MEMORANDUM FOR SCUSA 74

SUBJECT: Curbing PRC Aggression in the Indo-Pacific

1. **Issue**: Despite the current wars in Ukraine and Israel, the PRC must remain the primary US strategic consideration.

2. **Strategic Analysis**: Our nation is at an inflection point; ongoing wars in Israel and Ukraine have amplified the limitations of American resources and our ability to bolster American interests across the world. The limitations are especially pertinent in the Indo-Pacific, where the PRC has emerged as the only country in the world with the means and desire to upend the international rules-based order. The PRC’s strategy is multifaceted, with the primary objective of establishing its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region at the expense of U.S. and local interests in the region. Their actions and objectives actively threaten the sovereignty of nations in the South and East China Sea. Our greatest strength remains our network of allies and partners, who play a critical role in our effort to counter PRC military and economic aggression. However, with our deterrence capabilities spread thin, the PRC continues to close the economic and military gap.

3. **Relevant National Interests**: The U.S. must deepen its cooperation with regional allies and partners to counter the PRC’s continued and flagrant violations of the international rules-based order. Publicly highlighting these violations enables the United States to rally support among the international community to pressure the PRC into respecting the sovereignty of its neighbors. Focusing on a cooperative approach that augments existing alliances in the Indo-Pacific region will keep the PRC as the primary U.S. security focus while enabling operational flexibility of American security assets around the world.

4. **Strategic Options**:
   
a. **Curbing The Threat**: The U.S. must begin to curb the threat of China’s ambitions for regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region via their increased territorial encroachment of U.S. treaty partners, record number of incursions into Taiwanese airspace, and interceptions of FONOPS. To achieve this, the U.S. must take active measures to mitigate and contain the PRC’s military force.

   b. **Bolstering Alliances**: To curtail the economic influence of the PRC, the U.S. must rely on the cooperation of its alliances in the Indo-Pacific. Some practical examples of this cooperation can include diplomatically engaging our partners in the Indo-Pacific, reinforcing joint bases, supporting allied nation investment in regional security, and actively promoting the U.S.’s core values.
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i. Increase supply chain integration with Indo-Pacific nations through consistent and continuous regional trade agreements.

c. **Leaving China Behind:** The U.S. must subsidize the movement of offshoring operations to alternative options like India, where companies can achieve the same economic success without bowing to the PRC. Furthermore, such a move would enable the U.S. to use non-kinetic options for deterring the PRC’s aggression in the SE Asian region.

d. **End of the Road:** Due to the expansion of the Belt and Road initiative, the U.S. should cultivate its relations with Europe and the Global South to control Chinese FDI and trade of Chinese products, thus curbing Chinese influence and strengthening U.S. soft power.

   i. Reaching out to countries who are touched by the Belt and Road initiative.

5. **Recommendation:** For maintaining U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific region, the recommended Strategic Option is B. U.S. alliances in the region are crucial to reinforcing consistent American economic influence. This option will encompass a broad range of American objectives in combating Chinese power without breaking from diplomatic precedent and with minimal cost to the taxpayer. It will affirm the U.S. policy of deterrence, create a united front in preventing aggressive action from China, and strengthen the U.S. regional position. These economic relationships will allow the United States to facilitate diplomacy between ASEAN members and other Indo-Pacific states to foster multilateral relationships. Furthermore, bolstering existing partnerships enables the creation of new ones. To promote a more unified counterweight to the PRC, the U.S. should encourage political, economic, and military cooperation among these states.

6. **Implementation:** The US must make the case to join trade partnerships such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to actively engage with its partner countries and reinforce economic strength within the region. Additionally, the U.S. must reaffirm and further its commitments to the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and its mission to integrate the supply chains of Indo-Pacific economies to promote cooperation.

7. The point of contact for this memorandum is CDT Eric Liu at eric.liu@westpoint.edu.