train together at least once a year.

Conclusion

This is the time for bold steps in defense of Japan's southwest island chain. With each passing day, it becomes increasingly clear that China has achieved many of its goals in the South China Sea. China's artificial islands are finished and militarized, and no state in the region appears willing or able to resist. China continues to modernize military. While the United States remains the preeminent maritime power in East Asia, its qualitative edge in comparison to China is shrinking. Japan is rapidly improving its defensive capabilities to address growing concerns over China's rise.

The United States should redouble cooperation with its most important Asian ally to shore up current defensive mechanisms and operational capabilities and to enhance the defense of Japan's national territory in both the Senkakus and the Ryukyus.

Neither Japan nor the United States should underestimate the possibility that China might initiate a preemptive strike to seize the unpopulated Senkakus or to secure the Miyako Strait in conjunction with an invasion of Taiwan. With 2020 rapidly approaching—and the PRC's aggressive, expansionist rhetoric increasing—the possibility of an attack on Taiwan is growing. Such an attack would almost certainly disrupt Japan's vital SLOCs and could force the United States into a conflict with the PLA. By improving U.S.-Japan joint security in Japan's southwest islands, both countries not only provide a stronger deterrent to China, but also strengthen their own bilateral relations and cooperation. After all, both are dedicated to the same regional strategic objective: To keep the Indo-Pacific free and open.

Author Biographies

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Senior Fellow Seth Cropsey began his career in government at the U.S. Defense Department as assistant to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. He subsequently served as Deputy Undersecretary of the Navy in the Reagan and Bush administrations, where he was responsible for the navy's position on efforts to reorganize the Department of Defense; development of the maritime strategy; the navy's academic institutions; naval special operations; and burden-sharing with NATO allies. In the Bush administration, Cropsey moved to the Office of the Secretary of Defense to become Acting Assistant Secretary, and then principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. Cropsey served as a naval officer from 1985 to 2004. From 1982 to 1984, before the collapse of the USSR, Cropsey directed editorial policy for the Voice of America on the Solidarity movement in Poland, Soviet treatment of dissidents, and other issues. Returning to public diplomacy in 2002 as Director of the U.S. government's International Broadcasting Bureau, Cropsey supervised the agency as successful efforts were undertaken to increase radio and television broadcasting to the Muslim world.

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Senior Fellow Jun Isomura joined Hudson Institute in September 2005. He directs the U.S.-Japan Strategic Summit Program. Prior to joining Hudson, Isomura spent twelve years running his own international public affairs and risk consulting firm. He was a pioneer in cybersecurity in Japan, and from 1997 to 2000 conducted the Committee for a Large-Scale Plan for Network Security for the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. He was also a cabinet office member of the committee responsible for the Special Action Plan of Countermeasures against Cyber-Terrorism on Critical Infrastructure. In 1990, while serving on the staff of Shintaro Abe, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party, Isomura arranged a meeting between Abe and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Isomura also held a private meeting with Soviet Vice President Gennady Yanayev in the Kremlin just three days before the August 1991 coup.

General James Conway, USMC (Ret)

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General James T. Conway retired from active duty in 2010 after serving for forty years. Since then, he has joined and consulted for numerous corporate and non-profit boards, including Textron Inc., Colt Defense, and General Dynamics. He also co-chairs the Energy Security Leadership Council, a non-partisan energy policy think tank. Prior to his retirement, General Conway served as the thirty-fourth Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps for four years. As Commandant, he was the senior uniformed Marine responsible for the organization, training, and equipping of over two hundred-fifty thousand active duty, reserve, and civilian marines throughout the United States and overseas. He also managed the \$30-\$40 billion annual Marine Corps budget. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Conway functioned as a military advisor to the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Council, and the President. In addition, General Conway served as Commanding General of First Marine Division and was the Commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force during two combat tours in Iraq. He initially led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with ninety thousand troops under his command, including Marines, soldiers, sailors, and British forces.

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